

**“CULTIVATING” A GENERATION THROUGH EDUCATION: THE  
CASE OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines and discusses the strategic manoeuvring of the Gülen Movement, which is an influential religio-social movement in Turkey, in its power struggle with its rival groups and ideologies including the secular elite; through an analysis of internal and external dynamics behind its increasing prominence. I argue that Gülen Movement is a “movement of synthesis” which combines several values, each of which serves as a kind of capital. Through the analysis of several publications of the movement and semi-structured interviews conducted with eight university students, I conclude that the primary objective of the Gülen Movement is to increase its share of power. More specifically, this thesis examines the important characteristics of the education system in Turkey, and its functions for the Gülen Movement in its power struggle. I claim that the Gülen Movement, through its educational activities, creates a reciprocal deal where both parties profit. While the Gülen Movement enlarges its scope, spreads its message and proceeds to “cultivate” its counter-elite, it provides its followers with the ability to climb in the social strata and wholly participate in the society; not only by providing them with the material resources they need, but also rendering them as individuals who are conforming to the contemporary set of values and lifestyles.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2008, readers of Foreign Policy and Prospect Magazine named Fethullah Gülen the world's top public intellectual.<sup>1</sup> This result was controversial, however, because there was a fervent campaign among the Gülen's supporters to see their leader achieve such a "prestigious" title. Foreign Policy declared the surprising results as follows: "No one spread the word as effectively as the man who tops the list. In early May, the Top 100 list was mentioned<sup>2</sup> on the front page of *Zaman*, a Turkish daily newspaper closely aligned with Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen. Within hours, votes in his favour began to pour in" (Foreign Policy 2008). Though the result is controversial, it is important to show the capacity of the Gülen Movement to mobilize its followers through a global network. In Turkey, Gülen is far more famous, especially in the last two decades.

Some consider Gülen to be their inspirational leader, whereas others see him as a threat to the secular order of Turkey. His community has gained enormous strength since the 1980s and, has become influential in many aspects of contemporary Turkish society. For those who have concerns about the secular future of the country, the name of Gülen is sometimes an expression of "a paranoia." According to these individuals, every development in the country, which they consider to be a deviation from the ideals of secular Turkish Republic, is an activity of the Gülen Movement. "His opponents consider Gülen as someone who is almighty, controlling everything, and has latent powers disregarding any political authority" (Özdalga 2006:255). On the other hand, there are millions of people who consider Gülen as the "saviour" of not only the country, but also of humanity as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4349](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4349)) Retrieved in Jun 3,2009

<sup>2</sup>(<http://zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=684190&keyfield=666F726569676E20706F6C6963792067C3BC6C656E20656E74656C656B74C3BC656C20313030>) Retrieved in Jun 3.2009

Fethullah Gülen is the leader of the most powerful, widespread and influential religious movement/group known as Cemaat. *Cemaat*<sup>3</sup> has a huge education network throughout the world, which is comprised of almost 1000 educational institutions. These numerous institutions, dispersed over many different areas vary in expertise from finance to media and think tank institutions. Although no one knows the exact number of his followers, Berna Turam (2007) estimated that the number of the members of Gülen Community at around 6 million.

There is an increasing number of studies about Fethullah Gülen himself and the Gülen Movement (Agai 2002, Yavuz 2003, Ugur 2004, Aras and Çaha 2000). Most of these studies focus on the ideas of Gülen through his books or speeches, or the Movement's publications. They usually analyze the transformative and “revolutionary” ideas of Gülen and focus especially on his comments about terrorism and “dialogue of civilizations”. However, as Özdalga (2006: 276) points out, “the less studied dimension of this movement is how the life is under the influence of Fethullah Gülen”. How do the followers of the movement internalize the ideas of Gülen? Are there discrepancies between the ideology of the Gülen Movement on the macro level and in the

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<sup>3</sup> Hakan Yavuz (1999) makes an overview of the activities of the Cemaat as follows:

Gülen's community is based on a complex web of business networks and controls a large media empire. It owns *Sizinti* (a scientific monthly), *Ekoloji* (an environment-related magazine), *Yeni Omit* (a theological journal), *Aksiyon* (a weekly magazine), *Zaman* (a daily newspaper), *The Fountain* (English language religious publication), *Samanyolu TV*, and *Burc FM*. In addition to these media outlets, the community controls one of the fastest growing financial institutions, *Asya Finans*, which is backed by sixteen partners and has over half a billion US dollars in capital. Moreover, a powerful association of businessmen, *ISHAD* (is Hayati Dayanisma Derneği), which includes over 2000 businessmen and merchants, supports Gülen's educational activities. This infrastructure also includes universities and colleges, high schools, dormitories, summer camps, and over 100 foundations. Day-to-day activities are organized by a hierarchical management based on the tenets of trust, obedience and duty to the community. This structure is composed of businessmen, teachers, journalists, and students.

Today, we can add some more institutions such as *Today's Zaman* (a daily English language newspaper), *Mehtap TV* and *TUSKON* (Turkish Businessmen and Industrialist's Confederation).

way they are realized in the everyday lives of the followers? If so, to what extent the followers are able to accommodate their personal differences within the community?

This thesis is an attempt to understand the Gülen Movement, which became a central actor in numerous social and political issues in Turkey in recent years, through its relationship with secular elite and other religious/social groups, the dynamics behind its increasing prominence, the methods it uses in order to attract individuals, and the lives of the individuals who are living under the influence of it. More specifically, this thesis will argue that the Gülen Movement is a “movement of synthesis,” which synthesizes many different values, and positions itself at the very juncture of these values, each of which serves as a capital (not only economic, but also social, cultural and symbolic) for the movement to legitimize its activities and accumulate power in its power struggle with other groups within the field. Then, the Gülen Movement's strong emphasis on education and its functions for the movement will be explored. Education is crucial for the movement, because of the fact that it provides it with the material and human resources, and enables it to create its counter-elite in its power struggle against the secular elite in Turkey. Finally, through the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 8 university students, the reciprocal relationship between the movement and individuals who are currently or formerly followers of the Gülen Movement will be discussed. In this respect, it can be argued that this thesis is an attempt to build a bridge between macro and micro levels in the analysis of the Gülen Movement. Since the actual lives of the followers and the way they internalize the positioning of the movement are usually neglected in academic scholarship, there is a need to critically study the Gülen Movement, not only in terms of the most famous ideas of Gülen related to terrorism or dialogue, but also through an analysis of the followers' ideas and lifestyles.

## **I.1 The Methodology**

In order to answer the main research questions, two research methods were used in this thesis: discourse/content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

### **I.1.1 Discourse/Content Analysis**

The Gülen Movement exploits modern media techniques, print and visual publications in order to mobilize its followers. Fethullah Gülen has dozens of books and hundreds of sermons that have been recorded and disseminated. In addition, the Gülen Movement has an enormous media network including daily newspapers, television and radio channels, websites, magazines, journals, etc.<sup>4</sup> Through these venues the message of the Movement is disseminated and used to mobilize millions of followers. Since print, visual and electronic communication techniques are essential for the movement to present itself to its followers and “outsiders,” a comprehensive study was needed to analyze the documents and publications of the Gülen Movement, in order to investigate the main research interests of this thesis. For this purpose, I scanned the publications of the movement and used some relevant examples in this thesis, to discover accurate explanations for my research interests. For example, I refer to several books authored by Fethullah Gülen and Said Nursi<sup>5</sup>, and discuss some key concepts such as, “golden generation” (*altın nesil*), “marriage of heart and mind” (*kalp-kafa izdivacı*), or “houses of light” (*ışık evleri*)<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>4</sup> Some of them are; *Zaman* (which has the highest circulation rate in Turkey) and Today's Zaman (the paper published in English and sold in Turkey) dailies; *Aksiyon* and *Sızıntı* magazines and TV stations, namely *STV*, *S HABER*, *MEHTAP TV* and *EBRU TV*.

<sup>5</sup> Said Nursi was one of the most influential religious figures in the history of the Turkish Republic. He was born in Bitlis in 1873 and “He wrote several volumes of Qur'anic exegesis, known as the *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı* (The Epistles of Light), was the founder of the most powerful text-based faith movement active in Turkey” (Yavuz, 1999:586). “His disciples and his major work *Risale-i Nur* continue to determine the structure of an important segment of Turkish Islam today. Fethullah Gülen developed his own thought on the heritage established by Nursi's disciples and writings” (Balci, 2005:118). For a further analysis of Nursi and his thought; see: Mardin's *Religion and social change in modern Turkey : the case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (1989).

<sup>6</sup> “*İşık evleri*” are one of the most important components of the Gülen Movement's structure. “*İşık Evleri*” are private



in order to understand their views. Similarly, while discussing the Gülen Movement's inter-faith dialogue activities, I used the mission statement of the Rumi Forum available on their website, since the Rumi Forum is one of the most influential inter-faith dialogue institutions of the Gülen Movement. Also, while discussing the Gülen Movement's synthesis of Islam and capitalism, I analyzed The Confederation of German Trade Unions' (DGB) interview with Gülen, since it gave me the opportunity to investigate Gülen's ideas on concepts such as work, work ethics, wages and employer-employee relationships, which are particularly relevant to this thesis. In addition, this text is presented on Gülen's website<sup>7</sup> as his interpretation of above mentioned concepts through the lens of Islam. Similarly, I decided to analyze İbrahim Öztürk's article, which was published in *Zaman*. *Zaman* is the flagship of the movement's media network, and Öztürk is not only a prominent figure within the movement in the field of economics, but also works as an adviser for the movement's business associations, such as *İŞHAD* and *TUSKON*. Since the scope of this thesis is limited, the examples that I selected from the Gülen Movement's publications, which I scanned, provide accurate insight and allow a better understanding of their thoughts on the topics relevant to this work.

### **I.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

As indicated above, “the less studied dimension of this movement is how the life is under the influence of Fethullah Gülen” (Özdalga, 2006:276) and as Balçı (2005:24) notes, “semi-confidentiality” is an important feature of the Gülen Movement. In addition, I believe that studying a movement only through the way it presents itself to outsiders prevents the researcher

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flats or houses, in which the followers of the Movement who are mainly university students stay. In these houses, as Agai (2005:3) suggests, “Islamic education was and is taught on the basis of both Nursi's writings and Gülen's teaching, making use of the latter's tapes”.

<sup>7</sup> (<http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/12244/9/>) Retrieved in May 30, 2009

from grasping the reality of the movement. Therefore, I decided to combine discourse analysis with semi-structured interviews as my research method. For this purpose, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 students at Fatih University who are currently or used to be followers of the movement. One of the reasons for my selection of Fatih University students as my interviewees is that Fatih University is the only university connected to the movement's education network in Turkey. In addition, most of the students attending to Fatih University belong to the Gülen Movement's network, and it is, thus, a very significant actor in the dissemination of the ideas of the movement. The rationale of my selection of university students is that most of the Gülen Movement's activities are directed towards the field of education. As it will be presented in the Chapter IV, educational activities occupy a pivotal role in the operational scope of the Gülen Movement. Furthermore, students are one of the main targets, and therefore constituents, of the movement. For these reasons, I decided to interview students who attend Fatih University.

### **I.1.3 My Position as Researcher and The Research Process**

I first became acquainted with the Gülen Movement in 1998 while I was attending *Maltepe Dersanesi*, which is affiliated with the movement, in Ankara. I also attended Fatih University for my undergraduate studies between 2003 and 2008, and I met some of the “*abiler*” between 1999 and 2005. These experiences have been a major advantage for me in conducting the fieldwork. In this respect, I consider my position as an “outsider within” (Collins, 2004), since I lived in an environment which is heavily influenced by the Gülen Movement, and on the other hand, I am a researcher. As a result of this position, I easily found contacts and interview subjects among the followers of the movement.

### **I.1.4 University Students As Interviewees**

I interviewed eight Fatih University students, who were mainly selected according to their gender and positions within the Movement. I selected Fatih University students, since this thesis focuses on the educational engagement of the Gülen Movement, and Fatih University is the only university within the Gülen Movement's education network. I tried to select my interviewees from diverse backgrounds. For example, I interviewed five male and three female students, so as to take the possibility of different experiences in terms of gender into consideration. In addition, three of my interviewees were those who left the movement. I selected them, because I thought that they could present an alternate picture of the movement. Similarly, two of my interviewees, according to my intermediaries, are prominent members of the Gülen Community. So as not to violate the privacy of these interviewees, I will use pseudonyms in place of their real names.

