

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS VALUES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD: THE CASE OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT

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Abstract

The premise of this paper is that human rights values are a persistent theme of Fethullah Gülen's thought and *tajdid* and expressed by the Gülen movement through example. That *tajdid* is collectively constructed and communicated by allowing for adaptation and indigenisation in flexible response to different socio-cultural contexts. What is more, Gülen's views on democracy, pluralism, human rights and freedom of belief directly promote human rights values and norms. The paper argues that the Muslim world is very important to Gülen's overall aspiration for an inclusive civilisation and thus the movement is now active in most parts of that world. In time, as in Turkey, Gülen's ideas will enable and empower the periphery in Muslim societies to influence the centre ground and open the way for wider enjoyment of freedom and human rights.

The paper is in three sections. The first looks at the underlying dynamics of Gülen's influence and the nature of his *tajdid*, to assess whether his influence is transferable elsewhere. The second appraises the content of Gülen's *tajdid* arguing that human rights values are an inherent theme of his discourse on Islam. Here, the paper analyses Gülen's views on Anatolian Muslimness, democracy and politics, human rights and freedom of belief, illustrating Gülen's incremental *ijtihad* on temporal punishment for apostasy in Islamic law. The third part traces the movement's activities in the Muslim world, arguing that the movement has now entered a phase of adolescence, and asks whether Gülen's *tajdid* and discourse, through the practice of the movement, can indeed promote human rights values in this world.

Introduction

The premise of this paper is that human rights values are a persistent theme of Fethullah Gülen's thought and *tajdid* and expressed by the Gülen movement through example. That *tajdid* is collectively constructed and communicated by allowing for adaptation and indigenisation in flexible response to different socio-cultural contexts. What is more, Gülen's views on democracy, pluralism, human rights and freedom of belief directly promote human rights values and norms. The paper argues that the Muslim world is very important to Gülen's overall aspiration for an inclusive civilisation and thus the movement is now active in most parts of that world. In time, as in Turkey, Gülen's ideas will enable and empower the periphery in Muslim societies to influence the centre ground and open the way for wider enjoyment of freedom and human rights.

I must stress at the beginning that although there is a growing body of literature and research surrounding Gülen and the movement, there is extremely little, if any, so far concerning his influence in the Muslim world. This is largely due to the fact that the movement has been less visible or active in the Muslim world than elsewhere. More empirical research is required in this field. The challenge this presents therefore is to first contextualise Gülen in the Muslim world, before moving on to look at what influence, if any, he has in promoting human right Svalues in this region.

Thus, the paper is in three sections. The first looks at the underlying dynamics of Gülen's influence and the nature of his *tajdid*. The purpose behind this is simple; in order to predict whether Gülen has any meaningful scope of influence in the Muslim world it is imperative to first understand what makes Gülen influential in the first place, how influential he is in Turkey and whether that influence is transferable elsewhere. The second appraises the content of Gülen's *tajdid* arguing that human rights values are an inherent theme of his discourse on Islam. Here, the paper analyses Gülen's views on Anatolian Muslimness, democracy and politics, human rights and freedom of belief, illustrating Gülen's incremental *ijihad* on temporal punishment for apostasy in Islamic law. The third part traces the movement's activities in the Muslim world, arguing that the movement has now entered a phase of adolescence, and asks whether Gülen's *tajdid* and discourse, through the practice of the movement, can indeed promote human rights values in this world.

In assessing Gülen's potential influence in the Muslim world, I will refer to Serif Mardin's Centre/Periphery model. I suggest that the current power struggle in Turkey, as manifested by the tip of the iceberg political battle recently unfolding between the newly emerging, previously rural, democratic yet conservative public as represented by the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party and the militant-secular status quo margins as represented by the Republican People's Party (CHP), is in fact a struggle between the periphery and centre, respectively.

In this paper, I argue that just as Gülen's discourse and the Gülen movement were instrumental in empowering the periphery in Turkey¹, their presence will have a similar effect in the Muslim world.

Finally, any theological discussion in this paper is tangential to the main premise and argument. What is significant for the purposes of this paper is that Gülen is perceived and considered to be working within the traditional framework of Islamic jurisprudence and theology not that he actually is. The argument that he is, helps explain the perception and influence he

1 Ozdalga 2005: 441

enjoys in Turkey and increasingly abroad. Whether that is actually the case, is the subject of another study.

Gülen's Influence and *Tajdid*

Gülen is many things at once and it is this combination of characteristics, abilities and qualifications, some of which have hitherto seemed mutually exclusive, that marks him out from the rest and has provided him with a transformative edge. Gülen is an Islamic scholar, peace activist, intellectual, civil-faith-based movement leader, social reformist, mentor, poet and writer. He has motivated and inspired a whole generation in Turkey and abroad numbering millions (not used lightly) into a multi-ethnic (and even multi-religious) movement, which he calls a 'Community of Volunteers'.

While there is a lot interesting about the Gülen persona and psyche, for the purposes of this paper, I will look at the dynamics that enables him to enjoy an immense influence in Turkey.

The Gülen Trio-Formula: Devout-Intellectual-Alim

I suggest that it is the combination of three particular characteristics that have enabled Gülen to become immensely popular and influential in Turkey, namely being a Sufi-orientated spiritually-devout Muslim, an intellectual in contemporary reading and thought and an acclaimed Islamic scholar or *alim*.

Ali Bulac, a well-known independent Muslim scholar and columnist, was the first to emphasise Gülen's intellectual-*alim* credentials and its importance, stating that Gülen is the most recent reviver of the *Ulema* tradition. *Alim* (singular for *Ulema*) is an Arabic title provided only to the most knowledgeable Islamic scholars who have an impeccable command of the traditional Islamic sources, sciences and methodologies. However, Bulac argues that being merely an *alim* renders one insufficient, a mere conveyor. To be effective and relevant one has to be a *janahayn* (the dual wing), in other words an intellectual versed in western sciences and thought as well.

Concerning Gülen, in this respect, Bulac states:

Of the very few contenders, Gülen is perhaps the foremost representative of *janahayn*. His outlook has several key features: a profound understanding of Islamic sciences; a deep knowledge of biography (*ilm al-rijal*) in Hadith narration; and a thorough understanding of Islamic methodology (*usul*)... His book, *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*... is an extremely important work in terms of thought and Sufi tradition. Gülen's most important characteristic is that he analyzes contemporary issues and brings forth solutions using the traditional methodology of Islamic jurisprudence and Hadith.²

Gülen's appreciation of Western philosophies, history, literature and science is evident from the references he draws from these disciplines and interpretations he makes of contemporary issues. In an interview with Eyup Can, Gülen lists Kant, Descartes, Sir James Jean, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Puskin as some Western intellectuals whose works he has read³. We know from his memoirs that he studied Kant, Rousseau, Voltaire, Emile, Schiller and the works of such existentialist philosophers such as Camus,

2 Bulac 2006: 101

3 Can 1996: Ref

Sartre and Marcuse during his military service in 1961⁴.

In his 14 cassette sermon series delivered in 1978 over several months to a mosque-congregation regarding the existence of God (*Tawheed*), Gülen speaks in some detail about the 2nd law of thermo-dynamics, the big bang, astrophysics, astronomy, probability, atomic physics and biology in substantiating his arguments. Many other sermon-series, structured and methodological in themselves, include this variety of discipline and content. There are legendary stories told among Gülen's followers of how unaccustomed listeners used to sleeping during sermons, or left-wing intellectuals nudgingly persuaded to attend, wake up bemused and disoriented during the sermon to Gülen speaking about protons, electrons and neutrons.

It is Gülen's ability to draw his references from both Islamic and Western philosophies and interpret one within the other that marks him out as a *janahayn*. This dual-wing, allows him to achieve two-things, one draw sympathy and a gathering from those who draw their references from positive sciences and sympathise with the Western Enlightenment thought and two, demonstrate to the "Western-liberal" and "conservative-religious" that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam, science and the necessities of modern age.

However, this duo characteristic is insufficient to explain Gülen's influence. There is another wing missing in Bulac's description and that is Gülen's Sufi orientated spiritual devotion and fervour often manifested through intense emotion and dedication and poetic prose in his speech.

Gülen is perceived by the public as a deeply religious individual who has remained celibate from devotion to God and cause and leads a deeply ascetic lifestyle, sleeping and eating very little and spending most of his time, especially now, in solitary worship and study with his personal students. His unusual religious fervour and zeal is clearly evident in his excitement when delivering sermons in which he often ends up crying, in return causing the congregation to follow suit. Among the wider Turkish public, Gülen is known as the "crying *Hodja*".

Referring to Gülen's religious upbringing, Lester Kurtz notes:

[Gülen] memorized the Qur'an at a young age and testifies that he "began praying when I was 4 years old, and has never missed a prayer since." He dedicated himself early on to a simple lifestyle devoted to prayer, meditation, religious writing and teaching. Eschewing family life, he chose an ascetic's path, devoting his life to prayer and religious pursuits and owning virtually no possessions.⁵

Or at least that is how Gülen is perceived and perception is extremely important. In fact, without this reputation, Gülen's intellectual-*alim* credentials would win him little influence. Simply put, the common Muslim has become weary of so-called Islamic scholars in recent years, especially those who have an appreciation of Western sciences. Trust is only inspired if scholarly credentials are supplemented with devotion and practice and even then the question of orientation remains, i.e. Sufi, *Salafi*, *Shiite* or secular.

