

Politics, Education, and a Glocal Movement: Gulen-Inspired Educators and Their Views on Education in Politically Turbulent Times

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Abstract

The Hizmet Movement a.k.a. Gulen Movement is a collective initiative of a group of people from Turkey following altruistic ideals. Although it is rooted in Islam and the Sufi tradition, it appeals to all backgrounds via its secular schools and interfaith dialogue outreach. In the U.S., the movement runs educational institutions, interfaith dialogue centers, and charities, and has grown significantly since the start of the new millennium. The academic excellence, college admission rates, and medals won at local and international science and math competitions helped Hizmet Movement schools gain recognition and appreciation in the more than 100 countries where they operate. However, recent political unrest and, as a result, anti-democratic treatment of Hizmet participants in Turkey has taken a toll on this success and has transformed the movement into a diaspora. This paper serves as an introduction to Hizmet Movement's history, its perceptions in the U.S. and in Turkey, and the educational philosophies of its educators in a post-9/11 and post-15 July world. The focus on events is between 1960 to present.

Keywords: Hizmet movement, Gulen movement, Gulen charter schools, Muslims, Diaspora

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

This empirical research paper focuses on a Turkey-based educational movement, the Hizmet (Service) Movement (HM hereafter), also known as the Gulen Movement, and introduces its participants' educational philosophies. The HM has existed for more than a century, but the focus on events here is kept between 1960 to present. The HM is a collaborative effort of a group of people aiming to promote education, inter-faith dialogue, universal peace, and

charity across the world. It originated in Turkey in the 1960s, and it has a significant presence in the U.S. today with its interfaith/intercultural organizations, private schools, and, according to my own extensive research, 148 charter schools in 2016 (Table 2). Reuters (2016) estimates the number at 153 (Harte & Spetalnick). Globally, the number of schools linked to the HM is estimated to be around 1000 (Ebaugh, 2010, p. 97).

In Turkey, the HM is linked with the 17-25 December operations and the failed 15 July coup attempt against the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP hereafter). The HM and its participants are thus called many names. For example,

Terms and language used by President Erdogan on Hizmet and Fethullah Gulen since December 2013: they are a parallel state, traitors, pawns of a dirty international blood lobby, they are a virus, tumour, blood-sucking leeches, terrorists, raving “Hashashins”, assassins, they work with Mossad, their leader is a spell binder, a false prophet, a bogus scholar, a gang-leader, this is Turkey’s second war of independence, we will enter their lairs/caves, crush them, break them, we will vaporize them, split them into molecules, nationalize their schools, you must work hard and take over their work and organizations, they were going to assassinate my daughter, there is so much more about them you do not know. (“Demonizing the Hizmet Movement”, 2015, p. 2)

The study is significant in that Fethullah Gulen, the HM’s religious leader, resides in the U.S. and the charter schools the HM operates there serve many minorities. Those schools impact those diverse student populations through their pedagogical applications, and philosophical and institutional culture. Also, most of the available literature reflects the HM as a political movement. Although the literature on the HM is growing—albeit with its connection to politics-research that focuses on the educational philosophies and instructional practices of the HM educators is scarce. Herein, I present some Gulen-inspired educator’s visions on education. I also look for answers to the following research question:

How do Gulen-inspired educators perceive education in these politically turbulent times?

2. A Short History of Laicism and the HM in Turkey and Elsewhere

2.1 The Beginning

The HM’s roots date back to the time when the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923. The change in the government system and the bourgeoisie it produced worked against the movement from the very beginning. The new Turkish Republic established in 1923 by Kemal Ataturk turned its back to the 600-year-old Ottoman history and drew a sharp line between the past and the present. The new Turkish state adopted a zero-tolerance policy to anything that was even remotely religious because “*a primary goal of Turkey’s Kemalist regime was to suppress Anatolia’s Ottoman-Islamic tradition by taking over the definition and application of faith, education, and law in Turkish society*” (Hendrick, 2013, p. 16). The new system regarded Western culture and lifestyle as the only option for advancement.

An era of laicism began. The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk defines laicism as “*not a mere separation between religion and worldly affairs. It is the*

freedom of conscience, religion, and worship” (“Ataturk ilkeleri: Laiklik”, 2014). Under this new regime, the sultanate-Khalifa system (very similar in title and role to that of the Catholic Pope) was dismantled; the veil, important religious attire, was banned; the fez, a symbol of the Ottoman government, was coercively replaced with fedora hats. Furthermore, a Latin alphabet replaced the Ottoman alphabet written in Arabic letters. A whole nation became illiterate almost overnight. Educational institutions and places of religious worship such as *madrastas* (a school for Islamic instruction), *tekkes* (an Islamic monastery), and *zawiyas* (monastery complexes that belong to religious orders) were permanently closed.

After the royal family members and their entourage that consisted of 155 people were sent on exile (Hasanoglu, 2012, January 28), and those who stayed behind had been either executed or jailed, a new class of ruling elite rose into power. They adopted Western values and supported Ataturk’s ideas. In return, they acquired privileges such as access to state property, important positions in the government, and tremendous financial support in the form of tax-breaks, use of government resources, and other state enterprises. This lasted until another elite group rose to power at the turn of the new millennium: these were Political Islamists.

