

Gülen-Inspired Schools in Southern Kurdistan: Curriculum and Ideology¹

Fateh Saeidi²

Abstract

After the first Gulf War, the Kurds created a *de facto* government in Southern Kurdistan and formed the first cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in July 1992. The Ministry of Education undertook to guarantee an increase of human and material resources as well as making the Kurdish language as the language of study at all levels. However Southern Kurdistan still suffered shortages in education system; this unique situation was the most favorable time for investing in a private educational company. In 1994, the Fezalar Educational Institute started its education activities by opening the Ishik College in Erbil, and by 2016 thirty Gülen-inspired schools and the Ishik University had been established in the KRG. In the public sphere, these private educational institutions are known as Turkish Schools; due to the high standard of education, growth in the KRG was rapid, in spite of higher tuition fees. This research was to explore the relationship between the Gülen movement's (Hizmet movement) educational ideology and their role in new KRG's educational system. By demonstrating how the ideology of the Turkish-Islamic Gülen

¹ I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Dr. Eyyûb Kerîmî for his meticulous attention, insights, and support as the draft of this article progressed.

² PhD Candidate of Kurdish Studies at Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, and Researcher at Kurdistan Center for Middle Eastern Research, Soran University. E-mail: fateh.saeidi@gmail.com



movement can have an influence on students with the distinction between overt and hidden curriculum, I argue that the ideological aims of these schools are supported by imprecise modern curricula in ensuring the conservative moral attitude, the scientific worldview without skepticism, and an inequitable educational structure.

Keywords

Gülen-Inspired Schools, Southern Kurdistan, Gülen Movement, Hidden Curriculum

Introduction

The schools inspired by the Turkish Sunni clergyman, Fethullah Gülen's thoughts are called by different names in different parts of the world. In most cases, they are called Hizmet schools or Gülen-inspired schools. The activities of these schools in the Kurdistan Region go back to 1994 when they began their activities under the supervision of the *Fezalar Education Institute* (FEI). They established their first school in Erbil known as Ishik College (Büyüç 2015, 2; Fezalar 2016). Usually they are called Turkish schools among the local people. It is mentionable that the educational activities of Gülen supporters in Kurdistan are not limited to the Kurdistan Region. They established their schools in Northern Kurdistan (occupied by Turkey) in 1988 (Koç 2013b, 184) but they are banned in Iran and Syria.³ Inspired by the Gülen's concept of *hijrat* (migration), Gülen supporters

³ The Gülen movement doesn't have any educational institute in Iran and Syria. The difference between what was known as *Turkish Islam* and the Islamic model in Iran and the Government of Syria which led to the fact that these countries formally opposed the presence of movement. On the other hand, Gülen, critically, argues that the rulers of Iran are calling for the exporting Iran's Revolution, and in the case of the Arab countries, Gülen's emphasis was placed on the importance of the state versus the concept of the Islamic Ummah (Kösebalaban 2003, 173-5).

expanded their activities beyond the borders of Turkey from the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of new independent republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus which were mainly Turkish speaking countries and needed to develop their education paved the way for the rapid growth of the Gülen movement beyond the borders of Turkey (Balci 2003). As the result of major changes in the education system of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a great need was felt for modern education based on international standards. The experiences of Gülen movement in the inauguration and management of private schools made them a suitable option for a presence in the Kurdistan Region; this expedited due to their vast borders with their northern neighbor, Turkey.

Since then the Gülen Education Institute has expanded its activities in a way that it has established schools not only in the Kurdistan Region but in many Iraqi cities including Baghdad, Basrah, Musil and Rumadi. According to the latest figures of the activities of the institute, they have established 32 campuses in Iraq in 2014 and provided educational services to more than 14,000 students from kindergarten to high school, with most of them being located in the Kurdistan Region, including Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Duhok, Soran and Halabja (Büyük 2015). Apart from schools, the institute has managed to get formal permission for activity in the Kurdistan Region as an educational corporation through which the institute holds various scientific Olympiads, English language learning and summer courses outside Kurdistan. As well as these activities, in 2008, the institute established Ishik University in Erbil with the motto "the Future is here"; it has 6 faculties and 15 departments. Also, in 2014, a branch in Sulaymaniyah with two faculties began its activities. The figures of the educational year 2014-15 shows that

approximately 13,000 students in the Kurdistan Region study in these schools and Ishik University of Erbil has 2300 students (ibid.).