Thus, an accurate understanding of who Gülen is is more important than what he says. The influential Rand think-tank in the United States for example, wrongly identifies Gülen as a "modernist" and states that although modernists are the most suited allies of the West in terms of their discourse and beliefs, they lack the authenticity of the traditionalists and the

4 Erdogan 1997: Ref

5 Kurtz, 2005 p375

service-outlets through which to influence the public⁶. The overall observation concerning modernists are correct, categorising Gülen as one is not. The consequence of this is misjudging Gülen's influence. Had Gülen been a modernist as such, he would never have enjoyed the kind of influence he does in Turkey, let alone have any meaningful chance of doing so in the Muslim world. Hence the significance of getting this right.

The question of course is whether Gülen will be able to transfer his influence to the wider Muslim world. The Muslim world is a vast geography made up of over 50 different countries. A crude reply, leaving aside a detailed study of each country's idiosyncratic nature and its relevance vis-à-vis the Gülen movement, is 'yes', since the underlying cultural dynamics and characteristics are similar. If anything, religion is as important in most of the Muslim world as it is in Turkey. Gülen's devotion to faith and cause and fifty year proven track record will exchange as good currency in this part of the world. However, the main determining factor of Gülen's influence in the Muslim world will be the presence and effectiveness of the Gülen movement in this region.

The Gülen Movement and Tajdid (Renewal of Religion)

Gülen's spiritually-devout, intellectual-*alim* credentials comprises the first field of influence he enjoys among the Turkish Muslims. These characteristics have helped him form a second field of influence, the Gülen movement. Where Gülen's personal reputation fails to reach, this wider movement goes. So one can imagine two concentric circles one within the other. Gülen influences the movement, the movement influences wider society. Since Gülen not only combines but preaches the unification of spiritual devotion with scientific appreciation and religious knowledge, his followers also manifest this trio-quality. An active volunteer of the movement will be a practising Muslim or believer of some tradition, of moral character who seeks to abstain from worldly indulgences, usually at least of graduate level degree, well read in Islamic theology and fairly informed of other religions, thereby becoming a *miniature-Gülen*.⁷ Thus, the effective formula of influence replicated throughout the movement to varying degrees.

This characteristic empowers the Gülen-follower with self-confidence and is highly effective in influencing those who find themselves on one or the other side of the religious-secular spectrum.

So although Gülen is influential on an individual basis for the reasons given above, it is the faith based movement he now inspires which allows him to put his views into practice, and which marks him out as a candidate who can effectuate real change at the ground level. Without a mass following and wide influence among the grass roots of society, Gülen would have remained a scholar of great depth but no means of implementation. An elitist, an academic, a thinker who is waiting for the right masses to develop to be heard. With Gülen, the masses are ready, waiting for him to speak.

It is for this reason that Yilmaz argues that Gülen is engaged in "*tajdid* by conduct"⁸. *Tajdid* means to renew, revive and restore religion. It is an authentic Islamic mechanism prophesied by the Prophet himself.⁹

6 Benard 2003: 38-40

7 Active volunteers should not be confused with supporters and donors, who make up the backbone of the movement.

8 Yilmaz, 2003

9 Hadith (Ref)

Tajdid can only be undertaken by a *mujaddid*. A *mujaddid* in his effort to renew (*tajdid*) religion will use a tool called *ijtihad* (reasoning) and in doing so also become a *mujtahid*. *Ijtihad* is a re-reading and re-evaluation of religious text and sources to deduce and derive a re-understanding of its teachings for contemporary times while keeping within its overall framework and spirit. It too is an authentic mechanism and in accordance with Islamic orthodoxy. *Ijtihad* has its limits, rules and conditions and should not be confused with reform which has neither. All *mujaddids* are also *mujtahids* but not all *mujtahids* are *mujaddids*.

In relation to *ijtihad*, I coin Gülen's efforts in this vein as incremental (*tadriji*)¹⁰ *ijtihad*, since (i) he develops and communicates his *ijtihad* incrementally over many years and different mediums, respectively, and (ii) he does not claim that he is engaged in *ijtihad* at all, thus further delaying the recognition that he is in fact engaged in *ijtihad*. The relevance for this paper is that Gülen is currently engaged in this incremental *ijtihad* regarding the death penalty for apostasy in Islamic law as explored below.

In relation to Gülen's *tajdid*, Yilmaz states that:

Gülen has reinterpreted Islamic understanding in tune with contemporary times and has developed and put into practice a new Muslim discourse... on religion, pluralism, jurisprudence, secularism, democracy, politics and international relations.¹¹

Yilmaz argues that Gülen is undertaking this *tajdid* through conduct, because his ideas are put into immediate effect through the movement and affects the surrounding wider society in *la longe durée*.¹²

I suggest that Gülen's *tajdid* is collectively constructed by the movement's conduct and Gülen's views. If Gülen's *tajdid* is based on conduct, then the movement plays a significant role in the construction of that *tajdid*. What is more, Gülen encourages the contribution of the active player here, namely the movement. Thus, Gülen is aware that his general views and teachings will be locally received, interpreted and adapted in the process of application.

I suggest that the movement's contribution to Gülen's *tajdid* is in the form of (i) its interpretation of Gülen's views on receipt, (ii) its reformulation of those views to meet local realities such as funding and capability on application, (iii) its adaptation of those general views to meet local culture and customs (indigenisation) (iv) new realities formed by local conduct and activities of the movement pose new questions and challenges which Gülen responds to, and (v) the movement innovates new forms of conduct itself which are put to Gülen, to which he replies and the above process renews itself. Thus, there is continuous and interactive dialogue between the movement and Gülen, the net outcome of which is a collective *tajdid*. Some may claim that the same process of interpretation and adaptation is present in other (or all) forms of *tajdid* as well. While that may be true to some degree, since the movement is active in over a hundred countries, the spectrum across which Gülen's views are received, adapted and localised is ever more great. What is more, the fact that the movement's volunteers are well educated, well read and very mobile means they are more critical, analytic and innovative in their dialogue with Gülen. Also, Gülen promotes collectivism within the movement through his emphasis on joint decision making and consultation (*sura*). As such, every

10 In Islamic terminology, incrementalism usually refers to the revelation of the Qur'an over 23 years by the instigation of certain events (*sebebul nuzul*). The prohibition of alcohol in the Qur'an in four steps is usually given as an example of incrementalism in Islam.

11 Yilmaz 2003: 209

12 Yilmaz 2003: 220

venture and project of the movement has its own committee responsible for making its own decisions. Locally and collectively made decisions explain the movement's success in vastly different socio-cultural and economic markets across the world.

Thus, Gülen acts more like a chairperson in the construction of this *tajdid*. He sets the guidelines, objectives and principles. But then how those principles and objectives are put into action depend more on the movement than Gülen. Simply put the movement's dialogue efforts tell us much more about Gülen's *tajdid* on Islam and society than any of his essays or interviews on the topic.

The clarification of how Gülen's *tajdid* is constructed and communicated is important since it demonstrates that this *tajdid* is indigenised by the local people influenced by it. This does not mean Gülen's original thought is watered down; clearly it is not. But Gülen's global discourse and teachings are localised to best serve local conditions. The difference of the movement's educational projects in Turkmenistan with, let's say, the United State or Germany helps illustrate this point.

The significance of this regarding the Muslim world (and elsewhere for that matter) is that Gülen's views and discourse demonstrates that it is adaptable, flexible, durable and practical. These are essential qualities if Gülen's ideas and *tajdid* are to influence the Muslim world. Otherwise, without provision for indigenisation, the strong Arab culture would easily reject and react to this new discourse. This is something that will be explored further below.

