

A Contextual Analysis of the Supporters and Critics of the Gülen/Hizmet Movement

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ABSTRACT

The faith-based civic society movement inspired by the ideas and work of Fethullah Gülen has been increasingly recognized as a significant contributor to educational and economic development in Turkey as well as in an increasing number of countries where the majority of the population may not be Muslim. *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Le Monde* and *Forbes* have recently given positive coverage of the impact and activities of the movement in and outside of Turkey, in addition to the increasing number of academic journal articles and books by University presses such as Syracuse University Press, SUNY Press, Leeds Metropolitan University Press, and Stanford University Press. While originating in a predominantly Muslim society, the movement continues to attract participants in countries and regions with immense religious and ethnic diversity. Within Turkey, the supporters of the movement include journalists, academics, civic leaders and politicians, as well as the majority of current and past Ministers, Prime Ministers and Presidents of the country. According to Chris Morris of BBC, Gülen is seen as “the most prominent Turkish religious leader alive,” and is “widely admired and trusted by many ordinary Turkish citizens”. While the activities of the movement in education, media, interfaith dialogue, disaster relief and health care draw praise domestically and abroad, the movement does have

its critics. Critiques of the movement range from academic criticism based on field studies or literature surveys to politically driven “virulent attacks” in the media, attempts at economic marginalization, and continuing “legal harassment” by “radical prosecutors”. While often marginal within the overall context of Turkish society, some opponents accuse the movement of concealing a political agenda to change the secular nature of Turkish Republic, which is, according to Fuller, a “sweeping and unanswerable charge.” When examining such charges, certain patterns emerge allowing these critics to be identified as three main types: (1) political/pragmatic opponents who see the GHM as a threat to the establishment power/status structure, (2) ideological opponents such as former or current advocates of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, neo-nationalist (*ulusalcılar*), radical political Islamist groups, and finally (3) those who are misled by some elements of the media about the nature of the movement. In this paper, we analyze the most significant arguments and actions of those individuals and groups who praise and support or criticize and oppose the so-called “Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement.”

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The faith-based civic society movement inspired by the ideas and work of Fethullah Gülen has been increasingly recognized as a significant contributor to educational and economic development in Turkey as well as in an increasing number of countries where the majority of the population may not be Muslim. *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Le Monde* and *Forbes* have recently given positive coverage of the impact and activities of the movement in and outside of Turkey, as have an increasing number of academic journal articles and books produced by university presses (Yavuz and Esposito 2005, Abu-Rabi 2007, Yılmaz 2007, Turam 2007). While originating in a predominantly Muslim society, the movement continues to attract participants in countries and regions with immense religious and ethnic diversity.

Within Turkey, the supporters of the movement include journalists, academics, civic leaders and politicians, as well as the majority of current and past Ministers, Prime Ministers and Presidents of the country. According to Chris Morris of BBC, Gülen is seen as “the most prominent Turkish religious leader alive,” and is “widely admired and trusted by many ordinary Turkish citizens” (Morris 2005, p.79). While the activities of the movement in education, media, interfaith dialogue, disaster relief and health care draw praise domestically and abroad, the movement does have its critics. Critiques of the movement range from academic criticism based on field studies or literature surveys to politically driven “virulent attacks” in the media, attempts at economic marginalization, and continuing “legal harassment” by “radical prosecutors” (Fuller 2008, pp.58-59). While often marginal within the overall context of Turkish society, some opponents accuse the movement of concealing a political agenda to change the secular nature of Turkish Republic, which is, according to Fuller, a “sweeping and unanswerable charge.” When examining such charges, certain patterns emerge allowing these critics to be identified as three main types: (1) political/pragmatic opponents who see the GHM as a threat to the establishment’s power/status structure, (2) ideological opponents such as former or current advocates of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, neo-nationalists (*ulusalcılar*), radical political Islamist groups, and finally (3) those who are misled by some elements of the media about the nature of the movement. In the rest of this paper, we will analyze the most significant arguments and actions of those individuals and groups who praise and support or criticize and oppose the so-called “Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement.”¹

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No discussion of the present controversy surrounding the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement can be attempted without general knowledge of the Turkish socio-historical context in which the movement came to

be. If you will bear with us, we will now roughly sketch several historical dynamics pertinent to the development of the movement.

The history of Turks in Asia Minor goes back to 10th century. The Turks established one of the world's most powerful empires, one that lasted from the end of the 13th to the beginning of the 20th century. The relationship between the state and religion was relatively harmonious during Ottoman rule, although certainly, local problems cropped up at various times. When the empire fell apart, three main ideologies became prevalent, namely Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkism (Akçura, 1991). It was the ideology of Turkism, coupled with Westernism, that won out when the New Republic was established in 1923, even though Islam had been used as a unifying and motivating force both during the Turkish War of Independence and in the earlier period of the Republic.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) ran the country according to his own ideas and wishes. Although he made sweeping changes – such as closing all madrasas and dervish lodges, changing the script from Arabic to Latin, and ordering men of religion to perform the call to prayer in Turkish rather than Arabic – hence choosing nationalism as the unifying source among people; he rejected others' proposals to codify the ideology of the state, arguing that this would freeze the movement (Karaosmanoğlu, 2005, pp.143-144). Even so, in 1928, the designation of Islam as the religion of the state was removed from the national constitution; and until 1937, nothing was added. In 1937, Kemalist secularism was officially designated as the religion of the state. However, it is fair to say that when Atatürk was alive, he acted according to his own perceptions and the conditions of each given situation, rather than according to a written statement or constitution. The short-lived ban on broadcasting Turkish classical music from state radio stations is an interesting example of this.² Atatürk never banned headscarf; and although he did not attend prayers after 1924, he respected others' desire to do so.

After the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938, one party rule continued. The person who suggested codifying Kemalist ideology during the time of Atatürk was Yakup Kadri, who published a journal called *Kadro* (*Cadre*). Kadri argued in *Kadro*, that change had to come from the top down; and during the single party period his suggestions were mostly heeded: the administration during this period can be characterized as “for the people, despite the people,” i.e. as typical authoritarian French Jacobin rule. Until the multi-party years, the People’s Republicans Party (PRP) was the only party in the country. Elected officials and appointed officials were one and the same; and the governors of the provinces, who were supposed to represent the state, were also party representatives. Control over religion was hardened, until the state controlled and regulated virtually all religious activities through its bureaucratic mechanism, called the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). For example, all Friday sermons throughout the country were preached according to weekly texts sent by the central government.

In 1950, for the first time in the country’s history, democratic elections were held – that is, if we don’t count the elections in 1946, in which voting was public and tallying was behind closed doors. In 1950, the Republican People’s Party (PRP, or CHP in Turkish) party that had been in power since 1923 lost; and a newly established party, the Democrat Party, under the leadership of Adnan Menderes, a former member of PRP, won the election. After the Democrat Party had ruled the country for about ten years, the military incited by the Kemalist elite and the media, staged a coup-d’état in 1960, arrested Prime Minister Menderes and his ministers and hung them on the grounds that they had “taken the country backward” and on corruption charges which later turned out to be baseless. During the court trial, the Prime Minister was accused of being a reactionary (*murteci*), of not complying with the constitution, of killing innocent students in meat processing machines, of fathering an illegitimate child, and of downsizing a city to a town

for political gain. One of the serious crimes of Menderes was his allowance for the making of call to Muslim prayer in Arabic, as it is done in practically every Muslim community around the world. Although Menderes did not perform the Muslim ritual prayer a single time in his life time, his democratic stance on issues of religious freedom was enough to classify him as an enemy of the secular nature of the Republic.