Given the widespread activities of the Turkish schools in the Kurdistan Region, there is not much independent research about their curriculum and their impact on the new generation of Kurdish citizen in Southern Kurdistan; the research conducted has been carried out by people appointed by the Gülen Movement and they assessed the schools very positively (Kirk 2011, 2013); they have been of the same belief and tried to submit points indicating that these schools have been constructive and helpful (Akyol 2010; Pandya 2014). Other researchers, with the same beliefs, have dealt with the educational activities of these schools in Northern Kurdistan (Turkey) and then South Kurdistan (Iraq), and have attempted to show that the secular training in these schools has culminated in nurturing a new generation of Kurds who can be a substitute for the pro-Kurdish forces, in particular the PKK (Gurbuz 2015; Koç 2013 a, 2013 b). In all of these researches, the main points have been their support of the educational approach, the type of activities, direct educational results and the indirect political and cultural results from these schools.

The aspects I will try to indicate in this research are that after a brief overview of the issue of education in Southern Kurdistan from the formation of Iraq (1918) to the emergence of the political entity of KRG (1992) in order to clarify the historical background of the beginning the activities of these schools, I will try to illustrate that one of the demands of the Kurdistan liberation movement has been the right of education in the mother tongue. Then by using some of Michael Apple's viewpoints, particularly his viewpoints in the book 'Ideology and Curriculum' (Apple

2003), I will try to demonstrate the relationship between the ideology inspired by Gülen's thoughts for managing these schools and how the Turkish model of Islam emerged.

Education in Southern Kurdistan: a historical summary

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the World War I, and the establish of Iraq under the mandate of Britain (1918-1932) to the formation of KRG (1992), in different eras, supervision on curriculum and the type of education in the schools of Kurdistan has been one of the most significant demands of the Kurds. We can claim that although the subject had 'ups and downs', in most cases, education in the Kurdish language has been a part of curriculum of Iraq in the Kurdish-populated areas. In both of the constitutions of Iraq ratified in 1932 and 1958, the Kurdish language is mentioned as the second language of the country which should be taught in schools and universities (Hassanpour 1992, 102-125). As the result of increasing tension between the Kurds and the Iraq central government (1961-1970) and after several defeats of the central government by the Kurds, Iraq had to accept an autonomous region in the north; however, almost half of Kurdistan remained out of the autonomous region, which was created in 1974 by the central government; the inhabitants of these regions were deprived of education in the Kurdish language (Hassanpour, Skutnabb-Kangas and Chyet 1996, 372-3). The Ba'th party that pursues the dominance of the Arab nation over all other nations of Iraq, tried to apply the policy of *one language-one nation* in its nation-building project based on the *Orubah* ideology. The *Orubah* policy was the pursuit of the genocide of the Kurdish nation in the Anfal project; there were also software dimensions manifested in such policies as a centralist educational system by

changing the curriculum of geography, history and social sciences along with, displacing Kurdish teachers from Kurdistan to the southern parts of Iraq and substituting them with Arab teachers, banning the Kurdish language outside autonomous region (for example in Kirkuk and Khanaqin), changing non-Arabic names and putting pressure on teachers to register in the Ba'th party (Shanks 2016, 42-5).

When the Iraqi government withdrew from South Kurdistan in 1991, one of the consequences of the First Gulf War, a popular uprising followed in Kurdistan that culminated in the liberation of most parts of that region (McDowall 2007, 371-2). After the formation of the KRG in 1992, the leaders of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front controlled the region, while Iraq was under UN-imposed sanctions. The Iraqi central government also imposed special sanctions on Kurdistan. Kurdish leaders had to make a prompt decision for managing the liberated areas (Stansfield 2003, 123). Apart from the main problems of administration and communication systems, the new government of Kurdistan had to provide a solution for the underdevelopment of Kurdistan in all aspects; at the same time, they had to see how to establish a de facto state, protected by anti-Saddam coalition forces within the framework of the no-fly zone. Simultaneously, Gülen's policy and supporters seemed twofold: "In 1980s and 1990s, the Islamic circles in Turkey could not easily understand how Gülen justifies Turkey and US support for Iraq against Shiite Iran on the one hand, and the bombardment of Iraq by US forces on the other" (Seufert 2014, 23).

