

THE EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN AND ITS PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper deals with the educational thought of Fethullah Gülen and its application in a school in South Africa. It will attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school, both academically and in the promotion of universal moral values. The Gülen school provides an alternative both to the Muslim private school and the general private school. Unlike the latter, it gives more attention to moral values, and unlike the former, it is open to all learners irrespective of religious persuasion. It provides a service to society in the transmission of knowledge to humanity, and in cultivating moral values such as responsibility, tolerance, respect, reliability and compassion.

The paper is divided into three parts: First, it introduces the problem of educational dichotomy within the Turkish context since 1924, and how Fethullah Gülen attempted to reconcile science and religion, at least theoretically. Second, it presents the educational philosophy of Fethullah Gülen, especially his moral philosophy as inspired by Miskawayh's (d. 1030) psychology of the soul and his view of the role of the teacher, both in the transmission of knowledge and moral values. Third, it discusses the practice of Gülen's educational philosophy in South Africa, with special reference to Star International School, Cape Town, covering the religious motivations of the teachers, the moral ethos of the school, and educational problems and challenges.

Introduction

This paper will deal with the educational thought of Fethullah Gülen and its practice within the South African context. Gülen's educational philosophy is comprehensive; it is concerned with both the cognitive and moral development of the child. The paper will attempt to illustrate the effectiveness of the school at both these levels.

The Gülen schools have opened in South Africa, and they are bound to flourish in the next five years, due to the excellent academic performance of their learners in recent years. These schools will soon become an alternative to the established private schools and Model C schools in South Africa. Muslim parents are wary of the liberalism and permissiveness of the secular private schools, and some are critical of the elitism of the Islamic private schools. The Gülen schools are secular, but they try to maintain a balance between the needs of the individual and the society. They stress the building of character and cultivating universal moral values, and at the same time, they provide an excellent education in order to prepare learners to become useful citizens of the society. These schools are open to all learners, irrespective of religious persuasion, cultural background or socio-economic status.

This paper is divided into three main parts: First, it introduces the problem of educational dichotomy in Turkey since 1924, and it touches upon how Fethullah Gülen attempted to reconcile science and religion. Second, it deals with the educational theory of Fethullah Gülen, especially his moral education, with focus on the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge and moral values to humanity. Third, it will deal with the practice of Gülen's educational theory, with reference to Star International High School, Cape Town; examining the motivations of the teachers, the moral ethos of the school, and educational problems and prospects.

The first Turkish school, Star International High, was established in Cape Town in 1999. Since then two more were established, one in Durban (Star International) and one in Johannesburg (Horizon International School). These are private secular high schools, they follow the curriculum of the Department of National Education, and they are open to all children, Muslim or non-Muslim. One of the reasons for their great success in Turkey is that the educators have a vision inspired by Fethullah Gülen. This paper will elaborate on this vision and show how it is being implemented in South Africa. The Turkish inspired schools embrace learners from a diverse religious, ethnic, class, and cultural background. The school fosters social virtues such as respect, co-operation and tolerance; preparing learners to integrate into a pluralist, democratic society. For the Muslim minority, the school provides an opportunity for learners to cultivate moral values in a secular environment; assisting in their integration into a society that is a Christian majority. This model could be replicated in other countries where Muslims are a minority. It demonstrates that it is possible to retain one's distinct Islamic identity and at the same time integrate into the broader society.

Moral values are not taught as special subjects such as 'Right living' or 'Guidance'. Relegating morality to a subject taught in a period once a week is already a sign of moral failure. Morality has to shape the vision and ethos of the school, and has to be integrated into classroom lessons; moreover, it has to be lived and practiced by the teachers.

The Educational Dichotomy in Turkey

Since 1924 the Kemalist regime identified the problem of Turkey to lie within religion, which it believes to have been the cause of the neglect of science and the backwardness of Turkey. Consequently, it promoted the pursuit of science, but at the expense of religion and

the humanities. The secular state kept religion out of the domain of politics, and public education. Religion had to remain a private affair, and the educational system had to be secular. However, one period a week was left for religious instruction in the school curriculum, in case parents demanded it.

The religionists, on the other hand, had no faith in the new secular system of education, and kept out of it, and continued to promote religious education, but their graduates were marginalized and could not make a significant contribution to civil society. Said Nursi (d. 1960), a Turkish Islamic philosopher, realized the problem of conflict and dichotomy between the secular and religious, and sought to remedy it by harmonizing religion with science. There is no reason why a religious Muslim cannot also have a deep interest in science; after all, Islam encourages study and reflection on nature. Nursi's *risale—nur* (Treatise of Light), devoted to reconciling science with religion, opposed the blind positivistic conception of science, but promoted an indigenous understanding of science for Muslims. He promoted science as a study of the laws of nature, a study of God's art.

Fethullah Gülen, a younger contemporary of Nursi, was inspired by the *Risale-i Nur*, and so also promoted the harmony between science and religion. He sees scientific education and Islamic education as compatible and complementary. Although he was educated in traditional institutions, he has urged his sympathizers to open modern schools rather than traditional madrasas and mosques. For him, as with Nursi, an ideal education combines modern science with Islamic knowledge. Scientific knowledge without religion could lead to atheism, while religious knowledge without science could lead to bigotry and fanaticism. When combined, they urge a student to research further, and deepen both his belief and knowledge (Kuru, 2003:120; Yilmaz, 2005: 203-204).

He argues that science and technology cannot explain the meaning and the purpose of life, and they may be harmful for humankind if unjust and irresponsible people manipulate them. Science can neither provide true happiness nor replace the role of religion. Moreover, he emphasizes that the development of physics in the twentieth century shook positivist science (Kuru, 2003: 120)

But unlike Nursi, Gülen promoted this harmony through schools all over the world. This did not imply the Islamization of knowledge as we know it today.¹ There was no attempt to infuse Islamic elements into the secular curriculum. All he wanted was for committed Muslim teachers to excel in the sciences. Through education they could “raise a generation both deeply rooted in Islam and able to participate in the modern scientific world. He aspires to create an educated elite within the Islamic *umma* in general and within the Turkish nature in particular” (Agai, 2003: 50). High quality education will prepare religious Muslims for careers previously reserved for the Kemalist regime. This brought Gülen into trouble with the secular state. How could a religious man harmonize science with religion? This was an affront to the secular Turkish state that had tried to undermine the role of religion in public affairs for almost a century.

Modern secular schools, Gülen holds, have been unable to free themselves of the prejudices and conventions of modern ideology, whereas the madrasas have shown little interest or capability to meet the challenges of technology and scientific thought. These madrasas lack the

1 Since the 1980's the “Islamization of Knowledge” became popular, first among the Muslims of America, and then the rest of the Muslim world, where Islamic schools and universities mushroomed with the aim of Islamizing knowledge, including science. Gülen, in my view, was not preoccupied with Islamization; his focus was on natural science (not the social sciences), and it was important to pursue science, provided it could be combined with faith and ethics.

flexibility, vision, and ability to break with the past, to enact change, and to offer a relevant education for today. The challenge today is to integrate the strengths of the traditional education with the modern education. The youth must rise above the current education that diverts them from knowledge and reason. Gülen also encouraged greater accessibility and a higher standard of education for women (Michel, 2003: 72; Yilmaz, 2005: 203-204).