2.2 Short History of HM

The HM grew in Turkey under the spiritual leadership of Fethullah Gulen, an esteemed Muslim scholar. He was born in 1941 in a small village near Erzurum city, in Turkey. His father was an imam and his mother was a homemaker. He was the second child in a family of eight children. He memorized the whole Quran when he was five years old and took classes from Islamic scholars even though it was officially forbidden (Yavuz, 2013, p. 29, p. 30). He attended *sohbets* (small-group talks of religious nature) led by prominent religious figures. He could not finish his education since the family moved a great deal because of his father’s profession. He earned his high school diploma through an adult education program.

During the second half of the 1960s, he founded the HM in a bitterly secular Turkey. He established an all-boys’ dormitory to shelter and educate middle and high school students. He did not get paid for his services and did not get involved with money. Instead, “*he encouraged the sponsors of these institutions to actively oversee the use of their monies. This built great trust in Mr. Gulen’s honesty and integrity*” (Ebaugh, 2010, p. 37). Those dormitories eventually led the way to the establishments of private schools.

The Military Memorandum of March 12, 1971 left a significant mark on the Turkish political history. The 13th prime minister, Nihat Erim, called this development “*the result of more than a century’s yearning and striving for democracy*” (Erim, 1972, p. 246). He saw this change as necessary to establish order. The Turkish military declared martial law and mass arrests were made. In the meantime, Fethullah Gulen “*managed to establish lighthouses and created a web of networks to realize his dream of cultivating a new generation of religious revivalists*” (Yavuz, 2013, p. 36). In addition, *Sizinti*, the HM’s Sufism-oriented monthly periodical, began publication in 1979. Today, it is still published in English under the name Fountain.

Another coup followed on September 12, 1980. Fethullah Gulen was jailed for six months. He was later ‘let go’ without charges. No one provided any explanation. He moved from

Izmir to Edremit as an imam. At this time, high school and college students had become extremely polarized and brainwashed with communist and ultra-nationalist ideas. In such a time, Gulen's dorms became sanctuaries for parents because they "*served as shelters against alcohol and drug use, premarital sexual exploits, and involvement in communist, ultra-nationalist or other radical movements*" (Ebaugh, 2010, p. 28). Hence, his efforts snowballed, and many more dormitories and college preparation courses were opened.

After the 1980 coup, "*the military leadership issued an arrest warrant against Fethullah Gulen on grounds similar to his arrest during the previous coup*" (Yavuz, 2013, p. 39). Narli (2005) defines the Turkish military as the guardian of the Turkish Republic, and the protector of Kemalism and secularism. She states that whenever needed, the military intervened "*to preserve democracy, secularism, and national unity in the face of Islamist, separatist, and sectarian challenges*" (p. 231). Fethullah Gulen and HM sympathizers were classified as Islamist.

The warrant was lifted in 1986. After a five-year break, Gulen started to give public sermons again. The HM opened its first private high school, the Yamanlar College, in Izmir in 1982. The HM continued to grow and began a daily newspaper, Zaman, in 1986. The English version of Zaman, Today's Zaman, followed 21 years later.

More HM private schools opened in the 1990s and the HM became better known. The first Turkish school outside Turkey was founded in 1992 in Nakhchivan City, Nakhchivan (Ozcan, 2012). More schools followed in Central Asia. In 1993, the HM's Samanyolu TV started broadcasting. It was "*the only private channel of Turkey which produces programs with a hundred percent of its own funds and airs these programs in its own broadcast group*" ("Kurumsal [Institutional]", 2014). It ceased broadcasting in 2016 after the AKP government targeted the media network. The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) was founded in 1994 in Istanbul. The foundation was "*established to treat diversity as an asset, accept everyone as they are, and contribute to the ideal of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect and understanding*" ("About the Foundation", 2014).

In 1996, the HM's first private university—Fatih University—and its first interest-free bank—Bank Asya—started operations. The HM's Kaynak Holding, an umbrella company with 23 different subsidiaries was founded. However, after the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, Kaynak Holding, as well as over a thousand HM institutions, were seized or permanently closed by the government (Minister, 2016). No HM institutions have existed in Turkey since the end of 2016.

Fethullah Gulen met with the Pope in 1998 in the Vatican. He was the first Turkish Islamic scholar to do so. He eventually came to the U.S. in 1999 in order to receive medical treatment due to cardiac dysrhythmia. He also had diabetics and heart problems (Gundem, 2005, p. xxxii).

Fethullah Gulen dealt with his own health issues and legal battles in Turkey during the first decade of the new millennium. He was accused of imperiling the existence of the Turkish Republic through the use of intimidation, fear, and coercion; eliminating secularism;

debilitating, capturing, or destroying state authority; and devising and ruling a terrorist organization to achieve all these goals. Fethullah Gulen was eventually acquitted of all charges (“Gulen v. K.H.”, 2006).

In the meantime, the influx of the HM schools and institutions continued elsewhere. For example, today Sebat Egitim Kurumlari in Kyrgyzstan runs 14 all-boys’ and all-girls’ high schools, 1 international school, 1 university, and 4 college dorms; Cag Egitim Isletmeleri in Azerbaijan operates 11 high schools, 1 elementary and middle school and 1 university; Selale Egitim Sirketi in Tajikistan has 6 high schools, 1 international school, 1 language center, and 1 college dorm; and KATEV Uluslararası Egitim ve Kultur Vakfi in Kazakhstan has 28 high schools and 1 university. The first Turkish Olympiads was held in 2003. In 2012, students from more than 130 countries competed with each other to win the best Turkish speaker medal. During the event, students attending HM schools worldwide would come to Turkey, sit through Turkish language proficiency exams, recite poetry, perform songs, stay with Turkish host families, and go sightseeing.