The first cabinet of the KRG paid foremost attention to radical changes in the education system. The policy of educational development included several aims including the improvement of human resources and material facilities, education in the

Kurdish language at all educational levels, paying attention to the principles of educational equality, and the right of education in the mother tongue as well as religion for other minorities in the Kurdistan Region (Stansfield 2003, 147-9; 206-7). The most important matter for the Kurdish elite from the beginning was to combat the impacts of several decades of Arabization in Kurdistan. The dominant discourse at this time originated from Kurdish nationalism (*Kurdayeti* or *Kurdism*) which demanded the end of seven decades of the dominance of Arabic culture and language and the of nurturing a new generation on the basis of Kurdish identity.

After the formation of the KRG, there was a great need for investment in the education sector in Kurdistan. As the businessmen of the Gülen movement had successful experience in investment in Central Asia and the Caucasus, they were attracted to the southern borders of Turkey; contrary to the new independent republics of former Soviet Union, the Turkish language was not only unacceptable but also there was a negative outlook towards it because of the Turkish policies against the Kurdish language. Due to this fact, the founders and investors of the FEI prioritized their modern and secular education consistent with the local norms of their education agenda so that courses of Turkish language learning and religious educational plans at these schools do not make local parents and rulers concerned.

Gülen's conservative educational philosophy

In order to know how Turkish schools act, we have to examine Gülen' viewess because managers, teachers and tutors of these schools mainly regard themselves as followers of his opinions

and apply his guidance as an ethical model.⁴ It is obvious that the main propaganda of Gülen's followers is directed through the establishment of schools based on modern and secular education. Although in South Kurdistan, after the formation of the KRG, Islamic parties have been active in the public sphere however the secular parties (KDP and PUK) have manifested Kurdish nationalism. In addition, and due to the Ba'th interpretation of nationalism which was combined with Arabic Islam, every network activity with an Islamic dimension was regarded as suspicious. On the other hand, these two secular parties managed to gain the Kurdish citizen's favorable opinion as parties; they do have not any particular hostility towards popular religion. However, despite the background of Turkish schools which could form negative opinions about them in Kurdistan, most devout of Islamic people in South Kurdistan recognized Said Nursi (1876-1960) as a Kurdish Islamic reformist and in the mosques introduced him as someone who defended the rights of Kurdish people against the fascistic policies of the Ataturk regime which, in turn, acted as a winning card in the hands of the activists in these schools in Kurdistan.

Born in the village Nurs near Bitlis in North Kurdistan, Said Nursi had particular opinions about the relationship between modernization and Islamic teachings that affected many social movements in Turkey and Kurdistan. Generally, these social

⁴ There is major debate about how the movement connect to the thoughts of Gülen, Ebaugh believes that "He [Gülen] regularly admonishes his followers not to refer to the movement as "the Gülen movement" but rather the 'service (*hizmet*) movement.' Likewise, he rejects the label of 'the Gülen schools.' Rather, he favors collective consultation and consensus and argues that it is the millions of participants in the movement that deserve credit for the successful projects that are outcomes of sharing a worldview and spirit of commitment" (Ebaugh 2010, 124-5).