### **I.2 Historical Background in Which The Movement Flourished**

The Gülen Movement (sometimes referred to as *Fethullahcilar* and *Nurcular*) is an issue in Turkish society that has been hotly debated over the last two decades.

The Turkish Republic was founded on the pillars of Western secularism, modernity, and nationalism. From the early periods of the Republic, the secular state elite has stayed in a hegemonic position and has oppressed all other ideologies or movements that were perceived as to be threats to the pillars of the Republic. Through each stage of the Republic's history, and even during the late years of the Ottoman Empire, numerous religious movements have tried to challenge the hegemony and principles of the state. Almost all of them have been silenced

through coercion and partial consent. As Bilici (2001:12) suggests, “Turkish public space has been shaped by a relationship of domination between the Kemalist *panopticon*<sup>8</sup> and the Muslim *deviant*”. Nevertheless, these movements usually went underground and continued to organize people against the secular elite. As a result, there has always been a silenced group, which is excluded from the public spheres in the Republic. This is also a result of the failure of the “top down modernization project” of the Turkish state. Mardin (1973) argues that Westernizing modernity failed to win the hearts of Muslims because of state repression and the abuse of power on the part of westernizing bureaucrats. As a result, “Islam thus becomes a strategic tool for peripheral forces in the development of a critical view of the state as a source of repression” (Atasoy, 2005). In other words, conservative Muslims under the rule of secular elites created a “hidden transcript” (Scott, 1990) and resisted the dominant ideology of the state in a passive way. Since the 1980s, however, they have found the opportunity to openly advocate their causes, with the effects of not only the new ideology of the state (“Turkish-Islamic synthesis”), but also the legal and economic changes, and their social results.

Michel de Certeau, in his influential work, “The Practice of Everyday Life” (1984), distinguishes between two types of behaviour: strategic and tactical. According to him, “a strategy is the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (de Certeau, 1984). On the other hand, “By contrary with a strategy, a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus” (de Certeau, 1984). While he confines strategic behaviour to macro institutions, tactics, according to him, are the tools which are used by everyday people in order to manoeuvre within the space created by strategies. In other words, “a tactic is an art of the weak” and “a tactic is determined by the absence of power

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault, Michel. 1977. Discipline and Punish. p.195

just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (de Certeau, 1984), Ordinary people make use of “opportunities,” and divert what is imposed upon them and to render them “habitable”. The conjuncture, from which the Gülen Movement flourished, can best be analyzed through the concepts of strategy and tactic. As indicated in previous paragraphs, the foundation of the Turkish Republic was a project that aimed to create a modern, secular society. However, this project “failed to win the hearts of Muslims” (Mardin, 1973) and conservative Muslims developed and employed “tactics” in order to cope with the state imposed “strategies.” This environment paved the way for the Gülen Movement. After the 1980s, with the combined effects of the state's new ideology and legal and economic changes and their social effects, the Gülen Movement started to attract more people and accumulated the power it has today.

The rise of the Gülen Movement is simultaneous with the rise of political Islam in Turkey. Both have benefited from the military coup of 1980 and the economic and social liberalization program of President Turgut Özal in the same decade: “By dissolving political and social opposition, the coup provided the necessary political environment for the shift from the import substitution industrialization that framed economic policy since the 1960s to an export-oriented economics” (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2009). According to Toprak (1996:93), the coup in 1980 “had the explicit aim of state control over the organizational activity and the institutional autonomy of alternative sources of power which had emerged in the two previous decades and had enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom of action guaranteed by the 1961 Constitution”. Since the coup in 1980 almost totally destroyed the existing means of organizational activity, it can be argued that, it paved the way for loosely bound organizations, such as religious brotherhoods. In addition, “after the coup, the military began to emphasize a new ideology, the ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’” (Toprak, 2001). As Agai (2005:3) puts it, Gülen's “nationalistic, pro-

junta state, anti-leftist and anti-Iranian discourse was completely in line with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis promoted by the state after 1980”. In a similar fashion, Bilici (2001:25) argues that “1980 coup stands at the very *conservative corridor*, where Fethullah Gülen stands. The overlap between these two positionings explains both Fethullah Gülen’s explicit support for the coup and the growth of his community during the 1980s”. In brief, the Gülen Movement benefited from not only the new ideology of the state, but also the new policies and legal changes that were brought about by the coup in 1980.

In addition, the changes in the economic policies after 1980 and their social effects were other important factors that contributed to the Gülen Movement's rapid rise. The winner of the first elections (1983), after the coup was the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) headed by Turgut Özal: “Turgut Özal implemented policies based on an understanding that saw modernity primarily as liberal economics, consumerism and a combination of local elements with global trends” (Çınar, 2005:32). After Özal came to power in the mid 1980s, “changes did not take place in the lives of the secular urbanities only. The state's economy under Özal was also (and especially) geared to the advantage of the businesses of the religious in smaller cities in Anatolia” (Navaro-Yashin, 2002:81). The new social and economic policies after 1980, and their social effects, is an issue on which I will elaborate in the following chapters.

Turkey experienced many transformations in the two decades following the military coup in 1980. At the turn of the century, the Justice and Development Party (JDP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), a political party dominated by Islamists, came into power with enormous public support. The JDP's legacy has been highly contested, since it comes from an Islamist tradition and many

prominent members of the party, including the Prime Minister R.Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül, have wives who wear headscarves<sup>9</sup>.

During the last two decades in Turkey, there have been an enormous amount of issues hotly debated in the context of secularism and Islamism, and the Gülen Movement occupies a pivotal position in these discussions. Numerous studies focused on rising Islamism, and its visibility in the public. I argue that, both political and social transformations in Turkey cannot be understood without analyzing the Gülen Movement, since it is one of the most powerful and influential movements in Turkey and has had an important influence not only in the social realm, but also on the political structure of Turkey. For this reason, I will explore the characteristics of the movement, its strategic manoeuvring in its power struggle in order to distinguish itself from its rival groups, and the reflection of its macro positioning on the lives of its followers.

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<sup>9</sup> The headscarf is the most debated issue in Turkey since 1980s. Both secularists and Islamists perceive it as a political symbol. There have been many attempts by right-wing political parties to permit those women who wear headscarves to be able to continue their education in universities. However, neither of these attempts have been successful and it is still prohibited to enter universities in Turkey with a headscarf.

## CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVE/MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

The rise of Islamic movements all over the world is usually explained with the help of the alternative modernities approach (i.e. Turam 2007, Göle 2002). As a result, terms such as “Islamic modernities” have been introduced in recent years. As such, “the notion of the 'multiple modernities' denotes a certain view of the contemporary world -indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era- that goes against the views long prevalent in scholarly and general discourse. It goes against the classical theories of modernization [...]” (Eisenstadt, 2002:1).

Classical modernization theory views “the history as a process has a direction and its goal is modernity” (Hunt 2008:107). It implies that all societies will evolve in the same direction, and will thus reach the same destination. In other words, they will converge to each other and there will be no differences between them. According to this approach, the path from traditional society to modern society consists of five economic stages: 1) the traditional society; 2) the preconditions for take-off; 3) the take-off; 4) the drive to maturity; 5) the age of high mass consumption (Rostow (1930) 1990). For classical modernization theory, Europe is the center, and its level of civilization is the one that others must aspire to achieve. In other words, modernization is the synonym of Europeanization. This approach is called as the convergence theory, and Francis Fukuyama's (1989) famous thesis which celebrates “the end of history” is a good example of above mentioned convergence approach. He argues that Western liberal democracy is “the final form of human government” (1989: 271).

Opponents of this convergence theory argue that different cultures and civilizations cannot or will not converge into each other. For example, Samuel Huntington's famous article, “The Clash of Civilizations” (1993), asserts that there is a divergence between different



civilizations. He claims that there exists a “clash of civilizations” between these different societies, rather than a convergence between them. Similarly, Bernard Lewis (1990) sees a historical clash between Islam and the Christian West and, in his opinion, this gap is widening. He also considers Islam to be incompatible with modernity (Lewis, 2002).

The alternative modernities approach challenges not only convergence theories such as the classical modernization theory, but also the divergence theories such as the idea of “clash of civilizations” raised by Huntington. As Göle (2002:91) puts it, this project “presents a challenge to monocivilisational narratives of 'Western modernity'. It also attempts to open up readings of the modernisation of other civilisations and cultures”.

This approach challenges convergence theories by arguing that modernity can be received, understood, interpreted, and therefore experienced in different ways across different times and spaces: “There are many ways of being modern. Different societies absorb science and engender new technologies without accepting the same values” (Gray, 2000). Therefore, as Ballantyne (2008:53) points out, modernity is “polymorphous.”

The alternative modernities approach also rejects the premise that being European is the final destination for non-European people. As Gaonkar (2001) points out, “everywhere, at every national/cultural site, modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new but old and familiar, modernity is incomplete and necessarily so”. According to Wagner (2004:40), “Under names such as 'varieties of modernity' or 'multiple modernities', a research perspective has recently developed that aims at analyzing the plurality of interpretations of the modern signification. Such sociologies of modernity break with any reasoning that associates modernization unequivocally with Westernization”. In summation, the alternative modernities approach disaffirms the

convergence theories which assert that modernity is unique and Western, and all other civilizations and cultures will reach the same destination.

As Göle (2000:92) puts it, the multiple modernities perspective “implies the possibility of different experiences existing, significant divergences capable of changing and transforming the practice of modernity”. As indicated above, the rise of Islamic movements is usually explained with the help of the alternative modernities approach. With the effects of colonialism, globalisation or market forces, Islamic movements have undergone several transformations. The question that needs to be asked, according to Göle (2000:94), “is not whether Islam is compatible with modernity but how Islam and modernity interact with each other, transform one another, reveal each other's limits”. In the course of the interactions between Islamist movements and modernity, as Nilufer Gole (2006:80) suggests, “Islamic movements select and reinterpret the religion canon throughout their confrontation with issues of modern society”. She concludes that “the agency of women, self-reflexivity, individuation, mass media, market forces, and public spaces are transformative forces, underpinning the cross-fertilization of Islam and modernity” (Göle, 2000:95).

My argument is that the alternative modernities approach is a suitable perspective from which to analyze the Gülen Movement. In the following chapters, I will discuss this argument in a more detailed way and back it up with several examples from the Gülen Movement.

In addition, the scope of this study is far wider than only identifying the Gülen Movement as an alternative modernity. The alternative modernities approach does not allow us to grasp the ongoing processes of contestation and negotiation between different actors within the social and/or political arena, and therefore, it is not adequate to only identify the Gülen Movement as an alternative modernity. There is also a need to examine the process of this “alternative

modernization” since the modernization of a traditional society is a result of continuous negotiations and struggles between different ideas and values. In the case of modern Muslims in Turkey, this is not a peaceful transition process. The Gülen Movement achieved its current power in Turkey through several strategic actions and positionings in the last decades.

In order to examine the roots of the Gülen Movement's success, I will adopt a Bourdieusian approach and discuss the ways in which the Gülen Movement positions itself within the religio-social and/or political field in Turkey in order to distinguish itself from other actors and to accumulate power.

## CHAPTER III: THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT AS THE MOVEMENT OF SYNTHESIS

The Gülen Movement is an inheritor of the Islamist tradition mentioned above and often uses discourse that blames the secular state and its attitudes toward religious people. However, they diverged from the route which previous Islamist movements in Turkey followed in their opposition to the secular elite. This movement adopted a different approach in favour of education, accumulation of economic wealth and maintenance of modern lifestyles. In other words, Fethullah Gülen realized that the only way to combat the secular elite in Turkey was to gain power through education, economic wealth, media, and holding influential positions in higher echelons of the state. It is often claimed, though not legally proven, in Turkish secular media that the Gülen Movement is systematically trying to penetrate into the “most vital points” of the secular state including the army, which has always been the most dedicated protector of the ideology of the state, and the judicial authority. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for the secular elite to cope with such a movement while is trying to weaken their hegemonic power and replace it with its own hegemony. It is also a movement which, I argue that, is more successful in the mobilization of people.

