

BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY IN ETHNO-RELIGIOUSLY FRACTURED COMMUNITIES: “THE CASE OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN TURKEY AND ABROAD”

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Abstract

Civil society is generally associated with the presence of voluntary, non-governmental civic and social organisations, which are run by informed citizens and assume responsibility for monitoring state bodies and operations and mobilising available resources to maintain order and efficiency in the functioning of both state and society. Early civil society theorists argued the relevance of such voluntary associations to achieving a stable and functioning democracy. But what if the local conditions prevent the formation of such associations – if the social landscape is characterised by communal conflicts stemming from deeply entrenched ethno-religious differences? The reality of such conditions makes it imperative that strategies are re-formulated in ethno-religiously fractured societies, where what divides different segments of the population is more than what unites them.

This paper argues that it is possible to develop such strategies. The argument is based on field research in Mardin on the activities of the faith-based Gülen movement. This group has succeeded in forging policies and programmes that bring different ethno-religious communities together as a necessary first step towards civil society: common problems facing the different ethno-religious communities are identified, then solid services to address those problems are provided, requiring collaborative effort by the different ethno-religious communities. In this way the social potential of those communities is mobilised and channelled to achieve shared goals which enrich the society as a whole.

Introduction

Civil society is generally associated with the presence of voluntary civic and social organizations that function as the basis of a given community. Run by the informed citizens or the groups, these non-governmental organizations assume responsibility of monitoring governmental organizations and mobilize the available resources to maintain order and efficiency in functioning of not only the governmental organizations but also of the society in general. According to Alexis Tocqueville, the civic organization, or the ability of the citizens to organize through associations for common purpose, constitutes the basis of civil society. Critique of the American individualism, Tocqueville suggested that coming around common causes would create a civic consciousness for American nationhood which is far more important than fulfilling selfish individual desires.¹ Moreover, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba found a direct correlation between civil society and democracy arguing that political civil society organizations increase civic awareness which respectively generate informed voting choices, participation in politics and holding the government more accountable.² Along the similar lines with Almond and Verba, Robert Putnam argues that not only political but also non-political civil society organizations are crucial to democracy because they build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and interests within it.³ What is common of all four students of civil society is their conviction that the coming together of citizens within either political or non-political organizations for a common purpose is crucial to achieve a full functioning civil society and as such a healthy democracy. They all compare the merits of civic organization over its absence in terms of achieving a stable and functioning democracy.

What if the community does not have ability to organize at the first place? What if there are ongoing intra-communal conflicts stemming from deeply entrenched ethno-religious differences? How is it possible to convince the different ethno-religious groups within a community to come together around a common cause as Tocqueville suggests, which would eventually generate a common identity and as Almond, Verba and Putnam suggests, a functioning democracy? The very reality that the contemporary societies still suffer from ethno-religious conflicts makes it imperative for the students of civil society to reformulate their strategies to attain civil society in ethno-religiously fractured communities where what divides different segments of the community is mote than what united them.

I argue that it is possible to develop common practical methods to foster civil society and democracy in communities that are traditionally divided along the ethno-religious fault lines and have been experiencing conflict over those ethno-religious differences. My earlier field research in the city of Mardin, which is located on the Syrian border of Turkey and populated by ethnic Turks, Arabs, Kurds and well as Assyrian Christians, about the Gülen movement, a faith-based civil society movement, suggests that it is likely to develop common strategies to bring together different ethno-religious groups within a community to organize toward achieving civil society. Addressing the common problems facing the different ethno-religious communities within a given society, providing solid services to eradicate those problems, and seeking collaboration of those ethno-religious communities along the way constitute the

1 For a brief discussion of civil society and democracy relationship, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki / Civil_society#_note-8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society#_note-8)

2 See Almond, G.; Verba, S; *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*; 1989; Sage

3 See Putnam, R.; *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*; 1993; Princeton

crux of mobilizing social potential which is possible to channel to adopting a civil society's values and practices.

