

## QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

### THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN REDEFINING TURKEY AND ANATOLIAN MUSLIMNESS

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, 26 October 2007

#### **Question:**

Would the route of the movement in the future be transitional movement and how do you see this in the future?

In your paper you've raised a very interesting question whether the Gülen movement is a competition to the morals in Islam, you've also used the term interfaith and you've also talked about Gülen movement in conversation with war with radical Islamist country movements, do you think that the members of the Gülen movement is directly and indirectly address in Islamist countries radical interpretations in Islam?

#### **Mr. Bill Park:**

I suppose what I was trying to draw attention to was what seems to me, kind of impact on consequences of this variable focus of the Gülen movements activities drawn. And in a certain sense I can say that I see the point of engagements of, for example, the education activities in central Asia or Turkey, because of the receptivity, the cultural affinity, this reflects the emphasis that I put on the Turkishness of the movement. Also because the scale which the Gülen movements offer brings (which I've mentioned in my paper) an economic impact and perhaps political influence as well if not now maybe in the future, so I can sort of understand

that activity. But Gülen movements engages in other sorts of activities and indeed claims more for itself and this is I suppose where kind of slightly more critical tone. You mentioned the UK so I'll sort of use that as the comparison, Turkey can't bring its weight in political military economic empire but British economy could, we can be an imperial power. The Gülen movement can't sort of bring that in its way, so it raises the question of, for me as a political scientist, what the political consequence for Turkey, (hard to see), what the impact on Islam, (hard to see having seen that Gülen schools are fee paying and aimed precisely at Turkish society), and I suppose a lot of my observations about dialogue and so on, stress that same point, if the Gülen movement claims for it self to make a contribution to dialogue or transition of Islam it needs to engage with those people directly that are not a client to enter into a dialogue or looking into client that's not wanting to make the transition in the direction that the Gülen movement want it to. I'm not saying that Turkey could become imperial power in central Asia but I can see that lot of other stuff could come in the way of the Gülen movement activities both now and into the future. I find it more difficult to make that kind of observation about other areas.

I think that the dialogue activities of the Gülen movement have been much more inter-faith and secondly where they have been intra-faith. They've been what I will call safe territory. If Gülen movement is seeking, as it claims to be seeking, to shape the way in which the Islam evolves, and enable to emplace modernity, it needs to engage with those people within those places there is less receptivity to that, and so far the record is quite thin. Now this might be a matter of time, and I'm aware that there has been a shift in fact. The fact that the Abant movement's first meeting was earlier this year, I made that point in a negative way, up until then the dialogue would be with the western, well as of this year no longer. So maybe the Gülen movement is about to move into that kind of direction. But my observation was, and to make this point as a secularist rather than as an atheist, inter faith dialogue seems to me to take things no where, I'm aware that it creates its constructive activity and I'm aware that it's hard to say that it can do harm, so I'm no in that sense negative. But if you want inter faith dialogue you have to appeal to those people that are not client towards it. Well meaning Muslims meeting with well meaning Christians or Jews does not mean that's dealing with those people that are not well meaning out of intentionally or otherwise, so if there is a plea in my paper and there isn't because I'm trying to be a neutral observer is that perhaps that the Gülen movement might widen its engagement with educationally and dialogue activities with parts of the world that are at first glance not so receptive.

### **Question:**

When you mention Turkish Islam, how is it possible to elaborate? We have examples like Indonesia that have moderate movements that are competitable with democracy in Indonesia, so can we say that there are moderate interpretations of Islam? There are some countries like Iraq where radical Islam is dominant, and there are some countries such as Turkey and Indonesia that moderate Islamis dominant and Turkey is not an exception and unique.

### **Mr. Mustafa Akyol:**

When I said Turkish Islam I didn't mean that there is one brilliant interpretations of the Islam and that's the Turkish Islam, I don't mean that of course there are different experiences. But first of all by saying Turkish Islam or Indonesian Islam I think these terms are valid, of course there is one Islam in its teaching as its text resources, but how those text resources are put into

life and practice differs, each culture, each political context has its own context and they influence that. And of course there are many other moderate interpretations of Islam, in Malaysia, Indonesia and in fact in the Arabic world too, but in the 20th century the Arabic world had been influenced by many negative influences like colonialism, post colonial adventure, Israel, the occupation of and resistance against that, the recent war in Iraq, and Arab socialism these are all different things that create more radical interpretations. Of course there is also the problem of revivalism which is still continuing, Iraq for example is not a real nation in that sense, there are still tribal links and communitarian links. And things to the Ottoman modernization I think the Turks have gone beyond that kind of tribal issue, Saudi Arabia is quite tribal too. So this doesn't mean that the Turkish interpretation is the only one but we are speaking about the Turkish one today, that's why I mentioned it.

