

A GLOBAL SENSE OF SOLIDARITY, IN THE CONTEXT OF NARROW NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF THE HIZMET (SERVICE) MOVEMENT FROM TURKEY

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Abstract

This paper is an effort to understand/present and outline how the Hizmet (Service) Movement; more popularly known as the Gulen Movement and named after the prominent Turkish scholar Fethullah G?len; on which hundreds conferences papers and many books are written, has developed a global sense of solidarity that has a sphere of influence on the global scale: Active in more than a hundred countries with schools, aid organizations, intercultural centers and business organizations, the G?len movement is considered to be one of the most significant social movements that arose from the Muslim world.

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้พยายามที่จะเข้าใจและนำเสนอว่าขบวนการ Hizmet ได้กลายเป็นที่นิยมอย่างกว้างขวางได้อย่างไร ขบวนการดังกล่าวมักเป็นที่รู้จักในนามขบวนการ Gulen ซึ่งตั้งชื่อตาม Fethullah G?len ผู้เป็นนักวิชาการชาวตุรกี ที่นักวิชาการได้ทำการศึกษาและเขียนเกี่ยวกับแนวคิดของเขาไว้มากมาย ขบวนการนี้ได้แพร่หลายในกว่า 100 ประเทศทั้งในโรงเรียน องค์กรให้ความช่วยเหลือ ศูนย์วัฒนธรรมและองค์กรธุรกิจ ขบวนการ Gulen เป็นหนึ่งในขบวนการทางสังคมที่สำคัญที่สุดที่เกิดขึ้นในโลกมุสลิม

INTRODUCTION: Solidarity and Nationalism

The fact that, the changing philosophical and sociological meanings of the terms ‘solidarity’ and ‘nationalism’ from a global perspective makes it necessary to clarify that the usually trustworthy academic definitions of these terms are limited by the Western understanding version of them.

In his book, *Solidarity: From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community 2005*, Hauke Brunkhorst says that “Solidarity is a thoroughly modern concept. It is just as tightly bound up with the juridical concept of equality as with the political concept of democracy. Its origin is in the French Revolution”.¹ Later Emile Durkheim referred to two types of solidarity – mechanical and organic; a society characterized by mechanical solidarity is unified because all people are engaged in similar activities or responsibilities. In contrast, a society characterized by organic solidarity is held together by the fact that all have different tasks or responsibilities (George Ritzer 2004).

Even though nationalism is unique to the modern world as a political ideology, some of its elements can be traced throughout history. The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed. records that “The first roots of nationalism are probably to be found in the ancient Hebrews, and the ancient Greeks also felt superior to all other peoples. These feelings of cultural superiority (ethnocentrism), which are similar to nationalism, gave way to much more universal identifications under the Roman Empire and with the Christian Church through its teaching of the oneness of humanity. Then it was in the 19th century that nationalism became a widespread and powerful force. During this time nationalism expressed itself in many areas as a drive for national unification or independence. The early 20th century, with the breakup of Austria-Hungary and of the Ottoman Empire, saw the establishment of many independent nations, especially through the peace treaties ending World War I. The Paris Peace Conference established the principle of national self-determination, upheld by the League of Nations and later by the United Nations. While self-determination is a nationalist principle, it also recognizes the basic equality of all nations, large or small, and therefore transcends a narrow nationalism that claims superiority for itself”.

THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

After the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, a new country, the Republic of Turkey, which was to witness a radical change in the political system along the lines of the western European nation-states was established. This was an effort to establish and then hold on to, a nationalist, laicist, and Westernized republic. (Cetin 2010) Later, the new Republic of Turkey went through crises, conflicts and demands for modernization period of time (1923-1950): The Republican era: one-party rule, laicist policies, cultural revolution; the history and language reforms to erase the pre-existing culture and education, execution of people, forbidding publications in the old language and Kurdish language that was spoken and written by the biggest ethnic minority other than Turkish in Turkey.

