

CIVILITY IN ISLAMIC ACTIVISM: TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SHARED VALUES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Fethullah Gülen's works and movement have aimed to mend the tensions and fissures, specifically along racial and ideological lines on both practical and theoretical levels that are emerging in this rapidly globalising world. Within a civil society theoretical framework, this paper addresses the knowledge developed on Islamically inspired forms of activism, before proceeding to an examination of key civil society actors with focus on the Gülen movement.

Islam-based forms of organisation are conventionally presented as deficient in 'civility' or even antithetical to civil principles. The danger is that they are then simply excluded from normative definitions of civil society and their positive role in it diminished. In this respect, this paper argues for expanding the concepts through which we view and come to judge civility and citizenship. The role of shared values in building civil society is facilitated by expanding the concepts through which we measure and exclude crucial components. Recognising the value systems behind Islamic forms of organisation helps develop better tools for deciphering the shared values among various parts of civil society.

Focusing on the Gülen movement, through an investigation of its beliefs, values and practices, the paper illustrates not only its contribution in terms of expanding civil societies internationally, but also how – according to the criteria used for measuring its effect – it is positioned as a leading example of dealing with contemporary challenges. It is hoped that this work will contribute to laying the epistemological groundwork for those struggling against Islamophobia and striving to expose the values shared among all actors in a healthy and vibrant civil society.

Introduction

Within a civil society theoretical framework, the paper addresses the knowledge developed on Islamically inspired forms of activism and proceeds with an examination of the Gülen movement as a key component of civil society. A critical rethinking is required of the dominant theoretical understandings of civil society and views within the existing body of literature on the forms of organisation that contribute to its vibrancy and expansion. The dominant discourse or assemblage of ideas is ‘a clash of civilizations,’ spearheaded by Samuel Huntington. Huntington theorised that a clash of civilisations will occur as different civilisations are more likely to fight each other.¹ Issues have emerged because of factors, such as, the increased interaction among peoples of different civilisations and a global resurgence of religious identity, and demographic and economic changes that threaten to shift the balance of power among western and non-western civilisations. Consequently, as Özdalga points out, there has been an upsurge in the visibility of Islam.² For Huntington, religion is the central defining characteristic that defines identities.³ Such theorisation needs to be contested and revealed of its fallacies for a clearer understanding of global politics and the role of faith-based movements.

Islamic-based forms of organisation are classically presented as deficient in ‘civility’ or, in fact, antithetical to civil principles. As Özdalga further points out, “in spite of the increasing awareness that Islam and Islamic movements play a decisive role in modern society, they are most often brought to the notice of the public when large and sensational events take place. The result of this sporadic and sensationalistic attention is a general lack of focus on not only non-violent forms of Islam, but also on long-term analytical perspectives.”⁴ They become, therefore, excluded from normative definitions on civil society and their positive role in it diminished. Ever more pressing, a dilemma faces, more generally, theorists and leaders in terms of how best to tackle the growing security threats of terrorism and Islamophobia. In a globalised world in which terrorism has become one of the major challenges facing individuals and state leaders, narrowly constructed frames - of actors and institutions that have the ability not only to create greater civility but to counter anti-civil movements and actors - are actually exacerbating the problems of terrorism and racism.

Thus, the Gülen movement will be analysed in this paper and argued to be a leading model of Islamically-based associations and movements that contribute to the development of civil societies.⁵ It is an example that challenges these mainstream readings. It is crucial that policy makers and theorists, alike: a) question not only the basis but the effect of such framing and b) expand their theoretical framework of civil society in practical terms by seeking the inclusion of model civil society movements, such as the Gülen movement, that are in a position to best address and tackle these major problems.

The Gülen movement is discussed in an attempt to contribute to a questioning of the knowledge

1 Huntington, Samuel P. (1993) *The Clash of Civilizations?* Foreign Affairs, vol. 72, no. 3:22-49 and S. P. Huntington. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster).

2 Özdalga, Elisabeth. (2005) *Redeemer or Outsider? The Gülen Community in the Civilizing Process.* *The Muslim World*, vol. 95 (July), 429.

3 Huntington 1996, 47.

4 Özdalga . (2005), 430.

5 Berna Turam similarly argues Gülen’s significant role in civil society. See Turam, Berna (2001) *National Loyalties and International Undertakings. Islamic Modernism: Fethullah Gülen and Contemporary Islam.* Georgetown University (26-27 April).

developed on civility and citizenship globally. Through an investigation of beliefs, values and practices, the paper will argue that the Gülen movement functions as a mechanism to counter threats to civility and security. The paper illustrates not only its crucial contribution in terms of expanding civil societies internationally, but how – through an examination of its empowering effects and the civility components of trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and tolerance, it is positioned as a leading example for dealing effectively with contemporary challenges by countering forces that threaten civil societies. Its founder, Fethullah Gülen, and his movement have aimed to mend the tensions fissuring in this fast emerging globalised world, specifically cleavages along racial and ideological lines on both practical and theoretical levels.

