

The Gülen *Hizmet* Movement in Turkey: An Islamic Movement to Reduce Violence and Promote Tolerance through Education and Intercultural Dialogue*

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Abstract

This research reported herein is based on an exploratory study of Turkey's Gülen *hizmet* movement, a social movement whose participants are dedicated to the advancement of scientific and moral education, plus intercultural and interfaith dialogue leading to increased mutual understanding and respectful tolerance. The movement is grounded in the universalistic teachings and charismatic leadership of Islamic scholar Fethulah Gülen. Specific projects to pursue movement goals include the establishment and support of private schools (and related institutions) throughout Turkey and in other countries, sponsorship and organization of trips to Turkey for guests invited from other countries, and various other social service and civic projects (including, for example, hospitals, a television station, a newspaper, and numerous local charitable activities serving the poor). Focused interviews were conducted with a sample of businessmen who help fund movement projects and with Gülen *hizmet* school teachers and administrators in southeastern Turkey to obtain information regarding the organizational patterns and underlying motivations of movement participants. The results suggest an informal and decentralized network structure in which participants are motivated primarily by their religious beliefs. They also believe that Gülen schools help deter young people from violence and terrorism, and that tangible commitment to intercultural dialogue as exhibited by participants has the potential to increase tolerance among people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. These results are crucial for helping to overcome negative stereotypes of Muslims that are widespread in American society.

Introduction: Fethulah Gülen and the Turkish Hizmet Movement

The Gülen movement is a religiously inspired Turkish social movement that was started in the late 1960s and that is oriented toward promoting local and global peace, tolerance and respect for all people, and mutual understanding through scientific and moral education of young people and through intercultural and interfaith dialogue (see Hunt and Aslandoğan, 2006, and Ebaugh, 2010). It is sometimes referred to as the *hizmet* movement (*hizmet* referring to sacrificial service to humanity). The movement originated in the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic imam, scholar, spiritual leader, philosopher, and prolific writer who was born in eastern Turkey in 1941 and educated largely by his father and through his own wide range of reading and study. While still young he moved to western Turkey and participated in reading circles where he was influenced by mentors in the Sufi tradition that had developed in Anatolia and been influenced by the thirteenth century mystic Rumi. Mr. Gülen gained influence as an imam and public lecturer and became active in working with young people to promote a type of education that would combine modern scientific training with moral and spiritual development. He came to the U.S. in 1999 because of health problems (and perhaps also to establish some distance from the tense political climate in Turkey) and currently lives in Pennsylvania. Although widely recognized as the key figure in stimulating the movement that bears his name, he reportedly acknowledges that the movement transcends him personally. Even so, his name is mentioned frequently by participants—always *Mr. Gülen*—and he is frequently referred to as “*Hocaefendi*,” a term of endearment and respect for him as a teacher.

In terms of the standard terminology used in the sociology of religion, Fethulah Gülen should clearly be seen as a charismatic leader in the Turkish Muslim world, but one whose influence extends well beyond this world. The primary theme of Mr. Gülen’s message is the urgent need for mutual respect and tolerance, understanding, and peace among people of different cultural and religious backgrounds which he believes can be attained through intercultural dialogue and through scientific and moral education of young people (Gülen 2000, 2002; see also Hunt and Aslandoğan, 2006). This emphasis on universalistic human values reflects his understanding of the universalistic aspects of Islam as supported by the teachings of the Qur’an.

The major organized institutional expression of the Gülen movement today is a system of successful and highly regarded private elementary and high schools that have been established throughout Turkey and in several other countries (including Viet Nam and the U.S., for example). Many of the schools outside Turkey are in central and southeast Asia. Related student-support structures have also been developed, including university preparation centers, study centers, and dormitories. The university preparation centers and study centers provide supplemental organized instruction plus opportunities for individual study. The focus of this supplemental study is preparation for the state-required exams that are used for tracking and placement purposes. There is also a movement-sponsored University—Fatih University—in Istanbul. A second major type of movement project consists of sponsorship of a steady stream of organized tours of Turkey for visitors who are invited from various other countries (including the United States), with all expenses paid by Gülen movement sponsors, for the purpose of increasing their understanding of Turkish society and its historical background and current culture and also promoting intercultural dialogue and friendship. In the U.S. such trips are initiated and organized through a network of relationships that Turkish students establish with individuals selected from local populations, particularly university faculty members and administrators and community leaders. Such relationships serve as the foundation for the formation of local intercultural dialogue associations. These associations sponsor various programs and public dialogue activities in their communities plus annual Iftar dinners at the end of Ramadan. It is through these local network contacts that individuals are invited to visit Turkey for organized tours of major areas of the country. Such tours provide opportunities to visit Gülen movement schools as well as to enjoy the hospitality provided by families in cities on the itinerary who host these visiting groups with meals in their homes. I was invited to join such a group in 2006 with other faculty and Turkish graduate students from Texas Tech University and elsewhere in Texas. Both types of movement projects—the private schools for the young people and the organized tours of Turkey for visitors from other societies—are financed (sponsored) by voluntary contributions of business people. In addition to private schools and hospitality tours of Turkey, many other types of social service and civic projects are sponsored by the Gülen movement, including hospitals, a television

station (Samanyolu TV), a newspaper, a Journalists and Writers Foundation, and numerous local charitable activities serving the poor.