This practice of labeling individuals as reactionary/backwardist and, without solid proof, claiming that they have a hidden agenda, is a strategy that has been used time and time again in modern Turkish history, up to this very day. Generally speaking, it is used to destroy individuals' credibility, to incite the military's wrath and to usurp power, wealth and authority. Menderes became a victim of false claims, just like many prime ministers and politicians after him. Neither Turgut Özal, who was one of the most pro-Western and pro-American politicians ever in Turkish history; nor Suleyman Demirel, who was the longtime leader of a center-right party and former prime minister and president of Turkey; nor the current prime minister, Tayyip Erdoğan, nor the current president of the country, Abdullah Gül, could avoid this type of false labeling; for its roots extend back to the Kemalist elite's self-claimed ownership of the country and all national authority. An ironic statement by the PRP's governor of Ankara explains this stance very well. He said, "If communism will come to this country, we should be the ones who will bring it." In other words, any change Turkish society will undergo, has to be decided by the ruling elite.

For this reason, one of the most controversial issues in recent Turkish politics has been the relationship of religion, secularism and the state. Two main arguments related to this issue have solidified. The first of these arguments is that an overwhelming majority of Turks and a sizeable number of intellectuals and academicians are in favor of the American type of secularism, in which the state and religious entities have their separate realms, and the state preserves an equal distance to all beliefs. The second argument is for

the opposite type of (French) *laicism*, which the Kemalist elite prefers, namely the one in which the state has the right to decide how individuals present and practice their religion. In the face of this ongoing controversy, many Turks consider European Union membership a way to secure more rights and freedom for practicing Muslims, and hence, implement the American type of secularism.

In addition to the public debate over the true nature of secularism, another historical dynamic has shaped the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement. This dynamic is the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of modern Turkish society, inherited from both the Seljuk and the Ottoman societies in spite of the Kemalist elite's attempt to fashion a completely homogenous society in contradistinction to the past. As early as the 10th century, Muslim Turks lived peacefully side by side with the members of different religious groups, including Orthodox Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and Jews, and with subscribers to varying interpretations of the Islamic faith. This relatively peaceful coexistence lasted until the rise of nationalism and demise of the empire. However, certain elements of this past still exist in and outside of Turkey. Even today, Turkey and some regions that formerly belonged to the Ottoman Empire are home to the members of different religions as well as to Muslims whose theological and practical interpretations vary. It is important to note that the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement's efforts to promote inter-faith dialog hark back to this regional tradition of peaceful coexistence. When Gülen visited various religious leaders, or members of different faith, these people did not perceive his actions as something new or totally peculiar to him. Rather, they perceived his initiatives as a revival of an old tradition. As a Turkish-Jewish businessman phrases it, "It is a way which suits the Turks' ancestors."³

In short, the values, actions and educational projects of the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement can be viewed as a revival, or as a continuation of many socio-cultural and religious values and practices that were common to the region until the Kemalist project gained dominance. This does not mean, as some opponents assert, that the mem-

bers of the *Gülen/Hizmet* Movement are “reactionary,” or that they wish to flee from post-modernity by reviving certain governmental and social structures of the past. To the contrary, as many academics studying the transnational phenomena related to the movement conclude, the participants in the movement are working toward a flexible integration of the traditional values and cultural elements with globalization, democracy and modern social organization.

SUPPORTERS OF THE GÜLEN/*HIZMET* MOVEMENT

In his recent book on Turkey, Graham Fuller (2008, pp.59-60) asserts that “despite some virulent attacks against it, the *Gülen/Hizmet* Movement has been viewed positively by a number of leading Turkish politicians, prime ministers and presidents over the years on both the right and left”; that “some of the country’s top military leaders even looked upon it favorably as an Islamic bulk ward against communism during the Cold War”; and that “others still see it as a nationalist-minded source of religious values that can combat the radical left and other extremist movements.” As the movement has grown beyond Turkey and become a truly transnational movement, not only elected officials, but also journalists, artists, theologians and religious leaders have expressed their support for it by attending events organized by the GHM participants, by visiting *Gülen* -inspired institutions, and by publishing/broadcasting about the activities of the movement in various media. Recently, there has been recognition of the positive contributions of the *Gülen/Hizmet* Movement as well, by such renown figures as Pope John Paul II, who gave a personal audience to *Gülen* and exchanged ideas on interfaith dialog, former U.S. president Bill Clinton, and senator Hillary Clinton, who verbally acknowledged the contribution of the movement to world peace and true understanding of Islam. While it would be impossible to cite all such individuals here due to space considerations, we will attempt to

provide an overview of the supporters, with a focus on Turkish figures and prominent examples from each category.

Support for the movement's activities, especially in the area of education come from all segments of the Turkish political spectrum, with the exception of the fringe segments, ie. the radical left and right, who are in favor of a totalitarian state control of religion. During the early years of the movement, Turgut Özal, who was the prime minister at the time and later became the country's president (1984-1993), expressed his support for the movement by visiting its schools, recommending the schools to the leaders of the respective countries, especially to those in Central Asia, and by sending letters of reference. Özal was known to be socially conservative; but, economically and politically speaking, he was a liberal leader who understood the forces of globalization and opened the way for Turkey to become a member of the EU and global community. Özal met with Gülen personally, exchanged ideas, and expressed his encouragement for the GHM on many occasions.

The second important supporter from the opposite side of the political spectrum was the long time leader of the Turkish left and former Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit. Ecevit met with Gülen twice and visited the movement's schools in and outside of the country. Ecevit supported Gülen and the movement in the face of criticism from his fellow party members, at various times arguing that Gülen's understanding of Islam would help prevent Central Asian countries from adopting more politically oriented models of faith, and that Gülen's interpretation of Islam could coexist with the modern ideas. After a visit to one of the educational institutions run by Gülen inspired people, he stated:

"I examined the activities of these educational entrepreneurs and educators abroad, and I was pleased with what I saw. First of all, regardless of the host country, the educators were providing modern education. They were offering Turkish language classes to their students. And they were offering education in English, which is a prerequisite for scientific development today. Together with the local language, these schools were

providing education in three languages. This is a great humanitarian service” (Ateş et al., 2005, p. 30).

Gülen expressed his appreciation for Ecevit’s consistent stance several times, the last of which was published in an obituary in the *Zaman* daily when Bülent Ecevit died in November, 2006.

There are numerous other government officials and politicians who represent different ideological camps and parties, yet unite in their appreciation of and applause for the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement. Alpaslan Türkeş, the late leader of Turkish nationalist party; Süleyman Demirel, the former prime minister and president of Turkey, (center right); Husamettin Çındoruk, the former president of the Turkish parliament (center right); and Bülent Arınç, the former president of the Turkish parliament and vice president of the Justice and Development Party (center right); as well as Kasım Gülek, general secretary of CHP; Hikmet Çetin, the former prime minister (center left) and a member of CHP; the leaders of Central Asian countries such as Saparmurat Turkmenbaşı, the former president of Turkmenistan; and Haydar Aliyev, the former president of Azerbaijan, as well as presidents of Kazakhstan, Kirgizistan, and Tajikistan are among the political leaders who have expressed support for the movement. Tayyip Erdoğan, the current Prime Minister of Turkey, and Abdullah Gül, the current President, have also expressed their positive views numerous times, sent letters of reference, visited schools and attended cultural activities organized by GHM participants.

Additionally, the Turkish media has followed Gülen and the GHM closely during the last three decades. Many columnists of diverse political backgrounds (such as liberals, conservatives and leftists) have expressed their approval of various initiatives coming from the participants of the GHM. Ali Bayramoğlu, Cengiz Candar, Ahmet Taşgetiren, Şahin Alpay, Mehmet Barlas, Toktamış Ateş, Nazlı Ilıcak, Taha Akyol, Gülay Göktürk and Fehmi Kuru – all of whom are or used to be the editor-in-chiefs or regular columnists for many mainstream Turkish newspapers – have repeated on vari-

ous occasions that Gülen and the GHM contribute positively to the democratization and civic life of the country, as well as to the development of mutual respect among the various segments of society.