You said there are modern and radical Muslims, actually radicals are modern too. Radical Islam is basically, I would say there are modernists, traditionalist and radicals. Traditionalist just wants to keep the world as it was 10-14 centuries ago. Radical Islamists are basically getting a tradition and getting something from modernity, but that something is very totalitarian aspect of modernism, because when we speak about modernity we should acknowledge that it also includes totalitarianism. Nazism was a modern experience, communism is a modern experience. They vanished in the west to great extent but these radical Islamists take a lot of ideas from those state driven ideologies and they create this great weird synthesis between the traditional Islam and that kind of modernity. I think it's notable that the Taliban destroyed the Buddha Statues, but they were sitting there for 14 centuries, 10 centuries under Islamic rule, nobody had any idea of destroying them but the Taliban came with a very traditional and some modern mind, and that modern mind was a totalitarian state and they destroyed them.

### **Question:**

Do your views on Mustafa Kemal represent the views of Fethullah Gülen?

### **Mr. Mustafa Akyol:**

Definitely no! I represent my humble self and I'm not a member of any community or any movement. When people ask me what I am, I say I'm a freelance Muslim.

As for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, I generally criticize, what I call Kemalism which is an ideology which takes everything that everything that Mustafa Kemal did in his context, in his time and wants to turn them into internal principles like statism would be one of them, they say Mustafa Kemal Atatürk initiated a statist policy, private enterprise was not so much important so we have to keep that. But we live in a different world right now, we can't be statist, free markets work and we can see that. As for his personality, and things he did at his time, actually I appreciate most of the things that he did. Like he was the hero of the First World War, he founded Turkey and I think that he founded Turkey in true grounds. I appreciate this and I think his our finder. But I think we should understand him not as an untouchable, uncriticisable a super hero but we should understand him as a historical figure, like the British understand Churchill, or Americans understand Washington. If there are 100 things that Mustafa Kemal did in his lifetime I think I would probably agree with the 90 percent of them. But there might be some things that I might say well he did that at the time but I don't agree. There was this idea of scientism which was very prevail in 1920s and 1930s in which the science was seen as something which would replace religion and guide us in every field of life like in our morals for example. But now the world has gone beyond that point, now we understand that

science doesn't give us morals. Science gives you morals but it is you're morals whether to use them or not to use them. Morals come from different sources. So appreciating Ataturk as a historical figure, as Turkey's founder, but also having the freedom to be critical on some of the policies that were carried in his time is the best way to approach 1920s.

**Question:**

I wonder whether if you could even take it further that the creation or the retention of the capital mammary is really oriented by creation of utilitarian identity, we take little things like who is doing every harm today, accept the Gülen community, who is giving out the bullying who is breaking the jawsah is it Israel?

**Prof Marcia Hermansen:**

I think that a lot of this symbolic memory has to do with the Turkish culture. On the point of the Gülen community I think they are trying to evoke what is positive about the Turkish culture, both for insiders and outsiders. But once you do that, you get into interesting; you know you're opening things up. I'll give two examples one is that they are bringing the world of dervishes to America on a tour, but you know there are dervishes and there are dervishes, because it's kind of a performance. So there is this issue that sometimes you bring the official dervishes and there very good at doing the dance but then when there dance is over they want you to take them maybe to a bar or something. There is this issue about you opened up culture but who is there? Other example will be from the actors who play in these moral dramas become very successful, and then they go and become an actor on a regular TV. So you can't kind of control the actor. So there is this realm of this shared value but once you open it up... so the memory is about creating a community but the boundaries are a bit pursed.

The symbols themselves if you notice that the community is very sensitive about Islamic identity so many of the symbols like the natural symbols they're kind of vague, or somebody else mentioned some of the Gülen activities you wouldn't even had known it had anything to do with Islam, or the schools. I think that's another line or tension, that the community works how to negotiate that sort of identity in its public face at least if not in its internal memory the Islamic element.

**Question:**

What are the limits of analysis in policy?

**Marie-Elisabeth Maigre:**

When I talk about the liberalism of Gülen movement I talk about the economic liberalism, and when I talk about conservatism I talk about moral conservatism.

**Question:**

You've mentioned about the inter faith activities happening in the movement, and you've also mentioned in your paper about the education activities. Can't we think about these activities in a sense serving to this inter faith? Because when we look at the education activities kind of actually breaking the influence of maybe we can say Iran, so can't we see these activities in a sense an indirect serving for this inter faith as you say?

**Mr. Bill Park:**

I take this point almost fully. In a sense what I did in looking at the movement's activities is addressed the man's eye as they are expressed as I saw them. Of course by setting an example it might be possible to create alternative narrates value system and so on that become a source of attraction for those people otherwise are not directly targeted, so you sort of set up an alternative narrative value on how to be a Muslim and vast modernity, so I fully accept that.

Where I'm just a little bit hesitant is although I'm sure there are many ways that it happens in central Asia I spouse I would still say its not the most obvious area where the challenge to modern forms of Islam is greatest. There are other explanations to do with why the movement in central Asia is to do with more Turkishness. It might have a coincidentally positive consequence but I'm not sure whether if that's the drive and if you want to claim that you're creating a different sense of what Islam could be I think alternately you're bound to address the more reluctant part of the market more directly.