Gülen Movement's Influence in Turkey

The Gülen movement is "one of the most influential revivalist movements in modern Turkey."¹³ On Gülen's influence over his own the movement, Yavuz notes

A decade ago, this religious community was not even willing to allow their daughters to go to secondary or high schools. They preferred to send female students to the Qur'anic courses or strictly female Imam Hatip schools. For years, Gülen publicly and privately encouraged the community to educate all their children regardless of gender. Today, there are many all-female schools and many of their graduates go onto universities.¹⁴

Bacik states that the relationship between the Muslim self and Islamic groups has undergone significant change due to, *inter alia*, the Muslim self's understanding of some important concepts such as Europe and democracy and that members of the Islamic community are coming from better educated backgrounds¹⁵. I argue, that Gülen's contribution to this change is significant as stated by Kosebaban

Gülen's pro-Western attitude has played a key role in the domestication and softening of other Islamic groups' anti-Europe and anti-U.S. positions. Although many Islamists eventually came closer to embracing this idea, a majority of them initially criticized Gülen for his pro-Europe views. He was one of the first Islamic leaders to embrace the idea of EU membership and at a time when Islamists in general regarded it as a threat to Turkish security and Islamic culture.¹⁶

On Gülen and the movement's influence in Turkey, Kosebaban notes

Fethullah Gülen and the movement he established and leads comprise two of the most important actors in Turkish social and political life. His ideas, despite a number of complications and

13 Ozgalga 2005: 430

14 Yavuz 1999: 125

15 Bacik 2003: 31

16 Kosebaban 2003: 176

contradictions in them, directly influence Turkish foreign policy and certainly would bring some vivacity to that policy if put to practical application.¹⁷

Kosebabalan notes how some credit Gülen's intellectual contributions that led to the EU-OIC summit in Istanbul in 2002¹⁸. Supporting Kosebabalan, Yavuz states that 'Gülen is the engine behind the construction of a "new" Islam in Turkey'.¹⁹

On Gülen's influence of thought, Yilmaz states

Preliminary observations indicate that Gülen not only is renewing Muslim discourses and practices, but also transforming the public sphere, without claiming or boasting that he is doing so. In this regard, the movement is evolving into a school of thought based on Gülen's discourse and with the potential to influence the whole Muslim world. This transformation process is definitely a *tajdid* in the Turkish public sphere.²⁰

On Gülen's transformative discourse and evolving a new school of thought, Yavuz states

In the clashing visions of globalizations, Fethullah Gülen is a force in the development of the Islamic discourse of globalized multicultural pluralism. As the impact of the educational activities of those influenced by him attests, his vision bridges modern and postmodern, global and local, and has a significant influence in the contemporary debates that shape the visions of the future of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.²¹

We have already studied the dynamics of this influence, whether it be the Gülen persona or the movement. Through this influence, Gülen has helped strengthen the periphery in Turkey. The Gülen movement's education, media and business initiatives have empowered and enabled the working-class silent-majority in Turkey who were hitherto unable to contest for the centre ground.

What is more, through this new school of thought, Gülen has helped remove the theological and cultural dogmas, which until recently, prevented the periphery from positively engaging in society and therefore from moving into the centre ground currently occupied by the militant secular margins.

The AK Party phenomena, which has its roots in the pro-Islamic National Outlook movement, owes its evolutionary success in becoming a modern, inclusive and democratic Party, largely to Gülen's transformative discourse. In 1994, when Recep Tayyip Erdogan was characterising democracy as a means to an end, Gülen stood up at the Journalists and Writers Foundation and said 'there is no return from democracy; it's not perfect, but is the best system we currently have'. Again, in the polarised Turkey of the 1990's Gülen was the first to speak of dialogue, tolerance, acceptance of each other and peaceful coexistence. It was the Gülen movement's conferences, interfaith fast-breaking dinners, peace awards and so forth that brought together people of opposing ends of the political spectrum. Many expressed pleasant-surprise, even shock, at how they could share the table with once considered arch-enemies. However, at the time, many criticised Gülen on this, including some members of the current AK Party government and the Religious Affairs Directorate. It is interesting to note that the Religious Affairs Directorate now hosts several interfaith dialogue events itself and

17 Kosebabalan 2003: 170

18 Kosebabalan 2003: 181

19 Yavuz 1999: 121

20 Yilmaz 2003: 237

21 Voll 2003: 247

that the current government has adopted Gülen's approach of reconciliation.²²

Gülen helped ease the ideological rift in Turkey and the resultant community tension. When the Alevis were offended by the Sunnis he made a televised announcement as a Sunni imam, saying, 'if loving reverend Ali makes one an Alevi, then I am an Alevi for I love him dearly'. Regarding communists he is known to have said, 'they love this country as much as you do. You cannot question their patriotism.' Even on secularism, Gülen's announcements that he looks favourably on a Anglo-Saxon-style open secularism (against a French-style militant laicism) has helped ease tensions on this fault line as well.

The Abant meetings which brought together academics, writers, journalists and politicians (including leading members of the current government) to discuss deeply dividing political issues in Turkey and arrive at a consensus reflected in the Abant declarations are efforts in this vein.²³

Gülen's views on democracy, secularism, pluralism, human rights and modernity have helped empower Muslims in Turkey, who until recently fought to withstand the lure of these values despite their better judgment out of fear that giving in would run contrary to their faith. Muslims in Turkey were now able to socially, politically and more importantly, sincerely and constructively, participate in Turkey's public life and contemporary debates. The fact that the AK Party government has done more during its first term than any other in the past 40 years to achieve Turkey's accession to the EU, is proof of this point.

Gülen's *Tajdid* and Human Rights by Default

Before contextualising Gülen in the Muslim world, I will contextualise human right values in Gülen's discourse. My premise is that Gülen's discourse and the movement's activities are (i) human based and therefore contain an ever present underlying streak of humanistic values, and (ii) help eradicate the cultural and religious-couched objections towards human rights values. This means that, given its normal course, human rights values will spread through and with the movement's influence as a matter of default. I will look at Gülen's discourse on Anatolian Muslimness, politics, human rights and freedom of belief since they best illustrate the above-mentioned two points.

Anatolian Muslimness

Anatolian Muslimness is Gülen's understanding and practice of Islam. It is the underlying bedrock of Gülen's thought and discourse. All of Gülen's views and outlook are essentially based on this. Thus, where this primary understanding and practice of Islam is spread, Gülen's secondary views on democracy, human rights and pluralism will eventually follow.

22 Yilmaz 2005: 399-405

23 In 1998 the Abant platform discussed the relationship between Islam and secularism, in 1999 democracy and human rights, in 2000 pluralism and reconciliation.

The 1998 Abant Declaration states that 'revelation and reason do not conflict; democracy and secularism does not conflict with Islam; the state should remain neutral towards every kind of ideology, belief and philosophical view; the state should ensure basic human rights and freedom of belief, conscience and religion and should not seek to exclude nor deprive any person of the right to public participation'. (Ref)

The 2001 Abant Declaration reads: 'Civil and political freedoms, headed by the freedoms of belief, thought and expression, education, and organization, are the prerequisites of pluralism' (Journalists and Writers Foundation 2001: 316).

For Gülen, Islam is by its very nature moderate and therefore the recently popular phrase “moderate Islam” is incorrect as it implies that Islam can be anything but moderate. Gülen believes that moderation is such a central characteristic of Islam that any understanding of it that is not, is not Islam. He states that those who harbour an extremist practice and understanding do so either deliberately, ignorantly or because they have an incomplete grasp of Islam and have taken matters completely out of context.

Gülen states that the manifestation and emphasis of uniform Islamic teachings and tenets of religion can vary according to region and culture. This provides Islam with a degree of flexibility and allows for various “Islamic flavours” to develop which differ with each other in terms of nuances, emphases and aesthetics but remain the same on creed and teachings.

Accordingly, Gülen argues that the Anatolian Muslimness practiced in Turkey is different than the Arab or Iranian Muslimness. Anatolian Muslimness is “broader, deeper, more tolerant and inclusive, and based on love”²⁴.

Gülen states that he sees no canonical objection to acceding to the fact that different socio-historic conditions produce different emphases of Islam. In fact, Gülen goes a step further and believes in promoting this understanding to the wider world

Within this framework, if we exclude certain periods and individuals, the Turks’ interpretation of what Islam allows to be interpreted is correct and positive. If we can spread globally the Islamic understanding of such heroes of love as Niyazi-i Misri, Yunus Emre, and Rumi, if we can extend their messages of love, dialogue, and tolerance to those thirsty for this message, everyone will run toward the embrace of love, peace, and tolerance that we represent.²⁵

Thus, in saying that the Turks have a “broader and deeper” understanding of Islam, given that they have had the opportunity and experiences to interpret and explore Islam in areas that other Muslims have not, he is in fact suggesting that this understanding is more suited for contemporary times.

Turkish Islam or Anatolian Muslimness existed long before Gülen made these coins so widespread. However, it was Gülen’s interviews, talks and books that helped communicate this concept to the wider public for the first time. By analysing the underlying dynamics of Anatolian Muslimness he helped define the concept more thoroughly. In doing so, Gülen has legitimised the concept of Anatolian Muslimness and its recognition in the minds of Turkish Muslims. Before, most felt that admitting this would amount to schism in Islam. There are still some Turkish Islamic groups that criticise Gülen for making this idea so widespread. Convincing people to the contrary has helped define, protect and now spread this concept to wider the Muslim world.

What is being spread is not a new religion, but a practice imbued with certain values. Therefore, it is about fine-tuning the more conformist, rigid and didactic Muslimness to a more open, Sufi-orientated and loving practice.

Others saw in Gülen’s discourse a strong neo-Ottomanist taste. But a closer look into the work of Gülen will show that Gülen is using Turkish and Ottoman experience of Islam so as to extract Islam from a pure Arabic religion. The Turkish experience is more of an activist Islam and is coloured with devotion to Islam and yet tolerance to others.

