

Fethullah Gülen: Interfaith Dialogue as a Way to the Global Peace

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ABSTRACT

Fethullah Gülen is an authoritative mainstream Turkish Muslim scholar, thinker, and educational activist who supports interfaith and intercultural dialogue. He is opposed to violence and to turning religion into a political ideology. In Turkey, he has been credited for bringing about positive atmospheres between the Muslim population and the various religious minorities such as the Christian and Jewish communities. Outside Turkey, his ideas on interfaith dialogue have inspired many to establish organizations engaging in dialogue with the same objectives of mutual understanding, empathetic acceptance, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation. He has outlined four main foundations in his dialogue, namely, love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness, as a form of a religious order which is known as the universal values. He has introduced two types of practical dialogue, which are the dialogue through mass media and the dialogue through educational institutions, which aim to create a better understanding between the Muslims and non-Muslims among the Golden Generations. Over the years, Gülen is a champion of interfaith dialogue who has been committed to bringing global peace beyond the boundary of religion, race, and region.

Keywords: *Gülen, interfaith dialogue, global peace, education, Hizmet,*

Muhammad Fethullah Gülen was born on April 27, 1941, in a small village called Korucuk located in the Erzurum district, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The village has a population of only 60 to 70 families (Saritoprak & Griffith 2005). He is the fourth child among six siblings to Ramiz Gülen and Rafiah Hanim. Gülen's descendants follow their father's footsteps and has become a group of prominent and influential individuals in Islamic scholarship. Starting from his grandfather who was well respected for his knowledge in the local community, then his father, Ramiz Afendi Gülen, who was a respected ulama and well known to the locals as a scholar with a good personality. Apart from that, Ramiz Gülen is also known as a generous person. His mother, Rafiah Hanim, is a Quran teacher to the local children and women. Having a personality similar to her husband, Rafiah Hanim is known for her height of kindness and decency in her life with the community (Turam 2015; Kurtz 2005). The Gülen family is a family that adheres strongly to the teachings of Islam. His house is also a gathering place for the local religious scholars to hold Islamic discussions and religious circles. Gülen was brought up in a family which had vast knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices. He was exposed to practicing and mastering Islamic knowledge since young.

Gülen has no children because he is not married. He has put his priority on serving the world of knowledge and ummah. He is very concerned about the situation of the Muslims and gave his full commitment to it and that he is 'the father of the nation'. Even when he was asked about marriage, he would reply: "*The suffering of the Islamic community is more than though. I haven't found time to think of myself*" (Yucel 2010).

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Despite the controversy of him being the founder of the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETO), Gülen is a credible figure in promoting global peace. Examination of his work shows that there is no evidence to suggest that he organized violent activities or encouraged hostility towards other religions. Instead, what is on his mind is how human beings can live together in a challenging world in peace and harmony across the boundaries of religion, civilization, race, and region.

Tracing the course of his life, Gülen is a successful and highly influential figure in and outside of Turkey. Gülen has brought a new dimension of Sufi teachings and religious practices that are more practical and easily permeated into society. He has brought the values of global peace inherent in the teachings of Islam through the Sufi path that emphasizes human values. It is not just from the perspective of the intellect alone but guided by the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Fethullah Gülen is a figure who has successfully brought the values of Sufism and Sufi life into the global world. Not only for his practice but also for his followers to follow in his footsteps and thoughts.

Despite Gülen's strengths as a public figure and a charismatic leader, there are some weaknesses that he has such as his English-speaking proficiency. Although he has been in the United States of America for 22 years, he is still not able to speak English fluently. It seems like he is over-glorifying his mother tongue without trying to learn another language which could have benefited him more. That is the reason, why he always needs an interpreter during his speech or interviews where the English language is the medium of instruction. Although his idea has been spread in other languages, yet if he could master other languages, especially English, it would be better for him in delivering his messages to people of different languages. At the same time, the accuracy of the meaning of each speech can be more clearly understood as compared to the translators who might make mistakes when translating messages.

