

TURKISH MUSLIMS AND ISLAMIC TURKEY: PERSPECTIVES FOR A NEW EUROPEAN ISLAMIC IDENTITY?

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Abstract

The paper discusses the potential of Fethullah Gülen's thinking on the revival of core socio-ethical tenets of Islam to influence an emerging European Islamic identity. The long absence of any substantial Muslim population from the religious landscape of western Europe in the modern period began to end with the post-War immigration of Muslims from South Asia to the UK and other parts of Europe. But Muslims from other parts of the Islamic world have also established communities in Europe with their own, different expressions of Islam. The presence of Muslims represents a religio-cultural counterpoint to the projected 'post-Christian society of Europe', since they are now permanently settled within that society.

The encounter of 'Turkish Islam' (Anatolian & other) and the majority 'South Asian Islam' (with its diverse strands, Barelvi, Deobandi and others) in western Europe hints at the building of a new 'European Islamic' identity. Arguably, this twenty-first century 'European Islam' might be a synthesis of the 'Turkish' and the 'South Asian' expressions of Islam. Any disharmony, on the other hand, might kindle yet another rivalry in the heart of Europe. This paper considers whether Gülen's thought on community education based on the fundamentals of Islam could help build a positive and fresh expression of Islam that may reform the prevailing image of it as a cultural tradition that resorts to violence in order to redress grievances.

Introduction

It is a fact that societies have evolved in human history both in most edifying and shameful ways. There are significant references for the edification when humans first found fire, then the wheel and most recently the chip with which they have revolutionised their thought and behaviour, progress and creativity. However, the shameful historical data bring back the horrors of just the last century from holocaust to the Balkan conflict and the Rwandan genocides to the on going epicentres of conflict in the Middle east, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iraq to name a few. These polarities of creativity and dishonour glued to violence continue to mystify communities, demanding new routes to form society and community practice and to adapt to the rapidly changing world on a daily basis. Gülen's contribution to formation of community and society based on dialogue and tolerance, self sacrifice and altruism, avoidance of political and ideological conflict, taking action on a positive and harmonious way and taking responsibility¹ have had an infectious influence² on individuals and groups.

Fethullah Gülen has evoked a thought changing mechanism over the last three decades as a movement³ both within Turkey and several other parts of the world⁴ and has potential to

1 See Understanding of community within the Gülen Movement, <http://fethullahgulenconference.org.houston/proceedings/mhermansen.pdf>, An interview of Enes Ergene by Mercia Hermansen (University of Chicago). Sighted on 18 August 2007.

2 An overview of these activities and influence of Gülenian thought recorded by Hakan Yavuz some years ago is of rare significance to be footnoted here. (I am thankful to Yavuz for this impressive list). He views that Gülen's community is based on a complex web of business networks and controls a large media empire. It owns *Sizinti* (a scientific monthly), *Ekoloji* (an environment-related magazine), *Yeni Omit* (a theological journal), *Aksyon* (a weekly magazine), *Zaman* (a daily newspaper), *The Fountain* (English language religious publication), *Samanyolu TV* (I made a visit to this creatively established TV station and witnessed for myself the interest based channels consumable both to the local communities and Turkey's large Diaspora in Germany, US, Australia and the rest of Europe), and *Burc FM* Radio station. In addition to these media outlets, the community controls one of the fastest growing financial institutions, *Asya Finans*, which is backed by sixteen partners and has over half a billion US dollars in capital. Moreover, a powerful association of businessmen, *ISHAD* (*Hayatı Dayanışma Derneği*), which includes over 2000 businessmen and merchants, supports Gülen's educational activities. This infrastructure also includes universities and colleges, high schools, dormitories, summer camps, and over 100 foundations. Day-to-day activities are organized by a hierarchical management based on the tenets of trust, obedience and duty to the community. This structure is composed of businessmen, teachers, journalists, and students". See. Yavuz, M. Hakan, (1999) *Towards an Islamic liberalism? The Nurcu movement and Fethullah Gülen*, *Middle East Journal*, 53, 4 Autumn, 584-605.

3 In my reading of Gülenian community movement both in Turkey and in the Diaspora simultaneously has Islamic, nationalist, liberal, and modern characteristics. Its ability to reconcile traditional Islamic values with modern life and science has won a large, receptive audience. The group has even brought together divergent ideas and people, including the poor and the rich, the educated and the illiterate, Turks and Kurds, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims. Gülen's movement could be a model for the future of Islamic political and social activism and has created an archetypal canopy where ideas, thoughts devoid of political ideology, cultural roots, traditions, varying expressions of Islam without historical baggage can seek harmony in a practical way for all who wish to subscribe to a way of life deeply Qur'anic but positively modern.

4 It must be noted that more particularly Central Asia has been a focus in terms of education processes especially since the fall of the Soviet Union. "Statistics show that in January 2001 the movement in Kazakhstan had already 30 high schools and one university, welcoming 5,664 pupils and employing 580 teachers from Turkey. In the same period, 11 high schools and one university were established in Kyrgyzstan, with more than 3,100 pupils and 323 Turkish teachers. In Turkmenistan, the community controls 14 high schools and one university for 3,294 pupils and 353 teachers. Finally, in Uzbekistan (until September 2000, when all were closed because of a diplomatic crisis) 17 high schools and one international school, employing 210 teachers and welcoming 3,334 pupils, had been founded". Balci, B., (2002), *Central Asia: Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools*, *ISIM Newsletter*, 9, p.2. see www.Religiocope.com, sighted on 24 August 2007.

redefine what it rationally means to be Islamic and European at the same time. The current European Islamic voice which seems to be predominantly of South Asian heritage since World War II, requires encountering a different cultural manifestation of Islam in the Turkish heritage if a new phase and shape of Islam were to be evoked within the European Union into which Turkey's entry is a probability. This encounter is fundamental to the life of the 21st century Europe as it expands both as a demographic unit and an economic power even though there are visible and stark cultural, political, ethnic and epistemological differences embedded within.