A Glance at the Gülen Movement in Southeast Turkey

The Gülen movement has been able to mobilize Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrian Christians in Mardin to cooperate on tackling their common problems. The city has been heavily affected by the ensuing insecurity, infrastructural and economic deprivations due to the conflicts between the Turkish security forces and the terrorist organizations such as the Marxist PKK and the Islamist fundamentalist Hezbollah respectively since early 1980s and 1990s. The ongoing conflicts and insecurity have not only deprived the city of basic infrastructures, investments and educational facilities, but also deepened the ethnic fault-lines, less so the religious ones.

Against this background, the affiliates of the Gülen movement first established personal contacts with the local people from different ethnic groups in the late 1980s. Their conversations focused on such common problems facing all groups regardless of their ethno-religious allegiance as the lack of education of the youth, increasing unemployment, the consequential falling prey of the youth to either PKK or Hezbollah, and ensuing problem of terrorism and economic deprivations. The movement has not only preached about these issues but also mobilized the local people to tackle these problems together. The local people's cooperation seems to have yielded tangible outcomes which has changed the earlier attitudes and practices of the ethno-religious groups in Mardin, thereby preparing the ground for fostering participative civil society. These tangible outcomes include educational and cultural institutions which continue to build the human capital for a stable and democratic Mardin.

Gülen Movement Institutions in Mardin

Sur Dersanesi: University Preparatory Courses

Sur Dersanesi is a pioneer in Mardin in preparing the local youth for the national university entrance exam. Before Sur Dersanesi, a few organizations had attempted to run university preparatory courses in Mardin. However, they had ceased their operations either because of financial hardship or the security problems caused by the PKK and Hezbollah in the 1980s. In other words, they fled Mardin without fulfilling their promises to the local people to prepare their children for the national university entrance test.⁴ This unfortunate precedent made it difficult for the movement's local representatives to obtain the necessary official endorsement from the local government. The Gülen movement opened its first university preparatory course, which was also its first local institution, in Mardin in 1992. Ever since then, the movement's expansion in Mardin has been focused on opening university preparatory courses. Currently, the movement runs four university preparatory courses in the surrounding counties of Kızıltepe, Derik, Nusaybin, and Midyat. These courses serve the students not only in their own counties but also in nearby counties. For instance, since there is no university preparatory course in Dargeçit yet, the students commute to the closest county (Midyat) to attend the course. Opening another branch of Sur Dersanesi is always one of the top items on the movement's agenda in Mardin. In that regard, Mardin's *mütevelli* (board of trustees composed of local Mardinian businessmen) is currently negotiating with the local

⁴ I obtained this information through my interviews with the local people who helped the movement open its first university preparatory course in Mardin in 1992.

authorities of Savur, another county in Mardin, to obtain a license and rent a building to open a university preparatory course there.

The growth of Sur Dersanesi in Nusaybin is similar to that of its branches in the other counties. According to Murat Salim, a local store owner and resident of Nusaybin, the city has been heavily influenced by both the PKK and Hezbollah: “Between 1989 and 1993, the region was under the complete control of the PKK. For instance, if there was an incident that required a judicial process, the parties had to first see the regional administrator of the PKK. If they went directly to the official court, then the PKK punished them for that wrongdoing.”⁵ He suggests that Hezbollah, the counter-guerilla movement, took over control of Nusaybin from the PKK after 1993. About this time, the Gülen movement opened its first university preparatory course in Nusaybin. Murat Salim notes: “Sur Dersanesi in Nusaybin had about ten to fifteen students in 1996, but the number of the students has grown every year. The number was 280 in 2004, 480 in 2005, and 900 in 2006.”⁶ This growth has mirrored the growth in the other counties, such as Kızıltepe and Derik, which are under heavy PKK influence. Today, even though Kızıltepe is still a PKK stronghold, the local people send their children to Sur Dersanesi to prepare for national college entrance test.

