

Thesis Title:

**Navigating the Soul of the Mavi Marmara:  
Muslim civil society in Turkey and its transnational role in Palestine**

**By**

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**November, 2014**

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## **Navigating the Soul of The Mavi Marmara:**

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#### **Abstract**

This study explores how Muslim civil society in Turkey emerged, expanded and currently works to bring about change for social justice and freedom by engaging in activism involving humanitarian and development work, locally and transnationally. An understanding of Muslim values is essential when examining the motivation and roots of Muslim civil society, which emphasise moral values, self-empowerment, indigenous resourcefulness, mutual assistance, humanitarian work and ownership of development. The associated revival of the values and ethics of the individual enables a transformation in society that calls for political participation, democratisation, and the seeking of justice and equality. Consequently, some Muslim societies are attempting to mitigate inequities within their state structures through civil organisations in response to the awareness that some Muslim states have failed to deliver in terms of social services and have, at the same time, hindered freedom and democratisation. Moreover, certain adverse effects of globalisation resulting from foreign intervention, military occupation, financial upheavals, the politicising of foreign aid and dependency on aid further aggravate the tensions in Muslim societies. In order to address the consequent crisis, it is a highly timely undertaking to study how Muslim society attempts to tackle the various challenges of individual moral re-awakening and social justice.

Turkish society is deeply connected to the 'Palestine Question' for reasons of history, culture and religion. A considerable number of Turkish NGOs support Palestine either by influencing local public opinion and government policy or by extending assistance to the Palestinian people. In particular, the Turkish NGO, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), organised the humanitarian Gaza Freedom Flotilla, which sailed from Istanbul to Gaza, Palestine in 2010, highlighting the transnational activism between Turkey and Palestine. The subsequent events, which involved an armed attack by the Israeli navy and the killing of eight Turkish citizens and one Turkish-American on board the principle ship, the Mavi Marmara, generated tense and dramatic repercussions within Turkey, as well as regionally and globally. The incident significantly altered international relations and brought the increasingly assertive role of civil society in the political arena to the forefront of global awareness.

The paper presents a case study of the Mavi Marmara expedition which was chiefly organised by IHH, supported by several other civil organisations from other countries. The field research in Turkey also included surveys of a number of other prominent civil organisations and NGOs, including the Gulen Movement, Kimsu Yok Mu NGO, the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD), and interviews with Turkish activists, writers, business people and members of local communities. Further fieldwork in Gaza supplemented this and provides insight into how Turkish humanitarian aid is perceived in Palestine.

These events and organisations are part of a growing trend that is making policy makers and civil society leaders pay more attention to the potential and influence of civil society organisations in introducing change at individual and social levels. Moreover, non-state actors, such as NGOs, are becoming more able to demonstrate their dynamism in new

dimensions, mainly through the people-to-people paradigm and ethics created by this upsurge of humanitarian and development activism. The thesis concludes that Muslim civil movements are poised to play an expanding role in empowering local communities across the Muslim world to aspire to creating a just society and to ownership of development processes. At a global level, various NGOs in Muslim and non-Muslim countries are likely to experience an intensifying and consolidating of networking among different actors since a new impetus in civil society, motivated by Muslim values and morals and the common sharing of humanity, is inconspicuously surfacing worldwide. The people-to-people approach employed by civil organisations facilitates wider participation, interaction and cooperation that can realise the aspirations of self-empowerment of the individual and society, social justice and mutual assistance for humanitarian relief and independent development.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my heart felt gratitude to my advisor Professor Naito Masanori for the continuous support of my Ph.D. study and research, for his inspiration, deep knowledge, patience, enthusiasm and motivation. His inspiring guidance helped me throughout the time of research and the writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined completing my Ph.D. study without his guidance and support. It is with his supervision that this work came into existence. For any faults I take full responsibility.

Also, I would like to extend my thanks to Professor Eiji Oyamada, Professor Yoichi Mine, Professor Hisae Nakanishi, Professor Ryuichi Ida for their insightful comments, challenges and encouragement.

My sincere thanks go to the proofreader, Jessica Aitken, who worked tirelessly and demonstrated genuine commitment, professionalism and patience in improving the quality of the thesis.

I am so grateful to the Graduate School of Global Studies, Doshisha University, for their kindness, smiles and dedication in facilitating every step through the years of research.

My sincere thanks also go to IHH, KYM, their staff and volunteers and all of those who contributed to my research in Turkey, Palestine and Japan

I am also so grateful to my fellow students whose discussions, challenges and stimulating critiques, especially during the seminars, have generated interesting ideas and a new outlook to the work.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my lasting gratitude to my family, especially my mother and father for endless love and support. Also, my gratitude goes to my wife and friend for standing side by side with me in every possible way.



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## Acronyms

AKP	Adaletve Kalkinma Partisi (The Justice and Development Party)
CHP	Chumhuriyt Halq Partisi (Republican People’s Party)
DCA	Dan Church Aid
ECESG	European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza
EU	European Union
Fatah	Acronym in Arabic for the nationalist Palestine Liberation Movement founded by the late Yasser Arafat
Hamas	Acronym in Arabic for the Islamic Resistance Movement
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IHH	Foundation for Human Rights, Freedom and Humanitarian Relief
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
JWF	Journalist and Writers Foundation
KYM	Kimse Yok Mu (Turkish for ‘Is anyone there?’)
MIT	Turkish National Intelligence Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conferences
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PCHR	Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
PFLP	Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PNA	Palestinian National Authority

TICA	Turkish International Cooperation Agency
UAVs	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
UK	United Kingdom
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Work Agency
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
US	United States

## Glossary of Arabic terms

Al Abrar : the righteous

Al Amal Al Kheiri : charity work is the nearest translation in English

Al Mawrd : well-known Arabic-English dictionary

Al Muhseneen : the beneficent or doers of good

Al Mutaqeen : the pious ones

Aqida : belief

Bir : piety or dutifulness

Dar Al Dunia: the 'House of This Life'

Dar Al Naeim : the House of Happiness, which means Heaven in the physical sense,

Dar Al Redwan: the House of Spiritual Satisfaction,

Dersanes : study circles established by Nursi

Dunom : one thousand square metres

Dyanitt : Directorate of Religious Affairs

Eid al Adha: the Feast of the Sacrifice

Faridah : religious duty

Haddith : the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Haj season : Pilgrimage to Mecca and season of Eid al Adha

HasanaDaema : lasting reward

Hudna : ceasefire or truce

Ibn al Sabeel : a stranger or traveller, literally 'son of the road'

Iftar : breaking the fast

Ighathit al Malhouf : relief or aid for the sorrowful or grieved

Ihsan : kind act or benefaction

Ijma : the spirit of consensus

Ikhlaf : blessings and compensation in this life

Iman : belief or faith

Irregular Faridah : form of charity given to those who have a right to it

Jamaa : group

Janna : Heaven

Khair : charity, literally the one who succeeds a former ruler

Manna lilkhair : a preventer of good

Mardhat Allah : the satisfaction of Allah

Mumeneen Haqan : true believers

Rahma : mercy or compassion

Ramadan : The fasting month obligatory upon adult Muslim to fast every day from dawn till dusk

Sadaqa : alms or charity

Sadaqa Jariya : continuous charity

Sirat Al Mustaqim : the Straight Path

Sunna : the acts and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad

Surat Al Fateha: the first written Sura in the Quran

Tafrij al Kurba : relief, driving away of worries or grief

Tajdid : renewal

Takyas : Sufi spiritual training where the energies of followers are concentrated on pure metaphysics

Tauanu : cooperate

Tawhid : Unity of God

Thawab : reward in heaven after death

Ulmma: scholar especially religious scholars

Ulu al Albab : people of understanding or those gifted with understanding hearts

Ummah : community

Waqf : a form of Sadaqa Jariya in which the benefit or outcome is intended solely to fulfil one purpose

Zakat : religious alms

Zakat al Fitr : a form of Zakat obligatory during the month of Ramadan.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

In May, 2010, a flotilla of ships set sail from Istanbul heading for the besieged city of Gaza, Palestine, carrying humanitarian aid with a message redolent of the ending of the siege imposed on the Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip. Adopting the slogan, “Palestine Our Route, Humanitarian Aid Our Load”, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla campaign consisted of seven hundred participants from thirty-six countries worldwide and carried ten thousand tons of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The flagship was the Mavi Marmara sponsored by the Turkish NGO, the Foundation for Human Rights, Freedom and Humanitarian Relief (IHH). As six of the ships were sailing on their way across the Mediterranean Sea to Gaza, in international waters, the Israeli military attacked the Mavi Marmara flagship in the early hours of May 31st, 2010. The soldiers killed eight Turkish nationals and one Turkish-American citizen and more than fifty people were injured. The Flotilla participants were later taken into custody and arrested at the port of Ashdod. The reaction to this event was swift at regional and global levels in the hours following the attack. Turkey took the decision to sever ties with Israel bringing bi-lateral relations to an all-time low. International civil society and human rights organizations condemned the attack. Israel called the Flotilla activists professional provocateurs. Public and political repercussions followed in Palestine, Turkey and throughout the world. During the aftermath, international concern meant that the siege on Gaza was eased, although not lifted by the Israeli military, and Egypt was forced to open the only border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. Civil society organizations from Muslim and non-Muslim countries reacted and began sending humanitarian convoys to Gaza in a campaign to end the siege on Gaza.

This thesis explores the causes, reactions and implications of the sailing of the Mavi Marmara flotilla and the Israeli attack on it. The present chapter reviews the background to the study, presents the study objectives and its theoretical background. It describes and discusses the methodology employed in the field research and closes with a brief summary of each chapter.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Why did IHH decide to organize the Flotilla to Gaza? The answer lies in the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which by the year 2010, had reached crisis point after years of blockade that were exacerbated by the war on Gaza of December, 2008 to January 2009. This conflict, dubbed by Israel, ‘Operation Cast Lead’, inflicted a further and deeper crisis when more than fifteen hundred Palestinians were killed and

six thousands injured. Much of the infrastructure of the city was destroyed. Although the war ended on January, 23rd 2009, the siege continued to be imposed creating further aggravation of conditions in the Gaza Strip. Electricity was in short supply as part of the main electric generator was bombarded in addition to a shortage of fuel for maintaining the power plant's operation. The healthcare sector suffered from shortages of medicines, medical equipment and facilities for maintenance of equipment. The poverty rate increased and children became vulnerable to malnutrition and poor health. Hospitals faced real danger as electric shortages affected operations rooms, intensive care units, baby incubators, kidney treatment equipment, etc.. Politically, the US and Western countries had adopted a policy of boycotting Gaza after the Islamic Movement, Hamas, won the Palestinian national elections in 2006. Consequently, Western aid agencies had left Gaza resulting in many humanitarian and development projects halting activities abruptly. Consequently, the human situation and daily life deteriorated further despite repeated calls and reports by local and international human rights organizations.

In Turkey, the Palestinian question has always been a challenging issue within Turkish society and politics. Turkey is known for its deep links to Palestine in terms of history, culture and religion. In the Ottoman Era, many Palestinian families have family links with Turkey through marriage. However, politically speaking, the issue of Palestine/Israel is a divisive factor in Turkish society. For example, the secularist Kemalists, who represent nationalist Turks, are more inclined towards Israel and support bilateral relations with Israel. They had formed a consolidated and prolonged alliance with Israel over the preceding period of contemporary history of the Turkish Republic. The military establishment in Turkey views Israel as a partner and they have enjoyed expanded and deep cooperation in the military field. At the height of the alliance, both armies and navies performed manoeuvres publicly and openly. Such an outlook on Israel is in distinct contrast to the Islamic-oriented areas of society.

The Islamic sectors of Turkish society, in particular those of Muslim civil society, are perceived as pro-Palestinians. Although, Muslim civil society organisations differ in their ways of expressing support for Palestine, the majority hold the issue of Palestine close to the heart. Turkish people are particularly aware of history and have a keen sense of its significance. For example, people in Turkey reflect on the Ottoman Era in a very different way from people in the West. The widely held perception of the Ottoman rule and its relation to Palestine that the West projects is one of a mere military occupation of Palestine and that contemporary Turks still harbour the intention to reclaim the imperial Ottoman glory. However, this is very different to the understanding of Muslims, particularly Arab and Turkish Islamists, who perceive it as an "imperial narrative". In fact, this narrative has been taught and nourished by the nationalists of both sides, secularist and Islamist, in Turkey and the Arab world in order to break away from the past, to justify the newly nationalist outlook and to re-direct peoples' energies towards the nation-state. During the Ottoman Era, the Muslim identity was the unifying identity of different ethnicities.

The legacy of this remains in contemporary Turkish society, mitigating anew the problems arising from the different ethnicities in Turkey despite the influence of secularism and nationalism.

On the ground in Gaza, the siege dates back to the Palestinian parliamentary election of January 2006, in which Hamas won the majority of Parliamentary seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. The failure of the Palestinian authorities to deliver the necessary social services was an important factor contributing to the rise of Hamas. This was compounded by the failure of the Oslo Peace Process to realize peace and its dividends since, following the signing of the Oslo Agreements in 1993; the Palestinian people did not see results of peace negotiations leading to a Palestinian state. Consequently, many people witnessed the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The resultant disappointment following the euphoria of expectation of Oslo Accords promises and the dismal realities ten years later, led to the First Intifada (popular uprising in 1987), in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Esposito argues that the cause of the intifada was not Islam or Islamic fundamentalism but the continued Israeli occupation that had continued since 1967 and the consequent desperation of young people. The Palestinian authority proved to be unable to resolve the situation effectively.<sup>1</sup> The Palestinian Authority suffered from deep corruption and the inability to govern. The gap between people and political figures widened and trust became eroded.

The international aid community had implemented many programs and projects in the area but failed to significantly improve the lives of the Palestinians. Palestinians received substantial development aid from official donors but much of the outcome of this was destroyed by the Israeli air force during the Second Intifada that started in the year 2001. Furthermore, after the 2006 elections and Hamas' success, Israel and the US did not recognize the newly elected government and adopted a policy of boycotting it. As a result, the majority of official international aid donors pulled out of Gaza and brought an abrupt end to their humanitarian and development programs. For example, the World Bank and USAID moved their offices and staff from Gaza to the West Bank. Commitments to agreed projects were cancelled with USAID projects being stopped midway through implementation leaving vital roads under constructions. Many Western aid agencies moved to Ramallah leaving behind numerous unfinished public works. Moreover, the official aid community not only stopped development projects but went so far as to politicise aid by funding the political division between the two main Palestinian parties: the Islamic, Hamas, and the secular nationalist, Fatah. As a consequence of the siege, the movement of people was restricted and goods became limited; border crossings with Israel were closed and only opened in particular cases. Moreover, Egypt frequently closed the only crossing between Egypt and Palestine, at times for months on end.

To Palestinians, such political attitudes meant a double standard on the part of the West. Whilst many Western official agencies had claimed they were there to help the Palestinian people, many influential global institutions left Gaza and withdrew

from mutually signed programs when those people freely elected the Islamic-orientated Hamas. Thus, people and communities began to realize the double standards of the US and the international community. The international donor community became estranged in a complicated relationship with Palestinian society. Previous to the elections, despite almost twenty years of peace talks, the Palestinian people had seen no light or hope of an independent state, and people had become increasingly dependent on foreign aid, however, even with this support Gaza became classified as a humanitarian disaster area. To the Palestinians, the withdrawal sent a message that the international donor community had decided to punish the Palestinian people for their democratic choice. Knowing their dependence on international aid and development programs, Palestinians became highly apprehensive about the intentions of the global aid community at large. Local Palestinian academics and scholars began criticizing foreign aid and asserting that aid was politicized as it continued to Ramallah and West Bank while official funding stopped going to Gaza. The government at the time, the Palestinian Authority, sank deeper into corruption because of easily available financial resources of donors.

Thus, by the year 2006, Palestinian society was beginning face a deepening crisis in terms of the impossibility of realizing peace, building their own a state and the deeply corrupt national authorities. The elections in the West Bank and Gaza not only returned the Islamic movement, Hamas, as the winning majority in the Legislative Council but prior to that the movement had won the elections of the local government municipalities. As well as the disillusionment in realizing peace and independence, one major reason for Hamas' popular success is that the movement runs a wide network of civil society organizations and voluntary associations. This social network of relief and development responded to the increasing social injustice in society as a result of the Israeli military occupation in addition to the failure of the Palestinian Authority to deliver on services. Thus, Islamic NGOs reached out to the poor and marginalized areas of society. Local civil organization leaders demonstrated Islamic values which the local population identified with honesty, virtuous conduct. The NGOs applied ethics and morals such as assisting the weak, mutual assistance, showing mercy to the needy and invoking a sense of justice for a society facing tremendous challenges.

Adverse effects of globalization have impacted the Palestinian situation and made people more vulnerable. In particular, financial upheavals, wars and violence and other occupations in the regions have contributed to the overall insecurity within Palestine. Probably, one major aspect of globalization is the humanitarian relief and development that has become what people have perceived as a tool of foreign policy. For example, one USAID official stated at a gathering of international donor members in Gaza that the aid community is not here to help the Palestinians but the peace process; that is, the assistance was not for the purpose of creating a better and just world, but for certain political purposes. Such dishonesty would lead to further mistrust between the people and the donor community. The international community



failed because it was not sincere. It is this kind of double standards and hypocrisy that caused much of the instability. People did not see hope at the end of the process. Critics also point at the area of international development as further means of justifying foreign policy objectives of influential governments in the internal affairs of smaller sovereign states. It is this aspect of globalism that the common people of various societies worldwide find counterproductive and presenting a daunting lack of genuine human value and dignity. It goes without saying; consequences are clear in the pervasive injustice, widespread poverty and a prevailing deterioration of human conditions for many hundreds of millions of people. That the severity of this risks and endangers the current global situation is an understatement. Events in the world reveal consequential tensions at work that entail a prelude to the threats of world peace and stability.

Still the question remains: Why, despite the immense resources at the disposal of the international community, have humanitarian and development practices and policies not achieved the hopes and goals they were designed for? At the political level, the principle of humanitarian aid is being criticized and international agencies are being accused of politicizing humanitarianism. Over the past several decades, Islamic civil society organisations have developed in the humanitarian chasm created by this politicising, aiming to ameliorate the human suffering caused. The main aim of this paper is to explore the successes and challenges these organisations have met with.

Several influential Islamic movements developed after the establishment of the Kemalist state in the 1923, as a consequence of the re-awakening of Muslim values experiences in Turkey, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Significant among these movements are those associated with Said Nursi, the Naqsbendi Sufi Order, Fethullah Gulen, and Milli Gorus, also known as the National Outlook movement and made up of influential parties such as the National Order, the National Salvation and Welfare and Virtue parties. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Turkey also saw a remarkable rise in activities of NGOs, such as IHH, the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON), Denise Fenere and Kimsu Yok Mu. These NGOs are Islamic in outlook, rely on grassroots support and have become quite global in delivering humanitarian programs in many countries, including Muslim and non-Muslim. Thus, in the twentieth century, Turkey experienced a significant rise in the number of Islamic movements and important leadership figures that altered Turkish society. However, in order to understand the true role and impact of Islamic civil movements, it is important to shed light first on the background of the Turkish secularist state in which these Islamic movements and renowned religious figures found themselves. Examining the background of the Turkish state and the adopted ideology of its unique brand of secularism can, without a doubt, deepen our understanding of Muslim activism, and the movements and civil society in Turkey.

Thus, Turkish Muslim civil society organisations and NGOs began to articulate a profound affinity towards the Muslim world in general and Palestine in particular. Indeed, Palestine came to hold a symbolic meaning in terms of its religious and spiritual significance and as well as shared historical roots, if not the actual sharing of a common cause. This added new inspiration and motivation for Turkish Muslim NGOs. Moreover, the continued occupation by Israel is perceived as a failing on the part of Muslims. Civil society organisations with an Islamic outlook would express considerable public sentiment towards the Palestinians through the means of public awareness, humanitarian relief and development work. In the emerging environment of spiritual re-awakening, civil society activism and democratic reforms, the phenomenon of the Mavi Marmara became manifest as a reflection of a deep and dynamic change that is taking place in the soul of the people as well as Turkish society. Consequently, the thesis argues that the polity of present day Turkey is being shaped for the most part by its own society.

## **1.2 Theoretical Background**

This section explores the theoretical work on civil society in general and Muslim civil society in particular. The study here maps out the major theories and work that have dealt with the realm of civil society in the Muslim context as well as the Western conception of civil society. Chapter Two explores the Islamic term, *Amal Al Khair*, charity work, at length and its interpretation of the meaning of civil society. Here, the concept of civil society in its Western reference will be examined and, in particular, how it relates to the Muslim context. Thus, theories of Muslim scholars on civil society in Islam shall be discussed and debated, as well as the writings of prominent Western scholars on the subject. Finally, the section focuses specifically on theories of Muslim civil society in Turkey.

The concept of civil society is known traditionally as belonging to a secular and Western background.<sup>2</sup> The early Western school of thought on the subject can be traced back to Hegel and Marx. Hegel, who is considered as one of the most influential theorist on civil society, saw the state as playing a central role in regulating the life of society. The liberal element of Hegel's theory rests on the idea that a liberal civil society should monitor the excesses of the power of state.<sup>3</sup> Marx on the other hand, viewed civil society with misgivings, if not mistrust, on the grounds that it tends to rest in the hands of the bourgeoisie who deprive the masses, the proletariat, from fully realizing their power.<sup>4</sup> In fact, both Hegel and Marx held a negative view of civil society, although in different ways. Hegel was reluctant to put a great deal of trust in civil society as he thought that it could be a confusing and troubling phenomenon. Consequently, he considered a powerful state to be a necessary tool in controlling civil society. Marx, on the other hand, argued that civil society could be obstructed by the bourgeoisie, thus, society could become a strictly bourgeois democracy at the expense of the working class or proletariat. Real democracy is proletarian democracy

in Marx' view and it can only grow through the revolutionary consciousness of the working people.<sup>5</sup>

Western liberal democratic theory, in both early America and Europe, claimed that civil society meant human activities that are voluntarily organized with the aim of limiting the excesses of state or promoting certain goals in society. Tocqueville was a major proponent of these theories,<sup>6</sup> asserting that the flourishing of liberal democracy depends on an active participatory politics. Thus, the ideal liberal civil society depends on the free expression of different groups and individuals and harmonious interaction among different competing interests is vital for its success.<sup>7</sup> In this case, assuming social harmony as the norm in society could pose a risk for society and democracy. It is true that liberal thinking is central, however, there is no guarantee that harmonious integration would always prevail among different competing groups and individuals.<sup>8</sup> For example, the feminist movement has put the efficacy of liberal civil society to the test since feminism seemed to have witnessed a setback in advancing their goals due to "the inequalities that so often mar the cosy associational world".<sup>9</sup>

Critics of liberal theory have expressed strong misgivings about the liberal conception of civil society. In fact, they argue that liberal theory has not paid enough attention to civil society,<sup>10</sup> and that there is no concrete evidence that individuality and sociability can guarantee the necessary peace and stability needed to establish civil society.<sup>11</sup> Also, if the state is perceived as a potential threat, there is a subtle dimension represented in the economic hegemony within society that can further undermine the healthy status of civil society.<sup>12</sup> Here, civil society is distinguished as a sphere that is separate from both state and economy. Meanwhile, the capitalist economy can be as intrusive as the state with the weapon of hegemonic power since it has the potential for the "socialization of the masses" through the ideology of the economically dominating class.<sup>13</sup> In the end, classical liberalism rests mainly on notion of the minimum state since it advocates the rights of others; however, it does not inform society as to what to do.<sup>14</sup>

However, civil society can be looked upon as one informative way of expressing the uniqueness of a certain society based on its specific values and ideas. Whilst classical Western theorists dealt in the most part with the duality between state and civil society as fundamentally opposing spheres, in Muslim societies religion plays a crucial role in shaping the outlook of society and its relations to the state. The classical Western theorists either ignore or shun the role of religious values in society leaving essential questions unanswered. On the other hand, the study of Islamic civil society cannot be separated from Islam's values, traditions and history. And, like other societies, Islamic society is subject to the dynamics of continuous change in the contemporary world. Thus, investigating civil society in its various forms is crucial in understanding this social space that is vital for facilitating new ideas and means to improve the lives of people, participating in politics, shaping public decisions and

utilizing the empowering effect of Islamic religious values in seeking equality and social justice.

The growing phenomenon of civil society has prompted scholars of Islam to explain the trend. Arab Muslim scholars, such as Ghanouchi from Tunisia, Turabi from Sudan and Al Awa from Egypt, all influential and politically active in their respective societies, stress the importance of Islamic values as the necessary “prerequisites and the desired outcome of change”.<sup>15</sup> According to Ghanouchi, the community is to be considered superior to the state and a truly Islamic society rejects dictatorship, asserts freedom of choice and respects human rights.<sup>16</sup> Along the same lines, Turabi thinks that the community is the locale and source of ultimate political authority.<sup>17</sup> The Sudanese political and religious philosopher thinks that the most fundamental institution in Islam is ‘Public Opinion’ and identifies this as the imperative to encourage what is right and forbid what is wrong, (*Al Amr bi Maruf wa Al Nahi An Mukar*) and that the Quran envisions an active society where the spirit of consensus, *Ijma*, unites Muslims.<sup>18</sup> The Egyptian scholar, Hasan Hanafi, states that “social justice is the aim of Islamic ethics” and not limited to state action. He believes that the state is “merely an agent of Muslim society in the realization of the goal of the distribution of justice. It is the society that bears the obligation to promote these values within it, even if the state does not or cannot do so.”<sup>19</sup> This, he argues, is the reason that a myriad Muslim NGOs, Sufi orders and charitable organizations work on social welfare tasks in the name of Islam while states remain indifferent to the demands of its population.<sup>20</sup> No doubt, such scholars have covered a prolific amount of scholarly work as explained above, however, this particular school of thought did not concretely point to the growing trend of linking the local with the global on the practical level and in the context of contemporary times.

In the West, the study of Muslim civil society organizations has attracted much critical attention from various Western scholars over the past couple of decades. Their work has touched upon the phenomenon of the emerging nature of Muslim NGOs in local society and across borders as expressed in humanitarian and development activities because more Muslim NGOs have been expanding their role in this realm. For example, Pipes argues that Muslim NGOs use humanitarian assistance and development as a cover for further political or militant agenda.<sup>21</sup> Such views found some resonance in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, with the flourishing of Muslim civil organizations throughout the world and their reaching out to different parts of the world that suffer from wars and natural disasters, such schools of thought have become less significant and irrelevant. Nevertheless, the possibility of politicizing the work of humanitarian NGOs remains a reality; although an overarching statement like this would be an injustice to the aspirations of many NGOs that are deeply motivated by values other than the support of states or governments. In fact, it is more of a norm for Western international-based NGOs to receive regular substantial funding from their governments. Muslim NGOs, such as IHH, are funded entirely by the local community through Islamic charity and *zakat*.<sup>22</sup> NGOs often

assert their independence from government, in particular when pointing out reliance on their own community-based resources. However, despite the fact of self-reliance in terms of funding, relations between NGOs and government cannot be ruled out entirely.

In his exploration of Muslim values, the American scholar, Esposito, asserts that the vast majority in Turkey and much of the Muslim world share a common call for the transformation of society, not through seeking the reproduction of the past but to reconstruct society through a process of Islamic reform “in which the principles of Islam are applied to the contemporary needs”.<sup>23</sup> Ghanouchi is one of the most well-known Islamic intellectual figures in Turkey and has been a frequent speaker in Turkish circles, invited by NGOs and local foundations. He is not only the leader of the *Al Nahdah* Islamic movement that won the elections in Tunisia in 2012, after the Arab Spring, but also a respected religious scholar and political philosopher. His name is well known to Islamic NGOs in Turkey, from IHH to the Gulen Movement. Ghanouchi's belief in Islamic values is essential to attaining a civil society that is superior to the state since Islamic society rejects dictatorship and calls for justice and freedom.<sup>24</sup>

Augustus Norton, a British scholar from a similar school of thought as Esposito, explains that Islamic charity work is becoming more like a force for integration. He claims that the concept of civil society in Arab and Muslim societies is used as a “vehicle” for achieving political and social reform. In other words, the Islamic view of civil society is to stand in clear contrast to the “uncivil” nature of the state, in particular, the secular state. He further elaborates on this perspective suggesting that traditional Western scholarship on Islamists “has been overly textual” and has failed to understand the nature of civic activism in such societies. His approach prompted Western scholars to rethink their beliefs on the perception of Islamic charity work or civil activism and to trace its origins to the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, such debate has led to a serious examination of contemporary Muslim civil society, but not enough consideration has been paid to examine its roots in Islam in terms of the essential spiritual values as well as the historical institutions that made up civil society in Islam in the past. Historically, Islam is known to have been more of a society than a state or, to use contemporary terminology, a smaller state or government. Moreover, the religion of Islam belongs to the Abrahamic religious traditions and the shared commonalities among the three religions cannot be underestimated. Thus, examination of how Muslim civil societies rely on traditional and historical institutions is both valuable and crucial in understanding Muslim civil society in general.

In the context of Turkey, Islam is viewed by Muslim scholars and to a certain extent Western scholars as an integral part of Turkish identity and everyday life and it is argued that the most active institutions challenging the state in Turkey are the movements that use Islamic concepts to mobilize the population and society.<sup>26</sup> Such contemporary Islamic activism is experiencing an ascendance and prominence that

can be attributed to the rise of a Muslim-oriented Anatolian bourgeoisie combined with the legacy of traditional Islamic socio-political activism that is altering the relations between state and society. Thus, Islam seems poised to challenge the status quo by playing a crucial role between the state and/or authoritarianism and the masses who are aspiring to social justice in Turkey and the Muslim world in general.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, there are those who oppose the view that Islamic activism leads to the desired changes towards freedom and social justice. This view argues that the ultimate aim is to establish a “theocratic regime similar to the regime in Iran and wherein Turkey is evolving in the same way and may end up as Iran”.<sup>28</sup> However, this school of thought is based on an exaggeration in comparing the Iranian case to Turkey and one should not overlook the fundamental differences between the Turkish example and its Iranian counterpart. The Iranian theocracy acquired the helm of power in Iran through a revolution based on the Shia sect that adheres to strict theocratic interpretation. In Turkey, political change has been gradual and perhaps this characteristic can be looked upon as a defining feature of the Turkish situation. In addition, Turkey's majority is Sunni for whom religious interpretations differ from Iran's conceptional relationship between state and society. Iran's theology is closer to the former Catholic papal political power of medieval Europe, combining both powers of church and state or clergy and state. Yet, Islam traditionally does not intend a state religion sanctioning the daily life of society as state is known to be smaller than society.

Moreover, another school of thought argues that Turkish people generally lack individuality and create great cults around leaders; especially since change in leadership and parties can often take place upon death of a leader or a political coup by the military.<sup>29</sup> However, since civil society is founded on the free choice of an individual to associate with others, an individualistic culture is a necessary condition for civil society. Individuality is vital in achieving some autonomy from family and community in order to possess certain civil qualities that facilitate critical thinking, choosing leaders, and thinking about improving society and its social foundations.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, some scholars believe that Islam does not acknowledge individuality and the legal perspective that is supposed to protect the rights of an individual by law. Religion, the argument goes, does not provide for individual autonomy and so hinders the progress of the civil sphere, freedom of thinking and voluntary association necessary for participatory politics. This view generally aims at criticizing religion under the dominant secular nation-states of the contemporary period as being an obstacle to the formation of civil society. However, the mosque is known as a traditional Islamic institution where it is distinguished in function and representation from the church as an instance of Islam's community-orientated approach. The mosque plays the role not only of a place of worship but of a community centre that encourages freedom of assembly by local community members. Through this, community members are encouraged to act on their own behalf and on behalf of their community to improve local life and community.

Moreover, Turkish culture has been through considerable changes since the economic liberalization of the 1980s. Despite the fact that these have tended to reflect the culture of consumerism and materialism, Turkish society has realized improved educational and intellectual development.<sup>31</sup> In addition, globalization during the past few decades has left an impact both on the individual and on society in Turkey. Civil society in Turkey has opened up to the outside world and the global dimension seems to have been embraced by Turkish civil society organisations, including the Islamic ones, as the case study of IHH demonstrates. Its young founding members took the initiative to form the NGO after participating in humanitarian work in Bosnia during the Balkan war in the mid-1990s and, later, the NGO was registered in Germany under German law. Globalization is a crucial factor here particularly since Muslim identity seems to facilitate a seamless trajectory in dealing with other Muslim communities around the world.

## **The Gap**

There is a significant gap in the study of Islamic civil society in Turkey where little attention has been paid to the empowerment and self-reliance of local Muslim civil society and its links to transnational humanitarian work between Palestine and Turkey. Democratic transition is a contemporary process in Turkey and as a result Turkish transnational humanitarian participation is a newcomer in the global arena. After the elections of 2002 and the concomitant rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), civil society in Turkey began to enjoy freedom locally and transnationally. However, there is an absence of significant studies on the motivation and reasons for projects like the Mavi Marmara expedition, which are seldom dealt with in contemporary literature. Much of the literature on the Mavi Marmara that is available examines the legal and political dispute between Israel and the Turkish NGO; while little attention is paid to the important aspects of the spiritual, religious, social, civil background that empowered and motivated the project. Also, the direct relationship between civil activities emanating from Turkey and humanitarian conditions in Gaza has not been adequately investigated. Thus, this research aims to explore anew the deeper links associated with the expedition as a part of a civil society entity within Turkey, in its global and Islamic context.

## **1.3 Methodology**

### **1.3.1 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to explore how Muslim civil society in Turkey has emerged, expanded and works to bring about change for social justice and freedom, both locally and by pursuing transnational activism through humanitarian work and development. The revival of the values and ethics of the individual, based on Muslim spirituality, creates changes in society that call for political participation, democratization, justice and equality. An understanding of Muslim values is crucial to

examining the motivation and roots of Muslim civil society as it highlights the moral values, self-empowerment, indigenous resourcefulness, mutual assistance, humanitarian work and ownership of development locally and transnationally. Thus, through a case study of the Mavi Marmara expedition the aim is to highlight these qualities and the controversies ignited by the incident. While much has been written about humanitarian work in Palestine, research demonstrating how Muslim society tackles the various problems and challenges of individual moral re-awakening and social justice is a much neglected subject.

### **1.3.2 Fieldwork**

Observations in the field were conducted in Turkey and Palestine to explore the vision and activism of Islamic civil movements in both countries. The research focused specifically on Turkey's Muslim civil society, using the Mavi Marmara incident, chiefly organized by the civil organization, the IHH, as a case study. The researcher also surveyed a number of prominent civil society organizations and NGOs in Turkey and Palestine and conducted numerous interviews with individuals concerned with civil society, as detailed below. In addition to fieldwork, the research relied on written literature, including books, scholarly journals, Official Development Assistance (ODA) reports, and Turkish and Palestinian civil organizations reports.

The field surveys were conducted on four occasions in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, the first in Turkey and the other three in Palestine. In Turkey, the survey consisted, for the main part, of numerous meetings with staff and volunteers of IHH as well as other civil organizations and leaders, including those of the Gulen Movement and the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen' Association (MUSIAD). In addition, it involved interviews with members of the local community, including local businesspeople, professionals, students and individuals who are considered the backbone of social support for civil society in Turkey. Interviews were also conducted with politicians and scholars concerned with civil movements in Turkish society. As for the field surveys in Gaza, these followed the humanitarian work implemented on the ground mainly through IHH projects and programs in order to assess the impact and the nature of civil cooperation across borders between Turkey and Palestine. The survey carried meetings and interviews with a number of other Turkish NGOs implementing programs in Gaza, including Kimsu Yok Mu, Yildirim NGO and the governmental Turkish aid agency, Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA). The field study also included local Palestinian NGOs and institutions that function as humanitarian and development partners with IHH and other Turkish civil organizations that sponsor and fund humanitarian and development activities in the Gaza Strip.