With a balanced education learners can become agents of positive change; but if they do not have ideals, and are only taught marketable skills, they will add to the crises of the society. Intellectuals seem to prefer “the spiritually impoverished and technologically obsessed modern culture to a traditional cultural foundation that grew in sophistication and subtlety over the centuries” (Michel, 2003:74). Teacher training is essential; not only in methodology, but also in nurturing the whole person. Teachers should lead by example, otherwise they cannot hope to reform others. Gülen states: “In order to bring others to the path of traveling to a better world, they must purify their inner worlds of hatred, rancor, and jealousy, and adorn their outer world with all kinds of virtues” (Michel, 2003:78). Thus, teachers have to combine the study of science with character development. Success must be measured by scientific progress and moral progress. Material advancement without morality will destroy humanity.

The overall aim of overcoming the dichotomy of education is to create a “golden generation” armed with the tools of science and religion. By combining knowledge and human values, this new generation (*yeni nesil*) will solve the problems of the future (Agai, 2003: 57). Faith teaches what is good and beneficial, and combined with science, can benefit humanity. This idea gained support after 1980, and this integrated approach was (Agai: 2003: 57) considered to be a better alternative to the Kemalist education, which tended to undermine religion and alienate the modernised elite from their traditional roots (Agai, 2003: 58).

Yilmaz refers to the official state version of Islam as ‘Lausannian Islam’, which means that state and religion are to be kept separate, but the Turkish character of ‘Lausannian Islam’ is somewhat contradictory in that it attempts to keep religion out of public life by having it under the supervision of the state. Thus, although the constitution allows for religious instruction, it controls its transmission to learners (Yilmaz, 2005:389). Thus, the Kemalist regime does not remove religion entirely from the curriculum, but monitors it to its own advantage. Gülen schools, by contrast, operate independently of the state; indirectly challenging it; showing that progressiveness is not the monopoly of the secularists, and that religious teachers can also be progressive.

Although the educational theory comes from Fethullah Gülen, the curriculum and management of the schools are left to the educators. Turkish merchants also play no role in the management of the school; they leave all educational decisions to the principals and teachers. Funding comes from Turkey, from local Turkish merchants living in South Africa, and from some South African companies (Interview, Kemalettin Ozdemir, and May 2006). For Gülen, education should prepare learners to be useful citizens and good persons. Good schools cultivate virtues in their pupils, and lead them to achieve nobility of mind and spirit. The real teacher is one who sows the pure seed and preserves it. It is his duty to be occupied with what

is good and wholesome, and to guide the child accordingly.

Since the Gülen schools have a scientific orientation, they make sure they are equipped with the best laboratories and computer rooms. They want the learners to excel in these areas; enhancing the scientific character of the school. Literature and the humanities, however, have been neglected.²

For Gülen, there is no conflict between the Qur'an and the universe; the universe is a mighty Qur'an, reflecting the signs of God's existence. Religion does not oppose or limit science and scientific work; it guides the sciences, determines their goals, and infuses human values in them (Gülen, 2002: 80-81). Thus, the pursuit of science is consistent with the Qur'an, and can enhance faith, provided it is directed by religion. However, religion is superior to science as it prepares one for the eternal world, but science prepares one for this transient world. For science to benefit humanity, it has to be guided by faith. Religious truths are superior because they are absolute; but scientific truths are relative as they are changing all the time. The scientific truths in the Qur'an are not meant to be ends in themselves, but they serve a higher purpose which is to serve religion, a source of spiritual and moral guidance to humanity. If a scientific truth conflicts with a religious truth, and reconciliation has failed, we should favour the religious truth. The absolute truth of religion is the deciding factor in judging the scientific truth (Bakar, 2005: 362-363).

The Educational Philosophy of Fethullah Gülen

Gülen emphasized character building as an integral part of his educational philosophy, and his concept of character is based on a classical humanist conception of the soul.

The Psychology of the Soul

The key to the nurturing of moral character is knowledge of the soul. Gülen adopts the classical Platonic tripartite division of the soul as the foundation for explaining human psychology, and his moral education is based on it. Inspired by Miskawayh (d. 1030), he identifies the three faculties of the soul; the rational, the irascible and the concupiscent, representing reason, anger and lust. When moderated, these virtues give rise to courage, wisdom and temperance respectively. When these three faculties are moderated, the virtue of justice emerges. These four virtues are the core content of the internal morality of the soul. The rational faculty controls the two lower faculties of the soul. If properly nourished, it will moderate (not obliterate) lust and anger, which have a useful purpose.³ In keeping with this optimistic view

2 The school wants its matriculants to study science at a higher level, and will offer scholarships in the hope that the graduate will serve the school for a few years before working in their own professions. Mr Mejit Yaman, for example, graduated from a Gülen school in Turkey; did his degree in science, and taught in a Gülen school in Cape Town. He completed his Masters and Doctoral degrees at the University of Cape Town while teaching at the school. He is now back in Turkey, currently doing his military service. Gülen apparently has a personal bias for the humanities, but for practical reasons, his schools gave more attention to science. He is now urging educators to also give attention to literature and the social sciences.

3 On Miskawayh's psychology of the soul, and its comparison with al-Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 1060) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), see Yasien Mohamed's *The Path to Virtue: The Ethical Philosophy of al-Raghib al-Isfahani*. Gülen was inspired by these Muslim philosophers, who all adopted the Platonic tripartite division of the soul, and made it the basis for their ethical philosophy. Although Gülen might not identify with modern humanism, he was inspired by classical Greek and Islamic humanism; he had an open mind, and accepted ideas from any source, provided they could be harmonized with the Qur'an.

His attitude to humanism might have changed after he migrated to America. There is perhaps an attempt to reconcile

of human nature, Gülen states:

We must not seek to annul our drives, but to use our free will to contain and purify them, to channel and direct them toward virtue. For example, we are not expected to eliminate lust, but to satisfy it lawfully through reproduction. Happiness lies in confining our lawful bounds of decency and chastity, not in engaging in debauchery and dissipation. Similarly, jealousy can be channeled into emulation free of rancor, which inspires us to emulate those who excel in goodness and good deeds. Applying the proper discipline to our reason results in the acquisition of knowledge, and ultimately of understanding or wisdom. Purifying and training anger leads to courage and forbearance. Disciplining our passion and desire develops our chastity (Gülen, 2002, 60; Gülen, 2006:203-204).