In the first section, ‘Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement, Gülen’s philosophy will be outlined as a backdrop to an analysis of the movement and his works. In the second section, ‘Islam and the Idea of Civil Society,’ the theoretical underpinnings of civil society which reject religiously, specifically Islamically, motivated action will be contested. The paper proceeds in the next section, ‘Indicators for the Development of Civil Society in a Globalised World,’ with a brief description of the indicators that will be used to assess the impact of the Gülen movement, specifically in the current political context. The analysis through the two main indicators used for the purpose of this project will follow in the subsequent sections: ‘Empowerment: The Gülen Movement’s Role in Individual and Societal Development,’ and ‘Civility: Terrorism and Racism,’ respectively. Lastly, the ‘Conclusions’ summarise the findings and discusses future prospects and dilemmas.

Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement

The Gülen movement is based on an Islamic philosophy that embraces a ‘common good,’ and emphasises the universality of values, spirituality and principles of justice – in short, the welfare of society and all individuals within that society. Gülen’s work and movement has become an active force within civil societies, as can be seen in the numerous activities pursued, and its growing presence in an increasing number of countries outside its origins, Turkey.

Gülen is a peace activist, intellectual, religious scholar, mentor, author and poet, great thinker and spiritual guide who has devoted his life to seeking the solutions for society’s ills and spiritual needs. The movement depends on members’ recognition of a set of shared and meaningful references to Gülen’s ideal cognitive schemetas and the Nur (Light) doctrines that together lead to a collectivity.⁶ Many of Gülen’s ideas are influenced by Said Nursi’s magnum opus, written discourse of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876 – 1960), who authored several volumes of Qur’anic exegesis known as *Risale-i Nur Kulliyati* (The Epistles of Light).⁷ Other Turkish Muslim figures that have influenced Gülen include Alvarli Muhammed Lutfi, Mehmet Akif, Necip Fazil, Elmalili Hamdi, Nurettin Topcu, and Sezai Karakoc.⁸

Gülen envisions a world in which we will witness a revival of long-dormant moral values, an age of tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation that will ultimately lead to a single, inclusive civilization. In this vein, Gülen and his supporters have struggled for worldwide peace

6 Komecoglu, Ugur, quoted in Ihsan Yilmaz (2000) Changing Turkish-Muslim Discourses on Modernity, West and Dialogue. Paper presented at the Congress of the International Association of Middle East Studies, Berlin (October 5-7), 2.

7 Yilmaz, 2000, 2.

8 Thanks to Dr Ihsan Yilmaz for providing this information.

through conferences and symposiums. Gülen contributes to a number of journals and magazines and writes the editorial page for several magazines. He has written more than forty books, hundreds of articles, and recorded thousands of audio and videocassettes. He has delivered innumerable speeches on many social and religious issues. Some of his books have been best-sellers in Turkey and translated into German, Russian, Albanian, Japanese, Indonesian, and Spanish.⁹

He has led the establishment of many charitable organisations. He has influenced the use of mass media, in particular television, to inform the public of matters of pressing concern. Gülen has opened high quality schools and institutions for learning in over 100 countries, illustrating its wide reach and exponential growth. He believes the road to justice for all is dependent on the provision of an adequate and appropriate universal education. Volunteerism is a cornerstone to the success of his educational institutions, as well as the support of small businessmen, the social elite and community leaders, and powerful industrialists. With donations from these sources, educational trusts have been able to establish these schools and scholarships to help students.

The discourse of any movement is of crucial importance in assessing any impact on civil society. Some of the main ideas Gülen espouses are *ijtihad*, democracy, and harmony between science and religion.¹⁰ *Ijtihad* refers generally to some form of ‘re-interpretation,’ in which the Islamic scripts are understood in line with modern and civil values. Gülen embraces interpretation, which includes the rethinking of issues based on new contexts, environments, and differing cultures.¹¹ He encourages Muslims to resort to ‘civil *ijtihad*.’ As such, he encourages work on issues such as genetic engineering, organ transplantation, music, art, secularism, modern law, etc.¹²

