

# The Gülen Media Empire

The Monographs of Arab Media Report

Edited by  
Lea Nocera

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**Arab Media Report** is a project promoted by *Reset-Dialogues on Civilizations*, the international organisation for dialogue between cultures. It was created to develop a greater knowledge in Italy, of media in Arab countries and countries with a Muslim majority (Iran and Turkey).

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Partner



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# Table of contents

- 7 **Introduction**  
*Lea Nocera*
- 23 **Corrupted Speech: The Movement, the Party, and the Breakdown of the New Turkey**  
*Joshua Hendrick*
- 43 **The conflict between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Fethullah Gülen in terms of its various dimensions and motivations**  
*Ruşen Çakır - Semih Sakallı*
- 61 **An Old Friend, A New Enemy: The Fratricidal Struggle between R.T. Erdoğan and the the Gülen Media Group**  
*Ragıp Duran*
- 77 **Shifting the community press: a brief examination of Gülen-affiliated papers Zaman and Today's Zaman**  
*Joshua Carney*
- 93 **Representing Islam: Cinematographic Productions of the Gülen Movement**  
*Fabio Vicini*
- 103 **The Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV)**  
*Maria Concetta Tedesco*
- 111 *Bibliography*
- 115 **Authors**

# Introduction

*Lea Nocera*

Thirty arrests, among them five journalists and nine television series scriptwriters, directors and producers, marked the end of 2014 in Turkey. It was a year during which attacks continued on the press, especially media linked to the movement led by Fethullah Gülen, a man unquestionably in conflict with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Characterised by an interpretation of Islam in line with the times, albeit respecting tradition, capable of keeping up with technology, modernity and globalisation as well as using it, the transnational movement led by Gülen or *Cemaat* – as it is called in Turkish – is equipped with an organization that is multifaceted and widespread at an international level with its own schools, media, banks, financial and trade organizations, as well as support and influence networks also at a political and state level. For many years Gülen's movement had entertained excellent relations with the Turkish government and its diplomatic service, presenting and supporting the elements at the core of the Turkish model in which national temperament and religious values are merged and that during the 21<sup>st</sup> century had progressively affirmed itself abroad. Through its vast network of schools and

cultural institutes, and based on humanitarian and religious motivations dictated by interreligious dialogue, it has contributed to the consolidation of Turkey's soft power practices in many areas, well beyond the borders of the Middle East and increasingly gaining prestige and popularity.<sup>1</sup> These arrests, firstly involving the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Zaman*, Ekrem Dumanlı, and the president of the television channel *Samanyolu*, Hidayet Karaca, clearly revealed the rift that had developed between the government and the Gülen movement.

The matter had been debated for a year in Turkey, ever since the emergence of the corruption scandal in December 2013, with then-prime minister Erdoğan's attacks becoming increasingly frequent and harsh on the Gülen movement, accused of having formed a state within the state. It was therefore no coincidence that the media was targeted, as in the cases involving *Zaman* which with its over one million copies a day is the most read newspaper in Turkey, its English version *Today's Zaman* and other media known to be linked to Gülen through the media group Feza, or Samanyolu, which for some time had been harshly criticising the government. The journalists were charged with having formed a terrorist organization with the objective of assuming control of the Turkish state by applying pressure, using intimidation and threats. A few days later, a number of them, among them *Zaman's* editor-in-chief, were supposedly released due to

<sup>1</sup> On the Turkish model and soft power practices see the monograph by Joshua Carney, Marwan M. Kraïdy, Lea Nocera, Stefano M. Torelli. (by), entitled "The Turkish Touch. Neo-ottoman Hegemony and Turkish Television in the Middle East", Rome: *Arab Media Report*, 2014 downloadable at <http://arabmediareport.it/the-turkish-touch-egemonia-neo-ottomana-e-televisione-turca-in-medio-oriente/#>



a lack of evidence, and yet, in the meantime, there had been a show of strength.

The wave of arrests certainly appeared to be a new attack on freedom of the press and speech, and as such was to spark many protests in Turkey and abroad, not only among journalists but also in civil society and in political circles.<sup>2</sup> In this case, however, there had not only been the government's attack on a newspaper – or a media group – that had criticised it, but a political clash that had developed internally and then emerged and was amplified, thanks to the resonance of media belonging to different factions, linked either to the government or to Gülen's movement. The already distorted and complex relations between politics and the media in Turkey revealed new aspects worth investigating, the first signs of which had already been seen at least a year earlier during the Gezi Park protests.

At the end of May 2013, a few days after the beginning of protests in Istanbul that were to spark a series of demonstrations that lasted months, criticism addressed at Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the repression of protests in the columns of the daily newspaper *Zaman*, already known at the time for being close to the government, caused quite a significant degree of surprise. During the first days of demonstrations, in what turned out to be a failed attempt to contain or conceal the news to effec-

<sup>2</sup> On this subject see: Emanuela Pergolizzi, "La stampa turca commenta la stretta di Erdoğan ai media", *Arab Media Report*, 21 December 2014, <http://arabmediareport.it/la-stampa-turca-commenta-la-stretta-di-erdogan-ai-media/> and Elisa Gianni, "Dittatura, complotti e ramarico. Oped turchi sulla stretta di Erdoğan ai media", *Arab Media Report*, 17 December 2014, <http://arabmediareport.it/commenti-turchia-arresti-giornalisti/>

tively invalidate those events, most daily newspapers and television channels did not report what was taking place. In addition to the lack of news in the media, pressure was applied on journalists, which often resulted in threats or dismissals. There was no lack of protest from the demonstrators themselves who organized sit-ins outside the headquarters of a number of television stations (CNN, Habertürk) or daily newspapers, such as *Sabah*. Control exercised by the government and by groups close to it over the media and news outlets, however, did not affect social networks – considered dangerous following these events and felt to have strong subversive potential – nor did it involve a few small independent channels. In this context, the position assumed by *Zaman*, the newspaper with a daily circulation of over one million copies, was rather remarkable. The newspaper is a well-known source of information. At the time its support for the party in power in Turkey since 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) founded by Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, respectively current former presidents of the republic, was common knowledge.

The surge of support for the protesters turned out to be rather short-lived. In the weeks that followed, in spite of the fact that a number of commentators continued now and again to report facts from a different perspective, the newspaper's attitude as far as the protesters were concerned, soon aligned itself to that of other publications. All this in spite of the fact that its English edition, *Today's Zaman*, aimed at a different and mainly foreign audience, continued to express criticism of the harsh way in which the government chose to react to the protests. This at last gave rise to serious doubts concerning the so-

lidity of the political alliance between the government and Gülen's movement.<sup>3</sup>

What was certain was that this was not the first time that friction had been revealed between these two parties, but, generally speaking, until then there had not been talk of a rift or a conflict, but rather of structural internal adjustments. At a later date, other issues and events were to clearly reveal a deeper rift. The first indication involved government plans presented and approved in November 2013 closing the *dershane*, private schools used to prepare students sitting university admission exams. The most ferocious criticism expressed against this draft law was immediately raised by the Fethullah Gülen movement, reactions once again reported with great emphasis by the daily newspaper *Zaman*. The *dershane* were in fact one of the movement's most important organizations in Turkey – with control over about 3,500 of these schools – both from a financial point of view and as a place of propaganda and proselytism. The government's plans to close these schools was perceived as a direct attack on the movement, and therefore in a certain sense as a declaration of war. Soon after, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, a vast anti-corruption police operation involved important members of the government as well as entrepreneurs close to it. This was perceived as retaliation by the Gülen Movement, the widespread presence of which in the police force was now well-known. This was now an open conflict and one fought with statements, headlines and

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, the editorialist Mûcahit Özdoğan published an article in the online daily *Radikal* entitled “*Today's Zaman's* attitude regards to Gezi Park and new political reconfiguration” (“*Today's Zaman'ın Gezi Parkı'ndaki tutumu ve yeni siyaset tasarımı*”).

media reports, but not only. The police operation, resulting in an immense corruption scandal followed by a number of protests, was accompanied by quick government intervention initially involving a cabinet reshuffle and immediately followed by renewed control over police forces and the manner in which they were run. During the weeks that followed the scandal, many officials were transferred or moved to new positions and hundreds of police officers all over the country were dismissed. Simultaneously, one saw further re organization of administrative staff in other state apparatuses, such as the Ministry for Education. Many believed this was a purge aimed at obstructing, if not totally blocking, any eventual new arrests that could have also directly threatened the premier's own family. For Erdoğan, at the time prime minister, this simply meant averting a plot with "international ramifications" organized to ensure the fall of his government and endangering national security. This reference was clearly aimed at the Gülen Movement, the leader of which has been in voluntary exile in the United States since 1999. The movement, also called *Cemaat* or *Hizmet* (service), has been accused of creating a "parallel state", of having organized the anti-corruption operation and, thanks to its infiltrating the police, enacted thousands of illegal wire-taps in order to keep in check the government's most important representatives.

In truth, the well-structured presence of people affiliated with this movement, or close to it, in state institutions and the corridors of power – the judiciary, police, political and media world – had thus far been no mystery. Years earlier, a number of journalists such as Nedim Şener and Ahmet Şık had already reported the Gülen Move-

ment's infiltration of state bureaucracy and, although not accused directly because of their investigations, were charged and arrested. When he was arrested, Ahmet Şık, in particular, had been working on his investigative book, which was blocked even before going to print, a book entitled *İmamin Ordusu* ("The Imam's Army") and was all about the Gülen Movement, its origins, mechanisms and infiltration strategies for bureaucracy and the state police. The arrest of this journalist, and others such as Nedim Şener, took place within the framework of the Ergenekon investigation, a high-profile operation started in 2008 involving the most senior military ranks as well as journalists and intellectuals, all accused of being members of a clandestine organization aimed at overthrowing the AKP government, as early as in 2002, following its first electoral victory. The journalists instead said that the reason for their arrest was to be found in their investigative reporting on the Gülen Movement, at the time a strong ally of the government and with far-reaching power so strong it could manipulate any possible judicial case, ranging from police arrests to prosecutors' investigations, to media coverage. Effectively, they denounced the "state within the state" or "parallel state" that Erdoğan himself was later to steadfastly identify with the Gülen Movement accusing it of conspiracy. However, even before the conflict between Gülen and the AKP ignited and became inflamed, the alliance seemed necessary in order to redefine power in Turkey, in particular a reduction of the army's power. Thus the two great investigations that had characterised recent years in Turkish political life and justice, operations Ergenekon and Balyoz ("hammer"), led to the arrest – and more recently the release – of heads

of the army, and many other officers known also for their opposition to the AKP. The Turkish Army's old guard found itself effectively behind bars while, in the meantime, the government established the conditions for more direct control over the military, intervening for example in the appointment of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (*Yüksek Askeri Şura*, YAŞ).<sup>4</sup> In this process the Gülen Movement seemed to provide the necessary support, especially through the judges and prosecutors following and continuing investigations. These two investigations, particularly complicated and characterised by numerous contradictions and conflicting criminal cases, had often been observed with suspicion by analysts. Parliamentary opposition, the People's Republican Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), judged these investigations as being part of a broader strategy aimed at intimidating secular environments and legitimising the AKP's domination. The government, on the other hand, had always rejected these allegations; at least until the corruption scandal broke. Only a few days after December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the AKP Member of Parliament Yalçın Adoğan revealed from the pages of the daily newspaper *Star* that the accusations involving a plot against the army may have been the consequence of attacks organized by prosecutors close to Gülen. In the following days the army's General Staff was to request the opening of an investigation, reporting suspicious links between the prosecutors

<sup>4</sup> It was in 2010 that for the first time the government effectively appointed the most important members of the Armed Forces, preventing the promotion of generals involved in the Ergenekon case. On a number of occasions, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan presided over the meetings of the Superior Council of the Armed Forces.

and Fethullah Gülen.<sup>5</sup> Far more recently, the Balyoz case ended with the acquittal of all the 236 people under investigation, while previously many of those charged in the Ergenekon enquiry had already been released. This is an outcome that can only be linked to the vicissitudes of relations between the AKP and Fethullah Gülen, which have increasingly deteriorated over the course of the past year. Not long before the August 2014 presidential elections that saw Erdoğan elected President of the Republic, a new wave of arrests involved the police. In the meantime, the government had already adopted a series of legislative modifications in order to change the organization of the judicial system and in particular of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) in an attempt to strengthen its control also over magistrates.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in February 2015 an arrest warrant was issued for Fethullah Gülen, accused of being the leader of the so-called “parallel state.”

The anti-corruption scandal therefore sparked a no-holds-barred battle between on the one hand Erdoğan and his party, the AKP, and on the other Fethullah Gülen and the *Cemaat*. In this attack launched by the government against the Gülen movement, what appears most evident is the denunciation of the political involvement of judges, prosecutors and journalists belonging to the movement that, in spite of having earlier contributed to

<sup>5</sup> On the release of people sentenced for the Balyoz affair see: Marcou Jean, “*Les 230 condamnés de l’affaire Balyoz sont libérés*”, *Ovipot*, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://ovipot.hypotheses.org/10311>.

<sup>6</sup> Judicial reform approved by the government in February 2014, was revised by the Turkish Constitutional Court which considered parts of the reform as anti-constitutional since they did not respect the autonomy of powers. This did not prevent the government seriously influencing matters when the Turkish HSYK was renewed last October.

the AKP's success, later appeared to no longer be controlled by the government and to have effectively turned against it.

In this political conflict the media has played a fundamental role, within a reporting scenario that in Turkey has progressively become restricted and polarised. While in general the continuous readjustment of the balance of power – first between the government and the army, then between the AKP and the Gülen Movement – has effectively resulted in the country returning to the authoritarian system reported by many, and for the media it has resulted in a constant attack on journalists and media outlets. Over recent years, many journalists have been dismissed or arrested, while social networks have often been blocked, Twitter in particular. At the same time, daily newspapers such as the liberal *Radikal* owned by the Doğan group, are no longer on sale at newsstands but only available online, others such as the historic and secular *Hürriyet*, owned by the same group, has been threatened with closure by the government. There are a number of newspapers and, more broadly speaking, media outlets, considered to be pro-government, but the number of those linked to Gülen's movement is still significant. It is therefore no coincidence that last December, as said earlier, a year after the corruption scandal, the daily newspaper *Zaman* and the television channel *Samanyolu*, both close to the *Cemaat*, were targeted in a judicial case that led not only to arrests but also to the offices of news outlets being searched. In the meantime, a new daily newspaper has appeared in Turkey with government approval, the *Vahdet*, a newspaper whose name of Arab origin means 'unity' and whose spiritual guide is



Ahmet Mahmud Ünlü (known as Ahmet Hoca), a rather debatable figure linked to the brotherhood led by İsmail Ağa, situated in Istanbul's Çarsamba district.<sup>7</sup> As Jean-François Pérouse has observed, the new newspaper, rather similar to the nationalist paper *Akit*, does not seem to have brought much that is new to the Turkish publishing scene and yet, in addition to proving the government's constant attempts to influence information, it bears witness to the new alliances the AKP is once again forging following the rift with the Gülen movement.<sup>8</sup> These are alliances that once again refer to groups moving within the complicated and rather diversified galaxy of Turkish Islam.

What generally appears more interesting in the conflict between Gülen's movement and the AKP is the manner in which this battle takes place within a rift in today's Turkish conservative political religious world. It consists of a continuous readjustment of power in which politics and Islam confront one another within the context of a complex national history, a secular tradition, a strong and persistent form of nationalism, a desire for change and renewed religious fervour. In Turkey, Islam is not a new phenomenon nor is resorting to religion for political objectives. There is no doubt that over the past decade, with the AKP party's success deriving from openly Islamic formations, but not defining itself as a conservative democratic party, the presence of Islam and a vast collection

<sup>7</sup> Brian Chauvel, "*Vahdet, une unification sous le signe de la différence ?*", *Dipnot*, 10.04.2015  
<http://dipnot.hypotheses.org/1054>.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Pérouse, "*Un nouveau venu sans surprise dans la presse turque: le quotidien Vahdet*", *Ovipot*, 24.03.2015 [http://ovipot.hypotheses.org/10998#footnote\\_4\\_10998](http://ovipot.hypotheses.org/10998#footnote_4_10998).

of symbols and discourses have achieved more weight on the political stage. It is a complex and composite phenomenon, one closely linked to strategies involving the affirmation of political power and in some ways attempting to answer and ride the wave of a search for religiosity that is being experienced in contemporary societies.

