

Redefining “Us” and “Them”:
Gülen’s approach to transformation of perceptions
between Muslims and non-Muslims

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ABSTRACT

Fethullah Gülen, the spirited advocate for peace, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, has stressed the importance of positive perception and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. In his speeches and writings he has pointed out the negativity of the images of Other in this complex relationship: “Many Muslims, even educated and conscious ones, believe the West seeks to undermine Islam with ever-more subtle and sophisticated methods... Western colonialism is remembered. The Ottoman State collapsed due to European attacks. Foreign invasions of Muslim lands were followed with great interest in Turkey. The gradual “transformation” of Islam into an ideology of conflict and reaction or into a party ideology also made people suspicious of Islam and Muslims...” (Gülen 2002). Gülen also describes the negative perception of Muslims: “This negative image has been fed to the world and now we must once more communicate the essential facet of Islam to those who are presumed to be civilized, using the principle of ‘gentle persuasion’” (Gülen 2004). This paper analyzes the role of negative perception in the development of conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim groups and proposes the tools of conflict resolution and peace-building.

The perception of “positive We–negative They” defines the core of collective axiology. A collective axiology is a system of value commitments that offers moral guidance to maintain relations with those within, and outside, a group (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006). It provides a sense of life and world, serves as a criterion for understanding actions and events, and regulates in-group behaviour. A collective axiology defines boundaries and relations among groups, help to justify negative actions against out-group, and increase group loyalty. It is connected with the perception of an in-group as morally pure and superior and an out-group as evil and vicious as well as promotes a “tunnel consciousness” and a diminished capacity for independent thought.

Based on Gülen’s ideas, this paper proposes the ways of changing such negative perceptions. Such intervention has to emphasize the positive features in the self-description of an in-group: “I can and do say that peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance are fundamental to Islam” (Gülen 2004).

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INTRODUCTION

Fethullah Gülen, the spirited advocate for peace, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, has stressed the importance of positive perception and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim population. In his speeches and writings he has called for mutual tolerance. In his article *Tolerance in the Life of the Individual and Society* Fethullah Gülen points out that “Today, more than anything else, our society is in need of tolerance... our citizens in European countries can only live in harmony in those countries by means of a vast atmosphere of tolerance” (Gülen 2004a). For Gülen, dialogue, tolerance, and trust reinforce each other: developed through the dialogue, tolerance helps to accept all differences in order to further the wider goal of cooperation. “Hostility is unacceptable. Relationships must be based on belief, love, mutual respect, assistance, and understanding instead of

conflict and realization of personal interest. Social education encourages people to pursue lofty ideals and to strive for perfection, not just to run after their own desires. Right calls for unity, virtues bring mutual support and solidarity, and belief secures brotherhood and sisterhood. Encouraging the soul to attain perfection brings happiness in both worlds” (Gülen 2002a). The paper analyzes the role of negative perception in the development of conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim groups and proposes the tools of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Based on Gülen’s ideas, as well as theory of collective axiology, developed by the author in collaboration with Dr. Rothbart, the paper proposes the ways of changing such negative perception. Such intervention has to emphasize the positive features in the self-description of an ingroup: “I can and do say that peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance are fundamental to Islam” (Gülen 2004). Gülen points out essential components of such process, including the recognition of ingroup violent actions and human rights of outgroups, and focusing on common points. The paper stresses the necessity, emphasized by Gülen, of increasing the interests we have in common with other people.

GÜLEN’S VIEW ON THE PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS

Since the early 1980’s, Gülen actively develops the approach to inter-religious understanding and formulates a framework for inter-faith tolerance. Through his writing, Gülen showed the importance of a positive perception between Muslims and non-Muslims and focused profoundly on the issues of peace and tolerance in the framework of the religio-philosophical worldview of Islam that protects humanity and categorically forbids any indiscretion of it. “Gülen... has a clear vision of human greatness, of the traits that define great human beings, those who actualize in themselves the highest and best of human potential” (Carroll 2007:38). Thus, the

dialogue between people of different cultures and faiths could bring mutual understanding, respect, and dedication to justice. It gives opportunity to understand beliefs, ideas, and positions of others, as well as basis of their identity. "Accepting all people as they are, regardless of who they are, does not mean putting believers and unbelievers on the same side of the scales. According to our way of thinking, the position of believers and unbelievers has its own specific value... I have such strong feelings and thoughts about him this does not prevent me from entering into dialogue with someone who does not think or believe the same." (2002a).