The researcher relied on interviews and discussions based on qualitative methods of gathering information and data. When conducting meetings with staff members of IHH and other NGOs, interview questions followed a consistent pattern with pre-designed questions. For example, one question was asked specifically on the



motivation of every staff and volunteer working for IHH and other NGOs. Other specific questions dealt with their reasons for supporting humanitarian and development programs implemented transnationally in Gaza, Palestine. Other interviews were less structured as interviewees often express more than a simple answer to a certain question. Throughout the visits, whether in offices or when meeting volunteers in relevant neighbourhoods, field observations were constantly recorded in the form of notes. These field notes registered important observations on various matters which proved crucial in reporting the latest details and facts on the ground. In addition, the researcher kept a journal to reflect upon meetings, incidents, occasions and specific situations. Throughout the field visits, various officers and volunteers provided documents, brochures, leaflets and reports. Often, interviewees made comments or remarks on the documents provided, which were consistently recorded in a "travel journal" as notes and reflections. For anyone familiar with Turkey and the culture, it is rather easy to discover how willing Turkish people are to explain their point of view at length to a guest or interviewer. Perhaps this is due to the Turkish sense of hospitality that inclines people to speak at length and so made the interviewer, a Palestinian, feel welcomed in the office, shop or home. This can be a great advantage but it may also be challenging especially when a certain time schedule must be met.

In all, such extended meetings proved extremely valuable when inquiring and discussing the research issues in depth. On many occasions, the researcher encouraged the interviewees to express opinions as freely as possible. This proved crucial when meeting young volunteers from local universities in Istanbul and Ankara who donated with their time and efforts to programs of IHH and other NGOs active within Turkey and abroad. For example, since the first field survey was conducted only a year after the incident, when the issue of the Mavi Marmara was brought up, the subject was still fresh and new in the public eye and a top national item in the media. Almost everyone expressed great dismay at the death of fellow countrymen and the sense of constraint placed upon Turkey and its people as to how to respond to such a national tragedy. The challenge here was to go more deeply into the matter with the interviewee than was enabled by the media and public rhetoric. As the case study was such a huge issue in Turkey and linked directly to Gaza, it posed positive opportunities as well as challenges for the researcher as a Palestinian.

In field research, bias is certainly a concern especially with a highly controversial subject such as the Mavi Marmara, and particularly so within Turkey. Despite the obvious pro-Palestinian sentiment among Turkish people, discussing the Mavi Marmara generated many different views and answers. And being a Palestinian conducting the interviews prompted the researcher to emphasize the importance of neutrality in my approach with interviewees when conducting such serious research. There are always differing opinions and it is the task of the field survey to collect diverse opinions as essential data in order to strive towards a balanced and informative analysis at the end. This was kept in mind at all times whether meeting

pro-Palestinian interviewees or indifferent ones. While Turkish civil society is diverse, the various elements are often easily recognized and labelled by Turkish people in general. Once the name of an NGO is mentioned, people often try to categorize the organisation using certain political or religious labels. Whether discussing IHH or Kimsu Yok Mu, one cannot overlook the political implications or affiliations that can evoke assumptions in most people about those involved in the study inquiry. As an interviewer, the aim was to be as objective as possible and such an approach was maintained whether over the popular cup of tea or during lengthy discussions.

Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher used English or Arabic to conduct the interviews in both Gaza and Turkey. Some of the staff and volunteers understood Arabic having studied it in university and, for the most part, young university volunteers understood English. Therefore, the researcher found that most interviews conducted with young volunteers and staff was in English. As for meetings in Turkey with local businesspeople and shops who support humanitarian programs of NGOs, these were often only possible in Turkish. In such cases, a young student volunteer would join the researcher to translate the interviews. In the fieldwork in Gaza, Arabic was the language used in most interviews since various Turkish staff members of a few NGOs in Gaza were also able to speak Arabic. When meeting a Turkish volunteer or staff member in Gaza and who could not speak Arabic, a local Palestinian staff member often translated from Arabic into Turkish. Most Turkish NGOs who have offices in Gaza, including IHH, hire Palestinian staff members who speak Turkish, which they generally learnt during university studies in Turkey.

The fieldwork encountered certain limitations. In Gaza, border entry and departure can be unpredictable at best. The border crossing between Gaza and Egypt at Rafah is the main entry/departure point of Gaza as Palestinians are prevented from traveling across the Israeli border, except for those few who work for international agencies like the UN. As the research began in April, 2011, the sweeping changes in Egypt and the Arab world were in full swing. The following year, 2012, was relatively easy to enter the Gaza Strip as the former president of Egypt, Mohamed Mursi, allowed the Rafah border crossing to operate on regular basis. In July, 2013, Mursi was toppled and the latest Egyptian ruling has made the Gaza Strip virtually locked shut for months on end. It became risky for the researcher to go to Gaza not only because of the difficulties getting into Gaza but also because of the very real possibility of being unable to leave to return to the university in Kyoto. The Rafah border gate was a constant issue during the period of research that can be at best described as turbulent. Yet, the researcher conducted field surveys in Gaza three times.

Moreover, limitations in Turkey restricted the number of interviews that could be conducted with victims of the Mavi Marmara. Thus, much of the fieldwork focused on the staff, volunteer and networking of IHH and other NGOs; on particular, how these function, work and fund their activities locally and operate transnationally. These questions required extensive meetings with relevant stakeholders. Several

interviews were conducted with individuals and activists who boarded the Mavi Marmara but more would have been desirable.

The fieldwork included actual observations of humanitarian and development programs implemented by IHH and other Turkish NGOs in Gaza. IHH sponsors more than ten thousands orphans and at the Gaza branch office of IHH, there are several Palestinian and one Turkish staff member administering the orphan program. Field observations of their work were noted in addition to interviews with staff and with Palestinian beneficiaries. During the fieldwork, the researcher followed and observed how the IHH office in Gaza communicates with the Istanbul office requesting immediate medical supplies whenever hospitals in Gaza declare urgent calls for medical supplies. The response is usually very quick, although at certain times, medical supplies are not available due to the embargo on Gaza. However, IHH and Turkish NGOs in the area try to overcome such obstacles in order to provide the needed equipment.

One of the most important parts of the fieldwork was the surveying and observations of the Al Shawa hospital, an IHH-funded project in the north of Gaza. The hospital is the only one in the town of Beit-Hanoun which is located about twelve kilometres north of the city of Gaza. As a border town, Beit-Hanoun is considered on the most volatile areas of the Gaza Strip and, over the past ten years, it has probably suffered more than anywhere else from Israeli military incursions, tank shelling and air missiles. Interviews were conducted with those administering and working in the hospital in addition to its local beneficiaries. It was an important opportunity to assess the impact of an IHH project on such a local community. Speaking in Arabic made a significant difference in presenting questions to the local beneficiaries both in the hospital and the surrounding community. The hospital provides the medical attention needed for those injured in such an extremely volatile area on the Israeli border. In the last field visit to this town in October 2014, the latest scenes portray an ongoing tragedy as buildings and homes remain destroyed in rubble after the war on Gaza in July-August, 2014. Many of the recently displaced residents took refuge in the schools of the town. People are presently anxiously waiting for the reconstruction to begin, however, regional and international politics, as well as the internal Palestinian situation, pose a major obstacle for any immediate alleviation of the situation.

The fieldwork, also, covered the educational activities of IHH in Gaza. The group decided to support local universities by rehabilitating and rebuilding some of the scientific labs of the Islamic university that were bombed by Israel during the war of 2009. Most of these labs, the engineering one in particular, were concentrated in one complex. It was interesting to observe how IHH cooperated with the Turkish aid agency, TICA, to rebuild and re-equip most of the labs. Other field observations in the area of education included computerized educational faculties in a local school, vocational training centres in several locations within the Gaza Strip and centres for empowering women through employment in sewing and embroidery. Interviews were conducted with beneficiaries, such as unemployed young men and women, and

mothers who were learning about setting up their own businesses. The interviews as a whole provided in depth insight into the impact of such transnational programs between Turkey and Palestine.

Field observation and interviews were also carried out with a number of Palestinian families who lost their homes during the 2009 war. These families were now living in about thirteen homes that were rebuilt by IHH in areas adjacent to the border between Gaza and Israel. Each home was named after Turkish victims killed or injured by the Israeli military in the Mavi Marmara incident.

Local Palestinian NGOs work as partners with their Turkish counterparts in carrying out humanitarian and development programs. Therefore, visits and interviews were carried out with NGOs in local municipalities throughout the Gaza Strip. Staff of civic services and NGOs expressed their opinions and evaluation of their cooperation with their Turkish counterparts, including those in IHH and Kimsu Yok Mu. This proved highly valuable in assessing how Palestinians perceive Turkish aid and what it mean for locals that Turkish communities are involved in humanitarian activities in Gaza. In addition, Palestinian academics and opinion leaders participated in discussions and interviews in order to increase the researcher's understanding of the deeper implications of the newly emerging role of Turkish civil society in Palestine as well as the impact of the Mavi Marmara. One interesting discussions was held with Palestinian staff members who spent many years studying and living in Turkey, some becoming Turkish citizens. They gave another perspective on Turkish culture and how people perceive the Palestinian question.

Field research was also conducted with Western-funded NGOs operating in Gaza in order to provide a comparative study with the work of IHH and other Turkish NGOs. These included Save the Children and Dan Church Aid (DCA), which hosts the office of Action Alliance, an umbrella organization representing a number of Scandinavian NGOs working in Gaza and executing programs in the humanitarian field. Mercy Corps is another active NGO in Gaza that was included in the fieldwork. Funded mainly by USAID, which is an American governmental aid agency, in comparison to other Western NGOs, Mercy Corps is relatively new to the field in Gaza but it employs the largest number of workers of the NGOs in the area. There is more than eighty local staff and their open-plan offices occupy several floors of one building. Interviews were conducted with staff members who talked about their humanitarian programs and work procedures. Discussion and interviews with Mercy Corp staff focused on implemented programs, amount of budget, number of employees, impact on local community, and classifying the type of assistance. Discussions also included their perspective on Muslim NGOs operating in Gaza. Also, the researcher obtained feedback from a variety of members of the local community through several opportunities to speak directly about their perception of Western or Western-funded NGOs.

The survey also involved interviews with government officials, mainly the Ministry of Interior, regarding foreign NGOs working in Gaza, as well as meetings with Palestinian opinion leaders, human rights activists, journalists and academics. Thus, the survey included interviews with a wide range of intellectuals from different disciplines about the political dimension of activities of NGOs in Gaza, particularly those of IHH. These opinion leaders shared their thinking and impressions about the latest situation in Turkey, the Mavi Marmara and the emerging role of Turkey as a regional player.

### **1.3.2 Why Turkey?**

To understand the significance of Turkey's role, it is important to trace the identity of civil society in Turkey because the country is increasingly becoming a crucial influence in the region and globally. Turkey is relevant to both Muslims and non-Muslims but particularly relevant to Muslims because changes in Turkey impact other Muslim societies, especially in neighbouring Arab countries. Currently, as uprisings are continuing to take place in the Arab world, the notion of the "Turkish Model" (*Al Namouthaj al Turki*)<sup>32</sup> is a day-to-day topic of discussion. Therefore, it is vital to trace back the dynamics of Turkish societies and complexities. Muslim civil societies in Turkey are Islamic at the grassroots level in terms of self-empowerment, funding, mobilizing the public to influence public policies. In the past twelve years, since the election of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (AKP)), Turkey's foreign policy has witnessed a dramatic change under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the current prime minister and the former foreign minister, Ahmad Davutoglu. As the architect of Turkey's foreign policy, Davutoglu's main claim is that Turkey is a central country with an optimal geographic location. Yet, the vigorous role of civil society within Turkey played its crucial part in influencing the outlook of Turkey in its relations to the neighbouring region. What has evolved is an approach based on people to people relations. Muslim solidarity within Turkey brought about a strong sense of people's sentiment through civil society.

Moreover, Turkey is the most secularist country compared to the rest of the Arab countries. Consequently, the study of Turkish civil society provides a way to examine its counterpart which is the nation-state of Turkey. The significance of such a comparison particularly came to light at the outset of the Arab Spring when suddenly in many parts of the revolting sectors people began pointing towards the Turkish Model. Without knowing what it was exactly, Arab media, from Morocco to Bahrain, began referring to this model as a positive answer. The study of Turkish civil society clarifies the exact nature of the state and in Turkey secularism was the state's ideology. Other modern Arab states did not adopt or implement the principles of secularism so ardently like the Turkish example. The Constitution in Turkey is clear and obvious in its extreme form of secularism that does not provide any room for doubt as to the unacceptance of references to religions including Islam. On the other hand, Arab nation-states constitutions clearly mention Islam as source of legislation. However, while in principle Arab states are not secular, their practices are oppressive in a

fashion closer to a secularist-statist agenda. Thus, civil society in Arab countries cannot stand out clearly from the state as being different in terms of Islamic values because the state can conveniently refer to Islam whenever it finds it politically convenient. Thus, looking specifically at the situation in Turkey can provide useful insight into the relationships between civil society, nation-states and Islam.

Moreover, Turkish society is deeply connected to the ‘Palestine Question’ for reasons of history, culture and religion. A considerable number of Turkish NGOs support Palestine either by influencing local public opinion and government policy or by extending assistance to the Palestinian people. The timing of IHH's Mavi Marmara expedition to Gaza was significant in terms of delivering humanitarian assistance at a time when the international political community stood indifferent to the suffering and plight of the people of Gaza. It was a time when the Palestinian people felt that the international system was punishing them in a manner of collective punishment. Gaza was left alone and the flotilla was like the light that was about to arrive from the far horizon of the sea.

When the international community suspended the official aid to Gaza after 2007, IHH tried to lead the way to fill in the gap by committing programs both humanitarian and development in a seamless manner. Moreover, IHH focuses on human rights as well as humanitarian/development, which can be considered politically taboo for conventional actors in the field. This has placed IHH in a unique and sometimes controversial position within Turkey and outside. Thus the use of IHH as a case study brings about a rich opportunity in understanding the intense debate generated in Turkey after the incident of the Mavi Marmara and how different political and social actors in Turkey formed their perspectives and views at deeper levels on the civil society in Turkey.

#### **1.4 The Chapters**

The objective of Chapter Two is to illustrate the fundamental pillars of civil movements in the Islamic world from an Islamic perspective. The concept of “charity”, itself, is examined and the related moral values in Islam as reflected in the Quran and Hadith (Prophet Sayings). It is crucial to highlight the principles of Islam’s call for charity that urges Muslims to practice charity work as well as the inherent characteristics of this. Thus the chapter explains Islamic concepts, such as *waqf*, *zakat* and *Sadaqa*, which are various forms of charity and essential religious values in self-empowering, self-funding and sustainable resources for the long term.

This chapter also discusses some of the literature regarding the Islamic concept of morality and its impact on charity work and civil movements in Muslim society. In doing so, the author draws on the main sources of Islam, namely, the Quran and Hadith in his explanation of the concepts involved. Moreover, the study explores how the term “charity work” is widely used as an implication of “civil work”

in Arabic literature. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that the use of the terms, “civil society” or “civil movement” has become the centrepiece of his ideas about charity work. This part of the study ultimately aims to explore how Islamic moral values essentially shape the core values of civil society movements and/or charity work.

Chapter Three follows on from this by examining how Muslim civil society in Turkey has developed and evolved since the second half of the twentieth century to the present. It discusses how the phenomenal spread of Muslim civil society is evident in the influence of the various and numerous civil society organizations manifest in the social, cultural and political public sphere within Turkey. Using varying approaches, the most dynamic social movements in contemporary Turkey adopted the Islamic discourse of nurturing the values of the individual in terms of responsibility, spirituality, social justice and mutual assistance. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all issues related to democratic changes such as secularism, constitutionalism, and human rights and so on, however, it is necessary to distinguish the various approaches of prominent Islamic civil organizations in mobilizing grassroots activism and hence introducing change to society. Thus Muslim values and the role of society are being seriously examined across the Muslim world and the Turkish experience is providing lessons and reflections for civil society activists and political leadership elsewhere. The “civil” phenomenon is transforming the social landscape across the region and globally.

In order to understand the true role and impact of Islamic civil movements, it is important to shed a light first on the background of the Turkish secularist state. Thus the chapter first provides an overview of the background of the Turkish state and the adopted ideology of its unique brand of secularism. The Kemalist ideology and its centralist state formed a formidable background that Islamic reforms and leaders attempted to challenge the excessive tendencies of the state. It then describes the various Islamic civil organisations that have a significant influence in shaping the polity of present day Turkey. Lastly it introduces IHH, the NGO that initiated the Mavi Marmara expedition. Such NGOs have started to exert an impact the changes that are taking place within Turkey at the present time.

Chapter Four demonstrates how IHH responds to humanitarian and development needs across national borders by mobilizing local communities through campaigns of awareness and funding. A crucial aspect realized with funding by local community, empowered by networking and volunteers. Moreover, it is equally crucial to understand how IHH extends humanitarian and development services and program to Gaza, Palestine. In the absence of official donor community in Gaza, civil society organisations from the Muslim world appear to fill in the void left behind by donor governments in undertaking the goals of humanitarian and development. Muslim civil society is poised to emerge as a new form of empowerment, enhanced by people-to-people approach for the pursuit of ownership of development.

Chapter Five examines why IHH decided to sail to Gaza, looking specifically at the causes of the situation in Gaza. Firstly, it discusses the implications and failings of the Oslo Accords and then the role of the Palestinian Authority leadership and of ODA. It continues by discussing the causes and effects of the election of Hamas, the impact of the siege and the war and ends by considering the implications of the Goldstone Report in 2009.

Chapter Six discusses the regional and global effects, implications and reactions to the attack on the Mavi Marmara. Firstly, it considers the reaction within Turkey, which, along with the former Prime Minister Erdogan, gained a new standing in the region among the Arab people. The prestige of Erdogan and the image of Turkey appeared as pro-Arab and Palestine. However, despite widespread support, reactions in Turkey were tense mainly from two sides: the secularists and the Gulen Movement. The secularists held the opinion that IHH jeopardized Turkey's international standing and compromised the country's prestige; whilst Fethullah Gulen criticized the "confrontational" style of IHH claiming that the incident could have been avoided. The chapter then considers how, for the Palestinians, after the Mavi Marmara the siege was eased but not lifted; however, the dramatic events of the Mavi Marmara highlighted the humanitarian situation of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Israel accused IHH of provoking the attack and went as far as linking IHH to international terror groups. Finally, the chapter discusses how and why the US was not pleased to see two of its most important allies in such a volatile region becoming hostile to each other.

Chapter Seven presents the overall conclusion with a new analysis. Muslim civil society has been working to create a culture of social cohesion while Turkish politics is still evolving and gradually re-defining itself. It is progressing towards accommodating Islamic values in the polity system but without becoming an Islamic state. This chapter discusses the significance of the shades of definitions used to address political differences such as those between Islamist and Islamic and between secular and secularist; a distinction that is crucial in order to characterize the ongoing democratization of Turkish society.

More specifically, the chapter reviews the significance of the Mavi Marmara expedition, exploring the role of Muslim civil society in a rapidly globalising world. Considering this in terms of the optimism and the reality of the "possible", and the increasing obsolescence of the nation-state, it argues that a progressive understanding of Islam's ability to transcend national borders provides a grounding for a more cohesive global community that empowers non-state actors. The chapter completes the thesis with a discussion of the limitations of the research and suggestions for future work in the area.



## Chapter Two

# Islamic Morality as a Core Value for the Concept of Charity Work and NGOs

### 2.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to analyse the nature of charitable work in civil society in relation to Muslim values that are derived from the Quran and Hadith (the Prophet's Sayings). It is vital in this discussion to clarify and explain the uniqueness and characteristics of Islamic charity work. Morality and ethics are closely linked to charity work and civil society activism since Islamic principles and values call for the practice of these. The result of this is that both morality and Islamic values have impacted tremendously on the contemporary movement in Muslim civil society toward charitable approaches, including those of NGOs.

The Muslim world is currently witnessing a revival and re-awakening of Muslim values and civil society activism. For example, over the past few years the Turkish Muslim scholar, Yousef Al Qaradawi, has written extensively on charity work and NGOs' activism. As one of the most recognized scholars in the Muslim world, he has been calling for and encouraging civil activism through frequent discussions on his weekly television program on the pan-Arab TV network, Al Jazeera. His impact on the general public has been significant. During the popular uprising of the Arab Spring and the subsequent mass civil movements in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries, civil activism developed a new meaning, becoming a force of change; consequently, Qaradawi became a regular face in the Arab media supporting the youth and the revolutions. His books in Arabic are popular in Turkey, as are other Muslim scholars like Ghanouchi and Al Awa, with Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen's works being considered amongst the most popular. Such books and scholarly works are valued highly by those involved in the resurgence of dynamic civil society activities, including NGO members and humanitarian and development program personnel. One of the latest and most popular of Qaradawi's books, *The Principles of Charity Work in Islam in Light of the Scripts and Sharia Goals*, focuses solely on the topic of charity work and NGO activism. Here, Qaradawi highlights his intentions when writing on civil society by stating that his aim is "to show how Islam cares about charity work in general and introduce the detailed framework for such a concept in theory and practice".<sup>33</sup>

After discussing the definition of terms associated with Islamic charity work and morality, this chapter elucidates the principles specific to Islamic charity and closes with a discussion of Islamic morality as it pertains to civil society and charitable action.

## 2.1 Definition and meaning of charity work in Islam

In Arabic, the term, ‘charity work’ literally means “work to do good” and, as such, it is one of the basic aims of the message found in Islamic teachings. Sharia (Islamic laws) names the fundamentals in religion as the protection of religion, self, lineage, mind and money, and requires some kind of honour to be acquired through life.<sup>34</sup> However, charity work was not excluded within these fundamentals; rather, it was implicitly included as the first priority of religion, which is considered by traditional scholars to be the top priority of Sharia, and thus recognized as its core. According to this, knowledge of truth leads to both the belief in and the love of good deeds, and consequently leads to doing good deeds and charity.<sup>35</sup>

The concept of *khair*, or charity, is mentioned in both the Quran and Hadith using a variety of words, terms and names. Among others, there are: *bir* (piety or dutifulness); *Ihsan* (kind act or benefaction); *rahma* (mercy or compassion); *Sadaqa* (alms or charity); *tafrij al kurba* (relief, driving away of worries or grief); and *ighathit al malhouf* (relief or aid of the sorrowful or grieved).<sup>36</sup> All these diverse terms and definitions pertain to different aspects of *khair*, and its various specific meanings and attributes.

The well-known Arabic-English dictionary, *Al Mawrd*, defines the term, *amal al kheiri* (charity work is the nearest translation in English), as including the following: charity, beneficence, benefaction, benevolence, philanthropy, dole, almsgiving, and performance of good deeds.<sup>37</sup> The Quran and Hadith, which serve as the two basic reference books in Islam, mention charity work in various ways and instruct believers to carry out and encourage the practice; moreover, both forbid standing against charity work or warning against it. They praise those who do charitable work and vilify those who do not. Moreover, not only do both the Quran and the *Sunna* praise the performance of charity work but other sources praise those who call for it, cooperate for it and compete for its sake.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2 The principles and characteristics of Islam’s call for charity work

### *i. Motivation*

The essential principle of Islamic charity and its practice is that it is founded in a real belief that inspires believers to act charitably. This is expressed in the Quranic injunction clearly calling for the performance of charity: “O you, who have believed, bow and prostrate and worship your Lord and do good - that you may succeed”.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, another verse states that, “And whatever good they do / never will it be removed from them. And Allah is knowing of the righteous”.<sup>40</sup>

The renowned fourteenth century scholar, Ibn Kathir, elaborated on this in his famous work of commentary on the Quran saying that no good deed or charity work is absent from the knowledge of Allah and that God repays those who perform it with

*thawab*: a reward in heaven after death.<sup>41</sup> Thus, *thawab* provides a guiding principle by which a believer can understand how she or he should behave. Ibn Kathir's commentary on the Quran is probably one of the most persistently sought after by scholars and ordinary Muslims over the centuries since, as a general academic practice, reference to such a learned historical figure as Ibn Kathir can provide modern scholars with additional interpretations and insights on the meaning of verses. Moreover, the Prophet, himself, points out, "He who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgment speaks good or better not say anything".<sup>42</sup>

The rewarding of those who put effort into works of charity, and into delivering its benefits to people in need, is an important aspect of charity, as it reflects the great value given to this by Islam. Thus, those who assist in charitable works are regarded with high esteem. A story told by the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Ayisha, illustrates this: "The Prophet said, when a woman gives in charity some of the foodstuff (which she has in her house) without spoiling it, she will receive the reward for what she has spent, and her husband will receive the reward because of his earning, and the storekeeper will also have a reward similar to it. The reward of one will not decrease the reward of the others."<sup>43</sup>

Motivation is a major feature of charity in Islam. Spiritual values can provide powerful incentive and infuse vigour and enthusiasm for reaching out to others and society generally. Qaradawi asserts that this ensures continuity in attempts to answer the needs of people.<sup>44</sup> Through this, Muslims seek to gain *mardhat Allah*, the satisfaction of Allah and moral motivation, and so finally to attain blessings and bequeathments in this life.<sup>45</sup> Seeking the satisfaction of God is considered the most important of motivations. Qaradawi supports this by quoting the Quran:

"And the example of those who spend their wealth seeking means to gain the approval of Allah and assuring [reward for] themselves is like a garden on high ground which is hit by a downpour - so it yields its fruits in double. And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then a drizzle [is sufficient]. And Allah, of what you do, is seeing."<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, he cites a further Quran quotation elaborates on this:

"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing".<sup>47</sup>

Qaradawi explains that "seeking of satisfaction of Allah" means asking for *Janna* (Heaven), and that true rewards and happiness are in the heavens. The author adds that *Janna* is not only restricted to *Dar al Naeim*, the House of Happiness, which means Heaven in the physical sense, but it also implies *Dar al Redwan*, the House of Spiritual Satisfaction, granted by Allah. This powerful spiritual motivation was the driving force of many of the *Sahaba* (the Prophet's companions) upon hearing the

Quran's instructions for actions of goodness and charity. Their hearts responded quickly and they transformed the principle of charity into work and implemented their ideas without any hindrance from selfishness or the love of this life because thawab (reward of Allah) is greater than this and what they would find in God is good and everlasting.<sup>48</sup> To support this, Qaradawi refers to another verse: "Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love. And whatever you spend - indeed, Allah is knowing of it".<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the primary aspect of motivation is that charity must be given for the sake of good only, without any impurity or ill-feeling.<sup>50</sup> The goal of charity should be realized through religious, moral evocation that is neither mundane nor materialistic. In Islam, no charity is accepted from a person who uses it as a method of deceiving people or for political gain as is witnessed in certain countries where the real intention of candidates is not charity itself but rather to win electoral votes. An Islamic perspective perceives the whole through the lens of a moral standard where there is no separation between morality and real life.<sup>51</sup>

The second most important driving force of motivation is the moral dimension, which will be discussed in more detail below. The Quran regards those believers who give and perform charity as the *al Mutaqeen* (the pious ones), or those conscious of Allah. This is expressed in the following verse, "This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah; Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them."<sup>52</sup> There are numerous descriptions in the Quran of charity doers that elevate their status as believers, including *Mumeneen Haqa* (true believers) and *Ulu al Albab* (people of understanding or those gifted with understanding hearts). They are also called *al Muhseneen* (the beneficent or doers of good) and *al Abrar* (the righteous). Such descriptions carry powerful moral and religious meanings for many individuals.

The third most powerful motivation for doing charity work in Islam is the blessings and compensation in this life, *ikhlaḥ*. Islam as a religion combines two "goods": the good of this life and the good of the afterlife.<sup>53</sup> This life is referred to in religious term as *Dar Al Dunia*, meaning the 'House of This Life', in which motivation for charity work is applied and connected to people's need. However, the motivations connected to the life hereafter, that is, to life after death, is the more powerful incentive and possesses more influence. To explain further, when a person gives charity or participates in charitable work, such a person would feel the "blessings" filling his/her life; these include health, serenity, inner peace, harmony among family members, uprightness or integrity of his/her children, and blessings of money; overall, the recipient of these rewards simply enjoys a good life.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the doer of charity receives much goodness and many layers of growth and purification.<sup>55</sup> The Quran refers to this, saying, "But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] / He will compensate it; and He is the best of those who grant Sustenance".<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the concept of ikhlaf implies the bestowing of benefits from Allah upon the charity doer, be it in their general life, their family or through money which God bestows upon them. Another Quranic verse further elaborates on this, “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer / We will surely cause him to live a good life, and we will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.”<sup>57</sup>

Another important Islamic value that motivates Muslims to participate in volunteering and civil activism is ‘readiness to do charity’. The Quran honours this value highly and puts great emphasis on it. For example, the following Quranic verse talks about how a believer must be ready to do charity and be prepared to perform the actions involved: “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous, / Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.”<sup>58</sup> Concerning this particular point, in another verse, the Quran states that, “They believe in Allah and the Last Day, / and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. / And those are among the righteous.”<sup>59</sup> The Quran clearly puts great emphasis on this particular point, as shown in the following verse: “It is these who hasten in every good work and these who are foremost in them.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, being conscious of God urges believers to act and participate in good works for the benefit of society. Thus, a Muslim should always be ready to volunteer for charity work other than obligatory religious tasks, as made clear in the following Quranic verse: “And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. (Saying), we feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.”<sup>61</sup> Qaradawi interprets this verse as saying that God praises those believers who volunteer for charity and consequently they deserve God’s Heaven and satisfaction.

In relation to motivation, the value of “intention” is essential in the sense that some people intend to do good but for some reason they cannot perform the task. If a person does not have the means to carry out charity work then, he/she can compensate for it by holding sincere intentions to help, donate resources and do charity; and the mere intentions of one person, who wishes to have the means to give to charity, can be considered of high value and praise by Allah.<sup>62</sup> The reasoning behind this is that, at a societal level, such intentions held by individuals can contribute and strengthen social solidarity, empathy and community cohesion with moral concern and sympathy. Similarly, no matter how small the good deed, Islam puts high values on it since to God, it is big. A small act of charity for one person may seem to carry no value at all but for those who receive it, it could create a meaningful difference. The following Quranic verse eloquently expresses this point: “So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it”.<sup>63</sup> In another verse in the Quran, we find: “Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom's weight; while, if there is a good deed, / He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the great Hadith of the Prophet Mohammad says, “(O people!) Save yourselves from the (Hell) Fire even

if with one half of a date fruit (given in charity), and if this is not available, then (save yourselves) by saying a good pleasant friendly word."<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, in the case of not being able to carry out a good deed or charity work, possessing the intention in the heart, and praying that someone else can perform it, is important; as is guiding another person towards it. Such approaches are understood to gain the same *thawab* (reward) as the actual charity provider.<sup>66</sup> The Prophet Mohammad said, concerning this point, "There is a 'Sadaqa' (charitable gift) to be given for every joint of the human body; and for every day on which the sun rises there is a reward of a 'Sadaqa' for the one who establishes justice among people."<sup>67</sup> God gives *thawab* for every action someone participates in or commits themselves to, no matter how trivial this action is.

As well as being motivated to carry out charitable acts, an all important principle for Muslims is that they exert themselves by making *utmost* efforts for social causes. Thus, a Muslim is expected to be generous in helping fellow members of society and to do all he/she can do to assist and alleviate suffering and poverty. He or she must do all it takes to look out for the weak in society and strive towards more equality among members of the community. The Quran refers to this point by saying, "If Allah had so willed, / He would have made you a single people, / but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. / The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute."<sup>68</sup>

## *ii. Cooperation*

One of basic principles of charity in Islam is the obligatory nature of cooperation in charity work, which is considered as *Faridah* (Religious Duty). The scholar Qaradawi states that "a human being is small by him/herself alone but much more with the brothers and sisters and friends. Whatever one person cannot do, the group, *jamaa*, can do."<sup>69</sup> The Quran supports his point as follows: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. / And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty."<sup>70</sup> This Quranic verse is well known among Muslims and repeated on various occasions. Muslim people usually utter it when occasions of stress arise. It emphasises that society cannot function without the cooperation of its members in good causes. There are a number of NGOs that include the Arabic word, *tauanu* (cooperate), as part of their title.<sup>71</sup> Cooperation between the ruler and people of high value is also necessary. In relation to this, the Quran has a verse saying that, "He said that in which my Lord has established me is better [than what you offer], but assist me with strength: I will make between you and them a dam."<sup>72</sup> The Prophet urges cooperation and solidarity among community members, saying, "a believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other. The Prophet then clasped his hands with the fingers interlaced."<sup>73</sup> Thus, since the well-being of a community depends largely on the cooperation and solidarity among members, the Prophet urges believers in a given community to look out for each other

and to exert efforts in helping the needy and the weak. In other words, the well-being of each individual is an integral part of the whole in the pursuit for a sound community.

Similarly, the importance of appealing to others and prompting them to undertake charity work are important Islamic principles. The Quran substantiates this point, “And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful”.<sup>74</sup> In terms of promoting activism and appealing to others, the Quran supports this, saying, “Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? / For that is the one who drives away the orphan, / And does not encourage the feeding of the poor.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, later, it states, “Indeed, he did not used to believe in Allah, the Most Great, nor did he encourage the feeding of the poor.”<sup>76</sup> An additional citation is: “No! But you do not honour the orphan, and you do not encourage one another to feed the poor.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Islam does not only make it obligatory to feed the needy but also to answer their basic needs in life.<sup>78</sup>

Conversely, the Quran strongly decries those who hinder charity.<sup>79</sup> This is made clear in Qaradawi’s interpretation, stating that such a person is identified by certain characteristics: “And do not obey every worthless habitual swearer [and] scorners, going about with malicious gossip, a preventer of good, transgressing and sinful.”<sup>80</sup> It is made clear in the Quran that such a person, who prevents or hinders the work of charity or the performance of any goodness, is a self-degrading person, a backstabbing person, who spreads rumours among people, and obstructs goodness, and is aggressive and sinful. The description of such a person is expressed powerfully in the Quran as *Manna lilkhair*; a preventer of good.<sup>81</sup>

### *iii. Comprehensiveness*

There are certain characteristics in Islamic charity work and social activism that differentiate it from other religions or philosophies; for instance, the principle of the comprehensiveness of charity.<sup>82</sup> According to this, a Muslim should extend help and assistance to whoever is in need, whether near or far, friend or enemy, Muslim or non-Muslim, human or animal.<sup>83</sup> Allowing for particular emphasis on extending help to relatives and friends, a person’s charity and dutifulness must reach out beyond the immediate community. Islam recognizes the rights of strangers and those “far away”, in the name of Islam if they are Muslims; and in the name of humanity if they are non-Muslims.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, Islam urges Muslims to extend Khair (charity) to all and, in the same vein, the Quran forbids Muslims to hate other groups of people. Instead they are required be fair towards others and to show mercy and dutifulness because a true Muslim is a merciful person. As stated in Hadith, the Prophet said: “No one enters Heaven unless he is merciful”. To this, his companions replied, “Oh Apostle of Allah, we are all merciful”. In response, the Prophet told them: “It is not the mercy towards your friend

but the mercy to the public in general".<sup>85</sup>This principle stresses that non-Muslims live under the influence of Allah, eat through God's bounty and are not deprived from God's mercy and piety. Muslims are urged to establish peace with non-Muslims who do not show aggression and who are peaceful, as the Quran states: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. / Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly". Moreover, "Allah forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers."<sup>86</sup> And in relation to prisoners of war, Allah obliges believers to ensure the good treatment of prisoners by providing food and water and so not inflicting hunger or thirst upon Muslim and non-Muslim prisoners, even if a prisoner was a fighting soldier. Once a soldier becomes a captive or prisoner, he/she is entitled to their right to access to food, drink and good conduct that is suitable for a dignified human being.<sup>87</sup>

The same Islamic principles extend to the treatment of birds and animals. The following story is told about the Prophet:

"The Prophet Mohammad told his companion about a man who experienced extreme thirst, found a well, went down inside it and drank. As the man was leaving the well, he found a dog so thirsty that the dog was eating the sand out of thirst. The man said to himself that he was in the same dire situation moments before. Then, the man went down again to the well, filled up his hands with water and let the dog drink it. God thanked the man and forgave him. The prophet companions then asked; are we rewarded even in treating animals? The Prophet, then, replied, with any living being."<sup>88</sup>

#### *vi. Diversity*

Diversity of charity is another important characteristic. Both individual Muslims and Muslim society extend charity in many different forms that are not restricted to one specific way. Charity is enacted using different methods according to the needs of the recipients and the ability and means of the charity giver. Thus, it could be given as material means or in the form of responding to emotional and intellectual needs through avenues like education and culture. This can include psychological support aimed at bringing happiness, wiping away tears, talking about a person's worries and concerns and inspiring someone with confidence in God; and in general assisting someone to rid their heart of despair.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, acceptable aspects of charity range from donating money, through emotional support, to providing material assistance. It can be in the form of *Sadaqa Jariya*, meaning continuous charity; moreover, the Islamic concept of *waqf* is



considered to be a form of Sadaqa Jariya in which the benefit or outcome of a designated charity is intended solely to fulfil one purpose.