Europe of Yesterday looking to Future

Today's Europe is associated with a geographical area, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the Ural Mountains in the East, to the Black sea, the Hellespont and the Aegean sea in the South east and from the Arctic Ocean in the North to the Mediterranean Sea in the South. Europe's Eastern borders continue to move and for many centuries. River Don remained the border until in the 18 cc. and it was pushed back to Ural Mountains subsequently. However, there is no specific category as to why a certain border may remain as the defining factor for the East-West geopolitical demarcation. Edward Said contentiously reiterates in his Magnum Opus, *Orientalism*, moves from East-West debate to Orient-Occident essentiality and its operationalism. He observes that "men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient and Occident are man made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it a reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other".⁵ In fact the Eastern border could have easily being drawn at any point between 'Europe' and 'Asia'. There are no political ethnic or cultural differences to give precise indication of where 'Europe' ends and 'Asia' begins. Russia lies to the East and the West of the Ural range and the debate remains that why Russia does or does not belong to Europe. The borders are so fluid that one could even think that 'Europe' is just a Western appendage of Asia which in geographical terms is only as big as India.

Turkey is yet another classic case as the main part of Turkey lies to the east of the Aegean sea, and so geographically belongs to Asia (in fact it was called Asia minor). Its Western part, across the sea around the city of Istanbul, is considered European, and represents the remnant of the former Ottoman empire, that for several centuries encompassed a large part of South East Europe. Karel Blei says, "that the word Europe and Asia probably derive from Semitic or Phoenician words: Europe from ereb (sunset, evening) Asia from acu (sunrise or morning). Asia and Europe belong together, as morning and evening, as Orient and Occident".⁶

Europe and its Plurality

Europe from its very genesis has been a land mass of highly complex geo-political, religio-cultural, socio-economic and ethno-tribal composite. Tribes and nations that settled in Europe brought with them their own cultures, languages and religions and what is Europe today is a conglomeration and a ever changing patterns and behaviours of people, customs and rituals. It's a nation of nations, culture of cultures but over centuries had developed not so

5 Said, E., (reprint, 1995), *Orientalism*, (Penguin Books), 4-5.

6 Blei, K., (2002), *Freedom of Religion and Belief: Europe's Story*, (Assen, Royal Van Gorcum) 4.

much as a geographical entity but a cultural entity characterised by values it has formed itself to uphold. If there is an overarching recognisable element that makes this mosaic tenable over several centuries, then it is arguably described as the Greco-Roman culture as the basic determinants of European civilisation with Christianity being the medium through which this Greco-Roman culture was persevered and sustained. It could be argued that Europe came into being out of Athens, Rome and Jerusalem. Athens presenting art, science and Greek culture and other forms of life, Rome the state, law and justice systems and Jerusalem, the Judeo-Christian religious tenants. Christianity invariably becomes a synergy of a faith of historical Israel and with the spirit of Greece mingled with Roman military endeavours and its zest for expansion. The new Europe will now need to respond to the growing and formidable Islamic presence within Europe side by side with the Judeo-Christian paradigm and its centuries old influence on every aspect of life in Europe from art to politics and economics to social welfare.

Difference and Hybridity

Europe's difference is fundamental to its very being and its capacity for hybridisation of its people, cultures, tribes, languages, customs and rituals and is natural to its identity as a land mass infested with skills and innovative behaviours. It is this unique civilisational reconstruction and that Europe can only be understood and grasped in all its divergent facets. It is sociologically acceptable that difference is a direct result of hybridity which is a natural process of societal growth and expansion. Intermixing is still a taboo in certain societies while unknowingly those very societies have undergone serious processes of hybridisation despite socio-cultural and even political pressures. This process too is natural to Europe as previous socio-political engineering projects seeking to establish purity of ethnicity and nationhood have failed historically. Europe's ethnic, national or tribal claims for sense of chosen-ness or purity may be found in individual nation states or in national debates across the borders, but such claims are automatically made redundant as present priorities have been shifted from political nationalism, nuances of statehood or national pride to a new sense of being European. This sense of direction has been enhanced by the processes of globalisation and the unprecedented migrations patterns⁷ that Europe is experiencing since the primary migrations in the aftermath of the World War II.

Turkey and Modernity

My recent visit to Istanbul indicated that it is a growing European city. Secularity is rampant even though there are hundreds of minarets to be sighted from a boat ride in the Bosphorus as if to signify the possibility within Islam to open a new critical chapter to modernity and its passion for science and advancement. It seems that difference and hybridity is conspicuous not just in Istanbul, but also in other smaller medium size cities like Konya, Izmir, Kayseri and Efes in Kapadokya which were part of my exposure. Turkey and its 'Muslim population' symbolise an acute evidence of hybridity from Istanbul to Efes with a history of vibrant Christian presence and its folk expression and the Konya-based expression of Islam with the 'veneration' of the tomb of Mavlavi Rumi to the similar manifestation of the through

⁷ There is a clear inter-European re-migrations taking place of those who sought after political asylum and refuge in countries like Norway Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands to Great Briton, especially of the Somali heritage. Inner city of Leicester of East Midlands in the UK is a good example of these new settlements. My own neighbour is fluent in Finish and perhaps is her second language.

monumental icon of Rumi in the heart of Izmir. Both Konya and Izmir which are now Muslim places of pilgrimage depict a symbiosis of Islam throbbing to give new expression in a modern secular state, even though there are conspicuous democratic deficits in governance and structures which include the military institutions of the present regime. This internal hybridisation is what ‘Turkish Muslims’ are expressing, and my reading of Turkey in 2007, is Islamic but in a Turkish idiom. These are clear signs of a people in a hybridised disposition despite what their religious and political norms require them to become. Turkey even though is majority Muslim, yet their behaviour and customs indicate that they are no exception to the changing and challenging forms of life which they either adopt by choice or are made to embrace with or without consent as the defining criteria are beyond their control. Gülen in his extensive writing perhaps does not name it this process as hybridisation, however he passionately identifies hybridity and difference in his own unique way that “it is a condition for the development of nations that the individuals of which they consist should have the same aim. It is not possible for a community, although it shows activity, to develop and make progress while some of its members say ‘black’ and others say ‘white’ for the same thing.”⁸ Future of Europe alongside the South Asian and other Muslims and ‘Turkish Muslims’⁹ no doubt would create such a symbolic and actual difference as Gülen reiterates would positively contribute to the well being of Islam itself and its theological and fundamental ethico-spiritual openness to science and technology, philosophy and politics, culture and art, family and society.