The Gülen Movement can best be characterized by the syntheses that it makes. I argue that it is a “movement of synthesis” which combines different notions to position itself in the social field so as to accumulate prominence in its power struggle with other actors. In this chapter, I will examine how the Gülen Movement distinguishes itself from other actors in the social/religious field by appropriating and employing different kinds of capital.

According to Bourdieu (1993), “a field is a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own internal logic, composed of institutions or individuals who are

competing for the same stake”. “A field, in Bourdieu's sense, is a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins, 1992:84) Thus, fields are arenas for the contestation over resources. Every agent (be it an individual or institution) struggles to distinguish himself from others by acquiring different capitals, which are keys to be successful in the arena. Bourdieu (1991:230) identifies these capitals as follows:

The position of a given agent in the social space can thus be defined by the position he occupies in the different fields, that is, in the distribution of the powers that are active in each of them. These are, principally, economic capital (in its different kinds), cultural capital and social capital, as well as symbolic capital, commonly called prestige, reputation, fame etc. which is the form assumed by these different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate.

What is obvious in Bourdieu's characterization of a field is that agents (individuals or institutions) occupy a social position through the capitals that they possess, and these social positions are the determinants of power contests.

Bourdieu (1991:230) also describes the social field as a “multi-dimensional space of positions.” He explains this multi-dimensionality as follows: “Agents are distributed, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – in other words, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital in the total set of their assets” (Bourdieu, 1991:231). “A field is, by definition, 'a field of struggles' in which agents' strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their positions with respect to the defining capital of the field” (Jenkins, 1992:85). As indicated above, each field has its own internal logic, and therefore the degree of importance of a given capital may vary from one field to another.

The Gülen Movement, by encouraging higher education and its members holding influential positions in higher echelons of the state, accumulates a symbolic capital in its struggle with other groups in Turkey over the state power. In other words, it changes the previous “identity” of Islamists in Turkey, who were mostly non-educated, living in rural areas, and staying away from the state positions. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the positioning of the Gülen Movement in the social field, the capitals that it possesses, and the functions of these capitals for the movement.

### ***III.1 The Synthesis of Islam and Modernity***

First, the Gülen Movement synthesizes Islam and modernity. Fethullah Gülen is one of the followers of Said Nursi<sup>10</sup> (1876-1960) and sees his movement as a successor of Nursi's “Nurcu Cemaati”.<sup>11</sup> Said Nursi “tried to find a way of Islamic teaching which was to combine the demands of the modern world with Islamic knowledge in order to make Islam compatible with modernity” (Agai, 2005:2). Throughout his life, his main objective was to “revitalize Islam” (Mardin, 1989) in a world shaped by modern values such as reason, secularism, and scientific knowledge. Therefore, he reinterpreted Islam to make it compatible with modern world: “Like Fethullah Gülen, he was convinced that the modern nation state had to be accepted and ought to be shaped through participation” (Agai, 2005:2). Gülen continuously states that Islam and modernity are compatible. According to him, “national and cultural independence can only be

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<sup>10</sup> Said Nursi was one of the most influential religious figures in the history of the Turkish Republic. He was born in Bitlis in 1873 and “He wrote several volumes of Qur’anic exegesis, known as the *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı* (The Epistles of Light), was the founder of the most powerful text-based faith movement active in Turkey” (Yavuz, 1999:586). “His disciples and his major work *Risale-i Nur* continue to determine the structure of an important segment of Turkish Islam today. Fethullah Gülen developed his own thought on the heritage established by Nursi's disciples and writings” (Balci, 2005:118). For a further analysis of Nursi and his thought; see: Mardin's *Religion and social change in modern Turkey : the case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (1989).

<sup>11</sup> “Nurcu Cemaati” is a religious community in Turkey that follows the ideas of Said Nursi.

preserved if Muslims succeed in shaping the modern world according to their own beliefs, rather than rejecting modernity and losing all control over its development” (Agai, 2005:7). Similarly, he is in favour of globalization and “sees no way of halting globalization, it must be harnessed as an opportunity” (Yavuz, 2003:27). He seeks “a middle way between modernity and the Muslim tradition” (Kuru, 2003:129). “The Movement's distinctive features -having no radicalism and a project developed to transform the nature of the state- are the important signs of its modern nature” (Balçı, 2005:33). Balçı (2005:38) also states that “the Gülen Movement, though not meeting all the criteria, attempts to reconcile Islam and modernity”.

By synthesizing Islam and modernity, the Gülen Movement challenges not only the Western discourse, which sees Islam incompatible with modernity, as argued by some Western scholars including Bernard Lewis (2002) and Samuel Huntington (1993), but also the discourse of state's secular modernization project in Turkey, which has encouraged and forced Muslims to adopt Western secular values. The movement positions itself in between rural Muslims and secular Kemalists. In this position, the movement exploits both of these identities as symbolic capitals. By encouraging modern lifestyles and material progress, the movement attracts support and establishes a distinction in compared to other Islamist groups in Turkey, which remain critical to modernity and thus resist modern lifestyles. On the other hand, by emphasizing belief and Muslimness, the movement distinguishes itself from the secular Kemalists who are critical to Islamist lifestyles. Both “Muslimness” and “modernness” serve as symbolic capitals for the Movement and these characteristics are important keys to its success.

### **III.2 The Synthesis of Islam and Science**

Second, one of the major characteristics of the Movement is its intensive efforts to prove that Islam and science are not in conflict. For example, the *Sızıntı* Journal, established in 1979 and is the first publication of the movement, presents itself as a scientific journal completely dedicated to accomplishing the task of the “Islamization of science”. “Nursi and Gülen emphasize that, if combined with an Islamic approach, science can serve as a means to rationally comprehend God by studying His creation” (Agai, 2002). Most of Gülen's followers have higher education degrees, especially in the natural sciences, and they have little difficulty reconciling their religious identities with their studies. Education is highly encouraged within the community, and students of the movement's educational institutions are very successful in both national and international science olympiads.

To achieve this task of the “Islamization of science”, Nursi and, later, Gülen adopted an explanation, quite similar to the method of the Indian anti-colonial counter-movement (Chatterjee, 1989), which is based on “a separation of the domain of culture into two spheres- the material and the spiritual” (Chatterjee, 1989:623). In this view, “Science, technology, rational forms of economic organization, modern methods of statecraft-these had given the European countries the strength to subjugate the non-European people and to impose their dominance over the whole world” (Chatterjee, 1989:623). The elements of the material domain, in this view, should be adopted and incorporated into Muslim culture. However, there is a spiritual domain of culture which must remain untouched by the West, and it is the distinctive sign of Muslim culture vis-à-vis Western culture.



Said Nursi says that “spiritual progress depends on material progress”<sup>12</sup> (Nursi, 1993:92). In a similar fashion, Gülen, in his writings and sermons, places emphasis on the idea of the “marriage of heart and mind” (*kalp-kafa izdivacı*) in many instances (as an example see Gülen, 1998a). This implies that it is necessary to combine Islamic morality and spirituality with modern knowledge and technology. This distinction is what gives the movement the legitimacy to pursue activities such as adopting modern lifestyles, capital accumulation, and rationality. In addition, it can be argued that Nursi and Gülen see Islam as a symbolic capital, since they consider spiritual progress (being a good Muslim) as dependent on material progress. One of the most important aspects of the movement, this combination of material and spiritual progress, is characterized as “Islamic Calvinism”, since the followers’ understanding of Islam urges them to work hard in order to achieve material wealth. It is clear by now that one of the main objectives of the Gülen Movement is to preserve the spiritual domain, which is the sign of their Muslimness, and to adopt what the modern world requires in the material domain. When this is accomplished, “the golden generation” (*altın nesil*) will be formed, according to Gülen (Gülen, 1998a).

The movement's reconciliation with science additionally serves as a symbolic capital. By doing so, it distinguishes itself from other Islamist movements, which see science as one of the “enemies” of Islam. In addition, via this synthesis, the Gülen Movement has been able to attract and claim educated people among its adherents. These university students, academics and scientists, are among the main targets of the movement. This synthesis of the movement should be considered as another factor in its rapid rise.

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<sup>12</sup> “Manen terakki maddeten terakkiye bağlıdır.”

### ***III.3 The Synthesis of Islam and Inter-religious/Inter-faith Dialogue***

Third, the Gülen Movement is mostly known outside Turkey for its efforts in promoting multiculturalism and “inter-religious dialogue”. Gülen's ideas about terrorism along with his meeting with Pope Jean-Paul II in 1998, and with many other religious leaders over the course of the last two decades, are the main elements of the movement's construction of a public image, especially in non-Muslim countries. The movement, in these outside environments, either uses a secular discourse or only highlights its religious identity in a dialogue-based context. For example, the Rumi Forum, one of the most influential inter-religious dialogue institutions of the movement in the US, presents its mission as follows:

Rumi Forum was founded in 1999 with the mission to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, stimulate thinking and exchange of opinions on supporting and fostering democracy and peace all over the world and to provide a common platform for education and information exchange.<sup>13</sup>

It is obvious from this statement that the Gülen Movement primarily uses a secular discourse while presenting its activities to a non-Muslim audience. At this point, the use of the name of Rumi is of importance.<sup>14</sup> The Gülen Movement, in Turkey, does not grant a special position to Rumi within its discourse and activities. However, in the non-Muslim world - especially in the US - the name of Rumi is probably the most used discursive figure by the movement. Since he is very famous for his poems and teachings dedicated to love and of universalist character, The movement exploits the legitimacy of Rumi as a symbolic capital in order to legitimize its own activities.

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<sup>13</sup> Rumi Forum Website.  
([http://www.rumiforum.org/server/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=30](http://www.rumiforum.org/server/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=30)) Retrieved in Jun 3,2009

<sup>14</sup> Mawlana Jalal-ad Din Rumi, or simply “Rumi“, was a Persian poet, and mystic who lived in 13<sup>th</sup> Century. He is one of the best-known Muslim figures in the contemporary Western world. He is famous mostly for his universal teachings related to love and mysticism.

In addition, Gülen's famous statement “A Muslim must not be a terrorist and a terrorist can not be a real Muslim” (Herman, 2004) is a very important key to ascertaining his ideas surrounding terrorism.

“Tolerance” and “dialogue” are two of the most used words, not only by Gülen but also by the followers of the movement. According to Balçı (2005:145) “not only the national but also the international environment were convenient for the discourse which is based on dialogue and tolerance. This discourse was really original, especially for Turkey”. Gülen, without doubt, was the first Islamist religious figure who arranged meetings with leaders of other faiths in Turkey, and who used a discourse based on dialogue and tolerance. These interactions were another distinctive feature of the movement, and served/is serving to generate symbolic capital for the movement. This not only creates sympathy for the movement within Turkey and distinguishes it from other religious groups, but also legitimizes the financial, education and “missionary activities” (Balçı 2005) of the movement in the rest of the world. By favouring interreligious dialogue and condemning terrorism, the Gülen Movement challenges Western discourse and “radical” Islamist ideas in Islamic world.

### ***III.4 The Synthesis of Islam and Turkish Nationalism***

The fourth synthesis within the Gülen Movement is the combination of Islamism and Turkish nationalism. One of the main characteristics of the movement is its “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”. Gülen has always been committed to statism, for example he noting: “The worst state is better than the absence of state” (Can, 1995). In addition, one of the main reasons for the movement's success was the military coup in 1980, which favoured a Turkish-Islamic synthesis in order to prevent the country from the “threat of communism” and “Gülen, because of his nationalism, played a role in the fight against communism [he was one of the founders of

Erzurum branch of The Association For Fighting Against Communism in 1960s, note added]” (Balcı 2005:174).

The Gülen Movement's discourse in Turkey usually emphasizes the education of foreign students in educational institutions of the movement abroad. After the collapse of the Communist Bloc and the emergence of the Central Asian Turkic Republics, the movement shifted its focus towards these countries and community members established educational institutions and trade networks in those regions. This upheaval extended the vision of the movement and its educational institutions started to mushroom, mostly in the Third World countries: “They claim to have founded more than 500 places of learning in 90 countries” (Economist, 2008). The financial capital and manpower necessary to establish such an enormous network are primarily provided by the followers of the movement in Turkey. Therefore, the discourse that the Gülen Movement uses to motivate these supporters becomes important.