movements inspired by Nursi's thoughts in Turkey are called the Nur Movement (Turkish: Nurculuk) and the word "Nur" here features Nursi's masterpiece entitled *Kuliat Risale Nur*. The impact of Nursi's thoughts on Gülen's worldview is so strong that experts such as Yavuz call the Gülen movement as Neo-Nur (Yavuz, 2008) and a sub-division of Nur movement (Agai, 2003). Yavuz believes that "Nursi's writings indicate three subjects: first, increasing the consciousness of Muslims; second, rejecting the materialist and positivist discourse which dominated intellectual current; and finally, resurrecting society through reconsidering the common language of society namely Islam" (2008, 157). Intended for reaching these goals as well as for liberation from the disadvantages of modernism, which he calls materialism and atheism, Nursi believed that the belief inherited from our ancestors cannot respond to the problems of the modern age and, instead of it, a form of belief which he calls *true belief* should be substituted. In the post-enlightenment age belief images have been seriously challenged, Nursi confronts science dualistically; on the one hand, from his viewpoint, the main feature of positivism dominating modern thinking is that only science can be regarded as the source of knowledge, so for any kind of progress we should begin with scientific methodology. In his opinion, this approach estranges humanity from its sacred origins which culminates in human degeneration. On the other hand, Nursi believes that by knowing what we face in nature, we should use scientific means and can reach belief through knowing divine beings which culminates in understanding creation and the divine creator. In most of Nursi's writings in his mature years, this duality is evident and his solution for it in his thinking is to synthesize Islam and science, which is considered the solution for other dualities, including tradition and

modernity, belief and freedom. This interpretation of applying natural sciences for knowing nature and distancing from modern humanities have been the characteristics of Nursi's followers which appeared later in the curriculum of Gülen-inspired schools; therefore, widespread modern educational system has been formed which remained Islamic.

Gülen who considers himself a follower of Nursi's beliefs regarding education, points out this synthesis by Nursi as follows:

As Badiulazaman (Nursi) says there is an understanding of education which concludes that the mind is illuminated by science and knowledge and the heart is illuminated by faith and virtue. Such an understanding causes that students fly with two wings over the sky of humanity and be blessed through serving other people. Such an understanding removes materialism from science and makes it a useful instrument. Also it prevents from that science be a dangerous instrument. (Gülen 2004, 197)

Like his predecessor, Nursi, Gülen's understanding of science is a reductionist and conservative one so that whenever a contradiction between science and Islam is noticed, they limit the sphere of education to the advantage of religion. By a glance at the Turkish schools, this viewpoint will be clearer. They emphasize the teaching of natural sciences like physics and chemistry but social sciences are taught at the lowest level. These schools also organize scientific Olympiads which are all related to natural sciences.

By using the concept of hidden education we may approach the understanding of this educational model in the Gülen-inspired schools. By using the distinction between *evident* and *hidden* education, Apple wants to raise questions such as: What kind of

knowledge is chosen? Who are engaged in this selection? Who benefits from this selection? How do schools legitimize their education process and their selection? (Apple, 2003). Advocating the statistics of accepting students in the fields of medicine, engineering and biology in the Turkish schools is aimed at attracting the attention of parents to a higher level of preparation of students in these schools, given the high prestige of these fields in society for income and social position; on the other hand however, it indicates the hidden curriculum of these schools based on the distancing from critical thinking and a multi-dimensional approach that familiarizes students with diverse answers to a question, because the mainstream natural sciences are based on one-sided unchallenged answers. Yavuz believes that "Gülen's emphasize on the role of natural sciences is for preventing from fragmentation of identity and alienation which are the products of formalism. Therefore, Gülen's educational system wants to assist students to explore the features of nature so that they consolidate their faith in God. According to Gülen's doctrines, the lack of religious education causes atheism but the lack of scientific education causes prejudice and dogmatism" (2003, 38). Fear of formalism and relativism is a significant factor in the approach of these schools by distancing themselves from teaching modern humanities and social sciences.

What can be found in schools, however, is a perspective that is akin to what has been called the positivist ideal. The fact that scientific consensus is continually exhibited, students are not permitted to see that, without disagreement and controversy, science would not progress or would progress at a much slower pace. One point that is also quite potent is that it is very possible that the standard of *objectivity* (one is tempted to say *vulgar objectivity*) being exhibited and taught in schools may often lead

to detachment from political commitment. That is, it may not be neutrality as it is overtly expressed, but it may mirror a rather deep fear of intellectual, moral, and political conflict (Apple 2003, 83). On the one hand, in these schools, by the emphasis on teaching natural sciences and constructing the image of the student/scientist they try to illustrate that religion and science are not contradictory, on the other hand, by ignoring teaching humanities and social sciences for new generations, or the 'golden generation' in their terminology, try to distance them from materialism. The solution for the founders of these schools is to teach ethical education and use religious attitudes for consolidating the students' faith. By criticizing the materialist foundation of western civilization, Gülen says "Religion guides sciences and determines their real objective. Religion makes ethical, global and humane values as the guide for science. If this truth was understood in the west and the relationship between religion and knowledge was discovered, the world had gone in another path" (196).

