

MUSLIM MOVEMENTS NURTURING A COSMOPOLITAN MUSLIM IDENTITY:
THE ISMAILI AND GULEN MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The convergence of contemporary international affairs with religion calls for a new lens for interaction. This convergence, combined with the global topography of militant ideologies in the name of Islam, the impact of the War on Terror, and the rift in Muslim-West relations has caused confusion and anxiety among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This contemporary reality calls for original thinking and new models to address some of these religious, political and social concerns and to sow the seeds of peaceful and pluralistic cooperation. Several responses that promote international global justice and encourage conflict resolution economic and social development while being Muslim are available to address this new reality. The Ismaili Muslim and the Gulen community are two such examples. By advocating the reinterpretation of the Islamic message in light of contemporary realities and seeking to bridge the gap holistically between the Muslim world and the West, the Ismaili and Gulen movements offer creative possibilities of conception, thought, and action through transnational activism embedded in Islamic principles. To demonstrate these possibilities and realities, this paper seeks to illustrate how the Ismaili and Gulen movements are in fact reinterpreting

the message of Islam in light of contemporary realities while playing an active role in the development of educational institutions, philanthropy, and inter-faith dialogues with other communities. They serve as examples of progressive, transnational social movements that are rooted in Islamic tradition while negotiating a new kind of Islam in the modern world. By analyzing the movements four key segments including:

- vision of Islam
- leadership
- organizational structure and membership,
- key program engagements

the paper seeks to provide a holistic understanding of its emergence, development and transformation. Most contemporary writings on Islam tend to portray global Islamic activism in a negative light, but through strong emphasis on tolerance, service, philanthropy, education, and pluralism, Gulen and the Aga Khan are reshaping Muslim globality and offering an alternative view of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in today's world. Within the context of globalization, pluralism, multiculturalism, and internationalism, the Ismaili and the Gulen movements serve as modern day articulations of Muslim cosmopolitanism. The movements are reshaping Muslim ethos and a faith based identity while cultivating

a new paradigm for cultural, religious, and social engagement and interaction for a more equitable and just world.

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DEDICATION

To Munira, the woman who taught me the power of perseverance, patience, passion and humility, to Ally and Khurram—my two life-long confidants; and to my roots and cosmopolitan journey which inspired this endeavor long before I even knew it.

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INTRODUCTION

The convergence of contemporary international affairs with religion calls for a new lens for interaction. This convergence, combined with the global topography of militant ideologies in the name of Islam, the impact of the War on Terror, and the rift in Muslim-West relations has caused confusion and anxiety among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This contemporary reality calls for original thinking and new models to address some of these religious, political and social concerns and to sow the seeds of peaceful and pluralistic cooperation. Several responses that promote international global justice and encourage conflict resolution economic and social development while being Muslim are available to address this new reality. The Ismaili Muslim and the Gulen community are two such examples. By advocating the reinterpretation of the Islamic message in light of contemporary realities and seeking to bridge the gap holistically between the Muslim world and the West, the Ismaili and Gulen movements offer creative possibilities of conception, thought, and action through transnational activism embedded in Islamic principles.

Muslims today inhabit a vast land stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with a significant presence in the US and Europe and multiple allegiances to religious interpretation, nationality, country of origin, culture, ethnicity and political ideologies. The *Ummah* or Muslim community on a conceptual level

prevails; however, in sociological, communal, and political terms, the concept is being envisioned by Muslims through the current cultural, ethics and national identity lens. According to Ahsan, there is an identity of crisis between the Ummah and nation-state, but the key to the Muslim identity in the contemporary world is being articulated through actions, institutions and movements which bear the ethos of Islam and seek to negotiate multiple identities¹.

Muslim movements offer a mosaic of sorts representing the dynamism and diversity within its membership and ideologies. This broad spectrum of movements ranges from classical Islamic Modernists and Political Islamists to Global Jihadists and Contemporary Cosmopolitan groups. While the militant activists and ideologies receive the most attention in the media, contemporary cosmopolitan movements like those led by the Aga Khan and Fethullah Gulen have great significance in shaping the ways that Muslims face the contexts of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century and as such are adding a new dimension to the understanding of Islam.

So how are these two transnational Muslim social movements adding a new understanding of peaceful engagement and Islamic activism? To demonstrate these possibilities and realities, this paper seeks to illustrate how the Ismaili and

¹ Abdullah Al-Ahsan, *Ummah or Nation? Identity Crisis of Contemporary Muslims*, (The Islamic Foundation UK: 1992).

Gülen movements are in fact reinterpreting the message of Islam in light of contemporary realities while playing an active role in development of educational institutions, philanthropy, and inter-faith dialogues with other communities. They serve as examples of progressive, transnational social movements that are rooted in their own unique historical context of societal secularization and Islamic tradition while negotiating a new kind of Islam in the modern world. By analyzing four key segments--the movement's vision of Islam, leadership, organizational structure and membership, and lastly the key program engagements--this paper seeks to provide a holistic understanding of its emergence, development and transformation. The two movements are unique and current in orientation and action but seek to function within the ethical framework of Islam. Most contemporary writings on Islam tend to portray global Islamic activism in a negative light, but through a strong emphasis on tolerance, service, philanthropy, education, and pluralism; Gulen and the Aga Khan are reshaping Muslim globality and offering an alternative view of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in today's world.

As a faith, culture, and identity, Islam has historically been a motivating factor around which people have mobilized, united, and organized. Organizational structures have ranged from empires, nations, communities, movements, and NGOs. Muslim movements do not operate in a vacuum nor do they possess an

ideology that resonate with its constituencies; they are a dynamic, fluid, and complex system of relationships and interests that possess their own unique social, economic, cultural, and political dynamic. For Islamic activism, important resources and mobilizing structures have included mosques, assembly houses, (*jamatkhanas*), study circles, dense social networks of friends and family, Muslim NGOs, political parties, religious lesson (*dars*), sermons (*khutba*) and professional unions and student associations.

The Islamic mosaic of multiplicity of interpretation, spiritual affiliation, diverse cultural environments and practices is not new to Islam, but in recent years there seems to be a tendency to adopt a singular and linear understanding of Islam—one that ignores the diversity that has existed within Islam for centuries. At times it may appear that the 1.4 billion Muslims globally are all identical in faith and practice. This narrow understanding of Islam is a product of several factors, including the media’s oversimplification of Islam, the tumultuous nature of “secular” and “religious” in a Muslim context, a lack of understanding of what it means to be a Muslim state, and of the insular way that some extremists present the Muslim faith to the world. However, this understanding is not within the broader historic tradition of Islam. Mohammad Akram Khan, a Muslim Scholar from Bengal, says it best:

What is Islam is not stationary, what is stationary is not Islam, Islam welcomes all creative innovations. Islam never lacked nor ever will lack in

providing solutions to any problems in the world, because its gate to ijihad [creative interpretations] remains open at all times” articulating the evolutionary nature of Islam.²

Islam is one of the world’s fastest growing religions and Muslims are spread across every conceivable geographical location, political configuration and economic category constituting close to 1.4 billion people. The contribution of Islam to world civilization is undeniable and yet under studied in Western education. Within the last one hundred years Muslim countries have gained independence and have been negotiating their concept of statehood after a vacuum of political power and processes for decades. In this period, Muslims have been faced with economic underdevelopment, dictatorship, and antidemocratic regimes—all while modernity and globalization has become cornerstone of our world. So, what exactly does modernity or post-modernity mean for Muslims? In the modern era, Muslim societies have strived to merge the sacred and the secular with varying results. Responding to the challenges of colonialism and the eventual development of secular nationalist Muslim majority states, Muslim movements mobilized in an effort to combat the pure secularization of their societies. In an effort to compete (politically, socially, and economically) in the modern world, they utilized the sacred language of Islam, thereby creating socially and politically

² LaFeber Walter, “The Post September 11 Debate over Empire, Globalization, and Fragmentation,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 117 (Spring 2002): 1-17.

applicable Islamic idioms--an Islamic discourse on modernity. Modern Muslim social movements serve as an experiment in the re-reading of Islam and the modern era while renewing and reviving Islam, thus creating a new kind of modernity, an Islamic modernity.³

Muslim social and philanthropic movements, including local, national and transnational, have functioned as shared efforts to define individual and collective identity and encourage economic prosperity and political independence for centuries. The manifestation of such struggles ranged from the development of community organizations, civil society organizations, and social welfare institutions, to the mobilization of violent insurrection groups and guerrilla warfare. The mandate and ideologies of these organizations are as diverse as its membership, ranging from a literalist to a more liberal, progressive understanding of Islam and for many, the discussions are global but they are applied locally. The study of contemporary Muslim social activism and social movements provide a deeper understanding of how these ideas are being negotiated, understood and practiced.

³ Joshua D. Hendricks, "Global Islam and the Secular World: Transnational Muslim Movements and the Movements of Fethullah Gulen: A Comparative Approach," in *The Fethullah Gulen Movement in Thought and Practice* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University 2006).

So how are Muslims negotiating multiple allegiances to place, people and belief in today's world? Peaceful Muslim movements reshape Muslim identity as it relates to global citizenship, religious and cultural pluralism, transnational activism, and humanitarianism. Muslim global identity is manifested in the growing interconnectedness of Muslim communities, their global awareness of each other, their effort to base social and political action on Islamic discourse, their transnational charity and educational networks, and the increasing interaction of cross border flows through Muslim network(i.e. people, scholars, students, finance, goods, media images, and ideas). What is new is the innovative organizational strength, the utilization of technology, and pragmatic energy displayed by the transnational Muslim networks who promote their version of Islam; thus rendering a global Muslim identity. The deconstruction of the Ismaili and Gulen, two examples of civil/cosmopolitan movements, indicate that Muslim movements possess their own history and do not have a homogenous or stagnant attitude toward globalization and modernity. In fact, these two movements serve as pointed examples of how Muslim movements are compatible with modernity, globalization, economic and political liberalism while remaining true to the ethics and spirit of Islam.

To articulate the variance in foundation, belief system, organization and strategy among Muslim collective action and movement and to limit teaming

movements into one ideology, four broad categories seek to articulate the diversity of thought and practice among these movements and communities. The four ideological stances include:

- Classical Modernist
- Political Islamists
- Global Jihadist
- Civil and Cosmopolitans

These four categories are not mutually exclusive, especially as movements evolve and are presented to create a framework for analysis.

Classical Modernist

Humanity needs three things today – a spiritual interpretation of the universe, a spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.⁴

Classical modernism was the continuation of the reformist movements of Islam in the 18th and early 19th centuries and is seen as a way to address the challenges posed by modernity while remaining faithful to the tenets of Islam. Classical modernists are committed to reform Islamic thought, both legal and theological, and place strong emphasis on *ijtihad* or creative interpretation. The Classical Modernist response to this question was to embrace modernity as

⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam," in *Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 268.

essentially compatible with true Islam and to reject traditional Islam represented by the classical schools of theology and law as a deviation from the rational and liberal spirit of Islam. Many Muslim thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries realized that the impact of the Western ideas on Muslims required a response proportionate with the enormity of the challenge. Among the first modernists were Jamal-al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal and Fazlur Rehman in the Indian Subcontinent. “What 20th century MSMs [Muslim social movements] faced was a project to “re-Islamize” Muslim society, to “re-take” their capacity to make their own history.”⁵ They believe that the modern context demands a reappraisal and re-articulation of the intellectual legacy of Muslims while embracing the rich tradition and heritage that Islam offers.

Islamic Modernism refers to the idea that modernity and Islam are not contradictory phenomena but are mutually constructive. 19th century Islamic modernists argued that the Quran commands scientific inquiry so as to fulfill humanity’s requirement to understand the glory of God, which is represented in his creation of the Earth. Classical modernists believe that the revelation does not clash with reason and that an effort should be made to revive Islam’s rationalist

⁵ Nilüfer Göle, “Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, (2002), 173-190.

philosophical tradition. They are for a flexible interpretation of Islam and its sources as well as Islamic law in order to develop institutions commensurate with modern conditions and social change. The prototype of a classical modernist Muslim Social movement is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or Ikwhan Muslimin, a civic/political organization formed in 1928 under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna, especially in its earlier stages. According to Banna, Islam distinguished itself from other global religions due to its “concern with not only worship but also social systems...when a Muslim community is ruled by laws other than its own, a clash is bound to erupt between it and the ruling power.”⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood sought to nurture a new kind of identity which would encompass a new nationalism based on Islam, Arab ethnicity, and the Egyptian nation; however, they now would be considered a hybrid between classical modernism and political Islamism.

Political Islamists

Unlike Global Jihadists, Islamists overall choose an Islamic socio-political pathway to change. Like many proponents of political ideas, Political Islamists are not homogenous and include various strands. They reject, at least in theory, the modern ideologies of nationalism and secularism. Political Islamists argue for

⁶ Ahmad Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Fundamentalism*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 111-112.

reform and change in Muslim communities, emphasizing “Islamic” values and institutions over what they see as Western counterparts (i.e. secularism and nationalism). They are interested in establishing an Islamic state or an Islamic socio-political order in Muslim societies. Most argue for a gradual approach, one that avoids violence and uses education, beginning at the grassroots level. Political Islamists are particularly keen to project an alternative program to expand the scope of what Islam means and its role in society today. They are reacting to a situation in which the role of Islam in society, as they see it, is constantly eroded. In their views, the roots of erosion lie largely in the colonial period. They believe that in the post-independence period, the modern state continued to implement various colonial projects, including the marginalization of Islamic law, and that this has to be reserved. They argue that God’s sovereignty should be supreme in the state, in which case the state should enforce and implement Islamic law.

Notable movements associated with Political Islamists include the matured and current version of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the Pan Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Justice Prosperous Party of Indonesia), and the Jamat-i-Islami of Pakistan. They have similar approaches to social change, including an ideology that emphasizes a more activist Islam that challenges the existing authorities, whether state or religion. They are determined to change

Muslim societies from within. Maududi, the founder of Jamat-i-Islami, highlights certain key aspects of Islamic political philosophy, as he understood them:

The belief in the Unity and Sovereignty of Allah is the foundation of the social and moral system propounded by the prophets. It is the very starting-point of the Islamic political philosophy. The basis principle of Islam is that human beings must, individually and collectively, surrender all rights of overlordship, legislation, and exercising of authority over others. No one should be allowed to pass orders or make commands on his own right and no one ought to accept the obligation to carry out such commands and obey such orders. None is entitled to make laws on his own authority and none is obliged to abide by them. This right vests in Allah alone....Accordingly to this theory, sovereignty belong to Allah. He along is the lawgiver.⁷

Global Jihadist

Global Jihadist movement comprises of the most violent and widely publicized expression of Muslim ideology. These include localized national liberation struggles, international struggles such as the First Afghan War as a result of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and anti-western struggles by militant extremists. These struggles paved a way for the development of an international infrastructure of terror that used Islamic symbols to tap into Islamic networks and communities.⁸ Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Taiba are examples of Global

⁷ Sayyid Abull A'la Maududi, "The Political Theory of Islam," in *Contemporary Debater in Islam*, ed. Mansoor Maaddel and Kamran Talattof, (London: Macmillan 2000), 270.