Many actors, actresses, singers, directors, scriptwriters and art critics have also expressed support for the movement, in various ways. Cem Karaca is an interesting figure in this group. Hailing from a Turkish-Armenian family, Karaca defined himself as a leftist and was exiled to Europe after the military coup of 1980 until 1983 for political reasons. Despite some criticism, he openly expressed his support for the movement and for Gülen personally. As an artist, he recited one of Gülen's poems for an artistic project and sent letters to Gülen expressing his friendship and support. Gülen also sent letters expressing his respect and appreciation for the artist's endeavors. Gülen expressed his deep sorrow when Karaca died, and called him "someone with an intellectual and honest stance who earned our society's love" (*Zaman*, 02/08/2008).

There are also supporters among the Turkish celebrities. For example, scenario writer Ayşe Şaşa (in Can, 1998) describes Gülen's stance as "the 1,000-year-old collective heritage of the freedom-loving Anatolian people. It carries no defect of malice or prejudice. There's a benevolent stamp of broad tolerance and vast well-being in every atom." Director Halit Refiğ, actor Bulut Aras, soccer player Hakan Şukur, rock singer Murat Gögebakan, who dedicated some of his songs to Gülen, and many others from performing artists and sportsmen/women have visited either Gülen or the GHM's institutions, participated in cultural events organized by the GHM, and/or expressed their positive views of the GHM's activities and institutions.

Gülen invited and visited the leaders of major religious communities, like the Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Jews and Syriacs, first in Turkey and later abroad. For example, he met with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Barthelomeos, former Turkish-Armenian Patriarch Karakin, Chief Rabbi of Turkey, Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel Eliyahu Bakshi Daron, and the representative of the

Vatican to Istanbul, M. Marovitch. These encounters were not comprised of one-time visits, but rather, of periodic dinners, friendship meetings and friendship visits.

One of these inter-religious meetings was of critical importance. Gülen , after meeting with Christian leaders in Turkey, visited Cardinal John O'Connor in New York, and later met with Pope Jean Paul II in February, 1998 at the Vatican. During this meeting, Gülen invited the Pope to visit together the places sacred to Christianity which are located in Turkey; to open a new school of theology in Harran in the southeast Turkey, where Abraham is believed to have lived for some time; to set up an interfaith student exchange program; and to work together to disprove the idea of “a clash of civilization.” This monumental meeting has been discussed by many and is became the crux of some criticisms leveled against Gülen and the GHM. How ironic it is that Gülen , who had been and still is accused by radical secularists of clandestinely working to build an Islamic state, was at the time also accused of being one of the Pope’s “secret cardinals.” Nevertheless, since 1998, many theologians, priests, rabbis and Muslim leaders in various countries, including United States, have ignored such unsubstantiated claims and stepped up to express their support for the peaceful contributions of the movement to interfaith dialog worldwide.

Finally, the Anatolian businessmen and businesswomen who finance many of the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement’s educational institutions in Turkey and abroad have expressed their sincere support, not only verbally, but in terms of financial investment and organizational aid. In addition to one of the largest business confederations, which represents 150 business associations in Turkey, individual businessmen support the movement. The late Uzeyir Garih, a prominent Turkish-Jewish businessman called Gülen someone “who tries to balance the aggression, greed and egoism inherent in human beings with their intense natural inclination for education, and to teach fellow beings to love humans and God.”⁴ Another prominent Turkish-Jewish businessman, Jak Kamhi, has recognized

and applauded Gülen's contributions to the revival of the culture of peaceful coexistence, and adds "without this culture of peaceful coexistence that the Ottomans and modern Turkey have, I would not be here."⁵

In summary, a comprehensive review of the print and electronic media's reports on Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement over the past 30 years reveals a broad spectrum of local (Turkish) and international supporters. This spectrum includes Muslims and people of other faiths, successful businessmen as well as middle class families, gifted artists and accomplished scientists, discerning journalists and religious athletes, and politicians and educators with varying backgrounds and agendas.

ACADEMIC STUDIES OF THE MOVEMENT

In this section, we give an overview of some of the major questions asked by social scientists with regard to the movement and their conclusions. These questions include the general nature of the movement in terms of the goals of the participants, the nature of their participation and association, their outlook on politics, democracy and state, the nature and methods of social transformation, motivations of the individuals who contribute to movement projects, Gülen's formula for integrating modernity with the Islamic tradition, and his educational philosophy. It should be noted that academic interest in the movement has soared within the last decade, making it difficult to track all research groups and their results. For this reason, our treatment here should be regarded only as a starting point for a more comprehensive survey.

The Gülen /*Hizmet* Movement (GHM) has recently received a lengthy and positive assessment in a well-written summary included by Graham Fuller in his newly-released book, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, published by the United States Institute of Peace Press, an independent, non-partisan publisher on whose board of directors sits members *ex*

officio such as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Fuller, an adjunct professor of history at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, a former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA and later a political scientist for the RAND Corporation, is an expert on both the Middle East and the Muslim world, having spent over fifteen years in the region. He is the author of seven books on geopolitics and Islam, with two specifically written about Turkey.

Fuller discusses the GHM within a wider discussion of the resurgence of Turkish Islam in the global geopolitical context. He sees the GHM, as well as the AKP (Justice and Development Party), as hopeful developments within Turkish culture that are capable of moving Turkey toward a more democratic and open society compatible with the requirements of membership in the European Union. Fuller describes the GHM as “more modern and influential than any other Islamic movement in Turkey today” (p.56). Here he also contrasts what he describes as the “immensely worldly success” of the GHM with the notably modest life of Fethullah Gülen himself, emphasizing not only Gülen’s humility of person but also his complete abstinence from the collection of material possessions and personal wealth (p.56). Hence, it is clear that the economic success of the movement, due in large part to its participants’ openness toward capitalism and free trade as well as their willingness to form transnational partnerships, is not driven by a desire on the part of its founder to grow rich or politically powerful.

Fuller describes the GHM as both “apolitical” and “communitarian” (p.56). He observes that it seeks to bring social change to Turkish society through faithfulness to Islamic practices and values in the lives of individuals who become role models for others, rather than through a rigidly oppressive set of religious mores that are imposed top-down on every citizen. While it is not anti-political, he notes, it is also careful to avoid becoming politically partisan in its advocacy of social improvement through democratic participation. Because of its intentional architecture of decentralized,

grass-roots social service, it embodies a communitarian structure that operates mostly under the radar of high-profile political initiatives or personalities. Putting into practice the Sufi principle that ‘everything becomes worship’, the GHM works to bridge a modernist view of the wider world with the everyday practicality of Islamic community values and practices, seeking to create educated, prosperous citizens who are responsibly engaged with the democratic responsibilities and protections of their society while at the same time free to claim their own religious identity. For the members of this movement, as well as for Gülen himself, bridge building is best accomplished through education:

“The Gülen movement sees education as the preeminent means of bringing about social change and community renewal. It insists that religion can be fully understood only against the backdrop of knowledge as a whole and that only through broad education is the community strengthened and able to advance. The movement asserts that science and technology are fully compatible with Islam and that a knowledge of physical sciences and the universe is indispensable, generating awe in its revelation of God’s handiwork” (Fuller, 2008, p.57).

In contrast to William Park (2007, p.48), who argues that the GHM suffers from insufficient transcendence from cultural norms (Turkishness), he praises the GHM’s ability to marry a nationally expressed Turkish form of Islam with a forward-looking transnationalism that effectively resists a radically ideological pan-Islam on practical, democratic and religious grounds. Given its long historic identity that was shaped by the Ottoman Empire⁶, states Fuller, Turkish Islam can provide leadership throughout the Muslim world that doesn’t insist on abstract uniformity or advocate for a supra-state neo-Caliphate, but can still work effectively using international networks to promote a tolerant flavor of Islam that recognizes the compatibility of state, faith, and modernity, and affirms the unique cultural-historical identities of grassroots Muslims in a variety of nations and cultures.