Nevertheless, Gülen acknowledges the differences between the West and Muslim countries. In his latest writings, Gülen has stressed the negativity of the images of Other in this complex relationship and growing problem of misperception. "Many Muslims, even educated and conscious ones, believe the West seeks to undermine Islam with ever-more subtle and sophisticated methods... Western colonialism is remembered. The Ottoman State collapsed due to European attacks. Foreign invasions of Muslim lands were followed with great interest in Turkey. The gradual "transformation" of Islam into an ideology of conflict and reaction or into a party ideology also made people suspicious of Islam and Muslims..." (Gülen 2002b). Gülen also describes the negative perception of Muslims: "This negative image has been fed to the world and now we must once more communicate the essential facet of Islam to those who are presumed to be civilized, using the principle of 'gentle persuasion'" (Gülen 2004).

Gülen sees this problem in the framework of the global problem of increasing negativity in the perceptions of others. He stresses that "communities and diverse groups within communities live with apparently endless anger, hatred, and detestation, pursuing plans of murder and complete destruction that would never previously been held possible. Nations and all segments within nations wish to get rid of the people or groups that they see as "other" (Gülen 2008c).

The roots of such negative images, according to Gülen, lie in neglecting positive sides of human relations, humanity and love. The ways how people perceive each other are influenced by hate and disgust. "It seems that we have forgotten how to act like human beings... We are overcome with rancor and hatred, flushed with fury, and regard one another with feelings of vengeance. Our breasts are drained of love, a haze of loathing obscures our feelings, and for so many years now the magical aura of love is alien to our perceptions. We constantly produce evil in our thoughts" (Gülen, 2008a).

Gülen points on another source of negative perceptions between Muslims and non-Muslims: the prevalence of emotions over rational vision. He shows that people who are possessed by anger and hate could not think and perceive world rationally: "He or she is paralyzed in terms of faculties, disabled in terms of reasoning, and so lost that she or he can neither think healthily nor can behave normally. Nor is he or she consistent. Bursting into anger, they sometimes destroy and reduce everything around them to ashes, and sometimes they are even in unrelenting rage and fury to the point that they eat out their own heart" (Gülen, 2008c). In his article "Longing for Love" Gülen further develops this idea. "So many of us act upon our emotions and abandon rational thinking. We trample and silence those who do not think the same as us; this, indeed, is our most distinct character. We plunge forward, headstrong, on our own way, without considering for even a moment that there may be other solutions to different problems; thus, we lead the way to destruction in many cases where we could have been a means for constructive solutions" (Gülen, 2008a).

The inter-religious perceptions impact the personalities of people: "While a person keeps looking at things or events from the perspective of certain considerations, their character and temperament will gradually take shape in line with that way of thinking" (Gülen, 2008b). Negative views foster negative traits of character. Gülen shows that negative thoughts about others, called 'ill-opinion' (sui dhan) are connected with suspicion, jealousy, and rancor. In

addition, they lead to self-pride and vanity. People became prisoners and victims of their own negative perceptions: “They never become tired of rancor and cannot get over their anger. Never even attempting to manage their anger, they incessantly run after wickedness, one evil deed after the other, under the influence of these evil thoughts, and they try to make the wrong seem right” (Gülen, 2008c).

These images of others as evil and non-human also influence behavior of the people. As Gülen notes, “People’s way of thinking shapes their behavior” (Gülen, 2008b). The results of negative perceptions filled with hate are violent actions, bombings and murders. “One party carves out the eye of another or murders them; the other responds by running into crowds as suicide bombers or driving a car filled with explosives through them. Violence is everywhere, as savage as, or perhaps even more atrocious than that caused by any barbarian” (Gülen, 2008a).

COLLECTIVE AXIOLOGY

Several factors influence the unfavorable perception of outgroups. First, the human need for differentiation can be inadequately satisfied in homogenous societies with negligible cultural diversity (Brewer 2000, 2001). In such cases people tend to develop ingroup loyalties to a community, city, or ethnic minority, stressing minor differences to outsiders within the wider society (Volkan 1997). Second, since positive social identity is formed on the basis of favorable social comparisons (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), members of any ingroup tend to denigrate the outgroup. Thus, certain stereotypes, biases and prejudices shape ingroup identity. Third, even in situations of economic and social equality, operating ingroup/outgroup comparisons lead inevitably to an underestimation of the economic and social powers of the ingroup, as well as to perceptions of relative deprivation, thus fueling further negativities (Davis, 1959; Gurr, 1993; Runciman, 1966).