The tie between political, economic, financial and religious circles and the existence of religious groups accustomed to having to deal with and confront a secular and military tradition that has obliged them to come up with strategies and formulas, are the characteristics of so-called “Turkish-Islamic exceptionalism” as it has been defined by the scholar Şerif Mardin.<sup>9</sup> Gülen’s movement and the AKP are two significant examples of this and their battle for power leads one to reflect not only on the links between Islam and politics, but also on the political project itself – and the vision of society – of organizations and groups inspired by religious values, produced within a form of conservatism that is still rising.-

For the moment, in Italy there are no studies or in-depth analyses on Fethullah Gülen and his movement. This book therefore provides, for the first time in Italy, a framework of analysis of *Cemaat* and the role and importance it attributes to the media and to communications. “Fethullah Gülen’s media empire” examines the Gülen movement and its relationship with the media (TV, the press, films), the use the movement makes of the media in propaganda for its ideology and its religious and political message as well as in creating its image both

<sup>9</sup> Mardin, Şerif. 2005. “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes”, *Turkish Studies* 6, (2), Summer 2005, 145-165.

within the movement and externally. Particular relevance has been attributed to the conflict between the movement and the party in government – as previously mentioned – and to how this conflict developed in the media sector. This choice was dictated by a wish to provide greater elements in understanding the most recent political developments in contemporary Turkey. Studying the Gülen Movement is no easy task. As also emphasised by David Tittensor, the author of a recent essay on the subject, it is a “difficult subject” because most of the material and studies available are the work of authors close to or supporting the movement and are often based on the writings or statements of its leader.<sup>10</sup> This movement in fact promotes the publication of books and initiatives that spread knowledge about it at an international level, in different circles and not necessarily in an unambiguous manner.<sup>11</sup>

The papers published in this book are the work of authors who have for some time been studying Turkey, Turkish Islam and in some cases Gülen’s movement. The book begins with an essay by Joshua Hendrick entitled “The corrupted word; the Movement, the Party and the failure of ‘new Turkey’” providing a description of the *Cemaat*, its alliance with the AKP including the rift between them, with a reflection on relations between state and media in Turkey. The author provides a number of elements that help one understand how the movement works, dwelling on the different ramifications it has in

<sup>10</sup> Tittensor, David. 2014. *The House of Service : the Gülen Movement and Islam’s Third Way*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 3.

<sup>11</sup> As far as initiatives are concerned it is sufficient to consider the many international conferences dedicated to this movement: <http://www.fethullahGülenconference.org>.

Turkish society's various sectors as well as at an international level. This is a first important contribution containing key elements for understanding the in-depth analyses that follow. The second paper entitled "The conflict between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Fethullan Gülen in its various dimensions and motivations," written by Ruşen Çakır and Semih Sakallı, authors of a recent book on relations between the AKP and Gülen published in Turkey, addresses the various events and the reasons at the root of this conflict. A great expert on Turkish political Islam, which he was one of the first to study, Ruşen Çakır, together with Sakallı, helps readers identify both the main factors associating the AKP and the Gülen Movement, and the different approach used by them to address important issues in Turkish politics, such as foreign policy or the Kurdish issue.

The two papers that follow analyse in depth in a more specific manner the media galaxy supporting the movement. The essay entitled "Gülen's media in a fratricidal battle" by Ragıp Duran, a famous Turkish journalist and an expert in the media, presents a historical reconstruction of a number of significant moments in the movement's history, and studies in greater depth the importance this movement attributes to the media and the circulation of news. Thanks to this paper it is possible to better understand the control exercised by the media or the repositioning of newspapers. Joshua Carney, instead, in his paper "Change of direction. A brief analysis of two newspapers associated to Gülen, *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman*" focuses attention on the movement's two main newspapers, one published in Turkish and the other in English. Analysing the different editorial choices on

the basis of the readers the newspapers are targeting in Turkey and abroad, the author, a scholar of the Turkish media, allows one to assess how the movement is able to develop multiple strategies in order to obtain greater consensus in different environments.

The last two contributions, albeit remaining within the framework of a study of Fethullah Gülen's media, address two specific cases. In "Portraying Islam; Fethullah Gülen movement's film productions", Fabio Vicini, an expert on Turkish Islam, focuses his analysis on two films produced by the *Cemaat* with the intention of spreading its own ideological message. As the author underlines, these two productions effectively allow one to explore how the movement perceives itself and portrays itself, suggesting a more general reflection about the concept of the portrayal of Islam (*temsiliyet*). Lastly, Maria Concetta Tedesco analyses "The Foundation of Journalists and Authors (GYV)", an organization that acts as the movement's mouthpiece. A look at its organization and functioning allows one to perceive not only the importance the media has for this movement and the role assigned to journalists in searching for propaganda opportunities, but also to understand the subjects it concentrates on and on which it bases its own discourse, such as interreligious and intercultural dialogue, women, and relations with central Asia.

In conclusion, the book investigates a number of aspects that seem relevant for understanding the particular use of the media by this movement, thereby offering an original perspective of the movement as well as, more in general, the media in Turkey. At the same time, the book describes the conflict that resulted in the clash between

the Gülen Movement and the AKP, widely developed through the Turkish media, allowing an understanding of a number of elements characterising the complex relationship between Islam and politics in today's Turkey.

*Translation Francesca Simmons Pomeroy*

## **Corrupted Speech: The Movement, the Party, and the Breakdown of the New Turkey**

*Joshua Hendrick*

On July 9, 2014, Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, filed a civil complaint against Bülent Keneş, the Editor-in-Chief of the country's largest English language newspaper, *Today's Zaman*. Citing comments made by Keneş on Twitter, Erdoğan's lawyer stated that although the journalist did not call out the Prime Minister by name, he had gone beyond the limits of free speech by implicitly "insulting a public official." This was not the first time Erdoğan filed a claim against Keneş or against an employee at *Today's Zaman*. A few months earlier on March 29, one day before Turkey's 2014 municipal elections, Erdoğan filed lawsuits against Keneş, Memhmet Kamış, the deputy editor of *Today's Zaman's* Turkish language parent, *Zaman*, as well as against *Zaman* journalist Önder Aytaç and *Today's Zaman* opinion writer, Emre Uslu. These complaints were registered at a time when Erdoğan was repeatedly calling upon Turkish readers to boycott *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman*, and when journalists from both newspapers were being routinely removed from government press briefings.

Responding to what was framed as an attack on the media group that owned *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman*, Keneş and many columnists at both papers dedicated

hundreds of pages of printing space during the first seven months of 2014 to criticize Prime Minister Erdoğan for muzzling free speech. Erdoğan's efforts, they argued, targeted these news outlets because they were regularly reporting about corruption allegations that began to mar Erdoğan's regime in December 2013. Defending both his person and his paper's coverage of the corruption claims, Keneş wrote in his regular *Today's Zaman* opinion column:

*Unfortunately, Erdoğan – who seeks domination of the country and ignores democratic principles and the rule of law – has plenty of instruments to achieve this goal. His domination over the media and communication sectors are one of his most effective tools. Thanks to the censorship and oppression that Erdoğan has imposed via media power managed directly by him and state institutions working under his tutelage, he is able to present his government's biggest failures as a success - or at least he can hide the facts about these failures from the public attention.<sup>1</sup>*

#### *State/Media Relations in “the New Turkey”*

It is no secret that modern Turkey has long struggled with press freedoms. For much of the country's history, print and broadcast media were monopolized by a mixture of state-owned enterprises and by a small handful of family-based holding companies. It is also true that although the interests of the state were rarely questioned

<sup>1</sup> Keneş Bülent, “Erdoğan No Longer Wants to Govern Turkey”, *Today's Zaman*, 8 April 2014.



in twentieth century Turkey, public debate often thrived. In the 1960s and 1970s, political battle lines pitted “leftists” against “rightists;” and in the 1980s and 1990s these lines were redrawn to pit “secularists” against “Islamists.” Different groups consumed news from a range of ideologically diverse newspapers, and stories about government corruption, cronyism, and graft were regular. Notwithstanding a lively public sphere, the degree of diversity available was regulated, and there were always certain topics that remained off-limits for public discussion. A senior newspaper journalist whose career stretched back to the late-1970s explained as follows: “In the old days [e.g., before 2002] ... we knew the rules ... you could not discuss the Kurds, and you could not discuss issues related to the claims of the Armenians”.<sup>2</sup>

Following a nearly three-year long reign of a junta between 1980 and 1983, Turkey began a long process of liberalization that dramatically transformed the country’s media landscape. Reaching an apex in the early 2000s, and coinciding with the rise of the Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002, ongoing neoliberal reforms have created the conditions for private conglomerates to expand their interests into diverse sectors. Media firms have expanded into industry, and corporate industrial firms have expanded their holdings into mass media. For the first time in Turkey’s history, companies competing in the arena of mass news and entertainment have become linked to companies competing in heavy construction, energy, resource extraction, industrial chemicals, and other sectors that required state-administered contracting. And because critical press coverage could re-

<sup>2</sup> Field Interview, June 2013.

sult in the loss of lucrative state contracts, a refined form of market-oriented despotism began to take root.

This new reality was put on display in 2008 when a German court found a JDP-linked German-Turkish religious foundation (*Deniz Feneri*) guilty of fraud and embezzlement. In case proceedings, JDP officials in Turkey were named as alleged accomplices in the Germany-based scheme, and links to Prime Minister Erdoğan were mentioned as warranting an investigation. Many Turkish newspapers and television stations that regularly reported on the *Deniz Feneri* case were affiliated with what was, at that time, the country's largest media firm, the Doğan Group. Without ever explicitly denying the charges, Erdoğan responded that ubiquitous coverage of the case was indicative of a plot by Ahmet Doğan, the company's CEO, to exact revenge upon the JDP government for a previous refusal by the Istanbul zoning commission to issue permits that would have allowed Doğan to expand one of his hotels. Doğan dismissed this accusation; but he did begin to publicly accuse the Prime Minister of fostering favoritism. In this instance, however, he cited the state's refusal to permit a Doğan Group subsidiary to build a new oil refinery on the Mediterranean, a project that was given instead to the Çalık Group, a company whose vice president at the time was Erdoğan's son-in-law.<sup>3</sup>

For months, reportage on the alleged JDP corruption was regular in Doğan-owned newspapers, which led an angry Erdoğan to call upon Turks to boycott Doğan-

<sup>3</sup> Hendrick Joshua D., "Media Wars and the Gülen Factor in the New Turkey", *Middle East Report*, 2011, 260, pp. 40-46.

owned media. This battle's victorious blow was struck in September 2009 when tax authorities levied the largest fine in Turkish history upon the Doğan Group to the tune of \$3.2 billion.<sup>4</sup> Doğan was forced to sell off much of his company's media holdings, and reporting on the *Deniz Feneri* scandal came to an abrupt end. When discussing this new reality, the same journalist quoted above explained, "Nowadays ... you do not know the rules ... well you know the rules but they are different ... now you cannot discuss the Prime Minister or the party [JDP] ... his private life, business dealings, or any potential corruption ... nowadays these topics are off limits."<sup>5</sup>

The Doğan V. Erdoğan affair highlighted that by 2008 Erdoğan and the JDP had expanded "the rules" of state/media relations in Turkey. Still, Erdoğan's clashes with Keneş and his colleagues in 2014 seemed different. Unlike The Doğan Group, the media group to which *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman* belong was not invested in other sectors. Moreover, up until recently, both publications shared an editorial line that was widely viewed as promoting unconditional support for JDP policy objectives both domestic and foreign. Indeed, in regard to stories about alleged JDP favoritism and corruption in 2008, Keneş dedicated several of his columns in *Today's Zaman* to defend the JDP:

*It must be acknowledged that the [JDP's] report card is considerably free from guilt with respect to fraud and corruption when compared to previous governments. How do we know? Simple: The public resources of a country will not rad-*

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Field Interview, June 2013.

*ically increase or decrease in a short time. However, the proportion of these resources being spent in services for the benefit of the public can considerably change depending on how they are used and whether they are wasted or transferred to undeserving people. For this reason, given the benefits created by the [the JDP's] terms in government and the economic and social development it brought to the country, we can conclude that the [JDPs] involvement in corruption has been insignificant compared to previous governments . . . It would be a great injustice to say that [the JDP] government is entirely characterized by big cases of corruption”.*<sup>6</sup>

Such was Keneş's assessment in 2008. According to a journalist employed by CNNTurk in 2013, however, “not since the Doğan tax fine has anyone reported on the Prime Minister's private business dealings”.<sup>7</sup> Although true at the time, by the end of 2013 this was no longer the case. Beginning in December and continuing relentlessly for months thereafter, stories about alleged JDP corruption again became ubiquitous. This time, however, it was *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman* that led the reporting, and it was these papers that Erdoğan sought to silence. What changed?

### *The Gülen Movement*

*Zaman* and *Today's Zaman* newspapers are part of the Feza Media Group, a medium-sized firm that is affiliated

<sup>6</sup> Keneş Bülent, “Politics and Prevention of Corruption”, *Today's Zaman*, 25 April 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Field Interview, June 2013.

with Turkey's Fethullah Gülen Movement (GM). Referring to themselves by the moniker, *Hizmet* (service), GM associates put into practice the teachings of M. Fethullah Gülen, Turkey's most influential, and most controversial, religious community leader. His network consists of thousands of institutions and millions of individuals who, together with Turkish ex-patriots in over 120 countries, reproduce a multi-billion dollar network of schools, trade, finance, information communication technologies, construction, legal services, accounting, public relations, publishing, and mass news and entertainment.

Known to his admirers as "*Hocaeffendi*" ("Esteemed Teacher"), Fethullah Gülen disseminates his teachings in print and online<sup>8</sup> via hundreds of books, essay collections, periodicals, and websites. Although the entirety of his oeuvre is available in Turkish, a large body of his work (although often incomplete) is translated into English, and to a lesser degree into dozens of other world languages. The central refrain in Gülen's articulated worldview is a need for "volunteers" who are "filled with love for all of humanity" to form what Gülen calls "the generation of hope." The task of this generation is to cultivate a future "golden generation" (*altın nesil*) that will create the conditions for the end of days:

*What we need now is not ordinary people, but rather people devoted to divine reality ... people who by putting into practice their thoughts, lead first their own nation, and then all people, to enlightenment and to help them find God ... dedicated spirits ... who wander like Israfil ... on the verge of blowing the last trumpet in order to prepare*

<sup>8</sup> See <http://fGülen.com/en/>.

*dead spirits for the Day of Resurrection ... How fortunate are the blessed cadre to be the fuse to such an event. And, again, how fortunate are the ones whose breasts are receptive to this breeze.*<sup>9</sup>

GM-affiliated teachers, businessmen, outreach activists, journalists, and others constitute Gülen's "blessed cadre" whose members are asked to dedicate their time, money, and energy to create the conditions for the coming of the golden generation. Throughout his many essays on the topic, Gülen refers to the current "generation of hope" as an "army of light" and as "soldiers of truth."

The "truth" that Gülen's soldiers promote is that humanity has strayed from the path of divinely inspired wisdom, which he views as a crisis stemming from empty consumerism (materialism), carnality, and individualism. Helping Turkish and world society recover from moral decline requires *aksiyon insanları* (humans of action) and *hizmet insanları* (humans of service) who can offer the coming generation *irşad* (moral guidance). Such guidance is presented at the micro level by elders (*ağabeyler*) in the Gülen community, at the mezzo level in classrooms and in community social groups (*söhbetler*), and at the macro level via publishing and mass media.

Beginning in the late 1960s as a splinter group of a pre-existing religious community (i.e., Turkey's Said Nursi Movement), by the late 1970s, Fethullah Gülen was attracting large crowds. Around this time, his followers operated several student dormitories in İzmir and Edirne, and audiocassettes of his sermons were disseminated

<sup>9</sup> Gülen Fethullah, *Toward a Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, The Light Publishing, Somerset, NJ, 2004, pp. 105-110.

widely. During the 1980-1983 junta, Gülen's followers found opportunity in private education.<sup>10</sup> In an effort to avoid state suppression as an illegal religious congregation, affiliates restructured a number of pre-existing dormitories to function as private education institutions. In 1982, Yamanlar High School in İzmir and Fatih High School in Istanbul became the first "Gülen-inspired schools" (GISs) in Turkey. Over the course of the 1980s, dozens more were opened. In addition to private elementary and secondary schools, the GM enterprise expanded quickly into the field of standardized exam preparation. Called *dershaneler* ("lesson houses"), the GM eventually cornered a niche in cram-course curriculum, as students became known for their high scores on Turkey's centralized high school and university placement exams.

Connecting students to a growing network of schools, education-related businesses, media companies, information and communication companies, publishing firms, exporters, and financiers allowed the GM to create for itself a growing pool of human resources from which to draw upon in search of employees, suppliers, clients, and patrons. GISs were not only staffed by affiliated teachers, but also with media and technical equipment, textbooks, and stationary goods from affiliated firms. Owners of these firms maintained close social ties to the GM by subsidizing student rent at *işık evleri* ("houses of light," i.e., student apartments), by providing scholarships to students to attend private GISs, and by providing start-up capital for new GM ventures. In 1986, for instance,

<sup>10</sup> Hendrick Joshua D., *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World*. New York University Press, New York, 2013, pp.123-143. Yavuz Hakan, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement*. New York University Press, New York, 2013, pp. 92-116.

GM-affiliates bought a pre-existing newspaper, *Zaman*, and, once Turkey liberalized broadcast media in the early 1990s, the same firm began its first television venture, *Samanyolu TV*. Together, these became the two most successful companies in the Feza Media Group.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the GM took advantage of the Turkish state's effort to cultivate relations with post-Soviet republics. GIS's were begun with Turkish start-up capital throughout Central Asia and the Balkans and affiliated business ventures followed. To facilitate trade with these regions, an export-oriented trade association emerged, *İş Hayatı Dayanışma Derneği* (İŞHAD, The Association for Solidarity in Business Life, est. 1994). A shipping and transport firm was established around the same time, as was an "Islamic" (interest-free, profit sharing) bank (*Asya Finans*, now *Bank Asya*, est. 1996). In 2005, a number of smaller regional trade associations followed İŞHAD's lead to form *Türkiye İşadamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu* (TUSKON, the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists in Turkey), now Turkey's largest business-related NGO.

