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A Background for Understanding the Gülen Community[1]

Mustafa Şen

1. Introduction

Since the military coup of 1980, Turkey, supposedly the only secular but Muslim majority country oriented towards Europe in the so-called Islamic world, has seen an unprecedented rise of Sunni Islamic organizations. Recently they have not only dominated almost all religious, political and public issues, but have been able to establish transnational networks extending from Western Europe to Central Asia, as well. Among them, one of the most powerful and influential is the so-called *Fethullahçı* order, a religious community founded by Fethullah Gülen.

Gülen was a follower of Said Nursi (1876-1960), the founder of the Nurcu[2] movement. Nursi was trained in the *medreses* (traditional religious schools) and in the Sunni Sufi orders found in various parts of eastern Turkey. However, he was critical of the Sufi orders, thinking that traditional Islamic learning had become insufficient under the threat of Western culture, civilisation and institutions that imposed other priorities and needs. He wrote several volumes of Quranic exegesis, collected under the generic title of *Risale-i Nur* (The Epistles of Light). He described two objectives: the renewal of Islamic faith and the compatibility of Islam with modern sciences (Mardin 1989; Dumont 1986; Yavuz 1999). After Nursi's death, the Nurcus were divided in their views and plan of action. Today there are a number of Nurcu groups founded on the basis of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* collection. One of them is the Gülen community, which emerged in the 1970s and has gained much public attention since the second half of the 1990s.

In addition to Gülen's disciples, a number of scholars, politicians and journalists claim that the rise and transnationalization of the Gülen community signifies the florescence of civil society and the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. The existing academic and non-academic literature on the Gülen community, whether written from within or outside the community, has a tendency to present the community as a civil society organization, as well. Still, there exist great deficiencies when studying its organizational structure, hierarchical order, mobilization of the followers, and community networking on national, regional, and global scales.

This study disagrees with the leading analyses of the community, as their one-dimensional portrayals obscure major aspects of a more complex picture and a deeper sociological understanding. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to analyse the organizational structure of the Gülen community and to show how Gülen utilizes Sunni Sufism to shape his followers' inner self and to mobilize his disciples. A

1) I am grateful to Aykan Erdemir, Ahmet Murat Aytaç, Helga Rittersberger-Tılıç, and Ayça Ergun for their comments and help in various points.

2) *Nur* means 'light' and the suffix -cu here indicates a follower of Nursi's teaching. The same ending appears as -çı in Fethullahçı, 'follower of Fethullah', above.

thorough examination of the Gülen community is vital, when attempting to understand the wider socio-political contexts in which the community has emerged and become trans-nationalised within the last three decades.

2. The Gülen Community

The Gülen community comprises a large group of small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, an influential media empire and a widespread educational network. The community draws much of its human resource from entrepreneurs, students, teachers and journalists. There are over 100 foundations and associations that promote Gülen's views. For instance, the Foundation of Journalists and Writers introduces the community to the public at meetings. The Business Life Solidarity Association (*İŞHAD*) and the newly founded Confederation of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialist (*TUSKON*) attract thousands of small and medium-scale entrepreneurs who are either Gülen's followers or close to the community. It owns an interest-free financial institution, *Asya Finans* (Asia Finance) founded in 1996 (recently its name was changed into *Bank Asya*) and an insurance company, *Işık Sigorta* (Light Insurance).

The Gülen community is also very influential in the media sector. Its first journal, *Sızıntı* (Oozing), in publication since 1978, has been focusing on new scientific developments from a religious perspective. The community has journals on various other subjects such as the environmental journal *Ekoloji* (Ecology), the theological journal *Yeni Umut* (New Hope) and the journal introducing Islam in English, *The Fountain*. The weekly news journal *Aksiyon* (Action) exists since 1993. The daily *Zaman* (Time) newspaper bought by the community in 1986 disseminates the ideals and teachings of the community in the media sector. Recently Gülen's followers have bought two more newspapers, namely *Bugün* (Today) and the *Star*. Furthermore, the community owns *Samanyolu TV* channel, broadcasting to Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, a radio channel (*Burç FM*) and a news agency, *Cihan Haber Ajansı* (World News Agency). It also possesses several publishing houses that complement its activities in the media sector.

Since its inception, the Gülen community has displayed a special interest in the field of education. Gülen encourages his disciples to establish private elementary and high schools. The community owns around 300 schools and runs five universities in Turkey and abroad. Its educational infrastructure also includes dormitories, student housing, summer camps, and university entrance exam training centres, all of which play a crucial role in teaching and disseminating orthodox Sunni Islamic values and practices.

The presence of the Gülen community in areas such as education, media, finance and trade can be regarded as a decisive attempt to transform modern institutions according to Islamic precepts, advocating the superiority of an Islamic order. Indeed, its organisations and associations are well structured and strong enough to compete with secular ones in economic and cultural fields. More importantly, all these activities have created a social and economic space for the community's own elite, eager to replace the existing one in Turkey. Therefore, day-to-

day activities in such diverse areas should be seen as a powerful indication of the community's high organisational capacity. What makes this organisational capacity possible is the community's ability to mobilise its followers, united by a collective identity. More accurately, its organisational capacity should be understood as a consequence of the communal energy created by the disciples' devotion to ‹a shared future project› that aims at restoring the power and glory of Islam. All activities of the community are managed by a hierarchical organisation ‹based on the tenets of trust, obedience and duty to the community› (Yavuz 1999, p. 596). The managers of the community's organisations, which form its public face, are chosen in accordance with its inner hierarchy just as the activities' main objectives are set by the common ideals uniting the community. It is therefore necessary to examine the inner structure of the community, in order to understand how such a wide and complex organisation emerged. An analysis of its inner structure will show how a religious community, based on an orthodox Sunni stock of knowledge, combines traditional and modern organisational forms and mobilises its followers.