South Asian Islam in Europe, a ‘Home Away From Home’

It sounds really awkward to categorise Islam and its heritage with ethno-nationality or any other contemporary divisions. However, it has also become just impossible to define Islam or its traditional heritage without modern socio-cultural tools and mechanisms to fully understand Islam and its progressive developments. If one component is undermined the other loses its meaning and integrity. Hence, this section purposefully deploys the determined regionalism of Islam even though it would campaign for a theological sense of ummah¹⁰ which some consider is yet to be revived or functions as a mere concept or virtually as non-existent.

It is in this sense that South Asian Islam is distinctly significant to Europe more specifically since the World War II.¹¹ There is a conspicuous absence of Islamic presence and activism in

8 Gülen, M.F., (1996), *Criteria or the Light of the Way 1*, (Truostar London Ltd), 44.

9 Turkish contingency demographically out numbers significantly the entire population of other Muslims who have settled in Europe. This phenomenon is unique to Europe. It is my view that Gülen in fact has prepared an infrastructure for the Muslims to deal intelligently and wisely with modernity and its challenges. Invariably, then it would be possible for the Muslims of new Europe to conspicuously counteract the un-Islamic portrayal of Islam and its misrepresentation through martyrdom-paradise concept by suicide-terror tactics. It is the responsibility of the Muslims have to portray themselves as an engaged faith community and to rectify its present image as painted by the media.

10 It is understood as the universal community, house of Islam or more popularly brotherhood of Islamic roots.

11 The main influx of South Asian Muslims is now considered a post World War II primary migration into Europe, particularly to UK. 1.8 million Muslims in UK which is 2.8% of the total population of UK (*Sources: Total population - Office for National Statistics, 2001 figures; Muslim population - Office for National Statistics, 2001 figures*). The second being the Turks into Germany as Guste Arbeiter for the reconstruction of its battered infrastructure. 3 million comprising 3.6% of the total population. (*Sources: total population - Federal Statistical Office, 2004 figures; Muslim population - Federal Ministry of the Interior estimate*). France attracted Muslims from most of her former colonies as if returning to the linguistically familiar terrain, comprising 5-6 millions which is about 8.96% of the total French population (*Total population - National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies, 2004 figures; Muslim population - French government estimate*). These figures indicate nearly a 10 million in just three countries

Europe between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the influx French speaking North African and the South Asian Muslims¹² in the heart of Europe as if surrendered to the socio-political and religio-cultural voices then spearheading the European priorities in the context of the global changes. What I wish to argue here is the fact that the internal tussle between the lofty concept of ummah integral to the theological axiom of tawhid¹³ and risalah¹⁴ and the diversity of regionalism of Islamic ways of life. This regionalism is further manifested within the South Asian Muslim community which is predominantly settled in the United Kingdom.

There are three main regional Muslim groups which can be identified now settled in UK. The first the Pahadi-Urdu speaking Kashmiri-Pakistanis and Punjabi speaking Muslims, secondly the Gujarati-Hindi speaking East African Indians and other Indian Muslims and thirdly the Bangladeshi- Bangla-Syelheti speaking Muslims. These three major categories have in them each of their distinctiveness and multiplicity¹⁵ and these differences emerge and subside in varying degrees both within and in responding to the societal influences and cultural assaults to that distinctiveness which they wish to preserve, perhaps more as a survival strategy than a regrouping mechanism even though it not may look so. These patterns of groups behaviour is unique to many religious and cultural groups and is symbolic of settlement period and adjustment to the alien structures and the unknown socio-cultural patterns yet to be fully grasped.

South Asian Muslims were or are still perhaps at crossroads with a view of carving out a 'home away from home' which I think was a strong psychosocial element at least to the first generation of immigrants becoming nostalgic about the 'home' they left and the struggle they have gone through to carve out 'a home' here in Europe. This sense of in-between-ness perhaps is no longer a pain as the first generation has now seen their offspring and the extended families becoming more active and seemingly coping better than them during their early years of arrival in the country. Second, third and fourth generations have no other 'home' except in Europe, they would visit the ancestral village, meet their cousins, distant relatives, enjoy the tasty summer mangoes, but weeks later would be back in Europe for their work and regular way of life. Islam for these new generations is an enigmatic dimension. They are the offspring of a cultural Islam in which the religious Imam was both revered as the chief instructor and the formator of the life of a Muslim. Whereas, even though there are 'home grown Imams' yet most remain prayer leaders and madrassa¹⁶ teachers except a few who have taken a socio-political role. The latter group even though has adopted some mechanism to communicate Islam in the context of Britain and Europe, yet they face a Herculean task to

of Western Europe and the present expanded EU perhaps has at least over 12 million without counting the Turkish Muslims who comprise 68 million which is 99% of its total population (*Sources: Total population - Turkish State Institute of Statistics, 2003 figures; Muslim population - US State Department*).

12 These two Muslim groups that populated Europe in my view are culturally distinct, and different in every way. They brought with them a certain continental specifics in their patterns of reasoning, social behaviour, adaptation, settlement and cohesion. They may be all Muslims but very different Muslims in every definable way. What the North African and other Afro-continental Muslims have brought to France is different to what the South Asian Muslim have brought and contributed to the UK. The primary migrations took place between early 1950s until end of 1970.

13 The singularity and oneness of Reality, Allah.

14 The prophethood and the messengership of the last divine emissary, Muhammad Al-Mustafa (S)

15 Some of the sub categories could be identified as Sunni, Shia and other Islamic schools of thought (Berelvi, Deobandi) and other numerous caste, feudal, tribal and linguistic groups

16 Popularly known as schools of early Quranic learning. Some describe them as supplementary classes. These classes are substantially popular among the Diaspora Muslim communities in Europe, both young male female students attend these schools.

convince their own community the importance of diversifying the global portrayal of Islam and to maintain a critical distance to the cultural, linguistic, caste and tribal corridors which are part of the 'baggage' brought with them.