Fethullah Gulen’s arrival in the U.S. and his long-term residency there bolstered the expansion of the HM in the U.S. The first charter school opened soon after his arrival, and eventually their numbers reached 148. They became highly successful and parents put their children on waiting lists. Many also became institutions serving minorities. For example, the Harmony Science Academy district in El Paso, TX had a total student population of 3,300 in the 2016-2017 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2017, p. 18). 83.2% of this population was Hispanic, 9.1% White, 5.3% African American, 1.1% two or more races, 1% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian (*ibid* p. 18). In addition, 69.8% of the students were economically disadvantaged. In other words, the Academy district was heavily diverse with a profusion of underserved students. The Academy district met the state’s accountability standards as well as special education requirements in 2017. Also, 66% met or exceeded progress expectations in all grades and in all subject levels in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests in 2017—5% higher than the state average (p. 4).

On 15 July 2016, the Turkish military attempted a coup. It failed and President Erdogan claimed that the HM was behind it. However, Fethullah Gulen denied any involvement and issued a statement (“The Failed Military Coup in Turkey & The Mass Purges: A Civil Society Perspective”, 2016). He stated that, while he condemned the attempted military coup in Turkey in the strongest terms: “*Government should be won through a process of free and fair elections, not force. I pray to God for Turkey, for Turkish citizens, and for all those currently in Turkey that this situation is resolved peacefully and quickly*”.

Regardless, 50,504 people were arrested in 2017 on HM related charges [“Bakan Bozdog, Yozgat’ta Isyurlari Fuarinin Acilisina Katildi (Bakan Bozdog Attends Isyurt Fair Opening in Yozgat)”, 2017]. Those arrested included academicians, journalists, doctors, pregnant women, law enforcement officers, teachers, military service members, judges, lawyers, and housewives. The government rescinded the doctoral degrees of some academicians as well. Those who wanted to leave the country found that their passports were no more valid. Many later crossed the border on foot and sought asylum in neighboring countries, Europe, and the

United States.

3. Literature Review on HM

3.1 General Literature

According to Graham Fuller, a former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA, the HM is “*a powerful example of popular Islam*” (Fuller, 2014, p. 154). He describes the HM as a volunteer movement drawing its roots from Sufism, has no formal association with government, and seeing itself “*as an organization standing above or outside politics*” (p. 155). Regarding Fethullah Gulen’s vision, Fuller (2014) states that “*Gulen pursues ideas of progress and modernity-not to recreate a western way of life but to create a liberated Muslim mindset that can function confidently in the modern world*” (p. 158) and finds the HM very interesting in that it is a “*modernist Islamic organization comfortably operating in the material and commercial world as well as spiritual*” (p. 167).

Vicini (2013) focuses on HM’s pedagogical practices. He provides a closer look on HM’s “*educational and communal-life activities among university and younger students*” (p. 384). He describes the HM as “*Turkey’s biggest and most powerful religious group, with millions of followers*” (p. 383). He investigates the pedagogical relationships between Gulen-inspired university students and the younger high-school students in HM houses. The university students’ parents prefer that their children stay in HM houses rather than “*in other student housing, where alcohol and cigarette consumption are perceived widespread*” (p. 383). In HM housing, Gulen-inspired university students emulate the prophet’s “*good manners (edep), and morals (ahlak)*” that impose qualities such as “*modesty (tevazu), respectfulness (saygi), attitudes of self-control, and self-sacrifice (fedakarlik)*” (p. 385). They also use *exemplariness* as a pedagogical method. Vicini frames this practice as a “*pedagogical intervention [which] is not explicit but embedded in the practices of the pedagogue himself*” (p. 389). He highlights that although there is an emphasis on developing such qualities in those houses and to pass those down to the younger high-school students who regularly visit those houses, the majority of the time is spent doing schoolwork. They also help the high-school students with their homework and cook for them. He concludes that the HM promotes “*a model for Turkish Muslimness that challenges the long-standing secular tradition of the country*” (p. 395) and the HM houses loom “*large in guiding pupils to embody specific moral understandings and bodily dispositions*” (p. 396).

Another scholar in the area, Hendrick, states that the HM is “*an example of non-contentious contentious action, or better still, nonpolitical political Islam*” (Hendrick, 2009, p. 42). He describes the HM as very selective and that HM “*actors spend a great deal of time and money advertising their worthiness to the Turkish and international public. They do so, however, to advance their own interests, not to advance the interest of some larger public good*” (p. 19, p. 20). Tee (2016) indicates that Fethullah Gulen and his followers are interested in an “*Islamized national order*”, an endeavor that “*lies at the very core of the Gulenist project*” (p. 2).