Candar and Fuller state that Gülen can play a strong role “of positively representing Turkey in

24 Turgut 1997: 53

25 Camaci & Unal 1999: 196

the Muslim world, and demonstrating the moderate character of Turkish Islam and Islamism that denies neither democracy or good ties with the West”. They also add that “Turkish Islamists can assist in moderating other Islamist movements in the region [Muslim world] and in supporting reconciliation through its own successful mode.”²⁶

Gülen’s dialogue theology should also be read as part of his Anatolian Muslimness discourse. Gülen has been bringing out the theological, philosophical and historical teachings, arguments and stories, respectively, surrounding dialogue in Islam to the attention of contemporary Muslims. In developing this theology he refers to the Qur’an and *hadith* and re-tells stories from the Prophet, Ottomans and Sufi masters like Rumi to make his point. This theology informs the movement’s dialogue initiatives and sends out a very strong message that Islam necessitates dialogue and constructive citizenship. I argue that this is transforming Muslim understanding of Islam in general and attitude toward society in particular, in accordance with Anatolian Muslimness.

It is clear therefore, that Gülen is promoting Anatolian-Muslimness among Muslims. His primary vehicle in doing so is his dialogue-theology and the movement’s dialogue activities. Anatolian Muslimness and Gülen’s dialogue theology includes human rights values and culture. Gülen’s views on human rights itself is based on his fundamental understanding of Islam as discussed further below.

Islamic State, Political Islam, Democracy and Secularism

In terms of politics, Gülen advises his movement to remain non partisan and apolitical. Unlike other Islamic groups, Gülen argues that there is no such as thing as a puritan Islamic State, and that therefore there can be no ultimate goal to work for its fulfilment. Instead, Gülen argues that states and governments should follow certain fundamental principles as espoused by Islam

Islam does not propose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a government’s general character, leaving it to the people to chose the type and form of government according to time and circumstance.²⁷

These fundamental principles and values include justice, human rights, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of thought and expression, rule of law, meritocracy in public appointment, public order, balanced approach, consultation and elections²⁸. Note carefully how Gülen includes human rights, freedom of belief and elections as Islamic principles that must be upheld by governments and states. In that sense, any form of governance that upholds these principles is in fact “Islamic” even if it is not called so. The logical extension of this point is that Britain is more Islamic than Saudi Arabia or Iran because it is more loyal to the principles noted above.²⁹ Thus, Gülen is overtly promoting support for human rights values and democracy and undermining any support, albeit miniscule in Turkey, for a theocratic state³⁰.

26 Candar & Fuller 2001: Ref

27 Gülen 2001: 134

28 Gülen 2006: 88-92

29 I don’t think that it’s any easier to live Islam in another country than it is in Turkey. Supposedly there are Islamic regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia, but they are state-determined and limited to sectarian approval. (Turgut 1997: 151)

30 “[T]he Qur’an declares that the rule does not belong to holy and infallible spiritual leaders, as in theocracies, nor to any religious institutions under their supervision, nor to any other religious institution organized in any other way. Islam... does not allow any privilege based on family, class, race, color, wealth, or power” (An Interview with

Gülen is also against political Islam or Islamism which seeks to use religion for political means, regardless of whether it seeks to found an Islamic state or not.

In that sense, Gülen is against bringing religion into politics. That does not mean that politics should completely ignore religion or its citizens' religious needs, but that one should not be used for the sake of the other. In some ways therefore, Gülen can be considered to argue for a secular approach in politics.

If reconciliation is being sought between Islam and secularism, then according to some views of Islam, in fact according to some Qur'anic verses like Your religion for you, mine for me, there's no big problem. If secularism is understood as not basing the state on religion, not interfering in religion or in the believers' religious life, and acting in an unbiased way, there's no problem at all. I don't think secularism is in danger now or that it will be in the future.³¹

On democracy, Gülen states that "democracy and Islam are compatible. Ninety-five per cent of Islamic rules deal with private life and family. Only 5 per cent deals with matters of the state, and this could be arranged only within the context of democracy."³² Gülen argues that democratization is irreversible, that while not perfect, it is the best model so far, which must be further perfected, providing it with a metaphysical dimension which considers its subjects metaphysical need as well. What exactly Gülen means by this is unclear and is one of Gülen's ideas incubating for now.

On minorities and international law, Gülen states that "[M]ember of minority communities should be allowed to live according to their beliefs. If these sorts of legislation are made within the norms of international law and international agreements, Islam will have no objection to any of these".³³ Thus, Gülen has not only contributed to the internalisation of democratic and human rights values by Turkish Muslims but he is also promoting respect for international law and therefore codification of human rights values.

On democracy in the Muslim world, Gülen states that "despotic rulers in the Islamic world, who see democracy as a threat to their despotism, presents another obstacle for democracy in Muslim nations"³⁴ He adds that,

Those who follow a more moderate pattern also believe that it would be much better to introduce Islam as a complement to democracy instead of presenting it as an ideology. Such an introduction of Islam may play an important role in the Muslim world...³⁵

Thus, Gülen is aware that democracy can only be introduced in the Muslim world through Islam. This is something that will be explored further below.

Human Rights Values

Gülen looks at human rights from three perspectives: (i) the inherent value of freedom vis-à-vis freedom of choice and willpower, (ii) the contingent value of freedom vis-à-vis personal and social development and (iii) metaphysical human rights (*kul hakki* in Turkish).

Gülen views man as the centre of the universe. For him, man is the purpose of creation. Following the Islamic *tasawwuf* (roughly translated as the meaning and spirit of Islam)

Fethullah Gülen 2005: 450)

31 Ref: p185

32 Ref: p28

33 An Interview with Fethullah Gülen 2005: 451

34 An Interview with Fethullah Gülen 2005: 453

35 An Interview with Fethullah Gülen 2005: 452

concept of ‘all beauty and fairness require to see and be seen’, Gülen states that God is All-Beautiful and All-Fair and that He wanted to see His beauty and wanted His beauty to be seen. It is for this reason that God created humans. Humans have intellectual, emotional and bodily faculties to observe, enquire, understand, admire, praise and love God. Thus, humans were created as intelligent and conscious beings that can travel from the created to the Creator, marvel at the beauty and majesty of God’s art and arrive at some estimation and understanding of His attributes, names and qualities. Like Nursi, Gülen argues that all creation manifests God’s infinite names and attributes and that humans are “intelligent mirrors” who can turn and look at what creation is manifesting and appreciate their Creator.

However, there is an important ‘magical switch’ in humans which turns all of this on³⁶ and differentiates it from angels, who also marvel, worship and love God, and that is the element of choice. This “choice” is what makes humans human. The fact that a person chooses to recognise and worship God changes everything. Gülen explains that with this choice, humans can surpass angels in piety or fall lower than demons in barbarity. God wants humans to “choose” Him. Thus, choice was bestowed on humans as a gift and, simultaneously, test from God.

Once the matter is approached from this perspective, preserving the freedom of choice bestowed upon humans by God becomes an intrinsic, inherent and inalienable right of ones very humanness.

Being free and enjoying freedom are a significant depth of human willpower and a mysterious door through which man may set forth into the secrets of the self. One unable to set forth into that depth and unable to pass through that door can hardly be called human.³⁷

Summarily put, the universe was created for humans; a human is defined by its ability to choose. Choice is protected by freedom. Freedoms therefore allow humans to fulfil their purpose of creation. Hence, for Gülen, human rights which protect freedom of choice have an inherent value and must be promoted at all cost to preserve the balance of creation and purpose of existence.

While this is not a new outlook, and many Islamic scholars share this view, the fact that Gülen is willing to make the logical connection between this religious definition of “choice” and faith-neutral doctrine of “human right norms and practices” is quite significant.

By visiting the State and many other European countries, I realized the virtues and the role of religion in these societies. Islam flourished in Europe and America much better than in many Muslim countries. This means freedom and the rule of law are necessary for personal Islam.³⁸

Gülen’s second consideration of freedom is as a contingent value in relation to personal and social development³⁹. Gülen states that a human must strive to become an *insan-i kamil* that is perfect person. This perfection is one of belief, thought and practice. However, it does not solely relate to “religious matters” in the conventional sense but includes perfection and piety (*taqwa*) in “worldly” matters as well.⁴⁰

36 Gülen 2005: 15

37 Ref

38 Ref

39 Carroll 2007: 28-9

40 Gülen states that God sets the laws of religion and the laws of nature and causality. Thus, a believer must follow both. Failing to follow the laws of nature and causality means failing to obey God’s laws in achieving a desired result. Hence, Gülen re-defines *taqwah* (piety) as including, living in accordance with God’s *sunnatullah* (God’s

Freedom, in this context, therefore is a prerequisite to allow for personal and social perfection and development. Without freedom, the room and dynamic force for perfection and development is non-existent. The most pertinent form of freedom in this respect, is freedom of thought and expression:

True freedom is the freedom of the human mind from all shackles that hinder it from making material and spiritual progress, as long as we do not fall into indifference and heedlessness.⁴¹

Gülen considers free-thinking as a significant personal attribute of the “inheritors of the earth” or Golden Generation as he refers to elsewhere. These are the new generation of Muslims who have a balanced disposition, appreciation and awareness of this world and the next; who combine reason with revelation; who have love towards humankind and burn with the sensation of altruistic cause and action. For Gülen, this generation will contribute towards stability and eventual peace between not only people and nations but also between faith and science, matter and metaphysics.