South Asian manifestation of Islam in Europe is distinct for several reasons. Firstly, its immigrant nature and adaptation and settlement process; secondly, the expressive but at times over assertive regionalism with historical and cultural nuances and thirdly is the practice of Islam and its way of life with South Asian roots in the heart of a world of difference in Europe. Fourthly it is clear that some Muslim communities have migrated from being a majority and now having to live both as an ethnic and a religious minority is a psychological trauma which requires a healing process and an acculturation mechanism. These are not simple challenges for any community to undergo, socially, culturally and religiously. It is in this context that I argue that there is an astute possibility of a critical but enriching mutually beneficial encounter between South Asian idiom of Islam and the Turkish manifestation of Islam as Turkey begins to interact more with Europe, which is a flight from pressed upon and self-imposed isolation from the geopolitical and religio-cultural activities of the world to the West of Istanbul.

South Asian Muslims now have to recognise that nearly 70 million Muslim population had been just concentrated in one single country which will invariably impact upon the more known Islamic way of life in Western Europe since World War II. Islamic Turkey has a new responsibility to encounter this sister Muslim community or communities that have settled to embrace the life of Western Europe now over a half century. There would hardly be any no-go areas for these two culturally different Muslim families. It is my view that the celebrated mystical strand expressed in Sufi tradition within Islam would be one great bridge builder between these two worlds of Islam as both Turks and South Asians have had access to Sufi tradition and their revered spiritual masters across all schools of thought within Islam.

Rediscovering and Redeeming Islam in Europe

Islamic presence in Europe was a constant historical factor since 717CE when the Arab armies under the command of Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed the Mediterranean and invaded Europe. Many fierce battles and conflicts have been a regular feature to assert one's space and political claims. However, its 'golden age' in par with the Spanish Jewry and their intellectual and spiritual growth mark the religious freedom and coexistence within the continent and the mixture of coexistence and rivalry is a hallmark. There is a perceived fear and designated danger bestowed on Islam and Muslims since 9/11 as the enemy of the West. Historical rivalries between and among the Abrahamic traditions and the vilification of both the prophet of Islam and its Bedouin origins have been rejuvenated in political rhetoric and slandering which has supported the gross generalising Huntington thesis of clash of civilisations, igniting bitter memories of past wars and untold sufferings inflicted on one another. Some sections of the European Muslim community are torn apart culturally in a situation of in-between-ness. It's a politico-cultural uncertainty¹⁷ either to be belonged in Europe or to continue to live like an

17 It is my view that Both South Asian Muslims and the Turkish Muslims live in this *politico-cultural uncertainty*. South Asian Muslims are perplexed about the complexity of integration processes in the adopted land without compromising their core beliefs and attached values, even though individual Muslims may have embraced certain aspects of European life and even values uncritically. Turkish Muslims are torn between their historical Islam and the new demands of the politically assertive secular state and promotion of its values. These two issues are at the heart of the European Muslim struggle to live and express themselves both as Europeans and Muslims.

alien, an immigrant with a ‘myth of return’ but without an idea where to return to. It is in this context that Islam in Europe requires a rediscovery of its historical credentials as a religious faith glued to a system of law, governance and social care. It is Muslims who need to engage alongside their allies in this soul searching self discovery and Islamic selfhood in Europe.

Gülenian thought is a key to this self-discovery as he does not portray Islam as a political project to be implemented at one’s own whim and fancy. For him it depicts a repository of discourses and encounters that are spiritually charged and ethically motivating to build strength and fortify a society with justice and compassion. He is genius in ‘redeeming’ Islam and Muslims from historically inbuilt sense of undue protectionism, as if a burden and a feeling of guilt bestowed on them by their bygone generations.¹⁸

The future of Europe is a complex reality. Islam and its current manifestations challenge all institutions to seek avenues to understand it as the second most influential faith, alive and active in Europe but in most diverse capacities. There are two positions seemingly functional. Firstly, while Islam is well rooted in an inspirational and a formative way for its adherents from its inception, yet secondly there are some operational waves led by groups of Muslims within contemporary history, seemed to have (mis)used and indulged in un-Islamic ways, bringing destruction, suspicion, political rivalry and shame on itself with terror tactics. This challenge from within Islam must be critically appraised not only just as a sloganised political assault on the West as the sole enemy of Islam but also such acts have evoked a deconstruction of Islam, Islamic theology, practice and invoked interpretation of Islam to suit group agendas. The first position must be rediscovered to portray Islam’s way of life as a positive to contributor to the life and progress of Europe which has been covered with misunderstanding and years of intellectual neglect by the Western academia. The second wave of Islam must be redeemed as this position is untenable even as a structure to redress grievances with recourse to violence. Europe of tomorrow can no longer be a battle field as it now contained world’s most diverse societies with extensive human resourcefulness, competence, heritage and wealth that can be shared with the rest of the world.

Gülen’s faith based movement contains vital ethico-social parameters that can set out a new discourse between Islam and modernity. Gülen was also influenced by Said Nursi¹⁹ who was of the opinion that certain dimensions of non believers may be harmful to human progress. However, Gülen goes beyond and offers tolerance positively towards secularists and non-believers in Turkey. This act is not just about promoting multiculturalism but an act of incessant campaign for an inclusive society where baseless religious rivalry leading to conflict and instability which for him is the root cause of institutional decay and failed states of the present day.²⁰ Gülen revisits the fundamentals of Islam, offers an ethical basis for governance and justice, economics and trade, international relations and political maturity.

These socio-anthropological ingredients are fundamental to an integrated functionality of a society. Is there anything rediscovered in Turkish Muslims or Islamic Turkey with this duality of the secular state with its throbbing religiosity beneath the surface? If Islam is to be

18 An interview with Fethullah Gülen, (2005) Translated from original Turkish version by Zeki Saritoprak and Ali Unal, *The Muslim World* pp. 447-467. See this entire interview for a substantial exposition of Gülen’s proposition of the self discovery of and redeeming Islam and that I suggest in above paragraphs.

19 Born in 1878, village of Nurs, Bitlis Province, passed away in March 1960, Urfâ was an Islamic thinker from Turkey of Kurdish origin and the author of the *Risale-i Nur* Collection, a Qur’anic commentary exceeding five thousand pages. He was also known as Bediüzzaman by his followers, which means “the wonder of the time.

20 Aras B., & Caha O., (2000) Fetullah Gülen and his Liberal “Turkish Islam” Movement, *MERIA*, Vol.4 No. 4, p. 4

rediscovered and redeemed in Europe then Turkish model through the thought processes of Gülen and the faith-based movement need to be taken seriously as it offers and outshines as a living precursor to this antinomy.