An important form of Islamic charity relates to answering the immediate needs of a community through the setting up of a project. In this case, the funding comes from a charity source where a group of benefactors combine efforts to fund a project aimed at solving a problem for a given community, such as a village or a group belonging to a specific trade. For example, a group of individuals might decide on establishing a factory funded by *zakat*<sup>90</sup> money in order to provide opportunities of employment. Similarly, a number of individuals might buy a piece of land for agricultural use as an investment. The outcome or financial gains would then be utilized as a source of charity.<sup>91</sup>

Charity can also be given in terms of providing one's own time and efforts. For example, a medical doctor can allocate some of his own time as an act of charity by volunteering to treat patients freely or for a minimum charge for a specific number of hours every week or month, for the sake of seeking God's satisfaction. In some cases, charity through giving time and effort can be more valuable than donating money.<sup>92</sup> Hence, all kinds of charity are acceptable because it fulfils the needs of society.

Prophet Mohammad encouraged and instructed all kinds of charity in all aspects of life and not only in the form of money. To give one example, there is what is called the *social Sadaqa* (social charity), where people are strongly encouraged to resolve problems between two feuding individuals or people.<sup>93</sup> The importance of taking part actively in establishing social peace and harmony is vital and the action taken is considered Sadaqa. In one Hadith it is mentioned that, "the good word is charity".<sup>94</sup> Also, the Prophet says, "And your smile in the face of your brother is charity."<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, another type of Sadaqa, the *humane Sadaqa*, is also highly elevated among Muslims. Its meaning ranges from taking care of the weak to simply guiding a stranger in the right direction. Removing harmful object from public places is considered Sadaqa in that it prevents people being harmed.<sup>96</sup>

#### v. *Continuity*

Another characteristic of charity in Islam is continuity or sustainability. This is a highly important characteristic and feature because charity work for Muslims is either a *regular Faridah* (Religious Obligation) or *irregular Faridah*. The regular Faridah is bound by certain rules, such as *zakat* and *zakat al fitr*; a form of *zakat* obligatory during the month of Ramadan. The irregular Faridah is the type of charity given to those who have a right to it, in a way, or are qualified for it, this may include relatives, the needy, and a stranger or traveller, (known as *ibn al sabeel*, meaning literally 'son of the road'). The aim of the irregular Faridah is to relieve the destitute and rescue troubled people.<sup>97</sup> Both regular and irregular Faridah constitute obligations that

Muslims believe they must respect and attempt to carry out in order to cleanse one's self and to seek God's Satisfaction.

The conduct of the companions of the Prophet in daily life is normally considered seriously by Muslims. The companions were the first people to follow the Sunna, that is, the actions and sayings of the Prophet, therefore Muslims consider them, *Sahaba*, that is, the first Muslims to apply the true Islamic way, and the best examples of this. Following this, charity work and Sadaqa have become an integral part of a Muslim's conduct. One story that illustrates this refers to a man in Egypt who was known for being generous and giving much charity. When asked why he was always ready to give charity, he replied that he had heard from one of the Prophet's companions that the Prophet had said, "Sadaqa is like the believer's shadow on the Day of Judgment".<sup>98</sup>

### **2.3 Islamic Morality**

Since Islam stresses the comprehensiveness of morals in all aspects of life, there is no division in Islam between science/knowledge and morality, between economy and morality, between politics and morality, or between war and morality. All simply follow morality.<sup>99</sup> In relation to this, a Quranic injunction says, "Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah".<sup>100</sup> Similarly, a further injunction asserts, "And indeed, you are of a great moral character".<sup>101</sup> These references show how the Quran describes the Prophet Mohammad as a human being of the highest moral character. This indicates that the individual being is elevated closer to God and people at the same time by practicing a moral life. In his book, *The Muslims and Globalism*, Qaradwi points out that following the morals within *Iman* (faith), can provide a way to resist the onslaught of cultural globalization that make people prey to the modern machine of consumerism.<sup>102</sup>

Islam does not accept the idea that the goal justifies the means. The goal requires the honour and decency of the means to be combined together. Thus, making money through bribes or profiting from interest or cheating on trade so as to build a mosque or establish a charity project is not allowed in Islam.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Ihsan, (beneficence) is understood to be required by humans, animals, plants and by the Earth, itself; as well as by water, air and all other factors in the environment.<sup>104</sup> Morality, in this conception, involves being a practical and integral part of the whole and its values become the embodiment of our questioning of our own actions and their consequences in human interaction and in all aspects of the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, according to Islam, solidarity in a given society must extend to intergenerational peace in the *Umma* (community). Thus, one generation does not have the right to monopolize neither hidden nor known resources to the point of consuming them and leaving nothing for next generation. Consequently, the current generation must take into account the needs of the next generation as would an

insightful, merciful father who is concerned to leave behind conditions suitable for self-sufficiency and independence for his children.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, no nation in the world can maintain its existence, protect its identity or work in the pursuit of its ideals without morality. Qaradawi states that, “Morality is the protecting fence of nations”.<sup>106</sup> He soundly argues that, if this protective fence is broken, societies will become exposed to danger because laws alone cannot protect nations from deterioration and deviation since society needs a conscience to protect its laws.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, morality is not simply a religious obligation. It is also a practical necessity and no individual can succeed or be happy or achieve a goal without morals and virtues supplying him/her with strength and protection from deterioration. In Qaradawi’s words, “Islam considers morality the fruit of faith, even one branch of faith”.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Islamic morality comprises the feelings and sense of urgency among Muslims from all walks of life to apply their Iman (belief or faith) to their actions in all possible ways, to turn their faith into *Sadaqa Jariya* (continuous charity), and to achieve *Hasana Daema* (lasting reward). Qaradawi points out that focussing on charitable deeds brings rewards that continue as long as both life and humanity exists.<sup>109</sup>

Charity work and activism have historically supported different causes in Islam. Islamic charity institutions, or waqf, were an integral part of daily life among Muslims. The concept of waqf is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, suffice it to say here that waqf institutions were responsible for the development of society in areas such as health, education and social services. They cared for needy people, animals and birds. For example, waqf was known for taking care of abandoned cats, and for looking after migrating birds reaching Muslim lands where people helped the birds to survive their long journeys. Qaradawi highlights the belief, or *aqida*, that producing and encouraging such considerate feelings toward living beings, even as far as taking care of lost cats and migrating birds. Until the recent past, a cats’ home in Damascus housed more than 400 cats, all of which, especially blind ones, were provided with food and care.<sup>110</sup> This reflects how Islamic society is a society of solidarity and mercy where the strong show mercy to the weak and the rich to the poor. As the Prophet Mohammad said, “Believers in their solidarity, love, mercifulness and sympathy is like the human body; if one part complains, the rest of the body reacts with fever and stays up all night”.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, how does civil society relate to what Islam terms as charity work? Firstly, the Islamic principle of *Tawhid*, Unity of God, is the true basis of brotherhood among people. In this context, Qaradawi asserts that, “[t]he deities do not become brothers to worshippers but worshippers become brothers in front of the God of worshipers”.<sup>112</sup> The principle of Tawhid is the essence of Islam and it carries powerful significance in relation to individual and social actions and motivations to look after fellow human beings, the environment and true social justice. It is this that provides the fundamental relationship between Islam and charitable work. Contemporary Western academics have recently reconsidered the notion and implications of Islamic charity work and, as

a result, the perceived “Judeo-Christian” monopoly on charity has been challenged by this Islamic dimension. Previous to this, charity in Islam was thought of a “parallel world” and not taken seriously, or even considered to be part of international aid activities. This assumption is now being overturned. As well as significant charitable work in Africa, in Europe, Islamic charity is currently becoming a force for integration.<sup>113</sup> As the researchers, Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, assert in their study of aid in the Muslim world, “[s]ome of the most important international charities operating today are explicitly Christian (Caritas Aid, World Vision, Order of Malta) or strongly influenced by Christian values such as Oxfam, Save the Children, the Red Cross. But, one can go further and argue that the entire Western tradition of charity, resulting in today’s enormous NGO sector, has historically deep religious roots that are not always noticed”.<sup>114</sup>

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Islamic teaching strongly urges believers to do charity work and participate actively in social causes because charity is one of the basic aims of Islam. The two main sources of Islamic teachings, the Quran and Sunna, mention charity work in different ways, but both instruct and encourage believers to carry out charity. There are several Islamic principles calling for charity including the mere performing of charitable acts and readiness to fulfil a religious duty. Charity work in Islam is different from other religions or philosophies as being characterized by certain features: the comprehensiveness of charity, the diversity of charity, the requirement to provide continuing and sustained charity, the power of motivation and the good intentions of charity. The motivation for performing charity in Islam comprises a powerful dimension that ensures its continuity and consistency. The most important aspects of motivation are seeking the satisfaction of Allah, moral motivation and ikhlaf, the blessings and bequeathments in life.

Morality is a religious obligation and, as such, it is a practical necessity in the individual’s life in order to succeed and be happy. Morality encourages good deeds and actions that are rewarded in this life and the afterlife. Charity work is an action that expresses solidarity and brotherhood and translates into extending assistance, relief, support and cooperation. Muslims see morality, whether or not connected to religion, as leaving an impact or effect on the life of individuals and society as a whole. Thus, in Islamic terms, charity work, both as religious obligation and as civic action, leads to assistance, development and the protection of the dignity of human beings. This has been significantly developed and implemented in Turkey through the work of a number of civil organisations, which will be discussed in the next chapter

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Development of Muslim Civil Society in Turkey**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The historic collapse of the Islamic Ottoman Caliphate brought an end to thirteen centuries of the political order of the Islamic world. After the First World War, Turkey became a secular state based on nationalism, which not only cut itself off from the Islamic political system but also introduced an entirely new identity and rigid modernity based on ethnicity and laicism. The founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, intended to create a new nation founded in modern Western political thought, whilst severing ties to the past, especially Islam. One can only imagine what kind of an impact the early twentieth century had on ordinary people in Turkey as well as the Muslim world in general. A crucial way to understand such a monumental change is to see how society responded over the subsequent decades until the present day and how it developed to mitigate the new statist political terrain in Turkey. In a sense, Turkey's continuing reformist efforts in terms of society versus state are both about striving towards social justice and development and about dealing with the legacy of such far-reaching historical change.

Having discussed how Islamic values are central to Muslim charity work in Chapter 2, the aim of this chapter is to explore how Muslim civil society in Turkey has developed and evolved from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. Its phenomenal spread is evident in the influence of the various and numerous civil organizations in the Turkish social, cultural and political spheres. A deeper knowledge of how specifically Muslim values produced changes in society and ultimately altered its nature is vital to understand the roots of these changes. Using a variety of approaches, the most dynamic social movements in contemporary Turkey adopted the Islamic discourse of nurturing the values of the individual in terms of responsibility, spirituality, social justice, mutual assistance. It is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all issues related to democratic changes such as secularism, constitutionalism, human rights, and so on; however, it is necessary to distinguish the various approaches used by prominent Islamic civil organizations in mobilizing grassroots activism and introducing societal change. The impact of this can be seen in the changing role of civil society that is influencing the direction of the country at social, political, economic and cultural levels. Consequently, it is argued that the polity of present day Turkey is being shaped for the most part by its own society. Moreover, this transformation of society in Turkey is progressing in parallel with other societies in the Islamic world. In many Arab countries, the issue of democratization and development are increasingly occupying a

significant cultural space within these changes. Turkey has without doubt attracted attention. Thus, Muslim values and the role of society are being seriously examined throughout the Muslim world and the Turkish experience is providing lessons and reflections for civil society activists and political leadership elsewhere. Moreover, the “civil” phenomenon is transforming the social landscape across the region and globally in the search for a means to transform both individuals and society by realizing the concepts of self-empowerment, freedom and development.

During the twentieth century, Turkey has experienced the rise of a number of Islamic movements and influential figures that have altered Turkish society. But in order to understand the true role and impact of Islamic civil movements, it is important to first shed light on the background of the Turkish secularist state against which these Islamic movements and renowned religious figures have developed. Explaining this and the adopted ideology of its unique brand of secularism can, without doubt, deepen our understanding of Muslim activism, and the social movements and civil society in Turkey. The Kemalists ideology and its centralist state formed a formidable background whose excessive tendencies Islamic leaders and reforms have attempted to challenge. Thus, after outlining the establishment of the Kemalist state in 1923, this chapter explores how Said Nursi, an outstanding Islamic religious figure, formed a challenge to the state and became one of the most powerful voices in Turkey in confronting the state and its newly introduced secularist agenda. Following this, the NaqshbandiSufi Order, which is considered one of the most widely spread Sufi movements in Turkey, is described. It is deeply rooted in Turkish society and has continued to be influential and active at religious and social levels, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Another, influential movement presented is Milli Gorus, the National Outlook movement, which was made up of influential parties such as the National Order, National Salvation and the Welfare and Virtue parties, all of which were known to be Islamist.<sup>115</sup> After examining the implications of this, the chapter considers one of Turkey’s most influential intellectual and religious leaders, Fethullah Gulen, a social reformer who continues to struggle to change society through the moral cultivation of the individual and the adoption of active social participation in creating a just society and development. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Turkey saw a remarkable rise in activities of NGOs such as the IHH, Denise Fenere and Kimsu Yok Mu. These are Islamic in outlook, rely on grassroots support and have become quite global in delivering humanitarian programs in many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Such NGOs have started to have an impact on the changes that are taking place within Turkey at the present time. The chapter closes with a review of their approach and its challenges.

### **3.1 A background to Kemalism and state secularism of the Turkish Republic**

The modern Turkish state was established immediately after the First World War in a period that was marred by upheaval and tragedy. Between 1912 and 1923, the people of Asia Minor and Anatolia not only lived through the horrors of World War I but

also the War of Independence, which inflicted further tragedies on many people and transformed the social and cultural landscape. The people lived in an almost constant state of war during this long decade.<sup>116</sup> A coup and/or political violence within elitist political organizations became part of everyday life. The powerful Committee of Union and Progress witnessed internal political violence, including assassinations and political crimes, in an attempt to purge itself of dissidents so as to control the helm of political power in the country under a unified leadership that resulted in a state decried as nationalistic and even racist.<sup>117</sup>

In the aftermath of the First World War, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Turkish republic and secularism became the ideology of the state.<sup>118</sup> Secularism was imposed from above by the founding leader and a minority ruling elite comprised of civil servants, military personnel and intellectuals.<sup>119</sup> In order to achieve secularization of the state, Atatürk abolished the caliphate system ending centuries of Islamic rule.<sup>120</sup> The new state prohibited religion in public and closed down many religious institutions, finally replacing the state itself with a republic where secularism was enshrined in the new Constitution.<sup>121</sup> However, the masses were mostly Muslims who identified strongly with their religion. Consequently, the radical change was implemented from the topdown and the country came under the rule of a one-party political system.<sup>122</sup> Democracy was clearly not an aim of the state.

Thus, after the end of the War of Independence, on September 1923, Atatürk established the Republican People's Party (*Cemhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP)) as a political outcome of the war, aiming to achieve national unity and integrity. The CHP came to dominate Turkish political life with a complete monopoly from 1923 to 1945.<sup>123</sup> The internal policy of the new elites infected the Turkish state with a belief in the need to retain power at all cost.<sup>124</sup>

The complete domination over society was further evident in the state's secularism dominating and controlling religion in a country where religion has been an inherent characteristic of the individual and society for many centuries. During the single party period, the state controlled religious institutions, education and publications,<sup>125</sup> to support the republican elites' ambitions to build and form the 'secular citizen'. They strengthened this through a process of legislation and enacting laws based solely on secular principles.<sup>126</sup> In the early days of the Republic, it promoted the modernization of Turkey and called for separating religion from politics, seeking to emulate the Western philosophical outlook on modernization.<sup>127</sup>

### **3.2 Said Nursi and the Nur Movement**

As Turkish society felt alienated by the top-down state ideology of secularism in its strictest sense, one figure stood large in challenging the new status quo and was solely responsible for the beginning of an Islamic discourse in facing up to the newly emerging Republic. With an unwavering personal brilliance and scholarly excellence, Said Nursi started a social and religious movement across Turkey.<sup>128</sup> His movement,

known as the Nur Movement, facilitated the first new Islamic discourse since the beginning of Turkish Republic. Nursi, 1873-1960, was a prolific writer and interpreter of the Quran, as well as expressing views on various religious subjects. In his writings, he emphasized the cultivation of the self in enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of the believer in order to attain the best of the Quranic teachings and Islamic values. Nursi paid much attention to science as well and urging followers and Muslims generally to pursue a path seeking scientific knowledge along with the spiritual values of Islam. His writings on science were deeply illuminated by his understanding of the Quran. His work became widespread and he started to challenge and oppose the secularization of Turkey during the 1920s.

Nursi expounded on the value of justice in Islam through which he attempted to instil the meaning of justice on the individual Muslim consciousness. To Nursi, “justice is the critical concept” and he presented two forms of justice; absolute justice (Adalet I mahza) and relative justice (Adalet I Izafi).<sup>129</sup> He explained that absolute justice stresses individual rights no matter how trivial they may seem and “rejects any form of compromise in favour of the public sphere”<sup>130</sup>. On the other hand, relative justice is based on the “state protection of public interest against individual rights”. In this context, freedom is considered a basic need for society. His famous statement, “I can live without bread, but I cannot live without freedom”<sup>131</sup> is a personal testimony to his commitment to the concept of freedom and justice. It was Nursi’s belief that freedom is to be enjoyed by all members of society and the implementation of absolute justice is a requirement for society to protect freedom.

Followers and admirers of Nursi increased in number during the 1920s and many groups were keen on his writings. When he was imprisoned, his writings were smuggled out of prison and his followers and sympathizers secretly distributed copies of his works. His writings were read and discussed throughout Turkey in secret circles where his followers discussed the smuggled letters. Later these circles came to be considered the embryo of civil society in Turkey.<sup>132</sup> True to his beliefs, Nursi rejected the extreme centralization of the state. He fought back against secularization by encouraging the nourishing of the spiritual values of Islam by individuals as a means to realizing religious consciousness and instilling a sense of responsibility towards one’s own community and society.<sup>133</sup>

Nursi, the scholar, was able to revive the connection between religious ideas and social activism. His writings became known as *Resael i Nur*, meaning the ‘Treaties of Light’. In modern Turkey, the collected works of the *Resael i Nur* are regarded as the most popular book collection after the Quran and Sunna. Having lived in the both the era of the Ottomans and of the Republic, Nursi confronted the state as one of the Ulama (Muslim scholars). Traditionally in Islam, Ulama were an integrated part of society that played the role of providing checks and balances against the excesses of the state. They stood in guard against state infringements of individuals’ rights. For Nursi, witnessing the upheavals of the post-Ottoman era, which brought more statist centralization, must have generated a deep sense of disappointment. The



resultant resentment prompted the activist in Nursi to protest and introduce a reformist activism at the outset of the Republic. As one prominent Turkish sociologist elaborated, “the very concept of state was alien to pristine Islam.”<sup>134</sup> The Ulama knew well that a heavyweight state was not part of the plan for an Islamic society. For Nursi, it meant the struggle for the soul of society was only beginning as the Republic was barely established.

Moreover, his role in challenging the new status quo became more significant as his followers established study circles, known as *dersanes*. He challenged Atatürk and argued for justice and freedom for society, asserting that the basic tenets of Islam should be maintained. He objected to and rejected the secular nature of the state. His writings were popular and generated a sizable number of followers who talked about the issues he raised and discussed his ideas. Those discussions continue to our present day surviving against the odds of many years in a difficult situation. And for many, Said Nursi’s ideas and activities represented the first seeds of civil society action in modern Turkey.

### **3.3 The Naqshbandi Sufi Movement**

This Sufi order, or *tariqa*, traces its spiritual roots, or *silsle*, to Abu Bakr who was the best companion of Prophet Mohammad. This is a significant claim for followers of the order who fully believed in the message of *Tawhid*, the Unity of God and the Prophet Mohammad, as Abu Bakr was known by the epithet, “*Al Siddiq*”, which means the “faithful and sincere” companion. In practice, Sufis perform the *thikr* (or *thikr*): remembrance and utterances of Allah’s names and attributes such as the ‘merciful and compassionate’. These are essential rituals for Sufis to reach a higher level of spirituality. However, Naqshbandis prefer silent *thikr*.<sup>135</sup> As the remembrance of the word, Allah, *thikr* means that the believer enters into a spiritual mood for self-reflection and higher spirituality. In comparison, other Sufi *tariqas*, like those in Egypt, exhibit a different *thikr* ritual where elaborate displays of emotion with loud *thikr* are performed. The loud display of *thikr* is shunned by many Muslims in similar circumstances as it is perceived as indulging in spiritual escape or even hallucination. In Arab society, Sufism is considered almost irrelevant in daily life and its demands. In Turkey, however, Sufism seems to function differently in society as explained in more detail below. The Naqshbandi order’s practice of the silent *thikr* would imply a greater sense of self-control and reflective self-examination that may contribute to the development of spirituality of individuals and the quest for character building and instilling moral and ethical values.

In Turkey, during the twentieth century, the Naqshbandi order has played an important part in empowering the role of religion by infusing Islamic values at the individual level and thus contributing to transforming society over time. The Sufi *shaykhs*, or leaders of the *tariqas*, are often exemplary in their devotion and strong piety, or *Taqwa*, as well as having a strong sense of social and political responsibility.<sup>136</sup> The strict adherence to Islamic teaching such as praying five times a

day, fasting at Ramadan and abstaining from alcohol and harmful vices are obeyed strictly by followers. The shaykh is perceived as an example of the highest level of piety and therefore looked upon with reverence. The purpose of practicing piety is to bring a renewal of morals and ethics to society; and both individuals and groups work on the renewal of the self towards pious, moral and ethical attainment. Throughout Turkey, branches of the Naqshbandi order function through the help of loose networks and voluntary organizations working horizontally to bolster the moral character of the individual and also to reaffirm the “centrality of Islam” against Turkish secularism.<sup>137</sup>

Within the Turkish context, the significance of the resurgence of Sufism in the second part of the twentieth century not only related to a revival of religious and spiritual awakening but also concerned social and political issues. Moreover, the Sufi movement had to address a deeper challenge represented in the extreme Westernised state secularism that advocated a completely different philosophical outlook on life.<sup>138</sup> In other words, Sufi tariqas existed and functioned as civil society organizations. Against the state ideology, Sufi orders embarked on mitigating the modernization process that was taking place in Turkey by advocating devotion and love for God and the search for an awareness of God and the inner self.<sup>139</sup> The scholar, Hanafi, explains that “Islamic theory contains within it the idea of an integral politico-religious community but with power dispersed among its constituent elements”.<sup>140</sup> He further elaborates on this particular issue asserting that the tariqas should recruit followers and establish “autonomous societies” that existed independent from state control.<sup>141</sup> These institutions have played the role of what we know today as civil society throughout Islamic history.

On the other hand, Esposito argues that Sufi mystics played a major role in the greater visibility of Islam in public life in Turkey but Sufism remained confined to the religious and cultural sphere and the movement remained apolitical.<sup>142</sup> Followers of the Naqshbandi and other mystic orders like Qadaris and Tijaniyya were able to build nationwide organizations and branches. They did not face the state on political terms; however, they remained highly critical of Turkish secularism.<sup>143</sup>

The contention that the Sufi movement remained apolitical is questionable. It can be argued that within the Turkish political terrain, Sufism, particularly the Naqshbandi order, played an influential role in deciding the overall political outcome in contemporary Turkey. There were, though, apolitical sentiments that were more prevalent for some period during the early years of the Republic. However, when the elections of 1950 toppled the Republican Party for the first time since the founding of the Republic,<sup>144</sup> Some attributed the results to the changing attitude of the Turkish electorate but a closer look indicates that followers of Sufi orders, particularly those of Said Nursi had a significant impact. They had flocked to the election in support of Adnan Menderes and the Democratic Party.<sup>145</sup> The elections results brought the Democrats to power in what some hailed as the “greatest revolution ever to occur in the mind of the average Turk”.<sup>146</sup> This represents a political phase of the Republic

which shows how the Sufi movement could influence election results and political outcomes.

One may argue that Sufism in Turkey has the particular characteristic that the follower adheres rather strictly to the instructions of the leader of the tariqa. Despite this, there is in fact a tendency for the type of religious-based organizations, as in Sufi orders, to be characterized by horizontally rather than vertical hierarchies. That being said, though, the leader is usually venerated in high esteem and his opinions are taken particularly seriously whether in religion or mundane matters. Thus, Sufi orders wield considerable influence in shaping the mundane aspects of the individual as well as developing his/her spiritual character. And specifically, contrary to the perception of political apathy, Sufism has played a much more assertive role in Turkey than many would assume. This role is elaborated on below when discussing the impact of the prominent intellectual and social reformer, Fethullah Gulen, who is himself a self-declared Sufi and a strong proponent of advancing the values of Sufism in building a modern and balanced society.

Firstly, however, in order to further illustrate the impact of Sufism in general and the Naqshbandi order in particular, it is worthwhile to examine the contribution of Mehmet Zahid Koktu (1897-1980). Koktu was a prominent Sufi shaykh who descended from a respected and well-known Sufi family.<sup>147</sup> In 1958, he was appointed the Imam of Iskendepasa Camii, a highly significant urban centre within the city of Istanbul.<sup>148</sup> Following the tradition of the Naqshbendi order, Koktu committed himself to the traditional emphasis on moral aspects of citizens as well as the progress and development of society but he envisioned a different outlook by expanding his message in favour of industrialization at the local level. Thus, modernity was not an obstacle to his thinking whilst he stressed family values and morals.<sup>149</sup>

Koktu wielded political influence on prominent figures like Necmeddin Erbakan (discussed in the next section) and Turgut Ozel and both men followed him as Sufi disciples, practicing piety and religious instructions, although not necessarily on matters directly related to party politics. Ozel was a member of the Naqshbandi order and established the political party, Anavatan Partisi (the Motherland Party) after the 1980 military intervention. He initiated landmark reforms that laid down the foundation for the liberalization of political policies, society and the economy. Under his leadership, many Sufi groups expanded their influence in the field of media and established many television channels, magazines and newspapers. In the health area, the Sufi order established a foundation comprising several hospitals along with confederations such as the Labour Unions of the Right Path.<sup>150</sup>

Whilst considering how Naqshbandi Sufism in Turkey focuses on individual moral character-building and society, it is worthwhile noting how Sufism is perceived in other Muslim societies. For example, the Wahhabi school of Islam in Saudi Arabia would object to Sufism as being anti-social or at least impeding the progress of society. Originally, Wahhabism attempted to transform both the individual and

society in its own way, dealing with a society that it perceived as having “deviated” from the true teaching of Islam when the local population in the Arabian Peninsula adopted norms and local traditions apart from true religion. Later, Wahhabism was adopted by the state as its official school of Islamic teaching. In contrast, in Turkey, the Naqshbandi Sufi order stayed as it was; part of society, however with a new vision and emphasis on the spiritual and the modern. The concept of a Sufi calling for industrialization would come as a surprise to many people in Arab societies since Sufism is known as being too traditional to contemplate modern undertakings such as industrialization and democratization. However, in the case of Turkish society, the horizontal network of Sufi activism clearly shows the powerful influence it plays in transforming society.

The introduction of the nation-state in Turkey, as well as other Muslim countries, meant cementing the foundation of the new secularist political system over the ruins of traditional Islamic institutions. This is crucial to an understanding of the significance of the rise of Sufi activism in Turkey as a horizontal network of civil institutions. In the early part of the twentieth century, Kemal Ataturk banned Sufi tariqas and confiscated most of their properties.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, during the revolution of the 1950s, the new Egyptian state dissolved the Sufi tariqas and took complete control over the Awqaf institutions either by selling their assets or by turning them into a merely business projects.<sup>152</sup> Despite these state oppressions, the Sufis seemed to retain both its resilience and its relevance. This was because it is an activity that is readily accessible to the average man and woman and whenever oppression and economic conditions worsen, many Muslims return to Islam. Thus, the intended aims of the state to suppress Sufis, or Muslims in general, would probably backfire on the state. Now, the question arises as to how Sufi orders, under the increasing freedom of civil society in Turkey, will develop in the relatively larger public space in Turkey. And, with its apparently increasing power and influence, how the Naqshbandi orders will traverse the potential blurring of lines that could jeopardize the notion of civil society itself. As civil society inhabits a space distinct from state and economy, influential movements like the Naqshbandis would be able to risk their role in confusing the lines delineating state and society. This important issue is discussed in the next section.

### **3.4 The Milli Gorus**

In the sixties, political activism in Turkey materialized into an emphasis on an Islamist approach in seeking political involvement and development. And by 1970, the charismatic leader Necmettin Erbakan founded the *Milli Gorus*, or the National Outlook movement in English.<sup>153</sup> This was a major influential movement based on Islamist discourse for development and consisting of a network of civil organizations and political parties.<sup>154</sup> Several important political parties made up the National Outlook movement, including the National Order, the National Salvation, the Welfare and Virtue Parties.. All were to be shut down by the military, as explained below. In addition to political parties, the movement comprised a wide array of voluntary

associations, unions, and professional syndicates. Consequently, it played prominent political roles in the Turkish political scene, particularly during the last quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>155</sup>

During the second half of the twentieth century, a new urban, Muslim-oriented middle class emerged in Turkey that maintained conservative and traditional Islamic values.<sup>156</sup> This dynamic and pro-activist segment of society proved that Islam remained an integral part of daily life and identity. Erbakan and fellow founders of the National Outlook movement used Islamic “concepts and institutions to activate society.”<sup>157</sup> The very usage of the word Milli is interesting in how it was formulated and conceptualized by Erbakan. In Turkish, Milli means simply “national”, thus it was a safe term to apply in the secularist setting of the Kemalist state. However, the word is originally an Arabic one meaning “a religious community or sect”.<sup>158</sup> For the religiously oriented Erbakan and associates, the term was probably used conveniently, applying it in either its nationalistic or religious sense depending on the political context.

The National Outlook movement was built on two pillars at a political level: Islam and industrialization.<sup>159</sup> Here, Sufism and its concepts played an important role in the formation of its Islamic discourse. Erbakan was himself a Sufi and a follower of the Naqshbandi movement and he employed Sufi spirituality and piety in transforming Islamic values to be an essential part of the development of Turkey. The message was that Islamic spirituality is necessary for development of the individual as well as the country. For material growth, Erbakan strongly advocated industrialization as the way to attain progress, material strength and development. The development that Erbakan envisioned referenced a glorious past as the slogan of the movement revealed, “A great Turkey once again.”<sup>160</sup> Not only was the past glory part of the attempt to mobilize the populace but the Islamic values also appealed as expressed by the use of term, *Zul-cenabeyn*, meaning the “two-winged” development. Thus, in this way, the movement sought to combine traditional Islam and modernism through political means.<sup>161</sup>

Criticism of the National Outlook accused the movement of promoting the Islamic message under the cover of nationalism. The word, Milli, as explained above, could be understood in both the national and religious sense.<sup>162</sup> More positively, National Outlook can be considered committed to Turkish nationalism based on Ottoman-Islamic traditions; with the Ottoman era being characterized as independent from the West. Erbakan looked on the West as an immoral and decadent culture. He was opposed to the wholesale imitation of the West, asserting that a course of copying the West and following it in many forms and ways made Turkey dependent and deprived of its character and identity.<sup>163</sup> For the founders of National Outlook, the discourse involves a dichotomy between Islam and the West. As the two pillars of the movement were Islam and industrialization, the Islamist founders implied that Western technology was originally developed due to Islamic sciences in the past. As to the link of nationalism and religion, Shankland explains that this link exists in

many parts of the world; however, their relationship is rather “complex and manifest in a great variety of ways”.<sup>164</sup> The popular belief that Islam and nationalism are the antithesis of each other, and that, in principle, Islam puts the community of believers before ethnicity, tribe, or nationality is questionable. But in the case of Turkey, as Tinsaya argues, ‘Turkishness’ and Islam are closely linked.

In the realm of actual political power, the Welfare Party, or *Refah Partisi*, rose to prominence from the rank and file of the Milli Gorus movement with a strong appeal to the masses. This political National Outlook-based party expressed its vision of Turkey becoming the leader of the Muslim Umma and made its anti-Zionist position clear. For the first time in modern Turkish politics, a single party represented the widest range of membership, mainly middle class, that included professionals, students, labourers, business leaders, Islamic conservatives, men and women. Many of its supporters were considered mainstream Turkish citizens who benefited from the education system the state provided. However, society became increasingly disappointed with the economic performance of the previous governments of the Motherland and the True Path parties.<sup>165</sup> The charismatic leadership of Erbakan echoed the grievances of the masses and delivered a message of promise of economic prosperity in an Islamic discourse. The mostly conservative popular base of the Welfare Party responded in supporting Erbakan and, at the same time, those who felt marginalized were drawn to the appeal of the Welfare Party. Many people carried grievances due to denied rights and the societal gap was wide due to the privileges of the so called “White Turks”.<sup>166</sup> Erbakan appealed to a wide and popular constituency with the promise of solving the economic problems. But, he also used religion widely in party politics. He once described the Welfare Party as the “political expression of the Turkish part of the Umma”, that is, the wider Muslim community.<sup>167</sup> An approach that proved to be politically costly to Erbakan and the Welfare Party and later prompted further rethinking of the role of religion in politics and public life in Turkey.

The Welfare Party increasingly used religious terms and concepts that would eventually lead to its demise through military means and subsequent weakening of the Milli Gorus’ influence in society. Thus, in 1990, the Welfare Party adopted a platform program called the Just Order.<sup>168</sup> The message of the party referred clearly to Islamic references and concepts in a country where the founders and state elites held to a strict ideology of secularism. As a matter of fact, the terms and definitions used in the Just Order were not directly Islamic terms; however, the concepts bore Islamic references. For example, the Welfare Party called for the abolition of *riba*, interest on loans, and warned the state about wasting expenditure and asserted the demand for justice and equality on the state budgeting system.<sup>169</sup> The official newspaper of the Milli Gorus and the Welfare Party, the Milli Gazette, carried a Quranic verse which served as the paper’s motto; “The Truth has come and the Wrong has become Null”.<sup>170</sup> Erbakan saw the Welfare Party as a true representative of Islamic discourse in politics. Other leaders of the Welfare Party uttered harsh judgments from time to time such as describing those who do not vote for the party as taking sides with the

oppressors.<sup>171</sup> Such statements and the rising power of the Welfare Party sent warning bells to the establishment and the military, which were ready to clamp down on Islamic parties with the justification of their using Islamist slogans and reference to Islamist terms. Moreover, Erbakan was criticized by the Naqshbandi movement leader Sheikh Esat Cosan, for the seemingly patronizing tendencies of the Welfare Party leader in demanding full allegiance of supporters.