Furthermore, an Islamic thinker like Gülen should be more careful in quoting or backing up arguments of any source. However, perhaps due to his lack of knowledge of certain Islamic science or his misconceptions of the level of the authentic Hadis, several false Hadis have been used in his writings. For example, when he tried to describe the types of jihads in Islam, Gülen brought a false Hadis "*We return from a small jihad (physical warfare) to a large jihad (against lust)*". Although controlling lust is very demanded in Islam as a form of spiritual training to be a good person, attributing something to Prophet Muhammad without referring to an authentic source is something that is not appropriately done especially by such respected Muslim scholar.

Throughout his journey to uphold the truth, Gülen was involved in a series of controversies, especially in interfaith dialogue. He was accused of demeaning the image of Islam when he criticized the beliefs of a group of Muslims as dogmatic, fundamentalist, and anti-establishment. He was also accused of being an agent to Jews and pro to the United States when he kept silent on the Israeli atrocities against Palestine but, was vocal in criticizing the Muslims who committed terrorist activities. Even worse, he was accused by Erdogan Turkish government of being the mastermind of the attempted coup on July 16, 2016.

As a result, he has been listed as the most wanted person by the Turkish government as the man behind the terrorist activities. This has caused Gülen's activities, especially his global humanitarian activities and his missions in global peace to slowly diminish and his image tarnishes. For example, in Malaysia because of the bilateral and diplomatic relations between the Malaysian and Turkish governments, activities related to the Gülen Movement (Hizmet) and interfaith dialogue are slowly declining. Even worse, some local Turks such as the principal in an international school, Turgay Karaman, and a teacher named Ariff Komis, were arrested and deported back to their country of origin for being suspected to have links with Gülen's conspiracy of coup de'tat. This is one of the reasons that has caused the Malaysian community to distant themselves from Gülen's related activities. Generally, Malaysians have limited knowledge of Gülen's philosophy and thoughts including his approach to interfaith dialogue compared to other interfaith dialogue figures such as Zakir Naik. Although Zakir delivers many speeches on the comparison of religions, they are not in the form of dialogues, rather they are public speaking or questions and answer sessions that include condemning other religions. It

contrasts to Gülen's approach, which is less public speech, but more on a practical dialogue approach.

Gülen has no specific work or writing on 'global peace', yet the interpretation of his ideas and thoughts led to the path of global peace. Global peace in Gülen's thought is studied in the context of the situation of his ideas in the development of modern times and technological progress. Gülen sees the need to invite people back to the path of love and affection when faced with violence and radical Islam. Of course, Gülen is not alone in stating matters related to global peace. His ideas on humanity, dialogue, tolerance, and education were also mentioned by other contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Sayyed Mohamad Naquib al-Attas. Four approaches have been introduced by Gülen in realizing the idea of global peace, namely, interfaith (religious) dialogue, peace values through education, modern Sufism, and the concept of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* (Islam, religion of peace). However, in this article, we only focus on the first approach, which is the interfaith dialogue as a step to global peace.

The concept of global peace (world peace) as a human ideal, refers to not only the avoidance of war and violence (negative peace), but also cooperation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, and calls for freedom, security, development, and human prosperity around the world (positive peace). This movement has received great momentum in the 20th century by the international community and was used as a model for the formation and activation of international organizations, including the United Nations (Bahram & Alireza 2017).

Foundations of the Interfaith Dialogue

Gülen's idea on interfaith dialogue could be studied from his works such as, *Dialogue Is a Must (2003)*, *Jews and Christians in the Qur'an (2003)* *Turkish Experience of Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Past and Present (2004)*, *Tolerance and Dialogue in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Sunna (2006)*, *Love, Compassion, Tolerance, and Forgiving: The Pillars of Dialogue (2006)*, *How to Interact with Followers of Other Religions (2006)*, *Islam's Ecumenical Call for Dialogue (2006)*, *Dialogue with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) (2006)* dan *Towards a Globalization of Love & Tolerance (2012)* (Ahmad Faizuddin 2017).