Asymmetrical status or inequality is the fourth factor in the negative estimation of outgroups. In stratified societies with economic and political inequality, minority groups and groups with low status experience a stronger sense of collective self and more ingroup homogeneity (Brewer, 2000; Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk 1999; Simon 1992; Simon and Hamilton 1994). Their concerns about social identity, self-esteem, and dignity, combined with the perceived insecurity attendant upon their lower status, lead to stronger ingroup bias and negative projections (Gerard and Hoyt 1974; Mullen 1992; Sachdev and Bourhis 1984). For those communities with a history of intergroup violence, ingroup identity solidarity tends to supersede other kinds of identities.

Inequality and a history of conflictual relations can exaggerate unfavorable images. Nevertheless, cross-cutting practices, such as intermarriages, can maintain stability and balance within the larger identity system.

For communities engaged in generations of hostility, the multiplicity of group identities converges to a single dominant category, possibility retaining the symbols of a nationality, ethnicity, or religion. This unified, privileged identity is then juxtaposed against that of the dangerous Other. Members of different groups with multiple identities seek in their primary social identity a sense of security and moral legitimacy. Reliance on ideological myth becomes a powerful instrument for shaping ingroup identity, demonizing the Other, and providing cohesion in dangerous world.

Another important factor that defines the mode of perceptions between groups is collective axiology. The concept of collective axiology is developed in Drs. Rothbart and Korostelina's book *Identity, Morality and Threat* (2006). "A collective axiology is a system of value-commitments that define which actions are prohibited, and which actions are necessary for specific tasks. It provides a sense of life and world, serves to shape perceptions of actions and events, and provides a basis for evaluating group members. A collective axiology defines boundaries and relations among groups and

establishes criteria for ingroup/outgroup membership. Through its collective axiology, a group traces its development from a sacred past, extracted from mythic episodes beyond the life of mortals, and seeks permanence. Transcending the finitude of individual life, a collective axiology extends retrospectively from the salient episodes of the past to a prospective vision, presumably into the otherwise uncertain future. An individual's identity and values that are acquired at birth and left behind at death exist before that birth and behind that death" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006:6).

Axiology is an inquiry into the nature, criteria, and conception of value. Of course, such a study of values is legend in the world of philosophy, from its earliest days. In the present study, we explore how the value-commitments underpinning threat-narratives are often converted to a collective axiology of identity and difference, which in turn galvanizes conflict protagonists to resort to extreme forms of violence.

A collective axiology includes three constructed forms: mythic narrative, sacred icons, and normative orders.

1. *Mythic narrative.* "Stories of the threatening Other gain potency through dissemination of shocking images, harrowing anecdotes, and accounts of violence. Over time, such stories solidify perceptions of the Other through seemingly fixed negativities that are grounded, presumably, in a common place of origin, a shared ancestry, or common flaws. Through the power of such images, certain particularities of places, times, and actors become sacred to both storytellers and listeners" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006: 37). The sacred episodes acquire archetypal meanings that shape group consciousness and contribute to the mythic narratives that color their perceptions of the Other.

2. *Iconic order.* Many images of enemy became deeply emotional and concentrated the whole pattern of characterizing others as dangerous. "Emerging from specific storylines about localized episodes, icons function as the graphic expressions of negativities. A particular episode, event, action, or encounter is privileged, ven-

erated, and almost sanctified in this transition in the minds of the faithful. Certain impressions produce demonic images, adding to the religious significance of profane episodes. Viewed through such images, a stranger's actions function as *prototypes* of their unjust, immoral, uncivilized, or possibly inhuman character" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006: 37–38).

3. *Normative order*. The normative order provides a basis for understanding the world in morally binary terms: good/evil, holy/disrespectful, sacred/profane, or virtuous/vicious. "To accept 'who we are,' it becomes necessary to define 'who we are not,' that is, 'who are the Others.' Such divisions are often contested and emotionally-charged. This duality of ingroup/outgroup identities develops value judgments about how the world should be organized" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006: 40).

Two variables characterize the dynamics of collective axiology: the degree of collective generality and the degree of axiological balance.

1. *Collective generality*. The degree of collective generality "refers to the ways in which ingroup members categorize the Other, how they simplify, or not, their defining (essential) character" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006: 45). The collective generality includes four main characteristics:

- (i) homogeneity of perceptions and behaviors of outgroup members,
- (ii) long-term stability of their beliefs, attitudes, and actions,
- (iii) resistance to change,
- (iv) the scope or range of the outgroup category.