How do Turkish schools act in the Kurdistan Region?

For better understanding of the complicated mechanism of the Turkish schools, we can divide the educational activities of the FEI in the Kurdistan Region into three stages: (1) the period of establishing and attracting people's trust to Turkish schools (1994-2004); (2) the period of stability and quick growth (2004-2014); and (3) the period of reconciliation for survival (2014 onwards). The preliminary expansion of the Gülen-inspired schools was very slow; in the first 10 years only several schools and colleges were established in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Several reasons can be revealed for their few activities in the first period: First, they had a Turkish-Islamic background so they could not

attract people's trust because their Turkish identity was in contrast with Kurdish identity. They came from a country where not only teaching in Kurdish language was forbidden but also thousands of people were killed in the ethnic conflict between the Kurdish nation and central government; many other people have been displaced or are refugees or being held in Turkish prisons. This background had a negative impact on South Kurdistan's attitude for their acceptance. However, the founders of these schools were Sunni Muslims. The Sufi/Naghshbandi background of the Gülen movement and the influence of Said Nursi's thoughts on them (Yavuz, 2003, 2008) caused the Kurds of Southern Kurdistan, who were influenced by Sufi sects, particularly Naghshbandi Sufism (Bruinessen 1992, 203-265), to tolerate these schools.

Furthermore, although these schools demanded high tuition fees in the formation years, the fees were less than they are currently. Even though the lack of tuition could seriously cause problems for continuing the activities in these schools, the managers had solved this problem through two ways: First, these schools had started their activities by receiving assistance from the Ministry of Education of the KRG and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) as well as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). For example, they had obtained land, educational buildings and other facilities. Turkish businessmen of the Hizmet movement had also sponsored these schools in Kurdistan, as they had in many other regions outside Turkey. Due to lack of transparency, there is no evidence to know how these schools acted in the first stages. Some experts believe that Kurds have actively participated in expanding Turkish schools in the Central Asia (Balci 2003, 161) and they have come to South Kurdistan due to ethnic and cultural tendencies. In this period,

from the First Gulf War to the collapse of the Saddam regime (2003) the Kurdistan Region had faced double sanctions, both by the UN on Iraq and from the Iraqi central government on Kurdistan, and basic goods like food, drugs and petrochemical materials were not supplied (Stansfield 2003, 47-9). Iraq's disastrous economy which affected the Kurdistan Region as well as resulted that in this period, the KRG could not provide salaries for its employees, which is the main for the expansion of Turkish schools as they were directed and paid for privately (ibid., 48).

Finally, these private schools managed to build a positive image of themselves among the citizens of Kurdistan and paved the way for more expansion. The main reasons for this positive image include: (1) In the first years of their activity, while the KRG faced a critical economic situation, these schools did not take high tuition fees and, in some cases, they were free like state-run schools; (2) within the years of civil war during which the KRG had been practically divided between two local governments (Erbil under KDP control and Sulaymaniyah under PUK control) there was little interaction amongst the people of either side, but the managers of these schools distanced themselves from political debates and did not allied themselves with either of them, although it cannot be said that their education was free of a particular political ideology. For a long time, the argument that education is a neutral matter is challenged and as Apple tells us "education is not a neutral enterprise, that by the very nature of the institution, the educator was involved, whether s/he is conscious of it or not, in a political act." (Apple 2003, 1); (3) although the Islamic tendencies of the teachers were gradually being realized by people who recognized that they were encountered Islamists at the level of management and education. This consciousness played a significant role in the formation of a

positive image, as they introduced themselves as a suitable alternative for hardline Islamic movements and they dealt with the development of such concepts as dialogue amongst religions and different faiths, adaptation of Islam and democracy, tolerance and acceptance of the other. Moreover, their conservative approach towards ethics in a traditional and Islamic society would be accepted. When political tensions amongst different parties and ideologies had politicized Kurdistan society, emphasizing the co-existence of different thoughts could propound them as a positive pattern; (4) While educational structural facilities were in short supply due to the intentional backwardness of the Kurdistan Region by the Ba'th regime during 1970s and 1980s and double sanctions after the First Gulf War followed by the civil war between the Kurdish main parties, it was impossible for the KRG to provide the educational needs quickly, it was seen that students of the Turkish schools manage to pass the exams with the best grades, apart from learning Kurdish, English, Arabic and Turkish languages. This successful performance was a significant factor for affirming them as the professional experts in the realm of education.