He argues that in spite of its many shortcomings, democracy is now the only viable political system. He argues that science and religion are actually two different aspects that emanate from the same truth. He strives against terrorism by lecturing on Islam’s principles and against those who seek to use Islam’s name in their acts of terror. He strongly advocates pluralism in theory and practice. For example, he argues for a pluralism of ideas and that open contestation and persuasion is the route to toleration and co-operation, as will be elaborated on later. For Gülen, pluralism must also exist in Islamic legal opinions.¹³

Gülen’s movement becomes a powerful civil society force for a number of aspects. In more quantitative terms, it forms a loose entity that transcends cultures, ethnicities, and even religion due to its breadth over several countries at a growing rate. The movement draws on Islamic teachings that are mostly no different from most other religious teachings, thus enabling the movement to build bridges between faiths and the pursuance of common interests for the good of mankind and society. In this way the movement is positioned to root itself in a variety of contexts making it an ‘outward-looking’ form of organisation, as opposed to an ‘inward-looking’ form of organisation which comprises the dominant mode of religious-based and interest-based organisation. The movement, thus, has the capacity to be more effectual in

9 Gülen, Fethullah (2005) *Pearls of Wisdom* (Light: New Jersey), xii.

10 His ideas on inter-faith dialogue and education will be elaborated on below.

11 Yilmaz, Ihsan (2003), *Ijtihad and Tadjdid by Conduct: The Gülen Movement*, in: M. Hakan Yavus and John Esposito. *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Impact of Fethullah Gülen’s Nur Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 221.

12 *Ibid.*, 223.

13 *Ibid.*, 224.

its ambitions for greater world peace and individual and societal development.

But just as important to note is its firm philosophy and goals. In considering the impact of any organisation or movement, qualitative terms are just as, if not more, important. It is true that many forms of organisation preach principles of civility and world peace, all which are necessary for attaining such ambitions globally. But for the 21st century, I argue that the form of organisation that is best suited to the major challenges of terrorism and racism must not only embrace principles of democracy and universal principles of justice and rights, but also be rooted in Islamic philosophy. The core texts of Islam share and preach the same values of tolerance, understanding and peace as do the core texts of the other main faiths. However, cleavages are along racial lines that predominantly follow religious adherence. Moreover, Islam has been successfully framed by the doings of both Muslim and non-Muslim supporters of division, misunderstanding, and hierarchy. Thus, it must necessarily be a movement that understands and advocates the purposes of Islamic teachings as being for the welfare of individuals and society for this framing to be countered effectively and a ‘clash of civilizations’ to be avoided. The recent RAND report,¹⁴ developed by numerous high-level thinkers, has concluded that the way forward to the eradication of terrorism is through embracing liberal Islamic thinkers that are still rooted in the mainstream Muslim populace. The Gülen movement straddles this delicate balance and achieves much more.

Islam and the Idea of Civil Society

The inclusion or exclusion of Islamic groups or associations as civil society institutions has been a matter of considerable disagreement. Many argue that Islamic groups or associations fall outside the realm of civil society. Most research on Islamic movements has been directed to Islamist groups,¹⁵ particularly violent groups or movements, as opposed to Islamic organisations or organisations inspired by Islamic principles. Thus, mainstream and majority Islamic faith-based forms of association have been glossed over in much of the literature and theorisation. Apart from grievous misunderstandings, much research has been influenced by the orientalist bias. Additionally, civil society’s progressive teleology often embraces anti-religious positions and particularly those with some Islamic component. Thus, the behaviours, norms and practices that are ideologically motivated are seen as incongruous with the project of civil society.

Scholars, such as Clark, Verhagen, Göle, and Kandil assert that religious organisations have an important function in civil society. Clark shows that a danger in analyses has been the blurring between the minority of violent Islamist groups and the majority of non-violent Islamist groups, in which Islamic associations are characterised as instruments of the undemocratic and extremist Islamic groups.¹⁶ As Verhagen notes, the contribution of religious organisations is in terms of the value systems they furnish and also of the catalyst for social transformation they often become. Göle, in fact, in her study on Turkey, speaks of the

14 Please see Rand’s 2007 report at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG483/>

15 I use Laura Guazzone’s definition of the term, *Islamism*, referring to “an ideology and the set of movements associated with it.” *Islamists* consciously choose an Islamic doctrine as a guide for political action. *Islamist movements* can vary significantly in their doctrines and should not be confused with *Islam*, which is a much broader concept referring to the Islamic religion. See Guazzone, Laura (1995) *Islamism and Islamists in the Contemporary Arab World*, in: Laura Guazzone (Ed) *The Islamist Dilemma: The Political Role of Islamist Movements in the Contemporary Arab World* (Reading: Ithaca Press), 4.