3. Organisational Duality

The Gülen community has two sides. The first encompasses foundations, associations, media institutions and formal schools. The community carries out its activities through these organisations in the public sphere; here formal principles and relations are dominant. Through these forms of organisation, the community becomes ‹visible› in the public sector. Metaphorically speaking, this side can be described as the ‹material world› or the ‹outer husk› of the community. However, the community also has its own ‹private sphere.› It possesses an inner world containing its own particular language, symbols and rites, which cannot be penetrated from the outside. Metaphorically, this can be seen as the ‹spiritual world› or the ‹interior› core of the community. This dual structure enables followers to move between the ‹material world› and the ‹spiritual world› or the ‹outside› and the ‹inside.› The continuous flow created by this organisational duality is one of the most important aspects of the community, enhancing its organisational capacity, as well as, its tensions and ambiguities.

The Gülen community bears the peculiarities of the Nurcu groups in terms of its religious teachings and its organisational structure. There is no initiation ritual for enrolling in the Nurcu groups. If one shows an interest in religious matters and, above all, some knowledge regarding the life and works of Nursi, s/he may enrol in a Nurcu group with the recommendation of a member. There are no strict regulations for recruiting new followers. This, however, does not preclude an extremely strict internal hierarchy within the Nurcu groups.

The general name, given the members of the Nurcus is ‹Nur students› or ‹disciples of the light.› Nonetheless, in the Nurcu groups the followers are ranked according to their degree of devotion towards the teachings of Nursi and the rules and goals of the community. Both Mardin (1989, pp. 23-24) and Dumont (1986, pp. 51-52) note that the Nurcus consist of four hierarchical categories: *talebe* (student), *kardeş* (brother), *dost* (friend) and *sevgili* (beloved). In this categorisation, *sevgili*

represents the highest level. It consists of a very small group of disciples close to Nursi. They directly inherited the tradition from the master. »Friends« are the community's elite and its most important force, a status closest to the centre. Only the disciples who devote their spiritual and bodily energy to the community can attain this level. They are responsible for organising and directing the activities of the Nurcu groups in the various areas. The most dynamic section of the Nurcu communities is the subsequent rank known as the »brothers«. They have reached a high level of comprehension and have internalised the Nurcu teachings and moral standards. »Students« constitute the lowest rank; they have just begun studying teachings and rules of the Nurcu and their sole responsibility is to act as role models and to recruit new members. A follower can be promoted from a lower to a higher level, only if he accepts the rules and discipline of the Nurcus without protest and displays the prescribed moral and intellectual qualities over a number of years. It is also a Nurcu rule that followers study the Quran and the works of Nursi. This must be achieved in a spirit of sacrifice and diligence over a number of years. Celibacy is not compulsory, but recommended. This is because – like the master Nursi – one is considered a good Nurcu only if one puts all one's energy into serving the community (Dumont 1986, p. 51). In this respect, it is worth mentioning that Gülen, a perfect Nurcu, has devoted his entire life to the Islamic cause and has never married.

The general name given to followers in the Gülen community is *»şakirt«* (student). They are grouped in the same way as above. Gülen has added a new category to this classification and widened the circle with an additional rank. Those in this new rank are called *»müstadi«*, meaning ready to be friends (Kömeçoglu 1999, p. 148). This classification of followers, based on loyalty to Gülen and his community's rules and goals, provides important insight while understanding the organisational structure of the community. A closer look at the community's hierarchical order is necessary when analysing its inner structure.

Gülen and his disciples are eager to employ such fashionable concepts as »dialogue,« »tolerance,« and »democracy.« They are also keen to introduce themselves to the Turkish public and international circles as the representatives of a liberal and moderate form of Islam. For the last decade, Gülen's followers have begun to present their activities as activities of a civil society organisation. However, it should be noted that the community has an extremely strict internal hierarchical order. Not surprisingly, Gülen is the sole and unrivalled leader at the centre of the community. It is he who, with the help of a »consultation group« consisting of his most trustworthy students, determines the communities' main goals and policies.[3] This group includes a »world imam,« responsible for the administration of the community's activities in various regions of the world. Members in charge of the activities in Central Asia, the Balkans, Africa and other such regions are called »regional imams.« Below the regional imams come the country imams, followed by the city imams. This hierarchical order extends down through the districts, neighbourhoods, and

3) Accounts of Nurettin Veren, who was among the first disciples of Gülen and his right-hand man for many years, reveal that the group is not an autonomous body with its own decision-making mechanisms but an apparatus dominated by Gülen. In practice, all decisions are made by Gülen and implemented by the group (Erkin 2005, p. 62).

ışık evleri (light houses). The latter will be discussed below. In short, disciples who are in charge of transmitting decisions from higher to the lower units, giving orders, and carrying out leadership are called ·imam· (Cevizoglu 1999, pp. 226-229). In addition, every disciple in the community addresses those of a higher rank as ·*agbi*· (elder brother).[4] Information, concerning the community's existing or planned activities, is accessible to each *agbi* in accordance with to his rank. Thus, information flows from top to bottom within the community. Disciples must be unconditionally and unquestionably loyal to the elder brothers (Cevizoglu 1999; Bulut 1999; Aras and Caha 2000).