With greater influence came a need to frame a public image that could be perceived as worthy of social prestige. In a public relations campaign that began in 1994, another wing of the GM's operational ethos was born in the Turkish mountain town of Abant. There, a group of GM-affiliated outreach activists gathered together a number of Turkey's most widely read journalists and opinion columnists, as well as a number of academicians and writers from a variety of fields. Known thereafter as "the Abant Platform," this meeting was envisioned as an opportunity for a diverse group of thinkers to discuss some of the more



troubling aspects of Turkish political society. It spawned the emergence of the primary GM-affiliated think tank and outreach organization, The *Gazeticiler ve Yazarlar Vakfı* (GYV, Journalists and Writers Foundation).<sup>11</sup>

The GM's expansion in the 1990s came at a time when political Islam was on the rise in Turkey under the leadership of the *Refah Partisi* (RP, Welfare Party). After winning a plurality in 1996, the RP formed a coalition government and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, became Turkey's first "Islamist" Prime Minister. Political success, however, was short-lived and in February 1997, the RP was forced from power in a near coup.<sup>12</sup> Focusing its efforts outside party politics, the GM was able to navigate the RP's rise and abrupt fall, but it did not emerge from this period unscathed. Interpreted widely as an aftershock of February 27, in 1999 Fethullah Gülen fled to the United States. According to his spokespeople, the reason was for medical treatment for a chronic condition. Whether true or not, shortly after his emigration, Gülen was indicted *in absentia* for being the leader of an alleged criminal organization that aimed to overthrow the Turkish state. He has lived in the U.S. ever since.

Following Gülen's self exile, GM activists created GYV-modeled outreach and dialogue institutions throughout the world wherever the GM managed GIS's and wherever

<sup>11</sup> About this organization (<http://gyv.org.tr>), see the essay of Maria Concetta Tedesco "The Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV)" in this volume, p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> In what became infamously known as "The February 28 process," Turkey's military forced Erbakan from power by threatening a military coup. This was enough to rather quickly cause the RP government to collapse. In the two years that followed, the state cracked down on all forms of faith-based social and political organizing. For his part, Erdoğan was briefly imprisoned on charges of "inciting hatred" by reading a religiously tinged poem during a public speech.

GM-affiliates conducted business. Today, the U.S. hosts the most influential of these institutions outside Turkey, and the most in number.<sup>13</sup> In 2008, a federal court in Pennsylvania granted Gülen permanent residency in the U.S. In the same year, Gülen was named “the world’s most influential public intellectual” in an online poll conducted by *Prospect* and *Foreign Policy* magazines.<sup>14</sup> Although critiqued by the editors of both magazines as illustrating little more than a keen ability to manipulate the outcomes of an online poll, between the years of 2007 and 2012 the GM reached an apex in prestige and influence in Turkey and in countries around the world.<sup>15</sup>

### *The JDP-GM coalition and GM Media in Turkey*

From the beginning of the JDP-era in 2002 until the period following the JDP’s third electoral victory in the

<sup>13</sup> Such organizations include the Rumi Forum in Washington D. C. (<http://www.rumiform.org>, est. 1999), the Dialogue Institute in Houston (<http://www.interfaithdialog.org>, est. 2002), the Niagara Foundation in Chicago (<http://www.niagarafoundation.org>, est. 2004), and the Pacifica Institute in Southern California (<http://www.pacificainstitute.org>, est 2003). Representing the regional leadership of dozens of similar institutions throughout the country, these organizations are collectively organized by the GM umbrella organization, The Turkic American Alliance (<http://turkicamericanalliance.org>).

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/08/03/meet\\_fethullah\\_gulen\\_the\\_worlds\\_top\\_public\\_intellectual](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/08/03/meet_fethullah_gulen_the_worlds_top_public_intellectual)

<sup>15</sup> In addition to its nearly 1 thousand private schools in over 120 countries, its mass media and entertainment ventures in print, television, and online, in trade and finance initiatives, and its lobbying and outreach work, the GM runs a successful first respondent relief organization, Kimse Yok Mu? (<http://www.kimseyokmu.org.tr/?lang=en>), a number of modern hospitals in Turkey, and over 150 publicly funded charter schools in the United States. In April 2013, Time Magazine named Fethullah Gülen one of the world’s most influential people (<http://time100.time.com/2013/04/18/time-100/slide/fethullah-Gülen/>).

summer of 2011, the movement and the party were closely aligned as a conservative “new Turkey” coalition. JDP leaders like Bülent Arınç, Abdullah Gül, Ali Babacan, and even Prime Minister Erdoğan regularly endorsed GM-sponsored events (e.g., the Abant Platform) and regularly praised the achievement of GM-affiliated “Turkish schools” while on state visits to Thailand, Kenya, South Africa, and elsewhere. Linking the JDP desire to expand bilateral trade, government leaders regularly supported TUSKON trade summits, and public companies such as Turkish Airlines became regular sponsors of GM-organized events (e.g., Turkish Language Olympics, etc.). By 2011, a number of figures with known GM affinities even ran as JDP candidates. Although signifying growing strength, the GM’s close proximity to Erdoğan’s government called into question its long-stated identity as a distinctly “nonpolitical” collective actor. Highlighting this emerging contradiction was the change in tone observable throughout GM media from general conservatism to unconditional JDP apologetics.

Among the GM media’s primary objectives during its period of domestic growth in the 1980s, and in the context of its transnational expansion in the 1990s, was to carve out a voice for social conservatism in secular Turkey. A senior figure in the GM organization explained as follows:

*The newspaper [Zaman] was founded in 1986. Before then there were the attempts of other Muslim entrepreneurs but they could not survive ... In Turkey, media was a monopoly ... journalists were ... totally leftist, atheist people ... Journalists were always of that origin. So, there were aspi-*

rations to do something about this ... So, a newspaper was needed ... Then what happened? [After Zaman started publication] the other papers could not write fake news, because [by then], our correspondents were everywhere and by then we had a newspaper and a television channel. You must think of Zaman as a tool to correct fake news.

And also a crowd of people consisting of students at [GM] schools plus their families ... the people who listened to Ho-caefendi's sermons in the mosques of Izmir and Istanbul, in Sultanahmet, Suleymaniye, etc. People overcrowded the mosques and not everybody could listen to him. And there was a need to inform people correctly.

So, a more general medium was needed. Media fulfilled this. Instead of preaching in mosques, [we] used these tools. And [we] addressed many more people from the TV through several different kinds of productions.<sup>16</sup>

After taking over *Zaman*, GM affiliates expanded their media holdings to include two nationally-broadcasted television stations (*Samanyolu TV*, *Mehtap TV*), an English language satellite television (*Ebru TV*, based in New Jersey), a nationally-broadcasted radio station (*Burç FM*), thirteen foreign edition newspapers, Turkey's most widely-distributed political magazine (*Aksiyon*), a sizable news collection agency (*Cihan Haber Ajansı*), and Turkey's most widely-distributed English-language publication (*Today's Zaman*). And while these companies comprise The Feza Group, the GM is also widely-known to have close proximity with the industrial Koza İpek Holding Group, which publishes *Bügun* Newspaper, as well as with the independent *Taraf* Newspaper. Together with

<sup>16</sup> Field Interview, Winter 2007.

an expanding collection of media with direct links to the JDP, a new media alliance emerged in the 2000s whose parent firms received strategic support from the JDP state.<sup>17</sup>

### *Battle Lines Redrawn*

After the JDP's third electoral victory in 2011, overlapping interests between the GM and the JDP (e.g., conservative social politics, economically liberal development, removing the Turkish military's oversight from Turkish politics and society) were no longer enough to hold the two entities together. The result was the initiation of a bureaucratic, legal, and public relations war that continues today. According to a number of observers, the beginning of this conflict extends back to 2010; others point to one or another significant event in 2011 or 2012. Signifying indicators of emerging tensions include Gülen's public disagreement of the JDP's handling of the infamous "Mavi Marmara Incident,"<sup>18</sup> the subpoena of Hakan Fidan (the AKP appointed Chief of National

<sup>17</sup> Hendrick, op. cit., *Middle East Report*, 2011. Yeşil, Bilge, "Press Censorship in Turkey: Networks of State Power, Commercial Pressures, and Self-Censorship," *Communication, Culture, and Critique*. Vol 7 (2), 2014, pp.154-173.

<sup>18</sup> The Mavi Marmara Incident refers to an event that transpired in 2010 when a flotilla of aid ships led by a Turkish religious charity sought to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip in Palestine. An international collection of activists boarded ships in an attempt to deliver food and aid. When the flotilla entered Israeli waters, Israeli commandoes boarded one of the ships, and opened fire on the unarmed activists, killing nine people. All were Turks and eight were Turkish citizens (one was a Turkish American). It took over two years for Israel to apologize for the event, and Turkish-Israeli relations have never fully recovered.

Intelligence) in 2012 by a state prosecutor with alleged ties to the GM, and public disagreement between Gülen and Erdoğan during the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013. Whenever it began, speculations about a brewing feud were proven correct in the final months of 2013 when the two powers more forcefully collided. A brief account of ongoing friction is as follows.

On November 17, 2013 *Zaman* published leaked details about the JDP's plan to close all standardized exam prep schools (*dershaneler*) in Turkey. As the primary source of recruitment for the GM's collective organization, this move constituted an existential attack on the GM's ability to reproduce itself in the long term. On December 17, 2013, and again on December 25, state prosecutors with alleged links to the GM retaliated by arresting the sons of three JDP cabinet ministers, as well as a number of state bureaucrats and businessmen on charges of graft and bribery. Also arrested was an Azeri-Iranian businessman who was accused of orchestrating a gold smuggling operation between Turkey and Iran. Evidence included shoe boxes of cash found in suspects' homes, and voice recordings that, among other things, implicated a number of JDP officials including Bilal Erdoğan, the Prime Minister's son.

How and why did information about the closing of Turkey's exam prep schools leak to *Zaman*? What explains the timing of the state prosecutor's plan to move forward with the December 17 and 25 raids and arrests? Following the subordination of the Turkish military to civilian authority in the context of Turkey's Ergenekon investigation,<sup>19</sup> the GM and the JDP both sought to

<sup>19</sup> *Ergenekon* refers to a nearly seven-year investigation and court hearing of an alleged network of retired and active military personnel,

consolidate their power. In allegations that are emphatically denied throughout GM-affiliated media sources, GM actors are believed to control much of the Turkish judiciary and police force and are believed to have shifted their investigative attention from the Kemalist old guard to the JDP. This conspiracy was exacerbated in late 2012 when Prime Minister Erdoğan discovered recording devices in his offices. Shortly after, Erdoğan initiated an expansive plan to crush what he later termed the “parallel state” in Turkey, by which he meant the GM.

2014 began with Erdoğan lambasting “the parallel state” for attempting a coup against the JDP. In the months that followed, hundreds of policemen were fired or reassigned in precincts throughout the country, and dozens of prosecutors were removed from their posts. Following this, several audio-recordings incriminating a number of JDP officials, as well as Prime Minister Erdoğan and his son, were posted on Twitter. Shortly before the March 2014 municipal elections, Erdoğan cited Twitter as a menace to society and had his government block

and social/business elites accused of conspiring to topple the JDP government. In August 2013, 275 people were issued final sentences, including several retired Turkish generals. 19 people were sentenced to life in prison. In the context of the Ergenekon case (2007-2013), additional plots to overthrow the JDP were allegedly uncovered including a plan called “Sledgehammer,” another called “Glove,” and another called “Cage.” These three were rolled into the Ergenekon case, although the suspects for each case were tried in court as separate groups. In June 2014, those convicted in the Sledgehammer case were granted the right of a retrial in accordance with an appeals ruling that determined their right to a fair trial was neglected. For a scathing critique of the nearly seven-year saga, and of the GM’s alleged role in orchestrating wide-scale fabrication therein, see Rodrik 2014.

Turkish access to the site. Erdoğan defended this move by proclaiming that democracy that was under siege in Turkey:

*“December 17 is a black stain on Turkey’s democratic history ... It has surpassed all previous coup attempts and has been recorded as a betrayal of the state, democracy and the nation.”*<sup>20</sup>

Although the Twitter ban was overturned in early April, the March 30 elections resulted in a substantial victory for the JDP (43 percent) in local polls.

After the elections, Erdoğan took his fight against “the parallel state” [the GM] to new heights. His regime continued to purge police departments and prosecutors’ offices, encouraged public divestment from the GM-affiliated Bank Asya, and even explored ways to force that institution’s nationalization. The regime blocked state contracts with GM-affiliated firms (e.g., tenders with Koza-İpek Holding), and canceled the state’s support for GM-sponsored public relations events (e.g., Turkish Language Olympics).

For his part, Gülen regularly responded to these events with emphatic denials that he or his admirers had anything to do with illegal wiretappings, with stirring up public unrest, or with orchestrating criminal investigations. GM-affiliated media, specifically *Zaman* and *Today’s Zaman* newspapers, however, shifted much of their focus

<sup>20</sup> Resneck Jacob, “Muslim cleric linked to Turkish corruption probe”, see:

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/muslim-cleric-linked-to-turkish-corruption-probe/2014/01/17/55698400-7fa8-11e3-97d3-b9925ce2c57b\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/muslim-cleric-linked-to-turkish-corruption-probe/2014/01/17/55698400-7fa8-11e3-97d3-b9925ce2c57b_story.html)



to relentless reporting on the topic, a reality that continues today amidst daily revelations.<sup>21</sup>

*Conclusion: Wither the New Turkey?*

Having grown in size and influence during the JDP era, the GM expanded its influence, in part, by creating a mass media infrastructure that bridged social conservatism with the demands of democratization, free markets, and expanded trade. Aligned by mutual interests, the GM played a crucial role in legitimizing the JDP during its first two terms in power by using its media to present the party as Turkey's only hope for democratic reform and corruption-free governance. In turn, the JDP provided for the GM strategic resources to expand its education and business initiatives both domestically and abroad, and created the conditions for the GM to increase its influence in the Turkish legal system. In an effort to forge a new conservative power structure that subordinated the Turkish military, and that created opportunities for a new class of social, political, and economic elites, this "new Turkey coalition" harmonized because each "side" provided for the other much needed access, coverage, and support. The result was a "passive revolution" of con-

<sup>21</sup> An English language account of this struggle from the GM's perspective is available here:

[http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_ErdoğanErdoğan-war-against-hizmet-step-by-step\\_353694.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_ErdoğanErdoğan-war-against-hizmet-step-by-step_353694.html). An interview with Fethullah Gülen that was conducted by a GM-affiliated journalist and published in *Zaman* and *Today's Zaman* about this saga is available here:

[http://www.todayszaman.com/\\_part-1-islamic-scholar-Gülen-calls-conditions-in-turkey-worse-than-military-coup\\_342261.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/_part-1-islamic-scholar-Gülen-calls-conditions-in-turkey-worse-than-military-coup_342261.html)

servative social power that transformed the Turkish Republic in the global era.<sup>33</sup>

Illustrated by Erdoğan's lawsuits against Bülent Keneş and by his more general efforts to silence GM-affiliated news media, however, Turks are becoming more acutely aware that the coalition that created "the new Turkey" is being dismantled from the inside out. Moreover, Turkey's loss of democratic legitimacy in the context Erdoğan's attacks on the free press, together with the GM's collective inability to defend itself against claims of power hoarding in various strategic institutions of state, signify that both the movement and the party have much to lose in this battle. Whatever the outcome, the GM remains second only to the JDP in defining conservatism and national identity for pious Turks; and the JDP remains the only Turkish political party that can win enough votes to legislate in its interests. Considering the power and influence of both collectives, how this struggle ends will influence Turkish development for generations to come.

<sup>33</sup> Hendrick, op. cit., New York University Press, New York, 2013. Tuğal Cihan, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA, 2009.

## **The conflict between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Fethullan Gülen in terms of its various dimensions and motivations**

*Ruşen Çakır - Semih Sakallı*

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen community, or the Cemaat (“The Community”) as it is formally known:

The AKP is a political party founded mainly by the members of the Islamic organization Milli Görüş (“National Vision”) which, during the initial phase of constitution, was characterized by the distance it took from political Islam as demonstrated by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s famous affirmation, “I have taken off the National Vision coat.” Despite this fact, over the past few years in power and especially from 2011 onwards, the party has rapidly decreased its initial distance from political Islam. The AKP has come out on top of all political elections from 2002 until today, managing to stay in power on its own. On the other hand, Fethullah Gülen has successfully transformed his community into a very large-scale and powerful movement which operates mainly within the social field but is still quite influential in various other fields, from education to mass media, commercial enterprises to labor unions, think tanks to bureaucratic personnel.

This article first of all aims to focus on how and why

these two movements have passed from being allies to engaging in a fierce conflict in such a short time. Subsequently, we will discuss what the AKP and the Gülen community – which both define themselves with an Islamic and conservative identity, albeit in different ways – represent, as well as the meanings that these representations carry in relation to the war in question.