⁸ Joshua D. Hendricks, "Global Islam and the Secular World: Transnational Muslim Movements and the Movements of Fethullah Gulen: A Comparative Approach," in *The Fethullah Gulen Movement in Thought and Practice* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 2006).

Jihadist movements while HAMAS would fall under the category of a local jihadist group. HAMAS sees itself as a Palestinian Islamic movement. In the early 21st century, an anti-Western struggle has dominated much of the debate of militancy and extremism among these movements, particularly as a result of the events of September 11, 2001 and the series of bombings in both Muslim and Western countries by a global network of militant extremists. Osama Bin Laden's Fatwa in 1998 reflects his views on Jihad:

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life. On that basis, and in compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God"⁹

These militant extremist are driven by a worldview that is characterized by a deep sense of injustice against Muslims and a profound sense of powerlessness

⁹ Text of "Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans." Published Al-Quds al-Arabi on 23 February 1998. Statement signed by Osama Bin Muhammad Bin Laden; Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of the Jihad Group in Egypt, Abu Yasir Rifai Ahmad Taha, a leader of the Islamic Group, Sheikh Mir Hamzah, secretary of Jamat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan, and Faizul Rahman, leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh.

surrounded by a world which they believe seeks to annihilate Islam and Muslims. This worldview is enhanced by a narrative that reinforces this sense of injustice from the time of the Crusades, to colonialism, to post-colonial domination of the Muslims by the West. They also feel betrayed by fellow Muslims who collaborate with the West against Muslims. They are motivated by a particular understanding of jihad on a global level and a belief that less resourceful people can defeat a powerful enemy using terror as a tool to achieve their objectives. In the long term, global jihadists seek to destroy the Western-dominated political economic system of transnational capitalism and to initiate a revival of Muslim globalization.

Civil/Cosmopolitans

Societies which have grown more pluralistic in makeup, are not always growing more pluralistic in spirit. What is needed — all across the world— is a new “cosmopolitan ethic” — rooted in a strong culture of tolerance.¹⁰

Proponents of civil and cosmopolitan Muslim social movements are the more progressive, moderate, and liberal of the believers of the four ideologies in theory and practice. They embrace and focus on elements of civil society and cosmopolitanism ethics in their understanding of Islam. They believe in an interpretation of Islam that accommodates pluralism, advocates tolerance and an understanding of other social and religious groups, and seeks to recover Islam’s

¹⁰ The Aga Khan IV, The Tolerance Award at Tutzing Evangelical Academy Award Address, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.

early compassionate tradition. These movements also support the revival of the rationalist heritage of Muslims; where faith and reason do not collide; while trying to retrieve Islam from literalist interpretations. In an interview with Spiegel, a German news source the Aga Khan further reiterates that “Islam is a faith of reason” and when asked about the root causes of terrorism he suggested it pertains to “[u]nsolved political conflicts, frustration and, above all, ignorance. Nothing that was born out of a theological conflict.”¹¹

The Ismaili community under the leadership of His Highness the Aga Khan and the Gulen movement under the leadership of Fethuallah Gulen are two prime examples of civil and cosmopolitan social and philanthropic movement that are adding a unique dimension to an understanding of Islam. Both movements hold the Quran as core to their understanding of Islam; however, they preach and address the importance and creative understanding of the Quran in modern times:

Ours is a time when knowledge and information are expanding at an accelerating and, perhaps, unsettling pace. There exists, therefore, an unprecedented capacity for improving the human condition. And yet, ills such as abject poverty and ignorance, and the conflicts these breed, continue to afflict the world. The Qur’an addresses this challenge eloquently. The power of its message is reflected in its gracious disposition to differences of interpretation; its respect for other faiths and societies; its affirmation of the primacy of the intellect; its insistence that knowledge is

¹¹ Stefan Aust and Erich Follath, Spiegel Interview with Aga Khan: Islam Is a Faith of Reason, *Spiegel Online International*, October 12, 2006.
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,442180,00.html>.

worthy when it is used to serve Allah's creation; and, above all, its emphasis on our common humanity.¹²

Transnational Muslim movements are harmonious with existing political and economic structures, place a high value on pluralistic human interaction, and do not view secularism as contradictory to Islam. Similarly to Classical modernists, these movements believe that the revelation does not clash with reason and that an effort should be made to renew Islam's rationalist philosophical tradition. These movements are concerned more with the spiritual ethics of Islam and incorporating Islamic practices in daily life versus a political struggle. Gulen says it best:

If we want to analyze religion, democracy, or any other system or philosophy accurately, we should focus on humanity and human life. From this perspective, religion in general, Islam in particular, cannot be compared on the same basis with democracy or any other political, social, or economic system. Religion focuses primarily on the immutable aspects of life and existence, whereas political, social, and economic systems or ideologies concern only certain social aspects of our worldly [i.e., secular] life.¹³

Civil and cosmopolitan Muslim movements have a strong sense of service, promote pluralism, and embrace liberal political values. Members and followers of

¹² His Highness the Aga Khan, 'Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions' An International Colloquium, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, The Ismaili Centre, London, October 19, 2003.

¹³ Fethullah Gulen, *Toward a Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), 219.

these movements generally belong to the middle-class, are well-educated, strive towards economic well-being, and have a global and humanistic approach to human rights and conflict resolution. These trends further showcase the development of a “new transnational activism” which is anchored in increasing internationalism and “rooted cosmopolitanism”, and in this case, have an Islamic flair. ¹⁴ The changing face of international politics, religious pluralism, and globalization facilitate new forms of collective action and organization. ¹⁵ At the macro-level, internationalism refers to a growing network of international actors, state and non-state and this complex interchange of networks allows for creative possibilities to form alliances that cut across national borders. Rooted cosmopolitanism works at the micro-level where individuals—despite their physical and psychological disconnection from their geographical origins—remain connected, especially given the increase in migration. The intertwined forces of internationalism and rooted cosmopolitanism make existing social and political boundaries obscure and allow for the framing of local issues in the global arena and the adaptation of global issues to local settings.¹⁶

¹⁴ Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124-126.

¹⁵ Thomas Banchoff, “Introduction: Religious Pluralism in World Affairs,” ed. Thomas Banchoff, *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-33.

These movements nurture modern day Muslim cosmopolitans who are deeply rooted in their own religious, ethnic, cultural and national realities whilst seeking to blend their commitment to pluralism and peaceful coexistence with their understanding of universal principles of a global community. By encouraging a compassionate Islam which is open to interpretation and dialogue, the two movements are cultivating a new kind of Muslim community and holistic faith identity. As Appiah suggests, cosmopolitanism is more a temperament and characteristic than a principle and it develops through immersion and interaction. He outlines the attributes of cosmopolitans in today's context:

One distinctively cosmopolitan commitment is to pluralism. Cosmopolitans think that there are many values worth living by and that you cannot live by all of them. So we hope and expect that different people and different societies will embody different values. Another aspect of cosmopolitanism is what philosophers call fallibilism - the sense that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, subject to revision in the face of new evidence.¹⁷

The Ismaili and the Gulen movements are demonstrations of Appiah's "rooted cosmopolitanism" and Tarrow's "new transnational activism." These movements are best understood by exploring their underlying motivations, methods, and processes. By plunging deeper and deconstructing the various facets of the two movements, this paper hopes to articulate how the Ismailis and

¹⁶ Ibid., 15-56.

¹⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," *New York Times Magazine*, January 1, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/magazine/01cosmopolitan.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>.

the Gulenists redefine the ethos of the Muslim Ummah in the 21st century while being rooted in cosmopolitanism and sharing a commitment to pluralism.

CHAPTER 1

ISMAILI MOVEMENT

The first case study will analyze the Ismaili movement. The Ismaili community is part of the larger diversity of the worldwide Muslim ummah. The diversity of interpretation and practice of Islam both for the individual and the collective has paved a way for multiple groups in Islam and the Ismailis are one such group. They represent the second largest Shia Muslim community of roughly fifteen million followers scattered throughout twenty-five to thirty countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and North America. This chapter aims to deconstruct the movement by expanding on four elements that are key to understanding the Ismaili movement, including the following:

- the Ismaili understanding and interpretation of Islam,
- an analysis of its leadership, and in this case a living spiritual leader,
- the organization of the movement and its membership, and
- the main programmatic engagements and focus areas that the movement emphasizes.—in this case-- commitment to human development, building civil society, and advocating pluralism.

Ismailis belong to the Shia branch of Islam and trace their origin back to the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad. Like all Muslims, the Ismailis believe and affirm the Shahada that there is no God but Allah and that Prophet

Muhammad was the last Messenger. They believe that that life of Muhammad was a culmination of Prophet hood and that the Holy Quran is Allah's final message to mankind. Muslims hold this revelation to be the finale of the message that had been revealed through other Prophets of the Abrahamic tradition before Muhammad, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus, all of whom Muslims revere as Prophets of Allah. Throughout their history, the Ismailis have been led by a living Imam who guides his followers. The line of Imamate traces its hereditary succession from Imam Ali to the present day Imam, His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, the 49th Imam in direct lineal descent from Prophet Muhammad through Imam Ali. ¹ For Ismailis, the Imam provides guidance to maintain a harmonious balance between *din* (spiritual) and *dunya* (material).²

The Ismaili movement as it developed a thousand years ago was not simply a religion but a system of organized inner life of an individual and of worldly social organization. Many religions that preach eternity and infallibility stagnate generally limits a full understanding of advancement. "Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and

¹ The Institute of Ismaili Studies, "Ismaili Community: History," http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104448

² The Institute of Ismaili Studies, "The Ismaili Imamate and its Institutional Capacity," *The Ismaili*, United Kingdom, July, 2007.

outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules, even the set of regulations known as Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedures and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.”³ The movement is revered for its ability to remain contemporary while remaining embedded in the spirit of Islam.

The Ismaili philosophy did not develop in a vacuum. The historical context surrounding its political and social evolution is key to understanding this movement. However, an expansion and detailed study of the evolution of the Ismaili movement is beyond the scope of this paper.

Understanding of Islam

Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion. Throughout the Quran God’s Signs (Ayats) are referred to as the natural phenomenon, the law and order of the universe, the exactitude and consequences of the relations between natural phenomenon in cause and effect. Over and over and over, the stars, sun, moon, earthquakes, fruits of the earth and trees are mentioned as the signs of divine power, divine law and divine order. Even in the Ayat of Noor, divine is referred to as the natural phenomenon of light and even references are made to the fruit of the earth. During the great period of Islam, Muslims did not forget these principles of their religion.⁴

The two overarching pillars of the Ismaili ethos are higher spiritual enlightenment and service to humanity. For Ismailis, higher spiritual

³ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 185.

⁴ Aga Khan III, “Islamic Right to Equality”, All Pakistan Women’s Association Address, Karachi, Pakistan, 1954.

enlightenment is consistent with the 1400 Islamic tradition of a thinking and spiritual Islam that emphasizes the development of the human soul to its highest degree and purest form. "Ismaili spirituality is ultimately rooted in two essentially Islamic themes - a cosmos-mirroring "Unity" and a sacred history reflecting the working out of Divine Will and human destiny." ⁵

In the Ismaili understanding of spiritual attainment, matter and spirit are integrated and each realm possesses its own significance and position and therefore the spiritual and material realm are not paradoxical but complementary. Though they require worldly and rational categorization, they represent elements of a whole, and a true understanding of God must also take both elements into account. Such a fusion allows the human intellect and its relationship to creation at large to fulfill the ultimate goal of *tawhid* or the highest form of spiritual enlightenment. ⁶ In simple words, when one attains the highest form of spirituality it is a mere reflection of the origin, as stated in the following Quranic verse:

From Him we are and to Him we return (II, 156)

The role of the Imam is central to Ismailism. It is through the guidance of the Imam that a true understanding of Islam can be obtained; however, such a

⁵ Azim Nani, "Introduction to Ismailism: Cosmos and History," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd, 1987), 179-198.

⁶ *Ibid.*

view does not ignore the believer's ability to use a rational, reason or intellectual faculty. In fact, true understanding came to be defined as the ultimate unfolding of human reason (aql) to its fullest potential under the guidance of the Imam. Working out this process provides the key to understanding the heart of Ismaili spirituality. "Spiritual allegiance to the Imam of the time and adherence to the Shi'a Imami Ismaili persuasion of Islam, according to the guidance of the Imam, have engendered in the Ismaili Community an ethos of unity, self reliance and a common identity".⁷ The Aga Khan III in his memoirs speaks to his understanding of Islam and his role as an Imam:

The Imam is thus the successor of the Prophet in his religious capacity; he is the man who must be obeyed and who dwells among those from whom he commands spiritual obedience.⁸

The Aga Khan III's referred to Islam as "the greatest unifying, civilising and fraternising influence in the world" and "a great cultural and spiritual force for the unity of the world and the fraternity of the nations."⁹ According to the official website of the Ismaili Muslim Community "the Aga Khan has emphasized the view

⁷ Mohamed Keshavjee, "Reflective Learnings From The Training Programmes Of The Ismaili Muslim Conciliation And Arbitration Boards, Globally," in the 5th International Conference of the World Mediation Forum, 8 September, 2008, Crans-Montana, Switzerland.

⁸ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 178.

⁹ K.K Aziz, "Aga Khan III: A Study in Humanism" *The Ismaili*, United Kingdom Supplement, July 1998, 1-4.

of Islam as a thinking, spiritual faith: one that teaches compassion and tolerance and that upholds the dignity of man, Allah's noblest creation. In the Shia tradition of Islam, it is the mandate of the Imam of the time to safeguard the individual's right to personal intellectual search and to give practical expression to the ethical vision of society that the Islamic message inspires."¹⁰ Human society is believed to be in a continuous state of change, the role of Imamate is to find permanent solutions to issues raised by an increasingly changing world, to care for the spiritual and material well-being of their followers as well as humanity at large, and to safeguard the rights of the individual to spiritual, social, and scientific enquiry. The role of the Imamate is summarized by the Aga Khan himself in a recent address as follows:

One of the central elements of the Islamic faith is the inseparable nature of faith and world. The two are so deeply intertwined that one cannot imagine their separation. They constitute a 'Way of Life'. The role and responsibility of an Imam, therefore, is both to interpret the faith to the community and, also, to do all within his means to improve the quality and security of their daily lives. ¹¹

Ismailism encourages the need to view material objects and beings in the universe while seeking to understand the true essence and meaning behind them.