A high level of collective generality is connected with the viewing an outgroup as consistent, homogeneous, demonstrating fixed patterns of behaviors, committed to durable rigid beliefs and values, and widespread in the region or the whole world. A low degree of collective generality reflects the perception of the outgroup as differentiated, ready for transformation, exhibiting various kinds of behaviors, and relatively limited in scope.

The degree of collective generality can change over time, especially in the situation of strengthening intergroup tensions or violence. For example, escalation of conflict can lead to the perception of an enemy not as a small local group but as an entire race, ethnic group, nationality, or culture. The image of an outgroup can become more rigid, firm, and homogeneous. During violent conflicts, people tend to deny the diversity and competing priorities of an outgroup and its multicultural and political structure and to perceive it as a single “entity” with similar beliefs and attitudes and supporting common policies toward other groups.

2. *Axiological balance*. “Axiological balance refers to a kind of parallelism of virtues and vices attributes to groups. When applied to stories about the Other, a balanced axiology embeds positive and negative characteristics in group identities” (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006:46). Balanced axiology leads to the recognition of decency and morality as well as immorality and cruelty of both the Other and the ingroup. A high degree of axiological balance reflects recognition of one’s own moral faults and failings, while a low degree of axiological balance is connected with the perception of an ingroup as morally pure and superior and an outgroup as evil and vicious. This tends to promote a “tunnel consciousness” and a diminished capacity for independent thought. “In its extreme form, a low axiological balance is correlated to exaggeration, inflation, and fabrication of outgroup vices and ingroup glories. The ‘Them/Us’ duality seems fixed in the timeless social order. With a fabricated sense of its collective virtues, the ingroup promotes a sense of moral supremacy over the outgroup. Such an unbalanced depiction of group differences provides a ground for a struggle against criminal elements of the world” (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006:46).

Two variables —axiological balance and collective generality—define collective axiology for each identity group. Type 1 represents the pattern of *low* axiological balance and *high* collective generality. Such a pattern is familiar to cases of protracted conflict. A sacred ingroup requires loyalty and obedience. This collective axiology is

often associated with extreme forms of nationalism, fascism, racism, and sectarianism. The narratives of ingroups and outgroups reflect the duality of perception in which the Others are portrayed as evil and vicious and ingroups are perceived as virtuous and moral. People are not able to recognize the Others' merits, understand their complexities, and assess their motivation, values, and behavior. "In the totalizing effect of protracted conflict, visions of evil tend to overpower visions of goodness. The retributive justice of 'an eye for an eye' can blind protagonists to exactly what a just world would look like. In many conflict settings, the symbols of negativities—the images of evil-doings of the other—are far more mesmerizing than images of ingroup virtues" (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006, 48).

Type 2 represents cases of *low* axiological balance and *low* generality. The ingroup views itself as morally pure, sacred, and glorified, while the outgroup is characterized as exhibiting mixed values and virtues. Nevertheless, members of the ingroup can recognize the multiple voices of the outgroups, their ability to change, and the possibility of connection or collaboration with "the best" members of outgroups. They believe that particular policies and specially designed negotiations can produce changes in the Others. This kind of mixed attribution of values can be found in the patriotic sentiments of a nation's powerful social classes. For example, East Timoreans continue to struggle for ethnic identity as they seek to overcome the "totalizing" effects of Indonesian nationalism (Tan, 2006).

Type 3 portrays a *high* degree of axiological balance and a *high* degree of collective generality. This collective axiology is connected with the attribution of positive and negative values to both ingroup and outgroup. Individuals are relatively free to criticize the ingroup and have some positive perceptions of the outgroup. However, they see the outgroup as homogenous, having similar beliefs and behaviors. The characteristics of the groups in Quadrant 3 are also evident in gender stereotyping as a major source of violence against women. Thus, Cheldelin (2006) shows that society produces and repeats

through the media the stereotypes of women as sexual objects. The sexual violence against women is rooted in these rigid stereotypes, the perception of women as all alike, and discrimination.

Type 4 represents groups with a balanced axiology and *low* generality. Both the ingroup and the outgroup identities are perceived as representing virtues and vices and moral and immoral behavior. The ingroup members are allowed to openly criticize the ingroup and respect outgroup members. Nevertheless, the support and loyalty to ingroup values in this quadrant are important, and ingroup identity is relatively salient. This collective axiology is found in liberal and humanistic movements, peacemakers, and human rights advocates. This is illustrated in the humanitarian ideals in the field of international relations (Sterns, 2006).