4. Pure Form of the Community: the *Işık* (Light) Houses

The Nurcus institutionalised themselves by buying and renting houses and apartment floors known as ·*Nur dersaneleri*· or ·*Nur evleri*· (the light houses). These are places where the Nurcus assemble in order to read and discuss the works of Nursi, to perform religious duties and to talk about daily matters (Dumont 1986, p. 53; Mardin 1989, p. 24; Yavuz 1999, p. 590). The *Nur dersanes* are places where followers participate in the inner life of the community and where they gather to fulfil certain religious and social practices. At the same time, some disciples collectively reside in these *dersanes*. *Dersanes* are sometimes also used as dormitories for poor and successful students, expected to be loyal disciples. In the past, the Nurcus have been subject to continuous accusations and investigations. This is due to the fact that Nur houses are thought to resemble *tekkes* (the Sufi lodges) and *medreses*, abolished by law in 1925. Indeed, the Nurcus also call these houses ·*Medrese-i Nuriye*· (*medrese* of the light) (Güventürk 1964, p. 125).

The Gülen community acquired this institutional structure from the Nurcu movement, Gülen simply changed the Arabic ·*Nur*· into the Turkish ·*Işık*·, both of which mean ·the Light·. The main reason for this change was to avoid charges directed at the *Nur dersanes* and to underline the differences of his community. Like other Nurcu groups, each occupational group within the Gülen community opens its own houses and gets itself organised (Akar 1998; Cevizoglu 1999, p. 219). From the mid-1970s onwards, these houses' main purpose has been to enrol and train talented, predominantly poor students at different levels of education (Turgut 1998). The community promises the students' families that it will take care of their child's education in exchange for being able to providing them with religious instruction and the teachings of community; the goal of which is to shape them into devoted followers. This method of enrolling and financing students is designed to create a new generation, sometimes called ·the golden generation· (*altın nesil*), equipped with a high level of religious and modern education targeted at changing Turkish society and restoring the power of Islam.

The light house is the key institution in Gülen's educational mobilisation; its goal is the rise of a new generation with a strong Muslim identity. The community's edu-

4) For the analysis and implications of the paternalistic and familial language employed by the Nurcus, see Tezcan 2005.

cational mobilisation starts in the light houses and extends to summer camps, student dormitories, schools, centres for the university entrance exam and universities. Almost all teachers and administrators of the community's educational institutions are trained in the light houses. One not trained in these houses is unlikely to attain a prominent position in an establishment of the community. Most importantly, all community activities in the field of education become essential when transforming society from within and infiltrating state institutions (Bulut 1999; Cevizoglu 1999; Turgut 1998). Since the light houses are the community's central institutions, it is necessary to explore how Gülen defines the light houses, their functions and their role in mobilising followers to aspire to the goals dictated by the community. A closer analysis of the light houses will lead us to a deeper understanding of the community's 'governmentality'. Foucault (1988, p. 19) defines governmentality as various forms of association between the technologies of domination of others, and those of self. Below, I shall investigate the two types of technologies employed in the light houses. In the course of my argument, I will focus on three interconnected aspects of the light houses: (1) the parallels Gülen has established between his community and the first Islamic community through the light houses; (2) the ways in which Gülen defines the light houses as sacred places; (3) the institutional logic regulating the light houses where a new generation is being trained.

5. The Chosen Community

According to Gülen, in every difficult era 'cells' or houses have existed, functioning as centres of dissemination (*teblig*) and enlightenment (*irşad*). Their goal has always been to revive the Islamic faith and community. The companions of the Prophet or the first Islamic community began to spread the message of Islam by getting organised in these kinds of houses. Gülen is further convinced that the first light house was opened by Ibn-i Erkam who was one of the Prophet's companions (*sahabe*). Ibn-i Erkam rendered invaluable service to the Islamic cause and strongly contributed to the construction of the first Islamic community by opening his home to the Prophet during the dark times (*cahiliye*) when he was having difficulties finding an audience. At this point, it is worthwhile to emphasise the importance of the parallel drawn by Gülen between the light houses and the home of Ibn-i Erkam, and between his community and the first Islamic community (Gülen 1998a, pp. 10-18; Cevizoglu 1999, pp. 230-232).

In Gülen's account, the companions of the Prophet appear as the ideal community to be emulated by believers, as it was neither ethnic nor familial ties, but the Islamic faith that united and distinguished the Prophet's companions from other people: the nonbelievers. It was their faith that made them the devoted followers of a collective ideal or future project, namely the dissemination of Islam, with the Prophet as messenger of this ideal. It can be argued, therefore, that the parallel drawn between the light houses and the home of Ibn-i Erkam has not only put the light houses on solid religio-historical ground, but has given these houses a central role in the community-building process, as well. Consequently, the light houses are

described as sacred places where individuals become devoted to the community and to spreading Islam. Gülen employs the light houses as symbolic mediums, through which he locates his community in the same religio-historical space as the companions of the Prophet. His aim is to get his disciples to conceive themselves as members of a chosen community, responsible for spreading the Islamic faith, at the same time sanctifying his community as a conscious agent of this religio-historical mission (Gülen 1998a, p. 10).

This analogy can be understood as part of a strategy, of communicating to followers a sense of what Bourdieu (1984) calls »distinction«. Moreover, faith, piety and conscience also play a considerable role in creating such a sense of distinction. These notions cannot be considered the ultimately irreducible and sociologically inexplicable core of all religions. Rather, as Turner argues, what makes personal piety and faith possible is ritual, sacrament, myth, community and an objective religious law. If this is the case, it is reasonable to argue that the cultivation of personal faith, piety and consciousness can be viewed as active elements in uniting believers and guiding them to desired attitudes, practices and actions, thereby transforming selfhood. In other words, personal faith has to be trained, developed and practiced (Turner 1994, pp. 53-66).