Interfaith dialogue is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate despite their differences. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the others to practice their faith freely. Al-Qaradhawi (2004) suggests that the content of the interreligious dialogue must be focused on the similarities, not on the differences. Only through similarities, the agreement between the participants can be achieved and benefited. There is no dominance of one side over another when the dialogue aims to reach the truth. Academically, there are three kinds of interfaith dialogues, they are: (a) Dialogue between highly intellectuals of different faiths; (b) Dialogue at the ground level or between ordinary people; and (c) Dialogue of common problem where people of different religious backgrounds get together to cope with specific local concrete problems such as the problems of the environment, peace, poverty, or the problems of the world.

Gülen has identified and practiced those three dialogues in his life to promote global peace. He promotes the culture of interfaith dialogue in both written and practical forms, which is a path to global peace. He elevates the value of humanity in his philosophy thinkinh which is essential in maintaining global peace. Instead of appreciating the values of universal humanity, the potential for human beings to live together (peace co-existence) in peace is the best way. This Turkish thinker brought the idea of Islamic thought of mercy for all (Islam as universal mercy) as an image of Islam or as a religion of peace and prosperity, not only among Muslims but encompassing all human beings globally.

Thus, to Gülen (2004) interfaith dialogue is the first step to global peace: "*Interfaith dialogue is a must today, and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones*". Gülen created a more open Islamic ideology and encouraged Muslims to participate in interfaith dialogue by avoiding bad perceptions and prejudices. He called upon all mankind to forgive past

mistakes and be more positive for the present and the future. Ramirez (2007) also expressed a similar view as follows: “The first step should be trying to prevent future revenge, forgetting past quarrels and mutual bad memories about misdeeds and misunderstanding”. Gülen reminded us to eliminate resentment, forget past quarrels and bad memories of past misunderstandings. He (2004) stated that al-Quran encourages the importance of dialogue, where “peace is better”:

“In that respect, if we start our efforts for dialogue with the belief that “peace is better” (Al-Nisa 4:128), then we must demonstrate that we are on the side of peace at home and abroad. Indeed, peace is of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences that are bound to specific reasons and conditions. In that respect, we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or humanity”.

Thus, according to Gülen, developing dialogues, maintaining peace and security are universal human responsibilities. In fact, they are a part of the identities of the Islamic teachings (an Islamic way of life) (Celik & Pim 2007). In addition, tolerance and dialogue are keys to achieving peace and maintaining stability in society (Ghulam & Munaza 2010). Gülen (2004), has outlined four main foundations in dialogue; love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness, which according to him is a form of a religious order that is known as the universal values. They have been explained in his works, *Towards a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance (2004)*, *Pearls of Wisdom (2000)*, and *The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue (2004)*. According to Gülen:

“Love means the heart’s attachment and the will power’s inclination toward the beloved. It also means the feelings’ being purified of anything or anyone else other than the beloved and all the senses and faculties of the lover being turned to and set on the beloved only. Every act of the lover reflects the beloved: his or her heart always beats with yearning for the beloved; his or her tongues always murmur the beloved’s name, and his or her eyes open and close with the beloved’s image.

Gülen argued that interfaith dialogue is an expression of a divinely-inspired love, for the primary theological verity that binds together all people of the Abrahamic religion – Jews, Christians, and Muslims, especially the belief in God as the Creator. Love issues are in practical actions and at the inter-communal and inter-religious relations levels. It is expressed in terms of dialogical engagement: “dialogue is the real remedy for terror, chaos, and intolerance” (Pratt 2007).

While compassion, according to Gülen, naturally, every human being has their responsibilities for what is around them. We as human beings need to have compassion where the more these feelings are embodied in deeds, the higher and nobler our positions will be. On the other hand, if a person is cruel, oppressive, and violent, he would humiliate others and also, himself. When a person does not have the nature of compassion, then the nature of humanity is lost (Gülen 1998).

“Compassion is the beginning of being; without it everything is chaos. Everything has come into existence through compassion and by compassion it continues to exist in harmony. The earth was put in order by messages coming from other of the heavens. Everything from macrocosm to the microcosm has achieved an extraordinary harmony thanks to compassion” (Gülen 1998).

Soltes (2013) in his recent book *Embracing the World: Fethullah Gülen’s Thought and Its Relationship to Jalaluddin Rumi and Others*, compared the concept of compassion defined by Gülen’s and Rumi’s by saying that: “Fundamentally, the former one spoke and taught and wrote and while the latter speaks and teaches and writes of issues that reach beyond themselves because they are not time-bound”. Compassion is applied to all humans who share the abilities to hear and see; value and seek internally as much as possible and sometimes even externally.