After the collapse of the Saddam regime in 2003 and the continuation of insecurity in Iraq, the KRG managed to establish relative peace in its region and improve economic conditions. By ratifying the laws of federal Iraq and the stabilization of the KRG as a federal region in 2005 as well as enforcing open market economic policies, economic conditions in Kurdistan improved. In 2007, the KRG decided to conduct educational reform in its region. This educational reform, known as K-12, included all levels of education from kindergarten to the 12th grade of high school (Vernez, Culberston and Constant 2014, 1). As the curriculum used in the Kurdistan Region was outdate, the

authorities felt a huge need for widespread reforms in the sphere of education. The international sanctions in Iraq and South Kurdistan had been removed and, due to the lower level of power conflicts in the KRG, exploitation of new sources of energy increased the region's financial power for enforcing plans for modernization. According to the new reforms, in addition to keeping all levels of education, including higher education free, compulsory education increased from six to ninth grade. As a result of the increasing population, schools became very busy and there was a strong need for educating teachers and for enforcing the new educational planning. According to the RAND analytical report in 2014, the KRG needed to build 134 to 200 eighteen-room schools by 2021 to enforce reform in education and to realize educational progress; the financial resources of the KRG for such construction was estimated as inadequate so solutions as making one-shift schools to two-shift schools were suggested (ibid., xiv).

In addition to these problems, a shortage of the number of teachers required, the upgrading of education qualitative levels and an increase of education time were advocated as solutions. In spite of these problems which were almost unsolvable, the facilitation of activities by an experienced private sector actor seemed an attractive option. With more than ten years of activity in the Kurdistan Region, the Turkish schools managed to gain a particular credibility in terms of secular and modern education. In addition to the urgent need of the Kurdistan Region for schools providing modern and qualified education, other factors have played role in the rapid development of the Turkish schools in the Kurdistan Region. Although the Turkish schools take high tuition fees from students but as the result of emerging a new bourgeois class in Kurdistan, whose wealth come from oil

revenues and the neoliberal policies adopted by the KRG, these schools have always faced increasing demand.

Critical study of the Turkish schools in the Kurdistan Region

By applying what Apple adopts from Gramsci about hegemony analysis and he applies it at the level of education and curriculum, a more precise understanding of how these schools act and their aims will be reached. Apple indicates that considering schools as neutral institutions is meaningless. We can now begin to get a more thorough understanding of how institutions of cultural preservation and distribution, such as schools, create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups resorting to overt mechanisms of domination (Apple 2003, 2). By using the concept of cultural hegemony, Gramsci explains that, for domination of a social group on another group, direct force (for example military force) cannot be used, but knowledge and ideology can control society through hegemonic institutions, for example schools, religion, family, press and so on. The dominant group imposes specific beliefs, values and norms on the subaltern group; to gain the consent of the subaltern group, the dominant group should have ideological motivation, and ideology illustrates domination as a neutral phenomenon. For this reason, it has a powerful impact on the formation of a common sense amongst the subaltern group which considers the ideology as a natural condition and thinks and acts according to it.

The Turkish schools in the Kurdistan Region are part of a plan for expanding Turkish Islam throughout the world and can be considered as one of the common points of the AKP and Gülen

