

The Gülen Hizmet Movement

The Gülen Hizmet Movement:
Circumspect Activism in Faith-Based Reform

Edited by

Tamer Balçı and Christopher L. Miller

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P U B L I S H I N G

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The first step in this endeavour was the organization of a conference, “Peace through Faith-based Grassroots Organization? Exploring the Gülen Movement” held at the University of Texas—Pan American on March 27, 2010. We thank the Institute of Interfaith Dialog (IID) for providing \$2,500 in financial support for this conference; these funds were used for presenters’ travel and accommodation expenses. We also thank Dahlia Guerra, Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas—Pan American for institutional support.

This book is designed to extend that interdisciplinary effort by presenting expanded versions of presentations made at the conference and enlisting other interdisciplinary and comparative essays in an effort to present a more holistic understanding of the GHM. In this pursuit, all submitted chapters went through a rigorous double-blind review process and only the ones approved by the referees are presented to the readers of this book. The earlier versions of chapters by Tamer Balcı, Sonia L. Alianak, Christopher L. Miller, Thomas D. Pearson, Mustafa Ruzgar, Semiha Topal, and Mark Webb were presented at this conference. In addition, an earlier version of the chapter by Süphan Bozkurt and Yetkin Yıldırım was presented at the 33rd Annual Conference of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (September 24-26, 2004), George Mason University, Washington, D.C.

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Tamer Balcı and Christopher L. Miller
Edinburg, Texas, May 2012

INTRODUCTION

THE GÜLEN HIZMET MOVEMENT: A CAUTIONARY TALE

TAMER BALCI AND CHRISTOPHER L. MILLER

The arrival of the Arab Spring in 2010-11 brought the complex issue of the relationship between Islam and democracy to the forefront. The dictatorships and pretended democratic regimes tumbled down in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Threatened by the uprisings, so far the other governments in the region have either initiated reform proposals or fought back ferociously. Without strong liberal alternatives, Islamic-leaning political parties have become the default alternatives to the falling regimes. This issue brings up the question: will the revolutions that toppled down secular dictators bring forward pseudo-religious and anti-Western dictators like those in Iran, or will the new leaders create systems that will allow the coexistence of Islam and democracy as well as peaceful accommodation with the West? While a large number of Islamic-leaning parties or movements in the Middle East at least verbally support democracy and democratization in their countries, their explicit support does not erase the suspicions that once Islamist parties come to power they may establish authoritarian regimes. Unless an intrinsic correlation between Islam and the basic functions of democracy is established and Muslim leaders embrace freedoms as religious values, these suspicions will not be assuaged nor will the new regimes be able to respond to the needs of their people effectively. As these historical developments converge in the Middle East, a progressive religious movement, the Gülen Hizmet Movement (GHM), suggests solutions to the contemporary questions of the Middle East. M. Fethullah Gülen (1941-present), the founder and spiritual leader of the GHM, was arguing for the compatibility of Islam and democracy long before the Arab Spring was on the horizon. The arrival of the Arab Spring intensified the necessity to study the GHM not only through the words of Gülen but also through the actions of the movement.

The Gülen Hizmet Movement (GHM) is a modern Turkish-Islamic movement which functions in many areas from education, media, and healthcare services to interfaith and intercultural dialogue. The movement has become global in scope as Gülen's ideas have evolved since the 1980s. As various contributions in this volume will discuss in more detail, the GHM is at heart an activist movement and is committed to social action in a wide variety of fields. However, it engages in what we are calling "circumspect activism," by which we mean non-political, private, quiet, and frequently indirect action designed to encourage change through dialogue and example. This, in part, is because of peculiarities in the ideology of the movement, but is also a product of the historical settings in which it finds itself. In both its native Turkey and in the United States, in which the movement has a rapidly growing presence, political, social, and attitudinal pressures have shaped the movement's strategies for action. It is the intention of this collection to examine many different aspects of the GHM from a cross-disciplinary perspective to explore this concept of "circumspect activism," and propose some tentative conclusions about the movement's gestalt.

Before going any further in introducing this study, a technical issue of terminology must be explained. In its original homeland, Turkey, the movement has been called *hizmet* (service) by its adherents, stressing service to humanity for the sake of God which provides the common catalyst for its followers. Nevertheless, internationally the movement is known as the Gülen Movement. Many adherents of the movement, especially in Turkey, are not comfortable with this rebranding of the movement because the name Gülen Movement forefronts the leader, while *hizmet* prioritizes the movement's actions irrespective of its leadership, hammering home that they consider it a genuine movement and not a personal cult. In order to find a common ground for the Turkish and international names of the movement, in this book we are calling it the Gülen Hizmet Movement (GHM) which incorporates not only the two best known labels for the organization but also allows focus on both the ideas behind it, drawn largely from Gülen, but also the action that results from those ideas. In addition, incorporating the term *hizmet* allows reflection upon overlapping features between the GHM and the earlier Nur Movement, from which the GHM borrowed greatly.¹ Adherents of the Nur Movement also referred to their actions as *hizmet*.

¹ The Nur Movement was a "renewalist" movement led by Bediuzzaman Said-i Nursi (1876-1960), which taught that the Qur'an as a living text can have different meanings for different generations and that renewalism (*tajdid*) requires aligning meanings with the challenges of the present day. See M. G. Şahin, "Said Nursi and

In Turkey, the particular shape and trajectory of the GHM stem not only from its inheritance from the Nur Movement or its dedication to *hizmet*, but also from particular Cold War socio-political conditions during the period of its emergence and growth. Under the harsh illiberal secular practices of the Turkish state during that era, the adherents of *hizmet* could engage only in a circumspect, cautious activism in order to protect themselves from being blacklisted and made outcasts by the illiberal Kemalist² bureaucracy. *Tedbir* (caution) has been a commonly used term among adherents who lived through the military regimes and nominally democratic periods of recent Turkish history. Because of the lack of freedom of expression, Gülen had to take cautionary steps in every stage of the movement's evolution. This has become characteristic of the GHM's general approach.