Fuller emphasizes: “While the Gülen movement itself is unhappy with the discrimination that it suffers from the antireligious secularists within the state, the movement in principle fully accepts the legitimacy of the Turkish state and only seeks to develop greater religious freedom within it” (p.62). By affirming the necessity of advocating for religious values within the legal and constitutional structure of state, and not the other way around, he argues, the GHM demonstrates how an Islamic volunteer-service movement dedicated to improving society for the benefit of human welfare through education is not a threat to Western-style democracies, particularly those, such as in the United States, where secularism is designed to promote tolerant, transparent and civic-minded religious communities rather than drive them underground into reactionary militias. For the strongest evidence that Turkish Islam can be a global leader for Islamic democratic modernization, interfaith cooperation, and intellectual freedom, Fuller draws attention to the groundbreaking principles of the Abant Platform, an internationally-acclaimed public statement, published in 2000, whose Turkish architects, the Abant Forum, are mostly members of the GHM:

“Its platform advocates a modern, democratic, pluralistic, decentralized, tolerant form of government based on the people’s will and not on any ideological group. Its strictures fall most heavily at first upon a Kemalist elite (or any authoritarian secularist regime) that has gained dominance over the state, but the strictures have equal application to any other ideological group that seeks to impose its beliefs, whether Islamist, nationalist, or leftist” (pp.64-65).

Fuller calls for the engagement of Turkey and the Muslim world as a whole in the discussion of topics exemplified by the Abant Platform.

Nilüfer Göle, a professor of sociology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, has been studying the movement for over a decade. Göle is considered one of the leading experts on Turkey’s social movements with Islamic origins in general and the political move-

ment of educated, urbanized, and practicing Muslim women in particular. Göle (1997) considers the GHM to be a form of active pietism, and the emerging class of businessmen who support various GHM projects, to be an emerging elite group which could play a vital role in Turkey's development. Göle praises the educational philosophy proposed by Gülen, which integrates the teaching of scientific knowledge and ethical values, suggesting that this "integrated approach enables people to preserve what is best and still valuable from the past, as well as to accept and make use of scientific and technological advances; whereas isolationist approaches have been divisive and have polarized society into secular versus Islamic, modern versus traditional, and scientific versus religious camps" (Gole 1996, cited by Michel 2005, p.350).

Elisabeth Özdalga (2005, p.435), a sociologist at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey, notes that none of the organizations within the GHM "is characteristically based on family and/or tribal relationships but on the voluntary and active participation of relatively independent individuals." Özdalga sees the principle of "worldly asceticism" behind the competitive struggle that permeates the movement, especially its educational and economic achievements. The principle, Özdalga explains, urges the believer to always ask "what else can I do for my Lord?" Özdalga (2005, p. 437) sees the GHM's educational institutions in Turkey as well as those in developing countries as fostering an excellent balance of national identity and individuality ("a we-I balance"), characteristic of the modern nation state. We will discuss Özdalga's views on the nature of the opposition to the movement among Turkish establishment below in the relevant section.

According to Hakan Yavuz, an associate professor of political science at the Middle East Center of University of Utah, the GHM distinguished itself from other groups with Islamic origins in Turkey by stressing on Turkish nationalism, free markets and modern education. Yavuz notes the empowering impact of the movement's educational activities on a wide spectrum of Turkish society,

which, he argues, threatens some of the established elite power structures:

“Gülen represents a major threat for these people, because they want to see a backward, radical Islam, in order to justify repression – whereas with Gülen, you do not get that. [...] Gülen tries to educate the periphery by teaching them foreign languages and providing scholarships for study in foreign countries. This angers the establishment as well, because they want to control the country and not to share the resources with the rest of the population. [...] Gülen was on the side of the poor, while the establishment did not want to see his movement opening up educational opportunities for the marginal sectors of Turkish society. This frustrated militant secularists in Turkey” (Yavuz 2004, cited in Çetin 2008, p.121).

Yavuz notes that Gülen’s works “create a marriage between religion and science, between tradition and modernity,” (Yavuz and Esposito, p.20) and that the combining of “spirituality with intellectual training, reason with revelation, and mind with heart” are central to Gülen’s idea of serving God.” Yavuz also notes accommodating and respectful attitude of Gülen and the movement’s participants toward the Turkish state, which the former see as the source of stability and peace in the society, despite the harsh treatment of Gülen by some authorities after military coups. Other aspects of Gülen’s worldview that are shared by the participants of the GHM to varying degrees include avoiding confrontation with the state or affiliation with any particular political party, interpretations of nationalism that are far from exclusivist or supremacist, and a feeling of being at home with globalization and democracy. Yavuz sees an increased presence of topics like globalization, democracy and human rights in Gülen’s writing since early 1990s. Like Fuller, Yavuz recognizes Gülen’s focus on spiritual and intellectual consciousness of the individual as opposed to political changes at the macro level (Yavuz and Esposito 2003, p. 21). With regard to modernity and modernization, Yavuz notes that “the movement does not seek to negate or challenge the processes of moderniza-

tion,” but rather works towards educating conscious actors who are endowed with both religious and secular knowledge (Yavuz and Esposito, 2003, p.21).

On a critical note, Yavuz notes a gap between the ideas of Gülen and the actions of the movement participants (Yavuz and Esposito. p.29), probably due to the decentralized and autonomous nature of the organizations that are housed within the movement. While acknowledging the movement’s reconciliation with democracy and secularism, Yavuz argues that the movement itself has not yet become democratic or fully secular. On the question of the (a) political nature of the of the movement Yavuz argues that the movement is essentially political due to the immense influence it has through its educational, media and business institutions (Tavernise, 2008).

Berna Turam is an assistant professor of Sociology and Middle East Studies at Hampshire College, Massachusetts. Turam’s latest book (2007), which is based on her doctoral dissertation research examines “the sociopolitical conditions and cultural venues in which Islamic movements cease to confront and start to cooperate with the secular states,” with an emphasis on the Gülen movement in Turkey. Turam’s work is very thorough with field studies and interviews. Turam offers two main criticisms of the movement with respect to the empowerment of women. The first is that the majority of the female actors within the movement are active in the form of volunteer work, despite increasing numbers of professional women in the areas of education, health-care and media. The women who volunteer their time and social skills for various projects bring significant social and financial benefits to the movement but do not necessarily gain financially themselves or increase in their socio-political engagement capability. Secondly, the intellectual input by the female actors to the formation of the movement’s discourse is minimal. The number of women thinkers, journalists and writers are still considerably less than their male counterparts. Turam also sees a lack of opportunities for idea exchange among

male and female participants. On the positive side, Turam sees the attitude of the movement on the issue of wearing headscarves on college campuses leading to empowerment for women in the long term. She expects the long term effect of prioritizing education for women bringing in more opportunities to women for individual development and negotiation of their rights with political actors such as the state.

Sociologist Ali Bulaç, who has a large readership in Turkey, recently published a comprehensive book on the movement entitled *Din, Kent ve Cemaat: Fethullah Gülen Örneği (Religion, City and Community: Fethullah Gülen's Example)*, which examines the ways in which the movement has contributed to the modernization and the post-modern transformation of Turkish society. Bulaç sees Gülen as a “two-winged” scholar-intellectual, one wing representing the religious scholarly tradition from which Gülen comes, and the other representing his intellectual side that is nurtured by the best works of the East and West.

Sociologist Muhammed Çetin's doctoral dissertation research also examines many important questions about the movement, such as the nature of the movement, its motivational strategies, the challenge the movement poses to inefficient establishment apparatuses, and the nature of participation. What distinguishes Çetin's work (2006 and forthcoming) is that it provides a comprehensive overview of every aspect of the movement in the light of various theories of modern social movements.