3.2 Literature in the U.S.

The HM's initiatives in the U.S. gained momentum after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The NCLB indirectly promoted the expansion of charter schools. Until then, the HM had operated a small number of private schools—the Brooklyn Amity School, Putnam Science Academy in Connecticut, Science Academy of Chicago, and Pioneer Academy in New Jersey. Those were all founded before 2001. After the NCLB, there was a surge of new charter schools with Gulen-inspired educators. As of 2017, there were more than 100 charter schools with Gulen-inspired educators in the U.S. As the number of schools went up, so did the media attention. While some welcomed the diversity and the quality education that those schools offered, others grew suspicious of this Muslim movement. For example, Suzy Hansen (2014) describes Fethullah Gulen as a cult(ish) leader in search of power. She raises questions about the transparency of Fethullah Gulen sympathizers and states that “*the Gulenists’ opacity makes it difficult to tell whether they seek control*” (p. 39). Sociologist Joshua Hendrick also states that the HM is a “*very conscious brand that is passed on to very consciously selected people*” and that the HM’s “*employment ambiguity and lack of transparency invites critics*” (Steller, 2015).

According to Diane Ravitch, a historian of education Fethullah Gulen “*controls one of the biggest charter chains in the United States. It was only surpassed in numbers recently by KIPP as the largest corporate charter chain*” (Ravitch, 2017). She shares thoughts and experiences of other people with the HM in her blog as well. One of them was a former teacher at a charter school with Gulen-inspired educators (Ravitch, 2014). In the blog, he accused the school of providing teachers with no curricular support, no textbooks, and that the parents and students thought the Turkish teachers in the school were unintelligible. He also stated that some administrators treated the students poorly. An investigation followed with the result that “*the Ohio Department of Education, Dayton Public Schools, and Montgomery County children’s services have been unable to substantiate accusations*” (O’Donnell, 2015).

CBS News’s 60 Minutes reporter Lesley Stahl states that “*Gulen promotes tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and above all he promotes education. And yet, he is a mystery man, never seen or heard in public. And the more power he gains, the more questions are raised about his motives and the schools*” (Klug & Flaum, 2012). She classifies the schools as the largest charter school group in the U.S. and investigates the motives behind their establishment. She asks why Turkish teachers were brought to teach English in those charter schools, and whether or not the schools ask their teachers to give part of their salaries back. She also states that “*Newsweek voted two Harmony Schools among America’s top ten. More of these schools are open every year across the country and waiting lists just keep getting longer*” (Klug & Flaum, 2012).

4. Method of Inquiry

4.1 Sampling

Participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling. Of the research participants

approached, all but one consented to participate. IRB approval was obtained prior to research. Data collection happened via interviews and observations in Turkey and in the U.S. One participant provided written responses via email because of logistical issues. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were provided. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used except for Fethullah Gulen. The research was self-funded and did not receive monetary support from any external entity.

4.2 Participants

Nine research participants were recruited for the study. The inclusion criteria consisted of participants who identified as Gulen-inspired educators, Turkish or Turkish speaking, and served as teachers and/or administrators in Gulen-inspired schools. All participants were Turkish, adult male, and Gulen-inspired educators. No female participants were recruited, although gender was not part of the criteria for exclusion.

Table 1 outlines the profiles of the interviewees and the institutions they worked at the time of interviews. It includes a short description of each interview participant, the interview sites, school achievement scores (when available), and their philosophical stance on education. The table does not include Fethullah Gulen. The relevant information was provided in the form of a narrative below.

4.2.1 Fethullah Gulen and His Interview Site

The house where Fethullah Gulen lives is in a small town on the east coast. As I entered the building from the ground floor door, I saw shoe racks reaching up to the ceiling of the small hallway. It is a pre-Islamic tradition among Turkish people to take off their shoes when entering their home, and this place was no exception. After I put mine on the rack, I turned right and proceeded to what looked like a sunroom-turned-dining hall area. There were windows on all three sides letting the winter sun in. I was taken up the stairs to the second floor. The second floor consisted of a big communal room and smaller rooms on each side across the hallway. The big room was carpeted, as was the rest of the building. There were people sitting on the floors and sofas. Some were reading while others were quietly talking. The sofas were lined up against the walls and, except for a bookshelf and a couple of coffee tables, those were the only furniture in the room. The decor reminded of *dershanes* (lighthouses—homes where Gulen-inspired college students lived). The décor was kept simple because this served to indicate humbleness and frugality. Also, the largely empty room served as a location for prayer five times a day.

As I entered the room on the second floor, I noted that there were men reading books. The walls of the room were adorned with the names of Allah and Mohammad written in Arabic. The room faced the yard and the parking lot was just beneath. It also got plenty of sunshine because of the big hardwood windows painted brown. Access to the third floor was limited as it was Fethullah Gulen's living quarters. During my visit, the stairs leading up to the third-floor door was filled at certain times of the day with men waiting to gain access so that they could occasionally conduct prayers with him and listen to his talks. In my case, I waited three days to see him in person. The interview with Fethullah Gulen happened on the third

floor, in a room like the one on the second.

Fethullah Gulen is a soft-spoken individual and has written many books. At the time of the interview, he looked in his early seventies. He was wearing a shirt with trousers and a long jacket with earth-tone colors. He had on a white machine-knit kufi cap that he also wears while conducting his prayers. He is fluent in Arabic.

4.3 Research Design

A qualitative inquiry and phenomenological research design was employed for this empirical study. Leedy (1997) states that *“in phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to understand how a subject understands “reality” however he, she, or they so perceive”* (p. 161).