Self search, a Path to Rediscovery of Identity

Rediscovering the self-identity is the roadmap for a progressive path of understanding the whole in which the self is a unique participant and not necessarily an absolute icon of power, prestige and hegemony. The construction of the other is healthy as long as the other remains a criterion for the self to be reminded that the self has meaning and usefulness with the active existence of the other. The construction of the prominence of the self has been a key to the dominance of the self over the other, creating a ‘purity theory’, absolutising truth claims, exclusive ethnic roots and determined territoriality.

Europe is no exception to these dynamics even within liberal democratic dispensations. The notion of the self and the other is fundamental to the rediscovery of both the European Islam and Europe itself as a political unit, without which Europe will remain a fortress Europe mindset. Self rediscovery therefore is significant for Islam as a reactivated presence especially within the context of current global events in order to portray itself as a politically and economically productive element. They together can even challenge the trade-politics and economic agendas of the financial institutions and their designs for world development and global governance. Such would be the calibre of cooperation and mutuality that new European communities are able to muster for a Europe with a soul, wiser and generous.

Islam as a faith tradition must also be redeemed from its self imposed apathetic sense of aloofness which it sometimes portrays without a healthy critique of modernity in this age of globalisation and to shun the disparaging levels of victim syndrome. There are three apparent issues for the European Muslims. Firstly, how best the Muslims themselves disassociate the gross misrepresentation of Islam which is a religion of peace being used to redress grievances and its recourse to violent means to achieve designed objectives? Secondly how best the South Asian, North African and Arab Muslims in Europe are able to relate to their fellow Turkish Muslims, living in a secular state, who have links to Western apparatus of governance and style of living. Thirdly, it is a fact Muslims of South Asian whether migrated from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, East and North Africa or the Arab world who have now settled in Europe have come from societies either they have been a majority or a minority. Depending on their majority-minority social consciousness of pre migration situation has largely contributed to the adaptation mechanisms of these early immigrants and determined the processes of their behaviour and other cultural patterns distinct to each group.²¹

Ihsan Yilmaz observes that “Turkey is one of the very first Muslim countries that encountered the modern West and attempted to respond to the challenges posed by the Western power and

21 An example would be the case of Kashmiri- Pakistanis who were the majority whose population is largely concentrated in Northern cities with exception to Luton in Bedfordshire, UK. They hail from the two districts of Mirpur and Kotly (Pakistani part of Kashmir, also designated by some as Azad Kashmir (free). They migrated as the dominant group and suddenly found themselves as a minority which required a massive psychosocial adjustment apart from being socially and culturally relocated even though by choice. Whereas, the East African Indians who migrated during and the post Idi Amin regime already lived, adjusted as a minority within their African situation. Their remigration to different parts of Europe, more particularly to UK seem to have made their adaptation processes with a less baggage of a majority-minority consciousness.

civilisation”.²² Was or was it not the Republicans that paved the way to understand cultural Muslims of Turkish society? If they did attempt then was Islam undermined or was Islam gained a Turkish flavour? A good example was that Qur’an was translated into vernacular Turkish instead of its use in traditional Arabic version. Was Turkey then an exception? It was obvious that a secularisation process might have been accelerated by the staunch Republicanism for a state to function in their vision for governance distancing both Islam and Sharia.

I found in my sojourns that the ‘official Islam in Turkey’ cold and numbed to dialogue and encounter the mixture of intense folk religious practices perhaps institutionalised in some cohesive way via Sufi expression from Istanbul to Konya, Efus, Izmir and Kayseri. Would it be the modern Turkish state with its secular project that is capable of changing Islam or is it the collective religiosity of the masses that would be the key to humanising the secular state, naturalising it to hear the different voices of the collective? Aras and Caha jointly in their analysis reiterates that “Gülen’s goals are simultaneously to Islamize the Turkish national ideology and to Turkify Islam”²³ which is a creative way of distancing both political nationalism and political Islam and their ideologisation processes which according to him is not true to the spirit of Islam.

Religiosity and Transition

Islam in Europe is the second largest faith tradition, and the proposition to rediscover Islam may sound as if it has lost its identity as a faith in Europe. Currently it appears to be embroiled in a state of flux, transition and definitive change, hence creates an obvious opportunity to seek with wisdom and spiritual maturity. It is in this sense that Islam as a European institution required now to plunge into a fuller engagement in being not so much competitive and reactive, instead to constructively contribute to the expanding socio-political, religio-cultural, economic and business life of Europe. Theological Islam contains sufficient material within not only to comment on these strata of life but also to abundantly and critically dispense its value based principalities not just for Muslims but for the well being of all.

Europe even though claims that its foundations are built on Judeo-Christian patterns of thinking and a framework, but in practice it’s by and large currently is a post Christian society. It also struggles to carve out its own European-ness and identity with a rapid expansion of the membership of the European Union with its ever growing radical migratory patterns which the current European governments have mismanaged most times both at policy level and also in practical terms. In this sense its not only the Muslims or other minorities that struggle to locate their identity amidst the majority but also the majority is at crossroads for a self-definition. It is known that a time of transition is a time of threat and fear but also an opportune time for positive change and hope.

European Muslims are almost demanded by history to seize the moment as every nation state, culture, nationality, ethnic group and religious community is at a critical juncture repositioning each within the context of rapidly changing society. Defining a group, identity and perhaps its very survival is now determined by the existence and the productivity of the other. Self can define itself and have meaning in relation to the other. Hence the majority requires

22 Yilmaz, I., State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey, *The Muslim World*, 95,3 July 2005, 385. (I am thankful to Yilmaz for this well research article as it provides a key overview to the post 1923 developments in Turkey).

23 Op.cit. Aras & Omer (2000) p.3

a minority, Muslims in Europe will rediscover their potential in relation to the potentialities that they discover in their fellow European religious and ethnic communities vis-à-vis.