***Theoretical Framework: The Discovery of Universal Moral Values
through Intercultural Communication***

This section draws on some ideas from the work of Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987) to provide a general theoretical framework which can be used to analyze educational practices and intercultural communication oriented toward the identification of universal moral values. It is through the distinctive rationality implicit in this type of communication that individuals are enabled to interact as members of a global community despite differences in their particular cultural backgrounds and specific religious traditions. It is also important to note that the discovery of such universal moral values can be considerably enhanced by the emergence of socioemotional bonds from shared social experiences, such as, for example, the experience of hosts and guests sharing meals as they engage in dialogue intended to promote better mutual understanding for the enrichment of all involved.

The need to discover (or rediscover) universal moral values grounded in the life experiences shared by all humanity is perhaps the most urgent problem we face as a result of the increasing intensification of the process of globalization. To the extent that our deepening globalization leads to the continued sharpening of cultural and religious distinctions, the result is likely to be continued misunderstanding, economic exploitation, political conflict, ongoing risks of warfare and terrorism, and perpetuation of mutually denigrating negative stereotypes. Such tensions and conflicts will continue to reinforce the perpetuation of long-standing ingroup/outgroup boundaries that separate people representing different cultural and religious backgrounds. It is through the discovery of universal moral values through intentional intercultural dialogue that we can hope to avoid the deepening “clash of civilizations” as portrayed by Huntington (1996).

A vision that contrasts sharply with this increasing fragmentation and conflict is offered through the Gülen movement, as promoted and inspired through Fethulah Gülen’s charismatic leadership. Although grounded in Islam and inspired by the teachings of the Qur’an, Mr. Gülen seeks explicitly to link the universalistic aspects of

Islam with the universalistic aspects of other world religions. His teachings emphasize the shared humanity of all people, regardless of their particular cultural or religious background. The potential for Muslims to discover common bonds and shared values with Christianity and Judaism is particularly strong, inasmuch as all three religions are religions “of the book” that are derived from a common source in Abraham and his long-term significance for monotheism. But Mr. Gülen and movement participants are also devoted to discovering common ground with other religions as well, as indicated by the movement’s expansion in southeast Asia. The Gülen movement reflects a high level of commitment to this goal through practical activities whereby resources (material and otherwise) are devoted to the education of young people for enlightened citizenship in a globalized world as well as the promotion of mutual tolerance, understanding, and friendship through intercultural dialogue.

Communication oriented toward the discovery of universal moral values contrasts sharply with the type of communication that, according to many critical sociological theorists, dominates the institutional structures of the modern Western world. Without going into great detail in analyzing this type of cultural mentality, we might simply recall that 18th century Enlightenment rationalism promoted a skeptical orientation toward traditional religious beliefs that earlier had apparently served (sometimes vaguely and precariously) as the foundation for whatever moral ideals and values might be shared throughout the population—despite the common failure of these values to be implemented in practice. With the subsequent growth of positivism, all forms of knowledge other than sensory experience and scientific knowledge grounded in systematic empirical research were seen as merely subjective and therefore of questionable epistemological and ontological status. When applied to moral values, this skeptical critique can lead to a kind of moral relativism in which moral values, which vary for different people in different cultural and subcultural settings, are seen merely as matters of shared “social definitions” that reflect the particular historical trajectories of how different people adapted to their particular conditions.

Moreover, as famously emphasized by classical social theorist Max Weber, scientific knowledge of “what is” cannot be used to determine or support any particular moral claims about “what should be.” Weber’s (1947) insistence that values could not

be grounded in scientific facts was incorporated in his well-known distinction between “value-oriented” and “instrumental” rationality. (In his “ideal type” analysis, traditional action and affective [or emotionally expressive] action were outside the domain of rational action.) The ultimate ends reflected in value-oriented rationality were matters of individual or collective values that were subjective in nature and thus beyond the realm of science, while instrumental rationality involved the kinds of objective empirical “means/ends” relations that could presumably be demonstrated through empirical research or practical application.

Weber’s distinction between value-oriented versus instrumental rationality is incorporated in Jürgen Habermas’s (1984, 1987) critical perspective on the contrasting types of rationality reflected in different forms of discourse. Habermas focused heavily on how the logic of instrumental rationality dominates the macro-level economic and political structures of our society, sometimes even “colonizing” people’s micro-level “lifeworlds” and dominating other forms of rationality, including normative rationality, expressive rationality, and communicative rationality. Normative rationality (which may be seen as basically equivalent to Weber’s value-oriented rationality) has to do with the realm of norms and values and would include efforts to assess their consistency, evaluate their behavioral and institutional manifestations, analyze their conformity with basic human needs or human nature, etc. Expressive rationality concerns the communication of personal subjective feelings or experiences, including efforts to evaluate people’s sincerity or their ability to express their subjective feelings, the level of mutual empathy they are able to establish, and the generalizability of their feelings and experiences. Finally, communicative rationality focuses on the communication process itself and the efforts people make to overcome barriers to mutual understanding (see Habermas, 1984: 84-87). Habermas’s goal seems to be to deflate the privileged position of instrumental rationality, particularly as manifested in large-scale institutional structures, and elevating the other three forms of communication to equal importance. His argument for a more expansive concept of rationality clearly implies that all four types are important, but each is to be evaluated in terms of its own criteria.