¹⁰ Islamic Publications Limited 2008, Official website of the Ismaili Muslim Community, His Highness the Aga Khan, 2009. <<http://www.theismaili.org/cms/14/The-Aga-Khan>>.

¹¹ The Aga Khan IV, The Tolerance Award at Tutzing Evangelical Academy Award Address, Tutzing, Germany, 20 May 2006.

An intimate and intense interplay exists between the exoteric (zahir) and the esoteric (batin) that applies to everything in the perceptible universe and no less to the religious hierarchy in the observable world. It promotes a search for the esoteric 'batin' within the exoteric, 'zahir' and through this personal, intellectual, and mysterious endeavor encourages one to embark upon his or her own spiritual journey. In the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ismaili philosophical thought is defined as a “philosophy as conceived in Ismaili thought thus seeks to extend the meaning of religion and revelation to identify the visible and the apparent (zahir) and also to penetrate to the roots, to retrieve and disclose that which is interior or hidden (batin). Ultimately, this discovery engages both the intellect ('aql) and the spirit (ruh), functioning in an integral manner to illuminate and disclose truths.”¹²

The advantage of the Ismaili system is its doctrine of the Imamate along with ta'wil which keeps it current in any given time. Ta'wil is the tool utilized to interpret the scripture and is generally associated with Shia and Ismaili ideology. “The application of this Quranic term, which connotes ‘going back to the first/the beginning’, marks the effort in Ismaili thought of creating a philosophical and [investigative] dissertation that establishes the intellectual discipline for

¹² Azim Nanji, “Ismaili Philosophy”, originally published in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser, at <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/i/ismaili.htm>, 2003.
http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104808

approaching revelation and creates a bridge between philosophy and religion.”¹³

But the proper use of the organized functioning of the principle of ta’wil demands a broad religious education, of being conscious of complexities and realities of the community in the course of its whole history. This understanding shows that various changes which the Imam introduced through ta’wil are not incidental and haphazard, but form a part of a long tradition. A proper guidance of the community depends on the Imam, but the Imam has to have suitable, reliable, responsible, dependable, and intelligent set of assistants who could convey the Imam’s will and guidance to the community, who may assist it to apply the principle of ta’wil as authorized by the Imam. This demands well-trained and well-educated people in worldly and spiritual knowledge. In Ismailism the system of authorized ta’wil explains the application of the basic religious principles to the ever-changing forms of life in the society, and the Imam guides the community in its attitude to all that is of advantage for its progress.

The Aga Khan III speaks to the complementary nature of material intelligence and spiritual enlightenment:

I have explained in my Memoirs for the whole world to understand there are two worlds - the world of material intelligence and the world of spiritual enlightenment. The world of spiritual enlightenment is fundamentally different from the world of material intellectualism and it is the pride of the Ismailis that we firmly believe that the world of spiritual

¹³ Ibid.

enlightenment has come as a truth from the inception of Islam to this day with the Imamate and carries with it as one of its necessary consequences love, tenderness, kindness and gentleness towards first, our brother and sister Muslims of all sects and, secondly, to those who live in righteousness, conscience and justice towards their fellow men. These religious principles of Ismailism are well known to you for you have heard them from me and through your fathers and grandfathers and from my father and grandfather until I fear that by long familiarity with these teachings some of you forget the necessity of re-examination of your heart and religious experience.....But, as I started by telling you, there is also the world of matter and intellect which go side by side with reason and deductive and inductive powers. I have never, as you say in your own address, neglected to encourage schools and universities, and by welfare societies for the health of children, maternity, and more and more up to date needs that you may have, as far as it is possible in the areas in which you live, to get both mental and physical training that will make you capable of meeting the more and more difficult conditions of life and competition.¹⁴

At the Seerat Conference, a gathering that marks the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Eid Milad-un-Nabi (SAW). The primary purpose of the conference is to celebrate His life and His teachings and the need to follow in his footsteps, the Aga Khan commented to his views on Islam:

Islam, as even non-Muslims have observed, is a way of life. This means that every aspect of the individual's daily existence is guided by Islam: his family relations, his business relations, his education, his health, the means and manner by which he gains his livelihood, his philanthropy, what he sees and hears around him, what he reads, the way he regulates his time, the buildings in which he lives, learns and earns.¹⁵

¹⁴ Aga Khan III, "Material Intelligence and Spiritual Enlightenment," Platinum Jubilee Ceremony Address, Cairo, Egypt, 20 February, 1955.

The union of the spiritual and the material world and the holistic journey that inspires the daily life of Ismailis is summed up by a concluding passage in the Memoirs by the 48th Imam, Aga Khan III:

Life in the ultimate analysis has taught me one enduring lesson. The subject should always disappear in the object. In our ordinary affections one for another, in our daily work with hand and brain, we most of us discover soon enough that any lasting satisfaction, any contentment that we can achieve, is the result of forgetting self, of merging subject with object, in a harmony that is of body, mind and spirit. And in the highest realms of consciousness all who believe in a Higher Being are liberated from all the clogging and hampering bonds of the subjective self in prayer, in rapt meditation upon and in the face of the glorious radiance of eternity, in which all temporal and earthly consciousness is swallowed up and itself becomes the eternal.¹⁶

The Ismaili understanding of Islam enjoys and promotes a harmonious relationship with Islamic principles and new ideas and endeavors. It bestows much responsibility on the human intellect while utilizing the core of Islam and direction from the Imam as its guiding framework. The Aga Khan IV addresses students at convocation and states the importance of knowledge and its relationship to Islam:

In Islamic belief, knowledge is two-fold. There is that revealed through the Holy Prophet and that which man discovers by virtue of his own intellect.

¹⁵ Aga Khan IV, Address by His Highness the Aga Khan at the International Seerat Conference, Karachi, Pakistan, 12 March 1976.

¹⁶ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 335.

Nor do these two involve any contradiction, provided man remembers that his own mind is itself the creation of God. Without this humility, no balance is possible. With it, there are no barriers. Indeed, one strength of Islam has always lain in its belief that creation is not static but continuous, that through scientific and other endeavors, God has opened, and continues to open, new windows for us to see the marvels of His creation.....Our faith has never been restricted to one place or one time. Ever since its revelation, the fundamental concept of Islam has been its universality and the fact that this is the last revelation, constantly valid, and not petrified into one period of man's history or confined to one area of the world.¹⁷

Leadership

His Highness the Aga Khan or Maulana Hazar Imam (as he is known among his followers) is the current spiritual leader of the Ismaili movement. He is the 49th Imam of the Ismaili community and is considered a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, the first Imam. He became Imam on 11th July 1957 at the age of 20 after succeeding his grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan, the 48th Imam. For the purpose of understanding this movement in a contemporary context, this leadership analysis will focus on the Aga Khans in general and the Aga Khan III and IV in particular, the last two Imams of the Ismaili community. The modernization of policies within the Ismaili community began in the time of Aga Khan I in India but it was Aga Khan III and now Aga Khan IV that have institutionalized, formalized, and modernized the working of the movements inspired by their vision of Islam.

¹⁷ Aga Khan IV, Address at Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan, 16 March 1983.

The first Ismaili Imam to receive the title of “Aga Khan” was Hasan Ali Shah in 1818. He married Sarv-I Jahan Khanum, the daughter of the Persian Shah Fath Ali who bestowed this title on him. The Aga Khans at the time had a princely status in Persia. The successive Imams retained the title of the Aga Khan and thus the current Imam is referred to as Aga Khan IV. Aga Khan I emigrated from Iran to India in the 1840s due to the tumultuous nature of his relationship with Fath’s successor. This migration thus ended the Imamate’s historical presence in Persia and started a new era in the Indian subcontinent. Aga Khan I was the first Ismaili Imam to live in India and went on to establish his headquarters and residences in Bombay, Poona, and Bangalore. ¹⁸ This new consolidated organization paved the way for greater institutional capacity for religious and community life for Ismailis in India and abroad but initiated a more unified Ismaili identity for the community of followers. Aga Khan I had major influence on the politics of then British India and was granted the title of “His Highness” by the British Government. ¹⁹ Aga Khan I died in 1881 and was succeeded by his eldest son Aga Ali Shah, Aga Khan II. Aga Khan II set about continuing building on the work of his father by promoting his mission of social development within the community, with an emphasis on

¹⁸ Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of The Ismailis*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1998), 196.

¹⁹ Institute of Ismaili Studies, Ismaili Imamate from the time of the division in the Shia community: An overview, Last Updated July 13 2007 http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104388.

education. He established multiple schools and Ismaili centers. On the national front, he served on the Bombay Legislative Council and was elected President of the Muslim National Association in recognition of his educational and other philanthropic efforts for the benefit of Indian Muslims (both Shia and Sunni alike). Aga Khan II passed away in 1885 after being the Imam for only four years and the Sultan Muhammed Shah, Aga Khan III became the 48th Imam of the Ismaili community at the age of eight.²⁰

Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, served as the Imam to Ismailis for 72 years from 1885 to 1957—longer than any of his predecessors. Too young to cope with the responsibilities as the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, he was assisted by his mother in religious and financial affairs. Aga Khan learnt Arabic and Persian from well-known teachers. He also studied theology, philosophy and Persian poetry. Along with Islamic education, he also studied western thought, sciences, metaphysics, astronomy and mathematics from his European tutors. This blending of the two education systems left Aga Khan IV well prepared to serve his community (jamaat) as a spiritual leader.

Along with being the hereditary Imam of Ismailis, Aga Khan IV also occupied prominent positions in India—leading various political and social

²⁰ Ibid.

institutions. “He was the leader of the All India Muslim League, Founder-President of the All India Muslim Conference, supporter of the London Muslim League, head of the 1906 Muslim Deputation to the Viceroy of India, President of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference, one of the founders of the Aligarh Muslim University, Head of the British Indian Delegation to the Round Table Conference, Delegate to the Disarmament Conference, chief Indian Delegate to the League of Nations and later its President.”²¹ A detailed study of Aga Khan III is beyond the scope of this paper; however, he is revered as a Muslim reformer in humanist tradition, a statesman who believed in democratic socialism and was deeply involved in Indo-Muslim and international affairs. Accordingly to the Institute of Ismaili Studies website, an institution dedicated to the study of Islam and particular the Ismaili tradition, a short introduction sums up the life of the Aga Khan III quite succinctly:

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah was a social reformer whose concerns included the alleviation of rural poverty and the upliftment of women in society. An advocate of modern education, he became an ardent supporter of male and female educational advancement in India and East Africa. A keen connoisseur of culture, he advocated a truly multicultural education blending the best and highest of Western and Eastern literary classics. He was a champion of amity between nations and peoples.²²

²¹ K.K Aziz, “Aga Khan III: A Study in Humanism” *The Ismaili*, United Kingdom Supplement, July 1998, 1-4.

²² Institute of Ismaili Studies 2008, Speeches of Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan, http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104628

Although Aga Khan III was devoted to overall social progress and welfare, promoting education was his foremost goal for men and women alike. He placed significant value on the status of women and their role in society. While addressing the All Pakistan Women's Association in 1954 he stated:

Biologically the female is more important to the race than the male. While average women are capable of earning their own livelihood like men, they are the guardians of the life of the race, and only through their natural constitution are they able to bear the double burden. Experience shows the strong probability that the active influence of women on society, under free and equal conditions, is calculated not only to bring about practical improvement in the domestic realm, but also a higher and nobler idealism into the life of the State. Those who know Muslim society from within readily admit that its higher spiritual life owes a great debt to the example and influence of women. Today, as in the lifetime of the Prophet, probably the majority of devout and reverent followers of His teaching are women. No progressive thinker of today will challenge the claim that the social advancement and general well-being of communities are greatest where women are least debarred by artificial barriers and narrow prejudice, from taking their full position as citizens.²³

Aga Khan III revered being part founding circle of the Aligarh University as his greatest accomplishment. His commitment to education and higher learning was key to the development of a modern Ismaili community. Accordingly to Aziz, the Aga Khan III was a role model who practiced Islamic humanism like no other and it was his humanistic ideals that inspired and committed him to social,

²³ Aga Khan III, "Islamic Right to Equality," All Pakistan Women's Association Address, Karachi, Pakistan, 1954.

political, and economic equality. ²⁴ The Aga Khan III speaks to social development in his Memoirs, “[i]n matters of social reform I have tried to exert my influence and authority sensibly and progressively. I have always sought to encourage the emancipation and education of women.”²⁵

The Aga Khan II states the importance of primary and higher education for not just Ismailis but Muslims and Indians at large in his own words:

...believe me no country can ever flourish or make its mark as a nation, as long as the principle of compulsion is absent. The colossal ignorance of the Indian masses militates against uniting them as a nation, and the ideal of a united nation is an ideal, which we must constantly cherish and keep before us, making every endeavour towards its realisation. It is this colossal ignorance of the masses which prevents Moslems from uniting themselves in a spiritual union and of Brotherhood such as must be our essential aim and ambition. I firmly believe that primary education should be free and compulsory, and it should be so devised that its benefit may extend equally to the minorities, as to the majorities of the Indian communities. No system of primary education can be deemed satisfactory unless it is so carefully elaborated that minorities receive the same benefits as the majorities.....It is not only as a Moslem that I heartily support the movement for the free and compulsory primary education. You must also remember that we are Indian, and I support the movement just as well as an Indian as a Moslem from a deep conviction of its necessity. I have frequently emphasised the urgent need for a technical and commercial system of education, and I entertain great hopes from the University which may develop into a great centre of scientific teaching together with moral and humanitarian training. If our people take to science and scientific education in the light spirit, the

²⁴ K.K Aziz, “Aga Khan III: A Study in Humanism,” *The Ismaili United Kingdom Supplement*, July 1998, 1-4.

²⁵ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 186.

industrial and economic future of our community will no longer be in doubt.
²⁶

The current Aga Khan IV assumed the office of Imamate on July 11th 1957 in accordance with Aga Khan III's 1995 will. The Aga Khan III explained in his will that it was in the best interest of the Ismailis that the next Imam be a young man that had been brought up and educated in recent years to understand the dynamics of the modern world. He was the grandson of Aga Khan III and the son of Prince Aly Khan and Princess Tajuddawlah Aly Khan. The Aga Khan was born on 13 December 1936 in Geneva and spent his early childhood in Nairobi, Kenya, and then attended Le Rosey School in Switzerland for nine years. He graduated from Harvard University in 1959 with a BA in Islamic history.²⁷ The title of "His Highness" was granted to Aga Khan IV by Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain in 1957 while His Imperial Majesty the Shah of Iran granted the Aga Khan IV the title of "His Royal Highness" by in 1959.²⁸

Aga Khan IV is not only a religious leader for the millions of Ismailis around

²⁶ Aga Khan III, Inaugural Speech at the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference, December 4, 1911 Delhi, India.