16 Clark, Janine A. (1994) “Islamic Social-Welfare Organizations and the Legitimacy of the State in Egypt: Democratization or Islamization From Below?” unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, Canada, 35.

creation of an autonomous sphere in society due to Islamic values and the Islamicisation of politics.¹⁷ Kandil recognises that religion plays a key role as a motivating factor for women's voluntary initiatives since it encourages them to volunteer time and give charity and thus enables them to assume a profound role in civil society.¹⁸ Ghannouchi argues that Islam is naturally strengthening to 'civility'.¹⁹

This paper will emphasise, through a notable example, that Islamically inspired groups are equally relevant to the sphere in which dominant discourses are challenged and competing views are put forward. Excluding forms of collaboration and movements inspired by Islam means ignoring the fact that, as well as contributing to civility, they can be the most effective means for responding to the needs of citizens²⁰ and challenges facing many governments today. It is also important to recognise that a 'common good' is a contested domain. As Carothers explains, "struggles over public interest are not between civil society on the one hand and bad guys on the other but within civil society itself."²¹

The 'common good', although a contested domain, is however best accomplished when different groupings can experience peaceful co-existence through shared value systems. Since tensions between various ethnic, racial and religious or ideological groupings are increasing, as can be evinced in many European capitals today, to the point that individual safety is a growing concern, there has never been greater need to establish common principles and values among these groupings and leanings. Therefore, those civil society actors that espouse ideas and practices that strengthen intra-group unity and cooperation, as opposed to those whose interests and aspirations result in greater tensions or hatred, must be facilitated and supported by citizens and policy-makers alike.

Indicators for the Development of Civil Society in a Globalised World

Civility will take greater focus in analysing the Gülen movement, in way of demonstrating the key role this movement inspired by Islamic teachings plays in moving – including western societies – to greater civility and, thus, demonstrating the dysfunction of the mainstream conception of civil society from which Islamic forms of organising are often not included. Empowerment will be a further indicator used for analysing its role and importance in civil society.

Civility is understood here as the conduct of a person whose individual self-consciousness is partly superseded by his or her collective self-consciousness, with the society as a whole and the institution of civil society being the referents of her collective self-consciousness.²² As Seligman stresses, "The continuity of ethnic loyalties and solidarities (and so also the

17 Nilüfer Göle (1994) *Towards an Autonomization of Politics and Civil Society in Turkey*, in: Metin Heper (Ed), *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press), 221.

18 Kandil, Amani (1999) *Women and Civil Society*", in: *Civil Society at the Millennium* (Civicus, Connecticut: Kumarian Press), 63. Kandil (1999, p. 63) accredits the large number of women in Egyptian private voluntary organisations (PVOs) essentially to their traditional mothering roles.

19 Ghannouchi, Rached (1999) *Muqarabat fi al-'ilmaniyya w'al-mujtam' al-madani* [Papers on Secularism and Civil Society] (London: Maghreb Center for Research and Translation), 83.

20 Schwedler, Jillian (1995) Introduction, in: Jillian Schwedler (Ed) *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner), 16.

21 Carothers, Thomas (1999) *Civil Society: Think Again*. *Foreign Policy*, no. 117, 21.

22 Shils, Edward (1992) *The Virtue of Civil Society*. *Government and Opposition*, vol. 26, no. 1 (winter), 335.

potential for ethnic exclusion) within groups undercuts the very definition of universal citizenship within the nation-state....”²³ While “tolerance towards the other”, most often defined as synonymous with ‘civility’, is an indicator,²⁴ a wider range of “civil acts”, or what are referred to as “values” for the normative part of civil society, are considered here. While agreeing with Schwedler that “tolerance toward those with different views is paramount,”²⁵ following Antoun’s contribution to the definition of civility, “the practices and ideas that generate cooperation and trust for the purpose of accomplishing social goals”²⁶ must necessarily be part and parcel of the concept. Singerman also emphasises the important factors of “cooperation, trust, and mutual dependence”;²⁷ which is especially crucial for deciphering which activities and philosophies promote these values in an increasingly globalised world. Underpinning the concept of civility in dealings and behaviour, thus, are the values of trust, reciprocity, cooperation and tolerance.