Gülen describes this expansion of the movement as “spreading the name of Allah” (Gülen, 2007). Along with this Islamist discourse, a nationalist discourse is pervasive. Videos or books narrating the movement's activities abroad are materials that are commonly used within the community to motivate and encourage followers. In these materials, stories about, for example, students in a foreign country singing Turkish songs, playing Turkish folk dances and even singing the Turkish National Anthem are widely represented. Also, a waving Turkish flag is another figure in such visual displays. The movement always emphasize that these students are learning the Turkish language and culture, and this is a source of “pride” for the followers of the movement. Followers of Gülen organize an annual “International Turkish Olympiads”<sup>15</sup> in Turkey and dozens of children from different countries of the world engage in contests

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<sup>15</sup> ([www.turkceolimpiyatları.org](http://www.turkceolimpiyatları.org))

measuring their ability to use Turkish language. The most “emotional” moment of such events occurs when a foreign child (usually black) sings the national anthem of the Turkish Republic.

In addition, Fethullah Gülen's yearning for the legacy of the Ottoman Empire extensively shapes the nature of the movement. The Gülen Movement's imperial visions, expansionist policies, multiculturalism, and emphasis on material development and nationalism, rest on the idea of the Ottoman Empire, a point on which I will elaborate in the Section III.6. Therefore, “some consider him [Fethullah Gülen, note added] as a neo-Ottomanist” (Balcı 2005:174), and according to Yavuz (1999:595), “Gülen is first and foremost a Turko-Ottoman nationalist”.

In brief, the conjuncture within which Gülen matured and the collective memory of the Ottoman Empire set the boundaries of the composition of the identity of the movement. By synthesizing Islamism and Turkish nationalism, the Gülen Movement counters the ruling secular elite in Turkey and legitimizes its activities within the borders of the country. Using collectively shared figures, such as the Turkish flag, the national anthem, or the Turkish language, the Gülen Movement works to legitimize its activities. This legitimization provides the movement with the ability to manoeuvre in its activities, ranging from education to finance and media. As previously indicated, Bourdieu defines the field as a “multi-dimensional space of positions,” that is, agents are distributed according to the overall volume of the capitals they possess and according to the composition of these capitals. At this point, the reciprocity between different kinds of capital within the Gülen Movement can be observed. Symbolic capital gives rise to economic capital, and economic capital allows the movement the opportunity to successfully maintain its activities, and, in turn, to gain symbolic and social capital. By successfully employing Turkish nationalism in its public image in Turkey, the Gülen Movement gains support from the public, and this support paves the way for the movement's economic activities.

### **III.5 The Synthesis of Islam and Capitalism**

The final synthesis within the Gülen Movement is the synthesis of capitalism and Islam. Fethullah Gülen's and his followers' ideas on the economic activities of a Muslim, and practices of his followers, are key points to examine in order to understand their increased prominence.

In 2005, the European Stability Initiative, an organization based in Berlin, published a report entitled “Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia” (ESI Report, 2005). The main argument and finding of the report was there exists a miraculous economic development in mostly traditional and religious Central Anatolia, and the main factor driving this development is the individualistic and enterprising elements of Islam. In other words, economic and social developments in this region have generated an environment in which Islam and modernity easily combine. This report created a long-lasting public debate in Turkey, and numerous articles were written and public discussions were held about the report.<sup>16</sup> This is partly due to the report's provocative analogy of “Calvinism”. Though not explicitly stated in the report, a very prominent secular columnist, Ertugrul Ozkok (2006), claimed that the “ideological leader-The Calvin” of this movement is Fethullah Gülen.

The Gülen Movement controls a significant amount of economic resources (see footnotes 3 and 19). It is very clear by now that the *Cemaat* has no problems with the requirements of contemporary world and tries to adapt to it. Therefore, my focus in this section is how the way in which the movement and its followers manage to adapt their Islamic values to the modern capitalist world. In the course of interactions between Islamist movements and modernity, as

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<sup>16</sup> For a summary of these discussions, see: (<http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=224>) Retrieved in Jun 2,2009

Nilüfer Göle (2006:80) suggests, “Islamic movements select and reinterpret the religion canon throughout their confrontation with issues of modern society”.

When Gülen answers the question of The Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) about “workers' rights according to Islam”, he presents an Islamic understanding of work, workers' rights, wages and employer-employee relationships (Gülen, 2006). First, he elaborates on the Islamic understanding of the concept of “right” by giving examples from Qur'an and hadiths (the Prophet Muhammad's sayings/deeds). Then, he puts forward some verses of the Qur'an in order to demonstrate that it is legitimate to hire someone in exchange for a wage. One of the verses that he mentions is “And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort” (Surah An-Najm (The Star), 53:39). From the previous and following verses, it seems that this verse is about the man's efforts in this world in order to gain in the afterlife. However, Gülen interprets this verse in order to prove the legitimacy of wage labour. It is important to note here that Islamic texts permit different interpretations, and the interpretation depends on where the interpreter positions him or herself. For example, Ali Sheriati (2003) interprets different verses, hadiths, events, and characters in Islamic history in a way that allows him to reconcile Islam and Socialism. My purpose here is not to question the validity of Gülen's interpretation, but to show his positioning when he interprets an Islamic text. Within the same interview, Gülen provides some criteria about the conditions of work. For example, he says that “an employer should allow his employees to perform their prayers.” In a similar fashion, in the article, “Protestant Work Ethic in Muslim Turkey”, published in *International Herald Tribune*, the author quotes the following sentences:

In European countries, workers take a 15-minute smoking break; here we take a 15-minute prayer break," said Ahmet Herdem, the mayor of Hacilar, a town of 20,000 people in this deeply religious and socially conservative region of Central Anatolia, which has produced some of Turkey's best-known

companies. "During this time, you are in front of God and you can ask him to help improve business and this is good for morale. (Bilefsky, 2006)

This is a telling example of how conservative people reconcile their Islamic identities with capitalism. More specifically they see Islam not as an obstacle, but as an “incitement” for their capitalist activities.

Gülen further asserts that “there is a distinction between employer and employed in Islam, but this distinction is totally different from what the concepts of “proletariat” and “bourgeoisie” connote.” For Gülen (2006) “there has never been any separation, struggle or contestation between different classes in Muslim social life”. In this instance, Gülen’s actions are based on his dualistic understanding of world, and he claims to create a synthesis between Islamic morals and Western science and technology. Therefore, it can be argued that he favours a work ethic based on Islamic spiritual values and Western material values.

The other article (Öztürk, 2008) that I analyze here to show the Islamic interpretations of economic activities is written by Ibrahim Öztürk<sup>17</sup> and was published in *Zaman* Newspaper on December 1, 2008. In this article, called “Lessons of 'Fate' to The Businessman from Economic Crisis,” religious and capitalist languages are successfully intertwined. He first asserts that people should see the economic crisis as an opportunity for innovation, then pointing to a verse from Qur'an which states: “There is always an ease with a difficulty” (my literal translation). He concludes from this verse that “God orders us to create brilliant futures from this crisis,” further claiming that the “blessing of God” shifted from the West to the East, since the crisis erupted in the West. Finally he says that “Providence orders you '*hegira*'<sup>18</sup>”. He suggests that businessmen

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Ibrahim Öztürk is an economist in Marmara University and a columnist in Movement's daily *Zaman*. He is an explicit supporter of the movement and he often works as an adviser to the movement's business associations such as İŞHAD and TUSKON.

<sup>18</sup> Hegira is the escape of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in AD 622. It means emigration in Arabic.



should invest in the Balkans, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia, Sudan, and Ethiopia. His suggestions are ordinary, highlighting business activities such as innovation, searching for niches and investment; however his language is heavily filled with Islamic discourse. He has an understanding of Islam as a shared cultural bond, which serves as a social capital, as a legitimizing tool for capital accumulation which serves as a symbolic capital. The Gülen Movement synthesizes Islam and capitalism in order to challenge not only the secular elites, who have always favoured secular entrepreneurs in Turkey, but also the “divergence” discourse which asserts that Islam is not compatible with modernity.

In summary, the Gülen Movement controls an enormous amount of economic resources<sup>19</sup>, and its followers establish business associations.<sup>20</sup> Through these associations, supporters of the movement meet and do business with each other. Being a follower of Gülen (being Muslim, modern, nationalist) becomes a symbolic capital that helps individuals to gain economic capital. Similarly, the Gülen Movement uses its identity as symbolic capital for economic progress. The followers of Gülen prefer the economic enterprises of the movement in the market. Here, the identity of the movement becomes a symbolic capital for its capitalist accumulation. Additionally, the movement gains economic capital through its activities and with the help of this economic capital it establishes a domination over other groups. Therefore, it can be observed that there is reciprocity between the different forms of capitals present within the movement.

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<sup>19</sup> The information about the exact financial resources possessed by the Gülen Movement is always speculative. Since the Movement has a loose structure, it is impossible to calculate its total holdings. However, during the media campaign against the Gülen Movement in June 1999, the Turkish secular media wrote that the economic volume of the Movement was approximately 25 billion dollars (as an example see NTVMSNBC, 11 August 1999 “<http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/23431.asp>” retrieved May 18, 2009). It is important to note here that after the JDP came into power in 2002, the movement's prominence and financial power increased dramatically.

<sup>20</sup> Two of these associations are TUSKON (Confederation of Industrialists and Businessmen of Türkiye) and İŞHAD (Business Life Cooperation Association).

### **III.6 Neo-Ottomanism**

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the Gülen Movement positions itself on the very juncture of different values: Islam, modernity, scientific thought, multiculturalism, Turkish nationalism, and capitalism. The movement -by appropriating, synthesizing and reinterpreting these notions- distinguishes itself from other actors in the field, and through this positioning, forges its distinct ideology.

Since the ideology of the movement is based on the pillars of Islam, modernity, scientific thought, multiculturalism, Turkish nationalism, and capitalism, I will call this positioning “neo-Ottomanism”, as an overall concept. A selective reinterpretation of the Ottoman Empire, or the idea of the Ottoman, provides the Movement with the necessary tools to maintain its legitimacy, while positioning itself within the field. As presented above, the main objective of the movement is to preserve the spiritual domain, which is the sign of their Muslimness, and to adopt what the modern world requires within the material domain. For such an objective, the idea of Ottoman Empire is the best ideal for the Gülen Movement.

For example, the foundation of the multiculturalist approach of the movement is the pluralist structure that existed in the Ottoman Empire: “The Ottoman Empire had been characterized by a spirit of cosmopolitanism; by ethnic, linguistic and religious mixture and interchange” (Robins, 1996:69). The movement advocates tolerance between religious or ethnic differences and peaceful coexistence. It considers the Empire as a reference point.

In addition, the idea of the Ottoman Empire provides the movement with an expansionist imperial vision. As indicated above, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Central Asian Turkic Republics, the movement shifted its focus towards these countries and

community members established educational institutions and trade networks in the region.<sup>21</sup> This expansion went beyond the Central Asian area, and today the Gülen Movement has educational institutions in around 100 countries: “Today, Gülen schools and other educational establishments are globally far-flung, and can be found in locations as diverse as Russia, Armenia, the United States, Australia, China, Cambodia, sub-Saharan Africa, India, Pakistan, and in Western countries where Turkish minorities are located, notably Germany” (Park, 2008).

Fethullah Gülen always speaks in praise of Ottoman Empire, and takes a very conservative stance on the controversial issues related to Ottoman Empire (Gülen, 1996:3). For example, he emphasizes the heightened “level” of faith within the Ottoman Empire and uses it as an example to his community. According to him, “the Ottoman, more important than all, displayed an Islamic faith of very high quality” (Gülen, 1998b: 9). He has an intense longing for the power of the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, Gülen is of the opinion that the material decadence of the Ottoman Empire was a result of the spiritual degeneration of the Sultans and the people (Gülen, 1998b:28; 2004:152).