One defining characteristic of the GHM is its open acceptance of modernism and Gülen has grasped the modern age's mass communication and education structures well. Unlike ordinary imams, Gülen encouraged his adherents to open schools instead of mosques. He regarded learning and teaching as two divine duties of an individual.³ As detailed in chapter two in this volume by Bozkurt and Yıldırım, Gülen regards technical and moral education of the individual as two necessary components of teaching. The result of this teaching would be a "Golden Generation" to carry the world to a better future. Starting from the late 1970s Gülen's initiatives paid off and the first educational institutions affiliated with the GHM emerged. Education is an expensive and not an immediately profitable investment for profit-driven investors; modern states and nonprofit charities largely shoulder the burden of education systems worldwide. As a nonprofit operation with heavy backing from *hizmet*-motivated donors, the GHM was able to fund significant school construction: the number of GHM schools in the 1980s increased quickly by the end of that decade and construction mushroomed in the 1990s in parallel with the emergence of Turkish economic liberalization that

the Nur Movement in Turkey: An Atomistic Approach," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20 (2011): 226–227. See also Tamer Balci, "Islam and Democracy in the Thought of Nursi and Gülen," Chapter Three in this volume.

² Kemalism, named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the founder of the Turkish republic, is the official ideology of Turkey. See Chapter Three in this volume for more details on Kemalism.

³ Fethullah Gülen, "Bizim Maarifimiz (2)" *Sızıntı* 1:10 (November 1979) [Internet Resource] (accessed February 14, 2012). NOTE: Full internet addresses (URLs) for online sources can be found in the Works Cited section (beginning on page 270).

generated new capital among investors who were taken with the *hizmet* message.

Until the 1980s, Turkey had a mixed economic system. The Turkish state was actively involved in economics through strictly controlled trade monopolies of commonly consumed goods such as tobacco, tea, and alcohol. Private industry functioned as corporatist adjuncts to the state: only state-favored corporations were allowed to become big entrepreneurs and operated under state protection. A limited number of private and state-controlled banks favored secular and mostly Istanbul-, Ankara-, or Izmir-based corporations in terms of loan and credit distributions. This trend gradually changed in the 1980s. The post-junta conservative Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi (ANAP)) government led by Turgut Özal not only launched some economic liberalization, but also supported greater decentralization of economic development away from Istanbul, including support for a religiously conservative Anatolia-based bourgeoisie.⁴ It was, in fact, financial support from this conservative Anatolian bourgeoisie that helped to crystallize Gülen's ideas and loosely-based support circles into the GHM and who began funneling significant capital into the GHM's school-building program.⁵ The coalition governments of the 1990s and the infamous post-modern coup⁶ of 1997 interrupted the economic liberalization initiated by Özal's government. Indeed, the economic welfare of the Turkish people has rarely been the top priority of Turkey's unelected military-judicial bureaucracy, the self-declared bastions of the Turkish republic: until the last decade, the generals set the main state policies in Turkey and elected politicians were forced to abide or face military intervention. Despite this, the 1997 coup generated conditions for a new economic crisis in 2001, which in turn paved the road for an electoral victory for the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002. The new Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a political pupil of the Islamist-leaning former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan who had been deposed by the coup, and the AKP government reinitiated not only an economic

⁴ For the Turkish bourgeoisie see M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Role of the New Bourgeoisie in the Transformation of the Turkish Islamic Movement," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 1-19.

⁵ Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Dordrecht [Germany]: Springer, 2010).

⁶ Turkish columnist Cengiz Çandar coined the term "post-modern coup" because the coup was done indirectly through media instead of as a total military takeover of parliament and state institutions.

but also a political liberalization process by challenging military tutelage and bringing the coup-plotters to court.⁷

Since 2002 Turkey has been gradually moving from a nominal democracy that functioned under the shadow of a military and statist judiciary toward a full-fledged democracy by instating civilian control over the military. As Turkey democratizes, the GHM is slowly moving from the shadows, but new visibility poses questions about the nature of the GHM's activities. In Turkey, the GHM is a major player in both print and broadcast media and critics of the movement regard the views and opinions expressed in the Gülen-affiliated media as the explicit views of the GHM and consider it to be "political Islamism," while GHM adherents argue that the publications of the media outlets are not the voice of the GHM, insisting that the movement is a non-political one. Indeed, the level of indirect involvement in politics, where the GHM takes sides on particular issues rather than supporting or affiliating with specific parties, satisfies the needs of the movement. Adding to this semantic issue is the fact that there is no commonly agreed upon scholarly description of what constitutes "political Islam."⁸ Compared to their publications a decade ago, the GHM's media outlets are braver about weighing in on touchy issues in Turkey, such as the illegal acts of military personnel, the military coups in Turkey, and the Kurdish issue.

That said, however, even during momentary relaxations of authoritarian control at various times since World War II, the cautionary approach of the GHM did not change much. Ironically, while such circumspection was designed to shield the organization from criticism, it has itself become the source for many critical assessments of the GHM. Those suspicious of the movement raise such questions as whether it is, in fact, a conspiratorial underground organization with some hidden agenda. Even GHM adherents who are publicly known associates of the movement refrain from identifying themselves as "Gülenist." For example, when a journalist questioned a group of men from a publicly known GHM institution, the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYF) of which Gülen is the honorary president, as to why they do not "properly label themselves as part of the Gülen movement," they were still cautious in their answer: "Why?" one

⁷ Vali Nasr, *The Rise of Islamic Capitalism: Why the New Muslim Middle Class is the Key to Defeating Extremism* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 236-243; Ziya Öniş, "The Political Economy of Turkey's Justice and Development Party," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 207-234.