The teacher educates the whole child, mind and soul. When we rise above our animal self, through reason, we are exalted to the state of humanity. Man stands midway between animal and angel; he is not completely animal because he has reason, nor is he completely angel because he has desire. To be human, he rises above his animal nature, and this leads him to happiness in this world and the next. For this, he needs knowledge, which is an innate desire. Unlike the animal, who learns through instinct, man only matures with knowledge through the passage of time. Gülen states:

We are born helpless as well as ignorant of the laws of life and must cry out to get help we need. After a year or so, we can stand on our feet and walk a little. When we are about 15 we are expected to have understood the difference between good and evil, the beneficial and the harmful. However, it will take us our whole lives to acquire intellectual and spiritual perfection. Our principle duty in life is to acquire perfection and purity in our thinking, conceptions and belief. By fulfilling our duty of servanthood to the Creator, Nourisher and Protector, and by penetrating the mystery of creation through our potentials and faculties, we seek to attain to the rank of true humanity, and become worthy of a blissful, eternal life in another, exalted world (Gülen, 2002: 58; Gülen, 2006:202).

It may take us 20 years to acquire what a sparrow does in 20 days. The animal is not born to learn, but humans are, and it may take a life-time to “reach clarity of thought, imagination, and belief” (Gülen, 2002, 79; Gülen, 2006: 195). As mentioned, the discipline of our lower faculties is the key to our humanity. This requires the perfection of the soul in order to escape from the “dungeon” of our lower desires. Education, which includes belief and worship, is the key to perfecting the soul.

We are creatures composed of not only of a, body or mind or feelings or spirit; rather, we are harmonious compositions of all of these elements. Each of us is a body writhing in a net of needs, as well as a mind that has more subtle and vital needs than the body, and is driven by anxieties about the past and future to find answers to such questions as: “What am I? What is this world? What do life and death want from me? Who sent me to this world, and for what purpose? Where am I going, and what is the purpose of life? Who is my guide in this worldly journey?” Moreover, each person is a creature of feelings that cannot be satisfied by the mind, and a creature of spirit, through which we acquire our essential human identity. Each individual is all of these. When a man or a woman, around whom all systems and efforts revolve, is considered and evaluated as a creature

tasawwuf (Sufism) with modern science; the former providing the path to moral perfection (*seyr ul suluk*). Sufi teaching is connected to his educational theory because Sufism gives so much attention to nurturing moral values. Gülen’s reference to Miskawayh (who was also influenced by Plato and Aristotle) is a clear indication of his affinity to the classical Islamic humanistic philosophical tradition. See

Afsarudin, ‘The Philosophy of Islamic Education: Classical Views and M. Fethullah

Gülen’s Perspectives’, for more details on Gülen in the context of classical Islamic thought.

with all these aspects, and when all our needs are fulfilled, we will reach true happiness. At this point, true human progress and evolution in relation to our essential being is only possible with education (Gülen, 2002, 78; Gülen, 2006:194).

Home Education

Education begins at home, and the school is merely an extension of the home. Teachers do not merely provide information, but also nurture the whole personality, both intellectual and emotional aspects. Sound characters produce a sound society, but parents and teachers should set the example. The preparation begins with knowledge.

A nation's future depends on its youth. Any people who want to secure their future should apply as much energy to raising their children as they devote to other issues. ...The reasons for the vices observed in today's generation, as well as the incompetence of some administrators and other nation-wide troubles, lie in the prevailing conditions and ruling elite of 25 years ago. Likewise, those who are charged with educating today's young people will be responsible for the vices and that will appear in another 25 years. Those who wish to predict a nation's virtues future can do so correctly by taking a full account of the education and upbringing given to its young people. "Real" life is possible only through knowledge. Thus, those who neglect learning and teaching should be counted as "dead" even though they are living, for we were created to learn and communicate to others what we have learned. Right decisions depend on having a sound mind and being capable of sound thought. Science and knowledge illuminate and develop the mind. For this reason, a mind deprived of science and knowledge cannot reach right decisions, is always exposed to deception, and is subject to being misled (Gülen, 2002, 62; Gülen, 2006:205).

Parents have the responsibility of nurturing the minds of their children. It is therefore important to consider choosing the proper partner for marriage. Moral character should be considered above that of wealth and physical charm.

Children can receive a good education at home only if there is a healthy family life. Thus marriage should be undertaken to form a healthy family life and so contribute to the permanence of one's nation in particular, and of the human population in general. Peace, happiness, and security at home are the mutual accord between the spouses in thought, morals, and belief. Couples who decide to marry should know each other very well and consider purity of feelings, chastity, morality, and virtue rather than wealth and physical charm. Children's mischief and impudence reflect the atmosphere in which they are being raised. A dysfunctional family life increasingly reflects upon the child's spirit, and therefore upon society. Parents must feed their children's minds with knowledge and science before their minds become engaged in useless things, for souls without truth and knowledge are fields in which evil thoughts are cultivated and grown. (Gülen, 2002, 72; Gülen, 2006:207).

The Teacher: his Morality and Industry

Teachers should have an integrated perspective so that they are able to nurture the heart and mind of learners in a balanced way. The idea is not to make a radical break with the traditional past, for this will lead to modernity without morality. It is not enough to have material success for the global market, but also non-material values such as clarity of thought and moral character. The school should not produce people who are greedy, but people who are generous. There is nothing wrong with a salary, but the main motive should service to humanity.

In Western countries such as the USA, the focus of the curriculum has been to prepare students for a career that will make them money, but not to prepare them to be religious or moral. Wealth accumulation for its own sake is wrong. Knowledge should not be guided by utilitarian aims, but should nurture character. School should not be a place where moral

values are taught in a certain period in the week; but they should be part of the school ethos, and teachers should transfuse them to their students.

Gülen asserts throughout his writings that knowledge should be combined with love. Knowledge is the province of the sciences and provides students with the intellectual abilities to benefit others; but it will only benefit humanity if it is combined with love, which is a “person’s most essential element” (Gülen, 2002: 41). By love, he means self-sacrificing love that initiates action by absolute obedience to God, and out of concern for others, rather than for utilitarian gain. This love entails abnegation and the conviction to transform life on earth (Yavuz, 2003: p. 34). Such a love is the foundation of pedagogy. Consequently, not all teachers are educators. Gülen (2004) asserts, “Education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but only a very few can educate” (p. 208). Teaching merely conveys information, but educating includes giving knowledge and moral guidance. True teachers are preoccupied with what is good and wholesome (Gülen, 2004: 208). Teaching is a “sacred” activity that brings about positive change. Teachers transmit knowledge with wisdom, and moral guidance with personal example. The goal is to produce a “Golden Generation” that integrates spirituality and knowledge, heart and mind (Gülen, 1998; Gülen, 1996)

The teachers are carefully selected. Those who had a Gülen schooling are preferred as they are more likely to sacrifice their time and talent. Certain countries attract teachers from certain parts of Turkey. The Turkmenistan school, for example, attracts teachers from the prestigious Turgut Özal High School in Turkey.

Focus should be on *temsil* (example), not *tebliğ* (preaching). Preaching alienates, not attracts people (Balci, 2003: 10-16). Representation, not presentation, attracts people. Teachers should embody universal values, know their learners well, and appeal to their heads and their hearts (Aslandoğan and Çetin: 2006: 37).