The year of 1997 was a decisive one and represented a turning point for Welfare Party since the military decided to close it down. On the social level, Islamic-oriented social sectors within Milli Gorus generally gradually began to distance themselves. The overt use of Islamic reference in the Welfare Party political agenda certainly involved crossing the line between secularism and religion; which, in essence, is considered completely unacceptable in Turkish politics. Politics and religion in Turkey is a political minefield and the Welfare Party had apparently challenged the status quo.<sup>172</sup> As a matter of fact, National Outlook did not ignore the reality of the implications of this; in fact they even attempted to transform themselves from religious right-wing parties into “centre right parties.”<sup>173</sup> However, in February 1997, the military took over, justifying its coup on the Welfare Party by accusing it of using religious terms and concepts. Consequently, Naqshbandi Order followers distanced themselves from Welfare Party which disappeared. Consequently, as it had been the political arm of Milli Gorus, this contributed to the waning of Milli Gorus as a movement in general. This constituted a lesson that proved highly valuable and significant for subsequent Islamic-oriented parties seeking political participation in the secular state of Turkey.

The closure of Welfare Party is quite significant in studying Islamic discourse and its attempt to challenge the status quo of the secularist-nationalist regimes in the Muslim world. In Turkey, Islamic movements like Milli Gorus and the powerful Welfare Party faced a clear foe represented in the state. The Turkish state was unequivocal in maintaining its ideology of secularism and was defined clearly as such. Mass mobilization relied on Islamic appeal as most of the deprived and marginalized lived a modest life and held Islamic values closely. The nature of the struggle became polarized between Islamists and secularists. However, in other Muslim countries like in Egypt and other Arab countries, the nation-state used Islamic references and concepts but hardly implemented them. Modern nation-state governments in Arab countries abused the use of the words of Islam, in order to monopolize the support of the populace to gain legitimacy. The Egyptian Constitution stipulated Islam as the official religion of the state. However, state policies and the behaviour of Egypt before the pre-Arab uprising did not necessarily comply with the values of Islam. Alienation between ruler and people was inevitable. This was to become more costly in the confusing situation created by the use of Islamic terms by the state and the gap between this and its behaviour and policies.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Islam-oriented parties continued to mitigate the Turkish political realm but with more caution and less Islamism. A

dramatic and clear case is the rise of the AKP under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Taib Erdogan. Most of the AKP leaders are practicing Muslims but they carried the transitional process from Milli Gorus-based politics to the AKP discourse with its emphasis on liberal, secular and democratic models and without reference to Islam or attempting to reinterpret their Islamic understanding.<sup>174</sup> The Turkish scholar and daily columnist in Turkish media, Ihsan Yilmaz, explains that between the Welfare Party and the AKP, there was a transitional period represented by the Virtue Party (FP), described as a post-Islamist Party. The scholar goes on to shed light on the AKP that succeeded FP by calling it a non-Islamist party.<sup>175</sup> Like the post-Islamist Virtue Party, the non-Islamist AKP is pro-European Union (EU), human rights friendly, pro-pluralism and against social engineering and the politicizing of Islam.<sup>176</sup> Yilmaz points out that the Welfare Party and Milli Gorus thought differently from AKP and that the AKP and FP being described as “against politicizing Islam” is of no small significance. For example, contemporary scholars in Turkey who are sympathetic to the religious leader, Gulen, present themselves quite emphatically as against politicizing Islam. That is an Islamic discourse which is seen as necessary in public life in Turkey. In other words, pro-Gulen intellectuals support pro-Islamic discourse but not an Islamist one. At the state level, Islam needs not to be mixed with politics but Islamic values are to be the guiding principles of those who govern and run public life.

Examination of Islamic political activism in Turkey from the beginning of Milli Gorus to the rise of AKP reveals the significance of Islam in terms of empowerment of society as well as its limits within secular state parameters. Both marginalized social segments and the economically deprived were drawn to Milli Gorus because its leaders spoke using Islamic terms and values such as justice, equality, fairness, and they expressed hope and faith in a better future. In addition, the movement informed the masses and urged action on the contemporary economic challenges based on a proud past that the local community could identify with. Furthermore, the leaders were not distanced from the masses, which constituted an important source of empowerment as activists were an integrated part of the masses at provincial and local levels. It might not have been wise on the part of Milli Gorus to openly use bold Islamic terms but the appeal of the message of Just Order and the reference to a great glorious past in the Ottoman Era hit a sensitive chord among a large portion of the populace in Turkey. Islam is a powerful mobilizing force and Turkey’s example makes the potential social empowerment of Islam more apparent, especially after decades of secular education and Kemalist militarist school indoctrination. It demonstrates that Islam remained an integral part of Turkish society as well as its traditions and belief system. Thus, the Welfare Party succeeded in mobilizing the largest mass movement known in Turkey but the state and secularist elite challenged it and finally put an abrupt end to the rising party. Probably, the leaders of Milli Gorus committed a mistake in not treading more carefully amid the minefield between secularism and religion in the Turkish context. On society’s side, the Sufi groups chose to distance themselves from Milli Gorus in the 1990s.



Meanwhile, the Gulen Movement, as will be further examined in a later section, maintained the constant position of not politicizing Islam at state level. Therefore, although Milli Gorus had been able to galvanize popular support using Islamic concepts and terms at the helm of political power through the Welfare Party, at the end it faced termination as a political party and receives a diminishing support from conservative social groups.

### **3.5 The Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen Association<sup>177</sup>**

The Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen Association (MUSIAD) is an NGO that emerged out of Milli Gorus and which focuses on economics and business and as well as influencing democratization and development in Turkey. It was established in 1990 following the reformist era of the former prime minister, Turgut Ozal, and aims at linking development with tradition, history and values. According to MUSIAD, the organization was based on economic lines as an influential means to protect democracy. It works as a proponent for advocacy in lobbying and influencing top political elites and decision-makers.<sup>178</sup> The lobbying factor can be seen in contrast to its rival organization, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD) which is a secularist business organization; leaders of Milli Gorus believe that TUSIAD was instrumental in bringing down democratically elected governments in the past. MUSIAD established its perspective on three pillars; Islam, organizational methods and good relations with Muslim countries. It wants to open Turkey to the outside world, especially the Arab and Muslim world. Despite its Islamic sympathies, MUSIAD does not use any Islamic terms in its titles or in reference to itself. The Constitution in Turkey is secular and MUSIAD tries to avoid confronting the state. Their aim is to focus on development and at the same time rely on the richness of the Islamic tradition in Turkish society.

The MUSIAD organization claims that it reflects the Islamic way of social participation in the promotion of political freedom, democratization and development. Its leaders are keen on projecting their role as one of restoring the soul of NGOs and civil society. They assert that their organization aims to ensure advocacy for democracy by promoting relations with political leaders as well as party leaders such as those of AKP; and many AKP leaders have established relations with MUSIAD activists. The NGO also publishes a journal in which various political and economic issues are discussed and published as policy recommendations. Some AKP members used to belong to the Milli Gorus movement, which solidifies relations and consultation between MUSIAD and the AKP Party.

For business and trade, MUSIAD intends to participate in opening the way to linking Turkey to the global market and especially conducting business in the Muslim world. This is emphasised in MUSIAD policy by focusing activities in Muslim countries. In an interview with MUSIAD officials, they explained that they have supported trading companies in Turkey to initiate manufacturing products locally instead of relying on imports.<sup>179</sup> This also provides an incentive for other Muslims

societies to emulate and learn. In comparing itself with another prominent business NGO in Turkey, The Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), which is affiliated with the Gulen Movement, MUSIAD describes TUSKON as more of a bottom-up based organization. Despite the fact that MUSIAD is an NGO, it focuses on big businesses and lobbying among decision makers. Later, TUSKON will be discussed in more details to examine the different approaches of the two organizations. MUSIAD has a regional vision which aims at expanding businesses in Arab and Muslim countries. It is no surprise that such approach is adopted by MUSIAD since the leader of Milli Gorus, Erbakan, made it clear that he wished Turkey to be the example of the Muslim Umma. The concept of Umma is strong in MUSIAD, reflecting its intellectual background in the Islamist Milli Gorus.

### **3.6 Fethullah Gulen and the Hizmet Movement**

Fethullah Gulen is considered one of the most important figures in contemporary Turkey. As a religious figure, Gulen spent his early active life teaching people about religious morality, values, proper conduct and ethics. He preached in mosques and public places like coffee shops. He wrote books and articles on religion and Sufism. Like earlier figures such as Said Nursi and Naqshbandi leaders, Gulen preached about the revival of the religious morals and ethics and asserted that the values of society were in danger from the extreme secularism in Turkey that prevented expression of religion in public spaces. In terms of society, Gulen was most concerned with reviving society and sought to embrace both modernity and religion to create a better society. His most important message on social issues was the harmony of the duality between religion and science; morality and modern life; and that Islam is the absolute balance between science and religion. What distinguished Gulen from Said Nursi, for example, was that he brought Sufi values, or “the internalizing of Islam” to the realm of practice in a larger scale.<sup>180</sup> His greatest accomplishment has been in the field of education as he considered education and knowledge to be the keys to enlighten both the individual and society. The movement Gulen initiated, known as the Hizmet Movement, is made up of horizontal networks of several important organizations working in the field of education, humanitarian, development, such as Kimsu Yoke Mu and TUSKON, an organization focusing on business and industry.

Looking at his childhood and early life, it is clear that Fethullah Gulen was raised in a home where religion, knowledge and spirituality formed an integral part of family life. His early environment left a lasting impact on his personality and the way he views Islam and the world. Gulen was born in the town of Erzurum in eastern Anatolia on April 27th, 1941; the same day that the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, died.<sup>181</sup> His father had an early impact on the young Gulen as he was active in local Sufi circles in Erzurum. Being a Sufi, his father was committed to practicing religious rituals and piety. Around the middle of the twentieth century, Said Nursi disciples were active throughout Turkey in spreading the teachings of Nursi and the Resael i Nur and Gulen became immersed in reading his

works. His Mother, Rafia, was his first Quran teacher and later when he attended a local education institute, he learnt the Quran from a local teacher, Lutfi Effendi, a member of another Sufi order called the Qadiri.<sup>182</sup> Gulen developed a strong affection for his teacher and he memorised the whole Quran at an early age. In addition, his father taught him Arabic and introduced him to major religious thinkers in Islamic history.

Despite the strong Sufi influences in his early life, Gulen did not become a follower of Said Nursi or a Sufi order but he benefited immensely from his rich early spiritual teaching. Later, in his early adult life, during the 1960s, Gulen studied the *Risael I Nur*, and used it in sermons and teachings in the mosque. Nursi's work and ideas provided rich material for the young preacher who, in those days, was working in a mosque in Edirne.<sup>183</sup> Later in his life, he confirmed his status as a 'non-follower' of any Sufism by stating that he never followed a Sufi order and added that such tariqas possess their own rules and structures.<sup>184</sup> In relation to this, when asked why he is called *Khoja*, a title normally given to a Sufi master, he answered that the title carries a sign of respect for those who have religious knowledge and it only means respecting men of knowledge.<sup>185</sup>

Gulen affirms that the most important sources in Islam are the Quran and Sunna. He explains that spiritual development is best achieved through the guidance of these sayings and actions of the Prophet and that the "the Quran is the source of all Sufi thought and practice".<sup>186</sup> Differences arise because Muslim scholars, Ulama, differ in their interpretations of the two sources. Gulen points out that the Quran is the Holy Book and the practical side of it indicating how Prophet Mohammad lived his life is the Sunna. He has always demonstrated and called for the internalization of the life of Prophet Mohammad and his companions (Sahaba). Throughout his life of preaching and teaching, he often referred to stories by the prophets and Sahaba and enjoyed a wide audience of listeners and followers in Turkey. The simplicity of his message was important to move away from the complex hierarchy that Sufism can assume. Therefore, Gulen's Quranic knowledge and love for Sunna tremendously empowered him and helped him spread his message and receive considerable acceptance in society.

According to Gulen, Sufism needed to be accepted from a certain perspective to be able to use it as a viable spiritual force for the individual and to bring a change to society. In realizing the potentiality of Sufism, he considered it as an "accumulation of wisdom" of the teachers and leaders of Sufi orders rather than a rigid form of institutionalization.<sup>187</sup> And that it is the genius of Sufism that it is able to change the individual by internalizing the Quran and Sunna. Thus, in Gulen's understanding, Sufism can raise the level of spirituality and faith to a point where the individual learns to transform the self beyond mere obedience to religious rules. This internalization enables the self-empowerment of the individual to enhance self-control in avoiding selfish tendencies and in engaging with others who are in disagreement with patience; it, thus, establishes a constructive manner of encouragement and

mutual appreciation.<sup>188</sup> Hence, Gulen argued that such values lead to an ethical society and build the necessary foundations of cooperation and trust.

On the other hand, he was also critical of Sufism for its traditional role and its structured institutionalization. He talked about the combination of faith and practice in his message.<sup>189</sup> Thus, the internalization of the Quran and Sunna is a key concept to understanding Gulen and the entire Hizmet movement in its attempt to build a “balanced society”. Gulen asserts that his approach is different from traditional Naqshbandi Sufism, claiming that the Sufi order is preoccupied with rituals and ecstatic spiritual experiences.<sup>190</sup> For practicing Sufis, the spiritual development of students is closely monitored by the Sufi Master; but, for Gulen, the emphasis is on a simple basic belief in Islam and its faith and practice. For him it is important that the Quran values good deeds as well as prayer. For Gulen, *tajdid*, or renewal, is intended to empower communities and enhance a social activism in which religion is able to play a crucial role in the wider civil society.<sup>191</sup> Consequently, after addressing and teaching about individual faith and morals in his early years, Gulen focused his attention on society where he established the movement that is considered a major religious and social force.<sup>192</sup>

At a social level, Gulen is considered one of the “latest and most popular modern Muslims that Republican Turkey has produced”.<sup>193</sup> The actual number of followers or those who are inspired by him is not known. However, in Turkey, his movement is regarded as the largest civil movement in the country.<sup>194</sup> Through this, he established many charitable organizations; chief among them was the NGO, Kimsu Yok Mu (KYM), mentioned above, as well as numerous schools, hospitals, media outlets, and university foundations to fight poverty.<sup>195</sup> In terms of promoting business, he established institutions, discussed in more detail in the next section, to support small businesses with an emphasis on moral economy. For him, applying Islamic values and ethics is important at all levels and so extends to the realm of economy. For example, it is important not to engage in investments that may harm the general public such as gambling and toxic chemicals. He encouraged his followers in volunteerism which became the backbone supporting the movement’s programs and projects. Financial resources came from donations by members, trusts and foundations that helped in many ways to build hundreds of schools in Turkey and around the world.<sup>196</sup> In modern day Turkey, Gulen is referred to in local media as the “unofficial civil leader of Turkey.”<sup>197</sup>

Muslim civil society, as invoked by the *tajdid* approach of Gulen, offers a new meaning to society and its development in our contemporary era. The centrality of the spiritual and moral character of the individual is acknowledged in Gulen’s approach; however, spiritual and moral awakening would amount to nothing if not carried over to the level of development and social justice. Thus, communities are expected to embark on bottom-up thinking concerning development and social justice. Gulen, in effect, applies an Islamic mode of relations that understands the individual and society to be the essence of any social advancement and development. Furthermore, he did

not address the state to implement his programs and ideas. It was his aim to realize the reversal of the deterioration of society that he felt was perpetrated by state ideological intrusion and authoritarian excesses. Gulen's concept of renewal is also about reclaiming Muslim society and its central role for self-empowerment, social justice and ownership of development.

Education is also a central concern for Gulen, especially in the light of his understanding of the importance of achieving a synthesis of science and spirituality for the coherent development of society. He attempts to "synthesize reason and revelation, religion and science, individual and community, stability and change and globalization and nation".<sup>198</sup> According to Gulen, this is the proper and good education that can embrace modern life and the moral character of individuals. He established hundreds of schools in Turkey, and outside Turkey, in which the quality of education is important. The schools embrace the universality of values and morality.<sup>199</sup> Currently, the number of Gulen schools is estimated as over one thousand institutions from primary and secondary schools to colleges and universities, spread over one hundred and ten countries from central Asia to Eastern Africa.<sup>200</sup> At the core of all these institutions is the desire to combine modern science and knowledge with spirituality and ethics.<sup>201</sup>

Gulen emphasis on the centrality of education is influenced by the two extremes he believes have existed in Turkish society; from an early age, he experienced the excesses of secularism and the indifference of pure mysticism of Sufism in Turkish society. Education in Turkey, according to Gulen, forced students to choose between the secular public schools and traditional madrasas. The secular education of Turkey was more of a form of state indoctrination aimed at consolidating the nation-state ideology that state elites opted to influence on the populace. The secular ideology of the state was sustained through military or public school to produce what the state deemed to be Turkish nationalist subjects. Although the teachings of the Islamic religion was not totally banned, they were kept under fierce control of the government by the Directorate of Religious Affairs, or *Dyanitt*, which enjoyed a budget equal to five other ministries. Gulen aimed to remedy the rigidity of education material and the impoverishment of educational program.<sup>202</sup>

On the other hand, in terms of education, Gulen accused many Sufis of isolating and distancing themselves from real life. Much of the daily activities of Sufis involve engaging in metaphysical experiences with no practical meaning to daily life.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, Sufi institutions focused on spiritual training such as *takyas* where the energies of followers are concentrated on pure metaphysics. Thus, to Gulen, the extremities of secular education and spiritual escapism deprived people of a balanced and proper education.

Gulen's motivation to synthesise modern sciences with spiritual values relates to his vision for the ideal education. He envisions a type of education that stresses the practicality of life sciences and knowledge and the promotion of spiritual values. The

gap that he attempts to narrow between the two realms of knowledge was further consolidated by his belief in Islam's insistence on the middle way or rationality;<sup>204</sup> in this respect, the Quran describes believers as the community of the middle.<sup>205</sup> Also, he often makes reference to the Islamic concept of *Sirat Al Mustaqim*, the Straight Path. This is mentioned in *Surat Al Fateha* and it is read by Muslims in daily prayers forty times a day.<sup>206</sup> This Islamic concept is applicable in any place and at any time. But, for such a concept to emerge into reality and be practiced in daily life, young people need to be presented with the proper education that reflects the middle way and the Straight Path. In other words, in order for it to be realized, what Yilmaz terms, a 'golden generation', is necessary.<sup>207</sup>

Gulen elaborates on the fact that Islam is often accused of causing backwardness in Muslim societies, indicating that the problem is rather the disconnecting of Islam's spirit from the quest for building a society and modernization. In this respect, as the Egyptian scholar, Mohammad Amara, a regular contributor to Hira Arabic Magazine that belongs to the Gulen Movement, argues that the situation in most Muslim countries has become that of "a civilization without a spirit". Amara agrees with Gulen and explains why Muslims societies fell behind. He reiterated the explanation that the fourteenth century scholar, Ibn Khaldun, attempted to bring to this phenomenon. Ibn Khaldun said that individual belief and faith are the basis of all affairs pertaining to development, industry, knowledge and politics in the Muslim state. It is the individual with a firm belief and a clear set of values that makes the difference since the faith of individuals is the essential requirement for a health society and its progress.<sup>208</sup>

Politically, despite the insistence of the Gulen Movement's followers on the non-political nature of the movement, there are critics of Gulen. In fact, he is a controversial figure for some sectors in Turkey. Esposito describes the Gulen Movement as a nationalist Islamic movement that is apolitical.<sup>209</sup> But, some accuse him of "pan-Turkism"<sup>210</sup> and his Kurdish opponents accuse him of being pro-Turkishness. His Kurdish detractors refer to Said Nursi, despite his Kurdish origin, as a pan-Islamist and one who called for the unity of all Muslims regardless of their nationalities. Hence, for this reason, opponents of Gulen, especially those in the south eastern part of Turkey where most of the Kurdish community live, accuse him of abandoning the teachings of Nursi and, instead, advocating Turkish Nationalistic Islam.<sup>211</sup>

Others have accused the Gulen Movement of meddling in political affairs in Turkey. Gulen, himself, was accused of conspiring against the Turkish Republic in 1999 but eventually, in 2006, was acquitted of the charges. Some criticize him for having close ties with the elite of the AKP as his relationships with them go back to the Naqshbandi Sufi order.<sup>212</sup> In response, Gulen ironically pointed out his own criticism of the Welfare Party for its politicizing of Islam;<sup>213</sup> whilst he openly supported the AKP during the elections of 2007.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, the Journalists and Writers Foundation, a part of the Gulen Movement, often holds conferences and

lectures on local politics, particularly on secularism in Turkey and the state.<sup>215</sup> However, criticism of Gulen carries weight because of the extensive and wide network of institutions and foundations that the Gulen Movement founded in today's Turkey; although it is notable when meeting with followers of Gulen that they often insist on the apolitical nature of their movement.<sup>216</sup> In addition, secularists in Turkey are quite apprehensive and suspicious toward Gulen, with some even going as far as predicting that Gulen aims to be the next Khalife and is only waiting for the right moment to come back to Turkey.<sup>217</sup>

On the other hand, supporters of Gulen believe that one crucial component of the movement is the empowerment of civil society against the state.<sup>218</sup> Any organization from civil society cannot avoid criticizing the state or voicing certain political stands. The fact that Gulen criticized the Welfare Party, was led by Erbakan, a well-known Islamist figure, points to deeper issues than mere political wrangling. Erbakan's approach to the role of Islam in politics is different from Gulen, each having two different visions; one is Islamist and the other Islamic, respectively. That is just one major difference but it is indicative of how politics is conducted in modern Turkey. Gulen is more cautious and avoids an Islamist agenda, however, he believes that Islamic discourse should occupy a public space and not necessarily be communicated from the top down. Particularly within Turkey, the Gulen Movement has laid stress on dialogue between Islamists and secular intellectuals with the aim of producing a common understanding. In line with this, the Journalist and Writers Foundation (JWF), an NGO of the Gulen Movement, particularly tries to bridge the intellectual gap between Islamists and secularists.

### **3.7 Kimsu Yok Mu NGO**

Kimsu Yok Mu is known as one of Turkey's biggest NGOs working in the field of humanitarian aid and assistance. It was officially established in 2002. But, its real activities had begun on August 17th, 1999, when an earthquake hit western Turkey.<sup>219</sup> The crew of a TV station broadcasting events of the earthquake and volunteers helped the stricken area by covering the needs of victims on a nationwide basis. The result was a great deal of support and many donations collected by the production team for a TV program created for that purpose, known as Kimsu Yok Mu; meaning "Anybody there?" in Turkish. This name came from when the TV crew first arrived on the earthquake scene and they heard a voice from underneath the rubbles screaming "Anybody there?" After the success of the TV program in assisting the victims of the earthquake, it was decided to turn the program into an NGO.<sup>220</sup> Currently, it has thirty-three branches nationwide and is planning to increase the number to forty-six. It has 270,000 cases registered as needing humanitarian assistance in Turkey. Internationally, the NGO works in ninety-seven countries, extending its assistance to both Muslims and non-Muslims. There are two essential criteria for delivering assistance according to the NGO's policy; aid should be delivered to needy cases and it must be given directly to its destination.<sup>221</sup> For example, KYM delivers aid directly

to the needy in Uganda and Ethiopia and it relies on local volunteers and partnerships with local NGOs.<sup>222</sup> In Gaza, Palestine, KYM partners with a local Palestinian NGO in delivering assistance to local municipalities and universities.<sup>223</sup>

Kimsu Yok Mu is considered a civil organization belonging to the network of the Hizmet Movement and it enjoys the support of many followers and sympathisers. Gulen, himself, has the role of indirectly endorsing the activities and projects of KYM. Such an endorsement provides a significant boost for a particular project. KYM activists explain that Muslim values and ethics are important to their activities and Gulen's vision carries a considerable weight. As an example, when KYM decided to bring six hundred foreign students, mostly from Somalia, to study in Turkey, Gulen endorsed the program and this meant a vital boost to the program. The total cost is fifty million US dollars and the students are supposed to attend high schools and then continue to university level. Both the private sector and universities work as partners in sharing the cost and assisting in their own ways. Local donors also contribute immensely to this program in many ways.<sup>224</sup>

KYM considers Islamic values as essential guiding ethics for their work. Officials of the NGO often cite the Prophet's Hadith, "the best of you are those who benefit others", and the Quranic injunction, "We have sent you but a mercy to the world,"<sup>225</sup> is held in high esteem by KYM activists. Similarly, the teachings of Gulen and his books are widely read and discussed by the NGO's activists and supporters, as is Nursi's *Resael i Nur* (the Treaties of Light). According to KYM staff, humanitarian work and assistance are a reflection of the values and ethics they believe necessary to building a society that is fair and equal. The Islamic values of mutual assistance and justice are encouraged within the organisation and have become a driving force for supporters to donate to many causes.<sup>226</sup>

Funding for KYM campaigns relies on the donations of the local community and businesses, as well as tax deductions by companies. Religious and moral ethics motivate individuals to contribute particularly in the form of donations as zakat, religious alms. Latest information technology, like SMS messages, is utilized in the funding campaigns. Hundreds of thousands of people contribute to fund projects using a simple message that donates TL5.00 Turkish lira which is almost equivalent to three US dollars.

Critics of Kimsu Yok Mu point to Gulen's patronage, asserting that such a dominant movement as Gulen's is capable of producing powerful institutions, in this case a humanitarian one like Kimsu Yok Mu; however, they argue, these NGOs are supposed to be based on grassroots voluntary associations and should be maintained at local level.<sup>227</sup> If they develop into a mega-size organization, they would risk becoming too powerful to be considered a civil organization. Some voices in Turkey attribute this problem to a "personality cult" that surrounds Gulen. On the other hand, KYM activists and supporters of Gulen argue that the bottom-up approach characterizes their activities, insisting that the organization does not follow a



hierarchical form of organization. However, individuals who show leadership and initiative are encouraged to do so in order to contribute and give to society. The supporters argue that what is important is the individual's intention, personal conviction and sincerity. This debate is part of contemporary Turkish society as some segments of society do not feel quite comfortable with the way Gulen's influence has risen to prominence. However, examining his thinking and his actions makes it clear that his philosophy corresponds to a horizontally-based approach to social activism and civil society. Gulen is widely reported to object to his movement being named the "Gulen Movement" and his followers prefer the name "Hizmet Movement" which means "service movement." The organization is made up of loose networks of organizations and foundations and not governed by a vertical system of management. In fact, this horizontal approach is one of the strengths of Gulen's contribution to civil society and its widespread influence is probably a result of this style and philosophy. Described as a deep scholar of Islam, Gulen's activism reflects the Islamic way of a society-based approach to solving social problems. In a way, Gulen might be seen as attempting to remind Muslims of how to solve their own problems.

### **3.8 The Moral economy: The Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey**

The Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON) is considered one of the most influential business NGOs in Turkey. It is known as the business and trade branch of the Hizmet Movement.<sup>228</sup> Established in the year 2005, it is an umbrella organization involving seven federations that cover one hundred and ninety-two business associations throughout Turkey. The total number of members, as of March 2013, reached forty-seven thousand business people. It includes many kinds of companies in its profile especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Currently, with about five hundred companies comprising the main part of the network, TUSKON's activities cover all sectors of production and services. The NGO's main resources come from membership fees as well as one specific government initiative called "World Trade Bridge" sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of Economy. The NGO claims that it organizes the biggest business meetings in Turkey, for both local and international beneficiaries.<sup>229</sup>

TUSKON's members uphold Gulen's philosophy of valuing Islamic and moral values and the underlying motto of the organization is "Reliable Partner."<sup>230</sup> Morals and ethics are highly important to its outlook and activities in their pursuit of what they perceive as the realization of the moral economy. For example, the organization tries to avoid businesses and activities that are considered harmful to humans like gambling, toxic chemicals or alcohol.<sup>231</sup> However, TUSKON does not call itself an Islamic organization, although Islamic values play a crucial role in the philosophy of the organization, which focuses mainly on peace and helping humanity and which views politicians as tending to abuse the economy to serve their ends. However, in contemporary Turkey, society is seen as playing an increasingly vital

role in influencing the ethics of economics and TUSKON as an NGO is aware of its role in inducing a sense of morality in the economy and the conduct of business. For this, Gulen's philosophy is taken as a guiding principle.<sup>232</sup>

TUSKON's call for a moral economy has its roots in the tradition and history of Islam. Throughout Islamic history, trade has been a dominant activity of Muslims where adherence to ethical and religious morals meant establishing trust in the vast trade networks across the Muslim world. The success of traders depended not only on business skills but also on the trust that evolved out of strongly held religious convictions and moral conduct. The ethical conduct of Muslim traders in Southeast Asia prompted the local people to trade with them and to be influenced by them. Consequently, the spread of Islam in the area is attributed to the efforts of Muslim traders, contrary to the widely-held belief that Islam was spread by the power of the sword. Communities along the Silk Road in central Asia also traded with Muslims and, similarly, this had the effect of inspiring many communities to embrace Islam. Thus, TUSKON's call for a moral economy is rooted in a rich background of Islamic tradition and history.<sup>233</sup>

The role of TUSKON as a civil organization is also contributing to the ongoing democratization of the country. Twenty years ago, TUSKON as an NGO would not probably have been able to exist in Turkey under the contemporary political conditions.<sup>234</sup> As society and civil organization began changing, especially so in the 1990s, democracy became possible and the advent of the governing party, AKP, is a result of changes that society has been involved in. TUSKON asserts that AKP has been a positive force in the democratization of Turkey and that together everyone is aiming to open up the country and create prosperity and peace.<sup>235</sup>

Much of the activities and programs of TUSKON are conducted transnationally by establishing trading relationships and goodwill. The organization has a number of offices overseas, for instance, in Beijing, Washington, Moscow, Brussels and Addis Ababa. With the current number of Turkish businesspeople abroad standing at 300,000, TUSKON focuses much of its energy on linking the Turkish business world with its international counterpart and a vast number of international businesses are invited to conferences and joint seminars in Turkey. It is worth noting that TUSKON also collaborates with Turkish civil society abroad, particularly in Africa, in order to facilitate business contacts and market information about countries. Being part of the Gulen Movement, TUSKON at times relies on the humanitarian NGO, Kimsu Yok Mu, to provide market information and facilitate business members in reaching destinations. The fact that both the humanitarian NGO and the business-orientated TUSKON are both part of the loose network of the Gulen Movement facilitates collaboration between the two organizations.

At international level, TUSKON particularly looks at investment and collaboration as means to fighting poverty in Africa. Turkish NGOs working in many African countries supply TUSKON with information about investment opportunities.

Information provided from local situations is considered vital for companies intending to explore new markets and find new opportunities; which accounts for TUSKON having a wide presence in some countries in Africa. TUSKON stresses that morals and ethics that are upheld in businesses in the Turkish environment are also applied in Africa and other parts of the world; and the African business community welcomes TUSKON's business style. Consequently, according to TUSKON, they have been able to establish a considerable number of partnerships. However, these have not been received in the same way in central Asian countries, where there is apprehension about the increasingly visible activities of Turkish companies, and to the spread of Gulen's educational network of schools; reflecting a general doubtfulness in relation to the assertive role of Turkey in the region. But in the case of Africa, due to geographical proximity and different history, Turkish businesses seem bound to influence the investment environment at a continental level.

### **3.9 The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief**

In the 1990s, the political and social climate in Turkey experienced more dynamic changes as Islamic civil society intensified their public role. In line with this, the IHH organization started as a response to the war that broke out in Bosnia in 1992 and which turned out to be a momentous impetus for change in Turkish society. The Turkish people watched in pain as the Bosnian tragedies unravelled. Consequently, the founders of IHH, who were mostly in their twenties and thirties when the Bosnian war was raging in the mid-nineties, decided to act and to help the victims. They established the NGO but could not register it in Turkey because Turkish law before the election of the AKP did not allow Turkish NGOs to carry out programs and activities transnationally. Therefore, the young volunteers had to register in Germany and work from within Turkey as a foreign-based NGO. Consequently, the IHH was not officially founded till 1995.<sup>236</sup>

In Turkey, IHH volunteers aimed at providing humanitarian support to the victims of war in Bosnia, using donations collected from the Turkish public through a grassroots approach. The organisation was able to garner funding through local networks of volunteers and sympathizers; volunteers also delivered support and donations to the people in Bosnia and carried on humanitarian activities and programs throughout the war. At the time, IHH volunteers had the opportunity to meet with the president of Bosnia, Ali Babizec. He advised them to continue with their work on their return to Turkey in order to assist other Muslims in many parts of the world. According to IHH staff, this advice encouraged them to expand their work beyond Turkey. Currently, IHH is considered one of Turkey's largest and most influential NGOs with activities spreading to more than 130 countries.

What makes IHH such a big organization with the means to sustain its programs in so many countries? The answer is that the NGO combines an extensive network at grassroots level with an Islamic outlook on ethics and values. However, IHH does not identify itself as an Islamic organization but rather as a humanitarian

organization with an emphasis on Muslim values. When talking to staff and volunteers of IHH throughout Turkey, it is obvious that they are piously committed to the values of Islam and motivated by Islamic morals and ethics in their humanitarian work. However, IHH is different from Kimsu Yok Mu in that the latter is part of a larger movement lead by the charismatic Gulen, whereas IHH has no towering figure of a charismatic leader. The IHH workers are clearly aware of the difference. Despite that, both IHH and Kimsu Yok Mu are involved in many similar areas of local and transnational activities. For example, Somalia and Sudan are two destinations where both organizations work intensively on similar projects, such as treating the eye disease, cataracts, which is widespread in the region. During the religious festivals of Ramadan and Eid Al Adha, both organizations capitalize on shared festivities and reach out to many Muslim communities from central Asia to eastern Africa. At these occasions, Turkish volunteers and staff deliver gifts for the festivities and find out about the needs of communities. IHH interviewees explained that fieldtrips allow participants first-hand experience in understanding the humanitarian situation and on return to Turkey they begin to transform their observations into practical plans for humanitarian activities and programs.

However, within Turkish society, IHH has been the subject of criticism from both Islamic-oriented opinions as well as secularists. One view portrays IHH as an organization that deviates from the mainstream of Islamic discourse in Turkey. Among Gulen followers, IHH may be seen not only as a rival to Kimsu Yok Mu but also representing a different approach to Islam. Turkish intellectuals are keen to distinguish between being Islamist and being Islamic. An Islamist approach is looked upon as implying an Islamist agenda, such as unifying the Umma under one leadership. On the other hand, an Islamic approach implies the adopting of Islamic discourse in public life but maintaining the political system within the frame of nation-state. Gulen's followers view IHH as a more confrontational organization that can jeopardize the sensitive military/political equilibrium both within Turkey and internationally. Immediately in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident, which is discussed in detail later in this thesis, Gulen sharply criticized IHH, saying that the Gaza-bound flotilla provoked Israel and resulted in the loss of lives. Such a statement did not go down well with IHH staff or supporters. In retrospect, the incident of the Mavi Marmara demonstrates differences among civil organizations that are labelled as Islamic. The secularists on the other hand, point the finger at a tendency of IHH to be confrontational and Islamist and that the NGO contributed to tarnishing the image of Turkey and its international standing. The criticism went as far as accusing IHH of jeopardizing the alliance between Turkey and Israel; a statement that would probably be offensive to members of IHH who see Israel as an aggressor or even an enemy.

Such is the controversial image of IHH in Turkish society, while for those working in the organization, Islamic values, morals and ethics are highly meaningful in daily work. Spiritual and religious values constitute a crucial drive for motivation of volunteerism and social service. The Islamic value of thawab, reward in this life

and after, is a powerful spiritual motivation for activists of IHH; as is the Quranic injunction that encourages believers to act and do good deeds is common to hear from volunteers: “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.”<sup>237</sup> Verses like this are held in high esteem as are Hadith, the Prophet’s Sayings, such as, “The best among you are those who is of benefit to others.”<sup>238</sup> Their religiosity and values create a bond of trust between the organization and local community where they are donors for projects and programs.