⁸ For different perspectives on the issue see Frédéric Volpi, *Political Islam Observed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

answered, “I support the ideas of Gülen, and I support the ideas of [Immanuel] Kant. Should I wear a sign that says I support the ideas of Kant?”⁹

This cautionary approach is indeed not groundless considering that Gülen and the movement had to deal with persecution against Gülen until 2006.¹⁰ The persecution, indeed, forced Gülen into a self-imposed exile to the United States in 1999. Furthermore, the Anatolian businesses that supported Islamic institutions, including the GHM’s, were publicly blacklisted and boycotted by the Turkish military and depicted as purveyors of “green capital”¹¹ by the authoritarian secular circles in the aftermath of the infamous soft coup of 1997.¹²

Gülen still preserves his circumspect activism by limiting his political statements. He does not habitually express unsolicited ideas publicly on day-to-day politics, though he makes exceptions on rare occasions. His carefully selected statements set an example for his adherents. One occasion was after Israeli commandos raided and killed 9 Turkish civilians from the Turkish charity IHH¹³ onboard the Comoros-registered ship the *MV Mavi Marmara* carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza on May 31, 2010. Immediately after this flotilla incident, Turkish public opinion, including the GHM media outlets, was largely supportive of the Turkish government and its political actions against Israel. A few days later, to the surprise of many, Gülen told the *Wall Street Journal* that the action by the IHH was “a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters.”¹⁴ He further added that whenever a GHM charity delivers aid to Gaza, he always asks them to acquire permits from Israel. Another rare occasion on which Gülen made a political statement was shortly before the September 12, 2010 referendum to initiate democratic amendments to the 1982 Turkish

⁹ Suzy Hansen, “Global Imam: What does the leader of the world’s most influential Islamic movement really want?” *The New Republic*, November 10, 2010 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 9, 2012).

¹⁰ For the details of charges and trial see James C. Harrington, *Wrestling with Free Speech, Religious Freedom, and Democracy in Turkey: Political Trials and Times of Fethullah Gülen* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011).

¹¹ Green refers to Islam. Sometimes the expression “green capital” is used as a way of referring to capital resources that are spent to sponsor or expand explicitly Islamic causes. In Turkey the term is often used pejoratively as a way of referring to projects sponsored by the religiously conservative bourgeoisie.

¹² “28 Şubat’ın Sakıncalı Firmaları O Baskılı Dönemi Hatırlamak İstemiyor” [Internet Resource] (accessed January 24, 2012).

¹³ İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri (Human Rights and Freedoms).

¹⁴ Joe Laurie, “Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 2, 2012).

Constitution.¹⁵ Gülen publicly stated his support for the proposed amendments.¹⁶

Again, however, Gülen's circumspect example designed to guide the GHM in the murky waters of Turkish politics by setting cautious levels of involvement has not entirely blunted efforts by critics of the organization. When, for example, a cheating scandal relating to the Public Employee Selection Exam (KPSS) erupted in 2010, critics pointed their fingers at the GHM, implying that the organization was taking corrupt and secretive steps to ensure that graduates of its network of schools had an advantage in the competition for civil service jobs.¹⁷ Police investigation later revealed that a member of the question-preparation committee, unrelated to the GHM, actually leaked the exam questions.¹⁸ Similarly there have been claims that some officers in the Turkish police organization were actively both promoting and protecting the GHM. While the existence of various right- and left-wing groups within the Turkish police has not been a secret to anyone studying recent Turkish political history, the claim that certain groups within the Turkish police collaborate to eliminate or handicap the GHM's adversaries has yet to be proven.

Interestingly, while the Turkish police organization is a battleground between right- and left-leaning officers, the Turkish military has notoriously been the hotbed of radical leftist groups since the 1960s. Turkish socialists' attempt to bring socialism through a military coup backfired in 1971, but the ideological outlook of the left has remained influential among the young cadets.¹⁹ Since 2002, the AKP government has been improving its domestic support through elections and this support coupled with economic development in Turkey has encouraged the Erdoğan government to take the military under civilian control.²⁰ Since the summer of 2007, the Turkish government has been cracking down on coup plotters. One obvious and notorious case of such a changed policy is the

¹⁵ For a detailed report on the amendments see Selin M. Bölme and Taha Özhan, "Constitutional Referendum in Turkey," *SETA Policy Brief*, August 2010. [Internet Resource] (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹⁶ "Gülen endorses reform package, appealing for 'yes' on Sept. 12," *Today's Zaman*, August 10, 2010 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹⁷ "Kopya skandalında Gülen cemaati," November 25, 2010 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹⁸ "KPSS'de kopya skandalı ÖSYM'yi bitirdi!" September 4, 2010 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹⁹ Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 85-91.

²⁰ The AKP received 35 percent of the vote in its first election in 2002 and it later received larger electoral support in 2007 (47 percent) and in 2011 (50 percent).

case of the Ergenekon, the alleged clandestine organization of retired and active military officers and their civilian collaborators that has sought to impose a radical Kemalist and ultra-nationalist regime in Turkey. The GHM media outlets, for instance *Zaman*, *Today's Zaman*, and the Samanyolu TV station, have long supported democratization, civilian control over the military, and the crackdown on Ergenekon and other coup plotters.