The empowerment process has traditionally been left out of the analysis of social movements and associational activism. It is mostly feminists who have defined empowerment, and have emphasised the effects a woman has on her institutional environment as “circumventing, changing, or eliminating the society’s values, practices, norms and laws in order to lessen the extent to which they constrain her activities and choices.”²⁸ The mainstream conceptualisation of empowerment is, indeed, important to civil society development in a broader sense. Empowerment also involves the attainment of freedoms from injustice among threatened or oppressed individuals, groups, or nations. The language of freedoms must include broader categories where the systematic violation of rights and freedoms results in the same dynamics of oppression as has been widely described for women as a category. Any form of agency from which greater fulfilment, satisfaction, consciousness-raising, skills development, or piety may result is important not to overlook. As Adam Ferguson comments, “The happiness of individuals is the great end of civil society: For, in what sense can a public enjoy any good, if its members, considered apart, be unhappy?”²⁹

Empowerment: The Gülen Movement’s Role in Individual and Societal Development

Analysing empowering effects that result from the Gülen movement’s efforts, captures a deeper understanding of how their mode of action enables greater well-being, health and the ability of individuals to be in better positions to take greater control over their choices. Empowerment is achieved through its educational and charitable efforts. The movement is dedicated to education in a broad sense. It is an education of the heart and soul as well as of the mind, aimed at invigorating the whole being to achieve personal competence and the

23 Seligman, Adam B. (1992) *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press), 165.

24 Norton, Richard (1995) Introduction, in: Augustus Richard Norton (Ed) *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 213.

25 Schwedler 1995, 6.

26 Antoun, Richard T. (2000) *Civil Society, Tribal Process, and Change in Jordan: An Anthropological View*. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4 (November), 456.

27 Singerman Diane (1995) *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 50.

28 Ackerly Brooke (1997) *What’s in a Design? The Effects of NGO Programme Delivery Choices on Women’s Empowerment in Bangladesh*, in: Anne Marie Goetz (Ed) *Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development* (London: Zed Books), 141.

29 Quoted in Schwedler 1995, p. 5.

ability to be a useful citizen for the benefit of others.³⁰

Education has taken centrality in Gülen's philosophy for attaining existential rewards. Teachers in Gülen schools do not overtly proclaim their adherence to Islam nor teach the sciences from a religious perspective. Gülen explains that it is enough to be a faithful Muslim while imparting secular knowledge because "knowledge itself becomes an Islamic value when it is imparted by teachers with Islamic values and who can show students how to employ knowledge in the right and beneficial Islamic way."³¹ What Gülen has been inspired to achieve from the inception of the schools is a quality of education that surpasses rivalries and stagnation. This began when he confronted the problem, first in Turkey, of secular schools having been unable to free themselves of the prejudices and conventions of modernist ideology and the madrasas of having shown little desire and ability to break with the past or enact change and to integrate technology and scientific thought.³² An empowerment from stagnation in educational systems and philosophies and rivalry is achieved in his endeavours now on a global scale.

In Gülen's educational philosophy, scientific learning is not dissected from development of spirituality. As Gülen has continually emphasised, faith and science are not separate entities for individual and societal development and advancement. Piety and spirituality are part and parcel of developing the conscientious citizen. He asks people to "judge your worth in the Creator's sight by how much space He occupies in your heart, and your worth in people's eyes by how you treat them. Do not neglect the Truth even for a moment. And yet, 'be a human being among other human beings'."³³ For Gülen, improving a community is possible by elevating the coming generations to the rank of humanity through spiritual consciousness and the consciousness of others' rights. Gülen stresses:

Civilization lies in people's spiritual evolution and continuous self-renewal toward true humanity and personal integrity-to realizing their full potential as the "best pattern of creation." People must realize that civilization is not ... something to be bought from a store and worn. Rather, it is a final destination that can be reached only by following a rational way passing through time and circumstances.³⁴

As such, for a strengthened global civil society to be achieved, one must understand that to be civilised entails first the building of the self. This responsabilisation sought through 'secular' learning and spiritual consciousness consequently effects a stronger and healthier community, which in effect contributes to the wider civilization. Gülen repeats, "Magnificent nations produce magnificent governments. It is the generations with high spirituality, scientific advancement, financial opportunities, broad consciousness, and the individuals struggling to be 'themselves,' that form magnificent nations."³⁵

More deeply, one must look at the value systems which furnish and drive this whole process. Gülen expresses that a core component of this process involves jihad. He explains jihad occurs on two fronts: the internal and the external, both of which are based on struggling in

30 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom.

31 Agai, Bekim (2002) Fethullah Gülen and His Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 11, 41.

32 Michel, Thomas (2001) Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Schools. *Islamic Modernism: Fethullah Gülen and Contemporary Islam*. Georgetown University (26-27 April), 4.

33 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom, 76.

34 Gülen, Fethullah. *Civilization and the Confusion of Conceptions*, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

35 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom, 88.

the path of God. His focus is on the internal struggle, which he calls ‘the greater jihad’ and defines as the effort to attain one’s essence. The external struggle (the lesser jihad) is the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence. The first, he comments, “is based on overcoming obstacles between oneself and one’s essence, and the soul’s reaching knowledge, and eventually divine knowledge, divine love, and spiritual bliss.”³⁶ The second is based on removing obstacles between people and faith so they have free choice in belief and unbelief. For him, jihad is the purpose of our creation and our most important duty.