A Kyrgyz student said that he prefers the school as it develops his morality and a positive attitude to religion. Turkish teachers want to serve Turkmenistan/Kyrgyzstan; they identify with, and adapt easily to the common language and culture of the learners. Parents support the school because of the high academic standard, and dedication of the teachers who share a common culture with them (Balci, 2003:10).

Teachers should refine their own minds and hearts so that they can help students acquire a penetrating vision into the reality of things. Knowledge should lead the learner to an appreciation of the creation, and through this, an appreciation of God.

These schools have been established on the model of Anadolu high schools, with superior technical equipment and laboratories. Lessons are given within the curriculum prepared by the Ministry of National Education. Religious subjects are not even taught. Activities take place within the framework of each country’s current laws and educational philosophy. For example, in Uzbekistan, after students learn Turkish and English in the preparatory class, they study science in English from Turkish teachers and social subjects in Uzbek from Uzbek teachers. Giving religious knowledge or religious education is not the goal (Gülen, 2002: 87).

For Gülen, a teacher’s work is holy; he is blessed, albeit that he is teaching secular subjects. The world is sacred; even a school where so-called secular subjects are taught (Gülen 1998b, 17). The teacher performs one of the highest duties in Islam, *hizmet*, which implies both

religious and national service (Agai, 2003: 59). This service for others is also beneficial for life after death. However, the religious motivation behind this service must be projected with discretion. The projection of moral values should not be confused with the projection of religion. Teachers should apply discretion and prudence in their teaching (*tedbir*).⁴ Prudence is not only applied to the teaching of a subject, but also to promoting moral values. Without it, people will get the wrong impression, and think that the teacher is preaching Islam.

In Johannesburg, the pupils are mainly Christian Africans; in Durban they are mainly Hindu Indians, and in Cape Town, half the learners are coloured Christians and about half are Muslims. As a secular school, with pupils from a diverse religious background, it would not be prudent to promote Islam overtly. This would alienate non-Muslim learners and parents, and the school would lose its non-Muslim support. Moral values are shared by all religions, and so their promotion would not alienate the non-Muslim learners. The moral ethos of the school is then a distinctive feature of the school.

Teachers are inspired by Gülen's educational theory, but there is no organic link with him as the schools are managed autonomously. Naturally, there is a degree of consultation with Turkish educators at the national level, but this is intended to help improve administrative efficiency and academic excellence.

A moral concept that is applied to teachers is that of *hijrah* (migration). A true believer is always ready for migration. After several years of service, a teacher may be asked to move to a school in another province or country. The reason for this could be academic or moral. A physics teacher may be asked to move to a school where he is more needed, or because of his complacency and boredom, he is placed in a school that is more challenging and reinvigorating. The moral reason fits in with the concept of migration. If a teacher stays in a school for as long as a decade, he is more likely to develop material attachments to his school, house, and friendships. If he is required to move to another school he will be most reluctant. But if his stay is for only five years, he will be able to make the *hijrah*.

Work is a religious duty (*hizmet*) as one is providing for one's family and giving charity to the community. It is called *hizmet*, holy duty; for God is the one who grants the craft one is suited to. Money from one's work should not be wasted on luxury and amusement.

The school benefits from this work-ethic in two ways. The merchants help the school from outside, and the teachers from the inside. The dedicated teachers perceive their profession as a duty to God (Agai, 2003: 59-61).

Teachers who transmit knowledge, even to non-Muslims, are serving Islam as they benefit humanity. Pupils can learn from Turkish teachers how to employ knowledge in a correct and beneficial way. Parents trust the teachers as pious Muslims who teach their children knowledge in a manner that is not perceived as contrary to Islam. Parents are happy with the school because they have a good reputation regarding both their technical skills and their moral qualities. The parents appreciate teachers who neither smoke nor drink, and are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of others.

4 When teaching evolution, for example, the teacher should give all views, the creationist, the evolutionist, and the scientific critique of evolution.

The Gülen Schools in South Africa

The Gülen schools have become the elite high schools in Turkey, the former Soviet republics, and in Africa. These are secular private schools inspected by state authorities and sponsored by parents and entrepreneurs. They follow secular, scientific, state-prescribed curricula and internationally recognized programs. For want of a better word, we use the term “Gülen schools”. This could be misleading as there is no organic link between Gülen and the schools, only a spiritual connection. The educators are inspired by Gülen’s educational theory, which has world-wide popularity. Parents are particularly impressed, by their achievement in the sciences and their stress on the exemplary moral character of teachers (Aslandoğan and Çetin: 2006:32-33).

While the South African educational system during Apartheid used to rest on a rather Christian monolithic world-view; there were private schools that took on an explicitly secular, Islamic or Jewish character, These schools generally conformed to a national curriculum, even if it meant that they introduced Arabic, Hebrew or German, subjects which were part of the national curriculum, but was offered either as part of the school’s requirement, or by parents demand. However, with the Post-Apartheid South Africa, the Christian character of the national curriculum was obliterated by the new democratic constitution, and schools now follow a secular curriculum that does not favour a particular religion. The new democracy allows for religious private schools, but they are required to follow the national curriculum. Obviously, they are free to add subjects to the approved curriculum; if it is an Islamic school, Arabic might be offered as an optional or compulsory subject, and if it is a Jewish school, Hebrew might be made compulsory.

Over the last fifteen years there has been a mushrooming of Islamic private schools in the country. During Apartheid, many public schools became unstable due to school boycotts and political unrest. This caused parents to send their children to secular and Christian private schools. With the establishment of the Islamic private school a new alternative was created.

Since 1999, the first Turkish private High school was introduced in Cape Town, The Star International High School, to provide a secular education based on the national curriculum, but with emphasis on moral values. This became an alternative school for Muslims, Christians, Africans and Hindus. For Muslims the Turkish school became an alternative to the Islamic schools because of its stress on moral values and its affinity to religion. It offers Muslim learners an opportunity to pursue a modern education with a moral orientation.

In the Gülen School, the Muslim child maintains an Islamic identity in a secular environment. This is not possible in the liberal state school, where religion or moral values are not respected and encouraged; nor is it possible in the Islamic private schools, where a Muslim laager mentality is nurtured, making it difficult for them to adapt to a secular culture and pluralistic context. It is this balance between preserving moral values of an Islamic identity, (but which are also shared by pupils of other religions), and adapting to a secular school context, that attracted many parents to send their children to these schools.

For many South African Muslims, the Islamic private schools were too elitist. They might have Islamic subjects such as Arabic and Islamic studies, but they have cultivated an attitude of materialism, not one based on morality and spirituality.⁵ Gülen schools have also been ac-

⁵ My cousin’s daughters are at an Islamic private school in Durban. They used travel to school with the BMW, but when he bought a new Toyota Corolla, they did not want to drive in it. It struck him that they are imbibing material values at an Islamic school! He took them out, and put them in a normal public school. My cousin has no problem

cused of elitism, but we shall return to this question later below.