These steps actually attracted the enmity of coup plotters and pulled the GHM into a quagmire Gülen did not desire. Since 2009, Ergenekon stepped up reaction against civilian control in a “plan to finish the JDP [AKP] and Gülen” that was revealed in that year.²¹ Part of the exposed four-page military plan proposed that military police would raid a GHM student house and plant weapons and ammunition. The plotters then would allegedly have labeled the GHM as a terrorist organization ostensibly carrying out underground activities, thereby finishing off the GHM and possibly the AKP as well.²² Once the document was published, then Chief of Staff, General İlker Başbuğ, denied the authenticity of Colonel Dursun Çiçek’s signature on the document and dismissed it as just a “piece of paper.”²³ Technical criminal reports, as well as further evidence acquired later, made it clear that some generals aimed to target not only the GHM but also all Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).²⁴ Also the military ran dozens of websites calling for diminishment of the government’s power. On the basis of this evidence, Başbuğ was arrested in January 2012 and the case awaits adjudication.

Another alleged coup plan named *Balyoz* (Sledgehammer) listed 36 journalists to be arrested following the military takeover, including not only journalists from the GHM-affiliated media but also liberal and non-Muslim journalists such as the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, who was assassinated on January 17, 2007.²⁵ In addition, the plan listed 136 journalists who would potentially help the junta by rallying public support.²⁶ Once the alleged coup plans revealed that the journalists from GHM media were targeted, many in the organization shifted away from their customary circumspect position, openly taking sides with the courts’ accusations in regard to the arrest of journalists, leading the GHM-

²¹ Mehmet Baransu, “AKP ve Gülen’i Bitirme Planı,” *Taraf*, June 12, 2009 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 7, 2012).

²² Mehmet Baransu, *Karargah* (Istanbul: Karakutu, 2010), 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-165.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 301-306.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 458-459.

affiliated media outlets and the GHM itself to be labeled as overt political activists, giving critics of the movement, especially Kemalist ultra-nationalists, ammunition to use against the organization.²⁷

A related event took place in early 2011, when a previously not well-known and unemployed journalist Ahmet Şık, was arrested for being involved in the Ergenekon case. After his arrest, the draft of a book titled *İmam'ın Ordusu* (Imam's Army) about the GHM was confiscated by a court order which alleged that the book was prepared as part of the Ergenekon plot. After this event, the GHM and its alleged contacts in the police were blamed as being responsible for what was deemed harassment of critical journalists. In this case, however, Gülen intervened directly to prevent the GHM-affiliated press from taking incautious actions: through his lawyer Gülen released a press statement saying that many negative books had been written about him but he never attempted to prevent the publication of any of them. He further added that in the age of the Internet and mass communication, prohibition of a book would only attract more interest in it.²⁸ Indeed, the book shortly became available on the Internet, but Gülen's intervention in the case spared the GHM from any serious missteps that might have further opened the organization to denunciation by critics.

Adding to the confusion over official positions held by the GHM, whether real or manufactured by critics, is the decentralized structure of the movement. Hundreds of locally controlled and funded GHM institutions initiate activities by themselves along the lines of Gülen's thought. Indeed, this flexibility makes the GHM more vibrant and dynamic. The variety of activities, such as interfaith dialogue dinners, luncheons, panels, and conferences held in one place do not always resonate with the ones organized in another place because they are often designed to meet specific local needs. For instance, some GHM institutions organize Abrahamic dinners to bring prominent Jewish rabbis, Christian pastors and priests, and Muslim imams together. In other places the event may be an intercultural dinner including members of Hindu and Buddhist communities as well. Beyond this simple example, there might be other local adjustments that may not totally represent Gülen's views. Thus, to interpret statements or actions by any one GHM-affiliated or inspired group as being in any way "official" is highly dubious; the only safe course for judging whether a statement is more-or-less "official" is to

²⁷ "‘Gazetecilik’ değil, terörle suçlanıyorlar," *Zaman*, February 3, 2012 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 3, 2012).

²⁸ "Gülen'den Ahmet Şık açıklaması," *Milliyet*, March 28, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 3, 2012).

take only Gülen's own voice as the voice of the GHM, though as noted, Gülen seldom makes definitive political statements.

Given the current atmosphere in Erdoğan's Turkey, we might expect for the GHM to become less circumspect and to transform itself into a more open activist organization along the lines of existing NGOs. To some extent, this has been true. Having said that, however, we must note that the sort of intrigues discussed above remain in place as the Kemalist "Deep State" (*Derin Devlet*) remains active.²⁹ Thus fear of prejudice, intolerance, and persecution remain strong and in terms of achieving a full-fledged democracy with freedom of expression and individual rights, Turkey still has a long way to go.

But even in the ostensibly full-fledged democracy of the United States, the GHM has found conditions that also reinforce a cautionary approach, especially since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia in 2001. As noted above, Gülen has been living in the United States, initially as a political refugee and now for health reasons. Fearing broad-spread negative effects on Muslims following the attacks, Gülen briefly abandoned circumspect activism by publicly condemning the terrorist attacks and taking a stand against violence in the name of Islam, going so far as to take out advertisements in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to make his position clear.³⁰

Nevertheless, some well-funded organizations pour millions of dollars to spread the fear of Islam in the U.S. and overshadow the optimistic approaches of moderate Muslims like those in the GHM. A report by the Center for American Progress reveals that the rise of Islamophobia in the U.S. is a result of politically-motivated action to diminish the reputation of Muslims and to turn Americans against Islam, for example the passing of

²⁹ See M. M. Gunter, "Deep State: The Arcane Parallel State in Turkey," *Orient* 47 (2006): 334-348 and Michael M. Gunter and M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Paradox: Progressive Islamists Versus Reactionary Secularists," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (2007): 289-301.