4.3.1 Data Collection

Data collection happened via semi-structured interviews, site visits and observations. The semi-structured in-depth interviews sought to understand if these several HM school administrators and Gulen-inspired charter school educators throughout the U.S. and Turkey embraced and applied his thinking. They lasted between 30-45 minutes. [One interview was conducted via email because of logistical issues.] The observations happened in Fethullah Gulen’s house, HM private schools, in a winter retreat program at a hotel, an HM higher education institution, and headquarters of a charter school group with Gulen-inspired educators.

In addition, as researcher I conducted a thorough review of Fethullah Gulen’s academic and nonacademic texts, observations, close reading of his work, and exchanged ideas (direct quotes) about education—shared with him during a personal interview in May 2011, and later corrected, extended, revised by him. Those notes were also corrected and expanded by a trusted colleague of Fethullah Gulen. Furthermore, excerpts from his many writings, as requested by Fethullah Gulen were used; a condition to which I agreed to adhere in order to conduct the personal interview.

Finally, the charter schools list entailed an extensive and arduous research on the web. I tracked and compared aggregated school lists on various websites and then went to the official websites of the schools to verify data (when available). History or the school fact sheets were obtained to identify the years they were opened and the grade levels they served. In order to get this information, enrollment pages, bell schedules, school report cards, and/or the annual calendars were searched in detail. Sometimes the information needed was provided in a straightforward manner; at other times it was almost non-existent. In the latter case, state department of education websites were searched to find the data. On rare occasions, direct phone calls to schools were made to inquire information.

4.3.2 Data Analysis

Audio-recorded data was first transcribed word-for-word and those interviews conducted in Turkish, were translated into English. Expressions relevant to the HM participants’ experiences were clustered, and invariant constituents were thematized. Those themes were

then further explored through another reading of the interview data. Keywords were used to uncover commonalities in interviewee data, and anchor themes were created. Those commonalities were then summed up in composite descriptions under those anchor themes.

5. Results

Overlapping themes emerged from the interviews conducted with research participants on their perceptions of education. These themes fell under three categories: *character education*, *scope and sequence*, and *teacher quality*. A less subtle theme, *fear of persecution*, emerged as well.

Character Education: In addition to the emphasis on science education and education in general, research participants indicated the importance of healthy character development that included good morals and values. For that, Fethullah Gulen attached a divine purpose to education and stated that a child “*must find direction and clarity in thought, in introspection, and in faith; and by fulfilling his (sic) servitude, he must progress his heart and soul*”. This is to be accomplished via education. Participant 5 (P5) also stated that “*the only way to bring out that good in people is through education. So once people are educated, then they all have, to a certain extent, the values and morals and they can become better citizens and better people*”. P2 expressed a similar opinion: “*While we strive to offer quality education such as in science and math, we also try to preserve the students’ own values, cultures, and thus, educate them properly. I mean this is, as a school, our utmost goal*”. Last, P9, speaking of HM schools, indicated that “*these students also attain good characters here. They learn to respect their traditions, national values, and moral values of their people*”.

Scope and Sequence: Another prevailing theme was that education has a scope and sequence. The importance of set goals, having a sense of direction, and producing outcomes were emphasized. Fethullah Gulen pointed out to the need for being methodological in education and stated that “*methodological thought and methodological work are crucial fundamentals in science and divine wisdom*”. He also added that “*an educational system without a goal and a direction will only confuse new generations; and, when not given enough consideration and thought on what to teach and what methods to follow for their moral education, the same system will turn those generations into nothing more than bellboys of knowledge*”. This clarity of intent emerged in other interviews as well. For example, according to P8, the goal of education should be “*growth over time*” that indicates student achievement and “*provides a better picture of teacher and school performance that is irrespective of the demographic differences in the communities they serve*”. P8 summed up the goal of education as “*I believe that it is the duty of public schools to serve the needs of their students*” while another interviewee, P4, stated that education should help a student “*to realize his potential*”.

Teacher Factor: The last prevailing theme was the teacher factor in education. This theme emerged mostly as a result of the favorable opinions of the research participants on Gulen-inspired educators. This could be the result of the HM participants’ living, working, and collaborating within a close-knit community. Thus, the views on teacher factor and quality were mostly reflective of the elevated views on Gulen-inspired educators. Fethullah Gulen names teachers (in general) as “*soul engineers*” and states with their help “*the child*

finds his/her own self, aligns his/her thoughts, merges with the culture of his/her ancestors, and sets sail to divine ideals". In other words, teachers are important mediums that help students construct their identity. Similarly, P8 considered teacher quality as *"the single most important factor influencing student outcomes"* and also stated that *"educators need to be aware of the cultural, demographic, socioeconomic as well as linguistic background of the community they are working with and provide an education that opens and broadens the opportunities available to the students"*. P7 stated that—limiting his views on Gulen-inspired educators—*"teachers and administrators are good samples; for the students are taking them as examples in their lives"*. Likewise, on Gulen-inspired educators P6 stated that teachers are/should be people *"who take their cultural values seriously and who try to be good examples for their students"*. P3 found the instructor's background and character a *"very important"* element and stated that *"even if you get the best technology, the best books, but the real educators ... if they don't care, the kids they won't be succeeding"*.

Fear of Persecution: A less subtle theme that emerged from the interviews was the fear of persecution. During the interviews, P4 was very reserved and his answers to interview questions were short. There was an impression that he wanted to get done as quickly as possible and leave. In a way, his demeanor symbolized the internal reluctance and the fear of persecution all other research participants displayed at different levels. The climate of all interviews, except for Fethullah Gulen's, was cautious. The initial hesitancy to accept interview requests and careful wording of interviewee answers brought up the theme.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The research question was "How do Gulen-inspired educators perceive education in these politically turbulent times?"

