



Performing ‘Moral Opposition’: Strategy and Identity in the Gülen Movement

by *Mustafa E. Gurbuz*

This paper investigates the Gülen movement’s repertoires of action in order to determine how it differs from traditional Islamic revivalist movements and from the so-called ‘New Social Movements’ in the Western world.

Two propositions lead the discussion: First, unlike many Islamic revivalist movements, the Gülen movement shaped its identity against the perceived threat of a trio of enemies, as Nursi named them a century ago – ignorance, disunity, and poverty. This perception of the opposition is crucial to understanding the apolitical mind-set of the Gülen movement’s followers. Second, unlike the confrontational New Social Movements, the Gülen movement has engaged in ‘moral opposition’, in which the movement’s actors seek to empathise with the adversary by creating (what Bakhtin calls) ‘dialogic’ relationships. ‘Moral opposition’ has enabled the movement to be more alert strategically as well as more productive tactically in solving the everyday practical problems of Muslims in Turkey. A striking example of this ‘moral opposition’ was witnessed in the Merve Kavakci incident in 1999, when the movement tried to build bridges between the secular and Islamist camps, while criticising and educating both parties during the post-February 28 period in Turkey. In this way the Gülen movement’s performance of opposition can contribute new theoretical and practical tools for our understanding of social movements.

Panel:
The Gülen Movement,
Secularism and Democracy

Venue:
Lecture Theatre,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS

26.10.07 Panels	Parellel Session 1	Parellel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00	Presentation 06	
15:10-17:00		

Mustafa E. Gurbuz: studying for a PhD in the Department of Sociology at University of Connecticut, Storrs, U.S.A. His MA dissertation, *Politics of Headscarf as Social Drama*, discussed the mobilisation strategies of Islamic movements on the headscarf-ban protests in post-February 28th Turkey. Research interest: identity politics, social movements, and cultural sociology. Among recent publications on the Gülen movement: ‘Worldly Asceticism and Secularization: A Critique of Weberian (Mis) Readings of the Gülen Movement’ in Ibrahim Aburabi (ed.), *Challenges and Responses of Contemporary Islamic Thought: The Contributions of M. Fethullah Gülen* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming).

**Mustafa E.
Gurbuz**

me.gurbuz@gulenconference.org.uk