Political scientist İhsan Yılmaz sees the GHM as a leading civic movement with religious underpinnings in contemporary Turkey whose agenda includes universal education and interfaith dialogue with an aim to “promote creative and positive relations between the West and the Muslim world and articulate a constructive position on issues such as democracy, multiculturalism, globalization, and interfaith dialogue in the context of secular modernity” (2007, p.3.). Yılmaz points out that Gülen is sometimes referred to as an “opinion leader” and “the unofficial religious leader of Turkey,”

owing to his ability to motivate his audience and readership to engage in “a slow but steady process of a renewal in Muslim socio-political, jurisprudential, and educational discourses and practices leading to a new Muslim politics and international relations, a renewed juristic discourse, and a renewal in Muslim educational practice.” He argues that this process is “paving the way for a modern and harmonious society as a result of an evolving bottom-up approach” (2003, p.237). Yılmaz examines Gülen’s view democracy, saying that the latter “argues that democracy, in spite of its many shortcomings, is now the only viable political system and that people should strive to modernize and consolidate democratic institutions in order to build a society where individual rights and freedoms are respected and protected, where equal opportunity for all is more than a dream” (p.224). According to Yılmaz, Gülen feels that humankind “has not yet designed a better governing system than democracy” (p.224).

Dismissing the essentialist claim that Islam and modernity harbor essential incompatibilities, political scientist Ahmet Kuru argues that the middle way between modernity and the Muslim tradition that is sought by Gülen encompasses “science and Islamic knowledge, reason and revelation, progress and conservation, and free will and destiny” in a congruent framework. According to Kuru, Gülen finds historical and institutional reasons for the dichotomies between the modernity and Muslim interpretations of their religious tradition, rather than essential or inherent ones. Kuru also points out that Gülen’s “middle way” synthesis is neither eclectic nor hybrid, but instead relies on a dynamic interpretation of both Islam as well as modernity (Kuru 2003, p.130), paralleling the analysis of Yılmaz on the issue (Yılmaz, 2005a, p.175).

Other notable works that examine the movement from a social science perspective include Enes Ergene’s *Tradition Witnessing the Modern Age: An Analysis of the Gülen Movement* (2007), and Bekim Agai’s, doctoral dissertation, entitled *Between Network and Discourse: The educational network surrounding Fethullah Gülen (born 1938):*

The flexible application of modern Islamic thought” published in Germany in 2004.

POLITICAL/PRAGMATIC OPPOSITION TO THE MOVEMENT

In an attempt to better contextualize the message, meaning, and efficacy of the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement, this section briefly explores the characteristics and attitudes of those opposed or indifferent to it. However, as most political/pragmatic and ideological opposition has occurred in Turkey itself, we will focus our analysis upon Turkish mechanisms of social control which have affected the nature of the Turkish public sphere and civil society, and hence, the development of the GHM.

According to many researchers, the political opposition to the GHM is only one part of a larger struggle among political and civic actors of the country. The issues at the heart of this struggle include democratization, transparency, increased exposure to global economic competition as opposed to isolationism, increasing competition for government contracts and permits, improved civil rights, empowerment of the civic society and the reduction of the military’s political influence, issues that overlap almost completely with the consequences of integration with European Union. Professor of Economics and columnist Dr. Eser Karakas (2008), for instance, notes the well known, but non-explicit resistance of the leading financial-industrial conglomerate of Turkey to the government’s efforts for EU membership. The beneficiaries of the PRP (CHP)-originated social engineering project, concentrated in the bureaucracy, military and historically-favored businesses, view the efforts of GHM in every field as a threat to their established interests: Educational initiatives providing opportunities for upward social mobility, support for EU membership, ecumenical dialogue, increased presence in the media, breaking decades-old media monopolies, all represent substantial threats to the Republican project and their power bases.

The most frequently raised critique against the movement is a legal case against Gülen that accused him of founding a clandestine organization with the intention of overthrowing the secular regime of Turkey. That case has now been dismissed. While this case was, in fact, brought to the court by a state prosecutor, Gülen's critics fail to contextualize the case within the socio-political environment of Turkey in the late 1990s, particularly with respect to three key details. The first detail that is often not mentioned is the charged atmosphere of 1997, in which a democratically elected government was forced from power via a warning by the National Security Council. A second, often conveniently forgotten detail is the fact that the architect of the case was a state prosecutor known for his ultranationalist stance and made famous by his imprisonment of the current prime minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdoğan, on the basis of a poem the latter read at a gathering. This prosecutor was later dismissed from his office due to an illegitimate affair with a subordinate; furthermore, evidence has surfaced indicating that he was being blackmailed to prosecute Gülen in order to keep this affair from getting publicized. A third key detail is the connection of those business owners whose media outlets were instrumental in generating the publicity hype over the legal case against Gülen. These same media moguls also owned financial institutions that declared bankruptcy shortly thereafter and were confiscated by the state authorities, costing the Turkish treasury the equivalent of over 100 billion dollars. In the Turkish media, the trial of Gülen conveniently overshadowed the coverage of this major banking scandal (Soral, H.B., İşçan, T.B. & Hebb, G., 2006).

After listing a number of accusations leveled against Gülen and the movement during the politically charged atmosphere following the 1997 post-modern coup, Özdalga examines the motives behind the vicious media campaign against the movement. Özdalga underscores, in particular, the difficulty the movement's participants had understanding the publicized contempt aimed at the movement:

“Where did this contempt and hatred come from? Why this massive onslaught on a religious community that distinguished itself by its constructive educational ventures, by its strong loyalty to state and nation, and by its efforts to encourage ecumenical dialogue?” (Ozdalga 2005, p.440)

Özdalga attributes this contemptuous attitude to an “Outsider” role that is crafted for the movement by the “Established” elite in an “Established--Outsider” dichotomy relationship. The fact that the movement’s socio-economic composition (average urban middle class), ethnicity (mostly Turkish) and religious orientation (Sunni-Muslim) did not markedly differ from that of the official elite, only helped to exacerbate the contempt. Following the theory of Elias, Ozdalga attributes the motivation for the stigmatization of the “Outsider” to fears of losing power and status (p.438). A further observation about the dynamics of the Established-Outsider relationship that pertains the present discussion of the Gülen community is that the more the Established believe that they are threatened by Outsiders, the stronger the pressure on the Established to conform to norms and rules and to rally in support of taboos and collective blame fantasies.

Özdalga argues, contrary to what one might expect, that different religious interpretations (“secularism versus an activist form of Islamic revivalism”) did not comprise the major factor behind the hostility shown to the movement by the media-military-bureaucratic establishment at the time, since Gülen’s interpretation of Islam falls well within the mainstream interpretation of Sunni Islam in Turkey. While Gülen’s fresh revivalist interpretations are noted for their impact, (Eickelman 1999, cited in Yılmaz 2005b) they are considered within the flexible boundaries of the broad tradition in which Gülen developed his understanding:

“Gülen is not suggesting any radically different or heterodox interpretation of Islam, but adopts a solid, conventional Hanefi/Sunni understanding of the religious traditions. So it does not seem to be the content of the religious interpretation as such, but the very existence of a new relatively strong group, filled

with religious fervor and claiming a place in the public arena that annoys the establishment. This new element is perceived as being an anomic force, a force that challenges the norms and values, the order of the established hegemonic elite community” (Özdalga 2005, p.441).

Therefore, according to Özdalga, it was not religion per se that was at the root of the conflict that became very public during the late 1990s, but instead the use of religion as a “false ideology to displace the real threat.”

“From the Established-Outsider perspective, the key to the problem seems to lie in the threat posed to the existing power balance and established status hierarchy. One should not ignore the fact that the endangerment of status hierarchies may cause quite considerable and deep-seated existential anxiety in those who define their identities through them” (pp.441-442).

Özdalga notes that in the presence of publicized accusations the movement participants mostly remained defensive and did not launch counter-attacks. Özdalga attributes this behavior to a lack of assertiveness in general and avoidance of criticism in particular:

“Not only during the critical weeks of June 1999, but more generally, the Gülen community lacks assertiveness. It is as if any kind of criticism has been banished from the agendas of its supporters. This includes criticism of other religious communities; of any kind of public office, including the military, the government and the state bureaucracy...” (p.442).