Gülen *hizmet* movement goals of moral education and intercultural dialogue seem to reflect primarily the type of rationality and discourse that could be classified in

Habermas's terms as *normative rationality*. This is manifested in specific ways as people of different cultural and religious backgrounds develop strategies whereby they hope to achieve a better mutual understanding of their different beliefs and customs. This may be expected to include sincere exploratory efforts to probe more deeply into one another's underlying worldviews to discover underlying experiences, beliefs, and values they may share as human beings despite their differences in cultural background. Such beliefs may include respect for humanity and human dignity and rejection of violence for settling differences. (The process whereby people from different religious traditions seek to discover ultimate sacred values through dialogue may perhaps be captured in Habermas's phrase, "linguistification of the sacred" [Habermas, 1987: 145]). *Expressive rationality* is manifested in various rituals whereby participants in Gülen-inspired intercultural dialogue settings seek to express their mutual respect and regard for one another as fellow human beings. This would include various strategies, both verbal and nonverbal, whereby they signal their desire to develop socioemotional bonds that will lead to friendships and thereby strengthen their sense of being linked together as members of humanity with shared values and interests, despite different backgrounds and life experiences. The sharing of meals between guests and hosts provides an ideal setting for expressive forms of communication such as this; it includes the mutually understood "language of the heart" that can facilitate and promote the formation of socioemotional bonds transcending cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers. Finally, *communicative rationality* is obviously involved in intercultural dialogue as participants struggle to overcome the linguistic barriers that constrain their ability to achieve mutual understanding.

In contrast to Habermas, postmodern theorists tend to focus on discontinuities with modernity (Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1989; Baudrillard, 1994). Despite their variations, a major emphasis in postmodern perspectives is resistance to the notion that scientific knowledge is always the highest or only relevant form of knowledge—a point that might be compared with Habermas's critique of the limits of instrumental rationality. For postmodernists more generally, however, scientific knowledge is no less socially constructed than systems of moral values or aesthetic standards. This means that despite claims of objectivity and universal validity, scientific knowledge reflects the

particular historical circumstances and the subjective interests and orientations of those involved in its creation. When this refusal to accord a privileged position to any particular set of cultural beliefs and values is coupled with a postmodern fascination with cultural and subcultural diversity, possibilities for discovering universal moral values through dialogue appear to be seriously undermined. Intercultural dialogue may help reinforce this fascination with cultural diversity and perhaps encourage a superficial form of “live and let live” toleration under some circumstances (particularly among those with roughly equal resources). However, postmodern relativism does not seem to provide a compelling intellectual foundation for accepting and seriously confronting the difficult challenge of seeking to discover universal values that are grounded in shared human experiences (including religious experiences grounded in different traditions). In the absence of such values, social relations among people of different cultural backgrounds with different levels of economic resources and political power are likely to continue to be characterized by exploitation, coercion, and conflict (in addition, perhaps, to mere intellectual curiosity). On the other hand, intercultural dialogue that is grounded in a deep awareness of the common humanity of all people creates the possibility for the discovery of universal values that affirm and celebrate the intrinsic worth and deep interdependence of human life in all its different forms on a global scale.

Methods: Setting and Research Strategy

The research reported herein was intended to learn more about the social networks and organizational patterns that were involved in developing and carrying out Gülen movement projects (particularly education, good will tours of Turkey, and other projects such as those mentioned earlier), as well as the underlying motivations of those involved. In addition to the explicit goals of education and intercultural dialogue, it seemed to me that the movement has the potential for strengthening civil society not only in Turkey but internationally as well. It was obvious to me that substantial financial backing and volunteer services were required to implement, sustain, and expand the movement’s educational and various other civic and social service projects.

This research project developed from my conversation with the Turkish graduate student who was the leader of the Intercultural Dialogue Association (IDA) in Lubbock,

Texas, regarding my interest in conducting research on the social networks involved in the Gülen movement. I was interested in knowing more about the social relationships that seemed to exist among the various people involved in the movement. These include, for example, the business people who provide financial support for movement projects, educators and administrators in the Gülen schools, graduate students studying abroad who serve as guides and translators for the groups invited to visit Turkey, and various participants who host these groups of guests from abroad with their warm hospitality and meals in their homes. It seemed to me that the eagerness of Turkish students to organize and lead these organized tour groups and of Turkish families to host groups of touring visitors as part of their “Turkey experience” indicated some type of social network (or organizational structure) whereby graduate students studying abroad were linked with sponsoring host families, financial backers, Gülen school teachers and administrators, and many others. I was especially interested in learning more about the underlying motivations behind this extensive voluntary support, financial and otherwise, and what it reflected in terms of a strong practical commitment to invest in opportunities for intercultural dialogue intended to increase mutual understanding and promote friendships among people of different cultural and religious traditions. Following my own Turkey trip experience, I was interested in exploring how the underlying philosophical and religious orientation of the Gülen movement might offer a realistic possibility for discovering underlying universal moral values that these Muslim movement participants shared with other world religions—values that clearly contrasted with the popular American association of Islam with militancy and terrorism. Following my conversation with the IDA leader mentioned above and preparation of a brief written proposal, arrangements were made for financial sponsorship of this project through the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue, Houston, Texas.