Furthermore, neo-Ottomanism provides the movement with a utopia, a telos which plays an important role in the construction of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006). Fethullah Gülen, in his discourse, always uses examples from the Islamic Golden Age (*Asr-ı Saadet*: the time of Prophet Muhammed) and Ottoman times, and compares his movement with these times. For example, the nucleus of the organization of the movement are “houses of light” (*ışık evleri*), which are private flats or houses, in which university students can stay. In these houses, as Agai (2005:3) suggests, “Islamic education was and is taught on the basis of both Nursi's writings and Gülen's teaching, making use of the latter's tapes”. Gülen uses the analogy of the “house of Erkam” (the house from which Muhammed started to organize and spread the religion) to

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Gülen Movement's presence in Central Asia, see Balçı (2005).

describe the nature and the mission of these houses (Gülen, 2001). In addition, he describes his community as a “golden generation” (*altın nesil*) by referring to Mehmed the Conqueror (Gülen, 1997): “Educational, business and media networks are the foundations of a project of Golden Generation and a mission of putting Turkey in a status of hegemonic country [...]. It is the project of a Muslim society with a powerful state. Ottoman state is the stereotype for this project” (Bilici, 2001). This utopia serves not only as a legitimizing tool, but also as an encouraging telos, which once arrived at, resolves all problems, whether relevant or not.

# **CHAPTER IV: “THE CULTIVATION” OF A “GOLDEN GENERATION” BY PROVIDING PEOPLE WITH UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH EDUCATION**

As discussed so far, one of the most distinctive features of the Gülen Movement is its strong emphasis on education, and its educational institutions dispersed throughout the world. In this chapter, I will explore the reasons behind the movement's extensive engagement in educational activities and the functions of this engagement for the movement in its power struggle.

## ***IV.1 The Characteristics and Importance of Education in Turkey***

As indicated in the introduction, the Turkish Republic was founded upon the pillars of Western secularism, modernity, and nationalism. According to Göle (1997:47), “Turkey has had a very long tradition of ruling elites which, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been engaged in reforming, modernizing and secularizing Turkish society”. These ruling elite, after the birth of the Republic, implemented a top-down modernization project, or social engineering, and education was of central importance within it. According to Akpınar (2007:161) the, “[i]deologues and reformers of the Turkish Republic paid special attention to education in order to create a secular, modern society. They saw education as a pivotal institution, which would pave Turkey's way to becoming a member of contemporary civilisation”. It is not surprising that education was given a crucial importance in the process of the nation-building, because the education was the most effective apparatus at the disposal of the state that would effectively install all of the previously mentioned values.

Secularism in Turkey (more appropriately; *laïcité*) has been considered almost synonymous with modernisation. Göle (1997:49), inspired by Gellner (1981:68), identifies Turkish secularism as a “didactic secularism: moralistic and pedagogical, teaching and imposing a modern way of life”. She summarizes the relationship between Turkish secularism and the education system as follows:

“Secularism became instrumental in creating new Republican elites. This took place primarily by means of the national education system, which was put under the authority of the Ministry of Education in 1926. The state delegitimized religious education and established the supremacy of secular modern education nationwide. The building of the nation-state was thus accompanied by the centralization of education and the formation of its nationalist elites” (Göle, 1997:49).

In short, education was the primary tool of the state to create secular and nationalist citizens. Furthermore, the new education system created the new Republican elites:

Republican elites were the product of this new way of writing, reading and speaking. They used the Latin script, spoke 'pure', 'original' Turkish, without a local accent, mastered Western languages and referred themselves to Western sources in science and literature. [...] Language and script reforms endowed the new elites with a symbolic capital, conferring upon them legitimacy and prestige, and distinguishing them as 'progressive' (Göle, 1997:50).

This new Republican secular elite -consisted of academicians, military officers, jurists, teachers, journalists, novelists, and politicians, who were endowed not with economic but symbolic and cultural capital- and served as the protectors and the transmitters of the Kemalist ideology. Since becoming a part of this elite was primarily based on cultural capital, thus education, the young Republic provided an opportunity for upward social mobility to those who had access to education.

The young Republic strove to install its modern values even in the remotest corners of the country. For this purpose, education in villages was given importance, because a substantial

portion of the population was living in villages, and the economy was based on agriculture (Üstel, 2005:198). In order to establish the values of the Republic in rural parts of the country, for example, Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) were established between late 1930s and late 1940s: “Among the goals of the Institutes were ending illiteracy and creating intellectuals in villages, ending poverty, increasing economic activity and efficiency, spreading the political ideals of the new Kemalist regime” (Karaömerlioğlu 1998, quoted in Şimşek 2006). The main objective of these Village Institutes was to train teachers who would be sent back to villages as “missionaries of scientific enlightenment and progress” (Stirling, 1965:276). Through such means, the Republic provided people with the opportunity for upward social mobility, and thus a new Republican elite emerged.

Nevertheless, a substantial number of rural people who were located on the periphery were unable to access higher education until the 1950s. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, a sizable mass of rural peasants immigrated to cities, and there some of them found the opportunity to access higher education. The massive urbanization paved the way of people on the periphery to become acquainted with the lifeworld in the center, and the emergence of contemporary Islamist movements was simultaneous with this flow of immigration. (Unsurprisingly, the first veiling controversy happened in 1968 when Hatice Babacan<sup>22</sup> was dismissed from Ankara University for attending classes with her headscarf.<sup>23</sup>) Narlı (1999) summarizes the relationship between massive urbanization and the rise of Islamism as follows:

As Islamist supporters moved from provincial towns and villages to urban centers, they were more likely to gain access to formal education and opportunities for upward social mobility. Islamist groups responded to the needs and aspirations of the newly urban who might be university students, professionals, shopkeepers, merchants, or workers. The groups offered food to

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<sup>22</sup> Hatice Babacan is the aunt of Ali Babacan, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and currently the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey responsible for economy.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed study on the history of the veiling issue in Turkey, see; Aydın (2005)

the needy, scholarships and hostels to university students, a network to young graduates looking for jobs, and credit to shopkeepers, industrialists and merchants.

As Gledhill (1994:200) points out,

Even if practices of domination never eliminate the spaces within which counter-hegemonic discourses and practices emerge, they still influence the forms taken by counter-hegemonic movements and their capacity to articulate together to mount a challenge to existing power-holders.

In this respect, Islamist counter-movements in Turkey employed the tools of the secular Republican elite to mount their challenges against them: “This new agents of change represented the move of Islam from the periphery of the system to its center, and yet were themselves a product of that center, of its educational institutions and its urban life” (Göle, 1997:54). According to Narlı (1999), “One important strategy used by the Islamist movements was to develop an educated counter-elite as a base of support, especially by strengthening the Islamic stream in the educational system”. They used the same tools and followed the same path to accumulate the same cultural capital.

Both the nature of education and its role in upward social mobility in Turkey are helpful in understanding why the Gülen Movement extensively attached importance to education. As I have indicated before, the Gülen Movement is a counter-movement, and its ultimate goal is to increase its share in the power struggle. For this reason, the movement founded hundreds of educational institutions, student dormitories and houses (houses of light) for university students in order to create its own counter-elite. Students are one of the main targets, and therefore constituents, of the movement (the other main constituent is businessmen, because of their potential financial support).



## ***IV.2 The Structural Problems of The Turkish Education System***

The other main reason behind the Gülen Movement's extensive emphasis on and success in education lies in the opportunities that Turkish education system has created for it. The Gülen Movement has been exploiting the problematic nature of the education system in Turkey and turning it into an opportunity for itself.

Because of the increasing number of university candidates, the quota of Turkish universities is inadequate for all high school graduates who wish to pursue university education. Therefore, students are only able to start their university education through passing the University Entrance Exam (ÖSS). This exam determines which university, if any, the examinee can attend. For example, in 2008, only one third of the 1.5 million candidates passed the exam and enrolled in a university. Similarly, another exam called the “High School Entrance Exam” (OKS)<sup>24</sup> selects students who are successful enough to be enrolled in high-calibre high schools (e.g. Science High Schools, Anatolian High Schools etc). A recent report prepared by World Bank (2007:17) juxtaposes the problems of ÖSS System as follows:

- 1) “The OSS exam, as structured, does not measure the secondary education curricula or what students learned in secondary school, nor does it measure what students need for a particular university or tertiary program of study. Moreover, during the last year of secondary school, students focus more heavily on exam preparation than on school studies.
- 2) Given the content of the exam and the high stakes attached to it, students spend substantial time and money getting private coaching for the exam diverting students away from school, especially in the last year of school, and diverting large amounts of private financing into tutoring. Students with more limited financial means are at a distinct disadvantage relative to other students in obtaining the extra tutoring to improve exam scores.”

After analyzing Turkish education system in terms of income equity, the report concludes:

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<sup>24</sup> The OKS exam was abolished in 2007 by the Turkish Ministry of Education and was replaced by the SBS exams, which are spread out over three years.

Access to tertiary education in Turkey is uneven, benefiting students from higher income families more than those from lower income families. A survey of students taking the college entrance exam (OSS) has shown that students from high-income families, with more educated parents, and from larger cities are more likely to be placed in higher education. In addition, given significant differences in the quality of educational inputs and PISA scores by type of school, geographic area and family income, higher-income students are generally better prepared academically. They are also better able to afford private tutoring for the university entrance exam, which appears to increase the chances of doing well in the OSS. All the evidence points in the direction of unequal access” (World Bank Report, 2007:16)<sup>25</sup>

As demonstrated above, high school and university entrance exams are highly competitive and often require external tutoring. As a result, this education system paves the way for private preparatory courses (*dersane*)<sup>26</sup>. It is almost impossible for a student to be successful in these entrance exams without obtaining external tutoring. However, these private preparatory courses demand certain amount of annual tuition fee which ranges from 2500 TL (1200 Euros) to 10000 TL (4800 Euros)<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, those students whose families are unable to afford these expenses start the “race” from far behind. In addition, since a student's whole education is oriented towards the University Entrance Exam, the elementary and high schools that the student attends become important for the families. Therefore, private elementary and high schools, which compete against each other in terms of their students' achievements in the *ÖSS* and *OKS*, started to spread throughout the country.

Moreover, the military coup of 1980, along with its other benefits for the Gülen Movement which were presented before, favoured the Gülen Movement's educational activities. As Agai (2005:3) suggests,

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<sup>25</sup> For another comprehensive study on the relationship between income inequality and education in Turkey, see Duman (2008).

<sup>26</sup> Preparatory Courses are private establishments preparing students for various exams.

<sup>27</sup> There are even “boutique *dersanes*” which demand more than 10000 TL annually. Also, the market volume of *dersane* sector is estimated between 6-8 billion dollars. for more about *dersane* sector; see: (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=242225>) retrieved in May 29,2009.

[h]is nationalistic, pro-junta state, anti-leftist and anti-Iranian discourse was completely in line with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis promoted by the state after 1980. Legal changes enabled the building of state-controlled private schools and the financial support of public schools. While all other Islamic groups supported Imam-Hatip schools<sup>28</sup> or Qur'anic courses<sup>29</sup>, Gülen advised his followers to invest in private secular elite high schools.

As it is seen above, Gülen adopted a different method from those of other Islamic groups in the field of education. Thus, the atmosphere created by the military coup in 1980 paved the way for the Gülen Movement's to render education as the base of their activities.

### ***IV.3 The Gülen Movement's Educational Activities and Their Functions for The Movement***

The Gülen Movement, by aiming to create its counter-elite and benefiting from the problems in the Turkish education system and from the atmosphere created by the military coup in 1980, emphasized education and, in doing so, founded hundreds of educational institutions in Turkey. Later these educational activities of the Movement spread out of Turkey and around the world.

“Fethullah Gülen, staying loyal to the method of his spiritual guide (*mürşid*) Said Nursi, emphasized on education in order to enlarge his movement” (Balcı, 2005:158). The Gülen Movement started to operate in the field of education by establishing dormitories for university students: “Mostly, *Fethullahcı* (emphasis added) businessmen of a given city carry all expenses

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<sup>28</sup> *Imam Hatip* school is a secondary education institution in Turkey. They were originally established to train government employed imams. However, they became popular among conservative families who wished their children to be educated with a religious inclination. For example, current Prime Minister Recep tayyip Erdoğan graduated from one of these high schools.

<sup>29</sup> 'Qur'anic Course' is where children who are mostly under their 15s are taught to read Kuran. The authorization to open and close Quran courses belongs to the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey. However illegal Quranic courses are being opened under the guise of student dormitories.

of a student dormitory, because dormitories run by the state are unable to meet the housing demand which is increasing in recent years” (Balcı, 2005:158).