TRANSFORMATION OF PERCEPTIONS

The transformation of negative perceptions of others into positive ones includes two interrelated processes: (1) the increase in the axiological balance and (2) decrease in axiological generality. The first goal can be achieved through the alteration of the positive images of own group and negative images of others into complex images that contain both positive and negative features. The second goal can be achieved through the reassessment of the homogeneity of the other groups and perception of others as having multiple views and opinions. Gülen's approach to tolerance and dialogue provides insights for this complex process of transformation.

The structure of narratives, based on the perception of "They as an enemy" and reflecting negative attitudes, feeling, and stereotypes, can be replaced by a structure rooted in a nonviolent self-image. To alter their negative perceptions, people have to recognize and accept their own good nature: "We are far removed from representing our unique status among all of existence. Despite all the qualities we possess which the angels envy, we engage in acts that even evil spirits would be embarrassed of... We are all humans; this means our genes

all come from those of Prophet Adam and our essence is from the Truth of Ahmad. Then, come! Let us rise up against all the evil motives and cry out to all the worlds that we are vicegerents on the earth and that we are racing for the heavens! Let us make angels appreciate the eminence of being human!” (Gülen, 2008a). To Gülen, emphasis on peoples good will and good nature is not a new idea: “This is not constructing something from zero point, but revealing things, which were about to be declared “extinct” despite their existence, and became alien to us due to their inactiveness as reemerging waters in useless holes. We say: “Human beings are not animals ... They are human beings... Therefore, our behaviors should be on a different line and should include different criteria. Our relations with human beings should be based on being human” (Gülen, 2006b). Thus, the humanity of people can serve as an important basis for overcoming negativity in relations and perceptions.

The values, needs, and traditions of each religious group has to be perceived not as contradictory to each other, but in the framework of the respect for religion that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all religious groups. Gülen stresses “the necessity of increasing the interests we have in common with other people. In fact, even if the people we talk with are Jews and Christians, this approach still should be adopted and issues that can separate us should be avoided altogether” (Gülen 2004c). He also emphasizes that “For interfaith dialogue to succeed, we must forget the past, ignore polemics, and focus on common points” (Gülen 2002b). This approach can also help resolve contradictions between religion and secular state, changes people’s conceptions of a membership from different groups in conflict to much more inclusive group, and makes attitudes toward other religious groups more positive, even of they had a long history of offences.

As it was discussed above, one of the ways for the transformation of negative perceptions into positive one involves redefinition of us and acceptance of ingroup negative deeds The recognition of ingroup violent actions and human rights of outgroups poses a threat

to ingroup identity, which rests on the idea of “positive We–negative They”. As Gülen stressed, “when an individual is performing self-criticism—given that they do not give in to hopelessness—they should be harsh” (2008b). Describing people of good heart, he also stresses that it is important to analyze and fight own negative intentions and thinking: “People of heart are too busy fighting their selves and their misdemeanors to be interested in the misdeeds of others. In contrast, they set an example to others of what a good person should be, leading others to attain higher horizons” (Gülen. 2006a).

The acknowledgment of negative ingroup actions requires reviewing and reconceptualization of ingroup identity that always invokes strong resistance. Ingroup members have a strong aspiration to defend the positive self-image and defy accepting negative information that can destroy it. Stressing other important components of the meaning of identity, such as cultural heritage, deep traditions, history of peaceful coexistence with other groups, and so on, can help preserve a high level of self-esteem and ingroup pride.

Such narrative intervention has to emphasize the positive features in the self-description of an ingroup, such as “peaceful people,” “value of tolerance,” “open-mindedness and understanding,” and “pleasure of forgiveness.” These images always exist in the self-portrayal of all people and serve as powerful sources for self-esteem and pride. As Gülen points out “I can and do say that peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance are fundamental to Islam” (Gülen 2004c). He continues: “Indeed, peace is of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences which are bound to specific reasons and conditions. In that respect, we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or for humanity” (Gülen 2004b).

The next step is to change the negative perception between Muslims and non- Muslims. Gülen emphasizes that people do not have the rights to judge others and blame them for their mistakes and deeds. : “A person should not see all other people as superior

to themselves, nor should they project the weakness or ugliness that is in their own person on others through suspicion or make the mistake of criticizing certain attitudes and acts of others without knowing the underlying reasons... There is no such ethical rule that requires us to investigate the faults of others, to divulge them, or to embarrass these people. On the contrary, searching out faults and mistakes, divulging sins, and humiliating others is considered to be immoral in Islam” (Gülen 2008b).