6. The Golden Generation

The transformation of selfhood is, in fact, the most important aspect of the light houses, focussed on raising a new Islamic generation with strong faith and morals. Unquestionably, this derives from the Nurcu conviction that raising individual Muslim consciousness is a necessity in the revitalisation process of Islam (Mardin, 1989; Yavuz, 1999, p. 591). The light houses' primary function is to create a religio-social environment wherein personal faith, piety and conscience are cultivated. In Gülen's own words:

»The light houses are places where human deficiencies, possibly caused by their human characteristics are healed. They are sacred places where plans and projects are produced, the continuation of metaphysical tension is provided, and courageous and faithful individuals are being raised. Said Nursi himself said that ›the man who acquires the true faith can challenge the universe.‹ It is undoubtedly clear that today, the conquest of the world cannot be achieved on the back of a horse, a sword in hand, a scimitar at the waist and a quiver on the back like in old times, but by penetrating into people's hearts with the Quran in one hand and reason in the other. Here, these soldiers of spirituality and truth, raised in light houses, will pour out the light God has given them for inspiration into empty minds and help them prosper on the way to conquer the world in spirit and in reality. Thus, these houses are one workbench or one school here *şabloncu*[5] generations who have shaped themselves according to dominant ideas are healed and then return ... to their spiritual roots with its accompanying meaningful life.« (Gülen 1998a, p. 12).

5) By this term the Islamists mean the emulation of the Western-Christian culture and civilisation as model instead of the authentic national-Islamic values.

Gülen sees the light houses as sacred places in which a new generation is trained or even created. He calls this generation by a number of various names, all of which have a militaristic connotation: ›soldiers of light‹, ›soldiers of truth‹, ›soldiers of spirituality‹, or ›cavalrymen of light‹. The new generation's chief duty is to restore the power of Islam on earth. Special emphasis should be laid on further implications of Gülen's conscious analogy between his community and the first Islamic community. His insistence on the historic example as the pristine model to be emulated for revitalising the Islamic community can be defined as what Al-Azmeh (1996) calls ›activist utopianism‹. For him, Islamic political and social ideals, based on eschatology and historic example (Madina regime and the prophetic example) have an inherent utopian potential. This potential can be activated and valorised under condition of programmatic specification and the formation of a social and political constituency (Al-Azmeh 1996, p. 137). In this sense, the light houses can be regarded as an integral part of a well-specified program that releases the utopian potential inherent in Islamic ideals.

7. The Golden Combination: Religion, Science, and Discipline

One should also investigate the institutional logic, regulating the light houses, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the various technologies used to train or – more properly – to create a new Muslim generation and to mobilise followers for short and long-term goals. This may also help us to discern Gülen's understanding of education, on which the light houses and the community's educational establishments are founded.

At the outset, it should be stressed that Gülen describes light houses as a peculiar blend of different institutions, namely *tekke* (the Sufi lodge), *medrese* (traditional Islamic school), *mektep* (modern secular school) and *askeri kışla* (military barracks) (Gülen 1998a, p. 10-18; Can 1996, p. 75-77). This combination is seen as the only way to train and create a new generation, capable of governing not only Turkey, but the whole world, as well. Moreover, this blend of divergent streams of education is regarded as the only historical solution to the social and cultural problems, allegedly caused by the process of secularisation and modernisation in Turkey. Indeed, the idea of combining *tekke*, *medrese* and *mektep* was first proposed by Nursi in the late Ottoman Empire when the replacement of religious educational establishments through secular schools was being extensively debated. For Nursi this compromise could overcome the clash among these educational institutions and pave the way for advances in the modern sciences in Turkey (Mardin 1989, p. 80-81). In this respect, Gülen confidently follows the path set by his master and encourages his followers to apply this peculiar blend in the community's schools, in which *medrese* (read as religion) and *mektep* (read as modern sciences) are to be reintegrated (Can 1997, pp. 79-80).

For Gülen, the light houses have taken over the tasks of the *medreses* in the sense that the followers assemble in these houses to study the Quran and to participate in lectures and seminars on religious sciences (Gülen 1998a, p. 15). It is here that the followers extensively study the works of Nursi and Gülen, and here is where

their knowledge of religion and the teachings of the community are tested. It would be misleading, however, to assume that the light houses have reproduced the institutional structure of the *medreses*, without any modifications or additions. Gülen is convinced that the separation of physical sciences from religious studies resulted in the stagnation of the *medreses*. In his opinion, this was the unintended consequence of Gazali's struggle against philosophical sciences, which had harmful effects on the Islamic world at that time. His struggle was misconceived and, in spite of the Quran's clear stress on the physical world, physical sciences were dismissed from the *medreses*. Today, Gülen sees the repair of this historical mistake as the light houses' greatest task, recombining religious studies with modern sciences (Gülen 1998a, p. 13; Can 1996, pp. 75-76). Undoubtedly, this emphasis is derived form the Nurcu conviction that the Quran and modern sciences are perfectly compatible (Mardin 1989).

According to Gülen, it is the responsibility of good believers to read the facts and events of the universe as one would read a book. At the same time, however, one must know the book of God, namely the Quran, in order to read "the book of the universe" correctly, because these books are two sides of one Reality (*Hakikat*) (Can 1996, pp. 76-77). The former deals with the relationship between man and his Creator the latter between man and Creation (the universe). However, this recombination has further implications. Since the separation of religious and natural sciences, Islamic societies have lost control over modern science and have become dependent on the Western (read as Christian) world (Can 1996, p. 78). It is believed that the reintegration of both is the only way to restore the power of Islam and to make Islamic civilisation exceed Western civilisation. Therefore, the investigation of the universe and the study of modern sciences become important activities in strengthening Muslim society (Mardin 1989, p. 207). Furthermore, this blend of light of heart (symbolising religion) with light of reason (symbolising science) is viewed as the *modus operandi*, protecting new generations from irreligiosity and atheism, hence the main principle of moral education.