Gülen's Social Formula

Gülenian thought and perspectives on *istighrag* (immersion) which means “absorption, diving into, becoming deeply involved in, denotes transportation by joy, oblivion of the world, the cleansing of the heart of worldly worries”,²⁴ with which he says that one is filled with wonder, and one travels between love and witnessing truth that finally rest in the divine command. Gülen sums up his view on immersion with *hurriaya* (freedom) as being freed from selfishness and self-conceit or the evil commanding self which always pursue evils to ‘die before you die’²⁵ The real *falah* (enshrining success) of an individual or collective pursuits are imbedded in goodness and virtue. Gülen suggests a new social behaviour which can be found in fundamentals of Islam, not exclusively for Muslims, but for all who pursue honourable social interaction. The South Asian Muslims in a geopolitical sense may feel that they would be dominated by Turkish Muslims which need not be a fear but could well be a counterpart to a revival of a new spirituality of East-West encounter in the West.

Gülen in a radical way attempts to instil into this encounter a character formation through processes of education at all levels of society. It seems to me that he is articulating that it's neither the Ottomans nor the Moguls and their expression of Islam that Europe needs now to resuscitate a social conscience, religious faith, intellectual acumen, economic justice and moral principles and to help evolve a society that can deliver respect, honour and freedom. South Asian Islam has taken its roots now in the European soil and time is right to feel ‘at ease and homely’ and its encounter with the Turkish form of Islam (Anatolian) would be historical in Europe and fascinating sociologically.

Gülen and Democracy

The historical burdens continue to shadow them in their new found lands in which they have settled and some seem to attempt to rectify the past which is long gone. As I perceive Gülen's proposition of ‘democracy education’ becomes crucial as he believes that democracy is the only viable system for governance and structural development of a polity. Democracy essentially means the rule of the people, therefore meaningful democracy must be based on “an organisational structure that permits isolated individuals to enter the domain of decision making by pooling their limited resources, educating themselves and others formulating ideas and programmes that they can place in the political agenda and work to realise it. In the absence of such organisation, political democracy is the domain of elite groups that command resources, based on ultimately on their control of the private economy”.²⁶ However, Gülen view of democracy goes a step further than Chomsky, when he points to the soul of democracy that is “based on righteousness and reality”²⁷ which I view is a typically Anatolian analysis²⁸ which actually is the nerve centre of the Gülenian thought. Gülen lucidly but firmly

24 See. Gülen, F., <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/2097/7/>, sighted on 05/08/07

25 See Ibid. <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/1990/7/>.

26 Chomsky, N., (1987), *On Power and Ideology* (The Managua Lectures 1986) South End Press, USA, p.3

27 Gülen M. F., (2001) *A Comparative Approach to Islam and Democracy*, SAIS Review, XXI, 2 Summer-Fall, p.134.

28 I thought footnoting what I mean here. Anatolian analysis (phraseology is mine) is based on an attitude of tolerance, eliminating harsh restriction and rash judgement. It fosters and injects profuse influence to care for freedom to

illustrates his own argument and provides evidence from within Islam beyond Chomsky's analysis of democracy and hegemony, that "Islam does not propose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a government's general character, leaving it to the people to choose the type and form of government according to time and circumstances".²⁹

Gülenian Bridge-building Approach to the 'Big & Small' in Europe

There was at least a sense of 'big and small nation states' dynamics both in the post World War II period and during the Cold War era causing a real East-West divide, each having public and clandestine whistle blowers supporting each political camp. Hence, it was rightly called the Cold War, potentially at war but never fought a single, even though the political gurus were cocksure that such was eminent during almost a half century. However, Turkey with its enigmatic geopolitical circumstances has remained at least symbolically transcontinental because of its Ottoman residue, yet developing strong links with the West while fostering relations with the East more specifically with its special affinity to the central Asian people.

Turkey has involved in both creating and sustaining many regional and International organisations³⁰ since its embrace of republicanism in 1923. These European and international associations, Turkey's internal radicalism, the zest for a post-Ottoman political restructuring and the Istanbul-elitism have all shaped a secular society achievable and workable in Turkey. This brand of Turkish secular agenda has publicly distanced itself from the concept of both theocracy and the symbiotic nature of traditional Islam and governance which in theological sense is fundamental to Islam. Gülen states that "the details (relating to Islamic governance) of such issues have been entrusted to the passing of time. The divine commands and the prophetic suggestions about politics, state and the ruling community have been interpreted in diverse ways, resulting in different manifestations and various forms throughout history. Qur'an has addressed all these groups (from Bedouins to others such as Jews, Christians, and perhaps Zoroastrians too) considering their own understanding, approaches, views, evaluations and even lives".³¹

It is with this crucial entry into a world of debate, controversy, opportunity, and discourse on religion, governance and modernity that Fethullah Gülen innovatively introduces views, ideas and praxis³². In my view, Gülen speaks intensely of Islamic praxis fundamentally Qur'anic

practice all varied democratic forms of life.

29 Op.cit., Gülen (2001).

30 It is a founding member of the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, a member state of the Council of Europe since 1949, and of NATO since 1952. Since 2005, Turkey has been in accession negotiations with the European Union, having been an associate member since 1963. Turkey is also a member of the G20, which brings together the 20 largest economies of the world.

31 Op.cit., p.445. N.B. All in italics is added to further understand the quote.

32 The use of the transliterated Greek word 'praxis' indicates rather a complex set of meanings to understand its roots in modern English parlance. Praxis or practice does not mean simply action or activism in opposition to theory. It brings out what modern scholars call for a dialectics of theory and praxis. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educationist used this word (praxis) as something that falls conceptually in parlance with a word like pedagogy. Pedagogy and praxis make the core of what they articulate. (The liberation theologians of South America use this word extensively in their literary word and in their education processes of basic human communities which may be defunct now (according to conservative estimates) but in fact are vibrant in their own Latino ways which both Europeans and, perhaps Asians may not fully understand. "Praxis is not blind action, deprived of intention or of finality. It is action

but freshly compatible beyond the medieval definitiveness of interpretation of certain fundamentals of Islam. Gülen unequivocally and devoutly respects and honours the primordial religiosity expressed in the Qur'an and the Allah-experience unique to the prophet of Islam. Gülen's genius is that he roots his discourse within the historical tradition of Islam but introduces a fresh way to understand Islam and to adopt it to the contemporary issues of political, scientific, cultural and social paradigms which he thinks are part of the praxis of Islam. For him Islam without praxis is empty and it must speak to the modern men and women as relevant as it was during the time of the prophet. It is in this sense that Gülenian thought offers a bridge building approach to the difficult issues that Islam is facing under the current more vociferous manifestations of Islam on the world arena.