Özdalga (p.442) argues that while refraining from criticism and harsh attitudes towards others may be an asset in building new social networks, it may also be conceived as complacency and acceptance of the uneven relationship with the established elite, which may later impact the self image of participants. Her argument has been recently challenged by Mustafa Gurbuz (2007), who regards the GHM’s reluctance to launch counter-attacks on its opposition as a conscious performance of “moral opposition;” ie. of “turning the other cheek.”

A second charge that has been leveled against the movement concerns the financing of the constantly increasing number of schools in and outside of Turkey. While the transparency of funding is not an issue for the hundreds of thousands of donors in Turkey, to outsiders the charges may appear noteworthy. In responding to allegations of the movement's receiving aid from such contradictory foreign sources as the CIA, Mossad, the Vatican, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Russian Federation, Fuller explains that these schools are funded from the generosity of wealthy businessmen who see such work not only as a form of *zakat* (alms-giving as a means of assisting the less fortunate and reducing economic inequality), but also as the realization of *ihsan*, the deeper spiritual motivation to put one's faith in action for the purpose of perfecting spiritual excellence by 'doing beautiful things.'

“...the Gülen movement has launched a flag-ship program that has built a network of hundreds of schools. Funding comes from within the community and from wealthy businessmen for whom building a school has become the modern pious equivalent of building a mosque.” (Fuller 2008, p.57)

Fuller confirms what many other politicians and journalists have, namely that the schools are competitive and exemplify high academic standards, and that they are open to all regardless of religious persuasion. Their high quality faculty members, with their ability to teach character development through example, serve as a means of attracting students. In almost every way, says Fuller, these GHM schools are the opposite of fundamentalist religious schools: the instructors are closely monitored; the sciences and humanities are prized; intellectual openness is encouraged; and character education conforming to state standards is the only form of ethical instruction. In fact, in Turkey, religion is not taught outside of the narrowly defined comparative religion course established by the Turkish government's educational agencies (p.57). From one direction this willingness to accommodate the state has brought criticism upon the movement by some quarters of Turkish Islamists.

From the other direction, the attacks on these schools by “radical secularists” are easily discredited by simple visits to them. In this context, Fuller underlines the core values of the GHM, namely religious tolerance, intellectual freedom, scientific inquiry, and opposition to violence and extremism of any kind. Reminding the reader of Gülen’s conviction that violence, terrorism and extremism are antithetical to the true meaning of Islam, he confirms that empathic acceptance (*hoşgörü* in Turkish) toward other religious communities and interfaith cooperation with to people of other cultures is the hallmark of this Sufi-influenced movement (p.58).

With regard to the fine line that the GHM successfully walks with respect to being both ‘apolitical’ and yet still socially engaged in the democratic process within the anti-religious context of Turkish secularism, Fuller provides one of the best succinct explanations available:

“The [Gülen] movement eschews politics in the belief that it leads to social divisiveness and distraction from the essential issues of values and principle. In fact, the movement opposes the creation of political parties founded on religion in general, believing that they end up compromising or contaminating religion and that they only serve to create social strife damaging to the position of religion in society. The movement is comfortable with living within the secular strictures of modern Turkish Society –as long as “secularism” is not taken to mean state license to persecute the community’s members or enact legislation hostile to religion” (pp. 58-59).

Fuller also responds to Yavuz, who, in his later assessments, views the movement as essentially political due to the significant social impact of the financial, educational and media institutions that are considered within the sphere of the movement. Fuller underscores the fact that the social and moral aspects of the movement are direct and intentional while the social transformation that is expected to results from the movement’s activities is consequential, and hence does not allow for it to be classified as a political movement:

“There is no doubt that the movement quite explicitly aspires to transform society through transformation of the individual, a process that could ultimately lead to collective calls for the creation of national and social institutions that reflect belief in a moral order. In a very loose sense, it is possible to call this a political project if we consider any attempt to transform society to be a political project. But I would argue that it is just as much a social or moral project. Indeed, the term “political” loses its meaning if applied equally to all efforts to transform society, regardless of means” (p.59).

While acknowledging the strong and influential presence of the movement in the public scene that is broadcast openly and transparently, Fuller argues that the promotion of social change through education and information can not be considered political until and unless the movement enters the political process at the institutional level. Fuller also addresses concerns raised by some secularist circles with regard to the abstention of the movement from the institutionalized political enterprise, which is seen by the latter as a sign of a hidden agenda to change the secular nature of the republic:

“Ironically, the movement’s abstention from politics is in itself sometimes presented by the military as a possible danger because the movement cannot be held liable to usual political party laws. In this sense, it is believed to be working underground to subvert Turkish secularism and Kemalist principles. Yet, far from involving dissimulation, the major public efforts of the Gülen movement –such as promulgating public meetings, seminars, conferences, debates, and colloquia and distributing publications on the grand issues of contemporary civilization, Islam, secularism, globalization, and tolerance –suggest a serious commitment to openly examine questions of societal value in a manner acceptable to large numbers of people (pp. 59).

Fuller notes that in his disdain for explicitly partisan political organizing, Gülen strictly rejects the use of the term “Islamist” as an adjective for the movement (p.63).

IDEOLOGICAL OPPOSITION

The Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement's main ideological opponents, namely anti-religious Marxists/Maoists/Atheists (ie. the far left); neo-nationalists (ie. the far right), radical political Islamicists, and Kurdish separatist-terrorists (PKK) may seem too dissimilar to have anything in common; but, in fact, they are bound together by the rigidity of their political agendas, their willingness to use unethical, illegal and/or violent means to reach their ideological ends, and their hostility toward any efforts by Turkey to join the European Union. These extremist circles, who seek to garner the social, economic and political support of malleable Turkish citizens – in particular, that of the young and the wealthy – perceive the recent success of more moderate politicians and middle-of-the-road, faith-based civic movements like the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement as more than a mere hindrance to their plans; they define it as a threat to “their nation’s existence.”

Perhaps the staunchest opposition to the Gülen/*Hizmet* Movement comes from one radical end of the Turkish political spectrum: the far left.⁷ These militant laicist (ie. anti-religious) Marxists/Maoists/Atheists have been especially active and disproportionately powerful in the fields of print media and advertising since 1968. Their convictions are best represented by the Marxist-Maoist magazine, *Aydınlık* (*The Enlightenment*), which is famous for its antagonistic view of the Islamic faith in general, and of the GHM, in particular. Produced under the leadership of Doğu Perinçek, the leader of the Workers Party (IP), which has never received more than .01 percent of the popular vote in general elections, *Aydınlık* has consistently opposed the GHM for four decades; however, the magazine's inconsistent allegations and accusations, unsupported by evidence and refuted by legal verdicts, have lost credibility among many Turkish readers. Radical leftist writers who have persistently pursued Fethullah Gülen first insisted that he and his followers were after the establishment of a long-range Islamic