³⁰ The advertisements ran in the September 21, 2001 issues of these newspapers. An image of the original message as it appeared in the *Washington Post* is available at <http://www.fethullah-gulen.org/news/9-11-condemn.html> (accessed February 21, 2012). For more on Gülen's views on terrorism, see M. Fethullah Gülen, "In True Islam, Terror Does Not Exist," in *Terror and Suicide Attacks: An Islamic Perspective*, ed. Ergün Çapan (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004), 1-8; M. Fethullah Gülen, "Real Muslims Cannot Be Terrorists," and "On Recent Terrorist Attacks," both in M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love & Tolerance* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004), 179-183; 184-190.

an anti-*sharia* law in Oklahoma.³¹ One of the goals of the Islamophobia lobby, labeled in the Center for American Progress report as “Fear Inc.,” is to present Islam as a violent religion to not only the American people at large and to lawmakers, but also to law enforcement agencies.³² In a recent scandal the press reported that an anti-Muslim movie “Third Jihad,” a “documentary” claiming to investigate “a secret manifesto for ‘The Third Jihad’ in which Islamic radicals infiltrate American society in order to bring down Western civilization” was shown to New York Police Department officers and to cadets in the Police Academy as part of their terrorism awareness training for over a year.³³

Fundamental to this film’s polemic and to that of many other expressions of Islamophobia is a twisted understanding of an obscure and obsolete Shi’a Muslim practice called *taqiyya* (dissimulation). During the eighth century, the Shi’a leadership allowed Shi’a Muslims to hide their beliefs in the Shi’a faith in order to avoid persecution by the Sunni Umayyad Empire (661-750).³⁴ Anti-Islamic groups invoke *taqiyya* as an instrumental part of a purported “Islamic agenda” that, as depicted in “The Third Jihad,” disguises itself in order to infiltrate Western societies without raising suspicions about their true intentions.³⁵ This not only twists both the historical context in which the concept of *taqiyya* emerged, but also completely ignores the fact that even in its original eighth-century application, it applied only to Shi’a and not to the Sunnis who make up the

³¹ Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, “Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America,” Center for American Progress, August 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 9, 2012); George Zornick, “Fear, Inc.: America’s Islamophobia Network,” *The Nation*, August 29, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 9, 2012). For a detailed academic account of the rise of Islamophobia see John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds. *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³² Ali, et al., “Fear, Inc.”

³³ Michael Powell, “In Police Training, a Dark Film on U.S. Muslims,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2012 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 10, 2012); the synopsis of the film is from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) [Internet Resource] (accessed February 11, 2012).

³⁴ See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 39, 183 and John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), s.v, “Taqiyah”.

³⁵ Perhaps the best publicized example of this is Robert Spencer, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* (Lanham, MD: Regnery, 2005), which has generated thousands of pieces both of praise and condemnation for his twisted view.

majority of Muslims worldwide and an even greater majority of those Muslims who have migrated to the West.

A more widespread and better advertised example of twisting *taqiyya* into claims of a covert Islamic agenda involved the national hardware store chain Lowe's. A right-wing lobbying group, the Florida Family Association, attacked Lowe's after the chain began sponsoring the TLC network's program "All-American Muslim," which depicts life among mostly young Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan. The characterization of young Muslims as normal American kids angered the Florida group which claimed that the show "hides the Islamic agenda's clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values."³⁶ Bowing to this pressure, Lowe's pulled its advertising from the program stating that it had become "a lightning rod for people to voice complaints from a variety of perspectives," suggesting a much broader assault on the company by Islamophobic sources.³⁷ As one observer quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* put it, Lowe's and apparently other sponsors became "afraid to advertise on a show about Muslims that aren't terrorists."³⁸ Despite the fact that, according to an academic report by Charles Kurzman, any potential radical Muslim threat in the U.S. has been largely declining,³⁹ "Fear Inc." is not willing to give up its exaggerated claims of a global cultural jihad and continues its attempts to produce fear of home-grown terrorists. Evidence of their success may be found in President Barack Obama's signing of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on December 31, 2011. A provision in this act allows indefinite military detention of terror suspects, including American citizens, without trial.⁴⁰ The existence of the NDAA worries all Muslims in the U.S. and forces the GHM to maintain its cautionary approach even in this supposedly more democratic and open society. But it has also invigorated its circumspect activities centering on interfaith and intercultural dialogue: in contrast to the majority of Islamic

³⁶ Shan Li, "Lowe's Faces Backlash Over Pulling Ads From 'All-American Muslim'," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 11, 2012).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Scott Shane, "Radical U.S. Muslims Little Threat, Study Says," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2012 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 10, 2012); Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-American Terrorism in the Decade Since 9/11," Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, Duke-UNC-RTI, February 8, 2012 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 10, 2012).

⁴⁰ Mark Landler, "After Struggle on Detainees, Obama Signs Defense Bill," *The New York Times*, December 31, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 10, 2012).

organizations in the U.S., which have sought primarily to proselytize Americans into Islam, the GHM institutions in the U.S use their dialogue activities in an effort to erase stereotypes and negative propaganda about Islam and aim to avert Samuel P. Huntington's prophecy of a "clash of civilizations."⁴¹ In 1997 Gülen stated his disagreement with Huntington and added that "...if such a large wave has arisen and is coming, before the crash we should place a large seawall in front of it and break the wave."⁴² Gülen's seawall has been the interfaith dialogue activities in the United States and worldwide.

The GHM's circumspect approach has led to a degree of confusion about the movement on the part of the U.S. government. According to U.S. State Department documents leaked to the Turkish press by WikiLeaks, initial U.S. consular views on the GHM were negative, but the attitude became more positive as the consular staff learned more about the movement.⁴³ A U.S. Ankara Embassy report from March 2008 points to the movement's circumspect activism and other crucial elements:

Gülen's harassment by the State appears to be based on an unclear and arbitrarily-interpreted range of evidence, although in our experience the movement in Turkey has become secretive under the State's pressure, its representatives are cagey with us, and its goals are therefore more difficult to read. In addition, we have experience that more militant Islamists have moved into some of the Gülen structures in Turkey. Yet based on extensive and continuing contacts with Gülenists, we conclude that Gülen's approach is so gradualist, and his chief lieutenants are so wary of being tarred as militants, that the movement does not pose a clear and present danger to the State.⁴⁴

Indeed, at the zenith of political Islamic groups, such as Necmettin Erbakan's *Millî Görüş* (National Outlook) came to an end, Gülen's moderate views attracted supporters from these groups. The document noted that the GHM has been successful in changing the former political

⁴¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22-49.