Movement ideology. Contrary to his predecessor Nursi, Gülen emphasizes the Turkish nation, instead of Islam Ummah (Seufert 2014, 13) and maintains that due to the multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious features of the Ottoman Empire, we can return Islamic culture to the center of world civilization by reviving the inherited concepts of dialogue and tolerance. "Gülen believes that only the Turks played a major religious and cultural role in the Ottoman Empire, and now the Turks lead the Islamic world through emphasizing dialogue, science and education in the 21st century" (Ebaugh 2010, 33). Gülen's emphasis on the role of the Turkish nation as the leader of the Islamic world in the modern world has caused the Turkish language to be thought as a compulsory subject in all schools of the Gülen Movement. The Turkish language is considered as the *lingua franca* with which Gülen hopes to connect all Islamic societies. This way of thinking overlaps with the AKP formal ideology that on the one hand wants good relations with the west and on the other, tries to have influence in the Islamic countries. The border of the new Ottoman Empire encompasses much of the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Gülen Movement activities in these regions, after that AKP seized power, have had rapid growth. There is evidence that Gülen and his followers have had complicated security relations with the security services of Turkey (MIT) in the Kurdistan Region. Gülen has not hidden his cooperation with the Turkish security agency and said in an interview:

In Erbil [an Iraqi town dominated by Kurds], we opened a school for the Turkmens [a Turkic seminomadic group]. I told the president [Süleyman Demirel/1996] that they need to open a school in this area to protect the Turks from assimilation by the

Kurds.... We decided to open the school with the help of the State Intelligence Service. (cited in Yavuz, 2008, 199)

Gülen's remarks were made whilst in Turkey, Kurdish language learning in schools is forbidden and the genocide of Kurdish culture is one of the features of modern Turkey. A glance at the curriculum of Turkish schools in the Kurdistan Region indicates that many hours are spent on learning the Turkish language. According to the same source, because scientific courses are in the English language, there are few Kurdish language courses but no reason has been given for teaching the Turkish language courses. The other point noticed in observations about these schools is that, contrary to the propaganda of the managers who claim that their teachers were educated at the best Turkish universities, in fact, the teachers of these schools have educated at low to average universities in Turkey. In addition, they speak in English only in the science courses and the common language of the managers, teachers, students and service personnel is Turkish. The importance of the Turkish language is the subject which can be regarded as hidden planning in these schools as, under the guise of English language, they reduce the importance of the Kurdish language; a language for which the Kurdish nation has sacrificed so many people in order to have it taught at educational centers. When examining the textbooks of Turkish, English and Kurdish language teaching in these schools, it is noticeable that high quality colored books for Turkish and English are used but only low quality black-and-white pamphlets are used for teaching Kurdish. Concerning religious education, these schools have no apparent curriculum beyond general schools and they have an hour a week for teaching religious texts; for these they use the books provided by the KRG Ministry of

Education. Although the *hijab* is not prevalent in these schools, at least in two cases activities are dubious: Firstly, boys and girls are segregated in these schools from the beginning. This gender segregation still continues. This issue has not been opposed due to the conservative culture of the Kurdistan Region; it seems that local people even embrace it. Looking at websites, social networks and the academic book of Kirk (Kirk 2011) which contains some photos of some students and graduates of these schools, is noticeable that the Islamic hijab of girl students is precisely that which is stated as Islamic-Turkish dress which, in recent years, has been demonstrated repeatedly by the wives of prime ministers and leaders of the AKP which is quite different from the Islamic dress of women in Kurdistan. A part of this Islamic-Turkish model, beside media effects, relates to the imitation of students of their Turkish teachers who use this kind of hijab.

Conclusion

The educational activities of the Gülen Movement in the Kurdistan Region, given its limited population in comparison to similar activities in other parts of the world, seem unprecedented. The high quality education provided in these schools, in comparison with state-run schools and a secular education in four language schools have made a positive image of them in the Kurdistan Region. Now, after more than two decades of activities in these schools, we witness the appearance of educated alumni of these schools in the public and private sectors of Kurdistan. Although no independent research has been done about the identity of educated students from these schools and their relationship with the Hizmet Movement, the social networks of the Gülen Movement which broadcasts videos

about the impact of Gülen-inspired schools on educated students work and life, are indicative of the influence of these schools. In addition, due to the widespread economic relationship between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey as well as the huge investments made by Turkish companies in the Kurdistan Region infrastructure, the learning of the Turkish language for the students of these schools is a great advantage for finding high income jobs.