As the common saying goes, politics is not education, but education is political. On one hand there is the HM promoting education, inter-faith dialogue, tolerance, and charity for the well-being of the humankind through its schools, institutions, and its manpower across the globe; and on the other hand there are politicians, stakeholders, their supporters, and the politicized media adamantly determined to bring an end to it. In fact, the situation is much more complicated than that; this is not a fight between the former and the latter. In the case of the HM, this a struggle of *"democratic Islamism against Muslim autocracy"* (Fuller, 2014, p. 6) that has been going on for centuries. This Muslim autocracy professes itself through the JDP government's oppression on educational institutions with Gulen-inspired educators. For example, the Turkish government-backed hired Amsterdam and Partners LLP—a London-based law firm *"to expose allegedly unlawful conduct by the Gulen network worldwide"* (Pamuk, 2015) in 2015. Then the Amsterdam & Partners LLP law firm took legal action against Harmony Charter Schools in Texas [*"Complaint: Texas Education Agency (Harmony Public Schools)"*, 2016]. After the investigation, the Texas Education Agency's Special Investigation Unit *"has found that the allegation with regards to the violation of the Texas Public Funds Investment Act is unfounded"* (Texas Education Agency, 2016, p. 5). The case was dismissed. However, if such efforts succeed, it not only will put halt on the HM's contributions to education, it will also prevent the underserved populations from getting

quality education. The Turkish government's efforts to close those schools will impede the promising academic growth of the—pre-dominantly—Latino/a students attending these schools.

In these politically turbulent times, Gulen-inspired educators remain focused on their craft. Rather than react, they prefer to follow the Sufism-oriented teachings of Fethullah Gulen both in their practice and in their personal lives. They focus on being exemplary role-models to their students, helping them with good character development, and stay within a systematized and well-laid out pedagogical path. Their thoughts on education and education-related issues do not differ much from those of their western peers. For example, one of those scholars, Lafer (2014), states that schools “*work toward the full development of individuals in their humanity and the effective participation of such individuals in moving the society toward perfection*” (p. 10). This goes beyond the instruction of academic content and relates to the character development to which the individual Gulen-inspired educators pay attention. Moreover, he points out the teacher factor in educating students (particularly on democracy) and further states that “*only thoughtful teachers who understand the relationship of thoughtfulness to being and becoming more human (and this can only be known by experience thoughtfulness and its humanizing effects) can one teach well to democratic imperatives*” (p. 12). In sum, Gulen-inspired educators all expressed—albeit in different ways and at different levels—their common goal during the interviews which was similar to what most other educators would say: to help their students *make it* and to help them be the best they can by setting the example for them.

Lastly, as a result of recent political developments in Turkey, the HM and Gulen-inspired educators are forced to take up a new title: Diaspora. This is an involuntary step and a hard bullet to swallow for many Hizmet Diaspora (HD hereafter) participants; however, after Erdogan and the JDP regime “*fired thousands of educators, police, judges, prosecutors, journalists, and shut down (or taken over) schools, universities, businesses, and media outlets*” (Pandya, 2017, p. 31), and passed the Maarif (‘education’ in archaic Turkish) Foundation Bill to set up shop outside Turkey with a purpose to close the HD schools (“Is [Erdogan’s] Maarif Foundation Capable of Delivering Quality Education?”, 2017), this new diaspora title has become something that will define the community in the new millennium.

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Appendix A

Research Participants

Participant	Site	Test Scores	Philosophical Stance
2 White Turkish male in his 40s	East coast Private Boarding High School All-boys Non-descript exterior	2013 Average SAT scores: 406 in Writing, 523 in Math, 400 in Reading 2013 Average ACT scores: 21.7 in English, 27.4 in Math, 21.4 in Reading, 23.2 in Science, 22.9 in Writing, 23.9 Composite	Knowledgeable in general education Experienced educator Supportive and appreciative of the HM and its participants
3 White Turkish male in his 30s Well-traveled HM administrator	Midwest Private K-8 school Non-descript exterior	Unavailable New location-hard to reach data	Strong support to the HM and its educators
4 White Turkish male in his 30s HM administrator with advanced degree	Midwest Charter school administrator Interview at a hotel	Unavailable	Supportive of HM

5	<p>White Turkish male in his 30s</p> <p>Experienced HM administrator</p> <p>Head of 30+ charter schools</p>	<p>Midwest</p> <p>Headquarters located inside a large commercial building</p>	<p>(One of the schools in the same city as the HQ)</p> <p>In 2011 and 2012 combined: 45% met or exceeded state standards on ISAT, 49% met or exceeded state standards on PSAE, 73% graduate HS within four years, 21% achieved a combine score of at least 21 on ACT, 93% low income students, 15% ELL, more than 50% Latino, 30% Black, 4% White, 2% homeless</p>	Supportive of HM
6	<p>White Turkish male in his 40s</p> <p>Senior administrator in the HM</p>	Midwest	Unavailable	Strong support to HM, education, and teachers
7	<p>White Turkish male in his 50s</p> <p>Senior administrator in the HM</p>	<p>Midwest</p> <p>Higher education institute in a historical building</p>	Unavailable	Strong supporter HM teachers and education
8	<p>White Turkish male</p> <p>Charter school administrator</p>	<p>Western U.S.</p> <p>Charter schools</p>	Unavailable	Believes HM schools a role model for US public education, STEM foci
9	<p>HM administrator in a large private educational institution</p>	<p>Small rural city in Turkey</p> <p>Large, state-of-the-art private high school</p>	<p>(High school where interview took place)</p> <p>Most successful social sciences high school in Turkey according to data from State Student Selection and Placement System</p>	Believes HM schools a role model for all education

Appendix B
List of charter schools with Gulen-inspired educators in the U.S.