²⁷ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailes: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 496.

²⁸The Aga Khan Development Network 2008, His Highness the Aga Khan, http://www.akdn.org/about_agakhan.asp

the world, but a leader concerned with strengthening the contemporary identity of Muslim culture in the Ummah, or the Muslim Diaspora. In 2007, he has paid official visits to some 35 countries to recognize the friendship and longstanding support of leaders of state, government and other partners in the work of the Ismaili Imamate, and to set the direction for the future, including the launching and laying of foundations for major initiatives and programs.²⁹ The Aga Khan reiterates his commitment to spreading pluralism and tolerance in the following excerpt:

In my own role as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims over the past half century, I have come to appreciate the importance of pluralism in ever-expanding ways. The Ismaili community, after all, is itself a global family, spanning many geographies, cultures, languages and ethnicities—and sharing its life with people of many faiths. In addition, much of my work over this time has dealt with highly diverse societies in the developing world, often suffering from poverty, violence and despair. In such circumstances, a commitment to pluralism comes as no accident. For pluralism, in essence, is a deliberate set of choices that a society must make if it is to avoid costly conflict and harness the power of its diversity in solving human problems.³⁰

Organizational Structure and Membership

Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no

²⁹Islamic Publications Limited 2008, This is the official website of the Ismaili Muslim Community, Golden Jubilee, <http://www.theismaili.org/cms/8/Golden-Jubilee>.

³⁰ Aga Khan IV, Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan, on the occasion of the Signing of the Funding Agreement for the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, Canada, 25 October 2006.

cut-and-dried rules; even the sets of regulations known as the Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.³¹

Changeability and flexibility have allowed the Ismaili movement to flourish for centuries. The two focal points of the dynamism of this movement are the leadership of the Imam and a dedicated following. The community in the 21st century enjoys a sophisticated structural framework, including a global Ismaili constitution. The constitution provides:

- a modern framework for organization and regulation,
- sustainable income through religious dues (*dassondh*) collected at the local level,
- a system of hierarchical councils which help the Imam regulate and implement the constitutions and his policies, and
- a mandate for local *jamatkhanas* where Ismailis pray and congregate.

The smooth operation of the movement can be attributed to a dedicated global membership which has strong adherence to their faith as well as the communities they live in. A loose structural framework to organize and manage the movement was initiated by Aga Khan I and he paved the way for more systemic organization in both communal affairs and social services of his community of

³¹ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 24.

followers.

Aga Khan III was the first to lay some concrete foundations around which the community organized communally. Under the leadership of Aga Khan III, the Ismaili community experienced significant development as a community through the establishment of various institutions for social and economic development in South Asia and in East Africa.³²

The headship of a religious community spread over a considerable part of the world surface –from Cape Town to Kashgar, from Syria to Singapore– cannot be sustained in accordance with any cut-and-dried system. Moral conditions, material facilities, national aspirations and outlook, and profoundly differing historical backgrounds have to be borne vastly in mind, and the necessary mental adjustments made.³³

He is the first Imam to truly consolidate the affairs of the community through institutionalizing programs and projects which honored the diversity of his followers. “Simultaneously, with defining and delineating their Ismaili identity, Aga Khan III worked vigorously for consolidating and reorganizing his followers into a modern Muslim community with high standards of education, health, and social well-being.” The establishment of the 1905 Ismaili constitution for east African Ismailis was the first example of institutionalizing the movement in the

³² Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of The Ismailis*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1998), 201-202.

³³ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 184.

modern sense. The formalization promoted structural significance around which Ismailis organized their community and social affairs; however, there was much room for flexibility to manage their daily affairs.³⁴ It also gave Ismailis a form of structure which entailed hierarchical councils at the local, national and regional levels. Aga Khan III speaks to the administration of his Indian and African community:

India and Africa for example – the Ismailis have a council system, under which their local councilors are charged with all internal administrative responsibility, and report to me as to their doings.³⁵

The constitution laid out rules and regulations pertaining to personal law in matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance and provided guidelines for religious and spiritual practices. The constitution also provided further guidance on interacting within the community and with communities outside the faith. Similar constitutions were promulgated across the Indian subcontinent. He urged the community to adapt and assimilate in their respective communities and to be active citizens in their communities while keeping their faith and religious adherence strong. The Aga Khan appointed voluntary officers for specified periods for these councils. These officers served as the Aga Khan's appointee in

³⁴ Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of The Ismailis*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1998), 201.

³⁵ Aga Khan IV, *The Memoirs of Agha Khan: World Enough and Time*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), 185.

their respective councils and these constitutions were periodically revised to meet the community's emerging needs and circumstances.³⁶

Aga Khan IV further organized the structural framework to smoothly run the affairs of the Ismaili community in the 21st century and leading them in their secular and spiritual affairs through regular visit to his followers.³⁷ Through the modernization policies enacted by his grandfather and predecessors, he maintained and expanded the council system of communal administration and extended it to areas where Ismailis had settled, keeping in mind migration patterns of 1970s. He extended the practice to the United States, Canada, and several European countries as well as East and South Asia, the Gulf, Syria, Iran and Afghanistan, after a process of consultations within each respective constituency. In 1986, Aga Khan IV instituted and circulated a constitution that would streamline the social governance of the Ismaili community globally with built-in flexibility for local administration and regional diversities with the ultimate goal of social cohesion.^{38 39} His Highness states that: “[i]t is my belief that the Ismaili

³⁶ Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of The Ismailis*, (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1998), 201-202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

Constitution will provide a strong institutional and organisational framework through which my Jamat (community) will be able to contribute to the harmonious development of the Ummah and of the societies in which the Jamat lives.”⁴⁰

Multiple institutions were set up to serve the Ismaili community, including the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards, Grants and Review Boards, and Conciliation and Arbitration Boards. Other boards operate in several other social domains, including economic wellbeing, education, health, housing, social welfare, and youth and sports. These boards were always dedicated to the personal, social and religious development of the community. Aga Khan IV has ultimate authority in creating and staffing these boards, determining roles and responsibilities, and structuring control and jurisdiction. He has also established the Leaders’ International Forum (LIF) to whom he refers specific matters affecting the Ismaili community. ⁴¹

Historically, the physical frame for the movement is housed though its *Jamatkhanas*, or assembly houses. They are central to the Ismaili movement and are administered by a local steward or treasurer (Mukhi) and an accountant

³⁹ Shams Vellani, “The Institutions of the Ismaili Muslim Community” in *The Muslim Religion and Cultural Evolution of the Islamic World Conference*, Arrabida Convent, Portugal, 25 September, 2001. http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101136

⁴⁰ The Institute of Ismaili Studies, “The Ismaili Imamate and its Institutional Capacity,” *The Ismaili*, United Kingdom, July, 2007.

⁴¹ Ibid.

(Kamadia) who essentially serves as the assistant. The local chiefs also bear the responsibility of collecting religious dues (dassondh) of 12 ½% and presiding over religious ceremonies. Most jamatkhana, depending on the size of the community, have both a Mukhi and Kamadia and usually house the local Ismaili councils as well. Jamatkhana are the source of cohesiveness in community where Ismailis can conduct their religious and social affairs. Ismailis congregate in the jamatkhana to observe their own distinctive practices prayers (dua), meditative sessions of remembrances (dikhr) and recitations of devotional poetry (ginans) and readings of sermons (farmans) of the Aga Khan. The farmans, which are direct proclamations, are held in the highest esteem by Ismailis; they serve as on-going guidance on matters that are significant to the community in their religious and secular life.

The jamatkhana are designated by the Imam of the time for use of his followers (murids) who have given the oath of allegiance (ba'ya) and whose allegiance has been accepted by the Imam. The jamatkhana is an institutional building with several functions; its primary purpose is to serve as a place for tradition and practices specific to the Ismaili tariqah of Islam while serving as a space for cultural exchange, community outreach and education. Jamatkhana wherever established have served to represent the Ismaili community's intellectual and spiritual understanding of Islam, its social conscience, its

contemporary outlook, and its positive attitude towards the societies in which it lives. There are jamatkhana in various cities around the United States where Ismailis live. The recent building of the Ismaili jamatkhana and Center in Houston represents the grounding and physical expression of an American-Ismaili identity. Aga Khan IV speaks to the importance of the jamatkhana to his American Ismaili community at the inauguration in Houston:

Because this Center also incorporates the permanent home of the Ismaili Council of the United States and other Ismaili constitutional bodies responsible for the well-being of the Community all over this country, the Center we inaugurate today is equally important for every Ismaili in the United States. We are honoured that you have taken time on a day of rest amidst your heavy schedules to share this moment of celebration, gratitude and reflection with us.....Bolstered by a long tradition of self-reliance, and a strong system of Community organisations, Ismailis have established themselves quickly as productive members of society in their new homelands. This has been particularly true in the United States with its long history of welcoming immigrants, its sense of opportunity and hope, and its recognition of accomplishment and merit. I express my gratitude to the people and leadership of the State of Texas for giving concrete expression to these important American values.⁴²

The unique feature of the architectural design of jamatkhana is that they blend harmoniously with their physical surroundings thus enhancing the built environment and the architectural landscape of the local community. As such, Ismaili jamatkhana have become important cultural institutions and communal

⁴² Aga Khan IV, Speech at the Inauguration of the Ismaili Jamatkhana and Center, Houston, Texas, June 23 2002.

landmarks both in Muslim majority countries and globally. ⁴³ The Aga Khan remarks at the foundation laying ceremony for the Ismaili Center in Dubai:

For many centuries, a prominent feature of the Muslim religious landscape has been the variety of spaces of gathering co-existing harmoniously with the masjid, which in itself has accommodated a range of diverse institutional spaces for educational, social and reflective purposes. Historically serving communities of different interpretations and spiritual affiliations, these spaces have retained their cultural nomenclatures and characteristics, from ribat and zawiyya to khanaqa and jamatkhana. The congregational space incorporated within the Ismaili Centre belongs to the historic category of jamatkhana, an institutional category that also serves a number of sister Sunni and Shi'a communities, in their respective contexts, in many parts of the world. Here, it will be space reserved for traditions and practices specific to the Shi'a Ismaili tariqa of Islam. ⁴⁴

In 1997, the Aga Khan IV established the Institute of Ismaili Studies. It is a contemporary undertaking by the Aga Khan to study Islam in general and Ismailism in particular. The Institute draws on the worldwide knowledge and experience of institutions and scholars to create awareness through programs, publications, and partnerships in the field of Islamic Studies. One of the institution's mandates is to advance the community's religious education through research, knowledge sharing, human capital, and curriculum development. The institution's overarching goal is to promote general scholarship and learning of Muslim cultures and societies by harnessing a deeper understanding of the

⁴³ Karim Jiwani, Muslim Spaces of Piety and Worship, *The Ismaili*, London, March 2007.

⁴⁴ Aga Khan IV, Excerpt from Speech at the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of Ismaili Centre, Dubai, UAE, December 13, 2003.

history of Islam and its diversities and exploring the relationship of religious ideas to various dimensions of society and culture at large, especially around issues of modernity. The Institute functions as a center for higher learning for Ismailis and all those interested in Islamic Studies. ⁴⁵

Since taking the office of the Imamate, Aga Khan IV has been concerned about the progress of all Muslims, particularly Ismailis, in the face of modern challenges. Over the four decades since the present Aga Khan became Imam, there have been major political, economic, social and cultural upheaval internationally. Keeping in mind the changing the diversity and needs of the Ismaili community, the Aga Khan IV has steered towards a more organized yet holistic adaptation of administering the Ismaili community and preparing it for globalization and modernization. ⁴⁶ The Aga Khan speaks to the balance between tradition and modernity at his Platinum Jubilee Ceremony after ten years as Imam:

In all forms of art, painting, calligraphy, architecture, city planning; in all forms of science, medicine, astronomy, engineering; in all expressions of thought, philosophy, ritualism, spiritualism, it is of fundamental importance that our own traditional values and attitudes should permeate our new society. It would be traumatic if those pillars of the Islamic way of life, social justice, equality, humility and generosity, enjoined upon us all, were to lose their force or wide application in our young society. It must never

⁴⁵ Aziz Esmail, "The Role of the Institute of Ismaili Studies," *The Ismaili*, United Kingdom, 2000.

⁴⁶ The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Introduction to His Highness the Aga Khan, http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=103467

be said generations hence that in our greed for the material good of the rich West we have forsaken our responsibilities to the poor, to the orphans, to the traveller, to the single woman.⁴⁷

In addition to the institutionalization of the Ismaili community's social governance, Aga Khan IV founded the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) to promote a humanitarian, intellectual, and social vision of Islam and a tradition of service to society. This formal institution built on the work that Aga Khan III had initiated in South Asia and East Africa. The AKDN has foundations that can be traced back to institutions that were created by Aga Khan III. "By the time of his death in July 1957, these institutions included sophisticated medical facilities, schools, housing associations, insurance companies and co-operative banks. His 72-year long Imamate was a critical period in the modern history of the Ismaili Community. His leadership enabled it to adapt to historical change."⁴⁸ AKDN brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programs that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa and serve as a contemporary endeavor of the Ismaili Imamate to realize the social conscience of Islam. AKDN

⁴⁷ Aga Khan IV, An Address at the Platinum Jubilee Ceremony, *Convocation Address at Peshawar University*, Peshawar, Pakistan, 30 November, 1967.

⁴⁸ Shams Vellani, "The Institutions of the Ismaili Muslim Community," in *The Muslim Religion and Cultural Evolution of the Islamic World Conference*, Arrabida Convent, Portugal, 25 September 25, 2001. http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101136

agencies conduct their programs without regard to the faith, origin or gender of those they serve. ⁴⁹ The Aga Khan IV speaks to the work of AKDN last December:

The challenge of pluralism is particularly important for those who are called upon to lead diversified communities and to act in diversified environments. It is a challenge to which Canadians have responded nobly through the years - and it is also a challenge which has been central to our work through the Aga Khan Development Network, what we call AKDN. The AKDN's principal focus, as you know, has been the under-served populations of Central and South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Our approach has observed the principles of neutrality and pragmatism, but this has not always been an easy matter. Turbulence and discontinuity have characterised these regions, including the transition from colonial rule, the struggles of the Cold War, the tensions of the nuclear age, the rise of new nationalisms - of both the right and the left, as well as revolutions in communications and transportation which have so dramatically increased encounters among different peoples. Our Network has inevitably been drawn into a tangled variety of social and cultural contexts - including highly fragile, conflictual and post-conflictual situations. Our response has always been to focus on the pursuit of pluralistic progress. Even against the most daunting challenges, social and economic progress can and must be a shared experience, based on a cosmopolitan ethic and nurtured by a spirit of genuine partnership.⁵⁰

Under his leadership, the Ismailis have entered the twenty-first century as a prosperous, cosmopolitan, civic-minded and progressive community.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, many Ismailis from South Asia migrated to Africa and embraced many of those influences to create a distinct East

⁴⁹ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailes: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 496-504.