⁴² *Medya Aynasında Fethullah Gülen "Kozadan Kelebeğe"*, ed. Mustafa Armağan and Ali Ünal (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayınları, 1999), 83.

⁴³ "Turkey's religious Gülen community subject of latest WikiLeaks," *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 17, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 16, 2012).

⁴⁴ W. Robert Pearson, "Turkish Civic Society: Verdict Suspended In Case Against Islamic Leader Fethullah Gülen," March 11, 2003 [Internet Resource] (accessed March 4, 2012). Note: the Americanization of Turkish names, Gülen as Gülen for example, is in the original of all cited consular cables.

Islamists' minds causing them to shift in a more moderate direction consistent with the GHM's circumspect position.⁴⁵

Another U.S. consular document points out that the number of applicants for U.S. visas has increased ever since Gülen moved to the U.S. Many would-be visitors "remain reticent about revealing their affiliation with Gülen" because of the "fear of reprisal by the secular Turkish establishment or uncertainty about the U.S. government's position toward Gülen."⁴⁶ The document also points to the increasing number of work visas given to teachers to work at Gülen-inspired schools in the U.S.⁴⁷

As noted above, inspired by Gülen's vision of creating a "Golden Generation" of humanity, adherents of the GHM began opening schools in Turkey during the 1980s and since then have expanded their school construction efforts worldwide, including in the U.S. Most of the schools function as private schools. In the U.S., adherents also opened state-funded privately-run charter schools in several states. Recently some charter schools opened by followers of Gülen came under close scrutiny in the U.S. The FBI opened an investigation of these charter schools and their alleged connections with the GHM. The investigation was launched because a former teacher who worked at one of these charter schools claimed that Turkish teachers employed at these schools were given a written contract that required them to donate a portion of their salary to the movement; in essence transferring money paid by the state for instruction in the form of kickbacks to the GHM.⁴⁸ None of the existing work on the financial resources of the GHM mentions a written agreement between the movement and donors even when the donors pledge millions of dollars.⁴⁹ Thus, the claim of the Turkish teacher is the first of its kind. It is uncertain how this or similar cases might affect perceptions of the GHM in the U.S. or how the GHM may respond to such inquiries and potentially changed perceptions; time will tell.

There are many challenges to conducting research on the GHM. Certainly, one of the chief ones is the organization's cautionary approach, which leaves few footprints for a researcher to follow. In addition, the decentralized character of its organizations makes it very difficult to focus

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Fethullah Gülen: Why are his followers traveling?" [Internet Resource] (accessed February 16, 2012).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Martha Woodall and Claudio Gatti, "WikiLeaks files detail U.S. unease over Turks and charter schools," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 4, 2011 [Internet Resource] (accessed February 16, 2012).

⁴⁹ Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, 52-62.

on the movement as a whole rather than on individual NGO-type sub-organizations. In light of this and the general philosophy of the organization, it is difficult even to identify who the members of the movement actually are. The GHM does not have an official membership roster or any known rite, custom, or procedure for including or excluding anyone. It collaborates with anyone regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or nationality when confronting common issues. The modern concepts of civic organizations do not adequately help in understanding the GHM's network. The GHM is not a single establishment but a loose alliance of world-wide networks of independently-run organizations that share Gülen's vision. Its cultural institutions function with an open-door policy similar to those in the Sufi brotherhoods, in which much of Gülen's worldview is grounded. Because the institutions do not have any official ties with Gülen himself they are often simply referred to as "Gülen-inspired" institutions. Even in those cases in which an organization explicitly states their ties to Gülen, such as the Rumi Forum,⁵⁰ Gülen's official role is no more than that of honorary president. The individuals are employed in these institutions based on their skills and they may not identify themselves or be thought of by the movement as members of the GHM.

These complicating factors mean, for one thing, that researchers cannot thoroughly study the movement without the cooperation from the GHM and its sub-organizations. The activists in the GHM have proven themselves helpful to researchers in their endeavors to study the movement, however making use of such assistance can result in the researchers being labeled as "Gülenist" or "Fethullahcı" and their scholarly contributions brought into question through allegations of insider bias.⁵¹ Even so, because of the broad range of activities in which the GHM is involved and its worldwide network—the GHM currently runs over 1,000 schools and hundreds of cultural and interfaith institutions in over 130 countries as well as being extremely influential in the areas of public

⁵⁰ Founded in 1999 in Washington, D. C. as an arm of the GHM devoted to "foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue."

⁵¹ In the interest of full disclosure, the acknowledgements section of this book includes GHM-affiliated or inspired organizations and many of the individual authors confess in their chapters to having gotten either direct or indirect assistance from organizations and/or individuals who are affiliated with the GHM. As editors of this collection, we have consistently sought to avoid any biases, for or against the GHM, and have insisted that the authors do likewise. While some aspects of the movement find praise in these pages, readers will also find well-reasoned doubts and criticisms as well.

and private health services in Turkey and in several countries in need—scholars have not been able to avoid looking at the movement. Many specialized monographs by scholars in fields ranging from theology and sociology to history, public administration, and political science deal with these institutions—their foundation, structure, and influence—but such specialized scholarship cannot do justice to such a complex, de-centered, and far-reaching organization. The philosophy behind the movement’s activism is a quiet, non-hierarchical, and circumspect one of a sort that only a multi-disciplinary approach can adequately cover. Limiting the complexities of the GHM to the narrow focus of one discipline’s perspective or methodology may obstruct scholars trying to understand the broader scope of the movement. Thus, this edited book goes beyond a single disciplinary focus to explore the historical, political, theological, and cultural activities of the GHM with an eye toward illuminating aspects of the Gülen gestalt.