state. When a series of claims to defame Gülen were rejected by the courts and scoffed at by the public, and no evidence could be presented to prove them, radical leftist opponents of the GHM began to publish other forms of print media, such as a distorted, derogatory book about Gülen and his community based on “insider information” provided by student participants who had “left the Movement,” that claimed to “de-code” the GHM’s language, philosophy, and activities. In reality, this book, *Hocanın Okulları* (*Khodja’s Schools*) – which took advantage of statements made by students who for personal reasons had moved out of a dormitory supposedly belonging to the GHM – and others like it were produced to convince the Turkish public that the Gülen/Hizmet Movement’s “air of tolerance and moderation” were “a mere front” for more dishonest, lucrative and extreme Islamic political and economic activity.⁸ On March 20, 1998, a Turk federal court recognized the damage done by *Hocanın Okulları*, not only to Gülen’s personal reputation, but also to the Turkish Republic and public memory of Atatürk, ruling that all copies of the book be confiscated.⁹ When other games played against Fethullah Gülen, such as the circulation of false MIT (Turkey’s National Intelligence Agency) reports, failed to reduce either his influence as a spiritual leader or his movement’s success in various socio-economic and educational sectors, militant leftist circles remaining from (the attempted coup of) March 9th began attacking the Gülen and the GHM from another (artificial and baseless) front: more recently, their literature presents Gülen as the mastermind of a “moderate Islam” project designed by the United States to destroy the Kemalist ideology of nationalism and independence in Turkey (Webb, 2000, pp. 46-49). In criticizing Gülen’s “capitalist intrigues” with the U.S. and Israel, while at the same time calling him a *Nurcu* (follower of Said Nursi, another Islamic thinker), they imply that both he and Said Nursi are/were members of a dangerous, heterodox sect. By attacking Gülen on all such fronts, the left fringe is trying not only to frighten those intellectuals and politicians who give support to the

activities he has recommended and encouraged, but also to appeal to any other fringe groups who do not support Turkey's current relationships with the U.S. and Israel. It is quite ironic that certain slogans and articles from *Aydınlık* and other radical leftist publications find their way onto the websites of militant ultra-nationalist (ie. far right) and radical Islamist organizations.

That these marginal, atheist and uncompromising enemies of religion who were once tied to those behind the Iron Curtain should nurture grudges against Fethullah Gülen because of his beliefs, and hence, continue the age-old struggle of atheists against religion by slandering the Gülen/Hizmet Movement is no great surprise (Webb, 2000, p.50). But, it is questionable whether or not radical leftist-turned neo-nationalists like Dogu Perincek have supported Turkish national interests at any particular period. It can be concluded that they want to render Gülen's efforts for tolerance and dialog fruitless and take advantage of the confused atmosphere caused by seemingly random acts of violence and ensuing socio-economic and political strife. The fact that Perincek was recently arrested and charged with "being senior member of a terrorist organization and obtaining and possessing classified documents" in a probe into a network of extreme nationalists (Ergenekon) who allegedly want to topple the governing Justice and Development Party (AK Party)¹⁰, tells a lot about his credibility. His claim, after arrest, that "Gülen's gladiators and those running the investigation are working for the U.S. and are pitted against the Turkish armed forces"¹¹ can be viewed as extension of the "Gülen conspiracy theory," to which both he and outspoken militant laicists, like Hikmet Çetinkaya of the *Cumhuriyet* daily, subscribe.

Columnist Hikmet Çetinkaya and his colleagues at the militant laicist *Cumhuriyet* (*Republic*) newspaper comprise a second group of fierce opponents to the Gülen/Hizmet Movement. Like *Aydınlık*, *Cumhuriyet* is a far-leftist publication that has relentlessly opposed Gülen and the GHM for four decades, a stance that has also affected its internal politics.¹² However, *Cumhuriyet* enjoys a much wider

readership by laicist Turks of various political affiliations (and especially by those of upper-middle class standing), as well as significant financial sponsorship by one fortress-like bank and various private corporations, which fund the paper's production and circulation via advertising in exchange for "favorable" news. The profit-driven identity and character of *Cumhuriyet* writers and sponsors who support a "just" socialist administration and who appear to support equality and defend the poor, while at the same time lashing out indiscriminately at grassroots-based social manifestations of Islam in general and the Gülen/Hizmet Movement in particular, suggests that they, too, prefer life in Turkey to continue in an atmosphere of confusion. *Cumhuriyet*'s fervent propagation of a "Gülen Conspiracy Theory," in particular, continues to encourage average Turkish citizens, government elites, and even intellectuals and social academicians to fear the GHM and to reduce it to "an Islamic threat" without examining the community's intellectual, faith-based and cultural references, or considering its traditions, internal dynamics, and discourses of legitimacy. Interestingly, both Çetinkaya/*Cumhuriyet* and Perincek/*Aydinlik* continue their campaigns against Mr. Gülen, recycling the same old claims in ever-changing combinations despite the enormous financial cost that a series of lost court cases has cost them. Most recently, the individuals producing these publications have changed their tactics and begun printing the "respected opinions" of Russian leftists and American neoconservatives which mirror their own flawed analyses. It is interesting to note that Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute, when referring to *Cumhuriyet* as a source for his suspicion of Gülen's political ambitions, called it "The New York Times of Turkey," despite the fact that in Turkey the daily is often called the "Turkish Pravda," i.e. is known for its long-standing sympathy for Marxist-Leninist causes, and the fact that its current circulation does not place it within the top ranking 15 Turkish newspapers. *Zaman*, with its circulation of over 700,000 and its reputation for giving a voice to liberal and diverse political views, would be the

most deserving of that title. Not surprisingly, Rubin and *Cumhuriyet* have cited each other for “authentic” and “reliable” representations of public opinion in Turkey and the U.S. respectively¹³, even though neo-conservative institutions such as American Enterprise Institute are exactly the kind of institutions against which *Cumhuriyet* claims to have waged a crusade (Balci, 2008).

Gülen’s opponents on the right side of the Turkish political spectrum are less visible, as they tend to express their views and mobilize their resources behind closed doors or via anonymous websites; even so, they may be no less active in carrying out certain forms of counter-mobilization. Generally speaking, it is not practicing faithful Turks who have a negative view of the GHM, but rather, politically ambitious individuals who use Islamic conservatism as a front for their own parties’ ultra-nationalistic agendas. Two prime examples of such fringe opponents are Sevki Yılmaz, who served as mayor and then parliamentary representative of the city of Rize (near the Black Sea) during the Welfare Party’s (Refah Partisi)¹⁴ coalition government with DYP and its short one-party government stint (1996-January 16, 1998); and Haydar Baş, a Turkish academic, leader of a small religious community and a politician associated with the Independent Turkey Party (BTP), which attracted 0.48% 0.51% of the popular vote in the 2002 and 2007 Turkish general elections respectively. Both of these persons have used inflammatory rhetoric insinuating that Gülen and his followers are “bad representatives” of Islam, who “cater to” Jews and Christians. Their rhetoric, and that of other “Islamic” ultranationalists has been snatched up and reused by atheist leftists seeking to use whatever arguments necessary to rally the Turkish masses against Gülen and the GHM.

In fact, the only religious opponents of the Gülen/Hizmet Movement are hard-line “fundamentalists” who promote a distinctly separatist version of Islam, such as young Turkish “radicals” (*radikaller*). Many members of these groups view interfaith dialog as heretical and the Gülen/Hizmet Movement’s efforts to improve

the cultural, educational and interfaith sectors in various countries as incompatible with their own interpretations and practice of Islam. Hence, the GHM's schools in Afghanistan were temporarily closed by a subgroup of the Taliban in 2001, even though permission to open the schools had been granted by the state and its military in 1995¹⁵; and there are currently no schools in Saudi Arabia, Syria or Iran.