The unique character of Gülen's movement lies in its attempt to revitalise traditional values as part of modernizing efforts such as the Turkish state's official modernization program. Thus far, it has had some success as it attempts to harmonize and integrate the historically diverse lands of Turkey with its socio-political affinity with central Asian people and reconcile hundreds of years of tradition with the demands of modernity which is not an easy task. In brief, Gülen seeks to construct a Turkish-style of Islam as much as the Ottomans attempted to Islamicise Turkish nationalism, re-create a legitimate link between the state and religion, while Gülen emphasizes democracy and tolerance, and encourage links with the Turkic republics opening them to modernity and its challenges. Gülen aspires for his nation and people to look towards both the East and the West. East for Islam and its spiritual roots, civilisation, and moral code of conduct while he urges to look geopolitically to the West with Islam's own praxis of inquiry, science and the sense of Qur'anic justice. Gülen's socio-spiritual project is simple, not even as complex as that of Gandhi whose socio-political responsibility was enormous and critical on religio-political lines to find a solution for the political mess that was being created purely on religious lines even though his project was a united India, an abortive dream. There were no victors in the freedom project of India. However, all can be participants of a victory if the European dream can be achieved through wise political decisions and cross fertilisation of ideas and views not for a fortress-Europe but a borderless Europe to cultivate critical inquiry and freedoms for all. It's dream worth dreaming in Gülenian sense.

Gülen's movement seems to have no intention to evolve into a political party or seek political power even though his critics suspected of him such community based agitation within Turkey. The militarist elite continue to be varying of the Gülen movement as the Ankara regime abhors any potential socio-political, religio-cultural threat to its survival. On the contrary, Gülen continues a long standing and profound personal affinity with the Sufi tradition of seeking to address the spiritual needs of people to build work ethics, social and moral behaviour and to educate the masses and in fact has provided some stability to the nation in times of turmoil.

Like many previous Sufi figures including the thirteenth-century unique mystic, Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi³³ for whom Gülen has admiration and devotion has influence in Turkey and become

and reflection. Men and women are human being because they are historically constituted as beings of praxis" See. Freire, P., (1985), *The politics of Education*, (trans.) Macedo, D., (Garvey Publishers, Massachusetts) 154-155.

33 My visit to Turkey included rejuvenated my early years of admiration for Mavlana Rumi and his genius insight into spirituality, poetry and theatrical mysticism. My special visit to Konay and Izmir (Gülen's own place of teaching career for a long time had been also in Izmir) indicated that Islam (but in Turkish manifestation) is very much the heartbeat of the people even though a stark secularity is being portrayed in the public space of Istanbul. I believe that each Turkish province with its own rural-urban cultural juxtaposition will also portray the heterogeneity of Islam

a considerable spiritual force to distance totalisation of political Islam. Sufi expression of Islam has brought understanding and value to pluralism and diversity as found in the Qur'an to the contemporary society. Gülen brings Muslim Turkey to express its Turkish Islam in an inimitable way so that Turkish Islam can be a catalyst in devising a new understanding of a European Islam beyond the traditional definitions of being Arabic, North African or South Asian. It is right time that these three expressions of Islam understand that there is more about cultural expressions Islam than what has been familiar and known to them.

Gülen's fresh approach opens this intra-Islamic interaction and encounter between different expressions of Islam that have found its roots in Europe. It is appropriate that Turkish Islam with its nation state's approach to the secular paradigm and the popular allegiance to Islam become a learning arena for the multifaceted manifestations of Islam, yet struggling to relate to the secular project of Europe since Enlightenment to the end of Cold War and to the War on Terror campaign. Gülen's Islamomodernity discourse and praxis is a challenge both to the traditional understanding of Islam and the blind following of modernity project. He is radically critical of both but wishes that both speak to each other with here and now situations and face up to the reality of the contemporary world.

The challenge to the Gülenian groups will be determined by its ability to evolve and expand its strategic and skilful conduct to improve its relations with the Turkish military leadership and secular elites if it proposes reforms within. If these endeavours are successful, then the movement could have a major impact on both the Turkish State and Turkish society³⁴ and on the changes that take place in Turkey in the coming decades where Gülen himself could become a more important religious figure even though he may shun that position. Gülenian proposals are palatable within a democratic framework which he himself admits is adjustable, sustainable and could provide people the space to be free and deploy their skills for greater good. These propositions can easily be debated and tested now in the wider European context where Turkish understanding of Islam is able to rectify and provide the enlightened core of Islam to counter the Islamist interpretation to instrumentalise the tradition and to operationalise it to the very denial of its validity as a religion of peace.

Turkish Islam's (Anatolian expression) perennial links with the Sufi tradition and Gülen's own emphasis on its roots, spirituality and the wisdom guided by a chain of erudite Sufi masters have provided a crucial alternative to the 'official state religion of Islam'.³⁵ It would

within one country. This specific Turkish manifestation of Islam is a unique praxis for both the Western European and the South Asians to understand the complex diversity within Islam. Islam is no exception to a complex process of hybridisation in sociological terms, which in the end will retain the spirit and in fact flush out its own colonialist and feudal characteristic. This in my view is what Gülen campaigns for.

34 It must be noted that state of Turkey and Turkish society could easily be two things as the State has been created around a well crafted elitist framework with a highly motivated plutocracy and its long term alliance with the NATO's second largest military(only to second to the United States)

35 There is a clear distinction between the practice of Islam from the ruling elite to the ordinary masses. A good example would be my encounter with the people whom I met in Konya or Izmir, their Islamic practices were very much related to their folk culture they shared historically with many other worldviews. Whereas my meeting with people in Istanbul who were well connected to the republican ideology and its secular agenda were quite different even though were Muslim but they would distance themselves with the tradition as if any contamination would dilute their connection to the allegiance to the state. The preamble to the Turkey's constitution would elaborate this ideological position well. "The recognition that no protection shall be afforded to thought or opinions contrary to Turkish nationals interest, the principle of the indivisibility of the existence of Turkey with its State and territory, Turkish historical and moral values or the nationalism, principles, reforms and modernism of Atatürk and that, as required by the principle of secularism, there shall be no interference whatsoever of the sacred religious feelings in

be an ideal contact position for many Muslims, especially the South Asian Muslims who too have had exposure to a chain of Sufi masters, more particularly those who hail from the be-relvi school of thought and practice as well as non Muslims who wish to devise a global sense of citizenship in which difference is affirmed and respected where the State is not considered sacrosanct and hence cannot be hegemonic but must held accountable and be at the service of the citizens and their freedoms. It is in this sense that the Gülenian movement is definitively a bridge-builder in the expanding European cluster of nations, cultures and plurality to allow contemporary Muslims of Europe to revisit their fundamentals of Islam and its immense provision for justice, other forms of promoting civic life and governance.