The emphasis on peaceful images of the ingroup and outgroup can provoke supporting narratives that describe the ingroup’s peaceful history and glory and positive situations in interethnic relations. Such storytelling by different people will reinforce them through complimentary ideas and constructive character. The positive emotions produced during this process will strengthen the formation of peaceful self-concepts and positive perceptions of others, with an emphasis on tolerance, reconciliation, and goodwill. Gülen shows the importance of positive acceptance of other, avoidance of competition and judgment. “People of heart ... open their hearts to everyone, welcoming them affectionately, and appearing as an angel of preservation in society. Regarding their deeds and attitudes, they try to be compatible with everybody, they try to avoid vicious competition with others, and they avoid resentment...Furthermore, they give generously to other people in pursuit of positive activities and they try to show as much respect as possible to the philosophy and ideas that other people adopt” (Gülen, 2006a). More over, Gülen calls for perception of others without criticism. Describing people of the heart, he shows that “They turn a blind eye to what other people may do wrong. Responding with a smile to those who have displayed negative attitudes, such people nullify bad behavior with kindness, not thinking to hurt anybody, even when they have been hurt over and over again” (Gülen, 2006a).

To turn such positive perceptions into positive attitudes and actions, the next step has to be taken: the formation of a common, overarching identity that can lead to the de-escalation of conflict. The

common or shared identities can reduce intergroup hostility by minimizing the attention to ethnic/racial/religious differences and thinking of themselves as “one unit.” The sources for the basis of an overarching identity can be found in the common territorial position, national ideas, community problems, and so forth. Gülen shows the similarities of democracy and Islam: “In democratic societies, people govern themselves as opposed to being ruled by someone above. The individual has priority over the community in this type of political system, being free to determine how to live his or her own life. Individualism is not absolute, though. People achieve a better existence by living within a society and this requires that they adjust and limit their freedom according to the criteria of social life... As Islam holds individuals and societies responsible for their own fate, people must be responsible for governing themselves” (Gülen 2002a).

The formation of a new common identity is possible only if ingroup members do not perceive any danger or threat to their primary identity (ethnic/racial/religious) from a new overarching identity. If values, core ideas, or new identity needs contradict the possible (perceived) values and ideas of the existing identity, a new circle of violence can begin. The perception and concept of the new common identity have to be constructed very carefully, using narratives of existing collaboration and situations of successful teamwork. By asking such questions as “What can we do together to make our future better?” and “What can we do for our children?” people can change the emphasis of narratives from opposition in the past to mutual understanding and responsibilities, and mutual defending of human rights among former enemies. In this case, the concepts of a peaceful ingroup and of a new “We-ness” will be developed simultaneously and strengthen each other.

CONCLUSION

In his teaching and writing, Gülen constantly stresses the necessity of transformation of negative perceptions between Muslims and

non-Muslims and importance of tolerance as a way to bring about peace to the society. "People with different ideas and thoughts are either going to seek ways of getting along by means of reconciliation or they will constantly fight with one another.... The longest period of peace in the Balkans and the Middle East, which have always been volatile areas, was realized with the enduring tolerance of our ancestors. From the moment that tolerance and those great representatives left history, this region became void of peace and contentment...At the same time, our citizens in European countries can only live in harmony in those countries by means of a vast atmosphere of tolerance" (Gülen 2004a).

The transformation of negative images and formation of peaceful perceptions between Muslims and non-Muslims is a complex process that requires participation of both sides. Gülen points out essential components of this process, including the recognition of ingroup violent actions and human rights of outgroups, and focusing on common points. He also stresses the importance of emphasizing the positive features in the self-description of an ingroup, such as "peaceful people," "value of tolerance," "open-mindedness and understanding," and "pleasure of forgiveness." Gülen argues that no positive perceptions could be possible without increasing interests to values and ideas that people have in common and without understanding of the similarities of democracy and Islam. As Gülen points out, "To conclude, good intentions, positive thinking, and perceiving the beautiful are signs of a person's purity of heart and the immensity of their conscience. If a person starts to judge others, no one will be left behind. If we do not hold on to good opinions from the beginning, we cannot help but judge everybody and everything. But when other people are concerned they should hold on to good opinions. We must remember that it is better to be mistaken in a good opinion than being proven right with a negative opinion" (Gülen, 2008b)

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