A final, more recent opponent group to the Gülen/Hizmet Movement is the separatist-terrorist organization Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK). These Kurdish separatists in Eastern Turkey, Northwestern Iran and Northern Iraq, and to a lesser degree in Northern Syria and Armenia view the recent warming of many Kurdish citizens of Turkey, most of whom live in poverty-stricken Southeast Turkey, to both the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen/Hizmet Movement negatively. Journalist Ayhan Kıskaç (2008) examines the PKK's opposition to the Gülen/Hizmet Movement in more detail, concluding that it is only natural that an illegal organization which recruits its members from the young, unemployed, and desperate, would oppose a dynamic volunteer group providing educational (and hence future employment) opportunities to the same populace.¹⁶

In summary, the Gülen /*Hizmet* Movement's major ideological opponents are keenly aware of the unprecedented extent to which the media shapes public discourse in contemporary societies. Hence, the tactics they use to lessen the GHM's societal influence are mostly media oriented (print and electronic). Some opponents' attempts to direct the flow of information about Gülen and the GHM – by controlling the codes and symbolic resources framing this information – and to target and manipulate specific consumers of information date back to the 1970's; whereas others' attempts are more recent. Common tactics used to discredit the Gülen/Hizmet Movement are: distortion of statements made by Mr. Gülen and/or members of the GHM; distorted portrayal of actions by Mr. Gülen and/or members of the GHM; and claims at showing

“the truth about Gülen” and/or the Gülen movement. These attempts to reconstruct reality to fit a particular ideological agenda, be it vehemently secularist, nationalist or separatist, are manifested in newspaper, magazine and television reports, on websites and blogs¹⁷, in blacklists, and in authored and anonymous books. Although these media-savvy opponents of the Gülen/Hizmet Movement have succeeded in arousing at least part of the Turkish population’s suspicion about the volunteer movement’s activities and motives; most Turks and citizens of other nations who come into direct contact with GHM members via their schools, universities and social projects become firmly convinced of the positive intent and transparency of these institutions. Furthermore, the recent arrests of key instigators of the 1999 media campaign against Mr. Gülen, in particular, have spurred a public deconstruction of the campaign; which has, in turn, convinced many Turks less familiar with Gülen and the GHM, that both were falsely accused in the first place.

CONCLUSION

With its education, media and business initiatives, the Gülen/*Hizmet* movement is recognized as one of the most dynamic forces transforming contemporary Turkish society into one that is at home with democracy, globalization and human rights. The movement’s primary areas of activity are “constructive educational ventures,” the media, which is viewed as a continuation of the educational paradigm for the masses, ecumenical dialogue, business and health care. The supporters of the movement in Turkey include a majority of the elected officials, civic leaders, intellectuals and celebrities. The movement comes under suspicion periodically, however, for maintaining a long term political agenda. Former Marxist/Maoists and Neo-Nationalists are among the most fervent opponents of the movement. Social science research on the movement has been gaining momentum in recent years, while still trailing

behind the expanding presence of the movement institutions in Turkey and abroad. An increase in objective, research-based studies on the movement may help eliminate the emotionally-charged attitudes toward it often displayed in Turkish politics and the media, and pave the way for more constructive dialog among civic actors and government as the country proceeds on her journey toward European Union membership.

NOTES

- 1 "Hizmet," a Turkish word meaning "service (for the betterment of humankind)," is the term used by most participants in this faith-based civic movement to describe the impetus of the movement, and hence, to refer to their own activity.
- 2 For more details, see Granda 1973, p. 122.
- 3 Uzcyir Garih's sentiments have been echoed by other minority businessmen in Turkey.
- 4 Full comment available in Turkish online at <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/3739/134/>.
- 5 Zaman, November 3, 1998.
- 6 Fuller argues (p.61) that, in contrast to more rigid forms of Islam like the Wahabis, the GHM is genetically better suited to lead Muslims of many cultures and nationalities. "Its development within the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman context has made it more tolerant and open to other religious as well as to other Islamic schools of thought."
- 7 Western readers should note that "leftism" in the Turkish context does not imply the same set of values embraced by American or European leftists. For example, Turkish leftists are not anti-bureaucratic, freedom-loving champions of the environment, minority and women's rights; rather, they are elitist, authoritarian, pro-state Communists.
- 8 Many other such books claiming to "de-code" Fethullah Gulen and the GHM have been published by leftist publishing houses and/or newspapers; but, their language of publication has been limited to Turkish.
- 9 See <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/1823/6/> for a summary of this court decision. The small black book entitled *Hocanın Okulları* was claimed by an organization named STKB (Union of Civil Social Organizations). However, according to a statement made by the Security Division of the Istanbul Police Headquarters, there is no such union in police records. See Webb, 2000, pp. 89-91.
- 10 See "Neo-nationalist party leader Perincek arrested" in *Today's Zaman*, Istanbul, 03/25/2008 (<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=137233>), as well as other Turkish newspaper headlines in the last week of March, 2008.
- 11 See, again, "Neo-nationalist party leader Perincek arrested" in *Today's Zaman*.

- 12 For example, a respected Socialist-Kemalist thinker, chairman of the Atatürkist Thought Foundation and *Cumhuriyet* columnist, Prof. Toktamış Ateş, participated in some dialog and tolerance activities led by Gülen. He was later forced out of his chairmanship position due to his embrace of Gülen's message of tolerance.
- 13 *Cumhuriyet* daily, 15 April, 2008.
- 14 It should be noted here that Yılmaz's stern comments against the GHM was not a reflection of the general attitude of his party, as evidenced by the the open support for the movement expressed by the leader of its successor, Recai Kutan. As an example of Kutan's favorable comments about the movement, please see the archives of *Yeni Safak* and *Sabah* newspapers, available online. <http://yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/1999/haziran/23/politika/pol3.html>.
- 15 One year later these schools were reopened and as of 2005, boasted a competitive curriculum including courses in five foreign languages (English, Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Pashtun) and a student population of over two thousand. (T. Çetinkaya, *Zaman* 11/24/2005). Since then the number of schools has increased, and all evaluations have been positive. On the basis of this success, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and YÖK, Turkey's central Council for Higher Education, are currently making plans to found an international university in Kabul (For details, see: S.Yanatma & İ. Asaloğlu, 2008). Furthermore, on May 12, 2008, Afghanistan's Minister of Education, Muhammed Hanif Atmer, held a press conference to thank the Turkish educators for their positive contributions to Afghan society (See: "Afganistan'dan Türk Okullarına Övgü," *Zaman*, 05/12/08).
- 16 For greater description of the PKK's recruitment tactics and Kurdish Turks' response to the Gulen Movement's educational endeavors in Southeast Turkey, see: Kalyoncu, 2007 and Fuat, 2005.
- 17 Çetin (07/17/2008) criticizes, in particular, how ideological protectionist groups in Turkey, in attempt to retain their status at home and in the international arena as "the single voice of the Turkish people," are now using marginal individual blogs abroad to misinform non-Turks and rectify their loss of status. He warns that these individual blogs, with their absurd allegations against the GHM's cultural ventures and educational services, are produced in a culture of enmity that can polarize not only Turks, but all peoples. Finally, he condemns the the movement's opponents who, hiding behind the bloggers' coverage, have sought to create a distorted picture of the Gulen movement's motives and actions, saying that "this cheap collaboration produces nothing substantial, only groundless and dishonest lies."

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APPENDIX: THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE LEGAL CASE AGAINST GÜLEN AND ITS RESOLUTION

In 2000, Gülen was sued over allegations that he had established an illegal organization aimed at replacing the secular government of Turkey with one based on religious law. State prosecutor Nuh Mete Yüksel filed for the arrest of Gülen on August 3, 2000, at the Ankara State Court of Security. On August 7, the court rejected Yüksel's demand for the arrest of Gülen, who was in the United

States at that time due to health problems. On August 11, the same court ordered the arrest of Gülen in absentia. On August 28, Istanbul State Security Court dismissed the arrest order. On August 31, 2000 Yüksel filed a formal lawsuit against Gülen, with the charge that Gülen and his sympathizers had organized a gang to change the secular government into a theocratic state. Citing the 7th article of the Law Against Terrorist Activities, Yüksel demanded that Gülen be imprisoned for five to ten years. The trial began on October 16, 2000. After years of bickering and delays, the case against Gülen was finally dismissed by the state security court on May 5, 2006; and Gülen was cleared of any wrong doing. On June 24, 2008, The General Council of the Supreme Court of Appeals rejected the appeal of the state prosecutors, who again sued Gülen under the anti-terrorism law, and issued a final ruling acquitting Gülen of all charges. Ankara's 11th Court for Serious Crimes decided in favor of Gülen's acquittal and the ninth branch of the Supreme Court of Appeals confirmed the decision.