ATAK Koleji - Private School (Elementary-Secondary-High School)

Atak Koleji is the first and only private school in Mardin. Its construction, which is still ongoing, started in 1996. In the meantime, however, the school has registered students and provided an education. The school’s construction has been funded solely by a wealthy Mardinian family (the Ataks) that has been residing in Istanbul since 1974. The family decided to build the school upon the encouragement of a group of Mardin’s local businessmen and a teacher who share Gülen’s educational vision and believe that increased educational facilities are the only remedy for Mardin’s underdevelopment and the way to solve southeastern Turkey’s terrorism problem. When the Atak family visited Mardin and saw that non-Mardinian teachers, despite all the deprivations they suffered there, were dedicating themselves to educating Mardin’s children and youth at the university preparatory courses, the family was stimulated to contribute to the Gülen movement’s educational projects in Mardin. They are still contributing.⁷

Just as it is the first institution being funded solely by a civic initiative, Atak Koleji is a pioneer in terms of other characteristics. It has become a meeting place for the area’s different ethno-religious groups, most notably Kurds and Arabs. The school is located halfway between Kızıltepe (Mardin’s largest county) and the city center of Mardin, both of which are, respectively, strongholds of ethnic Kurdish and ethnic Arab populations. According to reports made by Atak Koleji teachers, even if the Kurds and Arabs have not engaged in an active conflict, they have not quite intermingled either.⁸ In addition to Kurdish and Arab students, the school also has Assyrian Christian students and follows a secular curriculum approved (and periodically inspected) by the Turkish Ministry of Education. Atak Koleji is a co-ed school and has about three hundred and fifty students taught by thirty teachers, fourteen of whom are women.⁹

5 Excerpt from the author’s interview with Murat Salim on February 9, 2006, in Nusaybin, Mardin.

6 Excerpt from the author’s interview with Murat Salim on February 9, 2006 in Nusaybin, Mardin.

7 See chapter 3, “Genesis and Development in Mardin.”

8 This information is based on my interview with the Atak Koleji teachers on February 3, 2006, in Mardin. Several other respondents of both Kurdish and Arab origin confirmed this information at different times and places.

9 This information is based on my notes from my trip to Atak Koleji on February 3, 2006.

The school is unique in Mardin for its education system and the opportunities it provides to its students. Beside teaching natural sciences and math, English as a second language, computer science as well as arts and humanities, the school prioritizes the students' development in terms of not only academic skills, but also of social and physical skills. Throughout the year, the students organize science fairs, exhibitions, theater plays, music performances, chess tournaments, and such sporting events as soccer and basketball tournaments. The teachers encourage each student club to organize own event and participate in those of the other clubs. The school principal Oğuz Ozan explains: "At the end of every school year, a fair is held among the student clubs; these clubs present the activities and accomplishments they have achieved in that year. The local people are invited to the fair and are asked to vote for the best clubs. The students are free to invite as many people as possible, including those with no affiliation to the school, in order to increase the number of votes for their club. Last year, the students brought about five thousand people from the city to visit the fair, and sought to increase the number of their votes."¹⁰ Ozan believes that this voting application helps familiarize students with democratic election practices.

Moreover, the school organizes public seminars and social gatherings with the local people. Through these public seminars, the school shares its future projects with the local people, and seeks their involvement in carrying out these projects. The school's engagement with the local people has not only changed some rooted traditions such as not sending girls to school, but also attitudes toward them. A mother from Surgucu village laments, "I was not allowed to go even to elementary school and was married at a very early age. She continues, "I did not have much say in my immediate family, let alone the extended one, but I am quite happy for Hatice [her daughter] because she is going to high school now in Balıkesir [a western city]. Even now, her father consults her for her ideas on issues. She has the opportunity to influence her father's decisions. She will be a strong woman and a good mother."¹¹

MOSDER (Mardin Reading Halls Association)

MOSDER has several branches in Mardin, one of which is in the highly impoverished and isolated Dargeçit province. Dargeçit does not even have a bank despite its more than seven thousand inhabitants, and has one entrance, which also serves as an exit and a military check-point. The main reason for such deprivation and heavy military control seems to be a combination of the local people's implicit support for the PKK terrorist organization, frequent clashes between the PKK and the Turkish security forces in the vicinity of Dargeçit, and the resulting absence of investment. MOSDER's reading hall opened in February 2005 and serves about one hundred and fifty students. The students are encouraged to spend as much time as possible there reading or studying for the national college entrance test. The students stress that the reading hall has helped them organize their preparation for the university admissions test by providing them with a study place and test books, and that without these they would not be able to prepare very well in their impoverished houses. While the ultimate goal of the reading halls is to help local students get educated and go to college, the most immediate function is to keep them off the street where they easily fall prey to either PKK or Hezbollah recruitment.