In 1950 power passed from a single-party dictatorship to an elected democratic government. But then something happened that would recur in different guises to haunt Turkey right up to the present: top army officers offered to stage a coup to suppress the elected government and restore the Republicans party which lost the previous election. The following years of Turkey saw similar political conflicts that resulted in the illegal deposition of the governments for four times including the one which was called 'Post-modern' military coup between the years 1960-1997. Of course, besides, the problems that were provoked by the pushed social and cultural transformation in a short period of time in the early years of the new Republic, education and health, which have been Turkey's two most important issues since the period of the Ottoman State, continually grew larger during the republican period and, worse than that, became tools for political goals. Especially, ideological and political concerns rather than logic and science ruled almost all the decisions made in the field of education. During this time, Turkey never became a noteworthy country in the international arena. On the contrary, universities, which should have made high-level scientific work, became a point of political focus and were in the forefront of military coups in the recent Turkish history.

WHO IS FETHULLAH GÜLEN?

Fethullah Gülen is a Turkish Muslim intellectual, who was born in 1941 into a traditional family in the Pasinler district of Erzurum, Turkey. Erzurum lies in the northeast of Turkey, and it is socio-culturally very conservative. It is a town that has, for long centuries, reflected the basic religious and national values in its social make-up.

As a young man, Gülen found himself in a position to deal with two different cultures, Islam and the West. Beginning three generations before him, people had experienced an identity crisis between these two cultures and civilizations. Gülen had a good view of the transforming cultural view of his age. Rather than falling into emotional or ethical despair in the face of social and institutional transformations occurring in Turkey and the world in general, he did not shy away from drawing on both individual and traditional experience while actively engaging with current social transformations by way of conscious participation. He developed a perspective that fed his personal, ethical, and cultural ideals with new repertoires of knowledge. (Ergene 2007)

Along with other great Islamic scholars like Maulana Jalaluddeen Rumi, one of the most important Islamic thinkers of late Ottoman Empire and the Republican era from whom Fethullah Gülen was influenced was Said Nursi (1873-1960). Nursi's ideas for a modern Islamic consciousness emphasized the need for a significant role for religious belief in public life, while rejecting obscurantism and embracing scientific and technological development.

KEYS POINTS IN HIS MESSAGE

Inter-faith and Inter-cultural dialogue: Fethullah Gülen believes that the thoughts, values and experiences which are shared by the people of not only the same nation but by all the nations of the world, are much more important and more numerous than what divides and antagonises them, encourage tolerance and respect and promote unity, while at the same time preventing the divisions and antagonisms from growing into open hostility and conflict.

Education: its role and significance

Fethullah Gulen unequivocally asserts: ‘If you wish to keep the masses under control, simply starve them of knowledge. The only escape route from tyranny is through the attainment of knowledge’. He believes the road to fair opportunity and justice for all is paved with an appropriate and sufficient general education. Only then do the resources develop within individuals and within their communities to enable understanding and mutual respect which, in turn, are the basis upon which each others rights can be secured by voluntary compliance. Fethullah Gulen has over the years encouraged the elite and community leaders, successful industrialists and businessmen, to support quality education for those who cannot otherwise afford it.

Fethullah Gulen maintains: If a civilized nation expects to be ignorant and free, it is expecting what never was and never will be’. In the field of education this principle means making intelligent use of, rather than running away from, the latest knowledge and technologies, notably mass communications technology such as television, to inform the public, especially those unable to attain a formal education, of matters of concern and relevance to them.

The usefulness of democracy

Fethullah Gulen is of the opinion that, in spite of its many shortcomings, democracy is the only viable choice in modern times for a system to manage political decision-making and governance generally. He argues therefore that mankind should preserve democracy and try to develop and improve it.

People will always demand freedom of choice in the way they run their affairs and especially in their expression of spiritual and religious values.

The duty of hope

Do not despair in the face of adversity and do not yield to anarchists’, he emphasizes time and again. He has warned most particularly

against giving up hope when disappointments and failures come thick and fast. Hopelessness is a quicksand that incapacitates the will to struggle and succeed; it is a noose that chokes the powers of reason and imagination so that, in their despair, people refuse to learn from their trials and run to false, short-term solutions which, in time, intensify the very problems they sought to escape. A strong faith in God and loyalty to fundamental principles are the best defence against the decay or loss of hope.