The IHH appeals to the local community for funding and support benefiting from zakat and donations, with some of the local business community also contributing. The funding campaigns are similar to KYM; however KYM enjoys the advantage of the leader Gulen who can have a tremendous impact on his followers in terms of donating and supporting projects. IHH relies on more than sixty thousands local volunteers who use many ways to secure funding. One major feature is to carry out an awareness campaign in local communities and universities to educate the public about regions affected by war or natural calamity.

The Islamic institution of waqf, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter, has a long tradition in Turkey and represents an additional means of income for IHH but it is not considered a significant source of funding. As described in the previous chapter, individuals who wish to perform good deeds for society, and so gain thawab, allocate their wealth, or part of it, to a particular social service. For instance, the owner of a building that hosts a number of shops in a commercial area will designate the rents of the shops as continuous funding of a certain social deed such as supporting an orphanage. While IHH benefits from some waqf, it is limited.<sup>239</sup> In the early years of the Kemalist Republic, the state confiscated or sold waqf properties and assets, which put a halt to the role of waqf in local development for most of the twentieth century.<sup>240</sup> It is slowly resuming its public role in development especially after the increasing level of democratization in Turkey in the early twenty-first century.

The IHH organization is part of the diversity of Turkish Muslim civil society. Its founders and leaders come from similar backgrounds that are shaped by the Islamic discourse that was prevalent in Turkey during the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the differences in approaches among civil organizations, such as IHH or KYM, emphasis on Islamic values is a dominant theme. Like other similar civil organizations, IHH is striving to build society from within and to remain as true as possible to its values and traditions. Despite that, Islamic discourse can be a controversial issue in local Turkish society and politics. In fact, society in Turkey is said to be divided along secularist and Islamic lines. That divide was heightened and highlighted when IHH organized the humanitarian flotilla to Gaza in the year 2010.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

Milli Gorus faded from the political scene because of its seemingly staunch Islamist

agenda since many supporters did not wish to witness a confrontation with the military or state. Many people considered both the Kemalist and Milli Gorus to be too ideological and too opposed to each other; so voters looked for a third way, which is why the AKP, the centre-right party, has gained a majority in Turkish elections over the last decade. The current AKP, under the leadership of Recep Taip Erdogan, is similar to the Democratic Party of the 1960s in its practical and democratic approach to polity. The AKP members are regarded as pious Muslims, however, they choose to conduct politics and the economic policies in a balanced manner. It is through this kind of balancing act of dealing with secularism that Muslim civil society movements in Turkey evolved and matured to work toward democratization and development. Therefore, Muslim civil society strove for self-awakening and empowerment and to enable social work and development. Moreover, politically, these NGOs could function as a political opposition seeking further democratization.

Furthermore, Muslim civil society and the rise of its influence in contemporary Turkey point to new dynamics and realities in global terms. They emerged out of a strong sense of the need for change towards social justice. Further analysis demonstrated how Muslim spiritual values are integrated into a modern context in order to bring about the spiritual reawakening necessary to enabling genuine progress and development in society. From the very beginning of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s, Islamic leaders and movements sought to improve the social, economic and political conditions of Turkey. The activism of Said Nursi and his great work, *Resael i Nur*, influenced generations of activists in Turkey and his followers founded the networks of dersanes that became known as the seeds of civil society in modern Turkey. Both Nursi and the Naqshbandi Sufi movements, stressed the re-awakening of the Muslim spiritual values and ethics in building the moral character of the individual which they regarded as the necessary prerequisite for the development of society. The Gulen Movement then built on the wisdom of Nursi and the Naqshbandis in implementing such values into the practical realm of education, humanitarian work and business world.

The revival of Muslim values is responsible for the re-Islamization of Turkey and is also conducive to the flourishing of NGOs in Turkey as one of the largest movements in the Muslim world. Consequently, influential NGOs such as Kimsu Yok Mu, MUSIAD, TUSKON and many others are changing Turkish society from within; thus, it was in this socio-political climate that IHH developed. Meanwhile society, in turn, is becoming self-empowered to affect the outcome of political order with a larger share of public space and voting power. A good number of the NGOs are, themselves, self-empowered and have proved their ability in generating their own resources from a popular base to fund social programs, activities and projects. Social programs and humanitarian relief projects reflect the commitment of local communities to fund and sustain their goals; moreover, Muslim values are indispensable in motivating and sustaining the NGOs. Zakat, as an example, is one source in Islamic practice that carries immense potential to relieve social injustice and

humanitarian crises and to promote ownership of development in local communities and transnationally. In this respect, IHH is especially significant in demonstrating the approach of contemporary Muslim NGOs both locally and in Gaza, Palestine, as discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Currently, IHH is an integral part of Turkey's revival of Muslim values in the second half of the twentieth century since these play a crucial part in its work ethics, motivation, and functions. Its substantial base of support, nationwide, qualifies the NGO to implement a sizable number of social and development programs in Turkey and abroad. Although many citizens within Turkey may not approve of IHH's politically-oriented outlook, the NGO still enjoys considerable support in society from those who may share its political convictions which are regarded as relatively conservative. The next chapter explores their work in detail, looking specifically at their involvement in projects to ameliorate the situation in Gaza.

## Chapter Four

### The Humanitarian and Development Role of Muslim NGOs:

#### A case study of IHH in Palestine

##### 4.0 Introduction

In Gaza, Palestine, humanitarian conditions reached crisis level as the siege intensified in the years following 2006. While Israel continued to impose the siege, the US led an international campaign boycotting the newly elected government. Subsequently, the humanitarian situation deteriorated at all levels. Development projects came to a complete halt as donor countries withdrew their activities, except in a few cases where minimum activities were maintained. Hence, the health sector suffered the most from shortages of medical supplies, lack of equipment or maintenance of existing facilities. The alarming poverty rate meant vulnerable children faced malnutrition and poor health. Desperate calls from international human rights organizations and UN offices, such as the United Nations Relief and Work Agency, warned of impending humanitarian disasters in the area. On top of this, the war on Gaza at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 plunged it further into humanitarian crisis; moreover, the siege was maintained throughout, isolating an entire population from the outside world. The official international donor community followed political policies with no impact on the changing reality on the ground.

Previous to this, as described in the previous chapter, the era of the 1990s had been invigorated by Islamist activists and civil society organizations, in particular, the National Outlook Movement, seeking to find a moral alternative based on Islam for the quest to resist the totalitarian and “homogenising policies of the Kemalist state”.<sup>241</sup> Despite the severe obstacles, the Islamic-based movement remained a source of power for the powerless and a means to achieve social justice and political influence over society.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, Muslim values played a pivotal role in shaping their social and political strategies and their moral outlook. In the years following the coup of 1997, Turkish civil society and Islamic movements increased and widened their participation in public life. The Turkish state realized that the military tutelage had weakened Turkish democracy by regular intervention and supervision.<sup>243</sup> However, the flourishing of societal participation created the necessary prelude to the emergence of the AKP. Following its eventual electoral success in 2002, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, aware of the grassroots movement in his country and its force in society, encouraged larger participation by society and civil organization. That in turn triggered a flourishing and dynamic civic society movement.

In such a socio-political environment, civil organizations, such as IHH, were able to develop into global actors of humanitarian relief and development within a few years. For instance, following their initial work in Bosnia, the progenitors of IHH



returned to Turkey to become more aware of the many parts of the Muslim world that were suffering from wars, such as in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Africa, and Palestine. By Ramadan of 2012, IHH activities reached more than 130 countries and regions around the world. In general, the humanitarian and development assistance performed by IHH in many countries worldwide has also earned the NGO much respect locally. In particular, IHH began establishing humanitarian programs and assistance to the Palestinians in Gaza. At the beginning of 2010, it established an office in Gaza city to coordinate humanitarian relief activities and development projects. Meanwhile, its head office in Istanbul carried out regular public campaigns in support of the Palestinians and collected funds for projects implemented in Gaza. The organisation was greatly helped when it was awarded official recognition since government recognition of an NGO's activities boosts its standing in public. The Turkish Ministry of Waqf also awarded IHH the accolade of 'distinguished projects in 2005'. IHH received another award from the Turkish Parliament in 2006 and an IHH mobile hospital project in Kirkuk, Iraq was designated the best project; as well as a project of "Sewing Training for Women" in Somalia.<sup>244</sup>

Using the case study of IHH's motivation, methods and work in Gaza, this chapter demonstrates how Muslim NGOs respond to humanitarian and development needs across national borders by mobilizing local communities through campaigns of awareness and funding. As indicated in Chapter 3, a crucial aspect is realized through funding by local communities and empowered by networking and volunteers; which is elaborated in more detail here. Based on the findings of the field surveys conducted in both Turkey and Palestine in October and November of 2011 and September 2012, the case study is used to explore the specifics of IHH's work, in this case, in Gaza. In the absence of any official donor community in Gaza, civil society organizations from the Muslim world appear to have filled the void left by donor governments in undertaking the goals of humanitarian and development work. Thus, as explored below, IHH's work in Gaza illustrates how Muslim civil society is poised to emerge as a new form of empowerment, enhanced by their people-to-people approach in the interests of local ownership of development.

#### **4.1 Motivation of Members and Volunteers**

In an interesting study of the link between religion and helping others, the scholar Einolf concluded that religion and spirituality were the most important motivational factors among the pro-social respondents. This was reflected in the many interviews conducted with IHH staff and volunteers concerning their motivation in working hard and exerting time and energy in so many causes across the globe. These made clear that employees share a strong sense of commitment to their humanitarian goals. Certainly Islamic values and spiritual motivation play a decisive role in the motivation of the organization; whilst IHH defines itself as a humane NGO aiming to deliver humanitarian aid to the needy and protect human rights by seeking social justice and freedom. At the same time, individual members also stressed that Islamic values have

a strong moral and spiritual bearing on their work. Everyone who was interviewed expressed the sentiment that his/her work is not only about being paid or having a job, rather it is a search for the spiritual within work in the temporal sphere.<sup>245</sup> Since their motivation connects to the life hereafter, reward in life after death is a powerful incentive and exerts a profound influence on the workers. As the Quran clearly indicates, “Never will you attain the good [reward] until you spend [in the way of Allah] from that which you love. And whatever you spend - indeed, Allah is knowing of it.”<sup>246</sup>

One interviewee was a young woman, educated abroad and well-travelled, who had been working for the IHH Research and Publication Department for the past five years. She described her job at IHH as follows: “When I work here and in the process of helping people, I feel, actually, I am helping myself.”<sup>247</sup> She said that she did not like money; rather, as she put it, “I am running after people's happiness.”<sup>248</sup> She stressed that there was a spiritual side that influences her commitment to work which is *thawab*, the reward given by God for every action a person participates in or commits no matter how trivial. Moreover, the Quranic injunction says, “So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it.”<sup>249</sup> In the course of her work, the interviewee travels abroad on assignments. She often goes to other countries to deliver assistance and aid, particularly during the times of Ramadan and Eid Al Adha. On such occasions, she makes it a point of visiting local NGOs for the purpose of networking and comparing notes.

In another interview, a staff member who is responsible for recruiting volunteers from universities, talked about how it all began for her at IHH. She said that she had worked for a private company in the past. She decided to change her job a few years back when she chose to wear the hijab. She had faced pressure from her company over this and eventually decided to quit the job. Working for IHH, according to her, makes her feel there is a goal in life and that her work connects this life with the afterlife. “Financial gain alone is not enough,” she confirmed.<sup>250</sup> In Islam, the notion of *Ikhlas*, that is the bestowing of Allah's blessing, combines the “two goods”, the good of this life and the good of the afterlife and through this empowers the motivation of believers to carry out good actions and deeds.<sup>251</sup> This relates to when a person gives charity or participates in charity work; such a person would feel “blessings” filling his/her life; be it through family, money, health, serenity, inner peace, harmony, or respect. It is about seeking to live a meaningful and good life.<sup>252</sup> The Quran points out, “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and we will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do”.<sup>253</sup>

Another staff member talked about her motivation in working for IHH, saying that there are many humanitarian problems in the world and she wants to do something about it. She asserted that IHH is an organisation that is concerned to tackle the deteriorating humanitarian situation and also to create public awareness of this, both inside Turkey and internationally. For example, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla

contributed immensely to people's awareness everywhere, as did the tragedy of the Mavi Marmara. With a canny political suavity that belied her young age, the interviewee explained that governments cannot do everything nor can diplomacy alone solve all problems. "I feel I am part of the solution", she said, adding that she, "trusts NGO work rather than government." Later she elaborated on this: "I think NGOs will be the most important players in the twenty-first century and that NGOs change public opinion and public opinion in turn changes government policy".<sup>254</sup>

In one interview, as staff member explained how Turkey has changed a great deal in the past ten years; in particular, he felt that the public are more aware of important issues. He referred to the current Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, as one of the most influential figures in contemporary Turkey. Mr. Davutoglu has frequently delivered lectures and conducted seminars on Islamic civil society, women's NGOs and on his approach to foreign policy. When asked about the values that are important to him, he said that Islamic values provide important motivation and encourage people to believe in justice and equality for everyone. Such motivation plays a powerful role in the daily life of Muslims. He pointed out that the Prophet Mohammad once said, "There is a *Sadaqa*, charity or donation, to be given for every joint of the human body; and for every day on which the sun rises; there is a reward of a *Sadaqa* [i.e. charitable gift] for the one who establishes justice among people".<sup>255</sup> The interviewee also asserted that from history he appreciates the institution of waqf as a heritage from Ottoman times and how deeply engrained it is in Turkish society in its role in realizing social justice in the past. He explained that IHH was an institutionalized form of a traditional charity in Turkey.<sup>256</sup>

Another female employee talked about her part in volunteering for IHH when she was only seven years old during the Bosnian war. Now in her twenties, she has been working for IHH for several years. She did not want to work for the government because it would prevent her from wearing the hijab in addition to her belief that NGO work can help people more. Other staff members expressed similar sentiments on the desire to help others in distress; as one said, "Here we are not only working but helping others".<sup>257</sup> The concept of helping others is deeply influenced by Tawhid, Unity of God, which is the essence of Islam. Tawhid translates into solidarity and transnational activities and assistance across Muslim societies. As one Muslim scholar elaborates, "faith in the unity of God and the unity of His creation helps to unify Islamic societies despite their great social, cultural and economic diversity".<sup>258</sup> As the great Muslim scholar, Qaradawi, explains, the worshiping of God leads to cementing the ties of brotherhood among people and that is the goal of Islam in economic affairs.<sup>259</sup> People do not become immersed in winning their bread for the day alone but in a larger meaning of life.

## **4.2 Characteristics and Methodology of IHH's Activities**

IHH puts a great deal of effort into expanding its network of volunteers within Turkish society. These volunteers assist IHH in its two vital objectives; awareness and

fund raising. According to the External Affairs Officer at IHH, these two concepts always proceed in parallel. More than sixty thousand registered volunteers throughout Turkey cooperate with IHH. They come from different walks of life such as merchants, university students, professionals and so on. Normally, volunteers in a particular city or locality form associations where a local businessman or a teacher becomes the head of the organization. Currently, there are about twenty-five cities throughout Turkey that have such local associations. These enable a rapid response. For instance, at the outset of the Somali famine, in the summer of 2011, IHH mobilized these associations to collect donations and support to help the Somali people overcome the desperate situation. The city of Bursa alone donated one million US dollars. The same goes to other causes, for example, when IHH asks the local associations to start a campaign for orphans in Gaza. As an IHH employee explained, NGOs have the ability to move fast, even faster than governments sometimes, and they can respond to different crises around the world.

IHH provides regular reports and feedback to the local community from the places where relief is received, such as from the Pakistani flooding of summer 2011. In this case, IHH was able to send back detailed reports that seem to count much in terms of trust and reliability for the local community than the mainstream news. On many occasions, IHH takes private donors to the targeted areas of humanitarian and development activities in different parts of the world. For example, during the last month of Ramadan of 2012, a group of seven volunteers, mostly businesspeople, visited Gaza to deliver Ramadan zakat. The purpose was to enable first hand observations and experience of the humanitarian and development activities they had been supporting through charity and zakat. In addition, it was considered a unique opportunity, given the special spirituality that the holy month of Ramadan evokes, to assess future charity projects and cooperation.

#### **4.2.1 Volunteerism**

Although it has some paid workers, IHH relies largely on volunteerism. In Ankara, the capital of Turkey, IHH has an affiliated association that has a large number of volunteers working in the city. Presently, there are more than one thousand volunteers and the numbers are increasing. They include a wide variety of people, including professionals, traders, businesspeople, students, etc., who express a willingness to participate in IHH projects that they read and hear about being implemented in many parts of the world. This enthusiasm is why IHH is able to rely so much on the support of local communities. The Ankara office helps in the promotion of awareness campaigns involving the participation of local volunteers in holding public symposiums and lectures, inviting prominent figures, and distributing books and leaflets. These campaigns are facilitate the seeking of funding from interested members of society.

The Palestine issue, in particular, enjoys wide support and awareness in the Turkish public consciousness. After the tragedy of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla,

sympathy for IHH activities ran very high among Turkish people. Turkish media covered the events of the Flotilla and the Mavi Marmara ship extensively over many days in the summer of 2010. Headlines like, “Israel Destroys and IHH builds,” flashed out from major newspapers in the aftermath of the terrible incident. IHH officials expressed their confidence in the Turkish people and the potential support for the needs of the Palestinian people. If construction material were allowed into Gaza, one IHH staff said, IHH and Turkish society would be ready to begin the reconstruction of Gaza.

In a field visit to a business area in central Istanbul, a number of local community members of IHH expressed their willingness to support humanitarian initiatives and projects conducted outside Turkey. Some talked about IHH as an organization that had been well known to their community since the Bosnian war, twenty years previously. A local business man talked about how IHH was entrusted and capable of delivering donated money to the right people and areas in distress. Another businessman described the people working for IHH, saying that he was encouraged by their wholeheartedness and dedication in the cause of humanitarian relief work.

One local owner of a small business said that he donates zakat money and Sadaqa on a regular base according to religious practices. He explained that God bestows His bounty and goodness upon people and that money is like a trust and it should reach the right places of those who need it; money is a responsibility, he added. This businessman elaborated that IHH provides a good opportunity to help him in giving his zakat and in turn his money is blessed. He said that he had known IHH for a long time and described those who work at IHH as honest, committed and trusted people.

Another group of local business people described how Turkish society is receptive to those who are in distress and in desperate need of relief and help. They said there are many traders and business people who are always willing to pay their zakat and Sadaqa. Notably, they added that their help would not only go to Gaza but it would also extend to Jewish people if they happen to live under siege and need help.

One businessman said that he noticed a wide support for Palestine from the full spectrum of Turkish society. He said that Turkish society and various political parties are concerned with helping and supporting Palestine, which reflects the public sentiment in Turkey. This is one reason why IHH receives such large support from a wide range of varying segments of society.

As civil society activists put it, there is no guarantee for NGO’s income but Turkish people have feelings of sympathy, mercy and love. When people here saw the tragedy of floods in Pakistan, they tried to help. In the past two months (as of summer 2011), when people saw the famine and hunger in Somalia, Turkish people were moved by the scenes and tried to give whatever they could to the people suffering

there. Thus, as long as there is zakat and Sadaqa, people continue their support for charity and civil society causes.

The lack of knowledge as to how Muslims feel about the world reflects a lack of knowledge about Islam's approach and position in world affairs at the present time; in particular, compassion and empathy are important factors in its approach. The fact that members of a community who watch a calamity somewhere outside their own national borders donate funds to alleviate the suffering tells much about how Muslims see the world. Compassion and empathy are two compelling factors. The fact that funding is carried out immediately natural disasters occur or when wars erupt is a clear indication of Muslims' desire to alleviate suffering and ease of pain. Islam advocates these values and instils the sense of responsibility in individuals within their own community, the larger Ummah of Islam and humanity at large. According to Islam this universe belongs to an all-encompassing creator that makes every individual connected to a centrally unified concept. This concept of Tawhid, Unity of God, invites people to relate to one another and urges us to give and do the utmost when others fall into trouble and disaster. The insistence on such responsibility can be a powerful and continuous reminder of what it is that a person should be and must do for fellow human beings.

Taking shared human values to a deeper level can translate into a more inter-connected global community. Civil society organizations are capable of being closely in touch with the individual donors and, thus, the full circle of Tawhid finds its route conveniently and meaningfully amplified between donor and recipient. Meanwhile, official policies of states function in a different realm and cannot be compared to the depth that civil organizations are able to envisage at community levels. Since public opinion and people's sentiment are becoming increasingly influential in impacting world affairs, it is at this exciting moment of history that we are witnessing an invigorating phenomenon of people empowering other people. People-to-people development is being tested and harnessed by local civil society organization and expanding it transnationally.

Clearly, IHH is very much a part of this transformation as exemplified by its reliance on volunteerism. It follows a strategy of combining awareness activities and raising funds, aiming at educating the Turkish public on problems and crises around the world by tapping into its huge human resource of volunteers across Turkey. Raising the awareness of potential donors and charity-givers combined with people's strong religious values and spirituality translates into a formidable potential of financing and funding humanitarian and development projects across national borders.

#### **4.2.2 The Significance of Waqf**

The institution of waqf has enjoyed a long history in Turkey. In Islam, waqf traditionally functioned as an endowment or trust established by individuals for a certain aim of benefiting society. For example, during the Ottoman era, it was waqf

that took care of schools and hospitals including social services. Moreover, women always participated actively in waqf activities. Ottoman colleges were prominent in the past because they were funded and sustained by waqf. According to a Turkish intellectual interviewed in Istanbul, the establishment of the nation-state in modern Turkey meant the beginning of the “execution” of civil society in Turkey. Immediately after the Republic was established at the beginning of the twentieth century, most foundations dedicated to waqf were sold and acquired by the state. The state established the so called Directorate of Waqf and through this controlled all the funding and money going into waqf projects. Once the state got its hands on it, waqf lost its essence and goal in society. However in recent years, the freedom of civil society has improved drastically. The positive atmosphere of change in policy and legal status of waqf has prompted the establishment of more than fifty private universities in Turkey during the last ten years alone. Currently, there are about a hundred and sixty-five universities in Turkey. As the IHH Director of External Relations stressed, waqf is still a strong tradition in Turkish society.

### **4.3 The Activities of IHH in Gaza**

In 2010, the civilian population of Gaza was living under severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Donor agencies of Western countries had already left Gaza after the Palestinian elections of 2006. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority was politically incapacitated because it relied heavily on Western funding. Egypt’s President Mubarak had reacted directly by closing the Rafah border crossing and so intensifying the siege. The deteriorating human conditions prompted Palestinian and international civil society organizations to voice outright condemnation of the death of children in Gaza and to demand action. Hospitals suffered from electricity black-outs that threatened the lives of patients including babies relying on electricity-powered incubators. Consequently, one of the first things IHH and other international NGOs did was to supply Gaza hospitals with big electric generators needed for surgery rooms, ICU units, baby incubators and other medical emergencies.

In May 2010, IHH and global civil society organizations embarked on delivering immediate humanitarian assistance to Gaza on boats of the Freedom Flotilla. The military attack on the flotilla, and its consequences, caused changes in the daily lives of people in Gaza. For one thing, the tightening of the closure of the Rafah crossing eased. Before the tragedy, the crossing used to close for days or even weeks on end. After May 31st, 2010, it opened six days a week. NGOs from Turkey and other Muslim and non-Muslim countries started to increase humanitarian and developmental activities in Gaza particularly after the 2008-2009 war on Gaza. IHH established a permanent office in the city. Other Turkish NGOs also either opened offices, as Yildirim did, or established relations with local counterparts, as did Kismu Yok Mu. The government-based organization, the Turkish Red Crescent now has an office in Gaza. Furthermore, Malaysian and European NGOs from Muslim communities, such as the Malaysian, Al Aqsa NGO, and the British, Muslims Hands,

decided to establish representative offices in Gaza. All these organizations became crucial providers of humanitarian and development cooperation.

For IHH to distribute its humanitarian programs and development projects, networking with local NGOs and municipalities became an essential part of its methods and daily activities. The IHH management in Gaza exerted efforts in establishing strong working relations with a number of NGOs operating in different fields, from relief programs in marginalized neighbourhoods to health-related purposes. Municipalities are always considered potential partners in implementing development projects. Indeed, IHH is regularly approached by municipalities with proposals and applications in the hope of initiating cooperation.

#### **4.3.1 Humanitarian aid**

IHH implements a number of humanitarian programs in the Gaza Strip. One important program is the sponsoring of more than eleven thousand orphans; this extends to offering the support of paying fees to orphans to attend university. In terms of health, IHH provides hospitals with emergency medical supplies in addition to treating injured Palestinians in Turkish hospitals. Medical equipment is procured for emergencies despite the difficulty of border control. Fortunately, it is comparatively easy to get permission to bring health-related equipment into Gaza. There is also a program aimed at helping poor families, especially those who lost their homes during the war of late 2008 / early 2009. Through this, 2,000 euros were donated to each of 2,000 families. Moreover, during Islamic occasions such as Ramadan and El Adha, IHH carries special programs where IHH staff and Turkish volunteers visit Gaza to donate zakat money.

Because the orphan sponsorship is considered a big program, the IHH office in Gaza designated a special section to administer work between Istanbul and Gaza. The person in charge of the section is a Turkish woman who is married to a Palestinian and speaks fluent Arabic. Applicants, typically mothers of fatherless children, apply for sponsorship in person. The Turkish employee enters the personal details of each applicant on a computer and the data reaches the IHH headquarters in Istanbul live on-line. During a field visit one morning to the orphan section of the IHH office, many women arrived from the town of Rafah, south of Gaza; some with large families of six or seven children. IHH normally sponsors all orphan children related to one family. To allow for the great demand it is planning to construct an orphan village at an expected cost of 750,000 dollars. The goal of the project will ensure all necessary requirements for orphan children in terms of education, health and daily needs.

During Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha (Haj season), IHH cooperate with the municipalities in distributing meat and food baskets in addition to holding Ramadan tents to host group *Iftar* (breaking the fast) for poor people. Such activities are part of IHH's seasonal programs. The budget of the Ramadan program of 2011 in Gaza was 40,000 dollars. In Ramadan of 2012, according to sources in the Gaza office, 2,300



food baskets were delivered to poor families in addition to arranging 2,750 Iftar meals throughout the Gaza Strip. Also, some cash donations, through a local bank, were given to those who are in acute need.<sup>260</sup>

Generally, visits by IHH staff and volunteers to various regions and communities aim not only at accomplishing the delivery of assistance but also at using the opportunity to assess needs in Gaza as well as gathering information to raise awareness in the local communities back in Turkey. When Turkish volunteers visited Gaza, they experienced something that Gazans normally live with; they were forced to suddenly cancel their travel plans due to the closure of the Rafah crossing. This happened after an incident in August 2012 when gunmen killed sixteen Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>261</sup> The Turkish delegation intended to stay for two weeks but had to stay on for an additional week. However, the experience left an impact on the group in that they experienced, just the once, something that Palestinians in Gaza have lived with for years.

#### **4.3.2 Development Assistance Work**

Development is an integral part of the goals and activities of IHH. In Gaza, IHH began implementing development projects as soon as they established an office in the city of Gaza. Their development projects include the construction of a hospital in the town of Beit-Hanoun, north of Gaza, at a cost of 650,000 dollars. Another involves dispatching highly skilled Turkish medical trainers to train Palestinian medical doctors in surgery and other medical fields. This dissemination of skills is contributing significantly to the training of Palestinian doctors and reducing the need to send patients for treatment outside Gaza. In education, as well as its work with orphans mentioned above, IHH has contributed to the rebuilding of university laboratories, especially IT and engineering labs at the Islamic University in Gaza. In terms of employment, it has increased prospects for university graduates by establishing the Ottoman Centre in Gaza city with cooperation of a local NGO. The purpose of this is to offer computer training and IT skills to enhance students' potential in the job market. Moreover, a housing project for the poor was initiated in February 2009, after the war, to rebuild houses destroyed during the war. It has also worked in partnership with local government councils and municipalities in implementing various infrastructure projects, such as water networks, digging wells for drinking water, solid waste equipment, and human resource training.

More recently, IHH has contributed to cementing networking between local governments and their counterparts in Turkey. The town of Jabaliya, north of Gaza, has already signed a 'twinning' agreement with the city of Umraniye in the Istanbul area. Through this, Jabaliya has become the first Arab municipality to gain membership of the Federation of Turkish Municipalities in the history of the Federation. The Palestinian town is also now a member of the Turkish Organization of the Federation of Cities and Local Regions. Similarly, other local municipalities are in regular communication with IHH for conducting projects and cooperation. The

needs of the local government sector are immense. According to IHH in Gaza, the organization provides equipment, such as wheel loaders and trucks, and shares information about what is needed with the Turkish official assistance agency, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA). According to an interview with IHH during the field research in September 2012, TICA is planning to open a branch office in Gaza.<sup>262</sup>

In terms of supporting women in employment and income generation, IHH has established vocational training centres offering skills in setting up small businesses. In particular, it has established several centres connected with the Gaza fashion industry, including design, sewing and embroidery. One such centre in Rafah town is active and enrolment is normally full. There are also training courses in other skills that are offered with reduced fees. Duration of these courses vary from two months to six months. Some students who show signs of improvements and progress may re-enrol to expand on their skills. Some of the more common projects are mushroom cultivation, raising rabbits, aquaculture ponds, sheep rising, farming, etc.

Staff in IHH offices in both Istanbul and Gaza emphasised their readiness to work on the reconstruction of Gaza. However, due to the contemporary situation, in 2012, the embargo on construction material did not allow such a sizable undertaking to take place. IHH was also willing to cooperate with other Turkish NGOs for the reconstruction of Gaza and officials expressed confidence in the support and funding for implementing further development in Gaza. But, the siege remains a huge obstacle. Turkish NGOs in Gaza maintain contacts with each other and with TICA, sharing information on ongoing humanitarian and development projects in Gaza.<sup>263</sup>

From the political perspective, Palestinian people are aware of the politics of aid as the West Bank and Gaza Strip are considered an area of intense humanitarian and development activities. At the basic level, most people realize the link between politics and aid; whether it is from government or civil society. During a field survey in September of 2012, many Palestinian individuals and intellectuals expressed the notion that international and regional players, both from government and civil society, have a special interest in Palestine for different reasons. When asked about the role of Turkish civil society and in particular IHH, Palestinian opinion leaders and social activists said they realized that politics cannot be completely ruled out of aid from NGO assistance. However, in the case of IHH, Turkey as a country and society enjoys widespread consent on the supposedly political implications. Certainly, many would argue that Turkey is aiming at an assertive and prominent role in the region. One way of gaining legitimacy to are gional role is the solidarity and support of Palestinian people. "Palestine is the door to the heart and minds of Muslims," as one community leader put it. Although the Turkish government would not directly instruct NGOs what to do in Palestine, it does facilitate and encourage their work in Palestine. Without doubt, Turkey enjoys a positive image among Palestinians. That is why Turkish NGOs, like IHH, finds itself welcomed and encouraged officially and publicly.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The contemporary rise of civil society in Turkey is experiencing steady progress invigorated by Islamic-based values that are part of the traditions and daily life of the Turkish people. The economic development of Turkey and a new climate of political freedom have induced a sustained change that is ushering in a dynamic Turkish civil society. Spiritual values are a sustainable resource for humanitarian and development goals and religious values and norms play a crucial role in motivating individuals and communities to perform charity and pay donations. For local community donors, acts of charity bring meaning and a sense of self-fulfilment in this life and the hereafter. The Islamic concept of Tawhid, Unity of God, is central to connecting local communities with their fellow Muslims and non-Muslims through humanitarian activities and development projects. Moreover, members of local communities rely on civil organizations like IHH to transfer the donations and implement programs on their behalf to Muslims and non-Muslims. Consequently, the IHH organization considers itself as a humanitarian organization based on Islamic values and enjoys support from a nationwide network of volunteers within Turkey.

Politics is said to be pervasively present in humanitarian and development activities. As we have seen in the above discussions, scholars discuss the inseparable link between politics and “the humanitarian”. However, we tend to overlook the human and emotional issues on the ground whereby the individual donor may be motivated by different reasons and the impact of this is felt by the recipient. This particular phenomenon becomes more obvious in the realm of Islamic funding where appeal is made solely to the individual and so funding is dependent on his/her decision to donate. Funding for Western-based NGOs are different since, there, financial flow is more systemized and follows official structures. However, the goal might eventually be similar to Islamic funding in terms of delivery of programs and projects; these might even surpass their Islamic counterparts due to better managerial expertise. But, the expression and flow of energy behind the direct funding from zakat and charity generate a dimension of deeper ownership and solidarity between distant communities and this is reflected in the nature of the connections between diverse communities across national borders. This becomes more about reaching a pinnacle point of empathy and meaningfulness between the donor and the recipient when the individual donor seeks only a prayer or gratitude on the part of a recipient. As said earlier, politics is involved in this but there is more to it at the grassroots level of donor-recipient relationship that often seems overlooked when examining Muslim civil society organizations that are currently acting at global level.

Thus, it is at this point in time that our world is witnessing an emerging new phenomenon of people empowering other people. People-to-people development is being tested and harnessed by local civil society organizations and acting transnationally. Muslim civil organizations, like IHH, are gradually emerging as global actors in the fields of humanitarian and development assistance. As they emerge, they are proving that humanitarian aid in itself is not sufficient and that

development must be implemented at the same time. IHH, as an NGO, seems to find the necessary time and space to act and deliver both humanitarian and development aid where states are unable to function due to political and legal constraints. At the same time, further work is needed to address challenges facing such organizations to respond more professionally and systematically at a global level.

Since the current international system relies mainly on the organ of state sovereignty - despite the weakening of the concept of state over the past two decades - the state as a fundamental legal organ for delivering development aid has in many ways been an obstacle to solving persisting crises. This has important implications for Muslim societies. The sense of Ummah, the Muslim community, can play a pivotal role in solving problems through relief and development projects. Muslim civil society has the ability to demonstrate flexibility and creative approaches in dealing with violence and problems facing many countries, including those relating to Gaza, which are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Why did the Mavi Marmara sail to Gaza?

#### 5.0 Introduction

On May 22nd, 2010, a large crowd gathered at the port of Sarayburnu in Istanbul to say farewell to hundreds of activists boarding the Mavi Marmara ship, embarking for Gaza, Palestine. The activists included Turkish citizens and others from more than fifty nationalities representing a diverse array of religions and political backgrounds and the voyage was dubbed the “conscience of the world” by the organizers.<sup>264</sup> On board there were authors, parliamentary members of several different countries, Noble Peace prize winners, academics and leaders of different religions. The main organizer was the Muslim Turkish NGO, IHH. The others were the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, the Greek Ship to Gaza Campaign, the Swedish Ship to Gaza Campaign, the Free Gaza Movement and the International Committee to End the Siege on Gaza. Subsequently, six more boats would join the Mavi Marmara to make up a coalition flotilla and, as the Mavi Marmara ship was departing the waters of Istanbul amid the waving crowds, these were already on their way from Ireland, Greece, the island of Crete and the port of Antalya in Turkey; all aiming to converge at a meeting point in the Mediterranean, just south of Cyprus.<sup>265</sup> The plan was to sail in a flotilla towards the port of Gaza in the south east of the Mediterranean. As the flagship of the expedition, the Mavi Marmara carried the largest number of passengers on board with a total of seven hundred and forty-eight passengers.<sup>266</sup> The flotilla carried thousands of tons of humanitarian aid such as medical supplies, electrical power generators, water desalination units, food, a hundred units of pre-cast homes and construction materials.<sup>267</sup> In addition, the activists intended a message that was embodied in the name of the project: the Free Gaza Flotilla. They aimed to challenge the siege imposed on the Palestinians in Gaza since 2006 by sailing into the treacherous political waters directly to the port of Gaza. It was the first attempt of its kind for a large flotilla to sail straight to Gaza since the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.