*From alliance to conflict: The relationship between the AKP  
and the Gülen community*

We will begin our discussion on the relationship between the AKP and the Gülen community by placing the objectives of both at the center of attention, and, in so doing, seek to explain three stages in the relationship in question. The first stage of “integration” sees as protagonist the AKP, who on 3 November 2002 rose to power alone. When it won the elections, the AKP was perfectly aware of the fact that it would have to deal both with a system, as well as the main actors by whom it was controlled, which defined it as “the enemy.” For this reason, it did not hesitate in developing all possible forms of collaboration with these centers of power. Furthermore, during this stage the AKP was particularly generous in terms of compromises, since it came to life and grew within a deep-rooted political tradition and therefore knew that it would have been mandatory to assume this attitude in order to be integrated into the system.

Throughout the integration stage, the relations between the AKP and the Gülen community were cold and distant. The main reason for this fact was the reluctance of the AKP government to harm its relations with the military, who saw the Gülen community as their

“principal enemy.” Although the AKP government did not fully satisfy the demands of the military, at the same time it absolutely didn’t want to give the image of a party “allied with the Cemaat against the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK).” Together with the aid of the global balance of power, the AKP government reached its goal of integration into Turkey’s existing political system to a large extent. However, that was a precarious and temporary balance, which had been transformed into an almost mandatory condition by the global conjuncture; in other words, the parties would not have been able to preserve this state of integration for too long and they were both well aware of its transience. In fact, through the Republic Protests<sup>1</sup> that saw the participation of members of the military and the judiciary, Atatürkers, Kemalists, social democrats and supporters of the Turkish left, several attempts had been made to prevent the appointment of Abdullah Gül to the presidency, to block the proposal for a law that would have liberalized the Islamic veil, and to close the AKP by means judicial proceedings. At this point, the AKP had reached the threshold of a new stage with two options in front of it: Either it could complete the integration process and become by all means a “central party” or it could engage in a conflict against the existing sovereign powers, which would lead to the liquidation of either the party itself or its adversaries.

<sup>1</sup> Republican Demonstrations (*Cumhuriyet Mitingleri*) are a series of protests that took place between April and May 2007 in reaction to a possible candidacy in the presidential elections before the Prime Minister Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül after him. The first, called in the name of the principle of secularism, took place in Ankara at the mausoleum of Atatürk, two weeks before the presidential election, with the participation of over one million people [editor’s note].

AKP chose the second option, thus launching what we will call the “liquidation” stage. In order to be able to compensate for its own failures and weaknesses, which would have become even more evident during the conflict, the party established a relationship based on full alliance with the Gülen community. Such a decision can be explained by three main factors:

- The ideological affinity between the party and the Gülen community;
- The important power of the Gülen community in terms of already trained personnel, presence within the bureaucracy and media power;
- The presence of common objectives between the party and the Gülen community

The alliance founded on these grounds worked almost perfectly until the constitutional referendum of 2011. Most of the members and supporters of the so-called “military tutelage” and “deep state” were gradually taken into custody and many of them were subsequently arrested. The main objective of this operation, which was to upset the balance of power within the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), was largely achieved. Taking into consideration the modus operandi adopted by the TSK, the party would have faced more difficulty in placing its own men in vital positions within the TSK as compared to the bureaucracy or the police. Despite this fact, however, the AKP - Cemaat alliance managed to reduce the power, the motivation and the concentration of the military to a large extent.

The AKP - Cemaat alliance, which substantially neu-

tralized the TSK, succeeded in upsetting the quite entrenched - especially after 1980 - balance of power in Turkey at a fast pace and with great dedication. Legitimizing its actions by the well-known proverb “Fire, once started, does not spare anyone,” the alliance often trampled on rights and fundamental freedoms without scruples. Despite the well-trained and expert staff provided by the Gülen community, the popular consent earned by the AKP – amounting up to 50% of the population as well as the large support of various groups, particularly the political Kurdish movement, which had been previously victimized by the strict securitarian policies of the military – the “liquidation” and the “conquest of the vital positions” (especially within the High Jurisdiction) did not (or could not) occur either at the level or at the speed expected. According to the alliance, the obstacle could be removed through an amendment to the constitution, and therefore the government submitted to referendum the proposal for a “package law” containing many articles which would have been certainly greeted with enthusiasm by the general population, while its true aim was to realize some radical changes especially within the High Jurisdiction. The Gülen community was as committed to this cause as the AKP itself, and in order to achieve the approval of the referendum, even Gülen himself launched a public appeal for a “YES.” There is no doubt that this change of attitude on behalf of the Cemaat, which owed its success mainly to its “meta-political” attitude that it had always assumed until then, shed light on the desire to occupy an important role in the new balance of power which would have been formed within the High Jurisdiction.

Taking a glance at the general picture which appears in front of our eyes today, we can see how the AKP, unlike the Cemaat, was not committed enough to controlling the new balance of power that would be formed within the High Jurisdiction, and as a result, its crucial positions were mainly occupied by the followers of Gülen. Though the AKP government was well aware of disadvantages of this position, initially there was no evident reason to complain about it, and the government did not move any objections to the presence of the Cemaat within the High Jurisdiction as long as the alliance between the two powers worked as expected. On the other hand, with the widening of the reach of the political trials mentioned above and their increasing illegitimacy, the government drew sharp criticisms from the West. Though finding this situation quite uncomfortable, the AKP assumed neither a consistent nor a principled attitude and pretended not to note some serious judicial errors until the party itself was directly penalized. In some other cases, the AKP went as far as justifying these judicial errors.

Fethullah Gülen's severe criticism of the AKP government after the Freedom Flotilla incident,<sup>2</sup> which led to a crisis with Israel, provoked some doubts regarding the strength of the alliance which, all things considered, seemed to have been working perfectly since 2007. Despite all the aspects that have been illustrated so far, it was yet impossible to think that this small-scale crisis could lead to a deep crack in such a politically-motivated alliance.

<sup>2</sup> About the Mavi Manara accident see footnote 18 of Hendrick essay in this monograph, p. 23.



The MIT<sup>3</sup> (The Turkish Intelligence Agency) crisis provoked suspicions by the two parties, who had formed a very successful alliance during the “liquidation” stage, about the extent to which they were truly collaborating to achieve the same political purposes. Even though during that time they tried not to attract much attention from the dissent by stating that everything was “nothing but a vile attempt to introduce enmity between them,” later on it became clear that they had not limited themselves only to analyzing the situation and discussing it further, but had also dedicated much time to gathering the information and the documents that they would later use against each other in the future. Did the MIT crisis break out because the two major actors in power didn’t succeed in coming to an agreement on how to solve the Kurdish question, or did it announce a farther-reaching struggle for power? We will find the answer to this question in the final stage of the relationship between the AKP and the Gülen community from 2002 to today; in other words, in the conflict between the AKP and the Cemaat.

Although the alliance, whose usual harmony kept fading down after the MIT crisis, had already become much shakier after the events of Gezi Park<sup>4</sup>, the breaking

<sup>3</sup> The crisis consists in the convocation of the Undersecretary of the MIT Hakan Fidan, the former undersecretary Emre Taner, the former deputy-secretary Afet Güneş and two officers of the MIT by the specially authorized prosecutor in Istanbul Sadrettin Sarıkaya to release a deposition as “suspects” due to the correspondences between some MIT officials and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party).

<sup>4</sup> The events started out with the the demonstrations against the government’s initiative to reconstruct, as part of the pedestrianization project of Taksim, the Halil Pasha Artillery Barracks in their former location where currently Gezi Park stands, despite the court’s decision

point was reached when the government decided to close the dershanes and immediately after when, as a counterattack, the police forces affiliated with the Cemaat launched an operation against corruption and bribery<sup>5</sup> in which Erdoğan himself, his family, some of his trusted collaborators and some entrepreneurs and businessmen close to the government were involved. Right after the police operation, the government intensified its attempts to liquidate the Gülen community more and more, using all the means at its disposal, and succeeded in large part to achieve its goal; thus revealing the removal of the Cemaat from its leading role in power, a

to cancel the project. The demonstrations were transformed into a massive anti-government reaction due to the statements of the Prime Minister Erdoğan and disproportionate use of force by the police forces involved in the clashes. The events gave voice to protest against the oppressive policies adopted by the AKP government especially in the recent time period.

<sup>5</sup> On the morning of 17 December 2013, many bureaucrats and businessmen including Barış Güler (the son of the Minister of the Interior Muhammed Güler), Salih Kaan Çağlayan (the son of the Minister of Economy Mehmet Zafer Çağlayan), Abdullah Oğuz Bayraktar (the son of the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning Erdoğan Bayraktar), the real estate tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu, the Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab and the general manager of Halkbank (People's Bank) Süleyman Aslan were taken into custody by the police in the light of the findings of three different investigations launched by the Department of Organized Crimes and the Department of Financial Crimes in Istanbul. Yet a second wave of the anti-corruption operation was launched soon after by the Chief Public Prosecutor in Istanbul Muammer Akkaş on 25 December 2013. The second list contained the names of several businessmen known for their closeness to the Prime Minister Erdoğan, like the Saudi Arabian banker Yasin al-Qadi, Fatih Saraç, Abdullah Tivnikli, Mustafa Latif Topbaş, Nihat Özdemir, Orhan Cemal Kalyoncu and Faruk Kalyoncu. However, Public Prosecutor Akkaş's request to detain the suspects for the charges of constitution and control of and membership to criminal conspiracy groups, threat, corruption, abuse of power and authority, tender fixing, money laundering and falsification of documents was declined.

role which it had until then occupied on equal terms with the AKP.

To sum up, we can affirm that the relationship between the AKP and the Gülen community has always followed a rough, undulant path made up of ups and downs, and recently it has turned into a destructive “war” in which both parties use all their force and resources at hand. But what exactly do these two movements represent? What is the main reason behind their insatiable desire for power?

*The differences between the AKP and the Gülen community*

At first sight, we may note that the two movements have several fundamental characteristics in common: Islam, conservatism, nationalism, lifestyles. Adding also a common political end to these characteristics, the tendency to see a harmonious blend between the two movements, especially in the second stage that we have just mentioned, prevails: in fact, for the majority of the population in Turkey, the Gülen community meant AKP, or vice versa; however, the underlying truth was soon revealed. Today, we can look back in retrospect and list the various reasons behind the rupture between the two movements. In this article, we will limit ourselves to illustrate the reasons leading to the transformation of their alliance in a full-scale “war,” which can be grouped under three main categories:

1. Foreign policy
2. Conflict of interest
3. The Kurdish question

The main field where the AKP has always glorified its actions and challenged those who have criticized them is certainly that of foreign policy. Nevertheless, foreign policy has also been the very field where the government has obtained the most doubtful and even disastrous results. The fervent attempts by the AKP government, during its early period in power, to join the European Union, to maintain good relations with the United States despite the government's refusal of the 1 March 2003<sup>6</sup> motion, to improve relations with Israel and to implement the "zero problem policy" with all its neighbors, particularly Syria, were all considered "successful moves" as far as foreign policy was concerned. However, starting from the clash between Erdoğan and Peres during the World Economic Forum held in Davos, all the moves listed above were in no time at all transformed into weapons turned against the government itself. The positions assumed by the AKP government, in light of the profound changes taking place in the Arab countries and the interventionist and aggressive policy that it adopted towards the revolts in Syria and Egypt, seriously harmed its relations with the West. One of the main events<sup>7</sup> which led to the construction of a clear boundary between the West and Erdoğan and his government was the spread of the allegations that Turkey had supported the radical Islamist

<sup>6</sup> It refers to the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003 parliamentary motion, when Turkey refused to participate to the coalition led by the United States to invade Iraq.

<sup>7</sup> Other events which have had a negative effect on the relations between the AKP government and the West are media censorship, Erdoğan's attitude and the disproportionate use of force by the police during the events of Gezi Park, as well as accusations of corruption and bribery.

groups in Syria and the surrounding areas during their attempts to bring down the government of Bashar al-Assad. Following the allegations that the government had either helped or deliberately closed an eye to terrorist groups such as the al-Nusra Front and ISIS, notorious throughout the world for the brutality of their actions, the relations with the West, which had already been quite tense for a long period of time, almost reached a breaking point. And what position did the Gülen community actually assume in the midst of all these developments taking place between the AKP and the West? One of the main reasons behind the conflict between the two movements is concealed beneath the very fact that the Cemaat assumed quite a divergent position from that of the AKP in these matters of foreign policy.

The Gülen community had a rather skeptical attitude towards the changes in foreign policy by the AKP government. By criticizing the foreign policies of the AKP, which were totally detached from - and sometimes even in conflict with - those of the West and its overtly interventionist attitude toward Syria, Iraq and Egypt, the Cemaat affirmed its pro-western position by insisting on the adaptation of a common policy with the West. Taking a clear stance away from Erdoğan's declarations that he would block the negotiations for joining the European Union and privilege the membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization instead, the Cemaat was, in a nutshell, quite visibly irritated by the AKP's directional shift in foreign policy. The same divergence of opinion manifested itself also in the government's foreign policy regarding Israel, though the reason was not Israel's attitude toward Palestine, as one would expect. Despite the

existence of a divergence of position between the AKP and the Gülen community regarding to the Palestinian question, one of the most important reasons for the diverse nature of the relations that both parties have established with Israel lies in the difference in their approaches towards the Islamist organizations in the Middle East, which constitute a significant threat to Israel. Although it was evident that terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Nusra Front and ISIS, with their centers of power located in the territories of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, were announcing an imminent catastrophe for Israel, the government never openly took a firm position against them; while the Cemaat, which had always stood quite detached not only from the radical Islamists in the Middle East but also from other communities and fraternities in Turkey who embrace fundamental Islamism, assumed a rather clear and pro-western attitude as it would be imagined. In addition, a careful analysis of both its organizational structure and development strategy will lead us to see that such a coherent attitude on behalf of the Cemaat conceals the unsuitability of its internal structure to support such a change of direction. The Cemaat, in fact, did not aim at active political participation in order to obtain power like the AKP but, instead, had several long-term objectives, and therefore did not retain such a quick transformation necessary to its goals. In either case, such a directional shift would not have been possible since the Cemaat was keeping a busy agenda with its educational propaganda not only in Turkey but also abroad. At the beginning of the 90s, the Gülen community started opening its own schools first in the Turkic republics and then in the Balkan countries, thus developing

a network which extends all over the world without limiting their project only to the countries with a substantial Muslim community. Taking into consideration the fact that the population of the majority of the countries involved in the Cemaat's "Global Expansion Project" are not mainly Muslim and that a large part of the members of the Cemaat were instructed, at least for some period, within the western education system, we can better grasp the difference between the community and the AKP; i.e. its reluctance to follow AKP's footsteps in its choices in foreign policy.

For the moment we'll conclude our discussion of foreign policy and focus on the conflict of interest which constitutes one of the main reasons leading to this war for power. During the period when the alliance between the AKP and the Cemaat worked as desired, the roles of the two protagonists of the political scene were very clearly separated. Under the leadership of Erdoğan, the AKP won all the elections and obtained public consent with quite high percentages and therefore could easily justify its policies aimed at weakening the "military tutelage." On the other hand, the Gülen community worked equally hard to reach the same goal by focusing mainly on the police force and the jurisdiction, and it managed to incrementally enhance its network within the state's internal organization in direct proportion to the favorable results it obtained. To put it briefly, the AKP was showing off on stage while the Cemaat was directing the orchestra. The efficacy and the forcefulness of the alliance meant more votes for the AKP and more penetration in crucial positions within the state organization for the Cemaat, but both protagonists yearned for more power. A trans-

formation began to occur when, exactly at this point, the AKP revealed its real intention to penetrate into the Cemaat's sphere of action. While on the one hand the AKP started to build student housing facilities, schools and universities by means of the foundations under its control and authority, on the other hand, it also intensified the charity actions through organizations known to be close to the party. The Gülen community interpreted the government's desire to close down the der-shanes as a clear demonstration of an attempt to conquer its spheres of power. We can affirm that Erdoğan, who, together with his team of collaborators, thus launched a process of transforming the party into a widespread community, wished to gain full control of the Islamist movement not only in politics but also in the public sphere; whereas the Cemaat wanted to have more say in the country's politics and expand its share of the power, and its members believed that the enormous popular consent gained by the AKP weakened the community and limited its participation – apart from a few common policies – to the decision-making processes concerning the economy, the foreign policy and a solution for the Kurdish question. In other words, the AKP started to invade the public sphere using its political power, while the Cemaat was ambitiously penetrating more into the political sphere in order to have more say within the balance of power. When the desire to invade the respective areas of action added up to the already existing differences of opinion which we previously mentioned, the “war for power” between the AKP and the Cemaat became inevitable for both. At this point, the Cemaat dedicated all its force and resources to throw off or at least



weaken the AKP government, while the AKP government used its political power first to eradicate the Cemaat from the state organization and then to weaken its networks within the civil society.