Visions for the future

Fethullah Gulen senses a positive change in the spiritual climate in the world. He envisions a 21st century in which we shall see the birth of a spiritual dynamism that will shake off the dust that has stifled moral values for so long. He looks forward to an age of tolerance and understanding leading to co-operation between the great human civilizations and ultimately to their unification. The nobility of the human spirit and moral conscience will triumph on the way to inter-civilizational dialogue based on shared values.

Mankind face anxieties and stresses in modern society, and their labours, even well-intentioned, have undesirable outcomes, psychologically, socio-politically and environmentally. The principal reason, Fethullah Gulen contends, is that man proceeds only haltingly in search of his Creator and the purpose of his creation. To the fundamental questions which we all ask—Why was I born? What is the purpose of my living? What is the meaning of death and what does it demand from me?—Fethullah Gulen gives very practical and convincing answers, but people must choose individually to be guided or not. In his speeches and writings he has often said: 'Man has come to a crossroads: one road leads to despair, the other to salvation. May God give us the 'wisdom to make the right choice.

Sharing the abundance

Fethullah Gulen does not believe that there exist any material shortages in the world which might conceivably justify the death of millions from famine or drought. The problems arise from unequal distribution of wealth and the resources from which wealth is generated. He argues

strongly that wealth should be channeled through private charities to the needy. He has spearheaded the establishment of many charitable organizations to handle the welfare of the underprivileged and to administer and carry out the most direct and effective methods of accomplishing this task.

Material and spiritual values

In his philosophical writings and speeches Fethullah Gulen has sought to synthesize the positive sciences with divinity, to reconcile the alleged incongruities between them. In the same spirit, he has argued that man must seek, in his everyday life of work and relationships, a subtle and delicate balance between material and spiritual values. Individuals and societies must guard against unrestrained avarice and the artificial multiplication of needs. Equally, absolute renunciation is not a way that all can follow, nor one that even the few can follow all the time. Through steady discipline and intelligent exercise of conscience a moderate path must be sought and held to. Only then can individuals and societies enjoy serenity and contentment.

Use reasoned argument, not violence

As for getting others to accept your ways, Fethullah Gulen tells us, mere force is not appropriate. In a situation where communication across great distances has become easier and easier, and people have access or can demand access to the means of mass communication, the only proper way to get others to accept your ideas is by persuading them through convincing arguments. Those who resort to brute force to reach their goals are intellectually bankrupt.

Current projects

Though officially retired, Fethullah Gulen remains active in the organization of meetings and conferences, and as writer and speaker. He is also teaching Islamic sciences to a large group of divinity graduates under his private tutelage. His following in his native Turkey and abroad

continues to grow. His biography recently reached its fiftieth edition. The Fountain Magazine (Issue 23, 1998).

THE HIZMET (Service) MOVEMENT

During the decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, he preached to large crowds in mosques and public places throughout Turkey and wrote hundreds of newspaper columns, articles and books espousing his ideas. Gradually, many Turks from all walks of life responded to his ideas of education, modernization, positive relationships with the West and interfaith dialogue by establishing dormitories, university preparatory courses and schools in which quality education, especially in the sciences and technology, were buttressed with commitment to Islamic ideals. With the fall of the Soviet Union, his ideas and service projects spread to the former Turkish-Soviet countries and ultimately to western Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, Australia and to Middle Eastern countries. Today, the G?len-inspired movement has over 1,000 schools in 100 countries on 5 continents. It is a civic movement rooted in moderate Islam and committed to educating youth, fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue, assisting the needy in society and contributing to global peace. (Helen Rose Ebaugh 2010)

Social movements take time to develop; they do not come ready-made. In any case, the availability of political opportunities does not automatically and promptly translate into increased action and is insufficient to account for the emergence of a collective action and actor. For an organized collective action as large as the G?len Movement, there has to be, already in place, a sufficient number of people with the necessary intellectual and professional skills, and the readiness and will to be employed, before a window of opportunity opens up in history.

Generally, a collective actor or action (such as a social movement or political party) does not automatically spring from political or social tensions or conditions. Numerous factors determine whether or not this will occur. Necessary factors include the availability of adequate organizational resources, the ability of movement leaders to represent their ideology attractively to the public or masses, and a political context which

makes action possible.