Gülen is emphatic that particularly the divine command and the prophetic suggestion about politics, the state and ruling community have been interpreted in diverse ways throughout history.³⁶ Hence Gülen himself in an interview reiterates this position as crucially important for his fellow Muslims when he makes reference to some Qur'anic semantics like ule-al-amr (those who rule), itaat (obedience to rulers) shura (consultation), harb (war) and sulh (peace).³⁷ His thesis on a possible new phase of Islam becomes evident when he appeals to Muslims to be involved in finding solutions to the present and future problems as participants of practice of Islam and its Ijtihad (independent reasoning). His invitation is for those mujtahids (those who are able to perform independent reasoning)³⁸ to base themselves on "the values that we call major principles (ummahat) such as faith (iman), submission (Islam), and doing what is beautiful (ihsan) and the acceptance of divine morals by the community are references that form the essence of administrative, economic and political issues".³⁹ Gülen's rootedness in the heart of Islam and anchoring his own sense of Ijtihad on contemporary Islam and what it's experiencing as a faith tradition remains central to his spiritual expression and the intellectual inquiry.

Some Concluding Strokes

The land mass of Turkey with its historical past of Hittite and Hellenic periods and to the Romans, then Constantinople becoming the centre of power in the Byzantine Empire with the 1054CE schism which later succumbed to the Ottomans who named it as Istanbul, the place of Islam, where the skyline describes itself a city of minarets. With waves of change swept through this nation is yet again at a critical juncture of her history when its entry into the European Union is imminent, 27 countries with 494 million citizens already, adding nearly 70 million of Turkey's population.

If the state of Turkey wishes to join the EU then it is imperative that Turkish flavour Islam⁴⁰ plus its diverse affiliations, and the secular pragmatism be added to the European polity

State affairs and politics". This paragraph enunciates the finest definition of State religion of Islam according to the State of Turkey which should be followed by its people.

36 Op.cit., An interview with Fethullah Gülen, *The Muslim World* (2005), p.455.

37 Ibid. p.454

38 Ibid. 454.

39 Ibid. 445.

40 This *Turkish flavour of Islam* is best described by Gülen himself where pluralism and diversity as natural developments in any society. He further says that Turkish Islam composed of the main, unchanging principles of Islam found in the Quran and Sunnah, as well as in the forms that its aspects open to interpretation assumed during Turkish history, together with Sufism... this is why Turkish Islam always has been broader, deeper, more tolerant and inclusive and based on love". See Unal, A., and Williams, A., (2005) *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gülen* (Fairfax, VA: The Fountain,.) 43. See. also footnote 23 to compare with the State flavour of Islam.

which has been dominated by the South Asian and North African Muslim immigrants since post World War II. This encounter between the organically heterogenic nature of Islam would invariably produce new relationships in the new EU both with Muslims and non Muslims which will make over 500 million population with Turkey becoming a member. Composition of this Europe with two major religious traditions side by side cannot simple afford to return to historical rivalries and painful memories of the yester years.

Islam in every way will face the challenges of modernity in all its manifestations in Europe. The fear of the other whether manifested in the attitudes and notions of Islamophobia and Westophobia are both negative but are real social practices apparent and alive within Europe. Giving into these would be to accept the Huntingtonian slogan of clash of civilisation which the Gülen movement wishes to transform into a culture of dialoguing communities. According to him the adherents of a religion like Islam, whose principles are supported by reason and science, should not be doubtful or find difficult in dialoguing with adherents of other religions. For him dialogue is not superfluous, but an imperative. Gülen believes that dialogue is among the duties of Muslims on earth to make our world a more peaceful and safer place.⁴¹

It is in this context that Fethullah Gülen's three decades of work both inside and outside Turkey will be pertinent to intellectual enlightenment, contemporary spirituality with abiding compassion, striving for peace based on justice, will display an identity not through tribal affinities like ethnicity, culture or perhaps even religion. Instead should evoke a sense of a citizen of Europe, responsible and care for not only one's own, the self but the also the other yet to be known in order to own an honourable shared future. This future then will not be a debate of them & us but finding a sense of direction for whole and all among the former them & us. This new understanding of a European citizenship in no way undermines any single faith, ethnicity, race or culture but could become the defining yardstick in order to enhance not the superiority of self over the other but the validity of each to seek identity in a global sense of a citizen, sharing world's resources and productively contributing to their growth and sustainability.

Encounter of 'Turkish Islam' in the Gülenian sense is able to evoke a transition in understanding the core of religion within the post Christian Europe and would certainly awaken a new form of spiritual growth between Christianity and Islam. Gülen is suggestive of a possible transitional encounter and would be crucial to end the historical rivalries between these two traditions lasted over centuries in order to open a new chapter of renewed relations of good will and cooperation as part of the Abrahamic legacy of faith and practice. Cordial alliances between traditions rather than obsessive allegiances and their essentialisation require as a matter of urgency to evolve a new code of conduct among traditions. Such futuristic dreams are possible as the present circumstances compel the religious bodies to revisit each of their core teachings in order to return to a common ground for a shared future where they wish to wrestle with most critical issues that all communities face today, security for people, equal opportunity and justice for all.

41 See. details of Gülen's opinions in Saritoprak, Z. & Griffith S., Fetaullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue, Op. cit, The Muslim World (2005) p.336 (original in Turkish, Gülen F., (1998) Hosgoru iklimi, eds. Selcuk Camci and Kudret Unal, (Izmir, Merkur Yayinlari) 37