Having explored the socio-political context of the Mavi Marmara expedition, the purpose of this chapter is to examine what motivated the organizers of the Flotilla to attempt to break the siege of Gaza with emphasis on the Palestinian perspective. In the aftermath of the incident, a drama unfolded surrounding the demise of nine of the Turkish activists. Many writers and scholars have dealt with the legal and political repercussions of this; however, not enough attention has been paid to how the Palestinians perceived the sailing of the Mavi Marmara to Gaza in the context of Palestinian social and political reality. Indeed, this expedition involved a non-state actor from civil society playing a pivotal role in responding to the humanitarian and human rights predicament experienced in the Gaza Strip. Consequently, the Mavi Marmara altered inter-regional relations through its very existence. Perhaps to the

surprise of many observers, its consequences inflicted a crucial impact that would be hard to ignore and compels us to examine further the long term significance of the role of civil society in the global arena, particularly in the combined areas of humanitarianism and human rights. The initiative of the Mavi Marmara began after the publishing of UN reports that clearly warned of a deteriorating situation in Gaza and which described the humanitarian risks inflicted on the civilian population in terms of health, environmental hazards and malnutrition.<sup>268</sup> Human rights advocacy groups in Palestine and outside provided facts and reports on how the military embargo and siege of Gaza appeared to constitute a collective punishment against the civilian population. Since the beginning of the siege year, 2006, the international community has not adequately responded to the need to end a siege which is argued by many to be illegal. Thus, as well as responding to a deteriorating humanitarian situation, the Mavi Marmara initiative aimed to resolve the ethical contradictions raised by the policies of the international community by upholding human rights and international law as far as the Palestinians are concerned.

Furthermore, the humanitarian and political conditions in Palestinians that lead to the Mavi Marmara incident relate to a number of deeper factors. These are founded in an accumulated background linked to the period of the “Oslo Peace Process” with its main actors: the US, EU, Israel, ODA, and the Palestinian Authority. As discussed in the next section, the Oslo process played a prominent role in influencing the current outcome in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, (OPT).

### **5.1 The Oslo Peace Process and its Impact on the Palestinians**

In this section, the Oslo Peace Process is examined in order to understand how it impacted the lives of the Palestinians. The Process, also known as the Oslo Accords, began in 1993 and established the Palestinian National Authority in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It introduced the use of ODA that would play a role in Palestinian political and social affairs for the first time in the history of Palestine.

The first signing of the Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1993 sought to realize a new initiative towards a Palestinian statehood and the establishment of peace in the region. The signing came immediately after the First Intifada that had started in December 1987. The five-year old popular revolt had engulfed all towns and cities of the OPT and throughout these years, it had gradually become clear that the grassroots revolt was not going to disappear. Moreover, in the aftermath of the first Gulf War of 1991, the United States had convened the international Madrid Conference to discuss the prospect of peace between Palestine and Israel. Another major impetus for the historic diplomatic step was the accusation by the former president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, that the United States was adopting double standards: When Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait, the US had responded by protesting the Iraqi occupation in 1990 and later ejecting the Iraqi military by force. The rhetoric of Saddam Hussein implied the contradictions in

this by continuously referring to the occupation of Palestine by Israel. The pressure in the region became evident as the US felt pressed to re-arrange the regional political landscape in the aftermath of its first direct military intervention in the Middle East. Thus, the Madrid Conference was the first major diplomatic event that took place in the post-Cold War period. In the “New World Order” of the American unipolar global power, the US and Israel imposed demands on the Palestinians and the world through the Oslo Accords. The major critiques of the negotiations were premised on the central core issues of borders, sovereignty and ending warfare.<sup>269</sup>

The Oslo agreement mainly consisted of three documents: the Declaration of Principles signed in 1993, the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations signed in 1994 and the Oslo II Agreement of 1995. In all, the documents/agreements “establish the ground for a relationship characterized by Palestinian dependency on Israeli goodwill and donor aid”.<sup>270</sup> The agreement implied “asymmetric containment” that allowed the Israeli government to assert control over important strategic assets and locations in order to continue the means of military control and order of Palestinian inhabitants of the land and the areas within the cities and villages. At the same time, the accords gave Israel a free hand to continue occupation of other lands in the West Bank for Jewish settlements.<sup>271</sup>

The PLO negotiators were aware of the flaws of the agreement from the beginning but allowed the organisation to become embroiled in the surrounding political maze because the agreement itself postponed any talks on a final outcome or conclusion. Arafat was once asked what the most difficult thing he had done was. After a moment of reflection, the PLO chairman replied that it was the signing the Oslo agreement.<sup>272</sup> The First Intifada of 1987 had taken Arafat and the PLO leadership by surprise;<sup>273</sup> during the five years of the First Intifada, the PLO was residing in Tunisia far away from the occupied territories. Moreover, Arafat and the PLO leadership decided to take sides with Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait. Consequently, after the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, Arafat and the PLO paid a heavy political price and, financially-speaking, lost substantial funding from Arab Gulf countries as well as from the strong Palestinian community of half a million who used to live in Kuwait and had contributed much to PLO finances.<sup>274</sup> Moreover, the PLO negotiated secretly in Oslo and understood well its weak political position. This was clearly taken advantage of by Israel; and the main issues were conspicuously absent in terms of basic matters such as borders, return of refugees, settlements, water and the status of Jerusalem. Consequently, the Palestinian Authority enjoyed neither independence nor sovereignty and Israel retained control over these fundamental issues.

Thus, at the time that the Oslo Peace Process started to be implemented, it faced criticism and posed a major challenge to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a future as an independent state. Chief among the critics was the scholar, Edward Said. Said objected fiercely to the Accords, describing them as “Cosmetics”<sup>275</sup> and saying, “I am for peace. And I am for a negotiated peace. But this

accord (Oslo) is not a just peace.”<sup>276</sup> One major reason for criticism, according to Said, was the clear disparity of power between the Palestinians and the Israelis which was entrenched in the peace process. The status of the West Bank stayed as it was, preserving another form of occupation. It meant that Palestinian populations remained trapped in their cities and villages with the Israeli army controlling the entrances and exits. As it stands presently, in June 2014, the number of Israeli military checkpoints throughout the West Bank has reached more than five hundred. Some are equipped with modern installations such as X-ray machines and devices to verify magnetic cards and IDs. The Qalandiya checkpoint, for example, which separates the city of Ramallah and Jerusalem, turned into an elaborate military control installation. The surrounding lands with Palestinian cities and population centres continued to be confiscated and expropriated for settlement expansion, especially in areas adjacent to the city of Jerusalem. The pressure and strain on Palestinian society was felt on a daily basis and many Palestinians believe the goal was to evict them from their land.

Thus, the Oslo Accords clearly did not work towards the prospect of a Palestinian state and major issues of concern were “swept under the carpet”.<sup>277</sup> The fundamental issues of sovereignty, Jerusalem, borders, return of refugees were intentionally postponed by Israel and the US so as to allow Israel to create more “facts on the ground,” by producing a new reality where Palestinians were no longer physically able to live in the occupied territories for both economic and political reasons.<sup>278</sup> At the present time, around the twentieth anniversary of the Oslo Accord, the reality in Jerusalem and the West Bank stands in a stark contrast to the desired outcome, with settlements and number of settlers greatly increased, reaching 6,000 settlers in 2014 compared to 150,000 in 1991. Additionally, Israel constructed a separating wall from north to south of West Bank, dubbed, ‘the apartheid wall’ by Palestinians. This wall created further social and economic insecurity for those communities existing alongside it.

For the Israelis, the Oslo Accords brought forth an intense division within Israel leading to the polarization between Left and Right, or the secular and religious, respectively. The Accords meant to establish a framework for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where a Palestinian state would coexist alongside the state of Israel.<sup>279</sup> But, the intensity of the polarization in Israel culminated in the assassination of former Israeli Prime Minister Rabin by a Jewish extremist in 1995. Right-wing Jewish extremism opposed the establishment of Palestinian self-rule and presented much fiercer opposition to land compromise.<sup>280</sup>



## 5.2 The Palestinian Authority Leadership

The Oslo Accords symbolized the PLO leadership's shift from a strategic vision of Palestinian self-determination to one of limited self-rule. In the modern history of the Palestinian national movement, this constituted a major deviation of Palestinian future aspirations. Prominent Palestinian national figures, such as Haider Abdul Shafi, (a former public political personality from Gaza) and Edward Said protested the Oslo Accords and eventually disassociated themselves from the PLO. "You cannot keep changing your objective. That is why I left them in 1991", Said once commented in an interview.<sup>281</sup> The PLO settled to gain in the short-term and abandoned its long term objectives as a national liberation movement.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, one significant impact of the Accords was the emergence of a Palestinian leadership characterized by self-interest and corruption over the cause of self-determination and the public good. The moment the United States invited the PLO leadership to the Madrid Conference, right after the first Gulf War of 1991, the leadership, already compromised by siding with Saddam Hussein, entered into a state of dependency and impotency that led to consequential corruption. This was manifested afterwards in the Palestinian Authority and its course of governance. As Said observed, "All of the Palestinian representatives saw it as the ne plus ultra of their career when Baker invited them to come as a delegation. That was their moment of acceptance by the white man."<sup>283</sup> He also commented that the Oslo Agreement offered Arafat the "trappings of authority in the West Bank and Gaza"<sup>284</sup>; and "He (Arafat) is autonomous, not independent and he rules by gangs and thugs."<sup>285</sup> At another point, he stated "They want Arafat to be a dictator."<sup>286</sup> The Oslo Palestinian leadership led the PA and stressed better relations with Israel in order to serve their narrow interests. Israel on the other hand, utilized this leverage well in order to obtain concessions.<sup>287</sup> The big issues of the Palestinian national movement seemed to have been compromised in order to guarantee the flow of international funding, as approved by Israel and the US

Thus, the Palestinian Authority generated a leadership whose style of governance contradicted much of the expectations of its public. The elite individuals around Arafat in particular emerged as corrupt and became involved in widespread monopolies.<sup>288</sup> Palestinians inside and outside the OPT mounted criticism against Arafat and the corruption of the authority.<sup>289</sup> The critics went as far as accusing the PA of doing Israel's dirty work, in particular, that it was asked to suppress voices within the Palestinian national liberation movement. In addition, Israel, the US and Western governments ask the PA to clamp down and suppress voices of Palestinians in the wider national liberation movement. In return, elites of the PA settled for certain immediate gains that ranged from financial benefits to obtaining VIP permits that allowed entry and exit to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In this context, the matter of Israeli military permits for exit/entry cannot be underestimated within the Palestinian reality. The Israeli newspaper, Haartzet, reported that Israel's Civil Administration, a military unit in the West Bank, issued an entry permit to the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas.<sup>290</sup> The permit

stated that Abbas lived in Gaza and that he was “allowed to go into Israel, except for Eilat, and into the West Bank and not allowed to drive a car in Israel”.<sup>291</sup> This is a fact that indicates the level of seriousness concerning the lack of freedom of movement. If the head of the Palestinian Authority is subject to restricted freedom, how much greater the restrictions on average man and woman in the OPT. Furthermore, Haaretz described VIP permits as the “hush money” that any PA official receives for his accommodation of the status quo.<sup>292</sup> The paper reported that: “When the Palestinian Authority declared its intention for application to become a member as an observer-state of the United Nations, few dozens of senior PA officials were denied their VIP permits since middle of 2011. Israel revoked the permits as a ‘punishment’ for the PA’s move towards the UN”<sup>293</sup>

The Accords of Oslo produced an integrated system of corruption in Palestine mainly in the areas of politics, ethics and morals. The Palestinian people had not experienced such forms of corruption before Oslo.<sup>294</sup> Thus, one major outcome of Oslo was the introduction of a culture of corruption. Bribery, nepotism, financial frauds are closely linked to the institutions associated with Oslo and society changed like never before with customs and social practices being introduced that were considered alien to local society.<sup>295</sup> In other words, Oslo brought with it the institutionalization of corruption in Palestine that became a complete system, widespread and yet defended. For example, the PA decided to allow the opening of the Jericho Casino in 1997 for gambling which worked against the fabric of Palestinian consciousness. The conservative Muslim majority of Palestinians could not understand or justify the opening of an international casino facility in a Palestinian town.

Gradually, Palestinian society began to realize that the desired political outcome remained as elusive as ever. The new Palestinian elite conducted a style of governance that risked and jeopardized Palestinians’ social cohesion and their traditional culture of resistance, whilst the military occupation continued to exercise its restrictions and rules over the civilian population. Consequently, social actors and civil organizations attempted to fill the gap created by the new political and social vacuum by implementing social services and programs. Muslim civil society organizations took the lead in this, especially after the beginning of the Second Intifada of 2001 when the administrative functions of the PA were restricted by the destruction of several ministerial and police buildings by Israeli aerial bombardment as this second uprising escalated. The subsequent weakening of the PA institutions, coupled with the rampant corruption, further prompted local civil society to act in the occupied territories.

The PA is the largest employer in the entire area of West Bank and Gaza. The World Bank estimates the PA bureaucracy at 77,000 people without taking into account the numerous security apparatuses. The figure for these is estimated at 50,000 members. Both figures combined add up to a 120,000 employees. Moreover, if that number is multiplied by six, the average number of members of Palestinian families,

it indicates that almost a million people depend on the PA payroll. In reality, this sector of the population is not only unproductive but constitutes a huge burden on the overall budget.<sup>296</sup> Yet, the payroll depends largely on the donor countries with the approval of Israel and the US. As a result, the average salary of a Palestinian public servant has become a political trump card in the hands of Israel, the US and the donor countries. As such, the salary is used politically against Palestinians; for instance, the associated family dependents were “mainstreamed”, required to behave and not to resist occupation. Thus, the PA found itself locked into a system of dependency at the price of the real issue and the real question.

Salam Fayyad, a former World Bank officer currently serving as the PA prime minister, has been criticized for not leading Palestine towards liberation or creating improvements in Palestinian daily life. In a statement made as recently as December 2011, Fayyad stated that “conditions are not ripe for resumption of a political process capable of delivering an end to the Israeli occupation”.<sup>297</sup> Thus, Fayyad argues that functioning institutions are a precondition rather than a consequence of political independence.<sup>298</sup> To the Palestinian public, the implications of Fayyad’s argument were disturbing since they implied that the situation in Palestine was not about occupied territories but “disputed territories”, thus legitimizing Israel’s claims.<sup>299</sup> Following the Accords, Israel had divided the West Bank into Areas A, B, C, asserting that it would withdraw from these defined areas if a negotiated settlement took place in the future; but it would not withdraw from East Jerusalem settlements or military bases. This created a precedent in the Israeli unilateralism of withdrawing from Gaza without negotiation with Palestinians. The result is that Gaza remained under “occupation” but from the outside. The same may apply in the future to Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank embodied in several cases of “Gazas.” The question raised by this is what kind of future is held for the Palestinians under the leadership style of Salam Fayyad? It would seem that Fayyad and the PA are poised to accept a status quo similar to apartheid in South Africa and the Bantustanization of Palestinian population. The checkpoint regime in the West Bank, with over five hundred Israeli checkpoints surrounding all Palestinian towns and cities, has had a drastic and regressive impact on the daily life of people and economy.<sup>300</sup> It is neither reasonable nor wise to dismiss genuine insecurities and grievances of the average man and woman in Palestine. While injustices are being inflicted on their daily lives, this can lead to pressure causing confrontations and instability. The recent past has proven so in the shape of the two previous Intifadas in addition to the occasional outbursts of violence.

Neoliberal economic politics became a priority from the time Fayyad first became Prime Minister in 2007.<sup>301</sup> Having worked for the World Bank, his policies brought splendid power and wealth to a small number of people in the West Bank. The PA government in Ramallah city cut down social services, introduced austerity measures and downsizing of public sector in order to pay mounting debts and governmental deficits faced by many developing countries in similar situations. For a

people living under occupation, such economic policies further aggravated the social and political crisis.<sup>302</sup> Neoliberal policies invite the enforcement and enlargement of security apparatuses in a political structure. As the economic gap widens in society due to neoliberal structuring of the economy it causes more widespread poverty, joblessness and absence of social safety nets; moreover, security's heavy hand is needed to quell potential protests and unrest of the disenfranchised of society. The PA security budget is estimated at one third of its overall budget.

Muslims around the world are watching the Palestinian scene closely as Jerusalem is the home of the third holiest place in Islam. In Turkey, it is not difficult to understand the extent to which the issue of Palestine affects a wide spectrum of Turkish society, including secularists, Islamically-oriented groups and Islamists, especially since, historically, Palestine was officially part of the Ottoman state. For the people of Turkey, the link between the Palestinians and the struggle for freedom for Muslims is more or less a general discourse. Thus, a failure to achieve peace will most likely generate repercussions in the whole region, including Turkey. The secularist Muslim governments, including the PA, are perceived to have come short of achieving the desired results in terms of social and political well-being. Muslim civil society in Turkey and Muslim communities of Europe acted promptly in response, attempting to fill the void by collaborating with local Palestinian networks as counterparts. Thus, a new form of cooperation and solidarity began to evolve encompassing local, regional and global networking of civil society in a seamless implementation of advocacy and assistance.

### **5.3 The ODA and the Palestinians**

Official Development Assistance to Palestinians is implemented under the continuous Israeli occupation. The question that arises from this is: Can real development materialize under foreign military occupation, particularly in the volatile Palestinian territories? Israel controls the main keys to the Palestinian economy and is in control of ninety-six percent of Palestinian external exports, creating a vast imbalance of economic relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Militarily speaking, there are 550,000 settlers in the West Bank, living in one hundred and fifty-one settlements, as of 2013. The settlements are still expanding and supported by the Israeli government. The current map of where Palestinians live in the West Bank looks more like scattered dots than contiguous territories. Moreover, the Palestinian market is a captive to Israeli exports— to the extent that the Palestinian import market is ranked as the second most important market for Israel after the US with whom it shares a free trade agreement. Even before the Oslo Accords of 1993, Israel attempted to control the Palestinian economy. The process continues as part of the occupation policy. Furthermore, Israel controls about twenty percent of Palestinian national income from taxes applied to Palestinian labourers working in Israel.<sup>303</sup> The result is that, according to the World Bank, unemployment has reached sixty percent among Palestinians and that two thirds of Palestinian live under the poverty line. Clearly, the facts on the

ground point towards development policies being implemented under full control of the Israelis.

Furthermore, over the years, aid has comprised thirty percent of Palestinian GDP.<sup>304</sup> Thus, public sentiment has grown resentful due to what they perceive as the double standards of the West and Western types of assistance.<sup>305</sup> People originally thought of aid as a means towards empowerment and ending occupation. However, while Palestinians have certainly benefited from the numerous projects, such as the building of schools, establishing civil defence facilities, medical equipment, etc., twenty years after the Oslo Accords, aid and ODA assistance have become highly controversial. People are questioning the integrity and ethics of ODA implementation in the occupied Palestinian territories. This begs the question: Are ODA governments carrying out the task on behalf of Israel by providing the local population of finance and aid which, under international law, are normally obligatory for an occupying power? Palestinian academics and writers<sup>306</sup> such as the prominent political science scholar, Sattar Qassem from Al Najah University in the West Bank, often discuss this in local and Arab media outlets. In one article, published on the pan-Arab Al Jazeera website, Qassem went as far as describing official aid as “the dirty money” or “Donor Opium” or the “Golden Handcuffs”.<sup>307</sup> Lama Khater, a regular columnist from the city of Hebron in the West Bank, went further by referring to ODA as part of the “alliance of occupation”.<sup>308</sup> Palestinian writers and public commentators would not deny some of the good work ODA has provided, but, in the final analysis, Palestinians have come to resent the overall politics of ODA as interfering directly with their lives and entrenching and prolonging the occupation.

Moreover, the debate over the role of international aid programs in Palestine intensified after the Palestinian national elections of 2006. Criticism was heightened when the US and international official bodies did not recognize the outcome of Palestinian elections. Palestinians argued that the donor community builds on the Israeli occupation. And that the donors have invested in a failed project. Donor agencies do not challenge the economic blockade imposed on Gaza after the elections or criticize the five hundred checkpoints in the West Bank. Carrying diplomatic number plates, vehicles of donor agencies are rewarded with easy access through the military checkpoints and on roads that are normally only available to Israelis or Jewish settlers when moving between cities in the West Bank. Only major industrialized and powerful governments pass through such checkpoints. To the Palestinians, this is a reason for further resentment.

ODA programs abruptly stopped in the West Bank and Gaza after the elections of 2006 because the Islamic movement, Hamas, won a majority in the Palestinian Legislation Council. In the months following the elections, the United States’ governmental aid agency, USAID, decided to terminate several projects, including an ongoing road project in central Gaza city. The project on Al Nasr Street involved a busy and central road hosting a large number of businesses, shops, bakeries, clinics, two major hospitals and crowded residential neighbourhoods. The

street stretches for more than five kilometres. Although a vital street, due to the termination of the project, people were obliged to use a road covered with dust and gravel. Shops had to close the doors and windows to avoid dust affecting their merchandise. A few years later, the local municipality re-constructed the street but, this time, under an embargo that prevented importation of any construction material. Instead cement slabs from bombed-out buildings were broken up and iron bars were retrieved for re-use. Various municipalities and village councils followed similar means of constructing and paving streets and roads throughout the Gaza Strip.

As well as corruption, the Oslo Peace Process produced a new Palestinian class of elitism benefiting from the flow of foreign aid and cash. These new elites have dominated the two local political and economic spheres and ensured the two domains complement and feed each other. The official elites are closely connected to the Fatah organisation and to the former PLO chief, Arafat. Gaza became known as the new “bonanza” for the holders of power and influence within the PA and Fatah during the 1990s. Many local Palestinians recall how the PLO members arrived “poor and desperate” -but this quickly changed. Arafat, nevertheless, used financial resources as means for acquiring loyalty and obedience within the rank and file of the new administration of the PA. The public sector became the new “bonanza” for getting quickly rich as foreign funding flowed into the various administrative departments of the PA.

The World Bank lent more than three billion dollar to the city of Ramallah, the seat of PA governance, since Salam Fayyad became prime minister in 2007.<sup>309</sup> A Palestinian research centre in the West Bank explains that the World Bank intends to create a new kind of consumer culture alien to the local conservative Palestinians. It leads towards a “trend of individuality and not collective benefit”.<sup>310</sup> When in debt, a Palestinian’s main concern becomes how to repay the debt. In the face of such an unrepayable debt, this honourable trait consequently becomes one way of breaking up the Palestinian collective will. Mainly the elites benefit from the consumer culture whether they are in government or associated with the Oslo Accords. In addition, the funds do not completely go to the Palestinian side because almost half of the funding returns back to consultants belonging to the original countries.

On the other hand, there are voices that not only praise the role of ODA but insist on its continuity and functions. The claim is normally advocated by the politicians who seek aid and resources necessary for people. Donor money is responsible for the monthly payment of more than 100,000 official employees. But, for how long can this situation go on? And for how long can Palestinians watch their daily bread and butter depending on outside money? These are questions that are normally not addressed seriously by the politicians and economists of the PA. Indeed, for the duration of modern Palestinian history, the dual challenge for Palestinians has related to liberation and development.

Furthermore, the NGO sector is increasingly associated with the Oslo Process in the so called ‘negotiation’ of Palestinian workforce, causing further social and political consequences in society. The brightest and best qualified young people prefer to work for foreign NGOs for high salaries and benefits. That leaves the private sector deprived of qualified human resources and unable to compete against salaries of foreign NGOs. Some donor funding has caused Palestinian indigenous grassroots activities to deteriorate and dilute the spirit of volunteerism in Palestine. The vibrancy and vigour of past Palestinian civil society is being jeopardized by the so-called “professional activities and hard-currency funding”.<sup>311</sup> The flow of easy hard-currency financing is contributing to the breakup of the grassroots model of organizing that Palestinians demonstrated so well in the EU and others. Currently, ‘volunteers’ expect to be paid and this has adversely affected Palestinian grassroots model.

The NGOisation of the development economy has also adversely impacted the private sector in the Palestinian context. Those who work for international NGOs receive salaries that are twice or three times higher than what an employee obtains in the private sector and this attracts educated young people who no longer seek employment in the productive private sector and hence undermine it.<sup>312</sup> The consequences of this economic and social trend lead to a Palestinian economy that is not independent. However, an independent economy is a necessary pillar for a future state and a regional stability. The cycle of dependency is, hence, driven by a military oppression and foreign aid.

In the Gaza Strip, there are large Western NGOs, such as Oxfam, Mercy Corps, Save the Children, and World Vision and so on. Implemented programs by these are considered “complementary and not necessarily essential”.<sup>313</sup> In several interviews held in Gaza with employees of Western NGOs in 2012, most of the areas of activities were referred to as “social programs”.<sup>314</sup> One program that stands out was referred to as “youth programs”.<sup>315</sup> Western NGOs focus on activities such as sports and social entertainment and gatherings. Others target gender issues to “empower women”. In relation to these, one staff member commented that really what the women wanted most and foremost was an income for the family, especially a job for the husband to provide food and income.<sup>316</sup> A director of a major Western NGO pointed out that the Islamic NGOs are the doing the infrastructure work in the Gaza Strip.<sup>317</sup> For example, in the year 2011, the Islamic Relief Organization from Britain constructed the Rafah Border Crossing from the Palestinian side which included passengers’ facilities and passport control booths. The modern facility cost three million US dollars. Several local Palestinians staff working for the Western NGOs said that they generate employment locally but they also describe the activities as “intangible” compared to the Muslim NGOs.<sup>318</sup> Western NGOs’ activities might play a role in relieving hardships of Palestinian people; however, they cannot be sustained forever. The employment of a few hundred workers with high salaries does not lead to the building of the future of many more young people seeking employment.

Increasingly in recent years, Palestinians have accused foreign donors of having lost their ethical and moral standing by interfering in the very fabric of Palestinian political and social affairs. For example, Germany provides Palestinians with aid and yet at the same time supports Israel with nuclear submarines. Germany takes sides with Israel and yet puts pressure on the Palestinian people through so-called “economic peace” by funnelling in massive donor aid that does not lead to independence, human rights and the right to self-determination. Such an approach entrenches the Israeli position making it a permanent occupation. A columnist from the city of Hebron, West Bank, gave the donor community a new term calling it “the occupation alliance”. She claims that the donor community aims at “diluting the Palestinian cause” by introducing numerous agreements from Oslo, Wye River, Annapolis, Taba, etc. The US and the international community, she asserts, “can be categorized as occupation alliance”.<sup>319</sup>

People in Gaza saw the Mavi Marmara as a light at the end of the tunnel, attempting at least to open up the sea-route from Gaza to Istanbul or Cyprus, or any sea-bound destination in the Mediterranean, and thus enable the region to connect with the outside world freely. For this reason, the Mavi Marmara flotilla attempted to arrive in Gaza by sea as a fresh way of opening up a new possibility because many Palestinians had become weary of the application and legitimization of the institutional structures of the international system and of implementing the UN’s Security Council Resolutions.

#### **5.4 The election of the Islamic Movement, Hamas**

The purpose of this section is to examine why the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, was able to achieve a majority victory in both municipal and parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2006, respectively. The year 2006 marked a significant turning point in the political context at both the regional and the local Palestinian level. The consequent repercussions impacted the overall trend of Islamic movements aspiring for a role in the democratization process in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Hamas won a landslide victory in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council against the nationalist and secular Fatah movement that had dominated the Palestinian political scene for more than half a century. According to the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur’s report on the situation in terms of human rights in the OPT of 2008, “Hamas convincingly won the general legislative elections in January 2006”.<sup>320</sup> This meant that, for the first time in Palestine’s contemporary political and social history, the nationalist Fatah movement was no longer the dominant player. Moreover, the new elections introduced a new discourse into Palestinian politics including the conflict with Israel. However, despite the results of the elections, Israel, the US, the donor community and Fatah did not recognize the new government formed by Hamas.



Following the 2006 elections, the US and Israel labelled Hamas a terrorist organization, which complicated the political scene. It was an especially paradoxical move when the so-called ‘terrorist organization’ had democratically won both the local government and the parliamentary elections. Palestinians realized, once again, the extent of the dominating power of the US to force them into a situation that contradicted their aspirations. For many Palestinians, the choice of Hamas represented a punishment for the nationalist, secularist Fatah who drove society to the brink of social disintegration. Hamas, on the other hand, gradually became known by its network of social services and volunteering work. A large segment of the population lacked basic services under Israeli occupation and it was the local associations and volunteerism that provided these, with Islamic associations representing the main bulk of grassroots activities in local communities. Meanwhile, ordinary Palestinians reacted with indignation and deep resentment towards the US for refusing to recognize their newly elected government.

Despite this, the US and the Middle East Quartet laid down conditions for recognizing the newly elected government. The Quartet demanded three conditions from Hamas movement: recognizing Israel, renouncing violence, and acknowledging previous agreements. Hamas rejected these. Instead, Hamas offered a long truce, *hudna*, lasting several decades but without recognizing Israel since, politically, recognizing Israel would mean the end of Hamas. This is largely because Israel does not acknowledge its responsibility for the Nakba, the catastrophe of 1948, when Palestinians were expelled from their homes in villages and towns, nor does it recognize the Palestinians’ right of return. (At the moment, more than six million Palestinian refugees live in the diaspora.) Moreover, Hamas claimed that the illegal military occupation was in itself violence and indeed the source of instability, stating that they were a resistance movement resisting foreign occupation in line with international law that stipulates the validity of defending against foreign occupation. To honour past agreements, Hamas agreed to delegate this task to the Fatah-based president of the PA.<sup>321</sup>

Previously, in 1994, the founder of Hamas had offered Israel a long-term *hudna*, or ceasefire, on the condition that Israel withdrew to the 1967 borders.<sup>322</sup> Thus, the peace offer demanded withdrawal from East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, implementation of Security Council Resolution 242<sup>323</sup> and the return of refugees, but without mutual recognition. The justification for *hudna* was that the conflict was unresolvable at the present moment. Time was needed to allow future generations to solve the intractable conflict. Hamas signalled a truce that would span thirty to fifty years or even more.<sup>324</sup> In a long-term ceasefire, Hamas argued, the current generation and people would live in peace and coexist free from wars and tragedies. Israel did not reciprocate, claiming that Hamas was buying time to arm itself to continue terrorism. At the time, Hamas proposed a ceasefire along the border of Gaza Strip and Israel, as a means to lifting the Israeli siege on Gaza. However, Israel has maintained the siege on Gaza since 2006.

At the social level, Islamic NGOs responded to Hamas' electoral victory with its vast social and religious network. The actions appeared as a natural response to the contemporary social disintegration resulting from the siege.<sup>325</sup> Consequently, Islamic values became prevalent at the individual and societal levels. Hamas literature appealed to a return to Muslim values of integrity, honesty and good work so as to build a cohesive and peaceful society through volunteerism and community work. The Islamic NGOs worked to fill the gap created by the corrupt governance of the PA, which most adversely affected those who resided in marginalized areas of society. Therefore, the Islamic NGOs established offices and projects in the most needy and vulnerable neighbourhoods of remote areas. In return, local communities embraced the activities and social programs.

Driven by Islamic values of justice and virtuous conduct, the Muslim NGOs worked in applying their value-system in their projects and became effective in local communities. For example, an Islamic principle stating, "Show mercy to those on earth and you're shown mercy from the heavens" is held closely by volunteers. Local donors provided money and time for various social causes and Muslim activists reached out and assisted the most vulnerable and marginalized. Certain localities lacked basic drinking water networks and Muslim associations installed central water purifying stations in villages located near the eastern border of Gaza. The border area is especially vulnerable as it is a politically and militarily restricted area as Israel created its own "security zone" to keep the entire eastern stretch of the Gaza Strip underdeveloped. International community donors normally avoid confronting the state of Israel and consequently "border regions" become neglected. However, local Muslim NGOs are familiar with such areas. They know the local economy and social conditions. Relations with local people are personable, based on intimate knowledge of the needs of locals. In addition, wealthy local residents become acquainted with Muslim NGO's leaders and volunteers and often offer support to the NGOs. One common practice throughout the Gaza Strip is that when a land owner carves up a piece of land a portion is donated for a social project.

Trust is essential between the local NGO and community. Local donors trust an NGO leader and therefore entrust their donations to the NGO. Land donation normally requires the building of two- or three-storey buildings that host a mosque, a health clinic, educational facilities and a kindergarten. Therefore, the trust of community is significant for the accountability and governance of Islamic NGOs. Trust is gained through the performance and integrity of the civil society organization. For example, during the research fieldwork, a local donor called an NGO official offering to donate a piece of land for a project in the middle area of the Gaza Strip. The donor was an elderly lady who expressed her intentions to donate one *dunom* (one thousand square metres) as a *Sadaqa Jariyya*, meaning a charity of continuous benefit. She wanted the land to be used for constructing a building to host a mosque, a clinic for the rural community, educational facilities and a small playground for children in the backyard of the mosque. The association official thanked the lady with

the often-expressed religious words, “May Allah accepts your deeds in this life and hereafter.”<sup>326</sup> Beneficiaries in the area knew the donor as a neighbour, a relative or a friend. The development practitioner, NGO volunteer or leader is a familiar person. The values that motivated the lady donor are the same as those that motivated the NGO leader; doing and performing a good deed in the spirit of social service, ethical conduct and helping others.

On the other hand, Palestinian non-Islamic NGOs are also known for active participation in civil society, but their networks are not as widespread as the Islamic ones. For the most part, they rely on foreign/Western assistance. For example, leftist organizations belonging to the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine, (PFLP) is known for a relatively wide network of NGOs. They are active in health, agriculture and human rights fields. Their Committee for Health Work, for example, is active throughout the Gaza Strip. The PFLP’s social network enjoys a credible reputation and good standards. It relies on funding from official donor assistance as well as socialist and labour movements in Europe, particularly Spain. As for the nationalist, secularist Fatah movement, it too enjoyed a good share of NGO support. However, since the movement shifted its strategy to administering the Palestinian Authority, Fatah NGOs enjoyed preferential treatment from the PA administration. Consequently, Fatah NGOs became influenced by the weak and corrupt management of the PA. These trends allowed the development of a new culture of the “business of NGOs”.

For the central question of national freedom and liberation of Palestinian people, the election of Hamas meant the re-evaluation of the Oslo Peace Process and reaffirmation of national liberation, return of refugees, release of prisoners. The Oslo Accord undermined the secular Fatah’s role as a liberation movement. However, although the PA is considered an establishment separate from the Fatah movement, Fatah still enjoyed a monopoly over the PA administration, security and budgeting. Thus, the shift from a liberation movement to a mere administrative body, dependent on foreign aid and managing day-to-day affairs, stripped Fatah of its national credentials as the main guardian of the Palestinian cause. Up until Oslo, the nationalist movement had always exercised a monopoly over the Palestinian cause but, in the year 2006, when Palestinians voted for Hamas, this confirmed a new turning point in Palestinian national politics. Voters did not expect immediate liberation and return of refugees, however, they displayed pragmatism and entrusted Hamas to “manage the expectations”<sup>327</sup> and assist society from further social deterioration. Thus, the election victory symbolized an internal collective consensus and social coherence. Also the outcome was the fruits of long years in the field of offering social services by civil society organizations.

Moreover, previously, the Palestinian community had been living deprived of its own state. Consequently, a culture of resistance had emerged out of social traditions and norms to maintain social cohesion and self-empowerment by society and its organizations. Globally speaking, the current trend among people of Muslim

countries seems to be moving in the direction of increasingly working with Islamic civic movements. Muslim civil society has demonstrated a sustained willingness towards social justice through NGOs, carrying programs and services funded mainly by members of the local community to regional and international beneficiaries, both Muslims and non-Muslims. In Turkey, such leading NGOs, such as IHH and Kimsu Yok Mu, explain that they function as charitable intermediaries between the local donors and the recipients, both locally and in other countries. Whether in Turkey, Palestine, Europe or US, Muslim NGOs in particular continue to expand. Sustaining their charity work relies on the residue of “spiritual integrity” for funding and material resources. Islam puts high emphasis on doing “good deeds” and that a prayer separated from “doing good” is not enough. Local Muslim communities in various parts of the world are driven by same values. Thus, many Muslims choose and fund common civic leaders to utilize resources for the aim of implementing projects and social programs. This is one major difference with Western NGOs, much of whose funding derives from government financing. Muslim NGOs are considered society-based and rely on a community’s resources. Honesty and trust play a central role. The accountability of an NGO in the Muslim context is constantly answerable to its reputation, and to trust in its respected community or society.