This project was intended as an exploratory research project, with data to be gathered through open-ended interviews with selected key persons involved in financing Gülen movement projects. Of course, I was fully aware of the challenges of conducting interviews through a translator, but I knew from my earlier trip to Turkey and from contacts with Turkish students at my home university that it would not be difficult to establish the kind of rapport that facilitates mutual understanding despite linguistic

barriers. I developed a brief interview schedule designed to elicit information regarding the nature of respondents' participation in the Gülen movement, the type of projects in which they were involved, how they got involved in the movement, their motivations for doing so, the type of network contacts they had with other movement participants, their organizational structure, the strength of their religious orientations, their perceptions of support for the Gülen *hizmet* movement in Turkey and the benefits it provided, and similar sorts of questions. I anticipated that the open-ended questions in the interview schedule would trigger extended conversation and so was prepared to make digital recordings of responses I received to these questions. Due to my own lack of appropriate contacts in Turkey (plus obvious language barriers), all arrangements in selecting movement participants for interviews were made by Gülen participants themselves; my major stipulation was that I wanted to talk with some of the "key people" involved in the movement in different areas of the country to the extent feasible. Participants in the movement in Lubbock took the lead in making arrangements with their network contacts in Turkey. It turned out that a colleague in the Philosophy Department at Texas Tech University, Mark Webb, was also being sponsored to revisit Turkey to meet with Gülen school teachers and administrators, so the arrangements made were for us to collaborate in our partially overlapping research projects. The decision was made by the movement sponsors to focus the research on three cities in southeastern Turkey: Diyarbakir, Elaziğ and Malatya.

Why these cities? For one thing, all were major cities in the southeastern part of the country with successful Gülen movement schools and an extensive network of active movement participants. The main reason for focusing on this region, however, was that the Gülen movement sponsors were interested in doing the research in an area where poor young people with Kurdish background are vulnerable to being recruited into the PKK for terrorist activities. The region is considered more disprivileged, and thus more volatile and prone to terrorist recruitment, than the more cosmopolitan and highly "developed" western part of Turkey. Although part of the tension and volatility that has existed in recent years in the area is due to ethnic tensions with Kurdish people, high rates of intermarriage have lessened the salience of ethnic distinctions. Even so, the overlap of socioeconomic class with ethnic distinctions

is still cause for concern. Gülen movement school teachers and administrators and their financial sponsors were unanimous in their perceptions that the type of educational experience provided by the Gülen *hizmet* schools undermines the appeal of terrorism. As respondents repeatedly emphasized in numerous conversations, such schools provide hope for a better future to their students plus instill moral values and respect for others that they believe will help deter them from terrorism. One Kurdish respondent stated explicitly that if it were not for his Gülen *hizmet* school experience, he might well be “in the mountains” (meaning involved with PKK terrorists).

Prior to our arrival in Diyarbakir from Istanbul, we were not fully aware of the specific arrangements that had been made for conducting interviews. I anticipated that some of them would probably be conducted during or after meals, but my fairly short interview schedule was designed for one-on-one interviews (partly in consideration of the extra time and effort it would take to communicate via a translator). It turned out instead that most of the interviews were group interviews, with the number in each group ranging from eight to fifteen. Moreover, unlike the typical interview situation in America where respondents often appear to have limited time and patience, the group interviews were essentially extended conversations in which no one appeared impatient or uninterested and all were eager to be involved. In fact, the “interview” process itself was always preceded by extensive expressions of welcome and hospitality interspersed with conversation regarding our eagerness to maintain the friendships formed and to continue the dialogue process. We also asked for questions that our informants might have of us, and several of them, particularly the students, were eager to learn more about life in America as well as Americans’ perceptions of Turkey.

Data Gathering through Extended Intercultural Dialogue

For the first couple of group interviews in Diyarbakir, I began to use the interview schedule at an appropriate point in the conversation. I soon discovered, however, that I was able to get better information and also maintain better rapport simply by an initial statement regarding my interest in the movement, followed by a query as to how participants themselves got involved it, and then letting the conversation flow. Digital voice recordings were made of large portions of those parts of the conversations that

were focused on our specific research topics. (Of course, we solicited permission, which was always granted unhesitatingly.) I also made brief notes of salient points during the interviews, especially during the first few days. After the first few days, it was clear that we were getting a remarkably consistent message regarding the nature and scope of respondents' involvement in the Gülen movement. Although our schedule was too full for through debriefings and note taking after each interview session, I wrote brief field notes at the end of each day so as to keep track of the details of each day's schedule and the salient information I had obtained. Overall, the data gathering process was less structured than desired but nevertheless elicited a great deal of information and also generated considerable informal friendly conversation and good will.

Our research began in Diyarbakir (population just under 400,000), where we spent almost three days. We met with four different groups of businessmen (all with meals) who were major Gülen movement sponsors plus educators and parents. Two of these meetings were in sponsors' homes. One was a breakfast meeting at a Gülen school where other Gülen movement groups separate from ours were gathered, including visitors from Ankara. On our final day in Diyarbakir we met with a public (non-Gülen) school principal before returning to the Gülen school for pictures and exchanges of gifts. We then traveled to Elaziğ (population approximately 270,000), arriving in time for an evening meal and group meeting with sponsors, followed by a full day in which we met with two groups of sponsoring businessmen, another sponsoring business person, and an educator and students. The following morning included interviews with teachers plus a meeting with an assembly of elementary and high school students for a question-and-answer session. We then traveled to Malatya (population approximately 300,000) where, late in the afternoon, we met with academicians from the local university (at an agricultural institute adjacent to a cherry orchard), followed by dinner with them. The next two days in Malatya included tours of schools, preparation centers, and dormitories, plus meetings with three different groups of businessmen. In addition, we met in a Gülen dormitory with university students who were serving as tutors for the high school students living there.