Secondly, the Gülen Movement is active in the field of preparatory courses. As Agai (2005:3) points out, “[i]n a time of political turmoil, Gülen and his followers hoped to educate a generation equipped with modern knowledge as well as Islamic morals. In 1978, his movement established its first study center (*dersane*) to prepare pupils for the central entrance examination for university access”. After the effects of the military coup in 1980, and with the increased decisiveness of the ÖSS, and the high profitability of the *dersane* sector, the number of the movement's *dersanes* rapidly increased. Today, the Gülen Movement has probably the most successful<sup>30</sup> network of private preparatory courses throughout Turkey.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the Gülen Movement is famous for its enormous private high school network. These high schools, including *Fatih Koleji* in Istanbul and *Samanyolu Lisesi* in Ankara, are very famous thanks to their success<sup>32</sup> in national and international science olympiads and students high scores on university entrance exams.

Most significant, the 'houses of light' (*ışık evleri*) are the most effective organs of the Gülen Movement. Balcı (2003:158) portrays these houses as "flats rented by the *cemaat* or purchased by *cemaat* businessmen where students-usually from poor families-are allowed to stay during their studies. Each "house of light" is under the direction of an *abi*<sup>33</sup> (older brother) who

<sup>30</sup> For example, 24 “champions of ÖSS” in the last 23 years (there can be more than one champion each year) were trained at *FEM* (<http://www.fem.com.tr/FemHakkinda.aspx>) Retrieved in May 30, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> This network includes FEM, Anafen, Maltepe, Körfez etc.

<sup>32</sup> For example, the students of *Fatih Koleji* earned 6 medals in the last International Olympics for Science and Mathematics in Hungary. For the full list of medals that *Fatih Koleji* earned in national and international Olympiads, see; ([http://www.fatihkoleji.com/olimpiyat\\_butun.php](http://www.fatihkoleji.com/olimpiyat_butun.php)) Retrieved in May 30, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Although this description is true, it ignores the female because of the fact that the houses of light are not the places where only male students stay. There is gender separation, and there are houses of light designed for female students as well. While the title “abi” (elder brother) is used to indicate the responsible person for the houses of light in which male students stay, the title “abla” (elder sister) is its counterpart for the houses of light for female students. In addition, the terms “abi” and “abla” are also in general use within the Movement denoting any person who is a

helps to educate the students". One of the movement's main targets is to include poor and successful students among the fellows. Such students are perfect targets, since the movement is able to provide them with the material resources they need. For example, the movement provides a university student coming from remote provinces with accommodation and financial assistance. Also, the student can benefit from the confidence of being a member of a community, and thus being assisted in navigating the metropole. The “houses of light” (*ışık evleri*), which are the nuclei of the movement, serve this purpose. University students stay in these houses, and they invite those who are being “dealt with” (*ilgilenmek*)<sup>34</sup> to these houses in order to influence them. While staying in these houses, each of students is responsible for a group of elementary or high school students. The university students assist these pupils regarding their school courses. This system is usually attractive for poor pupils, since their families are not able to afford such assistance economically.

The most prominent piece of the Movement's education network is Fatih University, which was founded in 1996.<sup>35</sup> Though its students may come from very diverse backgrounds, the student body of Fatih University, which comprises of more than 10000 individuals, mainly consists of the followers of the movement and those coming from conservative *nouveaux riches* families.

Through these educational institutions, the Gülen Movement enlarges its scope, legitimizes its activities, gains prestige, and obtains economic profits. In addition, it provides the movements with the essentials to create new elites, a process which is necessary in the power struggle against the secular elite. In a similar fashion, Balçı (2005:159) concludes that “even

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follower.

<sup>34</sup> “ilgilenmek” is a key term in the discourse of the followers of the Gülen Movement. The followers of the Movement adopted a method in conveying their message which favours “one to one dealing with” (*birebir ilgilenmek*) target individuals.

<sup>35</sup> (<http://www.fatih.edu.tr/?&language=EN>) Retrieved in May 30,2009

though running private educational institutions requires huge resources, they are crucial for the Movement, because they serve as springboards to infiltrate in all parts of the society such as business firms, government cadres, national education (*milli eđitim*) and so forth.”

## CHAPTER V: THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

### V.1 *Becoming a Follower of The Gülen Movement*

As I have indicated before, the interviews were semi-structured, and each went in a different direction, according to the characteristics and responses of each interviewee. However, there were common points which were discussed during all interviews. In all of these interviews, the discussion started with the interviewee's narration of his or her family background and the way in which he or she first became acquainted with the Gülen Movement.

Without exception, all of my interviewees responded that they come from “traditional, conservative Muslim” families. For example, Volkan<sup>36</sup> said that:

My family is a classical Anatolian family; they are traditional Muslims (*gelenek müslüman*)<sup>37</sup>. For example, my father does not pray five times a day, but fasts during Ramadan, and attends Friday Prayer.

In a similar fashion, Defne<sup>38</sup> recounted her family as follows:

It's a family which has traditional beliefs. I used not to feel that they are religious other than during Ramadan. Their consciences were traditional, not religious. For example, when I was a teenager, they did not allow me to wear shorts, not due to religious grounds, but because they considered this as inappropriate in a small town. If the tradition and religion collide with each other, they used to stand by tradition. For instance, if I don't have intimacy with my male cousins, they wouldn't like this attitude, because it's an attitude which is traditionally improper.

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<sup>36</sup> Volkan (22, male) is a junior student majoring in Management. He is from Kırşehir, a small town near Ankara. He first acquainted with the Movement in his elementary school (*ilköğretim*) years.

<sup>37</sup> The term “traditional Muslim” is a commonly used term within the Movement's discourse. It denotes those who are practicing Islam not because of their religious consciousness, but because Islamic practices are established in tradition/culture.

<sup>38</sup> Defne (21, female) is a junior student majoring in Sociology. She is from Bolu, a coastal city between Istanbul and Ankara. She is a follower of the the Gülen Movement since the elementary school. I interviewed her at Fatih University.

I also asked my interviewees if their parents had been followers of the Gülen Movement before they joined the movement themselves. It came out that only Emre's older brother, and İlker's<sup>39</sup> father were members of the movement. The other interview subjects didn't have any family members who were followers of the movement.

It became evident that all of my interviewees originated from conservative backgrounds. At least, their families did not have negative attitudes toward religion because; I observed that, for the subjects and their families, religion was taken for granted. In other words, since Islam is a part of their lives, not necessarily as a religious identity but as a part of their culture and tradition, they are in favour of any activity or discourse which, according to them, is done in the name of Islam. For example, when I asked Seda<sup>40</sup> the reason behind her feeling of involvement in the movement, she replied: "Because they are religious!"

Following this discussion of their family backgrounds, I asked them to talk about their "entrance" to the Gülen Movement. All of them, except Seda, first became acquainted with the movement in their elementary school, that is, during their childhood. For Emre<sup>41</sup>, it was his older brother who conducted his initiation. He says:

My brother brought me to Istanbul for my education. Because, the high school that I had attended in Diyarbakır was really bad. He arranged the procedures for my matriculation at one of the Gülen Movement's high schools in Istanbul. I was so happy that I was a student at this high school, because my dream was to attend a school in the West [Western Turkey].

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<sup>39</sup> İlker (22, male) is a senior student majoring in Mathematics. He is from Ankara. He first acquainted with the the Gülen Movement in the elementary school and left the Movement 4 years ago.

<sup>40</sup> Seda (20, female) is a sophomore student majoring in Industrial Engineering. She has been a follower of the Movement for 4 years.

<sup>41</sup> Emre (21, male) is a sophomore student majoring in Philosophy. He is from Diyarbakır, a city in the South Eastern part of Turkey mainly populated by Kurds. He is a follower of the Movement for about 8 years. I interviewed him at his house, which is a "house of light" (*ışık evi*).



All of the other seven interviewees first became acquainted with the movement through their outstanding performances in their studies. For example, Volkan says that in his elementary school years, he passed the assessment test of the preparatory course (*dersane*) of the movement in his town. Thus, he was awarded a scholarship to attend the private high school (*kolej*) of the Gülen Movement. Similarly, Fatih Önder<sup>42</sup> said that he earned the right to attend the *dersane* of the Gülen Movement and to get a monthly stipend after his success in the assessment test of that *dersane*. İlker narrated his story as follows:

I was attending a public elementary school. One day, some young men came to the school and conducted an assessment exam.<sup>43</sup> They said that they were representatives of Maltepe Dersanesi (The movement's famous preparatory course in Ankara). I came first in the exam, and they promised that they would provide the first ten students with teaching support. Then, they took us to what they called TÖV<sup>44</sup>. We were going there once or twice a week to study. After a month, they told us that they had assessed our excellence and based on this assessment had chosen five of us. Later I realized that one of those who weren't selected was an Alevi<sup>45</sup>. Then they took five of us to a "house of light" and we started to frequent that house.

The stories of other interviewees are not substantially different from these stories. All of them were brilliant students and received either financial or counselling support from an organ of the Gülen Movement. However, attending an educational institution of the movement does not automatically indicate that the attendee becomes a follower of the movement. They pursue a careful strategy to get individuals to embrace the values of the movement. For example, it can be inferred from İlker's comments that only those who are likely to become followers in the future are recruited. He noted that the student who was an *Alevi* was not selected, since the *abiler*

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<sup>42</sup> Fatih Önder (24, male) is an MA candidate in the Management Department. He is from Mersin, a coastal city in the Southern Turkey. He has been a follower of the Movement for 12 years.

<sup>43</sup> This also shows the power of the Movement. They can operate in public elementary schools, most probably through their good relationships with school managers.

<sup>44</sup> TÖV (Türkiye Öğretmenler Vakfı) means The Teachers Foundation of Turkey. For further information see: Balcı (2005:154)

<sup>45</sup> Alevis are adherents of a specific Shi'a strand of Islam, with some pre-Islamic influences. It is practised mainly in Turkey.

considered him to be of no use. Again, all of my interviewees indicated that there was no mention about religion or the Gülen Movement in the beginning of their counselling. For example, Erdem<sup>46</sup> said:

At first, they just provided us with teaching assistance and counseling. We were playing computer games etc. They were very friendly to us and we appreciated it. There was little mention of religion, such as the necessity and 'beauty' of praying. But, for a while, we did not learn about Fethullah Gülen or the fact that those people were the parts of a specific religious group and so forth. Now I think that after a careful assessment of us, they decided to start indoctrinating us.

It is interesting here that Erdem describes their activities as “indoctrination”. It is obvious that, after he left the movement, he adopted a negative approach toward it. Nevertheless, Defne, who is still a follower of the movement, narrates her story in a similar fashion:

In the second year of my study at the movement's *dersane*, our teacher took us to a book fair. The teacher bought *Reşat Nuri Güntekin's*<sup>47</sup> book “*Olağan İşler*”, and gave it to me as a gift. After a while, he bought Fethullah Gülen's “*İrşad Ekseni*” for me as another gift. I was so happy and grateful. When I went home, my father, who is a teacher at a state-school, saw Gülen's book and muttered: 'they started!' I did not understand anything from his expression.

It became obvious that the members of the movement were very careful in conveying their message. Based on what all of the interviewees said, they came into contact with the Gülen Movement not for religious purposes, but for “worldly” benefits. In other words, their motivation was not to become more religious, but to become more successful, that is, to be able to move up in social strata and to fully participate in society. The Movement targets brilliant students, and promises to help them to provide for their material needs. After a while, if the individual is

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<sup>46</sup> Erdem (23, male) is a senior student majoring in International Relations. He is from Ankara. He first acquainted with the Movement in the elementary school and left the Movement two years ago.

<sup>47</sup> Reşat Nuri Güntekin is a secular Turkish classical novelist.

considered to be positive, they start to convey their religious message. Thus, it can be concluded that a commitment to the Movement -at least in the beginning- is dependent on material benefits.