[W]e have to be more free-thinking and free-willed. We need those vast hearts who can embrace impartial free-thinking, who are open to knowledge, sciences and scientific research, and who can perceive the accord between the Qur’an and Sunnatullah (God’s pattern of creation) in the vast spectrum from the universe to life.

Free-thinking and freedom of thought is therefore an imperative climatic condition for personal development. Without this freedom, development will stagnate on all fronts. Although Gülen is against the categorisation of “this world” and “afterlife”, since he sees the two as inextricably linked, it is clear that according to him, without this freedom, development regresses both in the worldly and in the spiritual and religious sense.

For Gülen, to achieve social development, you must begin from the individual. A group of individuals who have attained a certain awareness and concern for others can then come together to engage in further altruistic works. This way, a virtuous cycle that feeds itself will be born and help strengthen civil society and social infrastructure. Thus, for Gülen, freedom of thought has a direct link with developing society as a whole through developing the individual.

That is what Gülen is trying to achieve through education:

if you wish to keep masses under control, simply starve them in the area of knowledge. They can escape such tyranny only through education. The road to social justice is paved with adequate, universal education, for only this will give people sufficient understanding and tolerance to respect the right of others.⁴²

In this respect, the hundreds of Gülen-schools that provide a broad and balanced curriculum and instil values of tolerance and respect for differences are significant in putting Gülen’s views into practice on free-thinking to the wider public. The very notion that education is worthy in itself, regardless of its topic, whether mathematics, geometry or English, is a huge step forward in removing the cultural shackles on freedom of thought in cultural Muslim thinking which in the past only valued Qur’anic or religious teaching.

Secondly, education empowers people to think, reason, listen, research, extrapolate, relate,

pattern of creation, laws of nature). As such, Gülen states that the West is more Muslim than Muslims since they have achieved superiority by following God’s laws of causality while the religious-Muslims have not.

41 Gülen 2006: 65

42 Ref

argue and learn which is immensely important in enabling individuals to become independent “free-thinkers”.

Once the mindset of constantly challenging the modes and mediums of the present is fully internalised, then perhaps the movement will have achieved what Gülen refers to as freeing oneself from the shackles of thought:

[A]s we draw toward renewal, it is imperative that we should review the historical dynamics of the last thousand years and question the changes and transformations of the last one hundred and fifty years of our past. It is imperative because judgments and decisions are nowadays made according to certain unquestioned taboos.⁴³

Finally, metaphysical human rights. For Gülen, human rights include not only the enforceable rights included in law, but also those rights that we hold regardless of enforceability in this world. In that sense, a right is a right and is no less “real” simply because it cannot be enforced. For Gülen, there is no categorical distinction between the right not to be tortured with the right not to be backbitten (*giybah*). From a religious point of view, all transgressed rights will be accounted for on the day of judgement. This is quite significant in Islam, since Muslims are taught that God does not permit Himself to forgive the transgression of another, unless the transgressed forgives first. Thus, Gülen lists *su-i zan* (negative thought about another), *giybah*, slander⁴⁴ tax evasion and, even, non payment of utility bills⁴⁵, the charge of which will be picked up by others, as transgressions of human rights. For Gülen, they are all one and the same, basic human rights.

Hence, Gülen extends the scope and depth of human rights to include the unenforceable as well. In doing so, however, he also extends the scope of the unenforceable to include tax evasion and illegal use of electricity and water.

Incremental (Tadriji) Ijtihad in the Making: Apostasy in Islam

Freedom of belief has been a tricky topic for the Muslim world. A quick survey of the debates surrounding this freedom during the drafting of art 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights will prove this point. The exact difficulty relates to the concept inherent in this freedom, namely the right to change religion. The question for Muslim countries has been whether Islamic law allows for Muslims to convert out of Islam. The conventional answer is that it does not and that one who does (*murted*) is punishable by death in Islamic law.

Regarding freedom of belief, Gülen is unequivocal. He clearly states in a number of articles that faith is a matter of choice and conscience and that no one can be coerced into believing or worshipping.⁴⁶ In one article⁴⁷ on the topic (a transcript of Gülen’s response dating back to the late 1970’s), Gülen passingly refers to the issue of temporal punishment for apostasy. Whilst he reiterates the conventional position as his own, he treats the matter as political rebellion towards the state and equates it with high treason. This latter comment marks the

43 Gülen 2005: 39

44 Gülen 1995: 277

45 Gülen 1995: 280

46 “If individuals cannot live by the principles of their religion freely because of certain obstacles put before them, this means that they have been denied the freedom of belief and conscience.” (An Interview with Fethullah Gülen 2005: 448)

47 “Dinde Zorlama Yoktur” Ayetini İzah Eder misiniz? (<http://www.asringetirdigiterreddutler.com/index.php/content/view/470/12/>)

beginning of an incremental *ijtihad* on the topic which will eventually manifest itself as part of an evolving *tajdid* on dialogue, pluralism and human rights in Islam.

I claim that Gülen is engaged in incremental *ijtihad*, since (i) he develops and communicates his *ijtihad* incrementally over many years and different mediums, respectively, and (ii) he does not claim that he is engaged in *ijtihad* at all, thus further delaying the recognition that he *is*.⁴⁸ His evolving position on the death penalty for an apostate is an example of this incremental *ijtihad*.

Since the aforementioned article, Gülen has not expounded on his position that apostasy is a political act of high treason. Instead, it has been picked up by Dr Ahmet Kurucan, a personal student of Gülen for many years and columnist of the Zaman Daily Newspaper on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) related issues. Given his expertise, columns and affinity with Gülen, Dr Kurucan is known as the movement's teacher on Islamic jurisprudence.

In 2006, I attended a Conference in Germany in which Dr Kurucan gave a talk on apostasy and punishment. He explained that the death penalty for apostasy was an *ijtihad* itself, not a definitive commandment of Islam, and that therefore it could be superseded by another *ijtihad* today. He argued that the time in which premodern jurists arrived at their decision, communities were deeply divided over Islam and Muslims were under political and physical siege from a number of fronts. Thus, you were either a Muslim defending Islam or a non-Muslim attacking it. For these jurists, apostasy at the time meant rebelling against the State and joining forces against the Muslims. There are a number of incidents at the time when apostates subsequently took arms against Muslims. According to Dr Kurucan therefore, apostasy was treated as high treason by the premodern jurists and their *ijtihad* of execution is in relation to this, not to the mere renouncing of faith.

This is an important observation backed by other scholars today as well:

Many of the scholars and jurists define apostasy in terms of rebellion against the State, where a Muslim-subject of the Islamic State after denouncing Islam joins with those who take arms against the Islamic State and thus commits a political offence against the State.⁴⁹

Dr Kurucan's PhD thesis (2006), entitled *Freedom of Thought in Islam*, substantiates this argument further. In summary, it argues that the Qur'an makes no reference to temporal punishment for apostasy, that to the contrary it states that *there is no compulsion in religion*⁵⁰; that there are a number of recorded incidents in the Prophet's lifetime when an apostate went without punishment whatsoever; that much of the justification for this *ijtihad* is based on incidents that occurred during the reign of Abu Bakr when whole communities uprose against the central government and that therefore these were political acts of rebellion against the State; that the Hanafi school of thought states that a woman apostate is not punishable by death since she cannot take arms against Muslims, which, coupled with the fact that Islam treats man and women equally in reward and punishment, helps prove the overall point that in the premodern jurists' mind, apostasy was equated with high treason and political rebellion. Dr Kurucan argues that since apostasy can no longer be charged with such meaning today (as imminent physical attack by the apostate) and that times have changed, then this *ijtihad* can be superseded by another.

48 See Gülen 1995: 218 for a short discussion about the need to consider the socio-cultural conditions, perceptions and customs of the time.

49 Baderin 2003: 124

50 Qur'an: 2:256

Whether or not one agrees with Dr Kurucan's reasoning is irrelevant for the purposes of this paper, since we are not engaged in a theological study. The point is that Gülen and the movement are using Islamic tools of reinterpretation and renewal to reunderstand Islamic history and teachings. In doing so, they are referring to traditional texts and methodologies and forming a new discourse and school of thought.

Given the importance of the topic and its potential for controversy, it is unthinkable that Dr Kurucan would take such a stance without Gülen's prior approval. Thus, the various incremental stages of this *ijtihad* include Gülen's article dating back to the late 1970's, the overall dialogue works that became a priority for Gülen in the mid 1990's, the various meetings with minority religious leaders in Turkey in same period, the repeated emphasis on freedom of belief and human rights in the Abant meetings in the 2000's and Dr Kurucan's academic work in 2006. All of these comprise a further reason and justification in themselves towards a new position on the issue of change of religion in Islam.