We will dedicate the final part of this article to the tension generated by the differences between the two protagonists of Turkey's political scene in their approaches towards the solution of the Kurdish question in order to illustrate how this tension contributed to the weakening of the AKP - Cemaat alliance. Given the ideological closeness between the two movements, it would be natural to expect that the policies generated and implemented by both regarding the solution of the Kurdish question would follow parallel or common routes. But, on the contrary, the policies implemented by these allies have often failed to maintain something like a parallel or common identity. The Gülen community wanted to take advantage of the government's internal organization and collocate the personnel trained according to its own principles within the governmental structures in order to apply the "vision for a solution," which would be set out and supervised by the Cemaat itself, to the Kurdish question. In this way, the Cemaat sought to resolve the conflict by first labeling the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), the KCK model (Group of Communities in Kurdistan), Abdullah Öcalan and perhaps even the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) and the HDP (People's Democratic Party) as criminals and then neutralizing them. From the community's point of view, the solution would have been reached by means of a direct relationship, partially developed but yet to be improved, with the Kurdish people.

On the other hand, the AKP has maintained a much more flexible position concerning the solution to the Kurdish question and almost totally abandoned its securitarian policies by 2013. Since the policies adopted by the AKP to solve the Kurdish solution are not part of the main arguments of this article, we will not proceed to a detailed analysis, but we will limit ourselves to reassert that the AKP, compared to the Cemaat, has followed a more flexible and pragmatic policy overall. We should emphasize, however, an important aspect: the alliance between the AKP and the Cemaat did not break due to the divergence of opinion regarding the solution to the Kurdish question. We shall illustrate this point better: the main target of the MIT crisis was Hakan Fidan, the MIT Undersecretary and one of Erdoğan's most trusted men, known and defined as his "right arm." Fidan was under accusation for his relations with the PKK. A quick step back to the events of 7 February 2012 will bring us face to face with quite a different scene than what we would expect: at that time, while the AKP government had an overly aggressively attitude toward the Kurdish question, the Gülen community did not seem in any way bothered by it. Furthermore, during the period which closely followed the events of 17 December 2013, one of the most repeated arguments by the mass media under the direct control and manipulation of the Cemaat focused on the government's choices of action in the "solution process" to the Kurdish question. The members of the community, including Fethullah Gülen himself, have pointed out on several occasions their support in favor of the Kurdish language rights in education. In the light of these facts, we can confirm

that the true reason behind the conflict between the two movements consisted in the splitting up of the positions within a new balance of power, which would emerge both during and after the “solution process” regarding the Kurdish question and not so much in the solution itself. In short, the Kurdish question and its solution are only parts of the enormous battle-zone in which the two movements fight their “war for power”.

Before concluding, we shall briefly compare and contrast the two movements’ respective visions of Islam. The main perspective promoted by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself and the “National Vision” movement, to which he used to belong, is based on engaging in a conflict against the West with the aid and support of the fundamentalists. From his point of view, the principal cause of all the problems that the Muslim world is facing is the West, and if the Muslim world could form a powerful alliance and assume a strong and determined position against the enemy, it could defeat it and permanently emancipate itself. In other words, Sunni Islamists like Erdoğan see the West as the root of all evils that afflict the Muslim world and do not hesitate to challenge the enemy the moment they feel strong enough to do so. On the contrary, the Gülen community challenges the archaic structures of the Muslim world with the aid and support of the West. From this point of view, if we carefully examine the very root of all the problems that the Muslim world is facing, we shall see nothing but the Muslims themselves, and this situation needs an intervention. In order to achieve a change, it is necessary to establish a harmonious collaboration with the West and take advantage of its resources.

Given such a fundamental divergence of opinion, it is

extremely difficult for these two movements to form an alliance and maintain a long-term co-operation. Taking a close look at the period during which the alliance between the two parties followed a harmonious path, we'll come across the statement, "I have taken off the National Vision coat," by Erdoğan and all the policies aimed at joining the EU. In other words, we can affirm that the alliance worked to perfection to the extent to which the AKP applied the perspective of the Gülen community to its own actions. However, as soon as the AKP re-embraced the National Vision perspective in its treatment of the Freedom Flotilla incident, the conflicts in the Middle East and the Gezi Park protests, the AKP government and the Gülen community inevitably came to a parting of the ways.

*Translation Nazli Birgen*

## An Old Friend, A New Enemy: The Fratricidal Struggle between R.T. Erdoğan and the the Gülen Media Group

*Ragıp Duran*

The Gülen group's daily *Zaman* (*The Times*, but also 'Prayer' – *Namaz* – when read backwards) is the most printed in Turkey with about one million copies per day. The group also owns the largest news agency in the private sector *Cihan* (*The Universe*).<sup>1</sup> *Aksiyon* (*Action*) is the most widely-published magazine at about 40,000 copies. Gülen's media empire also owns 11 national and international television channels.<sup>2</sup> It's hard to identify and count the number of local television channels and radio stations that are directly or indirectly owned by Gülen's group in Turkey. "There are at least 200," according to local media expert Erol Onderoglu.

In February 1979, the pseudo-scientific religious monthly *Sızıntı* (*Infiltration*) announced the Gülen

<sup>1</sup> *Cihan Haber Ajansı*, *Cihan News Agency*, publishes 450 articles for the written press, 800 photos, 250 news reports with photos, 85 news reports for television channels. Published in Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic, *Cihan* has correspondents in 35 countries and over 150 in Turkey. It has nine mobile studios for live reporting.

<sup>2</sup> *Samanyolu TV* (The Milky Way), with branches in Europe and the United States: *STV Haber* (News), *Mehtap Tv*, *Ebru TV*, *Yumurcak TV* (for children), *Küre TV*, *Hazar TV*, *Dünya TV* (in Kurdish), *MC TV*. There is also *Bugün TV*, owned by Koza Holding who is very close to Gülen.

Group's objective: 'winning hearts and minds,' which is to say, influencing the masses and consequently increasing its presence in the media. *Sızıntı* claimed to be the monthly magazine of "love and tolerance."

*From Said-i Nursi to Fetullah Gülen*

Originally from Turkish Kurdistan, Said-i Nursi (1876-1960) was the founder of a religious sect of which Fetullah Gülen was a devoted student. This Sunni sect attempted to reinterpret Islam on the basis of the *Risale* (pamphlets) *i Nur* (which means light but was also, at the same time, Said's name and the name of the village he was born in). In the over 6,000 pages written by Said-i Nursi, he advocated for 'An Era of Happiness' and indicated the path for achieving it. In practice, this meant that young students would be educated in the Nursi tradition, would infiltrate state institutions, and, in this way, acquire political power and ultimately control of the state. A Turkic-Islamic version of Trotsky's 'entrism,' the Nursi tradition considers social sciences of the utmost importance, especially for educating future politicians. Professor Serif Mardin published an important study<sup>3</sup> on Said-i Nursi, in which he estimated that the Nursi movement could be perceived as civil society's reaction to Kemal Atatürk's Jacobin-influenced secularism. In 1922, Said-i Nursi was already in political and personal conflict with the founder of the republic.

Fetullah Gülen, born in 1941 in the small village of Erzurum, was the self-educated son of an imam. He ded-

<sup>3</sup> Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, SUNY Press, 1989.

icated himself entirely to learning about Islam. After becoming an official imam himself, he worked in a number of cities in Turkey and was an active member of the Association for the Battle against Communism (Erzurum, 1963). A disciple of Said-i Nursi, he was often arrested, tried and sentenced for violating the republic's secular principles. Gülen left Turkey following the January 28, 1999 coup d'état, in which the army attempted to overthrow the elected government. He moved to the Saylorsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States where he became a Sunni Islamist televangelist. Gülen now broadcasts at least six hours a day on his many television channels. He writes books and articles, sends statements to conferences organized and financed by the Brotherhood, and presents himself as a 'man of inter-religious dialogue,' a 'great teacher of soft Islam,' etc.

In June 2008, Gülen was listed as one of the '100 greatest intellectuals in the world' in the American magazines *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect*. In 2003, the American weekly *Time* named him one of the '100 most influential personalities' in the world. Nonetheless, the American administration does not share a unanimous opinion on Mr. Gülen. Although a number of those close to the CIA have always supported him, Wikileaks published an extremely negative report about the head of the Brotherhood's financial, religious and scholarly activities (The Stratfor Report; January 7, 2011). According to these reports, Gülen is the head of a conglomerate of commercial and financial companies, schools, universities and media groups, the total turnover of which amounts to over US \$3 billion. "They are present in more than 40 countries," claims Rusen Cakir, a corre-

spondent for the daily newspaper *Vatan* and an expert on political Islam. Part of the Turkish left believes that the Brotherhood is directly manipulated by the CIA, and that Gülen is a pawn used by Washington against Turkish national interests.

For a long time, private schools and courses preparing students for university entrance exams in Turkey were Gülen's bastion. Young high school graduates from rural areas, primarily from impoverished social classes, remain the sect's preferred candidates. They are given full board and lodging in the *Maisons de Nur*. In the context of rigorous discipline, the young graduates are indoctrinated in Said-i Nursi's teachings. Prayers, fasting, theoretical and theological courses are directed by the Great Brothers and Great Sisters. The Brotherhood's primary faculties are law, political science, sociology, communication and management. It has its own private high schools and universities, but has also remained very active in the state education sector since the AKP came to power (The Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in power in Turkey since 2002).

*The Hizmet triptych: academics, trade, and media*

The Brotherhood is organized around three elements: academics, trade, and media. This triple dimension is mainly visible abroad. Thanks to the state political support after Abdullah Gul was first prime minister in 2002, then Foreign Minister from 2003 to 2007, and finally president of the republic from 2007-2014, the Brotherhood has been able to set itself up in foreign countries. These countries are mainly in Asia, Africa,



the Middle East, as well as Latin America, where Washington's political influence is clearly visible. The Brotherhood's educational, trade and media activities are forbidden in Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. Moscow does not wish to see 'the Islamic threat under American colours' increase in their country.

The Gülen Movement, or, as they call themselves, 'The Service,' establishes itself in a foreign country initially through businessmen. Usually the owners of SMBs, they differ from Western businessmen because they are Muslims. They form small communities providing support services and open good quality schools that cater to the children of presidents, prime ministers, interior ministers and chiefs of police, who are permitted to attend free of charge thanks to a (not-always-transparent or fair) scholarship system.

After setting up the first two elements – trade and education – foreign iterations of the Brotherhood acknowledge the great importance placed on relations with the media in their host country. Journalists, reporters and media owners are often invited on trips to Turkey or to other countries in which Gülen pursues his activities. Foreign university administrators are also extremely important to Gülen. Researchers or professors, who are not very well-known and in search of scholarships or political-ideological support, are generally encouraged to publish books on "the extraordinary life of the Great Man, the Benefactor, Fetullah Gülen."

Until 2013, Turkish governments and leaders including R.T. Erdoğan publicly boasted about the merits of Gülen's schools abroad. "These schools teach the Turkish language to young Africans and Asians," claimed Oral

Calislar, an old left-winger and one of Erdoğan's new friends, who writes for the daily newspaper *Radikal*,

The importance attributed to the media in Turkey is additionally expressed in the organization of grand visits to the United States, Africa and Asia for Turkish journalists and correspondents. Some have even published books about 'Master Fetullah's exemplary schools.' Another characteristic of the Gülen Group's activities is the paying of journalists and university professors or experts, and the presenting of small gifts for appearances on television shows or articles in Gülen's daily newspapers. It is also necessary to specify that media outlets owned by Gülen got on quite well with left-wing and opposition journalists in the days of the coalition government (before 2002) when the military maintained a degree of control over politics and the media in Turkey.

In order to form high quality cadres according to their pre-established plans and programmes, the Brotherhood sends its favourite university and high school graduates to American universities, such as Harvard and other East Coast universities, to complete their Masters or PhDs. For example, Ekrem Dumanli, the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Zaman* for over ten years, as well as his former deputy Eyup Can, now editor-in chief of the daily paper *Radikal*, both attended university in Massachusetts thanks to scholarships provided by the Gülen movement.

### *Blitz against the State apparatus*

The administration of the police and the judiciary are additional priorities of the Brotherhood. A few hun-

dred young police officers, judges and prosecutors – all Gülen scholarship winners – have studied at American universities or attended courses at private American schools. The investigative journalist Ahmet Sik was arrested and tried in March 2011 for an unpublished book about Gülen entitled *The Imam's Army*. He revealed this network when he was released a year after his arrest. He said, “I was first of all slandered by Gülen’s media, arrested by Gülen’s police officers, charged by Gülen’s prosecutors and finally Gülen’s judges decided to sentence me.”

This case is symbolic as it reveals the capacity and the power of Gülen’s group within the state organization before 2013. The journalists, police officers, prosecutors and judges criticised by Ahmet Sik were all, at the time, fervent supporters of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and there is no doubt that this arrest, as well as the arrests of many hundreds of others (Ergenekon, Balyoz, Oda TV cases etc.),<sup>4</sup> were accomplished with government’s agreement and support.

<sup>4</sup> Hundreds of members of the armed forces, ranging from generals to ordinary soldiers, were arrested, tried and sentenced in the Ergenekon case (opened in 2008), and the Balyoz case (opened in 2010). About twenty journalists – among them Ahmet Şık and Nedim Şener – and university professors were the accused in the *Oda TV* trial, which started in 2008. All were accused of fomenting a coup d’état against the Erdoğan government. Throughout the hearings, held in the Appeals Court for Special Cases, defence lawyers repeated over and over that the evidence was false, that the right to defence had been violated, presenting to the court technical and scientific reports from famous national and international centres. Almost all those charged were initially sentenced to long prison sentences, including life, but were all released after December 17. Erdoğan’s chief advisor, Yalcın Akdoğan, explained this change in attitude and this legal about turn, saying “The Gülen Movement prepared an ambush for our national army.”

In a bizarre, amusing twist of fate, these same policemen were arrested by Erdoğan's police officers after December 17, 2013, under accusations of espionage related to illegal wire-taps of ministers and businessmen close to Erdoğan that were released to the foreign media. They were also accused of fomenting a coup d'état. The ranks of prosecutors and judges who had organized operations between December 17 and 25, 2013, were also significantly reduced. In other cases, they were sent away to provinces far from Anatolia.

Another interesting case involved the former chief of police Hanefi Avcı, previously close to the Brotherhood but who, in August 2010, published a book *Haliç'te Yasayan Simonlar* (*The Simons of the Golden Horn*) denouncing illegal organizing by Brotherhood members within the police force. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison for having been a member of an extreme left-wing armed organization (Devrimci Karargâh- Revolutionary Headquarters). Avcı was accused of torture by a number of left-wing and extreme left-wing militants. "When law becomes a political instrument, anything becomes possible, in particular all kinds of injustice can be imposed," said Umit Kocasakal, the President of the Bar in Istanbul.

In both cases – Şık and Avcı – the Brotherhood had wanted to teach a lesson to those daring to denounce the Gülen movement. The message was a clear one: 'If you write a book against me, I will have you imprisoned. If you report my organization, I can present a chief of police as an extreme left-wing terrorist!'

Gülen's media played a decisive role in both cases, as well as in other arrests and trials generally illegal and il-

legitimate. This always works in the same way. First there is an allegation disguised as serious information posted on a not very well-known website. The following day, Gülen's media reports and develops the article, thus providing evidence that is generally invented and therefore fraudulent. False documents and false CDs are then published.

*Newspapers and journalists who change side*

The daily newspaper *Taraf* (*The Party*, founded in December 2007), played an almost-decisive role throughout this campaign of allegations aimed at those opposing the government and Gülen's movement. Launched as a liberal daily supporting the government, *Taraf* was the first to publish documents, mostly false ones, compromising 'putschist soldiers,' opposition journalists and anti-government or anti-Gülen bureaucrats. Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı, a former correspondent for *Taraf*, and then for the pro-Erdoğan daily newspaper *Sabah*, admitted in July 2014 that *Taraf* "was financed and run by Gülenists and was a paper at the service of the Brotherhood's causes." Kütahyalı is the typical symbol of the new generation of journalists with very few professional capabilities, knowledge, experience or education, but with close relations with those in power. He was presented by the powerful and by Erdoğan as a good journalist. Celalettin Can, editor of the bi-monthly publication *Tukenmez* (Left) said, "I was with this young man in a television studio when, during an advertising break, his mobile phone rang. He answered addressing the caller as 'Papa'. I thought it was his father. When

the conversation was over he told me he had been speaking to Prime Minister Erdoğan!”

Using the medium-sized publishing house *Alkim*, the Gülen Movement was able to persuade well-known liberal left-wing journalists such as Ahmet Altan, Yasemin Çongar and Alev Er to work for *Taraf*. Strictly pro-Erdoğan and anti-army in the beginning, the daily changed its allegiance a little before the December 17 crisis, becoming the mouthpiece for the Gülen Movement, which had already begun to oppose Erdoğan. “*Taraf* was the Gülenists Trojan Horse in the media,” claimed the media critic Daghan Irak. Oral Calislar was *Taraf*'s editor-in-chief for a short period of time between February and April 2013. He later admitted that “*Taraf* was a newspaper created to achieve a series of operations favouring Gülen.”

Another representative of this new kind of journalism in *Taraf*, Mehmet Baransu distinguished himself for his fervour in serving ‘justice.’ He had received a large suitcase containing files, CDs and documents implicating the military and, accompanied by a photographer from the newspaper, solemnly handed this suitcase over to the chief prosecutor at the Palace of Justice in Istanbul. A gallant ceremony accompanied the hand-off, which was reported the following day on *Taraf*'s front page. Later, after December 17, Baransu turned away from Erdoğan and was subsequently arrested and then released by Erdoğan's police in August 2014.