MARKOYDER (Mardin Village Development Association)

Compared to MOSDER, MARKOYDER has a more comprehensive scope for its activities, from providing educational facilities to distributing food and clothing to poor villagers. The

10 Excerpt from the author's interview with Oğuz Ozan at Atak Koleji on February 3, 2006.

11 Excerpt from the author's interview with a group of women from Surgucu village on February 2, 2006.

operational relation between the two organizations is such that MOSDER goes into a village if MARKOYDER identifies a need for a reading hall in that village, and they cooperate in opening the reading hall. In addition, MARKOYDER, in partnership with the teachers from Atak Koleji, visits families in the villages and tries to convince parents to send their children to school, especially their daughters, since the indigenous conservative culture impedes girls from going to school. MARKOYDER has reportedly been in contact with hundred and fifty villages so far.

What the Movement's Institutions Mean to the Local People

According to my interviewees' responses, Atak Koleji seems to be matchless in Mardin in terms of the education it provides the students. Similarly, Sur Dersanesi, the university preparatory courses, and the reading halls seem to provide the locals with opportunities that the state cannot offer and that perhaps only a small percentage of Mardinians could afford on their own. The material value of these services is clear. However, the local people also seem to attribute a special meaning to these institutions, for they view them as being more than just schools. There are contextual reasons for this special meaning: the local realities of severe unemployment, terror, a conservative culture, and a chronic shortage of schools and teachers. These correspond almost perfectly with what Atak Koleji and the university preparatory courses are committed to eradicating. Therefore, the fact that each of these contextual reasons is important to the parents, although to varying degrees, makes Atak Koleji, as well as other movement-associated educational institutions, something more than what such institutions, by common definition, are.

The local people who have placed their children in these institutions comment that they see the Gülen movement institutions as a way to keep their children immune to the influence of both the PKK and Hezbollah. Although they do not reflect the entire Mardin community, those parents who send their children to the university preparatory course view it as a way to rescue their children from the recruitment pool of both the PKK and Hezbollah. Based on this proposition, one cannot argue that the movement's activities have decreased local support for the PKK and Hezbollah, but we can conclude, based on the parents' statements, that their main motivation is not necessarily to help their children go to university but to keep them away from the streets, which constitutes the main recruitment pool for both the PKK and Hezbollah.

Is the Gülen Education Model Applicable to the International Arena?

So, the question is whether the sociological approach introduced and practiced by the Gülen movement in Mardin, which focuses on communal perfection through individual perfection, and mobilizes different segments of the society to tackle their common problems putting aside their differences, is applicable to alleviating ethno-religious conflicts in diverse communities around globe, and to fostering civil society within these communities?

The field research about the impact of the movement's services in Mardin which is not only ethno-religiously divided but also suffers from terrorism and economic deprivations, suggests that the movement is able to prepare the preliminary conditions for a civil society to flourish from that community. First, the educational facilities established and run by Turks, Arabs, and Kurds together have minimized, if not eradicate, the perception of Turk-Kurd enmity through which PKK has garnered popular support. Second, these institutions, be they

college prep courses or reading halls, took the unemployed youth off the streets, who constituted otherwise the main recruitment resource for both PKK and Hezbollah. Third, Gülen's ideas about Islam conveyed through both human interactions and media have convinced the public that radicalism conflicts with the very essentials of Islam. Fourth, Gülen movement's solid education services help rationality override nationalist and ethno-religious sentiments, and create a public opinion against violent means of conduct such as terrorism.