When one conquers one’s selfish desires through internal jihad, one becomes more giving, sacrificial, and conscious of others’ rights to well-being and happiness. Establishing a true civilization, for Gülen, is assisted when one learns to seek existential reward over worldly riches and status. He explains, “those who want to reform the world must first reform themselves. If they want to lead others to a better world, they must purify their inner worlds of hatred, rancour, and jealousy, and adorn their outer worlds with virtue.”³⁷

His movement has worked towards inculcating individuals with this desire and practice, and the effects can be seen through the numerous charitable works its members have developed. As such, the movement can be said to have an important effect in building civil societies as the bases of civilization, through individual empowerment and societal empowerment. Empowerment is achieved one, when the individual develops and advances his/her own skills, education and consciousness and two, when other individuals benefit from that person’s charity, education, or guidance. True civilization is premised on the empowerment of humanity.

Civility: Terrorism and Racism

The Gülen movement exemplifies an institution and mode of action that is indispensable to decision makers and policy makers struggling with the strains of ideological cleavages and growing fear and threats of terrorist and racist action. A look at four major components of civility – tolerance, cooperation, reciprocity, trust - illustrate how the teachings and philosophy of the Gülen movement is a vehicle for the development and securing of civil societies.

Tolerance is the “willingness to recognise and respect the beliefs or practices of others.”³⁸ It is something one needs to build from the inside. Gülen asks people to “be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone. He emphasises the meaning of tolerance in his article, “Islam – A Religion of Tolerance.”³⁹

Islam is a word derived from the root words silm and salamah. It means surrendering, guiding to peace and contentment, and establishing security and accord.... How unfortunate it is that Islam, which is based on this understanding and spirit, is shown by some circles to be synonymous with terrorism. This is a great historical mistake; wrapping a system based on safety and trust in a veil of terrorism just shows that the spirit of Islam remains unknown.⁴⁰

In this article and many of his other works, Gülen refers to the core text of Islam, the Qur’an,

36 Gülen, Fethullah, Lesser and Greater Jihad, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

37 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom, 105.

38 Word Reference Com: World Dictionary. <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/tolerance> Last accessed 5 May, 2006.

39 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom, 75.

40 Gülen, Fethullah, Islam – A Religion of Tolerance, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

and the sunnah, the traditions of Prophet Mohammed, and practices of the companions of the Prophet and Islamic scholars throughout history, to show how the message of peace and tolerance is repeated throughout.

Again and again, he underscores how misguided those people are who hijack Islam in legitimising terrorisation of innocents. Gülen warns of present-day manifestations of groups in Islamic history that threaten civility. He refers to the Karmatis, Kharijites, and Anarchists,⁴¹ to explain the groups today that often follow a literal meaning of the Qur'an, create chaos, hatred and warfare not only between Muslims and Non-Muslims but between Muslims.

Toleration of another person's beliefs and practices does not mean that one must like them, accept them for oneself, or even believe that they are correct. But one must accept the condition of a co-existence with people of diverse beliefs, traditions and practices, with the appreciation that others have the same right as oneself to personal beliefs and ways of behaving, given that legal parameters must be in place that will curtail behaviour that harms society. As Gülen most aptly puts it:

No matter how charming and enchanting the atmosphere that catches the eye or fills the heart is there is no permission for us to forget the truth to which we are committed. We cannot stay alien toward each other while we are in the same camp. We do not have a monopoly of the good and the beautiful; therefore we cannot be allowed to wage a war with the passengers who are heading to the same destination but on a different path.⁴²

Gülen believes that through education there will be sufficient understanding and tolerance to secure respect for the rights of others. In securing tolerance he however emphasises the need to view science or reason as part of religious understanding. He states:

Humankind from time to time has denied religion in the name of science and denied science in the name of religion, arguing that the two present conflicting views. All knowledge belongs to God and religion is from God. How then can the two be in conflict? To this end, our joint efforts directed at inter-religious dialogue can do much to improve understanding and tolerance among people.⁴³

For the Gülen movement, tolerance is achieved through a form of education that does not deny the place of religion, nor denies the place of what is known as 'secular' learning. This is merely a constructed dichotomy that bears little relevance in the true attainment of building a holistic self and society.