Gülen also emphasizes the aspect of tolerance in the life of a society where everything is based on agreement and unity. Tolerance can occur among individuals, communities, and nations.

Through tolerance, human beings forgive each other, respect each other's ideas, and are gentle towards one another. Meekness is a good way to touch a heart and get closer to others through simple attitudes, actions, and a loving heart (Gülen 2004). Tolerance can guarantee peace not only at the local community level but at the global level.

“Be tolerant that your heart becomes wide like ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offers a hand to those in trouble and be concerned about everyone. Applaud the good for their goodness, appreciate those who have believing so gently that their envy and hatred melt away. Like Messiah, revive people with your breath” (Gülen 2000).

Al-Quran insists on the culture of tolerance and Prophet Muhammad explains its importance to Muslims and their fellow humankind. The concept of tolerance can be defined with the *tasamuh* concept. However, it implies more mutual tolerance and mutual acceptance among religions and cultural diversities based on the Islamic perspectives. It is a receptive mind to listen to different opinions, to function in two ways as to share and accept opinions without affecting personal or own religious beliefs.

Finally, Gullen also suggests forgiveness as the foundation in dialogue. Forgiveness is the greatest value in human virtue. The Most Forgiving God has educated us with the story of prophet Adam who made a mistake while in heaven. When prophet Adam reached out his hand to ask for forgiveness, God forgave him and glorified him as an apostle (Gülen 2004). Forgiveness seems easy to express, but very difficult to practice even to forgive small things, let alone when involving big mistakes. Gülen describes the value behind forgiveness as follows:

“However valuable it is to ask for and expect forgiveness and to bemoan the things that have escaped us, forgiving is that much greater an attribute and virtue. It is wrong to think of forgiveness as being separate from virtue or of virtue as being separate from forgiveness. As the well-known adage says, “To err is human, to forgive divine,” and how well this has been said! Being forgiven means being repaired; it consists of a return to our essence and finding ourselves again (Gülen 2004)”.

Challenges in the Interfaith Dialogue

It cannot be denied that the success of interfaith dialogue depends greatly on its agenda and challenges. There are usually extremism, mistrust, misconceptions, weakness, and lack of proper representation which contribute to the success of the interfaith dialogue (Zia-ul-Haq 2014). Diversity in intra and inter religions, is also a fact that could not be denied. Managing the differences is an art. One of the arts is identifying the challenges in the dialogue. Thus, Gülen identifies a few challenges that should be tackled in realizing the success of the interfaith dialogue. Firstly, both Muslims and non-Muslims especially Christians should accept the bitter historical relationship between Muslims and Christians as a valuable experience. Muslims are still haunted by past events like how the Crusades were involved in religious war and theological disputes between two parties. The number of Muslims killed was more than the number of Christians killed. The history, used by the Western media and counterparts as an opportunity to condemn the Muslims. In contrast, this creates a negative view towards the West, where it is regarded as the enemy that continuously oppresses the Muslims economically and politically.

Secondly, the fall of the Ottoman Turkish Islamic empire and the era of Western colonialism remain a bad memory to the Muslims. It has become something very painful and unforgettable in the history of Islam. Furthermore, the West has succeeded in applying these ideologies to change the landscape of thought and lifestyle of Muslims. This situation creates a sense of prejudice towards the Westerns among the Muslims. Although the story of the fall of the Islamic empire has passed and no more forms of physical colonization have taken place, suspicion towards the West persists. It is true that recently there had been a massive surge of hatred against Islam and Muslims especially since post 9/11. There has been an increasing sentiment of Islamophobia. Consequently, there is a reciprocal relation between Muslims and non-Muslims

where many in the West see Muslims as fanatical, violent, and lacking tolerance. Meanwhile, Muslims see Westerners as selfish, hypocrites, immoral and greedy. As a result, there are clashes of ideas and civilization.