There are three Star International High Schools managed by Horizon Educational Trust (HET); one in Cape Town, one in Durban and one in Johannesburg. They follow the state curriculum, but include Turkish as a language up till grade 11. The Fountain Education Trust (FET), also inspired by Gülen, also follow the state curriculum (Interview, K. Ozdemir, 31 May 2006), but they are in charge of the Islamic schools called the “Sama” schools. This paper will confine itself only to the schools managed by Horizon Educational Trust.

The Star Schools are distinguished by their emphasis on science, physics, biology and technology. The Trust ensures that they have the best science laboratory and computer rooms. Turkish teachers teach scientific subjects, and South African teachers teach English, Afrikaans, Geography and History.

The school is open to learners of various religious persuasions, and it is different from the Turkish state schools. In the Turkish state schools, religious instruction is offered, but not respected; but in the Gülen schools religious instruction is not offered, but respected.

In the Star International High, Cape Town, there is an equal number of Muslim and Christian learners, and so it is not possible for the school to promote a particular religion. However, there is no problem with teaching moral values, which are shared by other religions. Teachers would teach the moral values of peace and reconciliation, and would sometimes mention the examples of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. The school promotes sound Muslim-Christian relations, ⁶ and prepares learners to become citizens of a pluralist society. The school promotes faith, but it is tempered with respect and tolerance for other religions.

The school also has a Turkish character: the Turkish national anthem is sung, the Turkish flag is in some classrooms, and the Turkish language is taught. But this is not the purpose of the school; South African learners should be proud of their own national identity. Gülen’s vision is that Turkish teachers should serve humanity, not only Turks. Thus, the learner’s identity is also shaped by a humanitarian vision.

Do South African pupils feel alienated by the Turkish character of the school? This is not likely. About the Turkish anthem one pupil said: “No, I do not feel uncomfortable about it. It is like learning a Turkish poem or song, and adds to the special flavour of the school. We also sing the South African anthem; so there is no bias towards one national identity.”

The Educational Background of the Teachers

The Turkish teachers are practicing Muslims, and share in the educational philosophy of their teacher, Fethullah Gülen. However, they do not impose Islamic values and practices on the learners. They believe that moral example, not moral preaching, influences the learners. As mentioned, they do not teach religion, but moral values are imbibed in the school. One moral value is identified as a theme for each month.⁷

taking them to school in the Toyota Corolla.

6 The Fountain Educational Trust has a Dialogue Centre next to the Claremont Main Road Mosque, Claremont. The Trust arranges Iftar functions and group tours to Turkey. In the tour this year they visited Konya, Istanbul, Izmir and Cappadocia. Cappadocia is an ancient district in East–Central Anatolia. Professor Stanley Ridge, a Christian academic and vice-Rector of the University of the Western Cape, was part of the group. Mr Khalil, head of the Dialogue Centre, said: “The purpose of the tour is to build bridges among people of different religious persuasions”. I selected the academics from the University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch and the University of the Western Cape.

7 I visited the school in Sybrand Park. It is located in a middle-class area, centrally connected to the N2 that takes

The Turkish teachers are science graduates and have attended a school in their country. New teachers adapt easily to the school as they share in the vision and mission of their leader, Fethullah Gülen. Academically, they know they must dedicate themselves to service of the school, and socially they mix easily with fellow Turks who share the same religious and moral values. They know that their service at the school takes on a form of sacrifice: the sacrifice to leave one's country, to give of one's time, to share one's talent, and teach for an average wage.

Teachers sacrifice their time weekends by giving extra tuition to the learners, especially the matriculants. They participate in national workshops twice a year, and contribute to it by sharing their teaching experiences with a view to improving on their methods (Interview, K. Ozdemir, 31 May 2006).

Teachers are expected to be frugal; they are not permitted, or encouraged, to live in expensive apartments, drive expensive cars, and wear expensive clothes. It is believed that such extravagances could blemish the image of the school and damage the trust of the funders. However, teachers do not live in poverty; they earn a decent salary, receive hospital care and obtain a pension upon retirement. In Cape Town most Turkish teachers live in a middle-class area called Pinelands. In Durban they live in an upper-class area called Westville. This does not mean that they live in luxury homes; nor does it mean the school building in the area is elegant. In fact, the school is made of prefabricated structures, and it is not as attractive as the Cape Town one. Thus, the teacher's place of residence is determined by the proximity to the school, and not determined by class or social status. The health and pension benefits apply only to Turkish teachers. A frugal life-style is expected of the Turkish teachers only.

Religious instruction is not taught, but religious values are discernable in the teacher's example. However, moral values are taught, but not in a moralizing, preachy tone. More attention is given to the practice of moral values.⁸ The teacher does not project his Islamic identity in the classroom; neither does he conceal his identity outside the classroom. For example, when it is time for prayer, he prays. The teacher, instead, will direct his attention to moral values inside and outside the classroom. Values such as responsibility, accountability, self-control and forgiveness are emphasized. Each month has a different moral theme. The moral virtue for the month is pasted on the walls of the classroom and school, and the principal will remind parents about the moral virtue for the month or the term. The teacher's duty is to emulate the Prophet's mission captured in the Prophetic Tradition (*hadith*): "Verily I have been sent to perfect character."

one straight into the city. The area is green, with trees on both sides of the spacious roads. The school is clean, and well-maintained. In the Grade 8B classroom, I saw a South African flag and a Turkish flag on the wall. I read the following values on the classroom wall:

March: Respect: Yourself, Family, community, country

May: good hope, perseverance, compassion, love

July: thankfulness, gratitude, appreciation

August: unity, loyalty, solidarity, peace, friendship

These words are also on the wall of the school. I saw the principal one Saturday put them up himself.

⁸ Learners will probably notice the teachers praying, and if they should ask a teacher about it, he should not hesitate to say: "We are Muslims and this is our prayer time". But this comes only in response to a question. Focus should be on example (*tamsil*), not preaching (*teblig*).

Turkish university graduates, who obtained a scholarship from the Trust, may feel morally obliged, but not legally compelled, to teach in a Gülen School before working in their own area of specialization (Interview, İlhami Demirtaş, May 2006). Turkish teachers are qualified academically for the subject that they teach; some have MA or MSc degrees. Not many, however, have a teacher's diploma or a Degree in Education. This can be a drawback in the system as the teachers may not be able to cope with the less intelligent child. Nevertheless, the school is not aimed at the struggling child, but a child with average or above average intelligence. In this sense the school may be regarded as elitist, but it is only academically elitist; for the norm is to be selective with admission on academic grounds.

Star International High, Cape Town, arranged and hosted the Star Maths Competition for several years, and has attracted learners from different schools to participate. This ought to have been good exposure for the school, but it has not helped in increasing the school enrolment. So far, the matriculation results were not good, and since the inception of the school, only two matriculants obtained distinctions.