Cooperation is, indeed, another value the Gülen movement strives for, as can be observed

41 As Gülen explains, Karmatism is a heretical esoteric sect founded by Hamdan ibn Karmat in the ninth century AD. Hamdan usurped the poor and claimed shares from the rich in Iraq and its surroundings as "collective property." and claiming shares from the rich. His group was religious only in appearance. Among many things, members rebelled against the Abbasid caliphate, tortured Sunni Muslims, ambushed pilgrims on their way to the Hajj, attacked the sacred city of Makka (at one time stole the Hajar al-Aswad from the Ka'ba), treated women as collective property, institutionalised prostitution widely, and legitimized alcohol. The Kharijites was another faction which blamed Caliph Ali, one for conceding to arbitration and accepting the treaty at the Battle of Siffin and two for not handing over the caliphate to Muawiya. They declared all others who did not think likewise—including the Companions of the Prophet—infidels. Gülen explains, further, they were dragged into bigotry, hostility, and intolerance, getting mired in harshness, violence, and crudity. Anarchists legitimized the actions of some tyrants against Muslims and have positioned themselves rebels against the state. See, Fethullah Gülen, "Three Groups Opposing Dialogue – Kharajites, Karmatis, and Anarchists," <http://en.fGülen.com/>

42 Gülen, Fethullah, Respect for Humankind, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

43 Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom.

in its philosophy and practice. Cooperation is important not only between groups but within groups for civility to take root and grow in any context. The movement enables the crucial civility component of cooperation in its endeavours to establish interfaith dialogue and within its institution establish an ethic of inclusivity.

Gülen argues,

Interfaith dialogue seeks to realize religion's basic oneness and unity, and the universality of belief. Religion embraces all beliefs and races in brotherhood, and exalts love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom via its Prophets.... For interfaith dialogue to succeed, we must forget the past, ignore polemics, and focus on common points.⁴⁴

He, furthermore, believes that, "The Islamic social system seeks to form a virtuous society and thereby gain God's approval. It recognizes right, not force, as the foundation of social life. Hostility is unacceptable. Relationships must be based on belief, love, mutual respect, assistance, and understanding instead of conflict and realization of personal interest."⁴⁵ Similarly, Gülen refers to the modern-day Karmatis, Kharajites, and Anarchists as those who threaten cooperation between those of different faiths.⁴⁶

Since non-discriminatory forms of cooperation are a key to establishing norms that support plurality, the inclusivity of individuals is noted. The Gülen movement supports educational and work opportunities for women. Many women work particularly as educators in schools and universities, and as administrators in certain areas.⁴⁷ With regard to religious minorities, Gülen schools have been established in various countries with communities of various faiths. Students of all backgrounds attend these schools because of the high quality of education they offer. Observers will attest to, even sometimes how surprised they are at, the high level of educational abilities of the students the professionalism of teaching staff.⁴⁸ As Özdalga notes in her observation of the staff of the schools, they give primary loyalty to their work and students as opposed to their families.⁴⁹ This is of particular importance to the formation of a civil society as in many, especially developing, countries, and particularly in the wider Middle East, internal loyalties supersede external loyalties, causing one major source of problems to the development of healthy civil societies. When travelling to visit some of the Gülen schools, Turan attests he witnessed a "pluralist nature of the student bodies - Christian and Muslim in Zamboanga, and Buddhist and Hindu as well in Kyrgyzstan - that what they sought to communicate were universal Islamic values such as honesty, hard work, harmony, and conscientious service rather than any confessional instruction."⁵⁰ He further comments, "in the Sebat International School in Bishkek, students from U.S.A., Korea, and Turkey appeared to be studying comfortably with those coming from Afghanistan and Iran."⁵¹

Gülen also pioneered the establishment of the Journalists and Writers Foundation in 1994, whose activities promote dialogue and tolerance widely within society. Gülen is the honorary

44 Gülen, Fethullah, *The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue*, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

45 Gülen, quoted in Yilmaz 2003, 230.

46 Gülen, Fethullah, *Three Groups Opposing Dialogue – Kharajites, Karmatis, and Anarchists*, <http://en.fGülen.com/>

47 Afsarrudin, Asma. *The Philosophy of Religious Education: Classical Views and Fethullah Gülen's Perspectives*, 21.

48 Michel (2001) 3.

49 Özdalga (2005), 435.