⁵⁰ Aga Khan IV, Inaugural Ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamate, Ottawa, Canada, 6 December 2008.

African Ismaili identity. In more recent years, many Ismailis migrated to North America and Europe, creating another distinct Ismaili identity true to their experiences. Today there are about fifteen million Ismailis spread across thirty countries, representing multiple geographical and ethnographic diversities who, under the leadership of Aga Khan IV, seek to live Islam everyday.

Overall, Ismailis are encouraged to embrace a cosmopolitan identity which is embedded in global citizenry, service, and Islam. Through the guidance of Aga Khan IV, the community has built further on inherited institutions, allowing for the development of the community and for the continuity of its Muslim heritage. The Aga Khan laid out his understanding of cosmopolitanism among his followers and the need for tolerance at the Symposium on Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies:

A cosmopolitan culture is a culture tolerant to the expression of diversity, open to discussion, curious in relation to the other. This tolerance is based on the fight for individual freedoms – of thought, of expression, of religion, of association – as a maximum value of society’s political organisation and has, as its limit, its own intolerance: in other words, we can only not be tolerant before other’s intolerance....

The dialogue between civilizations is, without a doubt, very necessary. I keep highlighting this, but this needs to be conducted with openness, good faith and moderation by all parties. It is because of this that the example portrayed by the Ismaili Community is so important. It is a live example of an interpretation of Islam which, without relegating the faith and tradition, follows the evolution of times, opening itself to the dialogue with other religions and cultures. It is my profound conviction that it is, after all, that

interpretation of Islam which is shared by the great majority of Muslims, which voice is unfortunately silenced by the noisy extremist actions.⁵¹

The Aga Khan's leadership and vision is reflected in the increasingly significant global impact that Ismaili community institutions and networks have in the fields of social, educational, economic, and cultural development. The Aga Khan has emphasized the view of Islam as a thinking, spiritual faith—one that teaches compassion and tolerance and upholds the dignity of man, Allah's noblest creation. In his Address below the Aga Khan speaks to the need to renew our sense of ethical sensibility:

What I am calling for, in sum, is an ethical sensibility which can be shared across denominational lines and which can foster a universal moral outlook... In conclusion, then, I would ask you think with me about these three requirements: a new emphasis on civil institutions, a more rigorous concern for educational excellence, and a renewed commitment to ethical standards. For these are all ways in which we can encourage a climate of positive pluralism in our world—and thus help meet the current crisis of democracy. For only in such a climate will we come to see our differences as sources of enrichment rather than sources of division. And only in such a climate can we come to see "the other" not as a curse or a threat, but as an opportunity and a blessing-- whether "the other" lives across the street-- or across the world.⁵²

Programs – Welfare and human development

With this denial of divinity in mankind, there is the denial of human

⁵¹ Aga Khan IV, *Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies, Evora University Symposium*, Evora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.

⁵² *Ibid.*

brotherhood ... The whole economic, social and religious fabric calls for immediate relief - uplift of the weak - economically, intellectually and culturally, so that there may be left no one to be called downtrodden.⁵³

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is the manifestation of the Ismaili vision of Islam through institutional action. Aga Khan IV created AKDN to consolidate the various initiatives that Aga Khan III had initiated to further support a humanitarian, intellectual, and social vision of Islam and a tradition of service to society. Its international activities have earned an enviable reputation for its commitment to the development of societies, without bias to national or religious affiliation, and to the promotion of culture as a key resource and enabling factor in human and social development. AKDN focuses on health, education, culture, rural development, institution-building, the promotion of economic development, and emergency relief. It is dedicated to improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, through embracing tenets of holistic human development. The overwhelming support for the AKDN comes from the Ismaili community globally through its commitment to philanthropy and service and the

⁵³ K.K Aziz, "Aga Khan III: A Study in Humanism," *The Ismaili United Kingdom Supplement*, July 1998, 1-4.

leadership and material underwriting of the Aga Khan IV and the Imam's resources, totaling an annual budget in excess of US\$500 million.⁵⁴

The Ismailis are themselves a culturally-diverse community. They live -- as minorities -- in more than twenty-five countries, primarily in the developing world, but also in Europe -- including Portugal -- and North America. This Ismaili multi-cultural experience is reflected in the approach of the Aga Khan Development Network —working with a wide array of partners to help the disadvantaged, regardless of their origin.⁵⁵

AKDN is a consortium of agencies which includes:

- the Aga Khan Academies
- Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance,
- Aga Khan Education Services
- Aga Khan Foundation
- Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development
- Aga Khan Health Services
- Aga Khan Planning and Building Services
- Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Aga Khan University
- Focus Humanitarian Assistance
- University of Central Asia

All of these agencies share all three principles that guide their work:

⁵⁴ Aga Khan Development Network, AKDN at the Governors' Global Climate Summit, Press Release, Los Angeles, California, November 19, 2008, http://www.akdn.org/press_release.asp?ID=693.

⁵⁵ Aga Khan IV, *Cosmopolitan Society, Human Safety and Rights in Plural and Peaceful Societies*, Evora University Symposium, Evora, Portugal, 12 February 2006.

1. A dedication to self-sustaining development that can contribute to long-term economic advancement and social harmony.
2. A commitment to the vigorous participation of local communities in all development efforts.
3. All institutions within the network seek shared responsibility for positive change. They actively work to facilitate collaborative ventures, seeking potential partners—from universities and governments, to foundations and international development agencies, to individual and corporate donors or investors—on the basis of shared objectives and the complementarity of resources.

A thorough analysis of AKDN's programs are beyond the scope of this paper; however, the paper will seek to analyze its unique initiatives in education, cultural understanding, social driven business practices, institutionalizing philanthropy, and pluralism to provide a glimpse into the vast work of AKDN and its agencies.

The Aga Khan Education Services and the Aga Khan University have been pioneers in the field of K-12 and higher education. The Aga Khan Education Services currently operates over 300 schools providing quality pre-school, primary, secondary, and higher secondary education services to more than 54,000 students in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and will soon include Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar and Mozambique. The establishment of the Aga

Khan University (AKU) in Pakistan was one of most ambitious undertakings of AKDN and now AKU accounts for 70% of all biomedical research in Pakistan and ranks number one in the field of health sciences in Pakistan.⁵⁶ In August 2007, the Aga Khan inaugurated another university, the Faculty of Health Sciences (AKU-FHS), East Africa's first private medical school, the second most ambitious initiative since AKU-Pakistan in the field of education. .⁵⁷ In his address the Aga Khan states:

I am pleased to announce the Aga Khan University's decision to build a major new campus in East Africa--and to locate that campus in Arusha. This project is, I believe, the first major private sector investment in the East African Community since the formal joining of Rwanda and Burundi. It is the biggest expansion step for the Aga Khan University since it opened in Pakistan almost 25 years ago. This new campus will be built over a period of fifteen years with a total investment of some 450 million dollars. It will include a new Faculty of Arts and Sciences and several graduate professional schools. It will be committed to teaching and research of world-class standards.But we undertake this effort with some confidence, bolstered by evidence of past success. We are pleased, for example, that the Aga Khan University has been ranked as the best university in Pakistan - and that its medical graduates score in the top 10% on licensing exams in the United States. We are also pleased that the first class of Aga Khan Academy graduates in Mombasa has scored impressively in the International Baccalaureate exams... We hope that the University will be a source of effective leadership for the East Africa of tomorrow. We envision students coming from many directions and many backgrounds—

⁵⁶ KARACHI: Need stressed to promote research, *DAWN*, March 29, 2007, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/03/29/local11.htm>

⁵⁷ Semin Abdulla, "Aga Khan Announces the East African Community's First Regional University to be based in Arusha," *Aga Khan University*, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, August 19, 2007.

living and studying together in a special regional environment, and then going out again with a strengthened sense of personal empowerment and social responsibility.⁵⁸

The mandate of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) is to promote cultural understanding. In 2002, the AKTC helped bring the *Silk Road to National Mall* to Washington, DC. The AKTC focuses on the revitalization of communities in the Muslim world—including their physical, social, cultural, and economic revitalization. Programs of AKTC include the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Historic Cities Programme, and the Education and Culture Programme. The Silk Road Festival was produced by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and for the first time in its 36 year history, the Festival was dedicated to a single theme, "*The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust.*" The 2002 Festival featured a living exhibition of the music, crafts, culinary, and narrative traditions involved in the cultural interchange between the "East" and the "West." Over 350 musicians and artists journeyed to Washington from 20 nations including Turkey, Syria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Mongolia, South Korea, Japan and Italy. The festival was opened by Aga Khan IV

⁵⁸ Aga Khan IV, Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan at the State Banquet, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 18 August 2007.

and Colin Powell. In his address Colin Powell stated the relevance and importance of the Silk Road and such an endeavor:

[T]he Silk Road was the main link between civilizations of the East, Central Asia, and Europe and from Europe, the products and ideas spread to the New World of the America. [it was] "more than an image of past glories The countries of Central Asia are once again joining the nations at either end of the Silk Road on a path to a better future for all ... The region's security, stability and prosperity depend on critical political and economic reform, but the Silk Road is once again a living reality."⁵⁹

Roshan is a AKDN poster child. Roshan literally means "light" in both the national languages of Afghanistan--Dari and Pashto. The name Roshan was given by the people of Afghanistan to symbolize the promise of hope, development, and a brighter future for Afghanistan. The Aga Khan Fund for Economic (Development?) is a major shareholder along with Monaco Telecom International (MTI) and Swedish-Finnish TeliaSonera at 12.25%to this young mobile company in Afghanistan with over 100 million subscribers.^{60 61} Roshan believes business plays a critical role in social issues and uplifting societies where they operate. They

⁵⁹ Aga Khan Development Network, Aga Khan and Colin Powell Open Silk Road Festival in Washington, Press Release, Washington, DC, USA, 25 June 2002, http://www.akdn.org/press_release/539/Aga-Khan-and-Colin-Powell-Open-Silk-Road-Festival-in-Washington.

⁶⁰ Shareholders Page, Roshan, http://www.roshan.af/web/?page_id=84.

⁶¹ His Highness Aga Khan IV, The Enabling Environment Conference, Kabul, Afghanistan, 04 June 2007.

currently operate in 227 cities and towns in Afghanistan and have invested \$341 million in telecommunication infrastructure. ⁶²

The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development is an international development agency dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship and building economically sound enterprises in the developing world. AKFED focuses on building enterprises in parts of the world that lack sufficient foreign direct investment. It also makes bold but calculated investments in situations that are fragile and complex. In a speech at The Enabling Environment Conference, Aga Khan IV speaks to innovative business practice and social responsibility:

All around the world, private companies of all sizes are a rapidly growing source of progressive energy. Increasingly, they see corporate social responsibility not as something extra - a symbolic after-thought tacked on to the corporate agenda at the end of the day - but rather as part and parcel of their basic commercial strategies. Many companies have set up dedicated departments or corporate foundations to lead such efforts - budgeting a portion of their proceeds to finance them. Other companies encourage and even match the contributions of time and treasure made by individual employees.

We can see a notable example of this potential here in Kabul. Roshan is a mobile phone company, only four years old, but already the largest company in Afghanistan - with over one million customers and nearly a thousand employees. For almost two years now, it has sponsored a department of Corporate Social Responsibility - the first of its kind in Afghanistan.

Roshan sponsors micro-finance projects which enable women to become

⁶² Social Program, Roshan, http://www.roshan.af/socialprograms/?page_id=246.

independent entrepreneurs - selling phone services, or repairing mobile phones. It provides playgrounds, meals, cultural and school projects for street children. It has pioneered in the field of Telemedicine - using fibre optic and microwave links to connect local patients to sophisticated doctors and equipment in Karachi.

Throughout the developing world, we see a new emphasis on the capacities of indigenous organizations to meet development challenges - on a bottom up rather than a top down approach. Voluntary village associations, for example, are undertaking projects which once lay in the political domain - ranging from the installation of water and sanitation systems and the building of irrigation canals, to the provision of educational services and the support of health and safety standards.⁶³

Given the tradition of philanthropy in Islam, the Ismaili community and Pakistan, the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP) was established in August 2001 under the aegis of Aga Khan Foundation (Pakistan), an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network. The purpose of the center is to promote and institutionalize philanthropy in Pakistan, especially corporate philanthropy. The PCP mandate is to build partnerships between the public sector, development agencies, and the corporate sector to share resources and to facilitate social and economic empowerment. The organization was founded at a conference organized in 2000 by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) on Indigenous Philanthropy in Pakistan. The Aga Khan Foundation continues to be the lead funder for the Pakistan's Centre for Philanthropy. The Aga

⁶³ Aga Khan IV, The Enabling Environment Conference, Kabul, Afghanistan, 04 June 2007.

Khan spoke to the importance of indigenous philanthropy in Pakistan and the need to create a philanthropy friendly environment in Pakistan:

The teachings of Islam and the history of Islamic civilisations give us direction and courage to take on the challenges and responsibilities of active engagement in philanthropic work....The question before this conference is how the movement toward self-reliance can be effectively supported and encouraged at the national, community and individual levels. The establishment of a Centre for Philanthropy, as recommended by the conference, would be a concrete step in that direction. Another would be to look for ways to strengthen an "enabling environment" of beneficial tax and regulatory conditions to stimulate philanthropic giving. Creating fuller public understanding of the role of philanthropy in the support and development of activities formerly offered exclusively through government funding are also very important.⁶⁴

The Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa is a recent and timely undertaking of the Aga Khan, the AKDN, and the Canadian Government to further strengthen the goals of building societies that have a deep respect for pluralism. "We are honoured that His Highness, leader of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, and one of the world's best known philanthropists, has chosen Canada as the home of this institution," Prime Minister Harper said. "Pluralism is the principle that binds our diverse people together. It is elemental to our civil society and economic strength."⁶⁵ Through research, education and exchange about the values,

⁶⁴ Aga Khan IV, Statement at The Conference on Indigenous Philanthropy, Islamabad, Pakistan, 17 October 2000.

practices and policies that underpin pluralist societies, the Centre hopes to promote pluralist values and practices in culturally diverse societies worldwide to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential as a citizen, irrespective of cultural, ethnic or religious differences. ⁶⁶ The Aga Khan remarks at the Signing of the Funding Agreement for the Global Centre for Pluralism were synonymous to Prime Minister Harper's earlier:

The Ismaili Imamate and the Aga Khan Development Network are deeply grateful to the Government and the people of Canada for the continuing spirit of vision, generosity and mutual respect which has brought us to this landmark moment.