## **5.5 The Siege of Gaza**

Israel has imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip from land, sea and air since the Palestinian national elections of 2006. This siege has been dubbed as the “world’s largest open-air prison”. Restrictions of movements of people and goods are two main features of the siege. Israel justifies it by claiming that the Gaza Strip is no longer under occupation since it withdrew its military forces from the Gaza Strip in September 2005.<sup>328</sup> The government of Israel declared that the “belligerent occupation of the Gaza Strip ended as of 12th of September, 2005 with all of the political, security and legal ramifications involved”.<sup>329</sup> Israel stated that “full governmental powers” were handed over to the Palestinian Authority on that date.<sup>330</sup> Thus, Israel no longer holds any legal and moral responsibility as an occupying power as well any duty towards the welfare of the residents of the Gaza Strip.<sup>331</sup> However, a United Nations report by the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Situation in the Palestinian Territories Occupied by Israel since 1967 refutes this argument. The report states that the Gaza Strip is under the “effective control” of Israel.<sup>332</sup> The report explains further: “Israel has, since its disengagement, continued to exert strict and continuous control over the borders, entrance and exit, airspace and territorial waters of Gaza”.<sup>333</sup> It added that “Israel mounted illegal military attacks against the civilian population of Gaza with land incursions and assassination ing individuals by the use of deadly aerial attacks. And the entire civilian population came under siege ever since Hamas convincingly won the general legislative elections in January 2006, and it tightened the siege after Hamas took over Gaza in mid-June 2007.”<sup>334</sup> The report concluded that “the Gaza Strip remains under Israeli occupation; with legal responsibilities attendant on being the occupying power and that the Geneva

conventions remain fully operatives”.<sup>335</sup> Therefore, the siege on the Palestinian population of Gaza has no legal basis as the UN report explains.

Furthermore, Israel wanted to capitalize on international public relations by withdrawing its army from inside Gaza and dismantled Israeli settlements in 2005, calling it “disengagement” and the end of occupation. The aim was to convince the world that it is no longer an occupying power and hence dispensed with all related legal responsibilities. However, the General Assembly Resolution 64/92 affirmed the applicability the Geneva Convention VI, GCIV, to the occupied Palestinian Territories and in that same day, the General Assembly issued another resolution 64/94 which directly referred to Gaza as part of the occupied Palestinian Territory. In addition, the Security Council confirmed in Resolution 1860 of 2009 “that the Gaza Strip constitutes an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967”. The issued resolutions of both the General Assembly and Security Council concluded that the Gaza Strip remains an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, has long claimed that the siege existed in order to prevent the transfer of weapons to Gaza. However, this argument was challenged by the remaining leftist voices within Israel. Imposing a stringent siege against the Palestinians in Gaza is part of a larger policy and a new phase of occupation. It leads to the manipulation of the inflow of the necessary commodities and food items. Dov Weisglass, the former official adviser to the then prime minister, Ehud Olmert, once admitted that Israel was going to punish the local population after the elections of 2006. “The idea, “he said,” is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not make them die of hunger. That would not look good.”<sup>336</sup>

The former Knesset member and leftist political activist, Uri Avneri, stated, “the intention of the Israeli government is to create a crisis that is so terrible that the people of Gaza will overthrow Hamas.” He further elaborated that the occupation and siege on Gaza is a “siege based on lies and wrapped in stupidity.” However, such a view is not commonly shared in Israel. Gaza is perceived through the security lens of Israel establishment and the public in general.<sup>337</sup>

On the security level, Israel justifies its actions as “defensive.”<sup>338</sup> This claim is viewed differently from a purely legal perspective, international law, and human rights issues. Israel cannot legally claim its actions are defensive until “it tests whether Hamas would cease its violence if Israel ended its unlawful blockade”.<sup>339</sup> Also, if the population is subjected to such a severe form of collective punishment, what is to be expected from the Palestinians?

In retrospect, some Palestinian critics voice their displeasure with Hamas for not “being active in resistance”<sup>340</sup>. Ironically, such criticism is often voiced by Fatah critics accusing Hamas of not being committed to resistance. Critics add that the Islamic movement is not that different from Fatah after all in seeking political power and control of government. However, proponents of Hamas claim the security reality

requires careful attention. Being the strongest movement in the Gaza Strip, Hamas had occasionally coordinated ceasefire deals with various “resistance groups” such as Islamic Jihad, the Committees for the Popular Resistance, and other splinter groups separated from Fatah. Since Hamas won parliamentary elections, public sentiment is always a factor taken into consideration by its leadership. After all, residents of the Gaza Strip wish to lead some kind of normal life within the actual circumstances. Yet, Hamas believes that the verdict given by the people through their voting entrusted it with the national project of liberation and defending the interest of the people.

In daily life, the mere thought of traveling to the outside world is a cause of an anxiety, uncertainty and risks for Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. Almost no one can travel through the northern border crossing because Israel prevents any Gaza ID holder from traveling to the West Bank. The few who can travel are the selected officials from the PA, international organizations and the United Nations officers. A Palestinian without prior “coordination” can be arrested and jailed if he/she reaches the border crossing. In the southern Rafah border crossing with Egypt, the border gate remains the only possibility of exit and entry. However, the Egyptian government imposes a stringent regime at the crossing with the opening of the gate being unpredictable with arbitrary refusal of entry or exit for many individuals.

There are six points of entry or crossings between the Gaza Strip and Israel. In the north, the Eritz crossing is restricted to the movement only of those approved and permitted. The remaining five crossings are located along the eastern border between Gaza and Israel. They are Nasal Oz, specifically for fuel transfer, Al Mortar, or Karin, for trade and goods, Kosufim and Sofa for entry/exit of former Jewish settlers in Gaza and finally Karm Abu Salem, or Kerim Shalom, for entry of humanitarian goods into Gaza. The Karni crossing for export and import has been virtually closed since 2007.<sup>341</sup>

Those who are most adversely affected by restricted freedom of movement are medical patients seeking treatment outside Gaza and the young students pursuing higher education abroad. In the year 2008, more than two hundred patients died while waiting to be allowed to travel outside for medical treatment. Israel does allow a number of patients for medical treatment in its hospitals but only if the patient obtains security clearance. When a patient happens to be a brother or a relative of a “wanted” individual, a militant, it is more than likely that the patient will not be granted permission to seek medical treatment in Israeli hospitals. The remaining possibility becomes the Rafah border gate with Egypt. The crossing between Egypt and Gaza has become purely political. The Egyptian government relies heavily on American annual aid, thus complying with policies in favour of Israel and the US seem to be favoured by policy makers in Egypt. The most critical period of Rafah border closure started at the beginning of 2007 and continued until the incident of the Mavi Marmara in May, 2010. Ambulances used to wait for hours and sometimes for days outside the Palestinian Rafah gate waiting for permission and patients died while waiting for the border gate to open.

After the Mavi Marmara incident, May 2010, the Rafah border gate witnessed an “easing” of restrictions since the incident brought the siege of Gaza to the forefront of international media causing embarrassment to Israel and to the former deposed Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak. After another year and a half, when the “Arab Spring” was underway in Tunisia and later Egypt, the Rafah gate crossing improved considerably. Moreover, during the time of Egypt’s first elected president, Mohammad Mursi, Palestinians in Gaza were able to cross the border with Egypt smoothly as Egyptian authorities allowed the crossing to operate daily. However, that exceptional relief lasted only until the military coup of July 3rd of 2013. Since then, the Rafah crossing with Egypt has experienced its worst periods; even stricter than the time of the Mubarak regime.

Gazan students have also suffered dramatically due to the lack of freedom of movement. Education has long been considered a vital “social and national asset” to Palestinians; with the Gaza Strip holding one of the proportionally highest number of graduates internationally, according to the United Nations report. As the borders closed to prevent free engagement in business and commerce, traveling also became a painful experience, especially for ambitious young people wishing to study abroad.

Thus, the prolonged political impasse meant that the international community had failed to uphold the principles of human rights and the doctrine of human security. Consequently, public sentiment among Palestinians gradually emptied of hope for a solution through the international community and international law. In the midst of this frustration and bewilderment at the injustice of collective punishment, one can imagine how Palestinians saw the sailing of the Mavi Marmara and the flotilla from Istanbul directly towards Gaza. The Mavi Marmara ship embodied far-reaching symbolism for residents of the Gaza Strip. From the perspective of the Palestinians, the flotilla was bringing hope and a light at the end of a tunnel while international order seemed impotent. As the Mavi Marmara, the flagship of the flotilla ploughed through the waters of the Mediterranean towards the coast of Gaza, the sight of it in the high seas evoked feelings of expectation and hope among Palestinians.

## **5.6 The War on Gaza**

On the 28th of December 2008, Israel launched an aerial bombardment against numerous targets across the Gaza Strip. It was the beginning of a new war dubbed by Israel as “Operation Cast Lead.” The bombardment continued for twenty-three days using the fire power of its air force, navy and land artillery. On the first day of the war, more than four hundred people were killed; many of them were members of the police department. The aim was to deliver a decisive blow against the police force to create internal security chaos and anarchy within Gaza. The heaviest losses took place when Israeli missiles directly hit a number of graduation ceremonies for new police cadres. At one police station in particular, the scene where graduates were maimed by direct hits by F16s missiles was captured by Al Jazeera TV Channel and broadcast minutes after the attack took place. In similar situations in different parts of Gaza, the media

broadcast several scenes of policemen's corpses scattered among the debris of destroyed buildings. The aerial bombardment continued to target governmental buildings in the attempt to destroy any capacity to govern and administer the Gaza Strip. Columns of black smoke rising into the clear blue skies could be seen everywhere while the sound of the exploding missiles jolted the city from all directions. The land artillery could be heard exploding at a constant pace along the eastern border of Gaza where Israel had amassed three tank divisions. The width of the Gaza Strip is only five kilometres and sound of tanks engines and artillery were eerily near.

In the ensuing days, Israel allowed members of the UN, remaining diplomatic missions and international NGOs to evacuate, through the northern exit of Eritz. In response, an international convey left Gaza within the first few days of the war.

The war targeted certain infrastructures that are seldom reported or highlighted by international media, particular those in the donor countries. Israeli F16s kept attacking ODA-funded infrastructure projects such as buildings belonging to the Palestinian civil defence, mostly funded by UNDP and other international donors. A government complex of several high-rise blocks, located in the west of Gaza city, was levelled to the ground. Those building hosted much equipment and office utilities officially donated through the cooperation of international donors. The newly built Ministry of Justice, completed months before the war, was reduced to rubble after receiving continuous bombardment for three nights before the war came to an end. However, the aid governments did not raise concern or complaint against the bombing of projects financed by their tax-paying citizens. The northern road of the Gaza Strip was a major infrastructure project funded by United States Aid, USAID, and the United Nations Development Program, UNDP. This was destroyed completely as Israeli tanks dug up the asphalt and caused permanent damage to a road connecting the northern part to the city of Gaza. Hospitals were also targeted. Located near the eastern border of Gaza city, Al Wafa re-habilitation hospital was frequently targeted with patients inside. Al Wafa received considerable assistance from various official donors, however much of its equipment and building were damaged.

## **5.7 The Goldstone Report**

The Goldstone Report, commissioned by the UN after the war on Gaza ended in January 2009, provides an elaborate description of the nature of the Israeli-imposed and the war. In particular, it mentions that: "The powers that Israel exercises from the borders enable it to determine the conditions of life within the Gaza Strip."<sup>342</sup>It also states that all the border crossings were under the control of Israel including, to "a significant degree", the Rafah crossing with Egypt under the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005 which determines who is allowed in or out.<sup>343</sup> The border areas alongside Israel are military controlled by Israel, putting Israel in control of agricultural and economic activities. In practical terms, the report makes clear that these areas had become a no-go zone for local residents, with Israeli



tanks, often enforced by large military force, carrying out military incursions. The report, also, observes that Israel controlled the airspace and continued to launch aerial attacks within the Gaza Strip. Moreover, the monetary system in Gaza is regulated and based on the Israeli currency, the new shekel.<sup>344</sup> Israel is in control of taxes and custom duties. Finally, the report concludes by underlining the fact that Israel “remains the occupying power.”<sup>345</sup>

This assessment by the Goldstone Report does not relieve Israel of “all of the duties of an occupying power which had previously been established”.<sup>346</sup> The report provides a clear description of the siege of Gaza facilitating a factual reference that could lead to legal action in whatever form deemed necessary to challenge Israel’s illegal siege. If international law is to be respected and applied, the UN report needs to be taken into account with a serious attitude by the international body. Otherwise, the credibility of the UN is brought into question. The report describes a system of a state-level policy of near-genocide against a captive Palestinian civilian population.

The war on Gaza and subsequent Goldstone Report has further significance for the Palestinians. The war reaffirmed a failure of the international system, including the United Nations, to protect the civilian population, their livelihood and dignity. Richard Falk, a prominent human rights specialist, argued along similar lines when he considered the findings in the Goldstone Report, asserting that it indicated the “weakening of the state system and the United Nations to uphold human rights”.<sup>347</sup> In retrospect, the Free Gaza Flotilla can be understood to signify the weakness of the state system and to demonstrate the developing assertive role of civil society in upholding the principles of human rights and justice. IHH had already established an office in the city of Gaza immediately after the war in January 2009 and, after the incident, Muslim and global civil society increased its activities and programs in Gaza.

Commenting on the Goldstone Report, Richard Falk underlined the rise of global civil society particularly concerning the connections between peace and justice.<sup>348</sup> Several participants on the Mavi Marmara expressed a similar sentiment; one saying, “the siege is unfair. It is meant to keep caged animals barely alive”.<sup>349</sup> The general disappointment in the international community for failing to lead was illustrated by the support for the Mavi Marmara; and this compelled civil society to act. The dramatic fate of the humanitarian expedition added to the assertive emergence and rise of global civil society to mitigate the abuse of human rights and injustice at a global level.

## 5.8 Conclusion

In Turkey, public opinion paid more attention to the Palestinian question after the war ended in January 2009. Turkish people gathered in public squares to protest the war and called for an end to the siege. The government of Turkey also condemned the war. Thus, IHH, acted at a critical moment when the sentiment of Turkish public opinion ran high in sympathy with the Palestinians.<sup>350</sup> However, the Mavi Marmara created a political controversy within Turkey. Those who opposed it worried about a possible confrontation with Israel and the US and that as a result Turkey might lose its international status. The spiritual leader of the Hizmet movement, Fethullah Gulen, condemned the flotilla because nine Turkish citizens died in the incident. During interviews and discussions with numerous individuals in Istanbul and Ankara in 2011 and 2012,<sup>351</sup> participants of the Mavi Marmara made clear that they had not expected the lethal military response Israel exhibited in the raid.

Despite the strong criticism, it is important not to underestimate the general public sentiment in Turkey especially during the year and months preceding the sailing. The question of Palestine had sprung to the forefront of Turkish public debate immediately after the war ended in January 2009. The UN, world governments and official international bodies failed to respond to the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza as the siege continued and still continues as a collective punishment. IHH and partners from the global civil society responded by attempting to open a humanitarian sea corridor and uphold the principles of human rights and justice, whilst Palestinians in Gaza saw the Mavi Marmara as the light of hope. In addition, Islamic values had a considerable impact at the individual level, emphasizing Turkish society's transcendence towards social renewal and reinvigoration in the community and beyond. By 2009, Turkey had become a different country from that of ten or fifteen years earlier. The political climate was freer and more democratic. These factors directly and indirectly contributed to an atmosphere in Turkey that gradually drew Turkey's attention closer to the question of Palestine and its ongoing affairs.



## **Chapter Six**

### **In the Aftermath of the Mavi Marmara:**

### **Turkey, the Regional and Global Implications**

June 2014

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The dramatic voyage of the Mavi Marmara in May 2010 brought about a crisis of regional and international magnitude. The incident shocked Turkey, which was now a nation grieving for the nine fellow citizens and dozens more injured. Across the political spectrum of Turkey, people felt, perhaps for the first time in decades, the indignation inflicted on a people who had been confident of belonging to a proud nation. Thus, in the aftermath and the ensuing confusion many began asking questions. For days and weeks on end Turkish TV and media constantly covered and analysed the Mavi Marmara, broadcasting painful images to the living rooms of millions of people throughout the country. The issue turned into a heated controversy, at the heart of which lay the issues of Israel's raid on the Flotilla, and on IHH for its central role in the expedition. The debate intensified further by questioning the role of the Turkish government in the whole incident. The Palestinian question itself was reinvigorated inside Turkey to ultimately occupy a crucial role in defining Turkey's relationship with its surrounding regions, taking into consideration historical links as well as the political trajectory of its foreign policy.

Over recent decades, contemporary Turkey has been experiencing a "Turkish Spring", involving political and social change more gradual than the sudden wave of change in the Arab world, where revolts and the quest for political changes brought sudden and mixed results. Whilst in these, although longstanding dictators like Mubarak and Kaddafi were toppled, the region continued to grapple with a mixture of upheaval and hope, in Turkey, society was engaged in gradual change towards participatory politics and striving to mitigate the formidable hegemony of the military tutelage over political life. Eventually, the voting constituency in Turkey elected a civilian government in 2002. This was a clear indication of society's empowering role and determination in taming the military and the elitist state establishment. By the advent of the first decade of the twenty-first century, democracy in Turkey began to take roots in a meaningful way perhaps for the first time since the foundation of the Republic in 1923. The democratic choice was made and hence expectations, both internally and externally, were raised to new heights.

The government of the centre-right, the Justice and Development Party, was based on conservative Muslim values and aimed at redefining itself and reshaping

Turkey as a democratic country as well as a regional and global player. The Palestinian issue, inevitably, came to occupy a crucial place in the new Turkey due to shared history, religion and culture. Previously, the military tutelage had disapproved of any public sentiment linked to the pre-Republican era, Ottomanism, and Islam. The governing secularists worked to diminish Ottomanism and erode Islamic tendencies by keeping Islamic institutions under state control. However, such a situation could not be sustained against the growing demands for public freedoms and democracy throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. The growing changes in society influenced government policies and visions of a future Turkey in light of its historical and cultural ties with the immediate geography of the region; however, this did not mean a return to a bygone historical era or slipping into nostalgia of past glory. As far as Palestine was concerned, the issue became manifest as one dominating feature that evolved into renewed vigour in Turkey's outlook in the region and beyond.

Much literature has been written on the Mavi Marmara, within Turkey and outside. One camp suggests that the government of Turkey used civil society as an expedient for foreign policy objectives. The secularists in Turkey, in particular, argue that IHH is closely linked to the AKP party since some party members share same roots, going back to the Milli Gorus Movement. However, despite the open support of some party members for the Mavi Marmara, AKP denies any direct authority over the decision-making of a civil society organization like IHH. But, secular critics of the AKP government claim that government officials knew before the incident that a number of AKP parliamentarians were supposed to board the Mavi Marmara but decided at the last minute not to join. The critics claim that the AKP government did not want to create a diplomatic crisis through the presence of Turkish parliamentarians joining the flotilla. This argument shall be discussed further in relation to the role of Turkish government, or lack of it, in the Mavi Marmara expedition.

Another argument asserts that the Mavi Marmara was not simply part of a flotilla organized by civil society, but rather an affiliation of terror networks. Here, Israel has repeatedly argued that IHH was closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly Hamas in Palestine; Hamas being designated as a terrorist organization by the US. IHH responded by denying the allegations saying that the goal of the Mavi Marmara was purely humanitarian and the defence of human rights. IHH also disputed the allegations on the grounds that it was recognized by the UN as a reputable legitimate international NGO enjoying a special consultative status within the UN. Moreover, the government of Turkey recognizes IHH as a legal NGO operating for humanitarian needs and human rights issues within Turkey and outside and, in 2011, awarded it the highest prize for its dedication to the field of humanitarian work. However, allegations of links to terrorism still surface in the media from time to time, particularly through press statements by Israeli officials.

An Islamic perspective on the debate seems to be missing especially within the mainstream media. The Islamic scholar, Rachid Ghanouchi, is the leader of the

Tunisia-based Al Nahda Islamic Movement and has been a prominent figure in the current changes sweeping Tunisia and several Arab countries. He is a frequent visitor to Turkey and regularly participates in public discussions and conferences in Turkey. A long-time advocate and proponent of Muslim civil society, Ghanouchi argues that Muslim society aims to seek justice and reject oppression no matter where it is. He elaborates that a Muslim community is responsible for lifting oppression and tyranny imposed on a community whether it is Muslim or non-Muslim. His writing is widely read by IHH staff, activists, volunteers and the supporting community and, on invitation from IHH, Ghanouchi participated in a public symposium coordinated by IHH in 2011 in Istanbul. According to Ghanouchi, the sailing of the Mavi Marmara aims at the heart of Muslim belief; embodying an approach to mitigating injustice and oppression whereby one community reaches out directly to another to alleviate suffering, tackle injustice and find solutions to many problems.

This chapter describes the dramatic sailing of the Mavi Marmara and examines its impact at regional and global levels in light of the reinvigorated civil society of contemporary Turkey, with an emphasis on the Palestinian issue. Although the flotilla could not make it to its destination, the incident represents a new form of thinking as to how to mitigate the continuing conflict of Palestine. The timing of the sailing also coincides with a period of extreme regional tension; the decision to sail was taken against the backdrop of a siege, a war, dubbed “Operation Cast Lead” by Israel, and the stagnated impasse of the peace process. More pointedly, the US government has always stressed its monopoly as “mediator” between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Thus, the conflict and its mitigation remained within the parameters of the state system and consequently the issue of regional stability has remained strictly confined to the “business of states”. For decades, a peaceful outcome had remained elusive with the average man and woman bearing the adverse results. The Camp David Agreement of 1979 concluded a negotiated deal between Egypt and Israel; however, it neglected Palestinian grievances. The failure to bring about a just solution by the leading powers, including the UN, created a persistent flashpoint of instability and violence. In contrast to this stalemate, the Mavi Marmara represented Turkish civil society, that is, a Muslim-orientated and globally-engaged civil society. It constituted a people-centred response and a form of diplomacy that reflected the long-held Islamic tradition whereby the role of the community is highly esteemed. The initiative of the Mavi Marmara reflected a constituency of local communities, although not the entire society. Thus, IHH is a civil society organization in a country considered to be a Muslim-majority. Consequently, while the impact of the Mavi Marmara clearly had a particular influence on the day-to-day life of Palestinians in Gaza, this chapter suggests it has further significance for examining the potential role of Muslim civil society, as a non-state actor, in creating a peaceful and just solution to the Palestinian issue and beyond. Can communities utilize and harness a new approach towards people-centred mitigation of conflicts? That is, a society-based approach to seeking justice. In this respect, Muslim communities across the world are poised to challenge injustice harder and seek peaceful outcomes by collaborating with

global civil society to solve global problems and injustices. Are there new possibilities on the horizon for individuals and societies, alike, to actively create a better and more just world?

### **The Sailing of the Mavi Marmara**

A year after the attack, again on board the ship, Hassan Jamil, a Turkish activist on the Mavi Marmara, recalled the details of those dramatic early morning hours of May 31st, 2010. These were in sharp contrast to the situation at the time of the interview when Hassan was strolling down the decks of the now serene ship, docked calmly in Qassem Pasha Port, Istanbul; for he was walking on the same deck where some of his friends and colleagues were killed. He, himself, was very lucky to escape death. While walking on the main deck, Hassan explained how he saw light spots of red lasers, dotting the deck boards, shifting and moving constantly as if spotting targets to shoot at. Then, gunfire was heard around him and it was a miracle that he escaped death. He survived while watching others losing their lives. It was a day that Hassan and more than six hundred activists on the Mavi Marmara are unlikely to forget.

Before this, on Friday, May 28th, the boats began to gather in the seas of the Mediterranean, according to plan. They came from different locations: three ships from Turkey, the Mavi Marmara, the Gazze I and Defne sailed from Istanbul; the Challenger I, Challenger II, Eleftheri Mesogios and Sfendoni from Greece; and the last boat, the Rachel Corrie, sailed from Ireland. Although the Challenger II and the Rachel Corrie didn't make it, two days later on the 30th of May, the Mavi Marmara and the five other boats of the flotilla met at a point about seventy-three miles off the eastern coast of south Cyprus, sailing as a flotilla of the Free Gaza Movement.<sup>352</sup>

The ships continued sailing throughout the day till around half past ten, not long before midnight, the captain of the Mavi Marmara saw the approaching Israeli battle ships on the radar screen. From this time until about three o'clock in the morning, the flotilla was followed by the Israeli navy. In preparation for the showdown, the Israeli navy had lined up four battle ships, two submarines, three helicopters and thirty Zodiac boats. At 3am, about thirty Zodiacs zigzagged around the Mavi Marmara trying to surround the ship. Submarines appeared in the visible distance and helicopters began hovering above the upper deck.<sup>353</sup> The Defne, a smaller boat which was trailing behind, contacted the Mavi Marmara by radio at ten minutes past four, informing its captain and crew of the Israeli navy ships and Zodiacs circling the Mavi Marmara. The captain of the Mavi Marmara sent out a message to the Israeli navy stating that the flotilla was carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza and that his ship and the other boats were heading south to Gaza port.<sup>354</sup>

According to an Israeli account, the Israeli naval commander radioed the Mavi Marmara and talked directly to the organizers: "You are approaching an area of hostility which is under a naval blockade. The Gaza area and the coast and Gaza

harbour are closed to all maritime traffic.”<sup>355</sup> He asked them to change their route and sail to the Israeli port of Ashdod, twenty kilometres south of Tel Aviv, adding that Israel would deliver the goods to Gaza overland and that organizers could observe delivery and return back on their boats afterwards.

The activists, in turn, rejected the offer, stating that their aim was to deliver the humanitarian support and break the Israeli blockade on Gaza. The spokeswoman of the flotilla, Huaida Arraf, a Palestinian American activist, stated that the flotilla’s objective was to sail directly to Gaza as a humanitarian convey. The participants’ aim was also political in defending human rights and bringing an end the siege. As activist Greta Berlin mentioned months later, this was a huge flotilla and it was going to Gaza to enable Palestinians to have access to their own sea since what Israel was doing constituted a “slow genocide”.<sup>356</sup> At a publicity level, the flotilla wanted to raise the profile of the situation and the activists insisted that the Israeli blockade prevented entry of construction materials, like cement to Gaza. The ships were carrying a large cargo of construction material. “The blockade is unacceptable under anyway”, said one activist, adding that the goal was to end it and “ultimately to have peace and security in the region”.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, IHH stated that, after the 2009 war, it had applied several times to Israeli authorities to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, but “no response came from Israeli side”.<sup>358</sup>

Despite the protests, the Israeli military demanded that the Mavi Marmara change its course - which was unacceptable to the activists. The mood among those on the Mavi Marmara and the other boats was one of determination and high hopes of reaching Gaza. One woman volunteer summarized this with a poem she wrote later, indicating the feelings among the activists at the time:

“If only you could ride the sea.  
If only your body was bullet proof.  
If only your boat was made of steel.  
If only your dream was real.”<sup>359</sup>

Ken O’Keefe, a former US Marine, who was on the Mavi Marmara, echoed the general consensus of the flotilla, saying the US, EU and UN did nothing to resolve the situation in Gaza. Since there was no action by the international community to help the Palestinians, the siege would continue for ever.<sup>360</sup>

Minutes after four o’clock in the morning of May 31st, communications were severed because the radio frequency emitted by the Turksat satellite was being jammed by the Israeli navy. The satellite provided communication access for the large media presence on the Mavi Marmara, which had been broadcasting live until that moment. Indeed, the Israeli military blocked and jammed every possible means of communication. Soon, Israeli navy ships began approaching closer to the Mavi



Marmara. At this moment, organizers on the Mavi Marmara asked passengers to wear life jackets.<sup>361</sup>

Soon enough, the raid on the Mavi Marmara started in earnest. It began at half past four in the morning. Israeli Zodiac boats, carrying ten soldiers each, began to push closer to the hull of the flagship. According to IHH accounts, the Israeli military did not fire a warning shot, but instead, it began by targeting the flotilla boats directly, killing those on the main deck of the Mavi Marmara. People on the ship began to throw chairs, water bottles, sticks and other objects at the Zodiacs below. In the sky above, helicopters flew above, hovering over the upper deck of the Mavi Marmara. Soldiers descended using a single rope onto the upper deck.<sup>362</sup> The soldiers encountered resistance by fifteen activists. According to Jamil, who was on the main deck in those chaotic moments, the deck was littered with laser spotlights: “The laser spots were many and transmitted at high frequency. I saw several people getting shot nearby.” In the ensuing scrambling, noise and chaos, three soldiers were “rendered ineffective” and their weapons taken away. The activists threw the weapons in the sea. The injured soldiers were carried to the lower deck for medical attention.<sup>363</sup>

The military gave a different account of those critical early hours. According to the Israelis, the activists on the upper deck attacked the soldiers with knives and iron bars as the soldiers were descending from the helicopters; and the Israel soldiers did not use lethal fire and weapons. The soldiers only used weapons when the activists started to beat them up and got hold of the backup handguns belonging to the soldiers.<sup>364</sup> Israeli soldiers who took part in the raid spoke about it after the incident and provided their own version of the events. Israeli soldiers referred to the activists as terrorists who wielded knives and metal bars. Giora Elinand, an Israeli retired Major General and head of the Israel Inquiry on the Mavi Marmara, stated that the people on the Mavi Marmara “were committed to kill and be killed”.<sup>365</sup> He remarked that the number of those killed was “surprisingly low”.<sup>366</sup> The Israeli government spokesman, Regeve, said the activists intended violence and did not wish Israel to deliver humanitarian goods. He categorically denied the existence of any humanitarian crisis in Gaza.<sup>367</sup> The leader of IHH, Bulent Yildirim, was accused of making a provocative speech the day before the attack when the Mavi Marmara was sailing. Yildirim was filmed speaking to fellow activists, threatening to “throw Israeli soldiers in the sea if the ship was attacked”.<sup>368</sup> When questioned about this “insightful” speech after the incident, the IHH leader insisted that his speech meant “peaceful resistance”. He confirmed that he “spoke correctly” at the time as they had a right to peaceful resistance.<sup>369</sup>

A number of eyewitnesses, who were injured, described what happened on the upper deck as the helicopters hovered above. Mehmet Yildirim, A Turkish volunteer, was shot in the leg and gave an account of what happened that morning and how he received the injury, including the moments when an Israeli helicopter flew above. He and others lay down realising that the helicopters were about to fire bullets. One bullet hit his leg and two bullets hit his back. Another Turkish volunteer, Ismail Yesilda,

who was at the end of the deck on the first floor and was shot in the leg, waist and shoulder, also provided his testimony. He explained that the Zodiac boats threw gas and sound bombs to intimidate the activists. “We could hear shots at this point”, he said. “The helicopters sent in soldiers and started shooting indiscriminately.” Then, the helicopters flashed powerful lights on the people below. “We could not see anymore”, he continued. They started to fire from behind the powerful flash light and he was shot with a bullet in the foot and then another hit his shoulder. The third bullet penetrated his back, one centimetre away from the spinal cord. A third activist, Revaha Gumrukcu, was wounded in the leg. He described in detail how he was on the upper deck of the bridge of the ship with the captain. “We were three of us and we lay down to protect ourselves. We saw the laser spots of the guns. They were right above us. I was shot at that moment and I do not remember the rest.”<sup>370</sup> A camera man was filming on the deck when, towards the end of the operation, he was shot. “I was filming when a soldier saw that the camera was filming”, he said. The bullet entered his body and came out of his biceps. He immediately fell on the ground. The Israeli soldiers destroyed the film and the camera.<sup>371</sup>

Amidst the shooting and ongoing confusion, the leader of IHH, Bullent Yildirim, took the loudspeaker and tried to instruct the activists to “sit in the lounge and show no resistance”.<sup>372</sup> Yildirim took off his white shirt and waved it at the soldiers. The soldiers, however, continued to fire. Then, Hanan Zoubi, a Palestinian Israeli citizen and a member of Israel’s parliament, walked straight up to the soldiers and started speaking in Hebrew and Arabic. She quickly offered to hand over the Israeli wounded soldiers in return for ceasefire. Suddenly, the shooting stopped for the moment. A doctor and two activists went up to the soldiers to hand over the wounded Israelis. But, the soldiers fired and shot the doctor in his arm. Then, the soldiers retreated and bunkered down outside the lounge as more military reinforcement with dogs arrived on the ship. Shouting instructions, the soldiers ordered all the men to leave the lounge one by one. They ordered the women to remain seated. As the men were exiting the lounge, they were all body searched, handcuffed and gathered on the deck.<sup>373</sup> Meanwhile, the helicopters were flying metres above the deck, making circles above the ship.<sup>374</sup>

By now, the Israeli soldiers were in full control of the ship with several dead bodies and tens of injured among the passengers. The situation remained as it was till nine o’clock in the morning. All the boats, including the Mavi Marmara, were taken to the port of Ashdod. On reaching the port, they found Israeli crowds celebrating “victory” over the flotilla. The crowd was swearing and hurling insults at the activists as they got off the boats and were taken to detention tents set up at the port.<sup>375</sup> At this juncture, the Israeli military attempted to force the activists to sign a document stating that they entered Israel illegally. However, the activists refused to do so arguing that they were brought against their will to the port of Ashdod. Though they refused to sign, every activist was fingerprinted, photographed and later received a health check. Their names and information were submitted to Shabak, Israel’s internal security

apparatus. After that, the activists were driven for an hour and a half to Beersheba prison. By time the activists reached the prison, it was four o'clock the following morning. Exhausted and tired, they were surprised to find themselves in a prison and demanded to see their consular representatives. Initially, their request was denied, but by five o'clock in the evening, almost thirteen hours later, Turkish embassy representatives arrived and tried to explain why it had taken them so long, saying that it was due to the large amount of paperwork needed for the high number of Turkish activists. The Turkish officials broke the news to the activists that nine Turkish citizens had been killed and many injured.<sup>376</sup> After midnight the following day, at one o'clock in the morning, the prison guards arranged the activists into groups. This took almost twelve hours, until noon when finally they were taken to Tel Aviv airport. Some participants were beaten on the way.<sup>377</sup> After reaching the airport, the ordeal continued for more long hours. Authorities at the airport slowly began processing the paperwork and passport controls until the early hours of the following day. Those whose passports were processed and completed boarded the plane but had to wait for twelve more hours. The Turkish participants refused to board the plane until every activist was out of the interrogation rooms of the airport, in particular, the leader of IHH, Bullent Yildirim. When the remaining activists did not appear, the Israeli authorities stated that there were no one left in the airport. But, the activists insisted on waiting for Yildirim and three more colleagues until they were freed. Finally, Turkish officials went to the interrogation rooms, negotiated with the Israelis and brought the four remaining people. In total, five people remained in Israel because they were severely injured and hospitalized.<sup>378</sup>

The plane, finally, took off and headed to Istanbul. Many of activists' personal belongings remained in Israel. The participants asked for their personal possessions just before flying out of Tel Aviv airport, but Israeli authorities informed they would send personal belonging later. According to the activists, when their cases arrived some time later most were empty with broken cameras and mobile phones. Much of the electronic equipment was confiscated. Moreover, according to some activists, credit cards and mobile phones were reported to have been used in Israel, most likely by Israeli soldiers.<sup>379</sup> Italian activist, Manulo Luppicini reported that Israeli soldiers confiscated his belongings and upon his return to Italy, he realized that money had been taken from his bank account.<sup>380</sup>

The Israeli general, Giora Eliand, who headed Israel's inquiry into the Mavi Marmara incident, was interviewed on Panorama, a well-known BBC program, as part of a "documentary" on the attack, titled *Death in the Med*.<sup>381</sup> Eliand stated that the media was what the Mavi Marmara was all about.<sup>382</sup> He added that what happened after the raid was an "an international outrage" and IHH had achieved its goal by provoking Israel into killing. However, the activists on the Mavi Marmara expressed outrage at the BBC program, and after the broadcast eyewitnesses and sympathizers protested outside the BBC building in London about the "refusal to address the blatant bias of BBC's Panorama's *Death in the Med*".<sup>383</sup> One protester lifted a front page of

the Morning Star newspaper, with the headline, “BBC under Fire for Blatant Israeli Bias”.<sup>384</sup> Fiachra O’Luain, who had joined the flotilla on Challenger 1, accused the BBC of not being faithful to the truth, saying, “I was a hundred metres away on the Challenger 1. [The account] was not at all faithful to what happened.”<sup>385</sup> The Irish activist added, “I was actually beaten up for asking for a lawyer at Ben Gurion airport”.<sup>386</sup> Frustrated with mainstream media, O’Luain blamed the BBC for not contacting members of the flotilla and focusing on the story of one side, that of the Israelis.<sup>387</sup>

For their part, the freedom flotilla activists employed every means available from the beginning to focus world attention on the mission of the Free Gaza Movement. For civil society activists, this was perhaps the most effective strategy they could employ. World attention was crucial. Many of the activists on the Mavi Marmara were savvy individuals, *au fait* with internet communication technology and the art of blogging. However, it proved to be an uphill challenge against the powerful mainstream media to portray what actually happened and the resulting promotion of their narrative of the story. The activists found it remarkably bold and blatant that the conclusion of the BBC’s narrative was that “the Mavi Marmara was not about delivering aid to Gaza. It was a political move designed to put pressure on Israel and the international community.”<sup>388</sup> The use of the term, “international community”, assumes that Israel’s actions and the imposition of the siege is in conformity with the international community; whereas the sailing of the Mavi Marmara questioned the very legality of the siege under international law. The narrative and the ensuing crisis became part of the battlefield that followed the attack on the Mavi Marmara in mainstream Western media as well as a significant part of the discussion within Turkish society.