Thirdly, it is due to the contradiction of two parties which the first sees Islam as a dynamic political ideology that accepts freedom. This freedom then turned into an independent ideology that was seen to separate religious doctrines from life values. The other party is those Muslims who tend to be extreme and reject the concept of tolerance. The contradiction of these two parties would prevent the West from understanding Islam and involving themselves in interfaith dialogue.

Lastly, Islam has been accused of being a new religion and has been deviated from the original teachings of the true religions namely Judaism and Christianity. Besides, the prophet Muhammad was also accused of being a false prophet, an ordinary human being, a clever deceiver, anti-Christian, or an idol of the worship of Muslims. Theoretically and practically, the history of the Islamic world records good relations in dealing with the Jewish people. It is stated that there were no discrimination and denial of basic human rights towards the Jews. Even when the Jews were in exile from Andalusia, they were granted asylum by the Ottoman government (Gülen 2003).

In order to overcome the challenges, Gülen stresses the importance of forgoing revenge on past injuries, disregarding polemics, and eliminating hatred from one's vocabulary. He asks the Muslims to see their own mistakes clearly and to be blind to the mistakes of others. Gülen stresses that religions especially Islam, are not and cannot be the source of conflict and war, but instead are the foundation of peace, harmony, and unity.

In truth, no divine religion was ever based on conflict, whether it be the religions represented by Moses and Jesus, or the religion represented by Muhammad, upon them be peace. On the contrary, these religions, especially Islam, are strictly against disorder, treachery, conflict and oppression. Islam means peace, security and well-being. Thus, in a religion based on peace, security and world harmony, war and conflict are malfunctioning things. The exceptional case is self-defence like when the body tries to get rid of germs that have attacked it, and this can be done only according to certain principles. Islam has always breathed peace and goodness. (Gülen 2004).

Approaches in the Interfaith Dialogue

Gülen introduces two approaches in dialogue, which are dialogue through mass media and, dialogue through organization and educational institutions. For the dialogue through mass media, Gülen has been appointed as the resident of the Journalist and Writer's Foundation (JWF), the most influential non-governmental organization (NGOs) in Turkey (Fontenot 2009). On June 29, 1994, in Istanbul Turkey, a JWF meeting was attended by community leaders, celebrities, journalists, and artists from various backgrounds (Bilici 2006). This was a strategic step of dialogue where he was able to join community figures, besides being able to disseminate his ideas to the press and public. JWF has organized several high-profile dialogue activities such as Interfaith and Intercultural Symposiums, National Tolerance Awards, and arranged meetings between Gülen and other religious leaders such as Pope John Paul II (Orthodox Church), Patriarch Bartholomew (Turkey's Chief Rabbi), David Aseo, and Eliyahu Bakshi Doron (Israel's Sephardic Head Rabbi) (Lacey 2014; Kayaoglu 2015).

Realizing the role of the mass media, Gülen took the clever step by disseminating his ideas using the power of the media. Therefore, around the 1980s, his followers successfully published in newspapers, radio broadcasts (Dunya, Burc FM), television (Samanyolu TV), internet, and journals (Sizinti, Aksiyon, The Fountain, Zafer, Ekoloji, Yeni Umut Dergisi) (Gulay 2007). In 1986, *Zaman Time* under the auspices of the Gülen movement was launched, which later became one of the most popular newspapers in Turkey with over 600,000 pieces printed daily. It has been distributed and published in various languages and countries such as Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Turkmenistan, and the United States (Saritoprak 2007; Fontenot 2009).

The second approach, which is the dialogue through organization and educational institutions, Gülen is a man of practice where he prefers to define the dialogue beyond the basic understanding of dialogue which involves only verbal discussion. Rather, he is of the view that dialogue should be institutionalized and practiced through social and educational activities. Thus, the Gülen movement carried out some activities such as dinners and breaking fast, seminars and conferences, visiting Turkey and her historical shrines, writing modules of interfaith dialogue, introducing education curriculum, and collaborating with various organizations in conducting humanitarian activities (Muhammad 2007; Yucel 2013; Lacey 2014). Gülen movements also join the community informally to foster a spirit of dialogue (Kayaoglu 2015).