- i.** I argue that with its proven capabilities in Mardin, whose ethno-religious diversity and socio-economic problems are representative of the global map where similar problems are experienced, the Gülen movement can contribute to eradicating ethno-religiously driven conflicts and to fostering civil society by mobilizing the indigenous different ethno-religious groups to tackle their common problems. That is, the reconciliatory approach of the Gülen movement can help to greatly appease, if not totally eradicate, social conflicts continuously experienced in various parts of the world provided that the following hypotheses are true for any given community.
- ii.** The parties of a given ethno-religious conflict are rational actors. As such, they recognize their interests in peace and stability, and in obtaining tangible results toward bettering their socio-economic situation.
- iii.** The Gülen movement's philosophy is that the absence of education, dialogue and tolerance is the source of all likely conflicts.
- iv.** It envisions societies that consist of idealistic and patriotic individuals who share common values with their counterparts with different ethno-religious backgrounds. These values are mainly dialogue, tolerance, individual perfection through education, and altruism.
- v.** The movement's vision of dialogue, tolerance, and search for common grounds between different cultures is what enables the movement to communicate to a wide range of different communities.
- vi.** The movement's strict avoidance from politics and from being politicized makes it able to communicate communities that are radically distant from each other on the political spectrum.
- vii.** The movement's activities within any community start with personal contacts with the individuals in that community. That is, the affiliates of the movement share the vision of the movement with individual(s) in the given community.
- viii.** Once inter-personal relations are established between the affiliates of the Gülen movement and the local figures, and the necessity of dialogue and education is agreed upon in a particular community; the schools and related educational institutions become media where a vision of dialogue and tolerance are realized through raising individuals who believe in the importance of intercultural dialogue and tolerance.
- ix.** The quality education provided by the schools and the joint-cultural activities held in cooperation with the local people become non-relational channel for communicating the vision of the Gülen movement, and they help the movement take further root in a given society.

Based on my previous field research about the impact of the Gülen movement, a faith-based civic movement, on an ethno-religiously highly fractured and socio-economically deprived community of Mardin, I contend that examining the Gülen movement's educational activities in the global conflict zones would enable us to develop strategies that may be helpful in

minimizing ethno-religious conflict and fostering civil society in these very zones. These case studies, which include the movement's impact on the conflicted communities of Bosnia, Northern Iraq, Afghanistan and Philippines, and will be further discussed in the following section, constitute more or less the global map of ethno-religious conflict in general. The case studies, each of them unique in the sense of their socio-political context and their underlying cause of conflict, present a representative sample of the population of ethno-religious conflicts around the globe.

The Gülen movement has been actively operating in all these four places for more than a decade, and has been successful to mobilize the indigenous ethno-religiously distinct communities to put aside their differences and cooperate together to tackle their common problems. Identifying the norms and practices that enable the movement to accomplish such an endeavor may help us identify common and effective strategies to minimize, if not eradicate, ethno-religious conflicts in general.

The Gülen Movement in the Global Conflict Zones

In order to fully assess the ability of the Gülen movement to appease social conflicts and contribute to building civil society in ethno-religiously fractured communities, it is imperative to select a sample or a set of samples, which reflects the notion of ethno-religious fracture with all aspects. That is, the sample examined should be representative of communities that divided along the lines of ethnic differences, religious differences, and ethnic and religious difference. Similarly, the set of samples should also take into account the political framework of the ethno-religiously fractured community under scrutiny. Since it is the concept of civil society and a social movement's ability to contribute to building civil society in a given community, the indigenous political culture of the local people should be taken into account as an indicator of availability of pre-conditions for civil society to develop. In this regard, Bosnia, Northern Iraq, Afghanistan and Philippines provide a unique combination of various sorts of ethno-religiously fractured communities.

First, Bosnia presents a case of community which is composed of Muslim Bosnians, Christian Serbs and again Christian Croats. Despite their common ethnic identity, and more or less, similar political cultures due to their common Yugoslavian background, these three different communities had as recently as a decade ago engaged in the bloodiest conflict due to nationalistic aspirations. Their religious differences had exacerbated, if not caused, their nationalism-driven conflict.