As Tezcan (2005, p. 301) observes, the Nurcu conviction of perfect compatibility between Islam and modern science has not led to the development of "a productive appropriation of scientific thought, *i.e.* a scientific culture", but to the fervent sanctions of science and technology and the call for "their unity with Islam." This is mainly because any Nurcu "reference to science is always interested to prove a divine power, which ensures harmony and order in the universe." There are further implications of this Nurcu conviction. Geertz (1968, p. 105) notes that Islamists developed two main strategies to stop the war between Islam and science and to cope with the secularization of thought: "the absolute separation of religious matters from scientific ones, and the attempt to show that scriptures, especially the Koran, anticipate and are fully consonant with the spirit and findings of modern science." Like other Nurcus in their "struggle for the real", the Gülen community generally pursues the second approach, which "consists of interpreting science" merely as an "explicit spelling out of what is already implicitly present in religion, an extension and specification of the religious perspective rather than an autonomous mode of thought". This approach treats "science, and indeed secular thought in general", as a mere "extension of Islam" (Geertz 1968, p. 105-106). Therefore, it

may be argued that Gülen's insistence on the recombination of religious and modern sciences leads to an islamization of modern science, a goal shared by Islamists elsewhere.

8. Sufism: the Spiritual life of Islam

Gülen is also convinced that *medrese* closed its doors to the spiritual life of Islam, namely *tasavvuf* (Sufism or Islamic mysticism). This was the second mistake that the religious studies had fallen into. *Medrese*'s sole focus was on the legal and formal aspects of religious studies, putting excessive stress on exoteric meanings of Islam. As a result, *medrese* adopted a narrow perspective in its investigation of the universe. For Gülen, *medreses*, ignoring the deeper (*derun*) and esoteric meanings of Islam, turned into fanatic establishments. Thus, the only way to end the rigidity of *medrese* and to open up new horizons in the investigation of the universe is to reintroduce Sunni Sufism into religious studies. In his view, the reintegration of religious and modern sciences will bring back the spiritual life of Islam and that this blend will recast these divergent institutions completely (Can 1996, p. 78-79). All this seems to explain why Gülen thinks that the light houses should embrace the tasks of the *tekkes*, in which the dormant and latent intuitive, emotional and spiritual faculties of the disciples have been activated, owing to training under strict guidance (Gülen 1998a; Can 1996; Trimingham 1971, p. 1). Undoubtedly, Gülen believes that the light houses, like the *tekkes*, create and maintain a spiritual atmosphere wherein his followers, especially the permanent residents of these houses, undergo ‹metaphysical tension.› He describes metaphysical tension as ‹inner enthusiasm, the potential of love, the source of power and the perpetual activity of spiritual sentiments that direct the believer toward religion, worship and spirit of action›. In short, metaphysical tension is understood as a state of spiritual existence, a state that makes ‹hearts energetic for action and attack› (Gülen 1996, p. 145).

Gülen has always been eager to put his ideas, analysed above, into action. In 1966 as a state appointed imam in Izmir, he promptly reorganised the Quran courses and disciplined the students by ‹beating the rebellious kids› (Erdogan 1995, p. 100; Çetinkaya 2005, pp. 13-14). In a way, he established his own *medrese* and began training the students who would make up the core of his community. In 1968, 1969 and 1970 he organised illegal summer camps in Izmir for the students, in order ‹to prevent them from losing concentration by going to their villages and towns, to prevent them from staying away from their courses, to discipline their minds and souls and to provide them with deeper religious feeling› (Erdogan 1995, p. 116). Gülen describes the camps as places where religious sciences of *medreses*, the spirituality of *tekkes* and the discipline of military barracks were combined. According to him, the camps embodied the three qualities required by the new generation: discipline, reason and soul. In a sense, this description of the camps can be seen as a concise expression of his understanding of education in general. Most importantly, Gülen recalls the summer camps and his educational activities as a battle against ‹communism› and as an effective way of preventing the youth from

delving into the left-wing political and ideological currents predominant at Turkish universities during the 1960s and 1970s (Erdogan 1995, p. 122). Since he greatly stresses the spiritual dimension of the light houses in particular and his educational initiatives in general, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at his understanding of Sunni Sufism.

9. The Greater and Lesser Struggles

In Gülen's writings and interviews, there are constant references to the vocabulary of Sunni Sufism, which was the cornerstone of his early religious education (Gülen 1998b; Gülen 1996; Erdogan 1997; Can 1996). Gülen evaluates the Sufi tradition as the main pillar of Turkish Islam, to be treated as distinct from the Arabian and Persian types of Islam in terms of its tolerant, cautious and patient approach (Can 1996; Sevindi 1997; Hulusi 1998; Aras and Caha 2000). Now, I will limit myself to highlighting only the following interrelated aspects: (i) his definition of Sufism; (ii) his understanding of Sufism and (iii) the role of Sufism and the Sufi asceticism in the community-building process.

Gülen refers to Sufism as a school of religious thought that shows the way to eternal Reality (*Hakikat*), to grasping hidden and esoteric meanings of divine acts and hence the universe, and to reaching beyond the legal and formal dimensions of religion. However, he tends to see Sufism as a continuous struggle to attain a higher level of moral and spiritual perfection. This can only be achieved by stripping the soul and disciplining the self (*nefs*), rather, than through contemplative and emotional mysticism. For him, the Sufi asceticism is a spiritual way of life that aims at deepening religious consciousness, thereby making the Islamic faith the sole element of the believer's inner nature (Gülen 1998b, pp. 1-2). Indeed, Gülen usually describes Sufism as the spiritual life of Islam, guiding believers to a deeper understanding of religious law and orthodox practice. In this sense, Sufism does not reject this-worldly affairs in favour of direct communion with God. On the contrary, the Sufi doctrine is mainly understood as the only way to establish a proper balance between this-worldly and otherworldly concerns and between the sphere of spiritual experience and outward, formalistic religious obligations. This is primarily due to the fact that the latter is conceived less effective than inner commitment, at shielding the believer from the harmful effects of modern everyday life, such as egoism, hedonism and utilitarianism (Gülen 1998b; Can 1996).