Transformation took place in 2005 when the school moved to a new building in Sybrand Park. It used to be a Jewish school, but it is now rented out to the Turks. The new school building is larger, greener and safer. It is now attracting a better class of learners at the Grade 8 level, which is the first year of high school. This year it had a big enrolment, and two Grade 8 classes had to be formed. One class is composed of brighter learners, and five years later, they will be the cream of the crop to obtain excellent results. Currently, there are only three matriculants, but they are excellent learners, and the school is expecting them to obtain distinctions and merit passes. This could be a turning point in the positive publicity of the school.

The Support of the Turkish Merchants

For Gülen, the whole world is sacred; so merchants should donate, not only to a mosque, but also to schools. They will be blessed in this world and the next world. The merchants know the power of knowledge, especially science and technology, but they also know that it should be linked to religion. The focus on science led to the neglect of the humanities; hence, Gülen has recently announced that attention should also be given to the social sciences, including history, human geography and literature.⁹

The total number of Turkish schools world-wide exceeds 500, and most of them are self-financing. New schools require financial backing, usually from Turkish voluntary organizations made up of Turkish merchants (Baydar, 2007:2). The merchants of a particular region in Turkey take responsibility for funding the school in Cape Town. Student fees also provide income, but no profit can be made as the school is not well-established. Local Turkish merchants and South African commercial companies also support the school, especially for the school functions and the Olympiad competitions.

Inasmuch as Turkish teachers share their Turkish culture with the pupils, they also learn

9 I attended a conference last year in Johannesburg on Islamic Civilization in Africa, and Dr Khalid Iren of ISRICA announced that scholarships are available for those who want to study the social studies in Istanbul. This coincided with my paper, which was on the neglect of the humanities in the Gülen schools.

Mr. İlhami said: "Gülen's personal bias is for literature and the humanities, but his focus on science was in response to the challenges in Turkey. Today, science subjects are important to fill the need for careers in these fields. In South Africa, it is imperative to offer science subjects; otherwise parents will not support the school. Equal attention can be given to social studies, but not at the expense of the natural sciences".

from the positive elements of South African culture, and return to their country enriched as educators (Baydar, 2007:2). Tahsin Tumer, the head of the Gülen schools in South Africa, said: “We educate a total of 1, 400 learners now. Fifty one of our teachers are from Turkey, 71 are from South Africa. [We have good relations] with the local authorities are very good” (Baydar, 2007:2). Turkish teachers live in rented flats; earn a salary (with benefits) of 1, 300 dollars a month. One third is married to Turks (Baydar, 2007:2).

Turkish teachers are dedicated. They earn a small, but decent salary, and are not focused on the material goods of this world, but the spiritual goods of the next world (Gülen, 2002: 86). They earn less than local teachers, but if married, they earn more than teachers who are bachelors. Principals earn a bit more, but have more responsibilities. Local teachers are paid on time, but Turkish teachers sometimes wait for their salaries placidly. They know that their purpose is not material gain, but to provide a service. They do not have the mind-set of the local teachers who are in the routine of working only from 8am to 3pm. Turkish teachers have a work-ethic that transcends working hours, and consider themselves on duty for 24 hours a day. With an average of 6 000 Rands a month, they can live decently, but not extravagantly. Even if they can manage to be extravagant, perhaps on account of parental support, they feel morally constrained to remain within the limits of moderation and frugality. Immoderation in the acquisition of material goods is frowned upon by the organization.¹⁰

The Turkish merchants opened up the Gülen schools in Africa either for humanitarian reasons or for trade (Interview, K. Ozdemir, 31 May 2006). Nowadays, Gülen is urging them to become as rich as they can. If they are wealthy, they will not only be able to give more in the form of *zakah* and *sadaqah*, but will also be in a position to allocate ten percent of their turnover to the organization. Some merchants give half their profits to the schools! Merchants are now working harder than before, not only to provide for their families, but also for the Trust. One merchant is donating virtually all his money for a major school project in Johannesburg.¹¹

The organization ensures that teachers maintain a decent standard of living. To allay any anxiety about future material insecurity, provision is made for medical care and a pension when they retire. If a teacher needs to be hospitalized, or should have an operation, the organization is there to take care of all the expenses. They are not subject to a medical aid, and the anxieties associated with it; especially when there is a strict limit to the use of medicines, and when they have to pay out of their pockets for medical service that charge more than the medical aid rates.

It is important that funders maintain the trust in the Turkish educators, and be assured that all monies will be used for what it was intended; be it the payment of rent, salaries or computer facilities. A decent, but frugal, life-style among teachers is important to sustain this trust and

10 Most Turkish teachers live in Pinelands, a middle-class, predominantly English area. They stay in two-bedroom spacious apartments. They adapt to each other very well even though they never met before in Turkey. They share a common vision, and so get along with each other, including their wives who belong to the same organization.

11 Mr Ali, a seventy- one year old wealthy Turkish merchant, visited Cape Town in the first week of August 2007, and met the Premier Ebrahim Rasool. His wish is to build a school (with a mosque attached) in Johannesburg before he dies. He says: “ I am like a fruit on a tree that will fall any time, so I should not be a wasted fruit, and therefore I want to see the school come up as soon as possible”. Mr Ali is donating 15 million dollars for the project in the Midrand. The mosque should have a Sinan architectural style. The project should be built on a ground of 130 000 square metres. It will have shopping malls that will bring in rental income to maintain the complex (Interview with Ithami, 9th August 2007). A similar project might be built in Cape Town if land is made available.

to allay any possible suspicion.¹²

The Academic Standard and the Admission Policy

The Gülen schools pride themselves in maintaining a high academic standard, having highly qualified educators, providing individual attention, and keeping close communication with parents.¹³ The mission statement of the Cape Town school reads as follows:

We accept it as our mission to offer high quality education with appropriate facilities, equipment and infra-structure to enhance the learning experience of our students. In order to implement this we constantly strive to improve and achieve more in all aspects. This is being conducted even faster in our new location [in Sybrand Park]. The school also practices the latest available teaching methods as well as a set of universal values that will build the character of the learners. Through imparting these values we aim to help them to become respectable and distinguished members of the society.¹⁴

Star International Cape Town is a private school, but cannot compete with the historically well-established private schools such as Bishops.¹⁵ The educators are aware of this, and so their ambitions are tempered with realism, and they are setting their target on competing with the Model C schools such as Westerford High.¹⁶

The Model C schools are the historically white public schools that have had better facilities during the Apartheid era, but are now open to all races. The school fees are much higher than the public schools, but they are on par with the cheaper private schools such as Star International High and Islamia College. The matriculants of the Model C schools obtain better results than those coming from the public schools. Star

International aims at academic excellence, so they do not aspire to compete with the public schools, but will rather make the Model C its yardstick for comparison. So far, it is not yet at the academic level of the Model C school, but it has the potential to equal it, or surpass it. Already, the Durban Star learners obtained better Matriculation results than many Model C learners.