Second, Northern Iraq presents a unique case with highly fractured community along the ethno-religious differences, whose political culture rests in secular authoritarianism of the Baathist ideology. As it goes through a political formation lately, the community composed of Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Turcoman, Shiites, and Assyrian Christians experiences conflicts along the line of these ethno-religious differences. That neither of these ethno-religious groups inherently possesses democratic political culture further minimizes the prospect of easy development of civil society in Northern Iraq.

Third, Afghanistan presents an example of community which is highly diversified with various ethnic groups sharing the same religious background. The ethnic groups include respectively Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Baluchi, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Nuristani and Pamiri among other small ethnic groups. After a decade-long war caused by the Soviet invasion, these ethnic groups whose political organization is based on tribalism continued their infighting thereby diminishing the prospects of developing civil society in Afghanistan. In

the meantime, emergence of the radical Islamist groups such as Taliban further blockaded any possible progress toward a civil society.

Finally, Philippines provides a unique example of community which is stigmatized with an enduring Muslim-Christian fighting. Like the Christians of Northern Iraq, Muslims, in other words Moro Muslims, constitute the minority in Philippines and are populated in the autonomous region of Mindanao in Southern Philippines. The Moro Muslims have politically organized themselves along the Muslim nationalist movement, which they describe as both Islamic and anti-colonial. As such, the main mobilizing force for the Moro Muslims has been their historical resistance against the Spanish colonialism, and that resistance currently continues as their struggle against the Christian Manila's attempts to assimilate the Muslim Philippines. In a way, after the end of the colonialism threat, the conflict in Philippines has transformed into an enduring one between the Muslim minority and the Christian majority. Yet, despite the earlier attempts to form a unified nationalist Muslim identity (Bangsamoro), the Philippine's Muslims have been organized along three distinct political groups, which are respectively the Moro Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and Abu Sayyaf. Despite their different political orientations, what brings these distinct groups together is their common uprising against their common "other"; the Christian majority.

What is interesting about the Philippines, where Muslim-Christian conflict is still vivid, and the contribution of the Gülen Movement in Philippines is articulated by Thomas Mitchell, the former representative of Vatican on interfaith dialogue for Northern Africa and the Middle East. Mitchell describes the Gülen schools running in Philippines as "peace islands in the sea of conflict" pointing to the fact that the schools bring together both Christian and Muslims students together in a peaceful atmosphere, whose fathers have been fighting each other outside the school campus for more than half a decade because of their religious differences.¹² It is certainly interesting to see a platform in Philippines where Christians and Muslims peacefully join together. What is more interesting though is to see that it is a platform brought about by Muslims affiliated with a faith-based civil society movement while the local Muslims are partially the cause of the conflict. The situation is pretty much the same in Bosnia, Northern Iraq and Afghanistan. In spite of sharing the common ethnic and/or religious background with the parties of the ongoing conflict in either of these places, those inspired and/or affiliated by the Gülen movement tend not to take part in, or not to continue if have taken previously, the conflict. Instead, they prefer to identify common grounds where they get together and cooperate to tackle their common problems.

Conclusion: Gülen Schools as a Means to Social Development and Civil Society

Finally, given the specific example of what the Gülen movement has achieved in the ethno-religiously diverse Mardin to maintain social consensus among different communities who had previously engaged in a conflict in one way or another and mobilize them to counter their common challenges, what are the prospects for the movement and its schools to do the same in other ethno-religiously conflicted communities? I have argued that the analysis of the Gülen movement's activities in such unique global cases as Bosnia, Northern Iraq, Afghanistan and Philippines would demonstrate that the movement is able to bring together the indigenous ethno-religiously different communities in these respective countries by addressing their

12 See Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gülen as Educator", in M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*

common problems, providing a solid vision and services to address those problems and mobilizing the local people to cooperate in solving those problems. It is certainly imperative to conduct a field research in all these countries to verify whether the Gülen movement is able to attain what it did in Mardin. Nevertheless, the accounts of those who have visited the schools in these countries like that of Thomas Mitchel, who visited the Gülen schools in Philippines, suggest that the movement is able to bring together the ethno-religiously different communities together in a peaceful environment.