The book starts with a quest to explore the roots of the GHM all the way to the pulpit of Gülen. In the first chapter Adem Akıncı examines the elements of Gülen’s rhetoric that were appealing to Turkish audiences. Many academic works on the GHM considered the educational institutions of the movement as its origin, however Gülen’s masterful preaching and exceptional oratory style is what actually lies at the base of the movement. Gülen was one of the most successful preachers in Turkey. As early as 1969, even his adversaries acknowledged Gülen’s deep cultural level as well as his commanding voice and persuasive talent.⁵² Akıncı argues that the eloquence of Gülen’s presentation and the soundness of his logical arguments, along with his method of using scientific themes and evidence in his speeches, attracted masses to Gülen’s sermons, facilitating the emergence of the movement. Furthermore, Akıncı analyzes key features of Gülen’s unconventional preaching and lecturing styles, which proved highly effective.

The educational institutions of the GHM have put Gülen’s ideas into practice and proved the applicability of his ideas on education. The GHM schools worldwide are run by the rules of each country in which they function. Islam is only introduced to students by way of teachers’ conduct and not through exhortation. In the second chapter, Süphan Bozkurt and Yetkin Yıldırım examine Gülen’s vision of education and the role Gülen puts forth for education in the creation of the “Golden Generation” of humanity. In Gülen’s educational philosophy education should cover both scientific and ethical components so that the educated bear the moral

⁵² “F. Gülen’e Cevap,” *Türk Birliği* 4:42 (September 1969), 17-19.

responsibility for both the application of their knowledge and for the outcomes of that application. The authors also assert that in Gülen's vision, education can spread the idea of tolerance and inter-cultural understanding and thus become a useful tool to prevent the clash of civilizations Huntington prophesized. Furthermore, Bozkurt and Yıldırım characterize Gülen's understanding of an ideal teacher and his expectations from education.

In the third chapter Tamer Balcı posits that beginning in the late nineteenth century, a significant number of Muslim intellectuals supported modernization and pro-democracy views in the Islamic world. Nevertheless, before these ideas had matured and spread widely, much of the Islamic world fell under either colonial or native authoritarian regimes, which halted the flourishing of free thought and delayed the creation of a democratic culture in the Islamic world. Said-i Nursi (1876-1960), an antecedent of Gülen, argued that God-given free will can only be practiced in a free democracy but he was silenced under the illiberal state secularism of Turkey. Gülen and the GHM suffered the same assaults from illiberal secularism, but recently-acquired democratic freedoms and increasing global communication channels allowed the GHM to give voice to the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

Sonia L. Alianak posits two different strategic approaches toward Islamic activism in the contemporary world: an Indirect Model, which seems best exemplified by the Gülen Hizmet Movement in Turkey and beyond, and a Direct Model manifested by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan. In chapter four, she analyzes how these strategic approaches grapple with the identity crisis created by modernity and globalization and attempt to appeal to the Middle East and beyond to the global Islamic world. This analysis has heuristic value for further studies in positing that the first model tends to flourish in constitutionally secular political systems; whereas the latter tends to exist in monarchies, especially where the rulers tend to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammad.

A discussion of Islam and Islamic movements without the role of women would be incomplete. Although Islam granted women divorce, inheritance, and property ownership rights in the seventh century, in terms of women's rights, the Islamic world fell behind the West during the last century. The insistence of some Muslim groups upon the practice of polygamy and subjugation of women to a lower status than men has been an open wound in Muslim societies and marks a particular dividing line between Islam and liberalism in the West. While these issues are still debated among Muslims, the GHM has progressed well ahead of others.

Gülen clearly discouraged polygamy and declared it an outdated tradition.⁵³ He further stressed the equality of men and women and encouraged women's education.⁵⁴ Women in the movement are active in various positions. In the fifth chapter Maria Curtis explores the active role of women within the GHM. She argues that the women in the GHM are not just passive participants. Countering claims that duties for women in the GHM are limited to supporting men's agendas and activities, Curtis argues that women in the GHM not only organize and run public events, but they also do fundraising. Curtis challenges the Western notion that public visibility is the sole measure of elevated status for women. Through her interaction with women engaged in *hizmet*, Curtis concludes that many Muslim women prefer to remain in their private spheres because they want to be recognized through their good work and production, not through public notoriety.

While the GHM has adopted a circumspect activist model, Gülen's progressive interpretation of Islam has increased the expectations from the movement. Although Gülen has been living in the U.S. since 1999 and once in a while express his views on Turkish political issues, he is not known to express his views on commonly discussed U.S. social issues. In chapter six, Mark Webb cautions that two major issues might be possible lines of fracture that have become evident in the movement's interaction with Christians in America: the role of women and homosexual identity. Webb mentions that the GHM has attracted many religiously liberal American collaborators, who recognize homosexuality as a legitimate form of gender identity and oppose the segregation of men and women. Although Gülen on many occasions has encouraged the further inclusion of women in GHM events and never preached for gender segregation—GHM schools do not segregate students and both Muslim and non-Muslim women are employed worldwide in the GHM institutions and schools—still some GHM events are organized specifically for women or men. Maria Curtis's explanations in the fifth chapter of this book addresses some of the issues Webb raises, but even the activists in the movement admit that they are sometimes a few steps behind Gülen's ideas because many adherents come from traditional Turkish families. Hence there is still room for misunderstanding about issues of gender between liberal Christians and others who might collaborate with the GHM. With regard to homosexuality, Gülen is not known to have expressed any comprehensive opinion on this issue and, generally, Islamic societies

⁵³ *Medya Aynasında Fethullah Gülen*, 90-92.