Moreover, Gülen regularly distinguishes between his understanding of Sufism from that of the Sufi orders, which strongly stress the esoteric elements of religion and make a severe distinction between otherworldly and worldly concerns. He also does not sympathise with the organisational form of the Sufi orders (*tarikat*). This is due to his Nurcu conviction that the most urgent task in this modern age, usually identified with the rise of atheism and materialism, is to save the Islamic faith not the Sufi orders (Gülen 1998b; Can 1996). This in fact requires a spiritual struggle, known as the Great Struggle (*Cihad-ı Ekber*), primarily targeted to suppress inordinate appetites and to discipline the self (*nefs*), in short, to strengthen the inner core against everything associated with the lack of religious principles.

Gülen sees this as a process of inner purification and perfection, the ultimate goal of which is to attain true faith and a high level of religious morality (Gülen 1986, p. 196; Bulut 1999, pp. 106-112). It would be misleading, however, to assume that the Great Struggle is a process of withdrawal from the world or a denial of this-worldly affairs. Rather, Gülen's views are in accordance with the Naqshbandi tradition, which sees the Great Struggle as a moral rearmament and refusal to be captivated and dominated by a world, working along materialistic and individualistic lines, abandoning religious standards and spiritual values (Ayata 1991, pp. 231-234). In this sense, the Great Struggle principally involves a process of inward transformation or what Mardin (1989, p. 223), referring to early Muslim reformers, terms »immanentization« of ethics. For Gülen, this process makes the believers immune against temptations, seductions and traps set by the modern world. They become strong enough to face the second struggle, the so-called Lesser Struggle (*Cihad-ı Asgar*) (Bulut 1999, p. 107). Now the main goal is to gradually transform and conquer all areas of the outside world by using all possible means. Undoubtedly, this emphasis derives from the Naqshbandi sheikh Sirhindi's conviction that »the true believer has to return to earth and come to grips with the realities of the world – and this world is one where one's task is to establish reign of Sunni morality« (Mardin 1991, p. 126).

For Gülen, it is only after the creation and consolidation of an inner space, organised according to Islamic precepts that it becomes the true believers' chief duty to initiate the attack and establish their own alternative institutions, capable of competing with secular ones in all areas of the everyday world. Hence, the Gülen community's insistence on educational activities and its high profile in the media sector can be explained as a conscious effort, aiming at steadily transforming what Habermas (1987, pp. 137-138) calls the »lifeworld«. Not surprisingly, the Gülen community conceives its activities in the educational, cultural and economic domains as a religio-social mobilisation that can automatically bring political consequences (Yavuz 1999).

10. Sufism as one of the Technologies of Self

In internal and external struggles, Sufism appears as a religio-spiritual resource at the Gülen community's disposal. The Sufi tradition is treated as a highly effective way to develop tactics and strategies to cope with materialism and the materialistic culture, with such tendencies as alienation, aimlessness and anarchy, leading to deep spiritual crisis. Indeed, Sufism not only enriches the believer's devotional life by stressing the morally and spiritually stimulating esoteric side of religion, (Trimingham 1971, pp. 28-29), but also provides spiritual and physical means for inner commitment, hardly provided by the outward and formalistic religious practices (Mardin 1989, p. 223).

Sufism's emphasis on the strength of the inner core has important repercussions in terms of the self-formation and identity-building processes. Gülen repeatedly refers to the Sufi asceticism as a method of disciplining the self, of attaining moral and spiritual perfection, thereby becoming the perfect man or *insan-ı kamil*

(Gülen, 1998b, p. 15; Can 1996, p. 84). The notion of the perfect man is derived from the Sufi premise that the qualities of God are inherent to man, hence through the guidance of a spiritual leader every man can attain union with God or direct experience of divine Reality by eliminating self (Trimingham 1971, p. 3; Schimmel 1975). This theosophical conception of humanity not only portrays the ideal person, but also attributes an extraordinary status to the believer who strives to eliminate self and who devotes himself to the Islamic cause. In Sufi doctrine, the perfect man is described as a superior and chosen person with a higher understanding of the divine mystery and love, which represent the highest values of Islamic society (Ayata 1991, pp. 246-250).

Gülen's repeated insistence on this-worldly asceticism and the Sufi notion of the perfect man aims at communicating certain values to his followers, such as caution, patience and tolerance, as well as a sense of dignity, self-worth, and self-esteem. Adopting the Sufi tradition Gülen directs his followers to a desired way of life and to attitudes spirited by self-sacrifice for the sake of the community. It can be argued therefore that in Gülen's golden blend, Sufism emerges as the 'technologies of self' rather than simply a way to approach eternal Reality in the traditional sense. Foucault defines four major types of technologies that 'human beings use to understand themselves,' namely technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of self. Each one of these technologies 'implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes'. The technologies of self permit individuals to act according to personal means or with the help of others when performing a number of tasks on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, in so doing they transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988, p. 18).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the light houses are organised and regulated by 'voluntary' and 'peaceful' technologies for moral transformation. Foucault argues that although each technology is associated with a certain type of domination, these four types of technologies do not operate separately, but are in constant interaction. Interestingly, Gülen himself sees the form of discipline prevailing in military barracks as one of the most important components of the light houses (Can 1996, p. 77, 82). This emanates from his conviction that obedience, loyalty and complete submission to the community's authority are essential conditions to make one a true believer (Gülen 1998a, pp. 38-43). This is due to the fact that personal efforts are not sufficient in preventing anxiety, which leads to spiritual crisis and weakening of the faith. For Gülen, an individual must be 'conditioned (*artlandırılmalı*) and even brainwashed' in order to avoid falling into the trap of suspicion concerning any minor faith issues (Erdogan 1996, pp. 67-68). Strict discipline is required to end any conflict between the believer's divine and profane needs, it guarantees self-control and the full suppression of individuality for the sake of the community. The result is the emancipation from anxiety. He is convinced that military barracks must be emulated to make his followers responsible and obedient to the rules and ideals of the Islamic community. This condition is seen as a necessity to prepare a secure foundation for solidarity and well-orchestrated

action. It is military discipline that combines inward transformation with outward control and in so doing consolidates the faith. In short, discipline that ensures the hierarchical relations of domination and subordination is treated as an integral part of a strong faith.