Therefore, what we have here is an incremental development and communication of a hitherto minor opinion through new arguments to change the conventional thinking and attitude towards freedom of belief in general, apostasy in particular in traditional Islamic law. I expect that Gülen will publicly endorse this position in the near future, completing the incremental process of this *ijtihad's* formation. This will then comprise a significant piece of the Gülen *tajdid* on dialogue, pluralism and human rights.⁵¹

It is true that Gülen does not criticise the punishment for apostasy in the article referred to above or since. However, it should be noted that this was back in the 1970's, that in the same article Gülen hinted at the line of thought that would be later developed by Dr Kurucan and that since then an incremental change of position has taken place in conduct and word. What is more, this is perhaps one of the most sensitive topics in Islamic law and given that Gülen is lambasted by some religious fanatical groups that he is trying to water down religious sensitivity in order to Christianise the Turks and ultra laicist militant margins that he is trying to establish an Islamic State in Turkey and Islamize the whole world, one can appreciate why Gülen would take a cautious note on this issue.

A number of jurists and scholars have also held that apostasy is not a punishable offence. However, the difference in Gülen's case is that he has the influence to change the thought of a critical mass to make a real difference. In doing so, Gülen and the movement are challenging a religiously-couched cultural reaction to the 'right to change religion' in the Muslim world. Religion is a matter of conscience and many Muslims believe that it is their duty to oppose the freedom to convert out of Islam, because of Islam. It is this which Gülen is incrementally challenging.

This does not mean that opposition to change of religion will immediately crumble, especially in the political circles. For them, controlling the right to change religion is a means to controlling opposition and religious authority. After all, it is they who decide what amounts to apostasy. However, the likes of Gülen's efforts will undermine the religious, cultural and public support for such a stance and in time will influence the thinking of the masses on freedom of belief in the wider Muslim world.

51 Other Gülen incremental *ijtihad's* incubating for the time being include "metaphysical democracy" and Islamic art in the modern age.

Gülen's Influence in the Muslim World

What we have examined above are some of Gülen's transformative views on frontline contemporary debates in the Muslim world. The point is to now assess whether Gülen can influence the Muslim world along the lines of the discourse espoused above.

Gülen on the Muslim world

Gülen's goal of universal peace allows us to judge the importance he ascribes to the Muslim, and for that matter, non-Muslim world. In his short English biography, often used as an introduction to most of his translated books, it states:

Gülen envisions a twenty-first century in which we shall witness the birth of a spiritual dynamic that will revitalize long-dormant moral values; an age of tolerance, understanding, and international cooperation that will ultimately lead, through intercultural dialogue and sharing of values, to a single, *inclusive civilization* (emphasis added).⁵²

In one of his early writings, Gülen states that this inclusive civilisation will emerge from the cooperation of the East and West and the respective values and strengths each represent:

Communities based on the cooperation of science and morality always have established true civilizations. For this reason, Western civilization remains paralyzed because it is based mainly on science, and Eastern (Asian) civilizations are not "true" because, in their present conditions, they have no scientific background. The civilization of the future will have to be established upon a combination of Western science and eastern faith and morality.⁵³

In another of his writings, Gülen explains further what those values and strengths are;

The West cannot wipe out Islam or its territory, and Muslim armies can no longer march on the West. Moreover, as this world is becoming even more global, both sides feel the need for a give-and-take relationship. The West has scientific, technological, economic, and military supremacy. However, Islam possesses more important and vital factors: Islam, as represented by the Holy Book and the Sunna of the Prophet, has retained the freshness of its beliefs, spiritual essence, good works, and morality as it has unfolded over the last fourteen centuries. In addition, it has the potential to blow spirit and life into Muslims who have been numbed for centuries, as well as into many other peoples drowned in the swamp of materialism.⁵⁴

Thus, for Gülen, universal peace and the will of God can only be achieved in an inclusive civilisation that merges the values and strengths of the East and West.

That is how we should read Gülen's request of his students to replace a map on his wall that solely shows the Muslim world, with one that shows the entire world. That is also consonant with the movement's efforts that span four continents and more than one hundred countries.

Therefore, Gülen's primary objective is religion-neutral and includes all people. To achieve this however, the Muslim world must be willing to contribute. To do so, Gülen argues that they must reform and revive themselves.⁵⁵ As to the nature of that revival, Gülen explains elsewhere

With all sincerity, we support a renaissance that would consist of the rediscovery of lost human

52 Woodhall & Cetin 2005: viii

53 Gülen 2006: 56

54 Ünal and Williams 2000: 247

55 The Islamic world continues to squirm in the vicious grasp of error... [W]e must work within the Islamic world... which will lead to a comprehensive renewal... The Islamic community needs to be revived... (Gülen 2003: 3)

values and the rapprochement of humanity with universal human morals. Again, we support a renaissance that allows the questioning of dictatorship and the end of dictators, and working towards a democratic society. A renaissance that fosters great achievement in the fine arts and promotes a careful reading of the book of the universe, which has been lost for a long time, is greatly applauded. We support a renaissance that promotes a longing for research, a passion for knowledge, and the articulation of religion in accordance with the understanding of our century in a new style and new manner. (Emphasis added)⁵⁶

From another perspective, it is clear from these essays that for Gülen, Turkey is socio-culturally, historically, geographically and geopolitically very important. Indeed, if we are to judge Gülen's priority by the scale of the movement's investment, then again -no doubt- Turkey tops the list. Unlike Hakan Yavuz, who seeks to explain Gülen's emphasis on Turkey, as nationalistic tendencies originating from his *dadas* spirit or frontier experience⁵⁷, I believe that this is due to Gülen's estimation of Turkey's past and future potential to lead the Muslim world towards an inclusive civilisation. Turkey is critically important to Gülen, because the future of Islam, the Muslim world and universal peace are so inextricably linked in Gülen's mind.

In his essay 'The World We Long For', Gülen speaks of '*our nation may shortly realize a second or third renaissance*' and his prayer to God to '[s]ow our people to the ways to revival in the Muhammadi line'⁵⁸. In this essay, Gülen is alluding to the leadership role of the Turks in reviving the Muslim world

After long ages of crises and depressions, despite all odd, this nation is still capable of such regeneration; it still has the potential to realize a new resurrection... Moreover, it has the advantage of the subconscious acceptance by peoples which shared history, a leadership which may possibly be of use again in the future.⁵⁹

Thus, Turkey's significance in Gülen's estimation is due to the role it is yet to play in this Muslim world.

Another clue on the topic is Gülen's ongoing intellectual project since 1991; a compilation of essays running into four volumes, entitled *Key Concepts of Sufism*. Here Gülen looks at key terminology and values in the practice of Sufism by locating these concepts within the Qur'an, the *sunnah* and the lifetime of the Prophet. Gülen oscillates between concepts such as *ashq*, *jazba*, *tevazu*, *tevekul*, *vasil*, *halvet*, *kurb-buud*, and the Qur'an, Hadith and practice of great Sufi masters. Thus, in these essays, Gülen is legitimising Sufi practice, thought and perception. He is meticulously threading a theological and philosophical link between Sufism and the sharia. In doing so, Gülen is strengthening one of the fundamental dynamics and underlying bedrock of Anatolian Muslimness, namely Sufi appreciation and perception.

These essays were clearly intended for Muslims. Its purpose is to spiritually reform. To do so, it defines and contextualises Sufi concepts in Islamic sources. Turkish Muslims do not need to be convinced of the legitimacy of Sufism in Islam. They accept this outright. I therefore argue that the primary audience of these works are not Turks but the wider Muslim world which, according to Gülen, desperately needs the Sufi touch. For Gülen, Sufism (or *tassawuf* to use a better word), is the spirit of Islam and a practice void of this is didactic, rigid and conformist.

56 An Interview with Fethullah Gülen 2005: 458

57 Yavuz 2003: 22

58 Gülen 2005: 28

59 Gülen 2005: 25

Thus, Gülen's intellectual project spanning sixteen-years is, in part, geared towards the Muslim world.

Why then is the movement so much more active in the West than it is in Muslim countries? The answer is practicality. The Gülen movement moved very quickly into Central Asia because it could, and because Gülen wanted to pre-empt Saudi and Iranian influence in the region. As for Europe, there was already an existing Turkish Diaspora there and the movement quickly flourished as a result of this existing base. What is more, for Gülen, Turkey is the most important Muslim country in the Muslim world, with its history, Anatolian Muslimness and ability to bridge the East and West and therefore the movement has always been at the heart of the Muslim world from the very beginning. Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt are some of the other Muslim countries where the movement is also now active.

The main reason why the movement has not, until recently, been active in Saudi and Iran is to do with these countries refusals. Saudi and Iran consider Turkey and Turkish-Islam as a threat to their Wahhabi and Shiite practices, respectively. It is widely known that both countries spend millions of dollars each year to convert Muslims to their Islamic outlooks through Islamic cultural centres, mosques, bookshops, student sponsorships etc.

However, none of this should be taken to mean that Gülen is not concerned with the Muslim world. My contention is that Gülen is seeking to mobilise and influence the Muslim and Arab world through the example and credibility the movement gains in the West. Gülen needs this credibility, since he is seeking to enter a resilient and, at times, hostile market

Q: What do you say about the attitude: "Forget about Europe, and become the leader of the Muslim world in the East. You're not European anyhow."