Additionally, two symbolic cases regarding the Gülenist press involve Emre Uslu and Onder Aytaç. The former was a police officer trained in intelligence who later wished to become a university professor and,

due to bad luck, became a correspondent for *Taraf*. More a Nostradamus than a Pulitzer, Uslu initially published pro-Erdoğan propaganda before becoming anti-Erdoğan. The latter became an instructor at the Police Academy after completing a PhD in Great Britain. Close to Gülen, Aytaç was dismissed from *Taraf* for calling for the execution of Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish leader imprisoned since 1999.

A herald for the Gülen media group, the daily newspaper *Zaman*, founded in 1986, was initially a small newspaper and the explicit 'voice' of the Gülen Brotherhood. Its editor-in-chief, Ekrem Dumanlı, tried to transform this small daily newspaper into a great working-class paper of Islamic observance. He organized meetings with readers all over the country and training seminars during which experienced and specialized journalists taught courses for the paper's young correspondents. *Zaman's* sales at kiosks never rose to more than 20,000 copies. However, *Zaman* claimed net sales amounting to a million copies a day. The management created a semi-fictitious subscription method consisting of printing and distributing over a million copies every day. The Brotherhood is organized in a way that has the community's wealthy members pay a monthly sum that is the equivalent to at least 30 or 50 subscriptions for newspapers. Every day an enforcer working for rich Gülenists goes to a corner kiosk and collects a package of between 30 and 50 newspapers and distributes them to fictitious subscribers. Every morning, one can see a package of three to five copies of *Zeman* outside shops, residences or offices.

*Zaman's* editorial policies have certainly greatly

changed since December 17. Previously a fervent supporter of Erdoğan, *Zaman* has now become the most radical of opponents to the AKP's power. What is interesting is that with the exception of the opinions of two correspondents, *Zaman* has never expressed serious self-criticism in order to explain such a radical shift.

*A Fratricidal struggle between the former Siamese twins*

Erdoğan and Gülen behaved like Siamese twins between 2002 and 2013. A year after its founding, the AKP, which had won the 2002 general election, needed Gülen's cadres to run the country. Initially, understanding between the two partners was almost perfect. There were however some disagreements, primarily arising from structural divergences as well as ideological differences. And for the Brotherhood what mattered was power. It is so flexible that it even managed to get along with Bulent Ecevit (1925-2006), a social democrat who was prime minister five times between 1974 and 2002.

From the start, Gülen and Erdoğan did not agree on a number of important issues, such as foreign policy with the United States, Israel or Iran. Gülen was pro-America, pro-Israel and anti-Iran. Erdoğan was not automatically anti-America, anti-Israel or pro-Iran, but there were, however, significant nuances in the understanding, analysis and behaviour of these two leaders. The Kurdish problem and the European Union were also subjects on which they did not agree.

The first minor – but public – incident between Gülen and Erdoğan concerned the Mavi Marmara de-



bacle in May 2010. Erdoğan wanted to indirectly attack Israel, sending a ship of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Gülen criticized this decision in two lengthy interviews published by the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. He wrote, “One should have asked the state of Israel for authorization.” Nine Turkish citizens were killed by Israeli commandos when they boarded the vessel while she was still in international waters.

As Erdoğan became more and more powerful, especially after the constitutional referendum held in September 2010 in which he won 58% of the votes, the Brotherhood demanded greater power. The prime minister instead wished to lessen the Brotherhood’s power within the state. His first decision was to close the private schools and courses held to prepare for university entrance exams. However, Erdoğan was not yet brave enough to directly oppose the Brotherhood. Instead of clearly stating that these schools were centres for educating young Gülenists, he chose to ‘reform private schools and nationalize them.’

Finally, on December 17, 2013, Gülenist policemen, prosecutors and judges accused Erdoğan, his son, four ministers and their sons, as well as many other AKP bureaucrats and businessmen of corruption and bribery. This was the last straw! Characterized by Erdoğan as a coup d’état, this operation involved the Gülenists taking revenge on the AKP and was aimed at discrediting the entire Erdoğan regime, whose leader and close supporters had become extremely rich with illegal and illegitimate financial operations. According to wiretap transcripts published online – which resulted in YouTube and Twitter being banned, once again illegally – and

also published by certain opposition newspapers, Erdoğan has set up a mafia-style regime to control all the media, falsifying documents that compromised him and to organize takeover bids to enrich those near and dear to him, led by his own son Bilal.

Erdoğan's reaction was harsh and oppressive. He branded the Brotherhood 'a parallel state,' as assassins,<sup>5</sup> and traitors to the nation. "We will destroy their dens," he said.

One must add that both Erdoğan and Gülen later expressed regret. "We gave them everything they wanted. We were rather naive," said Erdoğan. "We helped the devil because he was dressed like an angel", said Gülen.

The bitter conflict was started by the two media conglomerates: Erdoğan's and Gülen's. Endless attacks and slurs filled the headlines. Members of the armed forces, journalists and others already sentenced were released because Erdoğan needed new allies in his battle against the Brotherhood. The vast majority of his people had been illegally and illegitimately arrested, charged and sentenced at the time with Erdoğan's agreement and support. But today, media owned by Erdoğan and Gülen appear to have forgotten this collusion.

In conclusion, the media outlets owned by Erdoğan and Gülen remained united from 2002 until 2013. Gülen wished to impose himself on the prime minister, while real power was firmly in Erdoğan's hands. For the

<sup>5</sup> *Hashishin* or *Assassins*: Members of a Shiite sect active during the Middle Ages in Persia, the Assassins with their criminal methods caused Crusaders and Mongols to tremble, fighting against both Richard the Lionheart and Saladin Ayyubi. The black legend surrounding them still exists today.

moment, Erdoğan is in the lead of this fratricidal struggle. *Zaman's* sales have fallen a little, but the Brotherhood's television channels have become a good form of opposition in the eyes of Erdoğan's opponents.

According to the journalist Ahmet Şık, the author of a book about the Gülen Brotherhood entitled *L'Emboscade: Les Nouveaux Maîtres de l'Etat*, "Erdoğan, whether prime minister or president of the republic, wants to retain political power, while Gülen's objective is to be at the very heart of the state's power." So, while Gülen may certainly have lost the battle, "he is still very powerful in Turkey and abroad," wrote *Zaman's* correspondent Professor İhsan Dagi. He did not specify, however, whether Gülen is still supported by Washington.

*Translation Francesca Simmons Pomeroy*



## **Shifting the community press: a brief examination of Gülen-affiliated papers Zaman and Today's Zaman**

*Joshua Carney*

*Turkey's image in the world is currently undeservedly terrible with regards to freedom of the press. It would be extremely naïve to think that this problem has only domestic roots. [...] [The AK-Party] government must take this smear campaign very seriously.<sup>1</sup>*

*With carrot-and-stick tactics, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan currently controls most of the media outlets and brainwashes people with false information. [...] Since Turkey has been polarized by Erdoğan, his voters never look at critical media coverage, and even if they do, they do not believe it. They can explain away everything with conspiracy theories. [...] Erdoğan's propaganda machine is so strong that it has convinced half the population that Erdoğan is the leader of the world.<sup>2</sup>*

The above are excerpts from Ihsan Yilmaz's bi-weekly column in *Today's Zaman*. The first was plucked from an

<sup>1</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, *Today's Zaman*, 11 May 2011.

<http://mobile.todayszaman.com/search.action?category=&dt=2011&words=-/C4/-/B0hsan/-/20Yilmaz>

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, 14 August 2014.

<http://mobile.todayszaman.com/search.action?category=&dt=2014&words=-/C4/-/B0hsan/-/20Yilmaz>

extended series of articles in which he defended the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AK-Party) and its leader Tayyip Erdoğan against claims of censorship and media manipulation in Turkey. The second – of more recent vintage – reveals a shift in attitude related to the country’s most mesmerizing news story of the past year: the brutal parting of ways between Erdoğan’s AK-Party and the Gülen Community.<sup>3</sup>

Our brush with this byzantine story will attempt to explain the gap between these two comments with a modest look at two Gülen-affiliated newspapers: how they came about and the content that distinguishes them; their relations with other media groups; some of their editorial limits; and, finally, how they have reacted to Erdoğan’s self-proclaimed “witch hunt” against the Gülen Movement.<sup>4</sup>

### *Taking shape*

The Gülen-affiliated Feza Publishing house was established in 1986 and the daily *Zaman*, which went to press on 3 November under the editorship of Fehmi Koru, was its first publication. According to a former writer for the paper, *Zaman* was originally conceived as an alternative to the preponderance of “fake news” in a media environ-

<sup>3</sup> Members of the group tend to refer to it simply by the Turkish word *cemaat*, meaning “community.” It is also often referred to as the “Gülen Movement,” a neutral term that I will use interchangeably with “Gülen Community” here. Critics of the movement often refer to its members as “Fethullahçılar” in Turkish or “Gülenists” in English.

<sup>4</sup> See TZ Staff, “Erdoğan says his gov’t will carry out ‘witch hunt’”, *Today’s Zaman*, 11 maggio 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-347529-Erdoğan-says-his-govt-will-carry-out-witch-hunt.html>

ment characterized by monopolies and vested, highly secular interests.<sup>5</sup> Initially targeted narrowly at the Gülen Community, it had a “rebirth” of sorts when a number of Gülen’s followers returned from the US after receiving professional journalism training.<sup>6</sup> Led by Ekrem Dumanlı, who took the helm in 2001, this group focused on making the paper competitive with leaders in the Turkish market by improving layout, content, and quality of coverage. The results were clear, and its circulation figures began to rise steadily.

But this rise was not without controversy. *Zaman*’s approach to distribution is unique among Turkish papers: it employs a subscription model that includes both home and office delivery. As the paper overtook leading dailies *Posta* and *Hürriyet* around 2007, critics began to allege that this model inflates the paper’s actual reach, since Gülen-affiliated organizations often purchase bulk subscriptions and then distribute the paper for free.<sup>7</sup> For papers such as *Posta* and *Hürriyet*, which rely heavily on advertising revenue for survival, circulation is one of the most important factors in selling ads. Their readership consists entirely of consumers who make a conscious choice to purchase the paper from newsstands on a daily

<sup>5</sup> From an anonymous interview conducted in 2007 by Joshua Hendrick. See Hendrick, Joshua D., *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world*, New York University Press, New York, 2013, p.184.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, pp. 184–185.

<sup>7</sup> This claim has been addressed and perhaps too easily dismissed by Bozkurt Abdullah, “Controversy over dailies’ circulation figures”, *Today’s Zaman*, 28 March 2010, <http://www.todayzaman.com/tz-web/news-205623-controversy-rages-over-dailies-circulation-figures.html>. It is also addressed by Sözeri Ceren - Güney Zeynep, *The political economy of the media in Turkey: a sectoral analysis*, collana TESEV di studi mediatici sul programma di democratizzazione. TESEV, Istanbul, 2011.

basis and this, they argue, is a markedly different behavior than that of subscribers. While their complaints were ultimately dismissed by an investigatory commission, it would seem that advertisers agree, as these papers, both owned by the Doğan<sup>8</sup> Media Group, still top the charts in terms of advertising revenue.<sup>9</sup> *Zaman* started with and still maintains a relatively modest income from advertising, lending credence to the notion that the paper's motives are somewhat different than its solely profit-oriented competitors. Such questions notwithstanding, the paper is now the unrivaled leader in terms of print circulation in Turkey,<sup>10</sup> and it is one of two prominent sites of contact between the Gülen Community and the Turkish public.<sup>11</sup>

The latter point is important because organizations alleged to be associated with the Gülen Movement are often wary of revealing such ties.<sup>12</sup> *Zaman's* self-presentation acknowledges – but does not aggrandize – its link with the movement. In addition to covering major news stories in Turkey and around the world, its writers report on matters of particular interest to the community, such as the Turkish Olympiad (an annual pageant displaying

<sup>8</sup> On the figure of Aydın Doğan, great Turkish media entrepreneur, see the analysis of Stefano Maria Torelli, “Turkish media have a name: Aydın Doğan,” 28 May 2013. <http://arabmediareport.it/i-media-turchi-have-a-name-aydin-dogan/>

<sup>9</sup> Sözeri Ceren - Güney Zeynep, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> For the week ending 24 August 2014 *Zaman* boasted a circulation of 946,999, over twice that of its next closest competitor, *Posta* at 416,209. Source: yaysat.com.tr.

<sup>11</sup> The other, Samanyolu TV, is addressed elsewhere in this collection by Fabio Vicini in his essay “Representing Islam: Cinematographic Productions of the Gülen Movement”, p.48.

<sup>12</sup> See Hendrick's (2013) ethnographic analysis of the “strategic ambiguity” employed by the community both in Turkey and abroad.



the Turkish language skills learned by students in Gülen-affiliated schools from around the world), and the financial standing of movement-aligned Bank Asya<sup>13</sup>. While other papers in Turkey might also cover these stories, they tend to do so far less prominently. The paper contains a wealth of reporting and commentary dealing directly with Gülen and the movement as well,<sup>14</sup> including statements (or, on the web site, videos) from Gülen himself, reportage, and opinion columns often earmarked at defending the reputation of Gülen or the community.<sup>15</sup>

*Zaman* works in coordination with Feza's Cihan News Agency (Cihan Haber Ajansı - CHA), a news gatherer that maintains correspondents worldwide and that has grown to be one of the top news outfits in Turkey. Starting in the mid 1990s, *Zaman* also began to go global, and the paper now has eight international editions employing a variety of publication and language strategies.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On the Turkish Olympics and Bank Asya see also the Hendrick essay "Corrupted Speech: The Movement, the Party, and the Breakdown of the New Turkey", p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the archives of *Zaman* and Turkey's other leading daily *Hürriyet* reveal that, in 2002, the former had 1484 stories containing the term "Gülen," while the latter had 223. This trend is consistent throughout the archives of both papers, though there has been an upsurge of Gülen stories in *Hürriyet* since the onset of Erdoğan's "witch hunt."

<sup>15</sup> Şahin Alpay's 2012 piece "The Community's Shield," provides one example. Alpay makes reference to what he calls "conspiracy theories" regarding the Gülen Movement's alleged infiltration of the police force and its involvement in recent, prominent legal cases (the Ergenekon and the KCK trials). He then turns to writer Nazlı Ilıcak's book on the topic, summarizing and applauding what he calls her successful dismissal of such allegations. Alpay Şahin, "Cemaat kalkanı" (Community defence), *Zaman*, 24 February 2012. [http://www.zaman.com.tr/full-name/cemaat-kalkani\\_1244785.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/full-name/cemaat-kalkani_1244785.html)

<sup>16</sup> These are: *Zaman Amerika* (America), *Zaman Azerbaycan* (Azerbaijan), *Zaman Avusturya* (Austria), *Zaman Avrupa* (Europe), *Zaman*

*New kid in town*

In January of 2007, the English-language daily *Today's Zaman* (TZ) began its print life as the second major English-language paper in Turkey under the editorship of Bülent Keneş. Its rival, the *Hürriyet Daily News* (HDN),<sup>17</sup> had been around since 1961 and had, since 2000, been part of the aforementioned Doğan Media Group, Turkey's largest media company. TZ quickly outflanked its competitor in the print category, and has progressively increased its lead in terms of print circulation in the intervening years, a period that has seen both papers' figures rise considerably.<sup>18</sup> That said, HDN consistently garners more web traffic, boasting a global rank that is about twice that of its rival.<sup>19</sup>

This rivalry is important because these papers are the most prominent news sources presenting Turkey to the diplomatic and international business sectors in Turkey – as well as to the broader global community – and they represent divergent media cultures and ideological mis-

*Bulgaristan* (Bulgaria), *Zaman Kazakistan* (Kazakistan), *Zaman Romaniaa* (Romania), *Zaman Türkmenistan* (Turkmenistan). Some, such as *Zaman Amerika* and *Avrupa*, are printed in Turkish, others, such as *Zaman Azerbaycan* and *Kazakistan*, are printed in the native language of their country, but have multi-lingual web sites.

<sup>17</sup> The paper was actually called the *Turkish Daily News* at this time. It was rebranded as *Hürriyet Daily News* in 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Based on queries of [www.yaysat.com.tr](http://www.yaysat.com.tr), and [medyatava.com](http://medyatava.com) for the third week of February for each year between 2007 and 2014. For the week ending 24 August 2014, TZ had a weekday print circulation of 8,748, and HDN 5,614.

<sup>19</sup> Based on [alexa.com](http://alexa.com) site comparison performed on 30 August 2014. TZ had a global rank of 40,290, while HDN had a global rank of 21,206 in a system where lower numbers indicate a higher rank. Ranks within the US, Turkey, and the UK—the three top audiences for the web sites—showed a similar relationship.

sions. An example of this can be seen in their differing approach to the highly charged 2007 presidential elections. TZ was careful in its packaging of news and opinion for the Turkey novice-taking time to provide contextual information about the country's history and the nature of the electoral process. HDN, meanwhile, made far fewer overtures of this sort, and sometimes simply included translations of columns from its associated Turkish dailies as content for its readers. On the other hand, HDN displayed a far greater ideological breadth than TZ, including opinion pieces from supporters and detractors of all parties in the election. TZ's opinion pages were striking in their uniform critique of the opposition Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) and their endorsement of the AK-Party.<sup>20</sup> It was likely in response to the competition that HDN underwent a makeover in 2008, switching to its current name and offering a few more amenities for the reader who is still learning about Turkey. Despite this, both distinctions continue to be visible in the papers, as TZ consistently does more to court foreign readers and HDN consistently has a greater ideological spectrum in its opinion columns.