11. Military Barracks

In accordance with Sufism, discipline reminiscent of that in military barracks is used to make residents of the light houses loyal, obedient and submissive to the codes of social conduct dictated by the community. In the golden combination, the component of military discipline can be interpreted as 'technologies of power'. For Foucault (1988, p. 18), technologies of power 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or dominations, an objectivising of the subject.' A closer investigation of how daily life is organised and regulated in the light houses can give deeper insight into the ways in which the major types of technologies are combined to create a golden generation and develop a strong Muslim identity. The following paragraphs are summarised from accounts of two students, who lived in these houses for several years (Cevizoglu 1999, pp. 204-335; Bulut 1999, pp. 194-196; also Kömeçoglu 2000, pp. 183-184).

Male or female students live collectively in groups of five or six in the light houses. The houses have sufficient comfort to make the students' daily life easy. In every house, there is an elder person called the 'house imam' who is responsible for guiding and controlling the students. The students must be loyal to the elder brothers, who open the houses, meet expenses and deal with existing problems. Elder brothers also give courses and lectures to students, in which the teachings of the community are passed on. The house imam makes sure that the students regularly study the Quran, the works of Gülen and the *Risale-i Nur*. Under his supervision, the students learn the teachings, morality, values and ideals of the community. There are no private rooms for the students. House life is organised in such a way that the students have no private sphere or no personal privacy. Activities such as eating, ritual worship (*namaz*) performed in a room used as *mescid*, and studying for the religious courses are all attended collectively. The students have to sleep collectively in one or two rooms at set hours. Watching television or listening to music is not permitted. Reading books other than the ones selected by the elder brothers are not permitted. Students are asked to listen to Gülen's sermons or read his books in their spare time. They are periodically examined on the religious courses they have taken in the houses.

Students are also under surveillance during the time they spend outside the houses. Their relations with the outside world are established through the community. Students are isolated from their families as much as possible. They are encouraged to stay at the light houses or to join summer camps during holidays. They are responsible for reporting what they have done outside the houses. In a sense, an even stricter discipline than in military schools dominates the light houses. As an extension of this discipline, the house imam has to write a report for every student and must transfer it to the elder brother responsible for the house. Lastly, as part of

this process, the community determines not only the students' careers by directing them towards certain universities and professions, but also determines their most intimate issues including marriage, friendships, and hygiene (Turam 2004, p. 269).

In the light of the explanations and interpretations I have given, it is safe to describe the light houses as an inner space where the Gülen community becomes visible in its 'pure form.' This is the private sphere of the community, organised and regulated by the golden blend, through which a divine balance among divergent faculties, namely soul, heart, mind and body is achieved. This is the inner space where Islamic faith and morality, advocated by the community, are firmly inserted into the inner worlds of the disciples by using the technologies of self and domination. Due to the systematic mental, spiritual and bodily practices, the light houses are places where disciples are not only indoctrinated into the inner language, the symbolic universe, the short and long-term goals and ideals of the community, but also internalise the perception, evaluation, and interpretation schemes dictated by the community. This is the private sphere, where followers are equipped with what Giddens (1984) calls practical and discursive consciousness so that they can develop tactics and strategies to cope with the non-Islamic ruled 'outside world'. In other words, this sphere primarily functions as an interface between the followers and society, this world and the other world, the sacred and profane domains. Here they have learned to organise their daily lives according to the community's principles and ideals. Therefore, the light houses can be defined as a religio-social space, where the community has inscribed itself into the personalities of the disciples in such a way that they all embody the ideals, values and morality of the community. To conclude, it is reasonable to assume that persons trained and educated in these houses become invaluable assets to be mobilised according to the needs dictated by the community. Indeed, Gülen's followers are known to be highly loyal and strong believers. They are not only deeply committed to the community and its leader, but are also extremely disciplined and show solidarity when performing in the economic and non-economic fields.

12. Conclusion

I have presented a detailed picture of the rigid inner structure of the Gülen community, in order to reveal its strict hierarchical and authoritarian character. Not only does this have a harmful effect on the community's discourse on tolerance and dialogue, but is an impediment to the development and consolidation of civil society in Turkey, as well. Furthermore, there is a great asymmetry between its inner structure and formal organizations, eager to present the community as a civil society organization. This asymmetry, emanating from its dual structure has major consequences. Not only does this asymmetry fuel the constant controversies about its goals and ideas, but also radically blurs the limits and sources of the community's civic activities. In other words, they are the communal concerns that largely determine and shape the form, content and direction of the community's formal organizations. In a sense, it is possible to argue that the community resorts to associational life to legitimize and enlarge its influence and power on both the Turkish

state and society. A better awareness of the socio-political contexts responsible for the bloom of the Gülen community can uncover its highly political character and its articulation with the state.