Count	State	School	Year Opened	Grades in 2015-16
1	Arizona	Daisy Early Learning Academy Tucson	Unknown	PreK
2	Arizona	Paragon Science Academy	2008	K-12
3	Arizona	Sonoran Science Academy Broadway	2008	K-8
4	Arizona	Sonoran Science Academy Davis-Monthan	2009	6-12
5	Arizona	Sonoran Science Academy Phoenix	2004	K-12
6	Arizona	Sonoran Science Academy Peoria	2013	K-8
7	Arizona	Sonoran Science Academy Tucson	2001	K-12
8	Arkansas	Lisa Academy North Elementary	Unknown	K-5
9	Arkansas	Lisa Academy North Middle	2008	6-8
10	Arkansas	Lisa Academy North High	Unknown	9-12
11	Arkansas	Lisa Academy West Middle	Unknown	6-8
12	Arkansas	Lisa Academy West High	Unknown	9-12
13	California	Bay Area Technology School	2004	6-12
14	California	Magnolia Science Academy 1-Reseda	2002	6-12
15	California	Magnolia Science Academy 2-Valley (Van Nuys)	2007	6-12
16	California	Magnolia Science Academy 3-Carson	2008	6-12
17	California	Magnolia Science Academy 4-Venice (Los Angeles)	2008	6-12
18	California	Magnolia Science Academy 5-Los Lobos (Reseda)	2008	6-12
19	California	Magnolia Science Academy 6-Palms (Los Angeles)	2009	6-8
20	California	Magnolia Science Academy 7-Northridge	2010	K-5
21	California	Magnolia Science Academy 8-Bell	2010	6-8
22	California	Magnolia Science Academy-Santa Ana (Costa Mesa)	2012	6-12
23	California	Magnolia Science Academy-San Diego	2005	6-8
24	California	Magnolia Science Academy-Santa Clara (San Jose)	2010	6-12
25	Colorado	Lotus School for Excellence	2006	K-12
26	D.C.	Harmony School of Excellence-DC PCS	2014	K-5
27	Florida	Broward Math & Science Schools-Margate	2014	K-6
28	Florida	Discovery Academy of Science Elementary & Middle School-Dunedin	2013	K-12
29	Florida	New Springs Schools K-8-Tampa	2011	K-8
30	Florida	Orlando Science Schools Elementary	2012	K-5

31	Florida	Orlando Science Schools Middle	2008	6-8
32	Florida	Orlando Science Schools High	2010	9-12
33	Florida	River City Science Academy Elementary-Jacksonville	2010	K-5
34	Florida	River City Science Academy Middle and High School-Jacksonville	2007	6-12
35	Florida	River City Science Academy-Innovation-Jacksonville	2013	K-8
36	Florida	Seminole Science Charter School-Lake Mary	2015	K-8
37	Florida	Tallahassee School of Math and Science	Unknown	K-8
38	Illinois	Chicago Math and Science Academy (CMSA)	2004	6-12
39	Illinois	Horizon Science Academy-Belmont	2013	K-7
40	Illinois	Horizon Science Academy-McKinley Park	2013	K-12
41	Illinois	Horizon Science Academy-Southwest Chicago	2014	K-12
42	Illinois	Quest Charter Academy Middle School-Peoria (verification pending)	2010	5-8
43	Illinois	Quest Charter Academy High School-Peoria (verification pending)	2010	9-12
44	Indiana	Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA)-Indianapolis North	2010	K-12
45	Indiana	Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA)-Indianapolis South	2013	K-8
46	Indiana	Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA)-Indianapolis West	2007	K-8
47	Michigan	Michigan Math and Science Academy-Center Line	2009	K-12
48	Minnesota	Minnesota Math and Science Academy-St. Paul	2014	K-6
49	Missouri	Frontier School of Excellence-Kansas City	2007	6-12
50	Missouri	Frontier School of Innovation-Kansas City	Unknown	K-3
51	Missouri	Frontier School of Innovation-Kansas City	2009	4-8
52	Missouri	Frontier School of STEM High School-Kansas City	2009	9-11
53	Missouri	Gateway Science Academy-St. Louis Fyler	2012	6-12
54	Missouri	Gateway Science Academy-St. Louis Smiley	2010	K-5
55	Missouri	Gateway Science Academy-St. Louis South	2010	K-12
56	Nevada	Coral Academy of Science Elementary-Reno	Unknown	K-4
57	Nevada	Coral Academy of Science Middle-Reno	2000	5-8
58	Nevada	Coral Academy of Science High-Reno	2000	9-12
59	Nevada	Coral Academy of Science-Las Vegas	2007	K-12