### *Tilting Windmills*

In trying to distinguish themselves, columnists at TZ have made much of the differences between the media

<sup>20</sup> For further details on this discrepancy see Carney Josh, "Distilling ideologies: opinion page strategies for explaining the Turkish elections to foreigners", paper presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on the Communication of the Millennium, Istanbul, Turkey, 14 May 2008.

cultures of their parent companies. For example, writers İhsan Yılmaz and Yavuz Baydar, who have been with the paper from the start, have both taken up the issue of press freedom as a recurrent theme in their columns and, up until 2013, their work was marked by a consistent thesis: despite the real dangers represented by imprisonment of journalists, the primary problem with the press in Turkey is not the AK-Party and government repression but, rather, a corrupt media culture most clearly represented by the Doğan Media Group.<sup>21</sup> In the heyday of good relations between the Gülen Movement and the AK-Party, Yılmaz and Baydar were able to make much of the clientelist model that pervades the Turkish media sector,<sup>22</sup> noting that Doğan Holding, the media group's parent company, had reaped major profits from its interests in other sectors by providing coverage in keeping with the wishes of previous administrations.

It is of interest that these columns appeared during a period in which *Zaman* received robust state advertising from the Directorate General of Press Advertisement (BIK - Basın İlan Kurumu) tasked with distributing such funds.<sup>23</sup> The Doğan Group, meanwhile, had been threatened by the government with crippling fines in 2008 and 2009, and some of its writers had reacted with com-

<sup>21</sup> See, for example the following columns published on TZ by Yılmaz 19/11/2008, 15/11/2010, 9/3/2011, 3/5/2011, 5/5/2011, 23/2/2011 e Yılmaz 12/8/2007, 15/3/2009, 4/10/2009, 27/4/2011, 6/5/2011, 11/5/2011 and Baydar 19/11/2008, 15/11/2010, 9/3/2011, 3/5/2011, 5/5/2011, 23/2/2011.

<sup>22</sup> For more on this model, see Christensen Christian, "Concentration of ownership, the fall of unions and government legislation in Turkey", *Global Media and Communication*, 3(2), 2007, pp.179-199.

<sup>23</sup> For precise figures for 2010, see Sözeri & Güney, 2011, pp. 61-21.

plaints about media freedom. Though the fines were allegedly for tax violations, they were almost certainly Erdoğan's retaliation for Doğan Media's coverage of the Lighthouse investigation—a corruption scandal in Germany that potentially implicated AK-Party members in Turkey as well.<sup>24</sup> Critiques of Doğan (and either overt or implied defenses of Erdoğan) were ubiquitous across the Feza family in these years, and not only in the opinion columns. For example, in September of 2008, *Zaman* featured a long piece detailing the corrupt methods by which Doğan allegedly entered the media world and decrying his hypocrisy in complaining about government oversight.<sup>25</sup> This piece was continued in an even longer expose in the Feza weekly magazine *Aksiyon*.

Taken on their own, the arguments leveled against Doğan and the model his company represents were both insightful and in line with critiques and suggestions by a host of media critics and scholars.<sup>26</sup> What is striking, however, is that their presentation in *Zaman* and TZ tended to be highly selective. Employed with panache in order to silence critics of governmental, policial, or judicial interference with freedom of the press, such arguments consistently underplayed other real dangers to the media environment in Turkey, instead painting Doğan

<sup>24</sup> For further information see Cornell Svante E., “As Dogan yields, Turkish media freedom plummets”, *Turkey Analyst*, 3(1), 2010 and Hendrick essay in this volume, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Zaman Staff, “Aydın Doğan, nasıl medya patron oldu?” [How Aydın Doğan could become a media entrepreneur?], *Zaman*, 16 September 2008. [http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem\\_aydin-dogan-nasil-medya-patronu-oldu\\_738847.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_aydin-dogan-nasil-medya-patronu-oldu_738847.html)

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Christensen, 2007; Sözeri - Güney, 2011 and Kurban Dilek - Sözeri Ceren, *Policy suggestions for free and independent media in Turkey*, TESEV, Istanbul, 2013.

as the key culprit, ironic at a time when some of his papers had made a choice to set aside the clientelist norm that curries government favor and, instead, actually reported on a burgeoning scandal. Furthermore, the uniformity and repetition of such arguments suggests a coordinated effort across the *Zaman* family to instill a particular line of discourse.

### *Limiting expression*

Indeed, when it comes to key issues, the sanctioned line of discourse in *Zaman* papers can turn out to be all too clear.

Andrew Finkel, a journalist with a vast international publishing portfolio and over two decades of experience in Turkey, was one of TZ's most prominent columnists. He had joined the paper at the outset, apparently with the understanding that his "non-affiliated" voice would add necessary depth to the paper's lineup and bolster its credibility. On 7 April 2011, however, he was fired after penning a column that TZ editor Bülent Keneş refused to print.<sup>27</sup> The topic was a series of police raids on media outlet Oda TV and an associated publishing house. Ahmet Şık, a journalist who had been working on a book about alleged infiltration into the police force by the Gülen Movement, had been arrested and his book confiscated. Finkel argued that such measures were improper, tacitly giving credence to the rumors that the prosecutor

<sup>27</sup> HDN printed the piece on the same day. Finkel Andrew, "A dilemma", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 7 April 2011, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=a-dilemma-2011-04-07>

and police in charge of the case were associated with the Gülen Community. Days later, Keneş printed an explanation for the firing, saying he believed Finkel had inadvertently come under the influence of “strong and dark propaganda,” and reaffirming that the paper’s editorial line admits for only so much criticism.<sup>28</sup>

While Finkel was avowedly not a “community member,” even those who more closely identify with the movement can have trouble with its media outlets. On 26 August, long-time *Zaman* and TZ columnist Hüseyin Gülerce resigned from the papers. This news came as a bombshell to many because Gülerce, who had worked at *Zaman* for 25 years, including a stint as general publishing manager, was often informally referred to as the “spokesperson for the community” based on the many columns he wrote explaining the nature of the movement and the teachings of Gülen. Gülerce’s work from the past year suggests that he struggled deeply with his decision: some columns criticize Erdoğan and implore the (then) PM to give up his attacks on the community; others speak in more general terms about the author’s hopes for a moral and respectful kind of journalism. His last column came on 14 May and, on 1 July he Tweeted that he was supporting Erdoğan in the presidential elections. In the wake of his resignation, Gülerce gave a series of interviews with the news site Internet Haber,<sup>29</sup> hinting at the deep reservations that had been building up for him

<sup>28</sup> Keneş Bülent, “Why was Andrew Finkel fired?”, *Today’s Zaman*, 11 April 2011,

[http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/bulent-kenes\\_240737\\_why-was-andrew-finkel-fired.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/bulent-kenes_240737_why-was-andrew-finkel-fired.html)

<sup>29</sup> The interview is available at the following URL: <http://www.internethaber.com/huseyin-gulerce/>

since the dispute between the AK-Party and the community began in 2013. Ultimately, he said, *Zaman* had come to resemble the deeply anti-government paper *Sözcü* and he simply couldn't imagine working there any more.

### *Shifting loyalties*

The U-turn in rhetoric in *Zaman* and TZ has indeed been marked, though there were clear signs of discontent building up to the watershed moment. Prior to June 2013's Gezi Park protests, numerous columnists had expressed reservations about various actions by Erdoğan: his condemnation and the subsequent destruction of a friendship monument between Turkey and Armenia in 2011; his repeated advice that women should have three children and his strong statements against cesarean sections and abortions; his attacks on one of TV's most popular dramas in 2012<sup>30</sup>; and his suggestion that those who drink alcohol lead worthless lives. These had all received some degree of reaction among writers for *Zaman*, but this was usually tempered with a statement to the effect that the PM tended to act passionately and that he simply needed to be more cautious.

With Gezi Park, the statements became stronger. Gülerce, for example, spoke openly about how disappointing Erdoğan's behavior was, though he made sure

<sup>30</sup> On the importance of television drama in Turkey and the weight they have in the creation of social trends see Joshua Carney, Marwan M. Kraidy, Lea Nocera, Stephen M. Torelli "The Turkish Touch. Neo-ottoman Hegemony and Turkish Television in the Middle East", *Arab Media Report*, Oct. 3, 2014 <http://arabmediareport.it/the-turkish-touch-neo-ottoman-hegemony-and-turkish-television-in-the-middle-east/>



to balance this with a statement that many of the protesters were clearly professional agitators.<sup>31</sup> That said, Gezi Park did not mark the definitive souring of relations. Rather, that came in November, when Erdoğan touted a long-rumored parliamentary bill that would spell the end of the *dershane(s)* – a system of private, standardized test preparatory schools that had become ubiquitous in Turkey since the 1990s. The Gülen Movement was the major player in the *dershane* market, and the law affected not only the movement’s finances but also its potential to recruit new members. At this point both *Zaman* and TZ started printing pieces openly questioning the government and its motives. Despite the clear shift in tone, over the next month many of the editorial pieces still held out hope for a reconciliation. As Erdoğan’s rhetoric became harsher, however, so did that in the *Zaman* papers. The PM’s acceptance and eventual adoption of the term “parallel state” to describe the Gülen Movement seems to have been one of the emotional triggers for a final break.<sup>32</sup>

Setting aside the question of whether the Gülen Community is directly responsible for the corruption investigations targeting the AK-Party that broke out in

<sup>31</sup> See his 2013-06-04 and 2013-06-06 columns

<http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=3NaGmrzox0aFes+BSN4yRByq?newsId=317383&columnistId=0>;  
<http://www.todayszaman.com/search.action?category=&dt=2013&words=G/-/C3/-/BClerce>

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Gülerce TZ - 2014-12-17. This term, and its alternate, “parallel structure” have become the key epithets used by the AK-Party against the Gülen movement in the wake of the December corruption investigations.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=3NaGmrzox0aFes+BSN4yRByq?newsId=334287&columnistId=0>

December 2013 – it seems highly likely that Gülen sympathizers were involved at various levels, but the extent and integration of such involvement is impossible to state at this point – the reaction in the *Zaman* papers to these and subsequent events was an all-out attack on the AK-Party government. As former allies quickly became enemies, both the content and tone of news and commentary changed radically. In the wake of the resounding AK-Party victory in the 30 March municipal elections, and the ever-increasing measures by the government to stamp out the so-called “parallel state,” there was a shift to a more apparently “objective” tone in news reporting and a defensive approach to opinion pieces. With Erdoğan’s triumph in the 10 August presidential election, the latter trend has continued. *Zaman* papers are now marked by a preponderance of reporting and commentary on issues including irregularities in the judicial process targeting would-be members of the “parallel state,” the AK-Party’s attempts to sweep the December corruption investigations under the table, the government’s apparent efforts to destroy the movement-affiliated Bank Asya, the difficulties ahead for an educational system stripped of the *dershanes*, the discrimination faced by students, educators, and imams suspected of being Gülen sympathizers, and, of course, freedom of the press.

While all these causes are deeply important to the Gülen Community, the latter represents perhaps the greatest crisis. Both Erdoğan and his handpicked replacement for PM, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, have affirmed that there will be no holds barred in the attempt to eliminate the “parallel state,” and the press is clearly the most visible sign that the Gülen

Community still has a presence in the country. With this in mind, the urgency of some *Zaman* and TZ writers is understandable. Indeed, given the events of 2014, the about-face of the Yilmaz columns with which this piece began is likely an existential concern.



## **Representing Islam: Cinematographic Productions of the Gülen Movement**

*Fabio Vicini*

Renowned for its schools in over 120 countries, the Fethullah Gülen movement has extended its broad spread of cultural propositions into other fields since the end of the '90s. In so doing, it has created a real alternative submarket in publishing, telecommunications, and recently in the field of entertainment. Other Islamic groups in Turkey and beyond, both in the Middle East and Europe, have attempted to promote programmes in which preachers and Muslim intellectuals refer to spectators by drawing upon an explicitly religious discourse. However, in line with its pedagogical vocation and ambition to speak to a larger public the Gülen movement has distinguished itself for its productions in the field of television fiction. Among these, the numerous television series (a very popular genre in Turkey) broadcast by the movement's platform *Samanyolu TV* occupy an important position. Indeed, several stand out: *Beşinci Boyut* (The Fifth Dimension), *Ölümsüz Kahramanlar* (Immortal Heroes), *Tek Türkiye* (One Turkey), and *Şefkat Tepe* (The Hill of Compassion).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGmn4YoFX4k>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIlqE3oiYPg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8ZKRI0gRjY>

Instead, recent cinematic productions financed by the movement are much less numerous and less well-known. Here, *Kelebek* (Butterfly, 2009) and *Selam* (Peace, 2013) will be analysed. Not solely intended for a domestic public – through which they enjoyed a discreet though limited success – but also for an international audience, both films are quality productions backed by considerable budgets. Despite being filmed by little-known Turkish directors, they are inspired by a ‘Hollywood’ narrative style, and apart from a few exceptions, primarily feature emerging actors. Generally, ‘Islamic’ cinematographic fiction focuses on stories of well-known individuals in Islamic history and tradition. This is the case of the recent series *Omar* (2012), or of other films produced by the movement such as *Hür Adam* (The Free Man) – a biography of Said Nursi, the author of *Risale-i Nur* and inspirator of the Nur communities as well as of the Gülen

movement. In contrast, both *Kelebek* and *Selam* seemingly tell the stories of ordinary people. In reality, however, despite not being mentioned explicitly, the main characters in both films are teachers and activists of the movement – those who are known as unnamed heroes (*isimsiz kahramanları*) in the community. They are individuals who are ready to sacrifice their lives in the most remote



and difficult places in order to build a better world. For this reason both films have high-value content, which facilitates an analysis of the movement's self-perception, and of the image of itself and Islam that it wants to convey to the world.

### *The Butterfly Effect*

*Kelebek* (2009, director: Cihan Taşkın) is a specific reference to the 'butterfly effect', a metaphor exemplifying the theory of chaos inspired by the science fiction narrative, and captured by a vast filmography. It hypothesises that the movement of air generated from the mere beating of a butterfly's wings could cause a hurricane on the other side of the world. Quoted by a persuasive Ghassan Massoud in the guise of a *mevlevi* teacher to his small circle of students, the metaphor lies at the centre of the film's narrative plot. Here, Yusuf's choice of whether to go on mission with a group of friends (other volunteers of the movement), or not, reveals itself as instrumental in avoiding the events of 11 September 2001. Yusuf is a young teacher who, after surviving a terrorist attack in Turkey, tries to return to the normality of his everyday routine. However, due to his traumatic experience he has partially lost his memory and is in a state of shock, the real reason for which is only revealed at the end of the film. In the first half hour of the film, following the attack on the Twin Towers, Yusuf's sense of mental confusion and anxiety progressively increases. This feeling is fuelled by the *mevlevi* teacher who accuses Yusuf of being responsible for the terrorist attacks, until the protagonist regains his memory and decides to turn himself into the

police. From here, an imaginary account of what would have been if Yusuf had decided to travel to Afghanistan five years earlier unravels. Indeed, Afghanistan is where his friends would have subsequently opened a Turkish educational and first aid centre. There, Yusuf would have met Ümit (Hope), a young man who dreamt of becoming a teacher. He would have helped him to pursue his studies in America with a group of fellow students. Instead, Yusuf did not go to Afghanistan. Consequently, Ümit and his friends ended up being recruited into Taliban ranks and transformed into the hijackers responsible for the attack on the Twin Towers.

The film plays on this dual narrative plane between imagination and reality and is centered on the value of responsibility. As Yusuf says to an incredulous police commissioner who tries to convince him that he is not to blame for the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001:





“man is not only responsible for things that he does but also for what he *doesn't* do”. The extreme sense of guilt that torments Yusuf is a symptom of the sense of responsibility for all the evil and unhappiness in the world that activists of the Gülen community have to embody – at least, ideally – as part of their way of ‘living’ a Muslim life dedicated to the mission of serving the common good (*hizmet*).

