



27.10.07

SATURDAY

Giving Precedence to Common Points: The Limits of the Otherness in Fethullah Gülen’s Dialogic Methodology for Interfaith Encounters

by *Irina Vainovski-Mihai*

Panel:
Co-Existence and Dialogue

Venue:
Old Theatre,
LSE

27.10.07 Panels	Parallel Session 1	Parallel Session 2
9:30-11:30	Presentation 03	
13:00-15:00		
15:10-17:00		

This paper examines Fethullah Gülen’s teaching on interfaith encounters highlighting his dialogic methodology proposed for a globalised world in which Samuel Huntington’s idea of the ‘clash of civilisations’ (*Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1997) is still prominent. This idea, concludes Gülen, stems from the lack of trust in the religion of the “Other” and, rather often than not, from easily passing over the common points. According to Gülen, dialogue is not a superfluous endeavour, but an imperative (“Dialogue is a must”) and it should start by “Giving precedence to common points”. Gülen holds that the tendency toward factionalism exists within human nature. A meaningful and nonetheless necessary goal, he says, should be to make this tendency non-threatening and even beneficial. To fully appreciate the significance of Gülen’s accomplishments, one must understand the perspective from which he approaches the subject of interfaith dialogue. Based on his thinking as noted above, the purpose of this paper is to set out in some detail the way in which this renowned Islamic thinker limits the “domain” of the Otherness (Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2004; *Nation and Narration*, 1990) to make dialogue possible through overcoming both Orientalism (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978) and Occidentalism (Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, 2004). Challenging the discourse of conflict and focusing on common points may be an important strategy when mutual suspicions are still prevalent and when the field of postcolonial studies stand witness to conflicting processes of refraction (Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 2005; Amin Maalouf, *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, 1986).

**Irina
Vainovski-Mihai**

iv.mihai@gulenconference.org.uk

Irina Vainovski-Mihai: Associate Professor in Arabic Literature at ‘Dimitrie Cantemir’ Christian University in Bucharest, Romania. After graduating from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures (Arabic and English) at the University of Bucharest, she spent several years in various Arab countries, publishing travel notes, essays and research on literature and cultural studies, course books and other academic instruction aids, as well as translating works from Arabic, English and Hungarian. Recent publications include ‘*A Food of Their Kind*’ *The Gastronomic Image of the Eastern Other in a Time of Tensioned Self-Identification* (2006, in English), *The Wandering European and His Egyptian Guide: On Arabic Story- and History-Telling* (2005, in English). She is a founding member of the Center for Arab Studies in Bucharest and of the Romanian Association for Religious Studies.