Gülen inspires his followers in establishing cultural and religious dialogue organizations around the world, of which in the United States alone there are 42 organizations promoting dialogue activities (Yucel 2010). Saritoprak (2007) who studied a lot of Gülen's ideas stated that he had been in the United States and proved this with the following statement:

“In the United States where I live, I know of dozens of institutions that promote inter-faith dialogue. In major cities of the United States such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Washinton D.C, one can find many such institutions. For example, I lived for five years in the Washinton D.C area, where I participated in the establishment of the Rumi Forum for Interfaith Dialogue. I witnessed the foundation and the dedication of members of the Turkish-American community in the greater D.C”.

Interfaith dialogue in the United States continues to grow with the establishment of organizations under the Gülen movement such as the *Niagara Foundation*, *Raindrop Turkish House*, *The Institute of Interfaith Dialogue*, *Pacifia Institute*, and *Gülen Institute* (Lacey 2014). Consequently, they have successfully connected the Muslims with their fellow non-Muslims in the United States. Gülen spreads his idea of interfaith dialogue in Europe by regularly visiting France and Germany. As a result, Gülen's followers have founded schools that offer courses to children after school hours. They have also established the "Inter-cultural Dialogue" associations which organize cross-cultural themed events, promoting cultural exchanges between the Turkish origins and the local community. In addition, an *Association of Turkish Entrepreneurs* was established to sponsor the activities (Demir 2007). Besides that, the practical dialogue introduced by Gülen has led to the establishment of the Intercultural Dialogue Platform in Belgium, the Netherlands with a dialogue academy known as the *Dialogo Academie*, and in the UK. Another Ireland-based organization was established by the name of NI-TECA and TIECS and also the *Dialogue Society* (Lacey 2014; Kayaoglu 2015).

In the Southeast Asian region, they also established Gülen-related institutions which promote interfaith dialogue and global peace. In 1997, Sadik Yildiz, a journalist of the *Newspaper Era*, has been appointed as the newspaper's ambassador to Singapore. With the help of the local Turkish community, the Turkey-Central Asia Cultural Center has been founded in 1999, which was later renamed the Turkish Cultural Center (TCC). The center actively conducts interfaith dialogue activities, organizes luncheons, dinners, and breaking fast activities (Muhammad 2007). It is interesting to note that, their activities have been participated by non-Muslims consisting of Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus. The opportunity was used by TCC to establish community-based activities that promote peace in society. The main objective is to promote a positive image of Islam, which is a religion that practices the concept of moderation, opposing violence and extremism.

In Indonesia, an organization which is known as the *Pacific Countries Social and Economic Solidarity Association (PASIAD)* plays an important role in interfaith dialogue. The organization is made up of Turkish businessmen and local students who are interested in interfaith dialogues and issues related to global peace. The organization channels funds to schools or institutions that aim at promoting Gülen's idea of global peace in that largest Muslim country. (Muhammad 2007; Kayaoglu 2015)

Education as a Practical Dialogue towards Global Peace

Gülen is convinced that through education, religious extremism can be curbed, and tolerance can be fostered (Muhammad 2007; Ghulam & Munaza 2016). He also believes that schools are the best place to shape future generations of civilizations (Vile 2010). Thus, the educational approach of interfaith dialogue is applied through the schools founded by Gülen and his followers. According to Kurtz (2005), Gülen's idea showed results by taking the example of a school in the Southern Philippines that accepts Muslim and Christian students. They study together and receive a formal education, in fact, they can even live together. Most of these children are among those who lost their parents as a result of the war crisis in the southern Philippines.

In Turkey alone, there are over 150 schools that have been founded by the Gülen Movement (Hizmet) based on his idea of global peace. They have also founded over 1000 schools (Ghulam & Munaza 2016) around the world including Africa, Bosnia, Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, the Philippines, and Cambodia (Balci 2003; Gulay 2007; Muhammad 2007; Sunier 2014). Schools are one of the foundations for a better world in the future. School is symbolic of knowledge; the school environment can encourage young children to enrich their minds. Thus, the movement combines dialogue and education as ways to build peace, by maintaining social cohesion and mending the social cohesion between non-Muslims and Muslims (Celik 2011). As Gülen stated:

“Is essentially the ‘theatre’ in which all the scattered things of the universe are displayed together. It provides its pupils with the possibilities of continuous reading and speaks even when it is silent. Because of that, although it seems to occupy one phase of life, actually the school dominates all times and events. Every pupil re-enacts during the rest of life what he or she has learned at school and derives continuous influence therefrom” (Kurtz 2005).