A: We have one side in common with Europe and one side in common with the Muslim world. *Our integration with Europe will necessarily bring the other.* (Emphasis added)⁶⁰

The well-known Professor Akbar states in the Forward of *A Dialogue of Civilisations*, "[t]he size and effectiveness of the Gülen movement has grown exponentially over the past thirty years" and adds:

While conducting a research project for the Brookings Institution entitled "Islam in the Age of Globalization" during the spring of 2006, I travelled to nine Muslim countries, and my research team and I were shown just how influential Fethullah Gülen has become. In an attempt to understand the "mind" of Muslims throughout the Muslim world, we prepared a questionnaire that asked direct personal questions to each participant. The questions posed attempted to gauge reactions towards the West and globalization. We found that many people are following those who seek to put barriers around Islam, and to exclude everything else, especially Western influence. This idea is rapidly gaining popularity across the Muslim world. In Turkey, however, we saw that the most popular contemporary role model was Fethullah Gülen, indicating to us the importance of his intellectual movement and also its potential as a countervailing force to ideas of exclusion that are gaining more traction within the Muslim world.⁶¹

It is this potential influence of Gülen in the Muslim world that we now turn to appraise.

Gülen's influence in Muslim world

As noted at the very beginning, human rights values are an intrinsic value in the Gülen discourse. For Gülen, human rights are an inalienable part of one's humanness. Gülen's ideas

60 Sevindi 1997: 189

61 Akbar 2007: Foreword

surrounding tolerance, acceptance of one another, pluralism, democracy and the West are all connected with human rights and human freedoms. Gülen's Anatolian Muslimness, in particular, is a conveyor of Sufi perception which is favourable to human rights discourse.

Thus, Gülen's influence in the Muslim world on human rights will not be as distinct as some would have thought at the beginning of this paper. Rather, it will part and parcel of the Gülen-package. In fact, as seen above, Gülen will not claim to be changing or influencing anything. That is why he has a greater chance of success. Instead, the movement will concentrate on schools, dialogue efforts, media and intellectual gatherings. In time, the Gülen *tajdid*, ethos and principles will permeate the Muslim world through the example of the movement.

This is in fact what is needed. The problem in the Muslim/Arab world is intricate, complex and deep rooted and no progress can be made on any front unless the solution is encapsulating, incremental and localised or locally driven. The problems that surround the practice of human rights in the Muslim world are vast and complex and cannot be tackled on its own. A wider approach that deals with the underlying cultural, economic, social and political dimensions of the problem is needed. An approach that is not reactive to the problems of the Muslim world, but is positive and proactive.

That is why the Gülen solution is significant. It seeks to empower and enable the common person through education and dialogue which challenges cultural perceptions and overcomes dogmas. It seeks to mobilise the individual and society towards achieving to become *insan-i kamil* which can only progress in a free, fair and just society. Since Gülen's goals and teachings are justified in traditional Islamic sources, they have no problem of legitimacy or authenticity. Just as Gülen's and the movement's efforts have helped strengthen the periphery in Turkey, my contention is that this will be replicated in the wider Muslim world. The pace of this influence naturally depends on the movement's presence in this region.

Since 2005, the Gülen movement have begun a new initiative in the form of an Arabic magazine, called *Hira*.⁶² The magazine is published quarterly and includes topics such as religion, theology, culture, education, science and poetry and an editorial article by Gülen for each issue. The magazine is based in Istanbul and Cairo and draws writers from both Turkey and the Arab world. Contributors from the Arab world include very well known and respected writers and scholars. This is a new development; the only Gülen initiative that is exclusively dedicated to engage the Arab world. Clearly this is a medium through which Gülen is seeking to introduce the underlying dynamics of Anatolian Muslimness to the Arab world. The overall ethos of the magazine, reflect the Gülen emphasis and thinking of religion and society. Although the magazine does not engage in politics, its discussion of faith, religion and society will eventually help communicate Gülen's views on these issues. The challenge for the magazine is to catch and maintain the interest of the Arab youth. It is too early to assess whether it is achieving this.

The 12th Abant meeting, entitled 'Islam, the West and modernization', was held in Cairo over two days in February 2007.⁶³ Intellectuals, scholars and journalists from both countries took part in this two day-long platform. This was the first time the Gülen movement organised a significant conference in an Arab country. The event was co-organised by the prestigious Al Ashram centre for Political and Strategic Studies think tank which publishes a daily newspaper with a circulation of one million. The meeting in Cairo was entitled *Turkey-Egypt Talk I*, signalling that its mark the beginning of a series of events to be organised by the

62 http://www.herkul.org/yazarlar/index.php?view=article&article_id=2727.

63 <http://www.gyv.org.tr/bpi.asp?caid=336&cid=874>

Abant platform. The underlying objective of this meeting was to look at modernisation in the Muslim world; how to overcome common problems among Muslim societies; universal values such as human rights, democracy and rule of law and spreading these notions in the Muslim world through Muslim interpretation. The second of these meetings will be held in February 2008 in Istanbul and it is expected that leading universities from Egypt such as Al-Ezher and Seem University will take part.

Clearly it is very significant that this meeting was held in Cairo and can be taken as a further indication that Gülen is starting to slowly engage the Arab world. The fact that both *Hira* and this Abant meeting was based in Egypt is no coincidence. It is well known that both countries have good relations and share a long history together. Unlike, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Gülen speaks favourably about Egypt. Perhaps Egypt will serve as Gülen's springboard to the rest of the Arab world. If *Hira* and Abant are anything to go by, this certainly seems likely.

Given that the Gülen schools are not centrally coordinated, there is no verifiable data as to the exact number of schools in any given region. Recent estimates suggest six hundred schools in over a hundred countries⁶⁴. The website for the 5th Turkish Language Olympics organised in Istanbul by the movement states that 550 contestants took part in the event in Istanbul from 100 different countries⁶⁵. It is well known that all of these contestants were service-recipients of the Gülen movement in some capacity, often as a pupil in one of Gülen's schools. This confirms previous estimates regarding the number and span of Gülen schools.

The list of contestants from Muslim countries include: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Algeria, Chad, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Morocco, Philippines, Ghana, India, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Maldives, Malaysia, Mali, Egypt, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Jordan and Yemen. Of the 57 member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which includes all but a very few countries of Muslim population, the Gülen movement is active in approximately 42 of these. What is more, we know that some of these countries have more than just one school, for example there are seven each in Pakistan⁶⁶ and Yemen⁶⁷, six in Afghanistan⁶⁸, and three in Northern Iraq. Some of these we know about from the Internet⁶⁹ others from word of mouth. So at the very least, the Gülen movement is active in over forty Muslim countries; the more credible likelihood is that this activity involves at least one school if not more.

Clearly therefore, there is a Gülen presence in the Muslim world. What is lacking is the Middle East. Attentive readers will have noticed 'Iran' in the above-list of countries. During discussions with volunteers of the movement who have worked in the region, I was told that there are student-dormitories in Iran and in every major city of Saudi Arabia. Apparently, one purpose of these dormitories and hostels are to serve pilgrims. This is very significant. Conventional research and thinking on the movement has always maintained that the

64 Ref

65 <http://www.turkceolimpiyatlari.org/>

66 <http://www.pakturk.org/>

67 <http://www.tissenior.com/>

68 Abdullah Gülen (the then Foreign Secretary), attended the opening ceremony of the Afghan Turkish Girls school with a 1500 student capacity, in Kabul in February 2007. It was later reported that Mr Gul informed Margaret Becket (the then Foreign Secretary of Britain) of these schools and that she encouraged him to make these efforts known to the European leaders: <http://www.zaman.com.tr/webapp-tr/haber.do?haberno=522069>

69 There are a few websites that list some links to Gülen schools, such as http://www.turkokullari.net/index.php?option=com_weblinks&catid=14&Itemid=22

movement is non-existent in Iran and Saudi. My research suggests otherwise. Whether the movement will set up schools in Iran⁷⁰ and Saudi is another question, but they are certainly active there.

What is important to note at this juncture is the pace at which these schools and the span of the movement is growing. If we are to go by the Turkish Language Olympics, the number of countries taking part is growing at a phenomenal speed. In 2006, the number of countries that took part was 87, in 2007 this number reached to 100. Clearly, this is not a definitive estimation of growth, since a Gülen school may have chosen to only take part in 2007 despite being around in 2006. While this is quite possible in theory, it is unlikely in practice, given the importance Gülen places on these Olympics. In this respect, it would not be far off to suggest that the countries and schools that take part in these Olympics reflects the approximate size and scope of the Gülen movement in general and schools in particular.