FIELD OF ACTIVITIES OF THE HIZMET MOVEMENT IN GENERAL

- Education; Nonreligious, non-denominational schools.
- Interfaith-Intercultural Dialogue Organizations
- Media Institutions; an expansion of educational initiative to masses.
- Relief Organizations
- Business Associations; collectively includes thousands of businesses.
- Healthcare institutions

BASIC DYNAMICS OF THE MOVEMENT

Analyzing the internal dynamics of a movement is important for two reasons. First, it allows others to perceive the structure by which the movement is organized. Second, it prevents others from falling into the trap of overlooking the totality of the movement, as they focus on partial analyses. I use dynamics here to mean the key concepts of the movement. Intellectual and social attitudes of a movement are shaped by the movement's dynamics. Social science analyses that study a movement proceed on safer grounds if they are aware of that movement's dynamics, and they do not fall into frequent fallacies. Understanding a movement's dynamics allows us to pinpoint who is making an objective analysis, and who forges a "pirated" analysis without any knowledge (Ergene 2007). For instance, a person who strives to comply with the basic dynamics of Islamic Sufi practice by being humble in his or her relations with others (tawadhu), or regarding himself as inferior to others (mahwiyat), would surely appear as a shy person. An observer, who is unaware of any Sufi and ascetic dynamics, might interpret this humble attitude as hypocritical or clandestine. If an analysis does not account for this movement's Muslim Sufi dynamics and experiences, can we really call this analysis "scientific"?

Sufi, moral, and spiritual profundity in Islam invites believers to be humble and tolerant in their family and their social relations. Personal virtue and social maturity are pre-requisites. Thus, in order to understand this movement, it is first necessary to understand the spiritual dynamics of Islam, and the extent to which Islam influences its participants. It is almost impossible to analyze even an ordinary Muslim's intellectual and social life without first understanding the profound nature of Islam in general. Cultural Islam gives us a general outlook in regard to the theological, mental, moral, and social relations of Muslims. When we look from the window of general dynamics, we can obtain a first glimpse of the individual, spiritual, moral, and social attitudes of Muslims in a community. From all these points of view, elaborating on the religious/spiritual, social, and cultural dynamics of the G?len movement would help us formulate a proper rendering of the religious and socio-cultural attitudes of the movement in general. Indeed, the titles and concepts that I will highlight are also important in regard to how they are interpreted and how they are transferred to social practice, as well as to their deep meaning in Muslim cultural perception. The importance of G?len comes from his success in transforming these dynamics into action in socio-cultural life. In theory, these cultural and religious dynamics existed in books and other sources for almost 1,500 years.

1. Magnanimity (Generosity of spirit)
2. Communicating the word of God (call, conveyance, and guidance)
3. Living for others
4. The spirit of devotion
5. Sacrifice, fidelity, and loyalty
6. Representing and communicating the faith

CONCLUSION: IS SOLIDARITY AN AIM OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT?

We are all 'solidary' through the identity of our behavior.
Georges Jacques Danton

Solidarity is not in itself the cause or primary goal of the formation and the collective action of the Movement.

It is a secondary or a tertiary effect which results from the collective services and action. Put simply, the Movement and its participants do not pursue solidarity as a goal of their effort; rather solidarity ensues from their collective effort. The solidarity which participants experience comes from their doing together what they collectively have approved as good for themselves and wider society. Such solidarity can be considered a ‘natural’ output (as against ‘politically contrived’ or ‘artificial’ input).

There are other organizations which pursue solidarity by focusing inward and guarding against outside influences. This contrasts with the Gulen Movement, which always seeks common grounds with others.

Finally, as the main question in this paper “how and why”: This is the case. This can be addressed by grouping all the factors in three main categories:

- 1- Potential in the Turkish social and historical context
- 2- Characteristics of Gulen’s ideas, and the success of projects
- 3- Reaching out to overall population

Due to combination of all these three factors, some others like Public Stance against Violence, Terror and Suicide Attacks, Emphasis on the Spiritual Dimension of Faith, Science and Faith in Harmony, Pro-Democracy, Solutions to Social Problems Working on the Ground, Other Civil Society Projects, Fethullah Gulen’s ideas have influenced millions of people both in Turkey and abroad.

References:

All the information that needs to be referenced, and if not stated the source, were taken from the official website of Fethullah Gulen: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org>.