Education, according to Gülen, is a tool that carries the message of global peace. Gülen devises ideas and ambitions to form *Golden Generations*. It cannot be denied that education that balances religious traditions and modern technological advances is a necessity nowadays. However, Gülen also emphasizes how religious beliefs and spiritual practices act as guidelines and guidance in life. The value of religious life must exist as an identity of a Muslim and must be defended despite the challenges of the modern world. The education suggested by Gülen is a form of learning that is balanced between physical needs and spiritual needs. Education produces human beings who are responsible to be rulers and administrators of world affairs but still are slaves who are submissive and obedient to the orders and prohibitions of a Creator i.e. Allah.

Golden Generations is the result of the existence of two human characters mentioned by Gülen, the ideal man (ideal man) and the ideal society (ideal people). The ideal man according to Gülen's has been discussed by other Muslim scholars such as al-Arabi (1165-1240), al-Rumi (1207-1273), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), and Sayyed Hossein Nasr (1933-). Although there are similarities in the concept of perfect human beings (*insan kamil*) with al-'Arabi from the point of view of human beings being made perfect and seeing human beings have the attributes of perfection as a result of the manifestation (*tajalli*) of God's grace. Al-Arabi focuses more on philosophical Sufism which leads to the concept of *wahdatul wujud*, unification between divine and human nature.

This contrasts with Gülen's approach which does not call for human perfection to the level of *wahdat al-wujud* but places perfection through the example of the Prophets and his companions. Gülen's approach is more to the practicality of carrying out God's command, while *ibn Arabi's* tradition is more towards man living alone and putting in his own effort to unite with his God (*wahdat al-wujud*). Gülen applies an approach of thinking and acting in which human beings cannot be passive towards religious teachings but must be active in planning and doing all religious errands. For example, when a human perfectly understands the nature of the Most Merciful God, then he strives to spread his love to his surroundings as God loves each of His servants and has bestowed on every human being a sense of love and affection.

Golden generations are also the result of the formation of an ideal society. When society consists of ideal human beings, the character of society will be better. They are a responsible society, upholding human values, and bringing social justice. They reject inhumane behaviour and all bad traits. They tend to live in peace with feelings of love and affection and always offer help to make life easier for each other. The ideal society reflects the beauty of the teachings of Islam as a religion that means peace and the love of reconciliation. Gülen's idea of the ideal human being and the ideal society is an inseparable substance that is interconnected with each other. He combines two aspects of a micro (ideal human being) and a macro (ideal society). Both properties have their respective roles in paving the way for global peace.

Gülen is a real thinker who doesn't just write in promoting the idea of global peace. Through interaction and engagement analysis methods, this paper finds that Gülen took the first step by building a network between him and his community in his hometown. Starting with a small group in a district where he became a priest and teacher of religious studies, with his knowledge, personality, and credibility, his followers gradually increased day by day. Gülen's influence spreads and the community associated with him grows to become a very popular movement in Turkey. Individuals are easy to approach him personally. Gülen's network is also increasingly spreading, which is not limited to the local Turkish community but also the Turkish community who are abroad especially in Europe. The network is made up of many walks of life including corporate and government employees.

Gülen: Champion of the Interfaith Dialogue

There are two categories of groups that are directly influenced by Gülen's ideology. The first group is known as the Gülen Movement or known as Hizmet in Turkish which directly follows and supports Gülen's ideology. Followers of Hizmet are said to be numerous in Turkey, possibly in the millions, and are believed to hold influential positions in institutions from the police and secret services to the judiciary and President Erdogan's ruling AK Party itself. They are directly involved with Gülen's ideas in mobilizing humanitarian missions and organizing programs such as dialogue and friendly gatherings among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Their method of dialogue is not just preaching on the big stage but is a practical dialogue that carries the image of Islam which is a blessing for all the worlds (*rahmatan lil `alamin*) and highlights the value of humanity by helping the less fortunate. They bring Islamic *da'wah* that emphasizes pure deeds and behavior or *da'wah bi al-hal*. Practical dialogues are conducted for groups of people regardless of Muslims and non-Muslims from countries in turmoil with civil war such as the Philippines in Southeast Asia to poverty-stricken countries such as Kenya, in Africa. This approach leads to the acceptance of their presence among non-Muslims without hesitation and welcomes the teachings of Islam as well.