Indeed, our agreement itself exemplifies pluralism at work. It brings together people, ideas and resources from different continents and cultures, from religious and secular traditions, and from the public and the private sectors. And it continues in that spirit today.

Our hope and expectation is that the Global Centre for Pluralism will become a vital force in our world for research, learning and dialogue, engaging Canadians from all walks of life, and joining hands with a widening array of partners.

I am grateful that the Government of Canada has contributed so generously to its material and intellectual resources. Making available the Old War Museum is a particularly generous and symbolic gesture. Let us replace war with peace. Our own commitment is to invest in this building so that it

⁶⁵ Office of the Prime Minister, Canada's New Government welcomes Global Centre for Pluralism, Press Release Ottawa, Ontario, 25 October 2006, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1378>.

⁶⁶ Aga Khan Development Network, Government of Canada and Aga Khan Sign Funding Agreement for Global Centre for Pluralism, Press Release, Ottawa, Canada 25 October 2006, http://www.akdn.org/press_release/567/Government-of-Canada-and-Aga-Khan-Sign-Funding-Agreement-for-Global-Centre-for-Pluralism.

becomes a worthy testament to Canada's global leadership in the cause of pluralism.⁶⁷

The Global Centre for Pluralism, Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP), The Aga Khan University in Arusha, and Roshan are just a few examples to illustrate how the AKDN has promoted initiatives that provided impetus for addressing inequities through indigenous and systemic change. These initiatives showcase and acknowledge the notions of tradition and practice of giving and service in Islam while embracing a more strategic, holistic and collaborative view of human development and philanthropy. Like many philanthropists, Aga Khan IV's commitment to eliminating poverty and inequality is not unusual in our dichotomous world, but his integrated model towards human development is unique as it addresses the needs and desires of the whole person in line with the spirit of Islam. His vision for human development takes into consideration an individual's value aspirations for personal achievement through education and economic opportunities, which in turn have long-term and deep impacts on the well being of their community and surroundings. The Ismaili experience is unique given its transnational, cosmopolitan, and philanthropic spirit and the factor that differentiates the AKDN's social and philanthropic model is that it embraces many

⁶⁷ Aga Khan IV, Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan on the occasion of the Signing of the Funding Agreement for the Global Centre for Pluralism, Ottawa, Canada, 25 October 2006.

faith-based aspects of Islam including its ideals and values but it is not faith-limited.

CHAPTER 2

GULEN MOVEMENT

The second case study will analyze the Gulen Movement or community which is a unique case of global collective action embedded in spiritual Sufi Islam. Spearheaded by a distinctive modern day Muslim scholar and preacher, Fethullah Gulen. The Gulen movement or service (hizmet), is a loosely connected transnational network of autonomous schools, universities, NGOs and media and publishing enterprises. Unlike the Ismaili movement, the Gulen movement is not a sect within Islam but a collective based on the teachings of Fethullah Gulen that organized organically through grassroots initiatives. The young movement, some thirty years old, enjoys voluntary participation from people of different backgrounds, ideologies, nations, ethnicities, and faiths globally. Similar to the Ismaili movement, the Gulen movement is motivated by Islamic values and ideals. It encourages its followers to be civically engaged, to be generous and philanthropically driven, and be peaceful. To gain a better understanding of Fethuallah Gulen as a spiritual leader and the movement that organizes around him, the movement will be examined in the text below. Below, we use four lens to provide a holistic understanding of Fethullah Gulen as a spiritual leader and to understand the movement that grew around him. These lens include:

- Fethuallah Gulen's understanding and interpretation of Islam,

- an analysis of the movement's leadership in this case Fethullah Gulen,
- the organization of the movement and its membership, and lastly,
- the areas of social engagement that the movement promotes—including education, sound business practices and interfaith dialogue initiatives rooted in the fundamental beliefs of tolerance and pluralism.

The Gulen movement has strong roots in Sufi Islam and enjoys a well-built following among intellectual elites in Turkey and internationally. Fethullah Gulen is a progressive Islamic Sufi thinker who supports the modernization and development of Turkish society through education and public discourse, all the while addressing the spiritual dimensions of an individual's well being. Many attribute the movement to the renewal of Islamic traditions t which seeks to create a new Turkey—a modern day progressive state that embraces Islam. Recruiting through personal contacts and operating largely through a series of study circles also referred to as lighthouses, Gulen's followers seek to perfect themselves and their society through study, projects, and personal integrity.¹ The movement seeks to establish a "golden generation" which possesses both religious and secular knowledge. Through its efforts, the movement has established an

¹ Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>.

impressive network of business communities, newspapers, television and radio stations, student dormitories, cultural centers and publications in Turkey, Central Asia, Europe, South Asia, former Soviet Union and America. ²

The Fethullahci, or followers of Gulen, seek to co-exist within modern day systems of economic, social and political organization while elevating the spiritual life through education, scientific inquiry, and interfaith dialogue. Most importantly, they seek to set an individual example of personal piety in society. The ways in which the principles and teachings of Islam are understood and applied vary according to historical, political and social context, and this is evident through our understanding of the Gulen movement and its contribution to the discourse of Islamic studies.

Building on its emergence and prosperity in Turkey and its Sufi foundation, the Gulen movement incorporates tenets of Islam while nurturing a newer understanding of Islam in today's world. The international movement seeks to reshape Islam into its more contemporary, pluralistic and cosmopolitan version. ³

² Jon Alterman, and Shireen Hunter, "The Idea of Philanthropy in Muslim Contexts," Prepared for USAID by The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 22 February 2008, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/idea_of_philanthropy_in_muslim_contexts.pdf.

³ John Voll, "Fethullah Gulen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 247.

According to Voll, the movement's compatibility with contemporary realities of the world makes it an important Muslim social actor. Voll further asserts that the two underlying features of the new global reality of globalization and desecularization, transcend the 'modernist' imagination. Thus the Gulen movement has much to add to the discourse of modernity and religion in the public sphere. ⁴

Understanding of Islam

Islam, the true religion, is a unique order that never misleads and a divine source that opens new earthly and heavenly prospects for human beings. This divine system is called "religion" from the perspective of belief, "shariah" from the perspective of actions, and "community" from the perspective of social functions. Primarily, all actions and activities occur according to the belief system, and social life is shaped according to this behavior, these actions and activities. For this reason, believers, who have solid faith and who make their faith a part of their character, continuously practicing it, are sources of truth, justice and fairness; such a person is trustworthy, a representative of high morality, a seeker of knowledge and wisdom, and is loyal to the sacred call of religion. Such a faithful believer would also actively participate in working toward the perfection of human society. ⁵

Fethuallah Gulen's understanding of Islam is embedded in Sufism, the ancient mystical understanding of Islam that emphasizes a personal religious experience of God as divine love. Based on the notion that Islam is an inherently open and tolerant religion, Gulen advocates acceptance of and dialogue with non-

⁴ Ibid., 238-247.

⁵ Fethuallah Gulen, "A Brief Overview of Islam," February 9, 2006, <http://www.dislam.org/content/view/381/39/> (accessed March 2, 2009).

Muslim communities. In his writings on Sufi concepts, Gulen does not create new approaches nor does he bring new definitions to concepts already discussed by other Sufi scholars.⁶ Rather, Gulen benefits from some Sufi scholars' works to present a reasonable Sufi practice to his followers, thus operationalizing his understanding of Sufism.⁷ According to Gulen:

Sufism is the spiritual life of Islam. Those who represent Islam according to the way of the Prophet and his Companions have never stepped outside this line. A tariqah is an institution that reaches the essence of religion within the framework of Sufism and by gaining God's approval, thus enabling people to achieve happiness both in this world and in the next.⁸

For Gulen Islam has and can exist in a variety of forms and the characteristics of the religion are open to interpretation as espoused by the practice of Sufism. To Gulen, Islam's main credence stems from the unchanging principles found in the Quran and the Sunnah (the sayings of Muhammad).

To understand Gulen's interpretation of Islam, one must look at the genesis

⁶ Mustafa Gokcek, "Gulen and Sufism," in *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gulen Movement in Thought and Practice*, Houston, Texas, November 12-13, 2005.

⁷ Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gulen Movement," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 12, No. 3 - September 2008, http://www.merijournal.com/en/asp/journal/2008/december/park/index.asp#_edn15.

⁸ Fethullah Gulen, "Sufism as a Lifestyle," September 27 2004, <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/gulens-works/love-and-tolerance/271-sufism-and-metaphysics/1839-sufism-as-a-lifestyle.html>, (accessed March 10, 2009).

of the movement. The movement flourished under the auspices of Turkish Islam—one that is moderate and tolerant of non-Islamic lifestyles---which is historically attributed to the legacies of several leaders, including the Seljuks, the Ottomans, and then Kemal Ataturk. Under the Ottomans, the principles of Shariah were applied in the private sphere, but the public life was regulated according to customary law formulated under the authority of the state. This aspect of the Ottoman political system made religion's role less rigid and the state accepted it would be pluralistic, to the extent that followers of other faiths would to be governed by their respective laws. This system of governance promoted the attitude that religious institutions would be flexible and amenable to the changing times. During the 19th century, a time when many in the Islamic world rejected western ideas, Ottomans adopted many Western ideas and innovations.⁹

Another interesting feature of Gulen's ideas is his belief that it is non-Islamic for Muslims to advocate for the formation of an Islamic state. He believes that Muslims must support and be active participants of democracy and a free-market economy, so as to align themselves with mainstream global processes. In accordance with his opposition to an Islamic state, he also does not favor the state-

⁹ Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>.

sponsored Islamic law. He points out that most Islamic regulations affect Muslims in the private realm and that only a small segment of them concern the state and government and these provisions need not be enforced.¹⁰ He urged Muslims to focus on the more important aspects of modern life such as education and inter-faith dialogue, which are more relevant in the current global context.¹¹

In addition to the movement's attachment to the history and evolution of the Turkish political and Islamic heritage, the Gulen movement is heavily influenced by the teachings of a prominent Sufi philosopher and religious authority, Said Nursi, the founder of the Nur movement. Nursi's beliefs stem from a strictly orthodox and conservative Naqshabandiyah Sufi order, but his message was anything but. He believed that Muslims should embrace modernity and find inspiration in the sacred texts to engage with it. The Nur movement spread in the 1950s especially among the young in Turkey who were inspired by Nursi's teaching that religion and science were compatible and a Muslim did not have to choose one over the other. Religious moderates found solace in the movement's

¹⁰ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Islam in the Public Sphere," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 11.

¹¹ Yasin Aktay, "Diaspora and Stability: Constitutive Elements in a Body of Knowledge," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 151.

emphasis on the links between Islam and reason, science and modernity.¹² Nursi's teaching were geared towards empowering Turkish Muslims by updating their Islamic vocabulary to allow them to participate in modern day political and economic discussions on constitutionalism, science, freedom, democracy, and market economics, while adjusting to a new flexible Muslim identity.¹³ Even though the Gulen movement was heavily influenced by the Nur movement, there are certain characteristics that distinguish the two movements. In particular, Gulen is more nationalistic and state-oriented in his concerns but has taken the discussion to the new social, political and economic landscape globally.¹⁴ The Gulen movement took Nursi's ideas and understanding and implemented them; he is an executioner and practitioner and believes strongly in institutionalizing advocacy through the building of schools, media outlets and interfaith dialogue platforms. Simply put, Gulen is more action oriented.¹⁵

¹² Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>.

¹³ Jean-Francois Mayer, Interview with Hakan Yavuz - The Gülen Movement: a modern expression of Turkish Islam, *Religioscope*, 21 July, 2004 http://religion.info/english/interviews/article_74.shtml.

¹⁴ Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>.

¹⁵ Jean-Francois Mayer, Interview with Hakan Yavuz - The Gülen Movement: a modern expression of Turkish Islam, *Religioscope*, 21 July, 2004 http://religion.info/english/interviews/article_74.shtml.

The main aim of Islam and its unchangeable dimensions affect its rules governing the changeable aspects of our lives. 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. If we approach the matter in this light and compare Islam with the modern liberal democracy of today, we will be better able to understand the position of Islam and democracy with respect to each other. ¹⁶

The Gulen movement embraces the separation of the sacred and the secular and emphasizes that revelation and reason are not in conflict. According to Gulen and Nursi, it is anti-Islamic to talk about an Islamic state, thus Muslims should focus on becoming conscious and tolerant. They placed particular emphasis on organizing and creating Muslim networks driven by Islamic principles and becoming role models through practice and action. However, in their view when Islam became a model for the state, it was no longer Islam.

This vision of Islam as a totalizing ideology is totally against the spirit of Islam, which promotes the rule of law and openly rejects oppression against any segment of society. This spirit also promotes actions for the betterment of society in accordance with the view of the majority. Those who follow a more moderate pattern also believe that it would be much better to introduce Islam as a complement to democracy instead of presenting it as an ideology. Such an introduction of Islam may play an important role in the Muslim world through enriching local forms of democracy and extending it in such a way that helps humans develop an understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and material

¹⁶ Fethullah Gülen, "A Comparative Approach to Islam and Democracy", *SAIS Review*, 21:2 (Summer-Fall 2001):133-38, <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/love-and-tolerance/275-global-perspectives/1874-a-comparative-approach-to-islam-and-democracy.html> (accessed March 4, 2009).

worlds.¹⁷

Democracy for Gulen is the only viable system of political organization and governance as it provides a structural framework for a state that is inclusive of multiple identities, whether religious, cultural or political. Democracy allows for all people, to enter the political discourse and to become part of the state's agenda-setting and decision-making processes.¹⁸

Democracy and Islam are compatible. Ninety-five percent of Islamic rules deal with private life and the family. Only 5 percent deals with matters of the state, and this could be arranged only within the context of democracy. If some people are thinking of something else, such as an Islamic state, this country's history and social conditions do not allow it. Democratization is an irreversible process in Turkey.¹⁹

Leadership

Fethullah Gulen occupies a central place within the Gulen movement and he is considered one of the world's most important Muslim figures. In August 2008, Foreign Policy and Prospect Magazine conducted a poll on the World's Top 100 Public Intellectuals and Gulen was among the top 20. He has been called a modern

¹⁷ Z. Saritoprak, Interview with Fethullah Gulen, *The Muslim World*, Special Issue, July 2005 - Vol. 95 Issue 3 Page 325-471, <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/an-interview-in-the-muslim-world/1998-what-is-the-relationship-between-an-individual-and-the-state-according-to-the-teaching-of-islam-what-is-the-place-and-function-of-an-individual-within-a-state.html> (accessed March 6, 2009).