Another indication of the Gülen movement's pace of growth, for example, is in the media industry. In 2006 there was two international TV stations, Samanyolu and Mehtap. In 2007, three more TV stations came on air: Samanyolu Haber, a 24 hour news channel; *Ebru*, an all-English TV channel based and broadcast from the U.S and finally *Yumurcak*, a children's TV channel. In 2007, *Zaman*, the movement's Turkish newspaper, became the highest circulating daily at an average of 650,000 copies. In 2006, the movement launched its first English daily newspaper, Today's Zaman which is already the highest selling English newspaper in Turkey.⁷¹

Gülen's books translated into Arabic include, the *Infinite Light*, a topic based commentary on Prophet Muhammad's life (pbuh); *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*; *The Statue of our Souls – Revival in Islamic thought and action* and '*İrşad Ekseni*'.⁷² Gülen's official website is accessible in twenty languages including Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

New Phase: Adolescence and the Muslim World

The founding of an international relief and development charity in 2004, called "*Kimse Yok mu?*" (Is There No One?), which seeks to alleviate suffering and poverty in the world, signals a new phase for the movement, a coming of adolescence. The ambit of this charity is not just the Muslim world but poverty in the South and suffering all over. The charity website explains the various national and international relief programmes and projects carried out by the charity. The charity first undertook national relief programmes and *ad hoc* relief efforts to alleviate poverty and help natural disaster victims (Agri 2004, Bingol 2005, Eastern Turkey 2007). From 2005 onwards, the charity began relief programmes abroad. In January 2005, the charity appealed for donations for the victims of the South Pacific earthquake. With funds collected, the charity provided water sanitation machinery, clothes, food and medical help and support to victims of the Ace province in Indonesia. In 2006⁷³ and 2007⁷⁴ the charity pro-

70 I was told that when the movement proposed opening a school in Iran, the Iranian authorities replied "give us the funds and we will open it for you".

71 <http://www.TodaysZaman.com>

72 Not translated into English

73 Following the 2006 earthquake in Asia, the charity built three tent-villages in Pakistan which accommodated approximately 5000 victims. The charity provided these villages with food and support for six months. The charity also presented the Pakistan authorities with a four million dollar cheque as relief aid to the victims of this earthquake. The charity also built ten pre-fabricated schools, each with a capacity for 350 students, and provided school material and equipment.

74 In 2007, the charity began a campaign entitled 'Hand in hand with the Palestinian and Lebanon People'. This

vided aid and support to Pakistan and Lebanon. The local Gülen institutes helped coordinate the aid and support in these countries.

The efforts of this charity vis-à-vis the Muslim world is important for two reasons: (i) the credibility it will provide the movement in the Muslim world, and (ii) the wider implications of the movement entering a phase of development. The charities efforts to date prove that the Muslim world is important to Gülen and the movement, and is an excellent way to win the “hearts and minds” of the Muslim people in the region. What is more, this is also an excellent means of raising the profile and visibility of the local Gülen movement in the region and use of their local experience and knowledge. Through such relief work, the Gülen movement is gaining the awareness, sympathy and support of the Muslims in the wider Muslim world, enhancing its prospects of success in this region.

The second point is that this relief charity demarcates very clearly a new phase in the development of the Gülen movement.

Crudely put for the purposes of this paper, until recently, the main focus of the movement has always been to build its own capability, credibility and capacity. In that sense, all works and projects were geared around winning over volunteers and support. These works in themselves were always charitable but one unchanging dimension was the contingent gain for the movement. One example is that all donations received would only go to a public cause organised directly by the movement itself. In this sense, the movement was still in its early developmental stage.

What this relief charity does, is clearly mark out what was slowly emerging anyway; that the movement has now entered a stage of adolescence where it undertakes more complex and burdensome projects which do not necessarily benefit the movement itself. The fact that the relief charity collects money from businessman in Turkey, often the same people who fund Gülen projects, and then donates that money to earthquake victims in Pakistan, despite the movement needing that money elsewhere, is a sign that the movement has now entered a new phase where it considers itself capable of making such a donation. Put differently, the Gülen movement’s charitable works have moved to a whole new altruistic level defined by “need of society” as opposed to “gain for the movement.”

In the past the movement was criticised for remaining indifferent to wider public issues like poverty and human right violations. It appears that Gülen and the movement were not so indifferent to these issues after all, but building the mechanisms through which a meaningful attempt of contribution towards a solution could be made.

I argue that this will mean a more active Gülen in the Muslim world and South. The movement will not only spread as it first did in Turkey, but do so with more authority and greater speed. The relief charity is a clear indication that the movement considers itself to be of sufficient maturity to attempt bigger and more complex issues and that it has turned its energies towards the Muslim world.

In summary therefore, the Gülen movement is clearly present in most parts of the Muslim world. The movement is obviously strongest in Turkey and the Turkic states. However, the movement has clearly moved well beyond this and is now active in approximately 42 Muslim countries. The movement is not so active in the Middle East for reasons more to do with these countries than to do with Gülen. Gülen and the movement have demonstrated that they are

involved sending food to Palestine (13 lorries) and Lebanon (14 lorries). The list of other international support programmes undertaken by the charity continues.

now turning their resources to the Muslim world. The *Hira* magazine, conference in Cairo and expanding schools in the Muslim world demonstrates this and proves that this is not just a Turkish movement.

Gülen's view concerning the Muslim world in general and the Middle East in particular has been that much of the non-Arab Muslim world still approaches Turkey with affinity and as their natural leader given the Ottoman past. This "subconscious affinity and acceptance" is significant for Gülen as shown by his repeated repetition of this. I contend that Gülen is now seeking to cash that subconscious credit in the Muslim world. Given that the problems in the Muslim world are complex, deep rooted and intricate and that there is –to some extent- an Arab and Iranian resistance to Turkey, the Turkish-model and the Gülen movement, Gülen has sought to build leadership in the Turkic world and credibility in the West before attempting to permeate the Middle East. That attempt is well underway and I predict a growing number of schools, periodicals, newspapers and eventually TV channel in the Middle East in the next 10 years. Through *Today's Zaman* discussions are already underway with Arab counterparts.

Conclusion

This paper argues that Gülen's influence is transferable to the wider Muslim world, given its underlying dynamics and nature. The scope and depth of this influence depends on the presence and activity of the movement in this region. All research indicates that the movement is now investing greater energy in the Muslim world, whether through *Hira*, book publications or a growing number of schools.

The movement introduces Gülen's philosophy, views and *tajdid* to the Muslim world through its example. Gülen's *tajdid* proves itself to be adaptable, flexible, durable and practical. Most importantly, it is collectively constructed, based on action and conduct and spread among the grass roots of society. In this way, it lends itself to localisation and indigenisation providing it with a greater chance of success in the Muslim world. An ever-present underlying streak in Gülen's *tajdid* and discourse are human rights values. This is significant since it means Gülen's views, of themselves, promote human rights values by default. Gülen's views are spread through the example of the movement. This is best illustrated in the movement's dialogue activities among Muslims. These activities usher in Gülen's dialogue theology and Anatolian Muslimness. Anatolian Muslimness is Gülen's perception of Islam, which gives prominence to Sufi perception, love, tolerance, forgiveness and peace. Gülen would say that this is Islam in itself. I suggest that Gülen is promoting Anatolian Muslimness among Muslims to fine-tune the rigid, conformist and literal Muslimness in practice in some parts of the Muslim world today. This is significant for the development of human rights values in the Muslim world.

What is more, Gülen promotes human rights directly by internalising democracy, human rights, freedom of belief, pluralism and Anglo-Saxon-style secularism. It is well known among human right lawyers and academics that democracy and pluralism are considered the prerequisites for the enjoyment of human rights. Where there is antagonism towards either, there can never be the enjoyment of the former. Furthermore, by de-politising Islam and replacing the theological support for an Islamic state or theocratic governance with respect for rule of law, elections and other fundamental principles as noted above, Gülen is directly promoting human rights through Islam, or because of Islam. His incremental *ijtihad* –ongoing– on change of religion in Islam is significant in this respect.

The net effect of Gülen's efforts has been to contribute to a new type of Muslim in Turkey, who while a strong believer supports democracy, pluralism and human rights because of his faith not despite it. This has helped strengthen the silent and significant periphery in Turkey, who are now constructively participating in Turkey's public life and contesting for centre ground.

By tracing the movement's presence and growth in the Muslim world, this paper suggests that a similar effect will take place in this world as well. The movement's relief charity proves that the Muslim world is important to Gülen and that the movement has now entered a new phase of adolescence where it is undertaking wider social and more complex issues. One of these, I suggest, is enabling the civil society of the Muslim world. The growing activity and schools in this region bolsters this point further. This runs contrary to conventional thinking on the movement to date, which suggests that the Muslim world is not significant to Gülen. I argue that the Muslim world has always been central to Gülen's vision of an inclusive civilisation but practicality as opposed to philosophy prevented greater prominence to this region. What is more, the strong and resilient Arab culture against a Turkish model could only be countered through significant credibility. I argue that the movement now possesses that credibility through its works and activities in the rest of the world and is now seeking to make use of it in the Muslim world. Based on the movement's project so far and a long history of good relations, it is very likely that Egypt will serve as the springboard to the movement's wider activity in the Middle East.

The fact that Turkey's profile has been on a steady rise in the Muslim world in recent years will only add pace to the movement's efforts here. In time, and as in Turkey, that will lead to a change of culture, perception and mood on points pertinent to human rights enjoyment and contribute to a wider debate in the Muslim world on developing an internally meaningful and effective and externally coherent and consistent set of human right norms and laws.