The second group consists of individuals or groups who are interested and influenced by Gülen's ideology to inspire their actions. Indirectly, they become disciples and followers of Gülen. His practical ideology about peace inspires efforts and activities such as dialogues and gatherings in the community as took place in European countries and the United States. Many organizations carry out community activities involving various religious and racial backgrounds because of the inspiration of Gülen's ideology itself and emulate the efforts that have been made by the Gülen Movement or Hizmet.

In the USA, FETO published dialogue books which are aimed at the American masses by printing them in English and trying to bring Gülen to the position of a spiritual leader. Under The Alliance for Shared Values (AfSV), a non-profit umbrella organization that serves as a voice for civic and service organizations associated with the Hizmet social initiative in the U.S which led by Yücel Alp Aslandoğan, the spokesperson of Gülen stated that there are prominent people such as Catholic-Islamic researchers and Jewish rabbis on the board of directors, subsidiaries named Atlantic Institute, The Peace Islands Institute, The Rumi Forum, The Pacifica Institute, The Dialogue Institute of the Southwest, Niagara Foundation who continue their dialogue activities throughout the country.

Gülen's influence is more popular in African countries, Europe, and the United States than in the Islamic countries of the Middle East or the Gulf States. In the Middle East, the approach of interfaith dialogue in areas where the majority of Muslims and Arabs are dominant is less popular. On the other hand, it is developing well in African countries that always receive foreign humanitarian aids including from the Gülen Movement. Indirectly, it also strengthens the ties between different races, religions, and cultures in the regions.

While in the European countries, the welcoming European society allows Gülen's influence to seep in. A wise strategy of the Gülen movement is that they never introduce themselves as an Islamic movement, but rather as an organization that serves to humanity aids. This does not raise any suspicion and doubt to suspect them as a religious movement. Gülen's influence also grew in Europe upon receiving support from the Turkish community who migrated from their homeland because of jobs and running businesses. These contributed to the spread of Gülen's influence, not only in physical activities but also in economic activities including financial funding. In addition, it is supported by European countries that practice freedom of speech, respect human rights, and do not restrict any form of organization to carry out peaceful activities to the communities.

Several universities in the world have established institutes and chairs for the study of Gülen's thought which include studying his approach to interfaith dialogue. These include the Nursi Chair for Islamic Studies under John Carroll University in Ohio, the Fethullah Gülen Chair for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Catholic Relations under the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, the Fethullah Gülen Chair under Syarif Hidayetullah Islamic University in Indonesia, the Gülen Institute at the University Houston, and Fethullah Gülen's Chair in Intercultural Studies under the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium (Yucel 2013). Interestingly, these centers were not only set up by Gülen's supporters who are Muslims, but also non-Muslims who also supported Gülen's idealism.

To conclude, Gülen is a true champion of interreligious dialogue. As Pratt (2007) described this figure as a man of many facets. Over the years he has become increasingly committed to affirming the possibility of and need for inter-civilizational and interreligious dialogue. Gülen's promotion of dialogue is not merely reactive and pragmatic but is rooted in his vision of Islam and the contemporary world. Before the emergence of Gülen and his movement, at least in the Turkish context, the interfaith dialogue had been limited to a few Divinity faculty lecturers and had never gained any legitimacy among the people, and so dialogue activities at the institutional or national level were generally unknown and unheard where until the 1990s the meeting of Muslims with non-Muslims was unacceptable at the community level in Turkey. Gülen is convinced that dialogue initiatives are not only a moral but a religious duty and are not for the Muslim community alone but global peace. Gülen stressed that: "*If the world changes fifty times, our attitude towards dialogue activities will be the same and we share the same view about interfaith dialogue because our sources do not allow us to do the opposite*".

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