This observation entails a broader question about the Gülen movement's ability to contribute to developing human capital, the fundamental pre-condition of civil society formation, in the socially deprived and ethno-religiously conflicted countries such as those in Africa. The continent provides numerous examples of countries which have plunged into ethno-religious conflict and chronic political turmoil due to the lack of human capital which will enable civil society, political stability and economic prosperity.

The Republic of Nigeria, with its diverse ethno-religious popular structure, vast natural resources (particularly oil) and recent step into democratic political system, is representative of majority countries in the continental Africa. The country's religious distribution consists of 50 percent Muslims, 40 percent Christians, and 10 percent traditional beliefs. Even more diverse ethnic map of the country consists of 29 percent Hausa and Fulani, 21 percent Yoruba, and 18 percent Ibo with other various ethnicities making up the rest of the population.¹³ Since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, ethnic struggles have dominated Nigeria's politics. Religious differences, inequalities in oil resources among regions, and pervasive corruption and poverty have only intensified the conflict.¹⁴ The contemporary challenges that Nigeria faces include reconciling antagonistic Muslim Hausa/Fulani in the north (the majority), Christian Yoruba in the south, and Christian Ibo in the east; evenly distributing the oil revenues among all the states and local governments; and halting pervasive corruption in both public and private sector.

Despite the efforts of both the Nigerian governments to maintain a smooth transition from dependency to independency and from authoritarian to democratic rule, Nigeria has suffered and is likely to continue to suffer ethno-religious and regional conflicts. Religious differences among the ethnic groups, uneven distribution of oil revenues among the ethno-religious groups and of the natural resources among the regions, are likely to exacerbate the ethno-religious and regional conflicts in years to come.

Nigeria's contemporary socio-economic and ethno-religious structure provides a fertile ground for such parties as international arms dealers who would be interested in supplying arms to the parties of a possible ethno-religious conflict, and the entities who might be interested in an invasion on the ground of preventing a possible ethno-religious conflict from turning into genocide. As such, Nigeria remains vulnerable to both internal and external impacts thereby diminishing the prospect for developing a civil society and achieving both economic and political stability.

An immediate and sustainable solution to such possible threats is to attain human and social development which will consequently enable the Nigerians regardless of their ethno-religious identity to compete for available political and economic opportunity spaces in their

13 See CIA World Factbook – Nigeria, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html#People>

14 See "Nigeria" in *How Governments Work: The inside guide to the politics of the world*, London, New York, Melbourne, Munich and Delhi: Dorling Kindersley Limited 2006, p.162

potentially rich country. Developing an able human capital will also entail a thriving civil society since the educated population will participate in the country's political process, and monitor and hold the government responsible for its policies.

The improvement and reform of the education system with a great emphasis on secondary and post-secondary education is crucial to civil society building in any given country according to the World Bank civil society development program. Unlike the early civil society theoreticians who associate the possibility of civil society formation with the will of the people, the World Bank civil society program recognizes the reality that the will itself would not suffice to form a civil society if the human capital to do so is not present. With its proven experience and capability in Mardin and other conflict zones to help the ethno-religiously diverse local population develop human capital, the Gülen movement and its schools can contribute to developing the human capital not only in Nigeria but also in other African countries which possess similar demographic and socio-economic structure.

The case of Mardin has demonstrated that the Gülen movement has been able to mobilize the individuals of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian origins, who were previously fractured and isolated from one another, to tackle their very own common problems with their own resources. Based on this example, one can deduct that the Gülen movement emphasizes the role of human agency and the autonomy of society and individuals from the state. That is, the individuals organize together and mobilize their resource to meet their common needs. Consequently, the necessity of law and order to sustain what has been achieved as a result of the collective action cultivates both individual and communal quest and respect for the rule of law, which constitutes the backbone of a sustainable civil society.