The businessmen with whom we met represented several different types of businesses. In Diyarbakir, we had breakfast with an auto parts dealer (plus some

teachers and administrators), dinner with an entrepreneur whose business involved converting gasoline-powered cars to propane, plus some other businessmen, breakfast with a banker (plus other business persons and teachers). In Elaziğ, we had breakfast with the owner of a marble plant (at an outdoor patio at the plant) and several other businessmen plus educators. In the evening that day, we had dinner in the upscale home of a cement plant owner and several other business persons, plus the mayor of Elaziğ who (we were told) wanted to meet us. In Malatya, we had lunch in the private dining room of an auto dealership, the owner of which was described as having several businesses. We also had dinner with a person in the construction business who was currently building Gülen-movement sponsored dormitory housing for university students. This description of occupations is not exhaustive but illustrates the range represented. In Elaziğ we also met with members of the Women's Union at their building, learned about their own movement projects (creation of arts and crafts items to sell to raise money, preparation of meals to serve at Gülen movement meetings, etc.), and exchanged gifts. In Malatya we met at a dormitory with university students whose movement activities consisted of tutoring local high school students who lived in the dorm. (Many of these high school students were from small towns and villages in the region.) Most of our meetings with businessmen were in their homes or places of business, while meetings with teachers and students were in schools, university preparation centers, or study centers. All meetings that were not in private residences typically involved tours of the facilities, both educational and business. Meetings at the schools also included brief visits and question-and-answer sessions with students as well. In almost all of these meetings, students asked several questions about America and American perceptions of Turkey. Near the end of our visit in each city, special gifts of local interest were given to us (which we reciprocated in a small way, usually with Turkish/USA friendship flag lapel pins).

***Findings: Discovering and Expressing Universal Moral
Values through Intercultural Social Networks***

The first research question to be addressed has to do with the nature of the social networks and organizational patterns involved in the Gülen *hizmet* movement. As

noted earlier, participants in the movement contribute resources of time, energy, and money in developing and expanding a system of private school education in Turkey and in several other countries, hosting well-organized Turkey tours for visitors from other countries, and sponsoring various other civic and social service projects. The social networks through which these activities are carried out obviously include teachers and administrators in movement schools and preparation and study centers, businessmen who serve as financial sponsors (and sometimes host members of visiting tour groups), Turkish students studying abroad, and many others. I was particularly interested in learning the nature of the relationships whereby business people are linked with the educators, as well as how Turkish students studying abroad connect visitors from abroad to Gülen school educators and also to business persons who provide the financial backing for movement activities and to various participants who host tour groups in their homes.

Despite the limited and impressionistic nature of the data I obtained through the open-ended and conversational interviews as described in the previous section, it seemed consistently clear to me that the educators and business persons (all were men) in each of the three cities we visited were participants in the same partially overlapping social networks. The maintenance of these networks involves regular meetings in each city as well as visits participants make to one another's cities. We witnessed one large-scale breakfast meeting on the grounds outside a school in Diyarbakir that included a large gathering of participants from Ankara who participated with local people in various small-scale table group conversations and who were separate from the conversational network at our particular table. One of the business persons in our table group mentioned that Mr. Gülen had encouraged business people to get together in such meetings to talk about issues of common concern, and they obviously took this as good advice. Near the end of the meeting some of the students provided a *tae kwon do* performance, no doubt partly for public relations purposes for the extraordinarily large crowd at that particular gathering.

I was not able to get consistent or detailed information regarding the typical numbers of people who attended the local movement meetings, where they are usually held, or how many attend regularly and how many less frequently. However, the

meetings were described as routine events where issues and concerns are discussed and where decisions are made regarding projects currently being supported or new ones to undertake. Both businessmen and educators described as typical a pattern whereby educators would simply let the business people know what their needs were and, following discussion, a collective decision would be made as to how the need would be met and who would volunteer to provide the necessary financial (or other) resources. When I inquired about the organizational structure and leadership of the Gülen movement and these regular meetings, the responses suggested a loose and informal network of participants without a formal structure. Although there seemed to be consensus regarding a key contact person in each city, different people were involved in different ways, and the movement's organizational structure seemed rather decentralized. Decisions regarding projects and how to support them appeared to be based on consensus achieved through informal discussion rather than through formalized procedures. My impression was that these local meetings provided an "institutionalized" but informal and decentralized forum for participants to maintain awareness of their common concerns, share information regarding one another's activities, and coordinate with one another as needed to carry out the projects with which they were involved. As far as I could tell, however, there was no overall authority structure beyond the local network, and decisions at the local level seemed to be based mostly on the consensus that emerged from informal discussion.

It was clear, for example, that participants in the cities we visited were concerned with the appeal of terrorism to poor young people in the area, including those living in the more isolated small towns and villages of southeastern Turkey. Their responses focused explicitly on addressing the problems of poverty and inadequate educational opportunities in the public or "government schools." To help address the problem of poverty they provided food to poor people in the region. This was described as being done personally by affluent persons who actually took meals to the homes of poor families from their annual sacrifices (as opposed to writing a check to give them or to send to some social service agency). Gülen movement participants also reached out to the young people and their families in smaller poor communities in the area to recruit them to the Gülen *hizmet* schools. This sometimes involved providing dormitory living

facilities to enable young people from areas where there were no movement schools to attend Gülen schools in the city. This focus on education was seen as offering a realistic alternative to potential recruitment to PKK terrorist activity by providing hope for the future plus moral values that movement participants believed would deter young people from violence. One sponsor we met in a furniture store in Elaziğ provided 200 scholarships per year, in addition to helping support the local Gülen school plus a second school that was then being planned. As noted earlier, a sponsor in Malatya who was in the construction business was funding a dormitory for university students that was currently under construction. In a somewhat different area of service, the owner of the cement plant with whom we had dinner in Elaziğ volunteered that he and fellow movement participants would be willing to host 1000 students from Texas Tech University to visit Turkey. On a smaller scale, the meetings with groups of businessmen that had been arranged for this research project obviously required advance coordination, and such coordination for local meetings seemed to be part of the ongoing routines for Gülen movement participants.