12 The first group of Turkish teachers came to Cape Town, and shared a house in Claremont (two persons per room). The school started in Retreat. When it moved to Athlone, the teachers came to live in Pinelands, the first English garden town. From here it is easy to commute to school, it is against the traffic, and quick into Klipfontein Road. The teachers live in two bed-room spacious apartments with an average rent of R 3 500 per month. It is decent and affordable. The sub-economic standard of the school in Athlone attracted learners from Manenburg, Athlone and Mitchells-Plane. In 2005 the school moved to Sybrand Park, a middle-class area. The school spent R 200 000 to improve the gardens and build computer rooms and a science laboratory. The change was significant. Middle-class families supported the school, and in 2007, there was a large enrolment, and two classes of Grade 8 pupils were opened (Interview, Ilhami, 9th August, 2007).

13 See Star International Primary-High School (est. 1999) brochure: Other special features mentioned in the school brochure (printed 2007) are: recreational opportunities, fully equipped science lab, computer room with internet, special camps, trips and excursions, annual student shows, extra-mural and club activities, disciplined and caring environment, secure and safe atmosphere, latest educational policies and practices.

14 See Star International Brochure, Cape Town, 2007.

15 Bishops is an independent boys' school situated in Rondebosch in Cape Town, which provides instruction from Grade 0 to Grade 12 (ages 6 – 18), with a post-matric unit as well. The school was founded by Robert Gray, Bishop of Cape Town, in 1849. The school's formal name is the Diocesan College, but it is widely known as 'Bishops'. The school's character arises from its Christian foundation, its history, its position in southern Africa and the values which it strives to embody and to impart to its pupils.

16 Westerford is a co-educational High school located close to the Newlands Rugby Ground and Table-Mountain, and was established on 21st January 1953.

The Gülen schools have a reputation for good results, but this is not the only reason why parents send their children to these schools. They are also impressed by its moral ethos. The Cape Town school has not done as well academically as the Durban school. The matriculants of the latter school obtained 100% distinctions. The reasons for this are as follows: Firstly, Mr. Yasar¹⁷, the principal, established the school in Westville, an upper-class area in Durban. The location itself attracted the middle-class families to enroll their children. With the increasing demand, the school could afford to be stricter in their admission of learners. Secondly, the senior learners stay in the school dormitory under the supervision of a tutor and some teachers, who ensure that they do their schoolwork from sunset till midnight. Thirdly, they have a team of dedicated teachers who have a passion for the subject they teach, and who can teach it with clarity and effectiveness. Teachers will also sacrifice their time at the week-long study camps¹⁸ and weekend-tuition.

By contrast, Star International High, Cape Town, did not perform as well as Durban. The first Gülen school was established in Cape Town, and so this was a first experience for the Turkish teachers. They soon came to realize that the learners have a different cultural background to the learners in Turkey and Russia where they have been very successful. The pupils are not as docile as they expected, and much more was required to maintain the discipline of the learners. So far, the school only obtained two distinctions in the matriculation level. Let us review the main reasons for their poor academic performance. Firstly, the school was in Athlone, a sub-economic area.¹⁹ The school was rundown and had a shabby appearance, and so attracted mainly working class and lower-middle class families. A school should not be judged purely on the grounds of its physical appearance, but a school which is unknown to the public is bound to be judged simply on that basis. The principal said: “The parents were not so cooperative; they hardly attended the meetings and school functions. A reason for this could be the inadequate public transport and lack of safety at night (Interview, İlhami, August, 2007). Secondly, there is the problem of the English communicative ability of the Turkish teachers. Generally, teachers who are science graduates have a reading ability in English, but mainly for scientific subjects. When they come to Cape Town they become fluent in English, and this is only after five or seven years, depending also on how much they mix and practice with non-Turkish friends.

While they are still improving their English, they are not effective communicators, and this is what undermines the efficacy of their teaching. Hence, the learning and discipline of pupils are affected.²⁰ Thirdly, the rotation of teachers proved to be more disadvantageous than advantageous. The disadvantage is that just when the teacher has acquired English fluency, perhaps after five years, he is then posted to another school. The new teacher has to now also

17 Former principal of Star International, Cape Town; later moved to Durban to start the school there. He learnt from the failure of the Cape Town experiment, and adopted a strict admission policy in Durban.

18 At these week-long camps pupils revise Science and Mathematics under the guidance of teachers. Nabil Mohamed went to Durban this year twice to participate in the Week-study camp. Board and lodging are provided at the school dormitory. He said: ‘I benefitted greatly from Mr Binder, the mathematics and physics tutor; he has years of experience and an excellent method of teaching. I was also inspired by the Durban learners who have high aspirations; some are aiming for seven A’s’.

19 The school was first located in Retreat, which is on the outskirts of the city, and therefore quite far to travel. It moved its premises to Athlone, which is much more central, with easy access into town.

20 English fluency is imperative, even for the teaching of science subjects. For Gülen, the educator is concerned with the whole child, not only the subject being taught. A Turkish teacher said: “I teach mathematics, I do not need to be fluent in English”. I disagreed, and said: “In what language do you discipline the child?” He replied: “In English”. Discipline suffers when there is a failure to communicate.

adapt to the new environment, not only in building up his English skills, but also in adapting to the culture and background of the learners. The pupils in turn also have to adapt to the new teacher. This rotation undermines the stability and regularity of the school, and so, the school is not able to develop its unchanging character and image. The teachers make up the backbone of the school; they determine the character and ethos of the school; parents come to associate the school with its teachers and not with the physical building or location of the school.

It is inevitable that a new school will have its initial problems, but we have to judge it ultimately for its final outcomes. Thus, we turn to its achievements and future prospects. The school made major progress since it moved to Sybrand Park in 2005. The new location and more attractive physical structure of the school made an instant difference to the enrolment of learners from middle-class families. In 2007, on account of the large enrolment of grade 8s, the school was compelled to form two separate classes. This reflects the increasing support and demand for the school.

The matriculants of 2007 are expected to do exceptionally well. Judging from the June reports, half the class is expected to obtain distinctions. In future, the school can be choosy as to the quality of learners it wants to admit. Admission will be based on academic standards, not class or creed. Strict admission is not the policy of the school, but Mr Ilhami, the principal, indicated that is important in the South African context. He said: “Although not ethical, we have to adopt a strict admissions policy, otherwise we cannot ensure merit and distinction passes. Olympiad competitions and medals have worked elsewhere, but not in South Africa, where the school is judged purely on the basis of matriculation results (Ilhami: Interview, August, 2006).²¹

This new realization led Mr Ilhami to adopt a stricter admission policy, which excluded more of the working class families, not because of the class they belong to, but because they happen to be less anxious to see their children aspire towards excellence. Thus, it is not elitism on the basis of class that determines the admission criteria, but pure academic performance. The school wants to ensure that there is a reasonable through-put, and that even if they subsidize the child’s education, they must know that there is a greater chance of academic accomplishment and completion by the end of Grade 12. The school cannot admit learners purely on the basis of compassionate grounds, but only on academic merit.

The stricter admission policy will eventually do more for the publicity of the school than any Olympiad competition or gold medal awards. The fruit of it will be seen five years later when those learners are in Grade 12 and their names appear in the newspapers showing that they have obtained distinction and merit passes.