⁵⁴ "An Interview with Fethullah Gülen," tran. Zeki Saritoprak and Ali Ünal, *Muslim World* 95:3 (July 2005): 447-467.

prohibit homosexual behavior very strictly. Webb suggests a candid expression of opinion about this issue in order to prevent it from becoming a fracturing issue between the GHM and Americans who desire to collaborate with it.

In chapter seven Christopher L. Miller examines the origin of American secularism and its relevance to the GHM. Unlike in France, early American secularism evolved organically. Rather than being anticlerical, American secularism, as exemplified in the U.S. Constitution, grew out of the extreme condition of religious diversity that had evolved during the colonial era. In a way presaging modern globalization, this diversity led to a form of secularism that permits the conservation and/or creation of sacred space within a larger civil society so that communities can exercise their religious practices in an atmosphere that neither privileges nor discriminates against any particular form of religious expression. Through an examination of that evolutionary process, Miller lines up similarities between the rise of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century postcolonial religious movements in the U.S. and the rise of “strong religions” in the wake of global decolonization during the late twentieth century. While he finds that the GHM is a manifestation of such postcolonial religious efflorescence, Miller suggests that the GHM is somewhat unique because it embraces a spiritually-informed humanism and openness to dialogue. As such it may offer a more tempered alternative to other forms of religious activism.

The modern Turkish state’s illiberal secularism claimed sole ownership of the public sphere and aimed to lock Islam exclusively into a private sphere occupied by individual Muslims. One of the significant outcomes of this attempt was the exclusion of students with headscarves from the universities. The headscarf issue was one of the most debated issues in Turkey during the 1990s. Even an elected female Turkish parliament member, Merve Kavakçı, was physically prevented from being sworn in by the parliament in 1999 because she wore a headscarf. In the eighth chapter Semiha Topal analyzes the role of the GHM in the deprivatization of religion in modern secular Turkey. She explores the teachings of M. Fethullah Gülen and his encouragement of Muslims to engage in modern life in light of Max Weber’s ideal type of inner-worldly asceticism. Topal posits that with Gülen’s inspiration and guidance, his pious, educated, and conscientious followers have become major agents in reshaping the secular public sphere and have brought Islam out of its private isolation.

Since its inception, Islam has been one among many religions and interfaith dialogue has been a daily occurrence, whether in the multi-religious Muslim empires of the past or in modern multi-religious states.

The rise of globalization and the improvement of global communications have only broadened this historical reality by bringing even a greater variety of people from different faiths together. While Samuel P. Huntington expected that “the clash of civilizations” may dominate and divide global societies, through his volunteers, Gülen has sought to prevent this through dialogue between civilizations and faiths. Said-i Nursi suggested interfaith dialogue between the Muslims and the West a century ago. Following his footsteps Gülen has always been warm to the idea of interfaith dialogue, though Huntington’s theory perhaps made interfaith dialogue, as a mechanism for promoting understanding, respect, and peace, a matter of central importance for Gülen and the GHM. The GHM today runs perhaps hundreds of interfaith dialogue institutions worldwide. In the U.S. alone there are close to 50 interfaith dialogue organizations and sub-branches.⁵⁵ These institutions organize and sponsor dinners, panels, luncheons, and conferences to facilitate interfaith dialogue among various faiths. These events are not similar to the events organized by some Muslim or Christian groups that are designed to expose and possibly convert others to their faiths. The GHM interfaith events primarily include the religious heads of communities such as rabbis, priests, and pastors, who would be less likely to convert Islam. Furthermore, the GHM affiliate Institute of Interfaith Dialog is constructing a Peace Garden in Houston, Texas. Once completed later in 2012, the Peace Garden will house a Jewish Synagogue, a Christian Church, and a Muslim Mosque in the same garden. While the GHM is taking these optimistic steps, some scholars question whether or not the desired outcome of the interfaith activities can be achieved. Taking this question into consideration in chapter nine Thomas D. Pearson compares the interfaith approaches of M. Fethullah Gülen and contemporary Western moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre challenges the assumption that a simple dialogue could produce productive results. Considering MacIntyre’s argument that rationality is shaped by traditions, Pearson argues that a productive interfaith dialogue can only be possible if the sides involved in the dialogue primarily accept each other’s tradition-based rationalities as new and second first languages, which may help them to look at issues from the perspective of others.

Adding to this challenge, in chapter ten Mustafa Ruzgar argues that interfaith dialogue as an organized activity of coming together among different members of religions is not sufficient to build effective bridges between different religious traditions. He elaborates that the common

⁵⁵ Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, 57.

space afforded by a temporal condition, in which a normative opposition between the East and the West constructed at the disadvantage of the East, is quite fragile and thus subject to be disrupted by even the most trivial obscurities because of the fact that the “Other” still remains as the “*Other*” without radically challenging the exclusivity of contrasting religious claims. Ruzgar suggests that if the GHM desires a deeper sense of appreciation among religions, it must envision a more fruitful act of dialogue with the aim of transformation. He proposes that such transformation could be achieved if the issues of truth and salvation in other religions become one of the focal points of discussion. Ruzgar concludes with the argument that the primary sources of Islam provide important possibilities that might be utilized in inaugurating such an engagement.

As this summary makes clear, the chapters that compose this book look at the GHM from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives and address multiple aspects of the movement’s guiding ideology and actual behavior. It not only points out some significant achievements, but also some potential weaknesses in the movement. We hope that each chapter may be of value or interest to some readers and perhaps help the movement itself to move forward in a more informed way. We also hope that taken collectively, this multidisciplinary presentation might help to identify and give expression to a sort of gestalt that is otherwise difficult to discern in such an amorphous and sprawling organization. We will return to this larger, collective task in a concluding chapter.