Due to imitations of time and other constraints, it was not possible to assess the full range of movement participation and support among the populations of the three cities visited. In some of the conversations with sponsors (and in extended conversations with Serkan Balyinez, our guide and translator), I raised the question of whether the movement's strategy focused mainly on seeking large contributions from the wealthy segment of Turkish society or whether smaller contributions were sought or obtained from a much larger segment of the population. The response was that the range of contributions was much greater than what was reflected among the sponsoring businessmen we met. Serkan noted that the well-to-do businessmen we met were selected because of my express desire to meet "key people" in the movement. From other conversations, too, it was clear that there are many ways to be involved, including various forms of volunteer service as well as smaller financial contributions. Parents, for example, may be recruited to provide volunteer services in Gülen schools. Women provide meals for network meetings. And Gülen teachers unanimously reported (and their students unanimously agreed) that they are far more committed to their students than teachers in the "government schools" and that they spend a lot of extra time in

such activities as “home visits” with their parents – which also counts as *hizmet* (i.e., service to humanity). Finally, too, the service that Turkish graduate students perform in inviting and guiding visiting groups of tourists is also part of movement service, as is sponsors’ hosting of these groups in their homes. In short, in addition to financial contributions (large or small) any form of voluntary “service to humanity” can be counted as “*hizmet*” – particularly when motivated by the values taught by Fethulah Gülen and incorporated in the movement inspired by him.

Although the Gülen movement is based on voluntary social service and civic involvement, I was interested in learning whether participants felt that the positive effects of their activities might eventually be achieved more fully for the entire society through political means. In this context I mentioned that American strategies for dealing with social problems sometimes lead to efforts to influence government policy, such as, for example, advocacy for increased public finances for public schools through taxation. One response to this idea was that most people would be resistant to higher taxes. Another response (equally dismissive) was that government positions are “already filled” (and presumably would not be open to Gülen movement members’ participation or influence). It was also explained that Gülen movement participants seek to avoid being seen as politically allied with any particular political faction. Overall, it was abundantly clear to us that the participants with whom we talked regarded voluntary contributions and civic activity inspired by their religious values as far more effective than reliance on the coercive power of government in solving social problems. At the same time, however, it was also clear at the local level in Elazığ that a strong social tie with high rapport existed between a leading Gülen movement sponsor and the mayor (who, as noted earlier, joined us for dinner), and the mayor indicated in our conversation that he felt the city government shared the same values. And during an after-dinner visit late in the evening to a locally popular ice cream shop in Malatya, a “parliamentarian” from the Grand National Assembly of Turkey stopped by and, after brief introductions all around, engaged in some earnest conversation at a separate table with some of the businessmen in our group before engaging in a somewhat more extended brief conversation with Serkan Balyimez, Mark Webb, and myself, plus the locals in our table group.

Although my colleague Mark Webb and I were visitors and thus not privy to background discussion and possible debates among movement participants, our overall impression was that a high level of unanimity exists among participants on underlying presuppositions and values and basic worldview. Indeed, the religious beliefs and practices that motivate Gülen movement participants are widely shared throughout Turkey. Although variations certainly exist within the Muslim world and in Turkey, well over 90 percent of the population is Muslim. While the government is officially secular, the imams at the mosques are paid by the state, and the government occasionally sends messages to them for proclamation in the mosques. Throughout Turkey, from Istanbul to Diyarbakir (and beyond), calls to prayer are loudly broadcast throughout the cities from the loudspeakers atop the mosque minarets at the prescribed time five times per day. And in at least some of the hotels, arrows on closet floors enable guests to orient themselves toward Mecca as they prostrate themselves on the floor in their prescribed prayers.

As noted earlier, even though movement participants' activities are grounded in, and motivated by, Islamic beliefs, the emphasis in Fethulah Gülen's teachings is on the universalistic values shared by all of the major world religions, especially Christianity and Judaism, that he sees as being based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed as recorded in the Qur'an. In the movement inspired by Mr. Gülen, the discovery of these universalistic values occurs through education and intercultural dialogue. However, Gülen schools do not teach religion as such, and the stated goals of intercultural dialogue do not envision seeking recruits to Islam. With regard to education, Gülen movement participants (both educators and businessmen) were unanimous in emphasizing the crucial importance of both moral and scientific education. When I asked some of the educators about what specific moral values were the most important to be taught, and how, the response I repeatedly received was that it was important for teachers to set a good example by not smoking or drinking and by demonstrating their willingness to make sacrifices and to establish close and supportive relationships with their students and also with their families. "Government" (public) school teachers were sometimes criticized for failing to set a good example and for their failure to make the kinds of sacrifices or develop the level of trust in relations with their

students that Gülen school teachers did. In the question-and-answer session with an assembly of elementary and high school students in Elaziğ, it was obvious (despite the large size of the assembly and the heterogeneous ages of the students) that students and teachers had excellent rapport. Students applauded one another's questions to us as well as questions asked by the teachers. After the assembly, I mentioned to one of the teachers (who received especially loud applause after his question to us) that it was obvious the students really seemed to love him. His immediate response: "That's because I love them." As a student in Diyarbakir put it, the government school teachers do their jobs "for money" while the Gülen school teachers do their job "for God." (Of course, teachers' salaries in both the government schools and the Gülen schools are quite modest.)