### *Unnamed Heroes*

Advertised on gigantic posters throughout Istanbul, *Selam* was released (director: Levent Demirkale) in 2013. In this case, the film’s identification with the movement is immediately apparent not quite for its title or the veiled woman on the poster, but for its subject matter. *Selam* narrates the story of three teachers who renounce their professional ambitions and affections for their desire to promote a message of peace and hope (*Selamet*, hence the film’s title). They do this by going to work in three Turkish schools in three different countries: Bosnia Herzegovina, Senegal and Afghanistan. The effort, devotion and love with which these teachers devote themselves to their educational mission is central to the film. The latter is in fact dedicated to the memory of eleven *isimsiz kahramanları* who lost their lives while volunteering for the community abroad. *Kimse Yok Mu?*, a charitable organization linked to the movement also makes an appearance in the film. In addition, one of the last settings featured in the film is the Turk Olympics (*Türkçe Olimpiyatları*), an annual singing event organized by the movement, and in which students from its schools all around the world participate-



The plot consists of three parallel stories. Each narrative is centred on a different negative emotion experienced by three students – hatred (Senegal), revenge (Bosnia), suffering (Afghanistan) – which they are able to overcome thanks to the fundamental lesson of life transmitted to them by their teachers. A key value in the

film that is closely linked to that of responsibility, explored above, is ‘sacrifice’ (*fedakarlık*). In the film, this is partially evoked through the *Eid al-Adha* festivities but especially exemplified by the teachers, at times to the point of immolation. Hence, Zehra, a young graduate who renounces her love interest at home in order to take care of children with motherly love and affection in a Turkish school in Afghanistan. Then, Harun, Zehra’s love, also willing to renounce his emotions to go and open an educational centre in Senegal against his father’s will. Lastly, Adem, who leaves his pregnant wife to return to his students in Bosnia Herzegovina. He eventually sacrifices his life for them – in a tragic conclusion – but not before giving them a last valuable lesson by stating, “In your lives, be a bridge (*köprü*) [be-

tween people] not a river [dividing them]”.<sup>2</sup> This metaphor is also frequently employed by the movement, particularly in relation to interreligious dialogue.

Love for humanity; the will to give oneself entirely for the well-being of others; forever seeking God’s approval (*Allah’ın Rızası için*), without any expectations (*beklentisizce*), and with the sole intention of making other people happy. These are some of the values that emerge from the storyline. In their entirety, *they* compose a painting of what an ideal world dominated by *selamet* would be like, and one that the movement strives to create through its service.<sup>3</sup>

### *Representing Islam in a Global Society*

*Kelebek* and *Selam* are not merely two works striving towards self-contemplation. In fact, they are first and foremost a message to a Turkish, as well as global, audience. For the former, these works attempt to illustrate the movement’s ideals and humanitarian efforts; actions also carried out in Turkey’s name and on its behalf. Given that nationalism is one of the movement’s main dimensions,<sup>4</sup> the fact that all schools and centres represented in the two films work under the Turkish flag is not surpris-

<sup>2</sup> From the website of the *The Journalists and writers foundation*: <http://gyv.org.tr/Haberler/Detay/2738/Yunan%20akademisyenler%20Hizmet%20%C3%B6rg%C3%BCt%20de%C4%9Fil%20bir%20hareket%20G%C3%BClen%20k%C3%B6pr%C3%BCler%20kuruyor>

<sup>3</sup> Vicini Fabio, “Pedagogies of Affection. The Role of Emulation in Learning Processes” in *Anthropology of Education Quarterly*, 44(4), 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Balcı Bayram, *Missionnaires de l’Islam en Asie Centrale. Les Ecoles Turques de Fethullah Gülen*, Maisonneuve & Larose, Institut Français d’Études Anatoliennes, 2003.

ing. In this way, both films exemplify the fusion of Islamic ideals and state ideology that characterizes the Gülen movement. Yet, in both films, the movement's openness to global dynamics is increasingly clear. This is accompanied by the will to demonstrate the 'real' Islam to the world (in particular the Western one). This is not the Islam of terrorists or the Taliban; rather, it is an Islam of responsibility, sacrifice and love for younger generations promoted by the movement.<sup>5</sup>

Through their actions the teachers exemplify the 'perfect man' (*al-Insan al-Kamil*) – a trope of Sufi literature – that acts as an example/illustration of the ideal Muslim man that the movement diffuses.<sup>6</sup> This message responds to a specific pedagogical model and civilizational principle rooted in Islamic tradition. Indeed, it is also reinterpreted by Gülen through the new theme of representation (*temsiliyet*): representing Islam in everyday and individual concrete actions through activism and sacrifice in order to create a new world, and a new humanity.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, there appears to be an interesting evolution from *Kelebek* to *Selam*, which extends beyond this common ground. In the former, the choice of presenting ac-

<sup>5</sup> Agai Bekim, "The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education" in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State. The Gülen Movement*, ed. Hakan M. Yavuz and J. L. Esposito, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2003, pp.48–68; Agai, Bekim, "Islam and Education in Secular Turkey: State Policies and the Emergence of the Fethullah Gülen Group" in *Schooling Islam: the culture and politics of modern Muslim education*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, pp.149–171; Vicini, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Yavuz, Hakan M., *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Gülen, Fethullah, *İrşad Ekseni*. İzmir Nil yayınları, 1998.

tivists as fellow pupils of a *mevlevi* community is definitely the sign, together with other elements (America as a saving nation, veilled women), of a certain subservience to certain Western concepts. This is due to the movement's apparent desire to appease the West in order to construct itself as a global referent of a 'moderate' Islam. On the other hand, this choice corresponds to the parallel one set in motion by the leader of the Fethullah Gülen community. Indeed, the latter chooses to present himself to the world as a learned Sufi, when in fact his personal history and intellectual genealogy contradict this self-representation.<sup>8</sup> However, in *Selam* a greater display of self-confidence appears to take shape. Not only does one of the main characters (blue eyed and pretty faced) nonchalantly wear a fashionable veil, but the juxtaposition between an uninterested and selfish 'white European' with a generous, caring and altruistic 'white Turk' subtly underlies the whole film. This is likely a reflection of the author's experience as well as of the movement in Africa. This implicit critique of Western civilisation appears to mark a rejection in the movement's self-perception. Thus, moving from the expression of a moderate and 'good Islam' with which the West can dialogue, to the ambition of representing civilisation *tout court*.

*Translation Mary Botigliero*

<sup>8</sup> Vicini, 2013.



## **The Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV)**

*Maria Concetta Tedesco*

The Journalists and Writers Foundation (Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Derneği) is an association linked to Fetullah Gülen, who acts as its honorary president. The association was founded in June 1994 by seventeen Turkish journalists and writers, including Gülen himself. It was founded at a particularly tense ideological historical moment – marked by a polarization of Turkish society – with the scope of “promoting the idea of coexistence through understanding among the masses”.<sup>1</sup> Despite what its name implies, the Foundation is not a corporate association that aims to represent group interests. According to the official JWF website, its mission is to “create opportunities to build a common living space based on reconciliation and mutual respect.” To this end, the association organizes events that encourage people from different ideological backgrounds and religious orientations to discuss themes such as democracy and religious freedom, political and cultural pluralism, and the functions of the modern nation-state.<sup>2</sup>

In articles and books on the Hizmet Movement, the

<sup>1</sup> <http://gyv.org.tr/Hakkimizda/Detay/18/Our%20Mission>

<sup>2</sup> <http://gyv.org.tr/Hakkimizda/Detay/18/Our%20Mission>

JWF is usually cited as an emblem of values of pluralism and acceptance of diversity – derived from the Gülen thinking – due to the specific attention it devotes to dialogue and peace.<sup>3</sup> It is also cited as an example of the Movement’s contribution to a tolerant and progressive civil society.<sup>4</sup> However, despite being mentioned in these publications, JWF is not the main focus of discussion. This article aims to present a more accurate description of the Foundation, one emphasizing its social and media structure. On the one hand, the article underlines how JWF pushes for a redefinition of the social role of journalists and writers in a direction that extends beyond the duty of informing readers, stretching into the spheres of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and preventing social conflicts. On the other hand, it explores how JFW indirectly works as a spokesperson for the movement, releasing formal statements and transmitting messages di-

<sup>3</sup> See: Harrington James C., *Wrestling with Free Speech, Religious Freedom and Democracy in Turkey. The Political Trials and Times of Fethullah Gülen*. Lanham, University Press of America, 2011, pp.14-15; Esposito John - İhsan Yılmaz, “Introduction: Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives” in Esposito, John and İhsan Yılmaz (ed), *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives*, Blue Dome Press, New York, 2011, p.11; Abu-Nimer Muhammad - İhsan Yılmaz, “Islamic Resources for Peacebuilding: Achievements and Challenges” in Esposito, John and İhsan Yılmaz (ed), *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives*, Blue Dome Press, New York, p.50; Ebaugh Helen Rose, *The Gülen Movement. A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*, Springer, London, 2010, p.89.

<sup>4</sup> Yavuz M. Hakan, “The Gülen Movement. The Turkish Puritans”, in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State. The Gülen Movement*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2003, pp. 41-42; Ugur Etga, “Organizing Civil Society: The Abant Platform of the Gülen Movement” in Greg Barton, İhsan Yılmaz and Paul Weller (ed), *The Muslim World and Politics in Transition: Creative Contribution of the Gülen (Hizmet) Movement*, Continuum Press, London, 2013, pp. 52-52.



rected by Fetullah Gülen to his followers and wider public.

JWF is structured as an umbrella organization through which five platforms and a research centre carry out their activities. The different platforms have distinct objectives and fields of action, but they all follow the same *modus operandi*: bringing people from different cultural, ethnic, religious, ideological and political backgrounds around a discussion table. The aim is to find solutions to contemporary social problems through debate. The Abant platform (*Abant Platformu*) promotes yearly and quarterly conferences in the U.S., Turkey and the Middle East. On these occasions, intellectuals, bureaucrats and politicians come together to discuss themes linked to religion and politics. The Eurasia Dialogue Platform (*Diyalog Avrasya Platformu*) primarily aims to strengthen cultural ties between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Central Asian republics. This platform publishes 'DA' magazine in Turkish and Russian – with supplements in Kyrgyz and Kazakh – containing contributions by journalists and intellectuals from Turkey and Central Asia. The Platform for Intercultural Dialogue (*Kültürlerarası Diyalog Platformu*) organizes meetings and conferences focusing on inter-religious dialogue, with a particular focus on Abrahamic religions. The Medialog Platform (*Medialog Platformu*) plans annual meetings on a national level for people working in the media sector. Its aim is to create discussions on issues within the sector, such as employment problems, editorial independence and media ethics. The Platform also organizes conferences with foreign media and diplomatic representatives on Turkish territory to promote more accurate knowledge of contemporary

socio-political processes in Turkey. It also coordinates international forums in order to contribute to creating an ongoing dialogue between media of different nations, placing specific attention to countries neighbouring Turkey. Lastly, the platform provides training seminars to Turkish journalists and editors, and confers prizes to promote quality of information in order to establish a media model that serves public interest. The Platform on Women (*Kadın Platformu*) strives to create dialogue between women from different backgrounds on the common ground of “being first human than woman”.<sup>5</sup> It proposes solutions to problems, which are common to different women around the world. Furthermore, the JWF has established a Research Centre (*Araştırma Merkezi*) to analyse themes dealt with by the Foundation and to promote further research on Gülen’s thought and the Hizmet movement.

Although each different platform associated with the JWF boasts an independent board of trustees, they are linked by a relationship of constant coordination and comparison. All general secretaries of the various platforms belong to the board of trustees of the JWF. Moreover, weekly meetings and collective activities meant to enhance cooperation between the platforms are organized. This results in the promotion of initiatives, which can be common to each association, or to two or more of them, depending on the theme. Lastly, it is important to underline that all described institutions are technically separate from magazines and TV channels linked to the

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.kadip.org.tr/Hakkimizda/Detay/62/Misyonumuz%20&%20Ölkelerimiz>

Hizmet movement, such as Zaman and Samanyolu TV, and act independently of these. However, workers from these outlets participate in different platform activities as volunteers, in particular in Medialog Platform and Eurasia Dialogue Platform.

In light of the fact that many workers and journalists in the television sector volunteer for JWF, attention placed on social media and the use of DA magazine – to increase reciprocal knowledge and cultural ties between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Central Asia – all point to a certain reality. Indeed, these factors indicate how the association views the work of journalists, writers and television operators as not being exclusively limited to either the field of information provision or public entertainment. According to Hüseyin Hurmalı, secretary general of the Abant Platform, it is not a coincidence that the founders of the JWF are all writers and journalists rather than bureaucrats or politicians. In fact, journalists and writers represent the intellectual and liberal sphere of civil society, which is suited by its very nature to confront itself with the ‘other’ both within the nation and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

With the Hizmet movement expanding well beyond Turkey’s borders, the JWF has gradually assumed an increasingly global character. In fact, during the first years of its existence, conferences and projects organized by the Foundation were almost exclusively devoted to resolving internal issues in Turkey. These included issues such as the relationship between religion and secularism, or the coexistence of ethnic and religious minorities within the

<sup>6</sup> Interview carried out by the author with Hüseyin Hurmalı on 16 July 2014.

nation. Over the years, the Foundation began to focus on inter-religious dialogue and to finance development and sensitisation projects in various African and Middle Eastern countries. In July 2013, thanks to field experience in preparing and managing international development projects and education on human rights, JWF was able to attain a general consultative status with ECOSOC, becoming the first and only Turkish NGO to obtain this accreditation. JWF's affiliation with ECOSOC has contributed to the globalising of its objectives. Today, the foundation organizes international conferences around themes such as: women's rights, sustainable development, philanthropy, respect for the sacred, and the role of civil society in peace-building. Moreover, it provides finances and grants annual prizes to NGOs that work in the field of armed conflict resolution and prevention. After obtaining a general affiliation with ECOSOC, JWF also opened new offices in regions where collaboration with the United Nations is most intense: New York, Genoa, Vienna, and Nairobi. It is also about to open offices in Addis Ababa and Brussels. Its partnership with ECOSOC is obviously an important step for JWF. Indeed, this allows the Foundation – and, as a consequence, the Hizmet Movement – to enjoy greater visibility and recognition on an international level. Moreover, it ensures plenty of room for manoeuvre in spreading their ideas.

Lastly, it is interesting to note how JWF has a special relationship with Fetullah Gülen compared to other organizations linked to the movement. Not only is he among the Foundation's promoters, Gülen also participates directly in some of its activities. This does not occur

in the case of other institutions inspired by his teachings. For example, within the framework of activities organized by the Platform for Interreligious Dialogue, Gülen held meetings with various religious leaders: Pope John Paul II (1998), the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew (1996), the Sephardic Rabbi Eliyahu Baski Doron and various non-Muslim Turkish Leaders.<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons why Fetullah Gülen participates in JWF activities is that these initiatives are suitable for a religious leader. In fact, they do not require a specific professional background or technical skills, such as teaching in a school, writing for a newspaper or managing a television channel. Rather, they require authority and charisma. Lastly, members of the board of trustees, and in particular Mustafa Yeşil, secretary general of the Foundation, frequently hold consultation meetings with Gülen. This contrasts with other associations linked to the movement who work in a more independent fashion. During these meetings, both priorities and modes of actions are defined.

In fact, the intense relationship that the JWF has with Gülen is such that it unofficially acts as the movement's spokesperson. As argued by Etga Uğur,<sup>8</sup> by not having a formal legal character but rather functioning as an ensemble of disconnected associations and institutions, one of main problems of the Hizmet Movement is representation. In other words, it is not easy to answer the question "who speaks on behalf of the movement?" Perhaps newspapers and television channels linked to Gülen

<sup>7</sup> Gözaydın Iştar, "The Fetullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey: A Chance for Democratization or a Trojan Horse?" In *Democratization*, Vol. 16/6, 2009, p.1224.

<sup>8</sup> Uğur 2013, p.52.

spring to mind. However, if, on the one hand, the content of news articles and television programmes reproduce a vision of the world inspired by Gülen, they only partially convey the movement's official positions. On the other hand, these newspapers and televisions insist on an auto-representation of non-biased means of information that convey their work in a technical and objective way. Despite not claiming to represent the Movement, per se, the JWF releases official statements after careful consultations with Gülen. This is particularly the case during periods of acute political tension and social crisis. Moreover, according to Hüseyin Hurmalı, the Foundation "acts as Gülen's tongue."<sup>9</sup> This expression underlines how Gülen frequently intervenes, sending messages to those present or to the general public during conferences and dinners organized by JWF. He also employs the JWF logo for its official correspondence with religious or political authorities, both Turkish and international. The strategy of transmitting public messages and communications through JWF serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it allows the movement to identify in the Foundation a point of reference for its external relations. On the other, it enables news journals and television channels – such as Zaman and Samanyolu TV – to officially maintain a position of objectivity and neutrality in carrying out their work. Moreover, it allows them to reinforce their image as independent institutions inspired by, but not tightly bound to, a religious leader.

*Translation Mary Bottigliero*

<sup>9</sup> Interview carried by the author on the 16 July 2014.

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Newspapers, magazines, TV channels, film productions: the Islamic Fethullah Gülen movement owns a media empire in Turkey and in the world. Communication is a pillar of this movement, who promotes an idea of Islam behind the times, who, in the tradition, is able to match with technology, modernity, globalization and to use it. Thanks of his media and an extensive international network, composed of schools, cultural institutions, banks, financial and commercial structures, support networks able to affect political environments, since years Gülen movement is one of the most outstanding political player in Turkey, leaded by Akp party, of whom it was a strong ally, with whom now is on collision course. The monograph *Gülen Media Empire*, who contains Turkish, Italian, US authors' essays, intends to analyse Gülen movement and its relations with media (TV, print, movies). Through its media analysis, these pages offer a look within the movement and its conflict with Akp, more generally on Turkish media and political Turkish scenario latest developments.

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