All of my interviewees come from middle or lower class families. As presented in the Chapter IV, the education system in Turkey is highly competitive, and most of the students need external support (*dersanes*) to be successful in the high school and university entrance exams (*OKS* and *ÖSS*). Those students who come from middle or lower class families are often unable to afford the tuition fees<sup>48</sup> of *dersanes*. The movement helps by covering the educational costs of these successful students who are unable to afford it. As I presented earlier, Defne's father was a critic of the Gülen Movement, but he did not reject the scholarship that his daughter received from the *dersane* of the movement. Similarly, Fatma<sup>49</sup> and Fatih Önder noted that their parents were wary of their participation in the Gülen Movement, but they could not reject their overtures due to the scholarship that they were granted. Fatih Önder discusses his father's consent as follows:

Since my father was a civil servant, it was not the best thing for me to attend that *dersane* because; there was a negative opinion in the public towards the Gülen Movement at that time. [He is reminded of the negative media campaign against the Gülen Movement in June 1999]. However, he was persuaded thanks to the scholarship that I earned.

In brief, I observed two main factors behind Gülen Movement's success in attracting individuals. First, young pupils who come from conservative family backgrounds are attracted to the Gülen Movement, since they consider its identity, which carries motives from Islam and nationalism, as in accordance with their own culture and traditions. Second, by taking advantage of its ability to mobilize a significant quantity of financial and human resources, the Gülen Movement becomes

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<sup>48</sup> This tuition fee varies from 2500 TL (1200 Euros) to 10000 TL (4800 Euros).

<sup>49</sup> Fatma (25, female) is an MA candidate in the Economics Department. She is from Adana, a coastal city in the Southern Turkey. She first acquainted with the Movement in her elementary school years and she left the Movement 2 years ago. I interviewed her at Fatih University.

able to attract young pupils and their families who are unable to afford excessive educational expenses. Even those parents who are sceptical of the Gülen Movement often consent to send their children to one of its educational institutions due to the material benefits that they will receive.

## **V.2 “Cultivating” A Generation by Providing Them with Upward Social Mobility through Education**

When *Abiler* first recruited me, most of the families didn't want to send their children to *Abiler*. However, now, after seeing my success in my studies, everybody around me wishes *Abiler* would recruit their children. But, this time, *Abiler* rejected them, because they can find a sufficient number of students to 'cultivate' [*işlemek*]. That's why they are selective.

What is striking in İlker's comments is that he uses the term “cultivation” to denote the activities of the *abiler*. It is indeed a perfect term to explain the Gülen Movement's strong emphasis on education. The terms “culture” and “cultivation” have a common etymological origin. The term “culture” stems from Latin word “*colere*” which means to “cultivate” (Harper, 2001). The derived noun “*cultus*” refers “not only to cultivation in the agricultural sense, but also to training, style of dress, refinement, sophistication, and civilization” (Toadvine, 2005:20). The Gülen Movement attempts to create a cultural identity and to cultivate a generation, which Gülen himself calls “the golden generation” (*altın nesil*), through education.

As I have discussed in the Chapter IV, one of the most important means for upward social mobility in Turkey is education. However, with the increasing decisiveness of highly competitive entrance exams, and the resulting *dersanes*, the education system seems to not function properly because, the path to earning a prestigious university degree requires families to have a considerable degree of financial capital. The Gülen Movement steps in at this point. The Gülen

Movement has always been aware of the importance of education in Turkey and has concentrated on that. They provide those who are unable to afford their educational expenses with the material resources that they need. This creates a situation in which both parties gain because, via assisting successful poor students and their families, the Gülen Movement disseminates its message, “annexes men” (*adam kazanmak*), and consequently starts putting those selected on the social and political trajectory to become an elite, and engage in its power struggle against the secular elite. On the other hand, those students who have the potential to pursue, but unable to afford the expenses of, a prestigious education find the opportunity for upward social mobility.

During the interviews, I proposed the question: “If you hadn't joined the Gülen Movement, what would have been different in your life?” to my interviewees. Most of them primarily emphasized on the material benefits that the movement provided them with. For example, Emre responded to this question as follows:

If I hadn't become a part of the movement, I wouldn't have come to Istanbul after the elementary school. Probably, I would have started working in a shop. Perhaps I would have married early, or perhaps I would have been a carpenter. Also, I would have definitely been less religious.

Fatma answered in a similar fashion, but her position is different. She left the movement two years ago. She not only discussed what would have happened if she hadn't joined the Gülen Movement, but also speculated on the possible trajectories her like would have taken if she stayed within the movement:

Without the movement, I wouldn't have been able to pursue my education as comfortably as I did. I would have been in a worse position and my vision would have been narrower. If I were still a part of the movement, I wouldn't

have to think about my future now. I would easily go abroad to study without having to think about finding scholarship.

It is interesting that she decided to leave the movement even though she acknowledges that this decision would bring some negative outcomes. She explained this as follows:

I am aware that this decision brought me some difficulties, but I do not have regrets because I don't like to give up the control of my life to others. Now, I feel more free. My relationship with other people is more honest. People like or hate me just by considering my personality, not my title or position within the movement.

Erdem's response is as follows:

You know I am coming from a lower class family. The environment which I was living in was not suitable for higher education. I didn't have any family members or close relatives or neighbours who attended university. Thanks to the 'abiler', I did well in the OKS (High School Entrance Exam) and in the ÖSS (University Entrance Exam). Without them, most probably I would have been a vagabond (*serseri*), because I am the only one who had the chance to attend university among my fellows in the elementary school.

It is evident that the Gülen Movement provided my interviewees with this upward social mobility. The resources of the movement helped the redistribution of income and provided these students with the ability to overcome the barriers in front of them. Moreover, the *Abiler* and *Ablalar* have become important role models, or charismatic figures, in their lives. Emre, Volkan, Defne, Fatih Önder, Erdem and İlker emphasized the influence of their *abi*, *abla*, or teacher over their lives. For example, İlker said:

I remember my *Harun Abi*, who was a student at Middle East Technical University (METU). He was a real role model for me; influenced and motivated me a lot in my studies and world-view.

In brief, the Gülen Movement, by taking the advantage of external developments, successfully creates a situation from which both parties profit. As Balcı (2005:168) points out,

“the rapid rise of the Gülen Movement can be explained with its social policy. Students, who get assisted in covering education costs (in the form of scholarship or free housing), become devoted followers. With the participation of numerous firms to this process, *ışık evleri* spread throughout the country”. While people who get support from the movement find the opportunity for upward social mobility, the Gülen Movement legitimizes its activities, finds financial and human resources to maintain its activities, and attempts to create its counter-elite.

Furthermore, as indicated in the Section III.5, the Gülen Movement is a “capitalism-friendly” organization. As Balcı (2005:175) suggests, “capitalism is the essential power of the Movement. All the firms financing the Gülen Movement's educational activities are the products of Turkish capitalism. Probably, such a movement couldn't have formed without capitalism”. Thus, I argue that the Gülen Movement takes advantage of capitalism in two ways. First, the Gülen Movement is a product of capitalism per se. It wholly operates in and benefits from the environment created by capitalism. Second, as indicated in the introduction, “Turkey’s subordination to the world neoliberal order started in the late 1970s and was pursued consistently after the 1980 military coup” (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2009). According to Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2009);

The 1982 constitution, devised under the auspices of the military, validated the replacement of the social state with a new regulatory state [and] (italics added) [t]he new legislation is the ultimate step in the exclusion of social security from the rights of citizens. Thus, either security must be obtained in the marketplace or it must be gained as a result of another person’s or institution’s benevolence.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of these new neoliberal policies and decreasing effectiveness of the existing means of social organization, the poor and destitute became dependent on charity. As a result,

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<sup>50</sup> for more about the effects of 1980 Coup to the Turkish Social Security System, see: Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2009).

the Gülen Movement, along with other Islamic charity networks, found the opportunity to increase its effectiveness. Then, I argue that, by primarily targeting successful but poor students and providing them with the material resources they need, the Gülen Movement benefits from the inequalities created by capitalism.

In addition, the followers of the Gülen Movement have the ability to obtain several positions or titles within the movement. As Balçı (2005:21) suggests, the Gülen Movement has a “hierarchical structure which is reminiscent to a pyramid”. As adverted before, the titles *abi* and *abla* are the main markers of hierarchy within the structure of the movement. Each of them has a scope of operation and is responsible for a certain area, institution, or people. For example, while someone is responsible for those who are living in a certain “house of light”, another one is responsible for all of the students attending to Fatih University, or another person is responsible for all of the university students within the boundaries of Istanbul. Individuals who join the movement have begun to have access also to mobility within the movement. For example, Fatih Önder said:

Of course, we have some side benefits of being a follower of the movement. For example, people show you respect thanks to your position within the movement, or you can solve a problem within hours thanks to your contacts, while ordinary people can solve it in ten days. We are aware of these side benefits, and to be honest we enjoy them, but we fight with this feeling.

Fatma told a similar story, but from a critical perspective:

I experienced *ablalar's* psychological pressure so often. People, who are only ordinary individuals outside, become important individuals thanks to the movement. They enjoy and exploit it. Their behaviours and attitudes suddenly change. They abuse their so-called power and influence over other people.



These two conflicting comments address a common point: that the Gülen Movement provides its followers with several titles or privileges within the movement.

In conclusion, the mobility that the followers of the Gülen Movement are provided with is bidirectional. They not only have access to upward social mobility within the external social strata through education, but also are provided with an upward mobility inside the movement. I argue that this is one of the important keys to the movement's success in captivating individuals.

### ***V.3 A Key Concept: Loyalty (Vefa)***

An important concept which came into prominence during the interviews was loyalty (*vefa*). As became clear in the previous sections, my interviewees acknowledged the benefits of the Gülen Movement in their lives. After thinking about the possibility of non-existence of the movement in their lives, they acknowledged that they would not have been afforded the same opportunities had the movement not been a force in their lives. The acknowledgement of the importance of the Gülen Movement for their life stories produces a sense of indebtedness (*borçluluk duygusu*) within them. For example, Volkan said:

I attended a private high school for seven years for free, and now I am attending Fatih University without having to pay the tuition fee and even I get a monthly stipend. I have always felt their spiritual and material support. For example, when I went to Germany as an exchange student, they provided me with housing and guidance. This is why I consider my services (*hizmet*) for the movement as a 'pay back'. These are the outcomes of my loyalty (*vefa*).

Fatma's story is as follows:

I have always had the sense of indebtedness, since I received their scholarship during my education. I had been a loyal follower of the movement until I left it two years ago. Some time, my feeling towards Fethullah Gülen was like a love. When I came to Fatih University, everything changed. I had many problems with the people around me. Finally, I left them because of an issue about a

house [house of light] which was registered under my name. Nevertheless, I don't deny their contributions to me.

As the above examples illustrate, people develop a feeling of attachment to the movement, taking the advantages that are provided them by the movement into consideration. It is an important factor in the process of becoming loyal followers. As Volkan noted, he considers his services as a “pay back.”

This mutual relationship recalls the concept of “reciprocity” introduced by Polanyi (1945). Latham (2009) describes the concept of “reciprocity” as follows:

*Reciprocity* implies that people produced such goods and services for which they were best suited, and shared them with those around them. This was reciprocated by the others. There was an unspoken agreement that all would produce that which they could do best and mutually share and share alike. The motivation to produce and share was not personal profit, but fear of social contempt, ostracism, and loss of social prestige and standing.

The condition of reciprocity is established between the members of a given community when each of them contributes to the well-being of others and maintenance of social cohesion. Not only goods, but also services and other resources such as prestige are redistributed within the community. As Adaman and Madra (2002) suggests, “reciprocity involves the movement of funds, goods, or services among two or more economic subjects (individuals, groups, institutions) that are situated symmetrically with respect to one another in a symbolic network”. In my case, there is a reciprocal relationship between the Gülen Movement and its followers. More specifically, each individual within the movement contributes to the well-being of all and thus benefits from the resources collectively created. For example, a businessman assists a certain number of students in the form of covering their educational expenses, and gains respect and prestige in return. Similarly, a student, who receives financial assistance from the movement,

participates in the activities of the movement as a “servant”. Based on my interviewees’ remarks, they produce a “sense of indebtedness” and become “loyal” followers, by considering the movement’s benefits for them. Through this process, the followers of the movement maintain social harmony and foster social cohesion. Also, these reciprocal acts bind community members together, that is, render them loyal followers. In other words, people obtain a social capital which binds them together as a common cultural or religious bond.