50 Michel (2001), 3.

51 *Ibid.*

president of the foundation. The aim of the Foundation, according to its president, Harun Tokak, is the development and consolidation of love, tolerance, and dialogue, among journalists and writers, throughout Turkish society, and humankind.⁵² The Foundation has held several conferences and publishes books that promote its aim. In its aim for wider participation among various groups, the Foundation attracts scholars and intellectuals of different ethnic, ideological, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

Importantly, the Journalists and Writers Foundation also functions as a think-tank. The Abant Conference - its success, the first of its kind in Turkey - is a result of the Foundation's attempt to work together with people of various backgrounds to find solutions to some of the issues facing intellectuals in regards to Turkey, such as laicism, secularism, religion, and the state. The convention takes place yearly and ends with a declaration. In 1998, the theme was "Islam and secularism"; in 1999, "religion and state relations"; and in 2000, "the democratic state within the framework of rule of law."⁵³

Reciprocity is also a major component of civility. Inclusivity, as found within the Gülen school system, establishes a basis upon which individuals can share knowledge and can further an ethic of tolerance and understanding. Thereby, an ethic of giving, receiving and sacrifice are spread among those who participate in such projects, as well those who are educated through them. Norms of reciprocity help communities to better achieve their interests in a peaceful and civil manner. Reciprocity strengthens relations between the members, organisations they work with, and consequently communities. In short, it solidifies networks in which people can rely on one another to cooperate and struggle towards the goal of global peace.

Trust is the last component of civility that we will discuss, though no less important the building of a civil society than tolerance, cooperation, and reciprocity. Gülen emphasises the need for trust between individuals to facilitate cooperation and success in any endeavour. Gülen argues for the individual to be trustworthy so as to facilitate the bonds between people. This requires individual integrity and sense of responsibility to others' rights and needs. This is a "virtue related self-discipline and sensitivity."⁵⁴ He furthers the centrality of the principle of trust in admonishing its importance to the wider community: "If a state cannot protect its secrets from its enemies, it cannot develop. If an army reveals its strategy to its antagonists, it cannot attain victory. If key workers are won over by the competitors, their employers cannot succeed."⁵⁵ However, trust is broader than the terms of keeping secrets. Trust is, for example, also about entrusting another with one's possessions. This can be seen to be put into practice among members who sacrifice their time and material resources, in faith that their works and charity will be put into worthy causes by others who believe in and support Gülen's dreams and philosophy.

Conclusions

The Gülen movement takes a sizeable and important role in the development of a number of civil societies around the world. This can be seen in their educational and charitable projects. Of importance, however, are the ambitions, philosophy, and dreams with which the movement aspires and the principles upon which members are motivated and they base their activism. The movement aptly demonstrates how its Islamic principles are put into practice to

⁵² Yilmaz 2003, 231.

⁵³ Ibid., 231, 232.

⁵⁴ Gülen (2005) Pearls of Wisdom, 81.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

create a better world. Its impact can be more readily seen through a systematic analysis of its contribution in terms of empowerment strategies and modes of civil action.

The Gülen movement contributes to empowerment on a massive scale as its projects and schools have spread to over 100 countries. The features of its empowerment strategies include, first and foremost, the merging of the secular and spiritual to educate an all-rounded, capable and responsible individual who has acquired the desire to be a source of inspiration and help in the modern market economy and global world. As many observers have attested through visits to the Gülen educational establishments, individuals thrive in often multi-racial/religious and supportive environments; hence, they gain the ability to provide a solid foundation to a healthy community, which Gülen views as crucial component to a healthy civilization and civilized world.

Not unconnected, thus, is the impact the movement has on developing civil societies globally through the developing of civility – a crucial component to their stability and productivity. This is observed through the Gülen movement’s strong commitment to civil components of tolerance, reciprocity, trust, and co-operation. Practice in this direction is found in the participation of hundreds of thousands of individuals in the numerous establishments, the Foundation, schools, and charitable projects that establish these values and spread them to the wider societies in which they operate. An important example includes Gülen’s fervent commitment to inter-faith dialogue which takes place through all these venues on various scales.

This example as a humanistic movement inspired by Islamic principles should convince scholars and policy makers of its importance to the development of civil society on a theoretical level. Equally crucial, it should be viewed as a leading example of the forms of organisation that should be promoted for the benefit of civil societies, whether in predominantly Islamic countries or what one might commonly refer to as secular countries. Forms of organisation that promote empowerment and civility through Islamic teachings are crucial in a world in which civility seems to be increasingly threatened.

The challenge of the future of civil societies lies not only in the ability of such forms of faith-based movements to empower, provide example, and create better conditions for civility. We are entering a time in our history where proponents of a ‘clash of civilizations’ are influencing public opinion towards increased hatred and polarisation with growing terrorist action and the distortion of global politics and meaning of civil society. Terrorism and Islamophobia will continue to be on the increase if movements that have popular opinion in the Muslim world and solidly espouse values of democracy, human rights, and civility - and decisively establish through its discourse the compatibility of belief and these values - are not supported.