It is usual for Gülen schools to obtain gold and silver awards in Mathematics, Science, Computers and English in the Olympiad competitions held in various countries. This has created a sense of achievement and prestige,²² but not in South Africa. Since the inception of the

21 At a conference in September, 2006, Johannesburg, I presented a paper on Turkish education in South Africa, and one person asked a question: “How is it that the Turks are Muslims but they do not offer Islamic subjects such as tawhid, hadith, Qur’an reciting etc.” I said that this was a secular school, but they were still sceptical, until I said: “The Star International in Durban obtained 100% distinctions in grade 12.” I suddenly received a positive response, and some parents wanted to enroll their children at the Durban school.

22 To maintain high standards, weekend and holiday skills training for staff are provided. The school seeks to cultivate a competitive spirit, which is evident by sending children to the academic “Olympic” contests for high-school students all around the world. The pupils have returned with Gold and Silver medals.

Cape Town school, it has attained 23 gold medals; but they have no real meaning as parents' decisions are based mainly on academic results at the matriculation level. The proximity to the school, numbers in the class, and the moral ethos of the school, also play a role in the decision to enrol the child.

There were years when the Star matriculants performed worse than the matriculants of the better public schools. This should not happen. Star International must perform better than the public school; otherwise there is no substantial reason for parents to enroll their children at Star.²³ Presumably, Muslim parents support the school because it is managed by a Muslim trust, and because it discourages social vices such as dating and drinking parties. But this is not a main reason for their support. Like the non-Muslim parents, they support the school mainly for the better education it can provide for their children (Interview, Ilhami, and 8th August, 2006). The notion of a better education became more alive in the consciousness of the parents when the school moved to Sybrand Park. Since the change to a new location, more middle-class parents supported the school. Thus, since last year, better quality learners have enrolled at the school.

The Gülen school has a bias for the science subjects, including mathematics, physics and technology. It tries its best to acquire the latest technology, depending on the funds available (Interview, K. Ozdemir, and 31 May 2006). Turkish educators teach the sciences and South Africans teach the social subjects and languages. Obviously, a Turk teaches Turkish as a language, and South Africans teach English, Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu. The Johannesburg school has mainly African learners (Africans make up the majority in the country) and the Durban school is composed of Indian learners (Indians are a minority in the country).²⁴ The Cape Town school has an even mixture of coloured Christians and “coloured” Muslims.

Ilhami Demirtas, a biology teacher, who graduated from Middle East Technical University from Ankara, and principal of the Star International Primary and High School, Cape Town, said there are 200 pupils; half girls, attending the co-educational primary school. The High School is for boys only. One South African said: “These schools are a model for other Islamic private schools. Here is great respect for science and an eagerness to share universal values” (Baydar, 2007:2).

This year, the High school has fitted the latest equipment for the science and computer laboratories. The principal indicated that applications having been streaming in since last year, and now they can afford to be more selective with enrolment. The idea is to create a positive image for the school in an average middle class area. At a later stage, they could open up schools in up-market areas such as Rondebosch and Newlands. Once these schools become profitable, they will be in a position to subsidize Gülen schools in the poorer areas. Thus, the

23 The school does not intend to compete with public schools such as Livingstone High School and Belgravia High, but with private schools and model C schools. Nor does the school want to compete with the top private schools in the country; they are established for many years and too expensive. The school will rather compete with Model C schools such as Westerford High and Rondebosch Boys (historically White public schools), which have facilities on par with Star International and their fees are affordable to the average middle-class child (Interview, Ilhami, 7 August, 2007).

24 Durban is a humid and hot coastal city. The school is composed of pre-fabricated structures, which used to be a Christian missionary school before 1999. It has a big field and basket-ball court. There are two hundred students here, and they pay 2 000 dollars per year. They can get a scholarship of 200 dollars to supplement their fees. The school is modest compared to the one in Cape Town, but the learners are from affluent homes, and have high aspirations for their future careers.

idea to open up a school in an affluent area has nothing to do with elitism²⁵. The idea is to build self-sustaining schools that are profitable, and which can then be of assistance to the school that requires more financial support.

Generally, children from affluent homes have higher aspirations and learning ability than children from poor families. This is because they have had more opportunities and not because of any innate superiority. If children from affluent homes are attracted to a good school, it does not make the school elitist in terms of social class. The school will provide a bursary for a talented boy from a poor home, and not discriminate against him on the grounds of his lower socio-economic class.

As mentioned, elitism is a relative concept; a Gülen school in a poor area will be regarded as elitist, but not in an affluent area. Elitism is also relative to the cost of schooling; the less affordable the school the more elitist it is. The Gülen schools are affordable to the middle-class family, but not the working class. However, bright learners from the working class are also given the opportunity of a better education as their schooling is usually subsidized.

For middle-class standards the Gülen school is not elitist; but for working class standards it is elitist. The Gülen school in Durban is located in an area that is affluent, but the school building is rather modest. The learners are mainly from the middle-class; but as pointed out above, this does not mean that it is a socially elite school, but only academically elite.

Conclusion

Gülen promoted moral values in a secular school environment, which would work within the state's framework of unified education. Parents send their children to the Gülen schools because their graduates have been accepted in reputable colleges and universities, and their learners are less susceptible to the negative influences of drug and alcohol abuse.

For Muslims, a key question that arose is: "Why should I send my child to a secular school instead of an Islamic school"? The standard answer is that the school's teachers embody universal values such as truthfulness, trust, respect for parents, respect for the elderly, respect for one's heritage, and love for human beings. Muslim parents identify with these values and want this to be imbibed in their children (Ünal and Williams 2000:348).

We have discussed the educational philosophy of Fethullah Gülen, and showed how both the academic and moral aspects of his thought have been applied in the South African context, with special reference to Star International High, Cape Town. We have described the schools' achievements, shortcomings, and future prospects.

The school provides an alternative to the private and model C schools. Although secular, it promotes moral values and respects the religious diversity of South African society. For Muslim learners, it is an alternative to the Islamic private schools. The Turkish teachers are morally upright and religious-minded, and this inspires them. At the same time, the Muslim child learns to interact with his Christian class-mates and teachers, and he comes to know that there is a universal set of moral values that they all share. This prepares him to integrate into the pluralist South African society.

25 Elitism is a relative concept; a school that is regarded as elitist in one area may not be elitist in another. A Gülen school in a poor area like Manenberg will be regarded as elitist, but not if it is located in affluent Rondebosch. The school is not elitist in terms of social class, but only in accord with academic worth. Thus, funding and subsidization of learners will be in accordance to their learning ability and not social class.

The Gülen schools have a Turkish character: it is inspired by the educational philosophy of a Turkish religious thinker, Fethullah Gülen; the principal is a Turk, the science teachers are Turks, the foreign language taught is Turkish, the Turkish national anthem and Turkish songs are promoted at school functions.

Since the school moved to Sybrand Park, it has gained more support from middle-class families, and this is evident in the large intake of learners this year. Five years from now, the cream of the crop of the current Grade 8 classes will be matriculating, and we predict that most of them will obtain distinction and merit passes.