60	New Jersey	Bergen Arts and Science Charter School	2007	K-12
61	New Jersey	Hudson Arts and Science Charter School	2016	K-5
62	New Jersey	Passaic Arts and Science Charter School	2011	K-8
63	New Jersey	Paterson Arts and Science Charter School	2013	K-8
64	New Jersey	Paterson Charter School for Science and Technology	2004	K-12
65	New Jersey	Thomas Edison Energysmart Charter School	2012	K-8
66	New Mexico	Albuquerque School of Excellence	2010	K-12
67	New York	Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School	2004	7-12
68	New York	Rochester Academy Charter School	2008	7-12
69	New York	Syracuse Academy of Excellence Charter School	2003	K-12
70	New York	Utica Academy of Science Charter School	2013	6-9
71	North Carolina	Queen City STEM School-Charlotte	2015	K-6
72	North Carolina	Triad Math and Science Academy-Greensboro	2008	K-12
73	North Carolina	Triangle Math and Science Academy-Cary	2012	K-12
74	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Cincinnati	2005	K-8
75	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Cleveland Middle School	2005	6-8
76	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Cleveland High School	1999	9-12
77	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Columbus Elementary School	2008	K-5
78	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Columbus Middle School	2007	6-8
79	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Columbus High School	1999	9-12
80	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Dayton Downtown	2010	K-8
81	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Dayton Elementary School	2004	K-5
82	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Dayton High School	2009	6-12
83	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Denison Elementary School	2008	K-5
84	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Denison Middle School	2005	K-8
85	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Lorain	2009	K-12
86	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Springfield	2005	K-8
87	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Toledo	2004	K-12
88	Ohio	Horizon Science Academy-Youngstown	2010	K-8
89	Ohio	Noble Academy-Cleveland	2006	K-8
90	Ohio	Noble Academy-Columbus	2006	K-8
91	Oklahoma	Discovery School of Tulsa	2009	K-8
92	Oklahoma	Dove Science Academy-Oklahoma City	2001	6-12

93	Oklahoma	Dove Science Academy Elementary-Oklahoma City	2008	K-5
94	Oklahoma	Dove Science Academy-Tulsa	2000	6-12
95	Pennsylvania	Vision Academy Charter School-Lansdowne	2015	K-8
96	Pennsylvania	Young Scholars of Central Pennsylvania-State College	2005	K-8
97	Pennsylvania	Young Scholars of McKeesport-Pittsburgh	2015	K-5
98	Pennsylvania	Young Scholars of Western Pennsylvania Charter School-Pittsburgh	2011	K-8
99	South Carolina	Greenville Renewable Energy Education GREEN Charter School-Greenville	2013	K-9
100	Tennessee	Memphis School of Excellence-Memphis	2010	K-12
101	Texas	Harmony School of Excellence-Austin	2009	K-12
102	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Austin	2014	K-5
103	Texas	Harmony School of Political Science and Communication-Austin	2011	K-12
104	Texas	Harmony School of Science-Austin	2010	K-5
105	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Austin	2000	K-8
106	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Austin North (Pflugerville)	2008	6-12
107	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Brownsville	2014	K-12
108	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Bryan/College Station	2010	K-8
109	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Beaumont	2013	K-12
110	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Carrollton	2010	K-5
111	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Carrollton	2015	6-12
112	Texas	Harmony School of Business-Dallas	2012	K-12
113	Texas	Harmony School of Nature and Athletics-Dallas	2014	K-12
114	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Dallas	2010	K-12
115	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-El Paso	2009	K-12
116	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-El Paso	2006	K-12
117	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Euless	2014	K-5
118	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Euless	2014	6-12
119	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Fort Worth	2014	5-12
120	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Fort Worth	2014	K-5
121	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Garland	2014	6-12
122	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Garland	2010	K-5
123	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Grand Prairie	2014	K-8

124	Texas	Harmony School of Achievement-Houston	2015	K-5
125	Texas	Harmony School of Advancement-Houston	2010	9-12
126	Texas	Harmony School of Discovery-Houston	2010	6-12
127	Texas	Harmony School of Excellence-Houston	2006	K-8
128	Texas	Harmony School of Excellence Endeavor-Houston	2009	K-8
129	Texas	Harmony School of Exploration-Houston	2013	K-5
130	Texas	Harmony School of Fine Arts and Technology-Houston	2010	K-8
131	Texas	Harmony School of Ingenuity-Houston	2010	8-12
132	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-Houston	2010	6-8
133	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Houston	2010	K-8
134	Texas	Harmony Science Academy High-Houston	2000	9-12
135	Texas	Harmony Science Academy North West-Houston	2010	K-8
136	Texas	Harmony Science Academy West-Houston (Katy)	2013	K-12
137	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation- Laredo	2014	K-5
138	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Laredo	2012	6-12
139	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Lubbock	2014	K-12
140	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Odessa	2014	K-8
141	Texas	Harmony School of Excellence-San Antonio	2015	K-5
142	Texas	Harmony School of Innovation-San Antonio	2010	K-8
143	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-San Antonio	2006	6-12
144	Texas	Harmony School of Science High-Sugarland	2011	7-12
145	Texas	Harmony School of Science Houston-Sugarland	2008	K-6
146	Texas	Harmony Science Academy-Waco	2007	K-12
147	Utah	Beehive Science and Technology Academy-Sandy	2005	6-12
148	Wisconsin	Milwaukee Math and Science Academy	2011	K-8

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