¹⁸ Greg Barton, "Preaching by Example: Understanding the Gülen Hizmet in the Global Context of Religious Philanthropy and Civil Religion", in *Muslim World in Transition*, SOAS University of London, House of Lords and London School of Economics, on 25-27 October, 2007

¹⁹ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 200.

day Rumi by many. In addition to being the inspiration for and leader of the Gulen movement, Gulen is a prolific writer with over sixty published books; an interfaith enthusiast like no other; and a teacher who began his religiously infused journey as an official Imam in Turkey. His sermons, teachings, writing and initiatives advocate for tolerance, , and dialogues for peace. His work has inspired millions of followers to negotiate their Islamic identity with modernity. When asked in an interview with Foreign Policy on his place on the world's top public intellectual's list he suggested:

I have never imagined being or wished to be chosen as something important in the world. I have always tried to be a humble servant of God and a humble member of humanity. The Koran says that humanity has been created to recognize and worship God and, as a dimension of this worship, to improve the world in strict avoidance of corruption and bloodshed. It requires treating all things and beings with deep compassion. This is my philosophy, which obliges me to remain aloof from all worldly titles and ranks. However, I am not indifferent to the appreciation of kind people. [The voters were] extremely kind in naming me the world's top public intellectual, a title to which I can never see myself as entitled.²⁰

Gulen was born in Pasinler, Erzurum, in eastern Turkey in the early 1940s to a family that traces its lineage to a long succession of religious scholars. From a young age, he was taught the Quran, Arabic and Sufi principles and ideas. He studied under prominent Islamic scholars, receiving special training in religious

²⁰ Interview with Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar now living in the United States, *Foreign Policy*, Web Exclusive, August 2008 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4408.

sciences from Muhammad Lufti, a famous Muslim and spiritual master. Upon graduation from a private divinity school in Erzurum, he obtained his religious teacher's license and began to preach and teach about the importance of understanding and tolerance. He began a career as a government-paid Imam in late 1950s. In the mid-1960s he was moved to a post in Izmir and it was here that the movement started to take shape through study circles. He traveled the provinces in Anatolia and gave sermons in mosques, town meetings and coffee houses. The topics of his sermons and speeches were more diverse than most Imams in Turkey at the time. He talked about education, science, Islamic creationism, the economy and social justice. More broadly, he spoke of his vision of a society of devout Muslims who adopt modern methods and technical knowledge. Many of his sermons were taped and distributed by a network of followers.²¹

While still an Imam, Gulen became acquainted with some of the students of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his teachings. It was through understanding Nursi's ideas that Gulen began to realize the importance of combining the positive sciences with spiritual education. Gulen sought to become a teacher of both minds and

²¹ Eustis, Catherine. "The Cry of the Nightingale" Fethullah Gulen – A Modern-Day Rumi?" in *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, 4-5 March 2006.

hearts. Gulen joined the Light movement, a network for followers of the Turkish thinker Said Nursi. He later broke away from that group but continued to be influenced by Nursi's ideas on accommodating Islam to modernity and finding harmony between scientific reason and religious revelation—thus paving the way for the Gulen movement. Through his ideas and thinking, Gulen has had a profound influence on Muslim-West relations while inspiring a community of followers. Today, in his late 60s, Gulen continues to dedicate his life to contemporary issues of our time while promoting an open brand of Islamic thought deeply entrenched in his own life experiences and his world view inspired by Sufi ideas.

Organizational Structure and Membership

The Gulen movement arose in the late 1960s in Turkey as a civil society movement initially composed of a loose network of individuals inspired by Fethullah Gulen. To understand the significance and evolution of the movement, we must analyze its unique and loosely organized structure and membership as well as its evolution from a predominantly Turkish movement to an international one.. Unlike the Ismaili movement, which institutionalized its community activities and social activism through a constitution and local, regional and national and international bodies, the Gulen movement remained more of an informal and

ungoverned community.²² Gulen followers function as a decentralized and autonomous group driven by their vision and dedication to an educational understanding of Islam.²³ There are no membership guidelines or formal initiation processes in place, one could be an active volunteer or a sympathizer or silent follower of Gulen's teachings. In fact many of Gulen's well-wishers include people of other faiths. To be part of the Gulen community one does not have to be Muslim. .²⁴ Gulen's own words when asked about the movement by the Foreign Policy in August, 2008:

I cannot accept concepts such as Gülenism or Gülenist. I was only a writer and an official preacher among people. I can have no direct influence on any person or activity. It is inconceivable that I can exert pressure on anybody.

²² "I use the term movement, because a movement has a collective goal that it intends to achieve through a collective engagement. In order to achieve it, you need networks. The Gülen movement consists of a number of networks, organized horizontally. In this loose network system, the traditional values and idioms of the community play an important role. ... As a movement, it incorporates the network and community, or communal ethos. I would consider it as a movement based on the re-imagining of Islam and consisting of loose networks under the guidance and leadership of Fetullah Gülen... These networks are not necessarily organized in hierarchical terms. But we see three circles. The first is the core circle around Gülen. The second circle consists of those who give their time and labour in order to achieve the collective goals of the movement. The third circle consists of those who are sympathizers: sometimes they support the movement by writing an article in the media, or they give money, or they support the movement in other ways....So you have a number of circles, but each circle includes a number of networks. When we examine these networks, there is a sense of solidarity and of the Islamic ethos of brotherhood. This is the glue that joins these networks together". Jean-Francois Mayer, Interview with Hakan Yavuz - The Gülen Movement: a modern expression of Turkish Islam, Religioscope, 21 July, 2004 http://religion.info/english/interviews/article_74.shtml.

²³ Zeki Saritoprak, "Fethullah Gulen: A Sufi in His Own Way," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 168.

²⁴ Serif Ali Tekalan, "A Movement of Volunteers" in *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, Rice University, Houston, 12-13 November 2005.

But some people may regard my views well and show respect to me, and I hope they have not deceived themselves in doing so. Some people think that I am a leader of a movement. Some think that there is a central organization responsible for all the institutions they wrongly think affiliated with me. They ignore the zeal of many to serve humanity and to gain God's good pleasure in doing so. They ignore people's generosity. Such misunderstandings may lead others to have suspicions about the financial resources of the schools. A small minority in Turkey even accuses me of having political ambitions, when in fact I have been struggling with various illnesses for many years. ²⁵

Membership numbers range from 200,000 to 4 million. The discrepancy in numbers is due to the lack of clarity of what constitutes a member or follower. Membership generally denotes active participation and/or a pronounced affiliation to an entity; in the case of the Gulen movement, individuals do not necessarily need to identify as members. ²⁶

Fethullah Gulen is the solitary leader of the movement and a hierarchical yet vague order has been established around him. Elder brothers (abilers) provide the senior leadership to the movement; however, the ranking is strict and embraces a top down approach. Some critics argue that the movement lacks transparency in terms of financial, organizational and leadership structure, many

²⁵ Interview with Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar now living in the United States, *Foreign Policy*, Web Exclusive, August 2008. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4408.

²⁶ Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000, <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>.

view it as undemocratic where individual members do not have much say in the workings of the movement, especially in light of how Gulen embraces democratic ideals, tolerant and liberal attitudes. ²⁷ These criticisms seem severe given the nature and evolution of the Gulen movement and its followers and the historical underpinning of the movement's civic activism in Turkey. The numerous initiatives inspired by Gulen are seen more as practical manifestations of Gulen's teachings instead of as a religious order. Neither Gulen nor his immediate circles have ever attempted to formalize a structure encompassing its international endeavors. More importantly, individuals that do consider themselves followers of Gulen choose to do so themselves. The power of the movement lies in the informal personal networks which are technologically savvy, financial affluent, and seek to live a modern Muslim life embedded in spiritual attainment, material well being and intellectual enlightenment. Criticisms in the realm of financial transparency could be resolved by a more formal organization so individuals or institutions studying the movement can attain timely and accurate information. ²⁸

The Gulen movement started out as a grassroots movement that took its

²⁷ Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gulen Movement," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 12, No. 3 - September 2008, http://www.merajournal.com/en/asp/journal/2008/december/park/index.asp#_edn15.

²⁸ Aras Bulent and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal Turkish Islam Movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*. Volume 4, No. 4, December 2000 <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue4/jv4n4a4.html>

somewhat organized shape in Izmir during the 1970's under Gulen's leadership. Through Gulen's modern style of teaching and willingness to engage the business and community at large, he won the local business network's approval and appreciation of the. The grassroots nature of the movement, along with its pro-business, pro-market tendencies, shares many characteristics with the modern western philanthropic model of partnership and collaboration. The business community provided three types of support:

- they assisted Gulen with establishing and running summer camps for university students in the fields of faith, ethics and science,
- assisted launching the study circles, to read, discuss and debate Sufi and religious texts,
- helped build student dormitories or "lighthouses" to assist poorer students attend university and promote them to grow spiritually. ²⁹

In the 1970's the movement's first journal, *Sizinti*, a monthly magazine was launched to demonstrate the compatibility of science and Islam, and of religious morals and modern society. ³⁰ Gulen describes the lighthouses below:

²⁹ Hakan Yavuz, "The Gulen Movement: The Turkish Puritans," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 30-35.

³⁰ Osman Bakar, Osman. 2005. 'Gülen on Religion and Science: A Theological Perspective', *The Muslim World: Special Issue, Islam in Contemporary Turkey: The Contribution of Fethullah Gülen* Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, 359-72.

[T]he lighthouses are places where the people's deficiencies that may have been caused by their human characteristics are healed..... Thus, these houses are one workbench or one school where these directionless and confused generations who have shaped themselves according to dominant fashionable ideas are now healed and return to their spiritual roots with its accompanying meaningful life ³¹

Towards the end of the 1970's, community supporters along with Gulen unified and solidified the vision and created a plan of action for the movement. In the early 1980s the movement became public and evolved into a 'market-friendly religious-education movement.' ³² During this time, the Turkish government under the leadership of Turgut Ozal, felt comfortable with Gulen's focus on education and national development and the reforms paved the way for private schools. In 1983, two private schools were opened, one in Izmir and one in Istanbul both of which became models for hundreds of Gulen schools. Since the mid-1980s, the community has successfully built hundreds of schools inside and outside Turkey. They have initiated media outlets, such as the daily newspaper Zaman in 1986 and financial institutions, such as the ISHAD, a business association to support the various educational initiatives. The 1980s marked a time of increased organization, cohesion and infrastructure within the movement paving

³¹ Hakan Yavuz, "The Gulen Movement: The Turkish Puritans," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 33.

³² Ibid., 35.

way for internationalization in the late 1990s. ³³

The 1980s and 1990s marked a new era for the Gulen movement. With increased financial ability, a focus on interfaith dialogue, a stronger emphasis on education globally through the development of schools and universities all while embracing opportunities of globalization it evolved into transnational and pluralistic Muslim faith based movement. In just thirty years of activism, the Gulen movement has built an effective, global and influential Muslim faith-inspired movement. By raising moral and religious awareness through the founding of non-denominational schools and universities, and encouraging intercultural dialogue and understanding, they have made practical contributions to constructive and positive relations between the West and the Muslim World. With their special focus on issues such as education democracy, multiculturalism, globalization, and intercultural dialogue, the Gulen movement continues to garner support from Muslim and non-Muslims alike as they bridge the gap between the Muslim world and the West in the 21st century--all while raising individual consciousness of Muslims.

Programmatic Engagements

Today the Gulen movement has become a global phenomenon. Their engagement with different cultures and especially with the West, has helped the

³³ Ibid., 35-42.

movement and its members develop a more liberal and cosmopolitan consciousness. By the mid-1980's the movement began to develop and articulate its lines of social engagement to include educational initiatives, the establishment of media and business networks, channels for intellectual dialogue embedded in Islam-West relations, interfaith discourse, and lastly to facilitate religious teaching both nationally and internationally. All four spheres of non-religious endeavors emphasize action rather than instruction and advocate for a neutral, inclusive approach to dialogue and cooperation. Only the last sphere, facilitating religious teachings, focuses on religious teaching through continued sermons and writings of Gulen.

Disseminating knowledge, promoting interfaith dialogue and philanthropy are key traits of the Gulen movement. According to Gulen, the main problem in the world is a lack of knowledge and so the movement seeks to improve access to, production of, and the quality of knowledge. By establishing schools, media outlets, and business communities that are socially engaged and ethically bound, they hope to eliminate the controls and barriers that exist in seeking knowledge. By promoting both secular education in areas of math, science and humanities and religious education, they seek to provide a holistic platform for becoming a well

rounded Muslim.³⁴ As the Gulen school's network began to expand they maintained a high-quality, modern, secular model. In the 1990's, several higher institutions of learning were established and today Fatih University, a Gulen institution in Ankara and Istanbul, has built a solid reputation as a private university that attracts some of the highest-scoring graduates from across Turkey. The recent numbers publicized include six hundred schools and six universities in seventy countries.³⁵ Gulen speaks to the meaning and value of education:

Education through learning and leading a commendable way of life is a sublime duty that is the manifestation of the Divine Name Rabb (Educator and Sustainer). By fulfilling this, we are able to attain the rank of true humanity and to become a beneficial element of society.

Education is vital for both societies and individuals. First, our humanity is directly proportional to the purity of our emotions. Although those who are full of evil feelings and whose souls are influenced by egoism appear to be human beings, whether they really are so is questionable. Almost anyone can train themselves physically, but few can educate their minds and feelings. Second, improving a community is possible by elevating the coming generations to the rank of humanity, not by obliterating the bad ones. Unless the seeds of religion, traditional values, and historical consciousness are germinated throughout the country, new negative elements will inevitably grow up in the place of every negative element that has been eradicated.

³⁴ Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gulen as Educator," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito ((New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 69-84.

³⁵ Thomas Michel, "Peaceful Movements in the Muslim World" ed. Thomas Banchoff, *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 242.

A nation's future depends on its youth. Any people who want to secure their future should apply as much energy to raising their children as they devote to other issues. A nation that fails its youth, that abandons them to foreign cultural influences, jeopardizes their identity and is subject to cultural and political weakness.³⁶

The real accomplishment is the secular model that the schools embody in structure and practice, which is tuned-in to the local state curriculum, similar to how Catholic and Christian schools operate all across Southeast Asia and Africa. The Gulen schools do not teach religious education per se, but are relatively socially conservative in terms of co-ed socializing and dress code. Moreover the schools emphasize character building and moral development. Schools operating within Turkey and a number of Islamic countries have a religious curriculum, but schools in countries like America and Australia are primarily secular private schools. The Gulen's schools maintains its dedication to modernity through an emphasis on learning in science and humanities.³⁷

Gulen schools represent a combination of religious philanthropy and sound business principles. Philanthropic giving by the community's businessmen represents the school's main source of capital during the early years. The schools are intended to become self-sustainable over time through their fees.