However, the domestic and foreign policies of Turkey for regaining the glory of the Ottoman Empire is overlapped with Gülen's goals in this regard. After 2014 and the beginning of tensions between the AKP and the Gülen Movement, the ruling party wants to limit educational activities of this movement inside and outside Turkey. It seems that the KRG has tried to transfer the ownership of the FEL and appoint a Kurdish company as its owner (Dwarozh 2016). It is not clear whether this replacement in the management of these schools, which were directed by Turks and the curriculum for them which were inspired by Gülen's thought, will change or not. But it is obvious that the Turkish schools which are protected from any kind of criticism, including from its hidden education based on Gülen's ideology, has managed to provide a model of Turkish Islam, reproduction of social inequalities and gender segregation, and of course, its economically profitable business.

References

- Agai, Bekim. 2003. "The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethics of Education." In *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, 48-68. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Akyol, Harun. 2010. "The Role of Turkish Schools in Building Trusting Cross-Ethnic Relationships in Northern Iraq." In *Islam and*

- Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives*, edited by John L. Esposito and İhsan Yılmaz, 311-42. New York: Blue Dome Press.
- Apple, Michael W. 2003. *Ideology and curriculum*. Third Edition. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Balci, Bayram . 2003. "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam." *Religion, State and Society* 31 (2): 151-177.
- Bruinessen, Martin Van. 1992. *Agha, Shaikh and State*. New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.
- Büyük, Talip. 2015. *Catalogue of Fezalar Educational Institute-2015*. Erbil: Fezalar Education Company.
- Dwarozh. 2016. *dwarozh.net*. Accessed 02 2017, 25.
<http://www.dwarozh.net/ar/details.aspx?jicare=7403>.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose . 2010. *The Gülen Movement - A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*. New York: Springer.
- Fezalar. 2016. *Fezalar Education Company*. 3 13. Accessed 3 25, 2017.
<http://fezalareducation.com/>.
- Gülen, Fethullah. 2004. *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*. New Jersey: The Light, Inc.
- Gurbuz, Mustafa. 2015. *Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Hizmet Movement*. Vol. Rithink Paper 22. Washington, DC: Rethink Institute.
- Hassanpour, Amir. 1992. *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918-1985*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press.
- Hassanpour, Amir, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, and Michael Chyet. 1996. "The Non-Education of Kurds: A Kurdish Perspective." *International Review of Education* (Springer) 42 (4): 367-379.
- Kirk, Martha Ann. 2011. *Hope and Healing: Stories from Northern Iraq Where Persons Inspired by Fethullah Gülen Have Been Serving*. Houston: The Gülen Institute. www.Guleninstitute.org.
- Kirk, Martha Ann. 2013. "Iraqi Educational Opportunities Fertile Soil for Justice and Peace to Grow." In *A Just World: Multi-disciplinary*

- Perspectives on Social Justice*, edited by Heon Kim, 109-126. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Koç, Doğan. 2013a. "Hizmet Movement's Effects on PKK Recruitment and Attacks." *Turkish Journal of Politics* 4 (1 Summer): 65-84.
- Koç, Doğan. 2013b. "The Hizmet Movement and the Kurdish Question." In *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question*, edited by Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarihan, 179-194. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Kösebalaban, Hasan . 2003. "The Making of Enemy and Friend: Fethullah Gülen's National Security Identity." In *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, 170-83. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.
- McDowall, David. 2007. *A Modern History of The Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Pandya, Sophia. 2014. "Hizmet and the Kurdish Question in Southeastern Turkey and Iraq." *Turkish Journal of Politics* 5 (1 Summer): 73-94.
- Seufert, Günter. 2014. *Is the Fethullah Gülen Movement Overstretching Itself?* Translated by Harriet Spence. Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs. www.swp-berlin.org.
- Shanks, Kelsey. 2016. *Education and ethno-politics: defending identity in Iraq*. New York: Routledge.
- Stansfield, Gareth R. V. 2003. *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political development and emergent democracy*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Vernez, Georges, Shelly Culbertson, and Louay Constant. 2014. *Strategic Priorities for Improving Access to Quality Education in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. www.rand.org.
- Yavuz, M. Hakan. 2003. "The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritan." In *Turkish Islam and the secular state: the Gülen Movement*, edited by M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, 19-48. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- . 2008. *Islamic political identity in Turkey*. New York: Oxford University Press.

—. 2009. *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*. New York: Cambridge University Press.