Since the Gülen movement educators saw their schools as far more effective than the government schools, we were interested in learning more of their perceptions of the shortcomings of the public schools. One major problem seemed to be that class sizes in the public schools were far larger than those in Gülen schools. Gülen school class sizes ranged from 10-20 (with variations by grade level), while government school class sizes reportedly ranged from 30-40 and sometimes well over 60. Also, as suggested above, public school teachers were generally seen as either unable or unwilling to make the sacrifices that Gülen school teachers do or to establish the same type of close, trusting relations with their students and their families. For example, unlike government school teachers, Gülen movement teachers routinely engage in home visits with parents and attempt to enlist their help in the education process. Obviously, large class sizes were no doubt partly responsible for precluding this kind of intense personal involvement in the government schools. Fortunately, we were able to meet in Diyarbakir with a government school principal and to tour his school. Our conversation with him suggested that he shared Gülen movement ideals, but was unable to be as selective in recruiting teachers as the Gülen schools were, or to screen potential teachers for their commitment to such *hizmet* values as making sacrifices over and above routine classroom teaching (such as home visits) or serving as role models of moral behavior (like not smoking). Also, the government-financed education system did not include the supplemental institutions like the university preparation centers or the study rooms to

help students prepare for the state-required exams that determine their future educational track.

To what extent do the values expressed by Gülen school educators also motivate the businessmen who provide the extensive financial backing for the expanding network of Gülen schools, their sponsorship of organized tours of Turkey for groups of visitors invited from abroad, or the various other civic and social service projects that they support? Are these values linked explicitly in their minds with their religious orientation and commitment, and do they regard themselves as fulfilling their religious obligations through their financial support of Gülen movement projects? The overwhelming impression obtained from all of the meetings with businessmen was that the primary motivation for their extensive financial support of Gülen projects was indeed derived explicitly from their religious beliefs, values, and commitments. Although Gülen movement activities are not organized through the mosques, the strong religious orientations of all the individuals with whom we talked was so clearly evident that it would have been highly impertinent (especially with the linguistic challenges we faced) to pose detailed questions regarding the frequency of attending their local mosque or whether respondents followed the prescribed daily prayer schedules regularly, usually, occasionally, never—as might be done by American sociologists of religion in assessing survey respondents' religiosity. Almost all of our conversations were virtually saturated with references to religious beliefs and values. On one occasion, two participants (including our translator Serkan Belyinez) postponed joining a large gathering of businessmen sponsors for dinner with us for several minutes so they could attend the Friday evening prayers—and as far as we could tell, no one seemed surprised and indicated that this was unusual or inappropriate. Moreover, in discussing how Gülen movement social service projects include providing food for, and assisting, the disprivileged, it was noted that designating a portion of one's income as alms to help the poor is one of the five basic religious requirements of Islam which everyone was expected to follow. Persons with abundant financial resources were expected to use their resources to help the disprivileged as a fulfillment of their religious duty rather than hoard these resources for themselves. Our informants referred repeatedly to the teachings of Prophet Mohammed in making the point that service to humanity and

helping the poor were religious duties. On two different occasions, the story was related that when Prophet Mohammed stood in respect as a funeral procession went by, his companions were surprised and asked whether he knew that the deceased was a Jew. The Prophet remained standing and responded that he was a human being (implying that he deserved such respect).

Virtually all of the businessmen with whom we spoke (like the educators) explained their motivations by emphasizing that it is through service to humanity that rewards will be earned in the hereafter. When I had the opportunity to raise questions about various positive consequences that might be received in this life as well, the typical reaction was that being motivated by such rewards involves the risk of undermining rewards in the hereafter. At the same time, however, the businessmen and educators also noted that their efforts to help the disprivileged and those without hope through contributions of food and educational opportunities might indeed have positive consequences here and now in reducing violence and promoting political stability. But they also insisted that the primary rationale for providing charitable help to the poor was simply that Islamic teachings regarding the common humanity of all people required that those with an abundance of resources should share with their fellow human beings who are in need. Certainly none of the respondents would have cited such mundane personal motivations as behaving in accordance with the social expectations of their status, or “giving something back” to their community in exchange for the success they had achieved. Nor is the motivation for sponsoring trips for groups of visitors to tour Turkey intended as a strategy to initiate some type of “tit for tat” exchange that might be mutually beneficial in a mundane or material sense. In fact, it was explained more than once that Gülen *hizmet* movement volunteers expect nothing in return for their service (at least not in this life). At the same time, however, it might also be noted that many influential people throughout Turkey are also interested in strengthening their ties with European countries and the Western world, and this underlying goal was sometimes noted in passing in our conversations with movement participants.

The primary motivation for Gülen movement *hizmet* involvement that was emphasized explicitly and repeatedly in our conversations with participants was perhaps best exemplified by a Malatya businessman who emphasized Islamic teachings

regarding the need for love between people and for humanity and the obligation to express this love through helping to care for others in need. Another Malatya businessman expanded his account of the historical background of the Gülen *hizmet* movement by explaining how Prophet Mohammed's universalistic teachings had been manifested in the past in the tolerance he believed had been shown in the Ottoman empire to diverse types of people with different religious backgrounds. Several informants also mentioned the historic importance of the Sunni Muslim mystic Rumi, who also emphasized the universalistic spiritual dimensions of Islam. Overall, however, the most immediately relevant and unanimous explanation of the motivations behind the current Gülen movement in Turkey was the teachings of Fethulah Gülen, particularly his explicit focus on education and intercultural dialogue. These two strategies are, of course, closely related. The moral education of young people helps them learn to respect their fellow human beings and prepares them eventually to make their own *hizmet* contributions, while intercultural dialogue can be seen as a form of adult education whereby people from different cultural and religious backgrounds learn from one another while discovering the universal moral values they share through dialogue. The discovery of such values and their expression in service to humanity (*hizmet*) are clearly seen by our Turkish friends as the key to reducing violence and conflict and promoting respectful tolerance and peace among all people in our increasingly globalized world.