#### ***V.4 The Contemporary Form of Religiosity: The People of Synthesis***

As indicated so far, the Gülen Movement, with the effects of profound changes on the contemporary world such as globalisation and modernization, transforms the path that is hitherto followed by religious movements, and presents a different form of religious community. As has also demonstrated, the Gülen Movement synthesizes modern concepts with Islam and employs modern methods, such as mass media, in order to disseminate its message. Therefore, it is not wrong to describe the movement as a product of modernity. In this chapter, I will discuss the novel form of religiosity that is presented by the Gülen Movement through Olivier Roy's (2004:220) concept of “neo-brotherhood.”

According to Olivier Roy (2004:221), “Creating new *tariqat* from ancient ones is certainly nothing new, but what we call a neo-brotherhood is not simply the offshoot of a traditional *tariqat*, and is shaped along new lines; it is usually derived from a traditional Muslim *tariqat*, but with some innovations”. Roy (2004:222-223) describes that “A neo-brotherhood targets an individual who no longer has roots in a primary community and lives in a purely non-spiritual environment. It provides him with a new community often very similar to a modern

cult, inward-looking and inclusive, which deals with all aspects of the newcomer's life". Roy (2004:222-228) describes the characteristics of a neo-brotherhood as follows:

1. The brotherhood is headed by a sheikh who is more a modern guru than a sufi master. He writes extensively (hundreds of books) and performs his role at meetings or even on television.
2. His followers are recruited as individuals rather than as part of a family tradition; a neo-brotherhood recruits when traditional links of solidarity and communal ties have been broken.
3. There is no real initiation or gradation in membership. The follower learns the master's teachings by reading his writings and listening to his sermons (often on video).
4. The brotherhood has an active public presence, using modern public-relations techniques (such as multiple websites, printed media, and appearances on television).
5. They often reject the term *tariqat* in favour of *jamaat* ('*cemaat*', note added) or community.
6. In the West, most neo-brotherhoods claim to provide a bridge between East and West, and present themselves as moderate and pro-Western alternatives to Islamic fundamentalism.

I argue that the Gülen Movement is a perfect example of Roy's characterisation of "neo-brotherhood," since all these six characteristics of a neo-brotherhood are valid when applied to it. However, what is more important for my analysis is Roy's (2004:224) comment; "joining a neo-brotherhood means entering contemporary forms of religiosity". In the previous chapters, I discussed the positioning strategy of the Gülen Movement, through certain forms of capitals that it possesses, in its power struggle, and the syntheses that it creates between different values. Unsurprisingly, one may expect that these difficult syntheses create a different type of understanding of religiosity.

Like the Gülen Movement in its macro positioning, my interviewees seemed to synthesize different values in their world-views. For example, Emre told a story about one of his experiences in a "Quranic course" (*Kuran Kursu*<sup>51</sup>). He said:

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<sup>51</sup> 'Kuran Kursu' is where children who are mostly under their 15s are taught to read Kuran. The authorization

When I was a child, the teacher (hoca) slapped me in face in the Kuran Kursu. Then, I became estranged from there. But for the Gülen Movement, it was not the same. They were quite friendly and inoffensive to me, while teaching religious matters. I think that practices while conveying the message are very important. The movement attracted me because they use contemporary methods. For example, in other religious groups, they don't allow the followers to wear jeans. Or, a woman who doesn't wear headscarf can not join such groups. But, in my opinion, religion is a personal matter because, deeds are rewarded by intention. We can not know the intention of a person while doing an action. Also, wearing robes (cüppe) and having long beards are not suitable practices for the contemporary world.

Most of the interviewees frequently used the expression “the conditions of this age” (*çağın şartları*) while comparing the Gülen Movement with other religious groups. They labeled the Gülen Movement as “a movement which meets the requirements of this time” while also stressing the importance of using modern methods in proselytizing activities. For example, Fatih Önder said:

If I were a person who has long beards, I wouldn't be influential on people while conveying my message to them. I know that it (having beard) is a Sunna<sup>52</sup>, but if you have to choose between two things, you need to consider the opportunity costs of them. Therefore, the less important one should be sacrificed for the sake of the more important.

It is noteworthy that, they mostly stress on the lack of conformity to practices relating to external appearance, such as beard and robe, to the conditions of the contemporary life. This can be interpreted in two ways: first, they may wish to detach themselves from the representation of backward radical Muslim, as stereotypically shown in robes and having long beard. Second, they may wish to underline their distinctiveness from the other Islamist groups in Turkey. Whatever the reason is, it is clear that they want to synthesize their Muslim identity with a modern lifestyle. This shows that they internalized the macro positioning of the Gülen Movement, which

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to open and close Quran courses belongs to the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey. However illegal Quran courses are being opened under the guise of student dormitories.

<sup>52</sup> Sunna is the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad, which form a basis for much of Islamic law.

is based on several syntheses between different values. They wish to be modern individuals without having to sacrifice their Muslimness, and vice versa.

In addition, it was interesting for me that Fatih Önder used scientific discourse when talking about a religious issue. He explained the necessity of the “rational decision-making” between two practices with the concept of “opportunity cost.” Similarly, while we were talking about his MA thesis, which is about redistribution of income and NGOs, he gave examples from Qur’anic verses and hadiths to support his argument. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the Gülen Movement's efforts to reconcile Islam and science on a personal level.

It is also noteworthy that my interview subjects used the term “*gelenek müslümanı*” in order to describe their families. This implies that they consider their own religiosity to be different -and superior- from the religiosity of their parents. As Roy (2004:29) puts it, “[r]eligiosity is a personal experience, not a legacy. A born-again believer is by definition sceptical of the religion of his family and forefathers”. Here, we see that individuals are sceptical of the religiosity of the society, including that of their parents. They believe that they have found the right way of becoming religious and that “true believers are in a minority” (Roy, 2004:29). Also, this is another point that demonstrates the followers' internalization of the movement's understanding and discourse, since Gülen often uses this expression in his sermons and books.<sup>53</sup>

The tone of the interview subjects during the interviews is worth noting, as they were talking about religion and religious requirements as if they were religious authorities themselves. Olivier Roy, while discussing the changes brought about by globalization to Islam, suggests: “The self is the truth; faith, not religion, is the truth. It is surprising to find so many writings (in booklets or on the Web) reduced to simple statements – ‘Islam says ...’ - and the author could be

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<sup>53</sup> As an example, see Gülen (2003). “Günümüzdeki Kıyam Problemi”. Online: (<http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/3181/18/>) Retrieved in Jun 1, 2009.

Mr Anybody. Religion is everybody's business” (Roy, 2004:38). In a similar fashion, Hefner (1998:91) suggests that “[i]n contrast to an age when Islamic knowledge was the monopoly of a small number of jurists, Islamic knowledge and practice today are objects of interest for growing numbers of people”. For example, Emre talked about his religiosity as follows:

Religion is a personal matter because, deeds are rewarded by intention. For example, clearing the table after dinner, or sweeping up the ground are means of religiosity (*dindarlık*) for me. [...] Sometimes, you can alter your priorities. For example, female teachers who wear headscarves can not be public servants. This is why they should uncover their heads when necessary.

In sum, I argue that the Gülen Movement's positioning in the macro field, and its characteristics are, to different degrees, internalized by the followers of the movement and consequently they have adopted a new form of religiosity. They reinterpret the religiosity through the effects of contemporary developments, and combine their modern lifestyles and mentalities with religious thought. As Roy (2004:28) puts it, “[t]he self, and hence the individual, is at the core of the contemporary religiosity. [...] Knowledge of the truth is achieved through personal faith, not through years of theological learning”. They criticize the irreligiosity of society and perceive themselves as true believers, and thus a minority. In brief, I characterize my interviewees, including those who left the movement, as the people of synthesis, who hybridize different values and present different characteristics, which do not conform to old classifications.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis examined and discussed the strategic positioning of the Gülen Movement in its power struggle with its rival groups or discourses, the dynamics behind its increasing prominence, the methods it uses in order to attract individuals, and the novelties brought by it to the lives of individuals who are living under its influence. More specifically, this thesis argued that the Gülen Movement is a “movement of synthesis,” which combines different values, and positions itself at the very juncture of these values, each of which serves as a capital for the movement to legitimize its activities and accumulate power in its struggle with other groups within the field.

The thesis started by exploring the conditions which paved the way for the Gülen Movement's success. The top-down modernization and secularization project of the Kemalist elite in Turkey failed to establish its influence over diverse segments of the society. Individuals or groups developed different “tactics” to erode the influence of state's “strategies” and to create “habitable” spaces for themselves. This environment was the base for the movement to flourish. Furthermore, the influences of massive urbanization in Turkey started in the 1950s and the 1960s, the new ideology of the state after the military coup in 1980, social and economic policy changes in the 1980s and their outcomes, and the significant social, political and economic upheavals in the world were discussed as the factors that have contributed to the Gülen Movement's increased prominence.

Then, the thesis discussed the complex relation between Islam and modernity examining the case of the Gülen Movement and argued that the Gülen Movement combines modernity with Islamic and traditional values. The Gülen Movement was presented as an example to the alternative modernities approach, since it has a dual conception of the world, which consists of



two spheres: the spiritual and the material. I argued that the Gülen Movement, by reinterpreting and remodelling both Islam and modernity, forged its own conception of modernity, which reinterprets Islamic and traditional values in modern conditions.

Since the scope of this thesis is far wider than only identifying the Gülen Movement as an alternative modernity and since the alternative modernities approach ignores the power relations, the thesis analyzed the Gülen Movement's strategic manoeuvres and positionings in its power struggle with other groups and ideologies via the Bourdieusian concepts of “field” and “capital.” I presented that Gülen Movement, by synthesizing different values and situating itself at the very juncture of these values (Islam, modernity, scientific thought, multiculturalism, capitalism, nationalism) increases its share of power and establishes a domination over other groups. Through this “synthesis” approach, the Movement legitimizes its activities, presents itself as an alternative and finally gives its followers the opportunity to be able to have a Muslim identity without sacrificing the “benefits” of the modern world.

Then, via the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with eight Fatih University students, the Gülen Movement's strong emphasis on education and its functions for the movement were discussed. In the thesis, the peculiarities and the increasing inequalities within the education system in Turkey (starting from the primary school and reaching to university education) which have paved the success of the movement, which invests in education discursively and -most importantly- financially, were discussed. I argued that the Gülen Movement, through its ability to mobilize a significant amount of financial and human resources, attaches a special importance to education in order to enlarge itself by making use of the Turkish education system's structural problems and to “cultivate” its counter-elite, “the golden generation.” I further argued that the movement is grounded in capitalism in two ways: it is very

much anchored in capitalism as a powerful and large web of holding and strives on the inequalities of the current neoliberal capitalism in Turkey.

In addition, the reciprocal relationship between the movement and individuals who are currently or formerly followers of the Gülen Movement was discussed. In this respect, it can be argued that this thesis is an attempt to build a bridge between the macro and micro levels in the analysis of the Gülen Movement. Since the actual lives of the followers and the way they internalize the positioning of the movement are usually neglected, this thesis attempted to contribute to the expanding literature on the Gülen Movement from usually untouched perspective.

Finally, I examined the novel form of religiosity, through my interviewees, brought by the developments in the contemporary world. I argued that the Gülen Movement is a “neo-brotherhood,” joining which means “entering contemporary forms of religiosity” (Roy, 2004:224). The interviewees presented characteristics, like the Gülen Movement in its macro positioning, based on syntheses of different values.

After the whole discussion, I can conclude that the Gülen Movement is, in the first place, a product of ongoing power contestations. In other words, the primary objective of the Gülen Movement is to increase its share of power and establish domination over its rival groups. Through its activities, it creates a reciprocal deal where both parties profit. While the Gülen Movement enlarges its scope, spreads its message and proceeds to “cultivate” its counter-elite, it provides its followers with the ability to climb in the social strata and wholly participate in the society; not only by providing them with the material resources they need, but also rendering them as individuals who are conforming to the contemporary set of values and lifestyles. Individuals become “loyal” followers, that is, feel committed to stay within the movement and

participate in the activities of it, by considering the benefits that they receive from the community. Each individual within the movement, in different ways, contributes to the common well-being of the whole community, and thus, in return, benefits from the collectively created resources in different forms.

Since the scope of this thesis is limited, I did not have the chance to elaborate on the issues that arose during my fieldwork, such as the gender aspect of being a follower of the Gülen Movement or the hierarchical pressure within the community. Further studies can address and discuss these issues.

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