³⁶ Fethullah Gülen, "Education from Cradle to Grave," October 19, 2004, <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/love-and-tolerance/274-education/1855-education-from-cradle-to-grave.html> (accessed March 2, 2009).

³⁷ Bekim Agai, The Gulen Movement's Islamic Ethics of Education, in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 48-68.

However the fees structures vary by location. For example, the Gulen schools operating in Turkish cities charge high yet competitive fees and produce very high academic results. Schools in poorer districts of Turkey tend to charge considerably less but produce high academic achievers. Gulen schools operating in developing countries in Africa and Asia generally receive deeper philanthropic support from business communities. The schools also benefit from teachers who travel from Turkey to live and work in poor communities abroad to establish the schools and help maintain academic standards. In this aspect—Gulen school’s outreach is unparalleled anywhere else in the Muslim world. Many of the students studying at Gulen schools are non-Muslims and students from all backgrounds are welcomed to maintain a secular atmosphere. Even within Turkey, students at these schools report that their teachers do not talk about Fethullah Gulen or the movement, and with respect to religion, the schools operate according to the principle of teaching by example rather than by words, a driving philosophy of the movement.³⁸

The movement began to move into the field of media and outreach to provide alternative, wholesome, secular news and entertainment. In 1986 the daily newspaper Zaman ‘(i.e. era)’ was launched. Today, Zaman is a highly

³⁸ Greg Barton, “Preaching by Example: Understanding the Gülen Hizmet in the Global Context of Religious Philanthropy and Civil Religion”, in *Muslim World in Transition*, SOAS University of London, House of Lords and London School of Economics, on 25-27 October, 2007

regarded quality newspaper with a daily circulation of 500,000 copies, making it the fifth largest newspaper in Turkey and the first to launch an on-line version. It has agencies and correspondents around the world and prints local editions in ten different countries including Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Turkmenistan, and the United States of America. The holding company that owns Zaman, Feza Publications, owns a leading Turkish news agency, CHA, and a respected news weekly magazine, Aksiyon. The movement is also involved in publishing periodicals in environmental justice and theological studies. Samanyolu TV, reputed for providing quality news and family-friendly programming is popular in Turkey and is broadcasted internationally. The hizmet also supports the Burc FM radio network which broadcasts in major cities throughout Turkey. Apart from a limited number of devotional programs or columns, the media content is secular and does not discuss religion directly and has been compared to international media outlets such as the British Broadcasting Company and National Public Radio.³⁹

The third social engagement activity is Gulen's business networks and finance. In many respects, the social networks of small and large businessmen are comparable to secular service clubs, such as the Lions or the Rotary which have regular meetings and a philanthropic orientation. The movement also has a

³⁹ Ibid.

business support group called the Society for Social and Economic Solidarity with Pacific Countries (PASIAD) which serves to promote trade and development between Asia and Turkey. Asya Finans is another project of the movement, which is backed by Gulen followers and other. The bank has sixteen partners and has about \$500,000 million which has assisted in the expansion of finance related activities in Central Asia and was able to fill a void in the Turkish business environment. Lastly, the ISHAD; a business association of over two thousand businessmen and merchant serves as the financing arm of the various education initiatives of the movement.⁴⁰

Launching the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) marks the movement's fourth line of public engagement focused on high level dialogue and discussion. The Abant Platform, a project of JWF along with the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, and the Dialogue Eurasia Platform, organizes meetings, conferences, panels, and publications, to spread Gulen's advocacy for tolerance and modernity while bringing together intellectuals, thought leaders, policy makers, writers and activists, to discuss a wide range of contemporary contentious issues. In February 1998, Gulen met with Pope John Paul II to initiate a culture of interfaith discussion with leaders of different faiths. Furthermore, the

⁴⁰ Hakan Yavuz, "The Gulen Movement: The Turkish Puritans," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 36-37.

appointment of Gulen as the Australian Catholic University's Chair of the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations validates Gulen's passion of dialogue, learning and service. One of the Foundation's most important activities is their annual summer dialogue forum known as the Abant Platform. The first Abant Platform was held in July 1998 on the theme of "Islam and Secularism" followed by related themes including "Religion and State Relations" in July 1999, "Islam and Democracy" in July 2000, and "Pluralism" in July 2001. Most recently in April 2004 an Abant Platform was held in Washington DC in collaboration with the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University to pave the way for other similar discussions by organizations that would generally not host dialogue forums to discuss sensitive issues. ⁴¹

In the last few years multiple academic conferences and exchanges have been organized at various universities in the US, UK and Australia to facilitate discussion and dialogue around the Gulen movement. Examples include "Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice" which was held at the Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance at Rice University of Houston in November 2005, "Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice"

⁴¹ Greg Barton, "Fethullah Gülen: Contributions to Global Peace and the Inter-religious Dialogue" Speech was delivered for launch of the Fethullah Gülen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at the Australian Catholic University, November 23, 2007.

held at Southern Methodist University of Dallas in March 2006 and most recently, 'Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gulen Movement' in November 2008 at Georgetown University. These conferences are co-sponsored by local or national groups that are part of the movement along side Universities. This collegial experiment where scholars and academics congregate to propose and articulate their understanding of the Gulen movement and its impact within an academic and research oriented construct has proved to quite successful. The final sphere of the movement's activities is concerned with religious teaching. Isik Publishing "The Light Publishing" (under the Kaynak group of companies) publishes the Fountain, a monthly English-language magazine published in New Jersey and edited in Istanbul. The magazines are designed to communicate religious values and perspectives in general which are driven by progressive Islam and is a continuation of Gulen's earlier ministry of religious instruction. A key element of publishing house is to edit, translate, publish and distribute works of various contemporary Islamic intellectuals including Fethullah Gulen and Said Nursi.

We all change, don't we? There is no escape from change. By visiting the United States and many other European countries, I realized the virtues and the role of religion in these societies. Islam flourishes in America and Europe much better than in many Muslim countries. This means freedom and the rule of law are necessary for personal Islam. Moreover, Islam does not need the state survive, but rather needs educated and financially rich

communities to flourish. In a way, not the state but rather community is needed under a full democratic system.⁴²

Gülen and the various initiatives of the movement have served as change agents in transforming the way Islamic thought relates to the imperatives and realities of modern society. Since the 1990's the movement has essentially globalized by expanding their educational institutions, business practices, and interfaith dialogues. The uniqueness of this movement are its Turkish roots-- especially because modern Turkey is unique in the Islamic world in its aggressive, totalizing approach to secularism. While the Gülen movement is deeply critical of the positivistic character of Turkish secularism, it is not opposed to secularity and democracy but seeks to showcase the compatibility between Islam, modernization, secularism and liberal democracy without losing its Islamic identity. This experiment of Turkish Islam is where the Gülen movement burgeoned and then made its way to the global arena. Many view the movement as outwardly pro-bourgeoisie, while others regard it as a long-term effort to infiltrate Turkish institutions and subvert the secular state and make Turkey an Islamic state. Supporters of the movements argue that the networks are moderate, spiritual, self-

⁴² Mustafa Akyol, "What Made the Gülen Movement Possible?" *Muslim World in Transition*, London: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, October 2007.

correcting, philanthropic, and organic as they change the debate and discourse for Islam and Muslims globally. The loosely connected network has allowed individuals and institutions to develop under the auspices of Gulen's teachings and Islamic principles.

Despite one's view of the Gulen movement, most agree that it has added a much needed dimension and perhaps a new facet to Islamic activism while reshaping a new kind of Muslim identity.

CONCLUSION

The popular debate in the academic and policy worlds in the last few decades have revolved around the tension between the West and the Muslim world and focused on a means to develop a tool of engagement between globalization, modernity and Islam. In today's international political climate, Islam is often presented in international relations and in the media as a major obstacle to developing liberal democratic thought. Many see the faith as incompatible with the modern world. "The media and some opinion leaders [of the West] tend, if not actively perpetrate old clichés and stereotypes, show a lack of anything like a nuanced knowledge or appreciation of the tradition in the Muslim world." ¹ Furthermore, simplistic and politically colored explanations such as "good v.s. evil," or "the clash of civilizations," or the "Islamic incompatibility with the modern world" have shed more heat than light on the issue. ² These debates are further and somewhat fairly intensified in large part to a few radical and militant movements that are the basis of national, regional and international security concerns around the world. Despite more recent academic and media focuses on violent transnational Islamic networks, political Islam and Islamism, modest

¹ His Highness the Aga Khan (2003). Address at the 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony, The Institute of Ismaili Studies. London, United Kingdom, 19 October 2003.

² Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

attention is rewarded to global Muslim movements and Muslim social activism that represents an alternative understanding of the spirit of Islam and the Muslim Diaspora.³ One generally associates Muslim movements in a negative light and this paper sought to shed light on movements that are peaceful, progressive, and Islamic, in line with Michel's view on religious pluralism and peaceful Muslim movements:

[S]uch movements shape the vision, motivate the commitment, and inspire the social and educational projects of millions of Muslims in many countries of the Middle East, Asia, Europe and North America. They represent the most energetic and influential forces shaping the outlook and vision of Muslims and point that the direction the worldwide Islamic community is heading far more accurately than do than increasingly isolated circle of those who are involved in terrorist fringe organization.⁴

Today we need peaceful engagement tools and strategies to create a pluralistic world which respects and understands intercultural and interreligious variations and celebrates those diversities. The Ismaili and the Gulen movements are at the forefront of a global movement aimed at nurturing a new understanding of service and activism through solutions that are current and holistic. Gulen, founded in Turkey and the Ismaili movement now based in France with its Persian and South Asian roots, serve as religiously oriented transnational actors leading

³ Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context: In Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 25.

⁴ Thomas Michel, "Peaceful Movements in the Muslim World" ed. Thomas Banchoff, *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229.

movements that offer forward-thinking and Islamic action-oriented solutions. Even though both movements are Muslim in orientation, many of their supporters and sympathizers are from other faith communities. Furthermore, Gulen's education initiatives and interfaith activities and the Aga Khan Development Network are holistic platforms for individuals of other faiths to support the movement.

The two movements share several characteristics. They both promote a cosmopolitan and contemporary vision of Islam, one that compliments the realities Muslims face today. The two movements are centered on a spiritual vision of Islam where reason and intellect are crucial to both belief and action. The charismatic leadership of both the Aga Khan and Gulen are the driving forces behind the success and implementation of the vision of the movements. Both promote pluralism and interfaith dialogue through their writings and initiatives. The two movements have started to become of interest to both academic and policy makers who want to understand the cosmopolitan nature of a spiritual tradition that is embedded in Islamic principles.

Despite the similarities, the two emerged in different historical contexts. The Ismaili movement is a sect of Shia Islam and has developed and organized over centuries. To belong to the movement on a religious and social level, followers must entrust religious guidance to the living Imam and adhere to Ismaili principles. The Gulen movement, on the other hand, consists of a community of

followers that are mainly Sunni Muslims with a Turkish heritage. Drawn by his support for interfaith dialogue and his version of Sufi Islam, many more followers of Gulen come from different faiths and regions. The two movements share a similar rhetoric of collective action, but differ in their strategies, organization, and tactics. Their association with other social movements and their interaction with government authorities also vary. Through partnership development, collaborative projects, and alliance building with other groups (i.e. secular or religious) the two movements have created structures that support a deeper involvement and understanding of their versions of Islam. Before concluding with an analysis of the two movements, it is important to underline that this research is only in its initial stages, most of the paper was based on the writings of the Aga Khan and Gulen. To validate this research, in-depth interviews and archival research could be further conducted.

The movements directly and indirectly focus on bridging the divide between Muslim and Western communities—one of the most critical socio-political tasks in a post-9/11 environment. The movements' distinguish themselves from other global movements in several ways, including their peaceful presence in both the Islamic and Western worlds, their vision of a more enlightened and tolerant Islamic culture, and world outlook along with its recent expansion in an American Muslim context.

Both the Ismaili and Gulen communities use education and philanthropy to bridge the divide between the Muslim world and the West and to enrich their communities towards peaceful coexistence. As Muslim nations and Muslims seek to remain faithful to their tradition as well as to their own greater awareness of absolute human rights embedded in Islamic principles, and the inter-relatedness of the destiny of humankind, these two movements have provided a progressive Islamic approach to some of the individual and collective realities for Muslims. Through a new vision of Islam and action-oriented solutions, such as the development of educational institutions and other philanthropic endeavors, the Ismaili and the Gulen movements nurture Islamic transnational activism.

Muslims at the beginning of the twenty-first century are engaged in many vast projects of reframing the basic narratives of their identity and faith.... The old battles between tradition and modernity are over. The real battles now are among those who represent different visions of the future in a globalized (glocalized) and desecularized world. Some of the struggles are between those who continue to see the more long-standing visions of modern, secular society as crucial and those who advocate a postmodernity either of multicultural pluralism or of militant normative fundamentalism that divide the world into believers and unbelievers or into coalitions of the virtuous opposed to the axes of evil.⁵

The Ismaili and Gulen movements are emerging as models for peaceful Islamic activism, and add a much needed dimension to the “new world of

⁵ John Voll, “Fethullah Gulen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse,” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 246.

transnational activism, [where] religion is an important if sometimes overlooked element".⁶ However, these movements are not without their own sets of dilemmas and challenges---but they offer important possibilities and potentials to augment and enrich the discourse on peaceful Muslim movements. The key academic challenge is to offer a new perspective in understanding transnational social phenomenon and religion in a contemporary world. John Voll, a leading scholar on Islam, questions the binary approach and suggests a new framework for reading the social transformations and collective action. He proposes a more holistic look at Muslim movements discarding phrases such as modern-traditional, global-local, and secular-religious in order to closely and fairly capture the essence and impact of these hybrid movements.⁷ Within the contexts of globalization, pluralism, multiculturalism, and internationalism, the Ismaili and the Gulen movement serve as modern day articulations of Muslim cosmopolitanism. The movements are reshaping the Muslim ethos and a faith based identity while cultivating a new paradigm for cultural, religious, and social engagement and interaction for a more equitable and just world.

⁶ John Voll, "Trans-State Muslim Movements and Militant Extremists" ed. *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 268.

⁷ John Voll, "Fethullah Gulen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 238-247.

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