In Gülen community's history, there are at least three phases in which its involvement with politics and state has played a decisive role. The first phase refers to the formation of the community in Izmir where Gülen was able to find ways to secure the support of some pious small and medium-scale merchants, who were anxious of the rise of leftist and socialist movements. This phase can also be seen as an adjustment to the modern and secular conditions prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it was the disputes within the Nurcus, which arose from the approach to politics and the state that played a crucial role in shaping the Gülen community. According to Mehmet Kutlular, the leader of a Nurcu group, the first tensions between Gülen and the main Nurcu body emanated from Gülen's claim that they had become »excessively politicised« (Çakır 1990, p. 103; Çakır 1997; Çalişlar 2000). This was due to the fact that Gülen did not agree with the Nurcus' negative attitude towards the ultra-nationalist National Action Party (NAP). While the Nurcus strongly reacted against the NAP, who had asked them for support in the early 1970s, by distributing a pamphlet accusing the NAP of racism, Gülen and his followers supported the NAP. More tension was created in the second half of the 1970s when Gülen established close relations with the Islamist National Salvation Party, despite the fact that the main Nurcu body did not favour this party, but supported the centre right Justice Party (Çakır 1990, p. 103; Çelik 2000).

In the 1980s the community saw a great opportunity to increase its power and enlarge its range of activities at a time when relations between religious groups and the state and political parties were subject to fundamental changes (Ayata 1993; 1996). The military regime of 1980 conceived Sunni Islam as a major instrument to promote social and political stability and to legitimise its authoritarian policies. The military regime continuously propagated the ideas that »the state and nation cannot exist without religion«, »religion safeguards the state and national unity«, and »secularism does not mean atheism and lack of religion«. The coup enlarged the scope of power and influence given to the official religious body, i.e. the Directorate of Religious Affairs, it increased the number of state-funded Imam-Hatip schools and Quran courses, and made religious courses compulsory in schools. Most importantly, in the Althusserian sense, it interpellated organized Sunni groups as subjects, not only to consolidate its social foundation and legitimize its authoritarian policies, but also to create docile, obedient and loyal subjects to both the state and nation. Gülen and his disciples were among the avowed supporters of the military regime. He wrote articles in praise of the coup, and defended its violation of human rights and even torture (Çakır 1990, pp. 99-100; Çalişlar 1997; Çalişlar *et al.* 2000).

There was a further ideological link between the military regime and the community. After the military intervention of 1980, the Turkish Islamic synthesis (TIS), an ideology formulated by a group of ultranationalists and extreme rightists in the late 1960s, opposing the left and Kemalist elite with a universal and humanistic stance, became a semi-official state ideology (Güvenç *et al.* 1987; Bora and Can 1999, pp. 149-177; Copeaux 1998, pp. 54-92; Dursun 2003). Gülen's basic point of departure

is Islam. However, he also agrees with the basic assertion of TIS that there existed perfect harmony between the Islamic religion and the Turks, who were rapidly becoming the defenders and the vanguard of the Islamic faith. In his eyes, this was due to the fact that the Turks were predisposed to Islam and had found their ‹true culture› and identity within Islam. Gülen believes in the universal message of Islam while distinguishing between Turkish Islam and the Arabian and Persian forms of Islam, not only in terms of its tolerant approach, but also in its emphasis on spreading Islam into new regions (Can 1996, pp. 33-35; Sevindi 1997). In short, the adoption of TIS as a state ideology opened a new path for the community, through which it became a part and parcel of the ideological state apparatuses.

After the 1983 general election, the Motherland Party (MP) took office. It remained in office until 1991. Its founder, Turgut Özal, who served first as Prime Minister and then as President was an ardent supporter of TIS and was closely related to organised religious groups (Özal 1999). As a result of his deliberate strategy, the MP became a coalition of liberals, nationalists and Islamists, who ensured the support of various religious groups, including the Gülen community during the 1980s (Çakır 1990, p. 103). Islamists in the MP governments generously favoured the Islamic groups in the economic, cultural and political arena and played a crucial role in the emergence of a new business class, affiliated with the organised religious groups (Ayata 1993, p. 58). Also, this new class received a significant boost from international Islamic banks and financial institutions, which made their appearance in Turkey in the 1980s through the initiative of Özal (Yeşilada 1996, pp. 168-188).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Gülen community increased its power parallel to the rise of political Islam during the 1990s and focused its activity on Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and Europe. Both Özal, the President at the time and the then Prime Minister Demirel wrote letters to the leaders of the Central Asian countries, supporting Gülen's disciples, who wanted to open private schools in this region (Turgut 1998; Çetinkaya 2005; Erkin 2005).[6] Parliament members and ministers visited the Gülen community's schools in Turkey and Central Asia despite the security forces' reports that accused the community of being a reactionary and dangerous *tarikat*, trying to infiltrate the state institutions and the army (Kandıra 2001). Former President Demirel, former Prime Minister Ecevit, and the other ministers praised these schools and received awards from the Foundation of Writers and Journalists, the most influential institution of the community. Moreover, Gülen met with the then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller in 1995 to receive her support (Çalişlar 1997; Bulut 1999; Aras and Caha 2000). In a nutshell, for the transnationalization of the community, its links with politicians and the state once again played a very critical role.

To conclude, it is highly controversial to characterize the community as ‹civil society actors› or ‹civil society forces›. Put more accurately it represents, what Jessop (1999) calls, ‹a state project› among other state projects, which clash within the Turkish state and society. Gülen's interviews and speeches suggest that he generally speaks like a ‹statesman› who gives ‹directives› to state officials and that his ima-

6) For the community's schools in Central Asia, see Demir *et al.* 2000 and Balcı 2003.

gined audience is not society but the state. His disciples and himself enthusiastically portray him, as a benevolent and compassionate figure whose greatest goal is the well-being of the Turkish state and the promotion of Turkish-Islamic values. These values are considered the sole foundation on which to rebuild Turkey into »a state of grandeur« reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire. Such a state project, however, will surely provide yet new conflicts within both state and society.

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