Discussion: An Evaluation of the Gülen Movement's Universalistic Hizmet Motivations and Suggestions for Future Research

This concluding section will provide a brief evaluation of the effectiveness of Gülen movement projects in education and intercultural dialogue and explore further the challenges of identifying and implementing universalistic values from within an Islamic (or any other particular) cultural worldview. It certainly seems evident to us that a better understanding of Turkey's Islamic Gülen movement can correct some of the mistaken stereotypes that many people in America have about Muslims. We might even dare to suggest that the positive example provided by movement participants is worthy of emulation by people in all countries who are passionate in their commitment to the

goals of peace, tolerance, and mutual respect through service to humanity, moral and scientific education, and increased mutual understanding through intercultural dialogue.

Obviously, there are many limitations and constraints of the research described herein in addition to the linguistic barriers noted earlier. Admittedly, for example, our positive impressions as reflected herein were based on limited exposure to some of the movement's enthusiastic participants, supporters, and beneficiaries. It would have been enlightening to obtain information from more neutral sources in Turkey, as well as those who may be marginal supporters or who may even be opposed to the movement. For example, in some of our conversations it was noted that some Islamicists are opposed to the movement because of its "secularism" (or failure to teach the Islamic religion in the Gülen schools), while those who are opposed to excessive influence of religion in public life reportedly regard the movement as too Islamic. Ideally, analysis of any social movement should take into consideration the ways its goals and strategies are perceived by various people in its wider social environment. Beyond the question of how the movement might be evaluated by those who are either supportive or opposed, it would also be enlightening just to have some basic measure of the level of public awareness of the movement in Turkey and its various activities and projects. And in an even larger context, similar sorts of questions could be raised regarding Gülen movement activity in other countries, particularly in non-Muslim environments. An important question to be raised in this latter context is whether Gülen movement activists are seen (rightly or wrongly) as attempting to promote Muslim (or Turkish) influence or a specific Muslim (or Turkish) agenda or indirectly promoting conversion to Islam.

From the conversations we had with participants who are clearly committed to the Gülen movement, it should not be surprising that it was unanimously regarded as highly successful. Students, teachers, and parents all had high praise for the positive effects of Gülen school education. In addition to improved academic performance, better test scores, and awards received for students' academic achievements, there was unanimous agreement that students experienced improved morale and better relations with their teachers, parents, and peers. In all of the encounters we observed, teachers and students exhibited a high level of mutual respect for one another—and this

respect was graciously extended to their visitors from America. In addition, almost all of the teachers and school administrators with whom we spoke had themselves been influenced by their own Gülen school education and were inspired by that experience to pursue careers in education.

In addition to these positive effects of the Gülen schools, the experiences of all of those with whom we talked who participated in the organized trips to tour Turkey were likewise uniformly and enthusiastically positive. This was true for all the members of the tour group of which I was a part in 2006, as well as those who had visited from Texas Tech University the year earlier. Members of these Turkey tour groups were particularly impressed by the well-organized and informative nature of the tours, the first-class arrangements, the educational value of the intercultural experience—and of course the food. Perhaps most of all, tour group members were impressed with the warm and welcoming hospitality demonstrated by participating families in their homes—and from my experience on my own earlier trip as well as this research trip, these positive feelings were mutual.

The challenge of discovering and implementing universal values leading to tolerance and peace is particularly urgent in our time of increasing intercultural contact resulting from the multi-faceted process of globalization. Perhaps the key challenge for those in all religions who take this ideal seriously is to learn to distinguish the worthy aspects of that which is truly universal from the worthy aspects of that which varies due to differences in specific historical and cultural conditions. As suggested earlier this involves the kind of communication Habermas identified as “normative” communication—a specific type of communication that reflects a form of rationality that can be contrasted with the instrumental (means/ends) rationality of political and economic administrative structures. Since Turkey is a Muslim country, it is not surprising that Gülen movement discursive practices there would be integrally intertwined with Muslim beliefs, values, and practices. In view of the strong religious commitment of the movement participants with whom we spoke, it is perhaps not inappropriate to raise the question of whether persons in other religious and cultural traditions who also espouse universalistic values, and who share an equally strong commitment to respectful tolerance, mutual understanding, and intercultural dialogue, could truly be regarded as

fully equal partners. For “true believers” in any particular religious traditions, full equality with true believers in other religious traditions is difficult to envision, despite the shared commitment to basic human values that may be discovered through dialogue.

There is much to admire in the *hizmet* values promoted by Fethulah Gülen and expressed by participants in the movement he inspired. And there is much that is worthy of emulation by those in other religious traditions who are equally committed to the universalistic values that are central in their own religious beliefs as well. It is vitally important for non-Muslims to understand and appreciate how Gülen movement participants are motivated by their Islamic beliefs and values to seek to serve humanity in tangible ways through their efforts to reduce poverty, expand and enrich the educational experience of young people, promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue, and reduce violence and conflict by working for respectful tolerance and peace in our pluralistic world. It is equally important to recognize that the universalistic human values that motivate these actions are central in other religious traditions as well. It is through the mutual recognition of our implicitly shared universalistic human values that we can hope eventually to move beyond peaceful and respectful toleration of our cultural differences toward increasing mutual enrichment of our common humanity.

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