## **6.1 Reaction and Implications within Turkey**

### **6.1.1 The Mavi Marmara and the Turkish government**

After the Mavi Marmara attack, the debate in Turkey on whether or not the government of Turkey knew of the sailing in advance intensified. As mentioned above, one argument claimed that the government knew well in advance and facilitated the necessary groundwork for IHH to undertake the project, thus using IHH for a foreign policy goal. The other view emphasized that the Mavi Marmara was an entirely civilian initiative emerging from within civil society in Turkey and in cooperation with international counterparts. Thus, it is crucial to assess this debate in light of the AKP-based government’s strategic vision of “Zero Problems”, long envisaged and advocated by Turkey’s well-known foreign minister, Ahmed Davutoglu.

From the advent of the AKP government in 2002, Turkish foreign policy was anchored on the premise of “Zero Problems” with its immediate neighbours. However, the Mavi Marmara incident revealed deeper internal tensions within Turkey

manifested in rivalry for the future trajectory of Turkey in the region and ultimately the global stage. This is also expressed in the sharp differences between Fethullah Gulen and his supporters, on one hand, and IHH, the organizer of the Mavi Marmara, on the other. This internal tension within Turkey was exacerbated by the question of where to place Turkey; one side aiming to anchor Turkey solidly in Europe and the other to anchor it in its “natural place” in the west Asia region, looking towards Europe. The secularists in Turkey also expressed their position on the Mavi Marmara, reflecting the vested interests between the secularist establishment and Israel. Moreover, the incident had an impact on the Palestinian people particularly those in Gaza. The reactions of Israel and the US are important to understand the far reaching implications of the shared stand of the two allies in condemning the Mavi Marmara. Finally, the flotilla generated a debate on the role of civil society in working with counterpart actors in a newly assertive role, nationally and globally, to mitigate conflicts and injustices at the global level.

When discussing the Mavi Marmara in Turkey, one realizes the controversial sentiments among scholars and the public on whether the government had a prior knowledge of the Mavi Marmara's plans. The fact that nine Turkish citizens were killed on a Turkish ship in international waters was received by the Turkish public both with shock and a sense of humiliation being inflicted on a proud nation. This generated not only a critical stand against the government but an angry response by pointing the finger at the government for provoking the tragedy. The argument asserting prior knowledge of the government is backed by the claim that ten AKP members of Parliament were planning on boarding the Mavi Marmara. In a last minute decision before sailing, a senior official from the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Ankara warned the parliamentarians against doing so because the foreign minister was worried that the presence of parliamentarians would escalate into a major crisis.<sup>389</sup> Connections between the IHH and the AKP were substantiated, in July 2010, when the New York Times reported that the IHH board of directors included a former AKP parliament member, Zeyid Aslan, who was acting head of the Turkey-Palestine Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Committee. Mehmet Emin Sen is another board member who held the post of AKP mayor of the town of Mihalgazi.<sup>390</sup>

The Turkish secularist opposition newspaper, *Hurriyet Daily*, did not mention any direct links between IHH and the government, however, the paper stated clearly that the AKP government, under the leadership of Erdogan, was “morally and politically behind” IHH; and the Mavi Marmara incident brought fame to some and notoriety to others. The newspaper referred to IHH sarcastically as a “GNGO”, meaning “Governmental-Non-Governmental Organization.”<sup>391</sup> Being one of the most influential daily papers in Turkey and belonging to the main opposition secularist party, *Chumhuriyt Halq Partisi*, the paper criticized the government for its indirect role in the Mavi Marmara. The view of the paper conforms to that of other Turkish observers; while the AKP government might not have played a direct role in the planning and execution of the Mavi Marmara project, it was difficult to imagine that

the AKP did not know about it in advance. Prior knowledge appears to be the prevailing consensus and, according to the critics, the expedition most likely received the blessings of the government.

The Turkish government's support for IHH was perceived by some as a way of using an NGO for the foreign policy objective of challenging Israel, and to make both IHH and the government heroes at home and in the Arab World.<sup>392</sup> This argument claims that Erdogan essentially "brought peace between Turkey and the Arab street" which used to see secular Turkey as nothing but an obedient servant to the West.<sup>393</sup> But, prior to 2010, Turkey had already been giving the impression of a newly emerging country. The most impressive part was the success of Prime Minister Erdogan in introducing democratic reforms and economic development. This had immense meaning for the people in the region. Also, the Davos incident of February 2010, better known in Turkey as the "One Minute Incident", signified Erdogan as a leader who could challenge the status quo that was dominated by the US-Israel hegemony in the region. This incident presented a significant image of Erdogan when he insisted on making his case in defence of Gaza in front of the Davos audience and the Israeli President Shimon Peres. While the session moderator kept interrupting, Erdogan pressed on to make his point and eventually the Turkish Prime Minister protested and walked out while Amro Mousa, the Arab League General Secretary, remained seated. The stark difference between Erdogan and Mousa carried serious implications for the people of the region. On the one hand, Erdogan appeared to stand up for the weak and for justice. And on the other, Amro Mousa reflected the agonizing impotency and ineffectiveness of the Arab League and Arab governments. Without a doubt, it had a powerful impact on public sentiment where Erdogan stood tall and high in the eyes of the masses of both Turkey and the Arab people. Consequently, in the summer of 2010, the Mavi Marmara added to the image of Erdogan, and of Turkey as a changed country that was gradually becoming more assertive and confident.

Moreover, as a civil society organization, IHH believes that its duty is to apply influence over public policies and its staff are well aware of their role as active members of civil society within Turkey. One staff member, a woman in her late twenties, explained with conviction that IHH was not only a humanitarian organization but a civil body that reflects the values of a significant segment of society in Turkey. She elaborated on the Palestinian question explaining that Turkish people have a strong affinity towards Palestine. She explained that such a sentiment runs deep in the history and imagination of the people of Turkey.<sup>394</sup> Another volunteer also pointed out that people in Turkey, whether secularists or Islamic, consider Palestine as a matter very close to their hearts. She went further, saying that Palestine was "even part of the identity of Turkish people".<sup>395</sup>

Thus, the Mavi Marmara created a profound impression on the Turkish public in terms of relations between their country and Israel; especially since for the first time, the Turkish people watched their own citizens killed by Israel. One IHH woman

who participated in the Mavi Marmara expressed her feelings in the aftermath of the raid. She said that people in Turkey could not imagine the gravity of the situation in Palestine. Her ordeal lasted only several hours in the sea with a few days detention afterwards; however, Palestinians have been living with this for decades. The reality hit her hard. She said that, for her, the world became a different place after the Mavi Marmara. When she returned to Turkey, she said everyone was talking about the Mavi Marmara where stories and witnesses' accounts were being published and broadcast. The reality of the Palestinian situation was, for the first time, becoming part of Turkey.<sup>396</sup> To her, it was a turning point in her life, as she found the severity of injustice very hard to comprehend. In the research fieldwork, one young university student who volunteers for IHH in Ankara city, participating in campus activities such as public awareness and promoting the humanitarian causes of IHH in Africa and other places, reflected on the Mavi Marmara, although he was not on the flotilla. He talked about how the Mavi Marmara affected his outlook in many ways and asked, "Why am I prevented from reaching my brothers and sisters in Palestine?"<sup>397</sup>

The Mavi Marmara incident would have been unthinkable during the late 1980s at the time of the first Palestinian Intifada and later during the first few years of the new century. Turkish democracy was not fully practiced during those years and the state elite and military apparatuses still held much control. However, grassroots activism and the emergence of the new social consciousness, particularly of Islamic values, sought to minimize statist coercive measures against freedom and public space.

In today's Turkey, it is still significant how the Mavi Marmara captured the minds of the Turkish man and woman in the street. Turkish people, whether secular or religious, were forced to rethink hard the consequences of the Mavi Marmara. In the newly founded democracy and social openness in Turkey, "re-identifying" with Palestine found routes into social activism and sentiments within a growing Islamic consciousness in society. In the following pages, a few important aspects are carefully analysed in order to discern the blurring of lines between different segments of Turkish society and to argue that, despite clear distinctions in political sentiments and inclination, there remains one deeply held underlying identity that relates to history and religion. Such a widespread public sentiment is bound to bring about a change in the thinking of official policy-makers.

The Mavi Marmara incident took place during a time when Ahmed Davutoglu was the foreign minister and considered the chief architect of Turkey's foreign policy. Davutoglu is most known for Turkey's new vision and strategy of "Zero Problems" with neighbouring countries. The new foreign policy of Turkey in the Middle East aimed towards "economy and civilization ties rather than security concerns".<sup>398</sup> A respected academic before making a career in diplomacy, Davutoglu understood the cultural, religious and historical ties with the Arab world. Davutoglu saw Turkey as "a central country with such an optimal geographic location that cannot define itself in a defensive manner".<sup>399</sup> For most of the twentieth century, the Republic of Turkey concentrated its diplomatic relations with the West and Israel, maintaining security-

based relations with the rest of the Arab countries. However, with the advent of the AKP, for the first time in Turkey's contemporary history, Turkey went beyond the security pivot of its relations with neighbouring Arab people and re-directed relations towards a deeper level. Turkey began a serious approach to widening its access to markets and investments in Arab countries. As a result, Turkey's exports to the Middle East increased by twenty percent in 2009, compared with twelve percent in 2004.<sup>400</sup> Trade with Gulf countries increased fifteen fold from one and a half billion US dollars in 1999 to seventeen billion in 2008. Trade with Iran reached ten billion dollars annually.<sup>401</sup>

The new foreign policy invoked another significant dimension; the people's diplomacy. This concept is based on inter-Muslims relations throughout the history of Islam. The Zero Problems paradigm is not an entirely new concept, rather, it retrieves what used to be considered normal and natural among Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities in the region. It is on this premise of "People-Centred Diplomacy", in other words, a peaceful vision, that the Zero Problems initiative sought methods of peace and dialogue in solving problems in a region bogged down for generations by the Israel-Arab conflict. Where the international system, including the UN, US and influential governments, failed to apply intentional law, justice and peace, democratic Turkey was determined to attempt to mitigate the conflict in accordance with the vision of Zero Problems with neighbours.

Therefore Turkey undertook a serious diplomatic initiative to resolve the problems between Israel and Syria with Prime Minister Erdogan playing a central role as a mediator between Damascus and Tel Aviv. The high point of these diplomatic activities took place towards the end of year 2008. Before that, Erdogan was not known for any rhetoric against any states or any single state in the region. The critical moment came when Olmert, then Prime Minister of Israel and on a visit to Ankara in December 2008, promised to keep Erdogan informed of situation in Gaza, having made it clear to Erdogan and Davutoglu that "Turkey had brought Israel and Syria to the brink of face-to-face talks or even a peace deal".<sup>402</sup> However, on December 28th, 2008, soon after returning to Tel Aviv from Ankara, Olmert broke this promise and launched the war on Gaza, which became the turning point in the relations between Turkey and Israel. Prior to that, there had been no mention in Turkey of any axe to grind against any state in the region. At the time, the AKP government had no ideology except the vision of Zero Problems, a strategy to bring peace in the region based on economic cooperation, culture and civilization, and historical ties. Relations between Israel and Turkey collapsed as Israeli military operation caused the killing of 1,400 Palestinians in the three week course of the war.<sup>403</sup> When the war ended in January 2009, it proved to have been the pivotal point in Israel's deteriorating relations with Turkey.

The lowest point in relations came with the Mavi Marmara incident of May 31st, 2010 when Israel's military killed nine Turkish citizens in the international waters.<sup>404</sup> Davutoglu swiftly reacted to the killing by going to the UN and



condemning the Israeli actions as piracy, and accusing Israel of implementing state terrorism. As discussed below, he demanded a UN resolution to condemn Israel in the strongest terms possible. From then on, Turkish foreign policy on Israel changed drastically and attempted to isolate it on every international platform. Erdogan, also, became a sharp critic and lashed out at Israel's policies of occupation and the resulting abuse of Palestinians. The post-Mavi Marmara period created a different reality and dynamism in the region as Turkey became more in tune with the masses of the Arab world. In the meantime, Israel grew more isolated.

In comparison to Turkey's stand, the majority of Arab and Muslim governments paid lip service to the Palestinian cause without doing anything genuine about it. When the Mavi Marmara was on its way through the Mediterranean, the Gaza siege was partially implemented by the Egyptian regime of the former president Mubarak and the surrounding Arab governments watched; however, they did not attempt to undermine the siege. On certain occasions, Arab governments condemned the siege during summit meetings held annually by the Arab League. Press statements were often released, demanding rights for the Palestinians. However, such official rhetoric turned into repetitive cliché normally uttered at times of annual summits. Over time, people in Palestine and surrounding Arab countries had grown impatient with official indolence and incapacity and with the moral and material bankruptcy of Arab governments. People were fed up with empty rhetoric supporting the Palestinian question with not much tangibly materializing on the ground. The mood in the Arab street before the commencement of every Arab summit conference was largely cynical and sarcastic. On one occasion, Qaddafi, the former strongman of Libya famous for his flamboyant and theatrical outbursts in front of cameras and media, waved a document on the first day of a convention that was supposed to be the final communiqué of the Summit in Damascus in 2010. By reading it out before the conference was officially over, he made a mockery of the attending kings and presidents. Such were the public scenes of the participants of Arab summit meetings where support for the Palestinian issue was nothing more than lip service. Meanwhile, the Arab street was becoming increasingly dismayed, disappointed and impatient.

Against this backdrop of incompetency on the part of the official Arab governments, the Mavi Marmara represented a fresh approach with its roots in Muslim tradition. The sailing, in essence, was an approach involving the people-to-people tradition of Muslims. It was diplomacy of the people. In this respect, the Muslim scholar, Qaradawi, has repeatedly advocated the role of the people, society, community or civil society in taking the initiative to undo injustice. As he argues, it is individual consciousness based on the moral and ethical solid ground that should act to establish fairness and help the weak.<sup>405</sup> The teachings of Islam are clear that the duty of a Muslim is to be answerable firstly to the ethical imperatives and principles. Spiritual well-being can lead to the benefit of society at large and its freedom and aspirations. Muslims identify with fellow Muslims as loyalty is aimed at the wellbeing of fellow Muslims and human beings generally; not the state. Loyalty is

first to one another, to the general wellbeing of a community. Loyalty should allow human energies, volunteering organizations and the goodwill of Muslims and everyone at large to reach out and seek fairness and peace. Thus, the essence of a Muslim initiative is premised mainly on a people-to-people approach: people diplomacy as the basis of human relations. The ethical dimension compels a Muslim to react to oppression if some members of a society experience and live in dire and unjust circumstances both within his/her home country and beyond its borders. The Mavi Marmara sailed from Istanbul to join a flotilla with non-Muslims, sharing similar and common values. Thus, the voyage was dubbed the “Conscious of the World”.

The foreign minister of Turkey knew beforehand about the Mavi Marmara’s intention to sail to Gaza. The news of the sailing was not a secret as IHH and members of various international organisations took months to prepare for the voyage. IHH staff and volunteers were keen on exercising their right as a civil society organization. The nature of their role and position within the body politic of state-society relations is a highly conscious principle among IHH organizers. In other words, IHH took a decision as a civil organization to embark on challenging the siege on Gaza and defend the human rights of a civilian population. The government of Turkey, at that point in time, was feeling frustrated with Israeli policies and aggression against the Palestinians. Turkish political leaders understood the behaviour of Israel to be disrupting the security of the region through the continuous abuse of the rights of Palestinian people. Thus, Turkish leaders knew of the sailing and did not attempt to stand against it. However, rather than using the expedition for foreign policy objectives, it was more a case of a government extending its moral support to the mission of IHH as a civil society project.

Thus, the AKP government supported the Mavi Marmara on ethical grounds, namely, that it was standing on the side of justice. By now, Erdogan enjoyed substantial credibility among the average man and woman in the region, being a leader of a democratic country and a growing economy, and standing up for justice. The newly acclaimed confidence of Turkey became highly visible in the region and globally. This was illustrated when the New York Times criticized the government of Turkey, particularly the Prime Minister, “Erdogan today is the most popular leader in the Arab world. Unfortunately, it is not because he is promoting a synthesis of democracy, modernity and Islam, but because he is loudly bashing Israel over its occupation and praising Hamas instead of the more responsible Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which is actually building the foundations of a Palestinian state”.<sup>406</sup> An average Palestinian would refute this claim by the New York Times as unsubstantiated. Over the past twenty years, Oslo peace talks have contributed to the diminishing of the possibility of founding a Palestinian statehood or the so-called two-state solution. If the New York Times “evaluates” the Palestinian Authority as more responsible, why did the Palestinians elected the Islamic movement to Parliament in the year 2006? The way Palestinians saw the situation was more as irresponsibility on

the part of the US, which had full monopoly on mediation and that much of the official international community followed suit. For an entire generation, a Palestinian state seemed more like a mirage. The criticism went further by accusing the AKP government of “not joining the European Union but the Arab League” and eventually “joining the Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel”.<sup>407</sup> The critical piece appeared in July 2010 after the Mavi Marmara and described the Erdogan government as an “Islamist government” leading Turkey away from its “balance point between East and West”.<sup>408</sup> The labelling of the AKP government as Islamist is not exactly accurate. In Turkey, the Constitution does not allow an Islamist mode of government to survive as a political party due to the strict secular constitution of the Republic of Turkey. In fact, the AKP defines itself as a “conservative democrat” party.

In relation to the EU, under the AKP, Turkey has created a special ministry to facilitate its entry into the European Union. However, the Mavi Marmara’s challenge to the Israeli siege of Gaza seemed to unsettle the mainstream Western media and influential circles in the West have become accepting of dictators in Muslim governments crack down on civil society initiatives that support the Palestinians. For instance, before the Mavi Marmara, the Mubarak regime obstructed land-based humanitarian convoys trying to cross at the Rafah border gate between Gaza and Egypt, especially so in the few years prior to the event, without offending mainstream Western opinion.

In many ways, the Mavi Marmara highlighted a crisis that arose between Turkey and the West when the former began attempts to resolve conflicts in the region.<sup>409</sup> These attempts faced several disruptions. For example, the Israeli “Operation Cast Lead” in 2008/9, disrupted Turkey’s efforts in making peace between Syria and Israel. In addition, relations between Turkey and the US reached a low point as the US perceived the Turkey peace efforts to be bypassing the superpower.

In relation to the Arab world, the Mavi Marmara and the general outlook of the Turkish government contributed indirectly to the rise of the Arab Spring and the popular drive towards change. Although for observers outside the region, the Mavi Marmara may seem as an incident confined mainly to relations between Turkey, Palestine and Israel, the Flotilla echoed with further significance because those who sailed were regular, normal citizens challenging injustice and risking much on the way. The young in Palestine and in the Arab world generally watched and followed the Mavi Marmara ordeal as it sailed in the nearby waters of the Mediterranean Sea. For days on end, Al Jazeera TV channel reported live, hour by hour, on the unfolding story. The broadcast images and stories of individuals, activists, committed to a humanitarian cause made an impact on the people. In Arab capitals, from Amman to Riyadh, to Rabat in Morocco, many commentators highlighted the ineffectiveness of Arab governments in contrast to the initiative of those brave civilian activists. The killing of nine people and injuring of many more intensified the solidarity with Turkey and the Palestine cause. Thus, the Mavi Marmara highlighted the ineffectiveness of Arab governments in dealing with injustice, lack of human rights

and the suffering of Palestinians. The expedition exposed the weakness of the official political leadership of Arab countries which added up to the frustrations of the restless young population and ultimately created a public fermentation.

From the outset of the Arab Spring, Turkey was one of the first countries that expressed support for the people's protest movement and showed a keen interest in having a smooth and democratic transition take place in Arab countries. This is one reason why Turkey opposed the military intervention of NATO against Libya and advocated indigenous and local forms of intervention to lead the way towards transition to consensus and democracy. The street protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen did topple dictators but not enough to bring about sufficiently deep change to create sustainable alternatives. Consequently, reference to the “Turkish Model” became trendy in the region. The term was first referred to immediately after the end of the Cold War when central Asian countries started using it. However, it was an unpopular term within Turkey as the military had been in control of the state apparatuses during the Cold War.<sup>410</sup> Yet, despite the vigorous talk about the Turkish Model, Turkey itself currently seems poised to try harder in the quest for democratic goals, although, the Gezi Park protests and the crisis between the AKP and the Gulen Movement has dampened the enthusiasm for the Turkish Model for the time being. These setbacks, in which critics of AKP accused the government of undermining the integrity and well-being of civil society, were a response to the slowness of the democratization process within Turkey. Despite these, the democratic process seemed salient and strong as late as 2012 and the Turkish economy continues to perform at a growing pace.

Both the Mavi Marmara sailing and Erdogan himself, as an assertive elected democratic leader who successfully transformed his country and brought economic prosperity, played significant roles in influencing the minds of young people in Egypt and Tunisia when they took to the streets in protest. Subsequently, the Turkish government openly and ethically supported the revolts in Arab countries that were expressing legitimate demands against authoritarian regimes, perceiving its position as a “stand on the right side of history”. Moreover, public opinion in Turkey was strong and vocal in support of the wave of awakening in the Arab world, and the elected AKP government of Turkey would be unlikely to survive if it turned its back on the revolutions or the Arab Spring.<sup>411</sup> A policy of ignoring a legitimate protest would not be in the best interest of the Turkish government while it calls for consolidating democracy in the region.

### **6.1.2 Diverse Reactions from Civil Society in Turkey: The Gulen Movement, Kimsu Yok Mu and IHH**

The Mavi Marmara incident generated a debate that exposed differences among the main actors of Turkish Muslim civil society. Specifically, differences surfaced in relation to democracy in Turkey, issues of Palestine, and Turkey’s place in the region;

the question of Palestine being highly related to the role exercised by Turkey in the region.

A few days after the Mavi Marmara incident, Fethullah Gulen, the spiritual leader of the Gulen Movement, criticized the incident, making his views on the matter very clear. In an interview by the Wall Street Journal on June 4th, 2010, Gulen, who was described as “Turkey’s most influential religious leader”,<sup>412</sup> denounced the flotilla organizers and the Mavi Marmara for their “failure to seek accord with Israel before attempting to deliver aid”.<sup>413</sup> He added, “it is a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters”.<sup>414</sup> The spiritual leader said that if IHH wanted to help Gazans, Israel’s permission would be necessary. Elsewhere he states, “I wish the organizers of the flotilla used diplomacy as much as possible”.<sup>415</sup> Moreover, Gulen indirectly blamed Prime Minister Erdogan who “endorsed and encouraged the Free Gaza Enterprise”.<sup>416</sup> Gulen refused to call the nine Turkish victims martyrs.<sup>417</sup> He described the actions of the Mavi Marmara as “very inconsiderate and irresponsible”.<sup>418</sup> The Gulen movement even bought an advertisement in the New York Times, one full page, condemning the Mavi Marmara for the violence and confrontational methods used by supporters of IHH. The advert caused outrage among IHH staff and volunteers.<sup>419</sup>

The statements and claims by Gulen were refuted and intensely scrutinized within Turkey, especially by his movement’s fellow Islamic civil society organization, IHH. Critics accused Gulen of failing to condemn the excessive use of force and violence exhibited by the Israelis during the raid as well as the brutal blockade on Gaza, and instead pointing the finger of blame on the victims.<sup>420</sup> One critic, Levent Basturk, asserted that Gulen projects himself as a Turkish patriot; however, he refused to put the responsibility on Israel, a foreign country, for killing nine and injuring many of his own countrymen in a military attack on unarmed peace activists. He emphasised that Gulen remarked that the activists knew what they were getting into, hinting dangerously that the activists were asking for death.<sup>421</sup> Gulen’s detractors responded by asking who brought violence to the Mavi Marmara? And whose blood was shed? As Alain Gabon pointed out, in insisting on the need for Israel’s permission or the use of diplomacy, Gulen was either “disingenuous or ignorant of Israel’s refusal to compromise on the issue”<sup>422</sup>; since for someone to ask Israel’s permission to break the blockade was unthinkable. Gabon described Gulen’s position on seeking permission from Israel as morally wrong and ineffective, saying that many Muslims would find such an attitude un-Islamic.<sup>423</sup>

Basturk further commented on Gulen’s call to use diplomacy with Israel by blaming the spiritual leader for failing to identify the real situation of Palestine and pointing out that Israel was the country that ignored diplomacy in resolving problems. He supported his argument by referring to the seventy-seven UN resolutions passed, that condemn Israel’s actions over the decades - and yet Israel continued to break international law.<sup>424</sup> The writer went on that Gulen had always preached democracy and human rights. The Gaza Freedom Flotilla and the Mavi Marmara took an action

that was considered to be “a practice of civil disobedience against an abusive power”, one that was acting in violation of the human rights of a besieged people seeking basic needs.<sup>425</sup> Rejecting the Mavi Marmara as a form of civil disobedience by global civil society seemed like an “insult and slander” aimed at a democratic action.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, as IHH stated in its Summary Report, IHH had filed several applications to Israeli authorities to deliver humanitarian aid by land and sea which had been rejected by Israel.<sup>427</sup> Israel has been abusing human rights for a long time, in Gaza particularly, however, as Basturk points out, Gulen did not speak out about Palestine and Israel. Indeed, while Gulen justifies Israel’s actions against the flotilla, he was ignoring the mounting humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the actions of civil disobedience by global civil society against a state that is known as an apartheid regime, as former President Carter had previously labelled Israel.<sup>428</sup>

Moreover, Gulen was accused as being “a cult leader whose empire aims to train an Islamic elite who will one day rebuild the Turkish state”.<sup>429</sup> The accusers elaborate on the “empire”, describing a network of thousands of schools in Turkey and in more than one hundred countries, and ownership of numerous commercial outlets: an Islamic bank with assets of \$5.2 billion (according to the bank’s 2008 report); an insurance company; the daily newspaper, Zaman; Aktion Magazine and publishing companies; a radio station and the television network, STV.<sup>430</sup> Followers of the Gulen Movement donate “one-third” of their income to Gulen related foundations.<sup>431</sup> In the US, followers of Gulen established the Assembly of Turkic American Federations in Washington in 2010. The foundation aims to function as a lobbying and umbrella organizations representing about 180 local Gulen-based NGOs in America that focus on education and culture.<sup>432</sup>

Within Turkey, the Gulen Movement has come under the spotlight in conflict with the AKP government since December 2013 over allegations of government corruption. On the other hand, the AKP government and supporters claim that the influence of the Gulen Movement is so strong that it is allegedly creating “a parallel state” in Turkey. The claim points to the Turkish police force, which “may be largely influenced by the imam through Gülen sympathizers in key positions — effectively creating a counterbalance to Turkey’s powerful military, a secularist bastion”.<sup>433</sup> Such a charge has been constantly denied by Gulen himself who insists that official state affairs remain outside the reach of the movement. This point remains quite contentious within Turkey. The movement has been described as religious as well as political, social and cultural, whereby the movement has an influence in politics in Turkey. Thus, while Gulen followers insist on being apolitical, within Turkey this is looked upon as a “far more rhetorical, defensive posture than a reality”.<sup>434</sup> The American Homeland Security denied residency status to Gulen in 2007, as the US government reported that Gulen was “primarily the leader of a large and influential religious and political movement with immense commercial holdings”.<sup>435</sup> The application was rejected despite the fact that Gulen applied for residency as an applicant with “exceptional ability as an educator”.<sup>436</sup>

In theory, social movements have generally been characterised as involving “contentious political action”.<sup>437</sup> They are defined as “organizations, groups of people and individuals, who act together to bring about transformation of society”.<sup>438</sup> The members of such social movements normally do not enjoy regular access to formal institutions. Thus, social movements may introduce new discourse and ideas that may face unacceptance. Discourse and their accompanying actions induce challenges to authorities in our modern era. The Gulen Movement has not been spared from continuous politics in the case of Turkey since the summer of 2013. According to Basturk, writing in *Turkey Agenda*, the Mavi Marmara played a part in the contentious politics between the Gulen Movement and the government, as he stated, “it was the Mavi Marmara crisis in 2010 that created the first cracks, in their relations”. Gulen wanted Turkey’s foreign policy not to be adventurous and to stay fixed on the West.<sup>439</sup>

As the Gulen Movement traces its roots back to Anatolian Sufism, particularly to Said Nursi, the great Sufi scholar of the early twentieth century, it has long advocated the inner spiritual values of individuals as the main means to bring about change in society. Gulen was a disciple of Nursi who built upon the Sufi teaching of his former mentor and took it further towards the practical realm of society, specifically the area of education. One salient feature of Gulen’s teachings is the use of peaceful methods towards change. Literature on Gulen is quite pervasive within Turkey, thanks to numerous publications and online websites. Gulen’s followers, like many of the columnists and writers for Gulen’s Turkish newspaper, *Daily Zaman*, describes Gulen as a man who “opposes fanaticism and violence, advocates interfaith dialogue and peaceful relations among various peoples”.<sup>440</sup> Supporters say that people are inspired by the teachings of Gulen because the man stands for peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law; and because he respects the political and religious rights of various communities in Turkey.<sup>441</sup> Gulen is described as a person who is “unique among Muslim leaders [because he is the] contemporary representative of the liberal and tolerant kind of Islamic tradition in Turkey”.<sup>442</sup> Thus, comments by critics may appear overwhelming to followers of Gulen considering the high esteem and reverence towards the spiritual leader. Moreover, the spiritual leader hails from a great Sufi tradition with a Sufi discipline that focuses on aesthetic and peaceful dimensions, and to a large extent this has influenced his outlook. Having said that, what would Gulen suggest to deal with the situation of Gaza? Would he suggest a different approach from that of IHH?

Indeed, the Turkish NGO, *Kimsu Yok Mu*, which belongs to the Gulen Movement and is considered one of Turkey’s largest and most influential humanitarian NGOs, advocates a different policy to IHH in approaching the situation in Gaza, preferring to deal with it as a strictly humanitarian case. Its humanitarian policy relies on seeking official government approval from Israel and it coordinates entry of humanitarian assistance through Israeli border. This means that whatever material goes through the border must fall under the imposed restrictions of the Israeli

military occupation authority. Chief among such restrictions is the prohibition of construction materials.

The Gulen Movement-based NGO seeks to please both the Palestinians and Israelis and does not challenge the Israeli status quo in the occupied territories. This position would seem contradictory to what Gulen Movement generally stands for, which is chiefly human rights issues. In other words, how can its position of “neutrality” help the cause of lifting the siege against Gaza in the long run? When international law and human rights are violated by one side, consultation with Israeli occupation would lead, most likely, to no avail. This is not to question the benign intentions of KYM; however, good intentions alone would not lead to the ultimate aim of defending human rights and justice. This, in a way, resembles the attitude of the United Nations which often appears to be calling upon “both sides” to show restraint or compromise and yet no tangible results surface on the ground because international law and UN resolutions are not applied. Clearly, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the victim and oppressor cannot be equal. Muslims and non-Muslims participating in the flotilla could not overlook the ethical questions of the Gaza siege and Palestine in general. The KYM, on the other hand, adopted a cautious stand which may appear ambiguous and unclear in dealing with the Palestinian question. The Gulen Movement is quite large and influential and it appears that there exists a certain gap between the elites of the movement and the common membership of its widespread base. The elites are keen to keep good relations with America and Israel as they calculate the political costs and risks attached to the Palestine question.

In addition, the Gulen Movement pointed out that IHH instigated violence in the first place by challenging the Israeli naval blockade, claiming that the very challenge to the blockade meant inviting trouble and that IHH knew of such consequences ahead of the sailing. This view seemed to be further strengthened by video footage of a number of men on the Mavi Marmara challenging Israeli soldiers with sticks and metal bars on the upper deck. In Gulen’s view, such actions on the part of activists caused further escalation and tension that eventually led to the killing of nine people. Another example of this is the video, mentioned above, showing a defiant speech made by Yildirim, the head of IHH, the day before the raid. Months later in an interview, Yildirim stood by his words, describing what he had been claiming was his right to defend the ship peacefully. Moreover, he stressed that the Israelis were already intending to inflict violence on the Mavi Marmara to set a precedent against any future sailing attempts to break the blockade.

In retrospect, critics of Gulen’s views claim that the spiritual leader is also trying to protect his global interests, thinking that the US and Israel could harm his global network of educational institutions; the US wields enough political and diplomatic clout to influence numerous governments to the point of closing down the schools or disrupting the business activities of the movement. The US could use such clout in a show of support for Israel, overtly and quietly, to harm a diverse array of



parts of the Gulen Movement. Paradoxically, the AKP government waged a campaign against the Movement using its diplomatic prowess, asking several countries to close down schools belonging to the Gulen Movement during the early months of 2014. For example, Gulen schools were closed down in Azerbaijan, where there had been extensive activities associated with Gulen in a country where the Turkish language is spoken.

### **6.1.3 The Secularist Position**

The secularists in Turkey reacted to the Mavi Marmara by maintaining a low profile, whilst pointing the finger of blame at IHH for damaging Turkey's foreign relations. Thus, the *Hurriyet Daily* newspaper, a major daily belonging to the main secularist opposition party, CHP, asked: "How can such a large country as Turkey with interests in four continents, and with export, investment and globally-linked economy, be dragged to the brink of war by a nongovernment organization?"<sup>443</sup> The questioning of IHH's actions persisted in describing what happened as a new phenomenon within Turkish polity, particularly so in the secularist establishment. Secularists have long maintained a distance from neighbouring countries and anchoring Turkey's interest in Europe and the US, being a NATO member and, thus, enjoying strong military relations with Israel. The idea that the Mavi Marmara could trigger a war might seem exaggerated; however, this reflects an attitude of the patronization of Turkish politics that has long characterized the secularists. In other words, IHH, in the eyes of secularist critics, was more of "a bad child" who did not heed the established norms of Turkey. On the other hand, the position of the secularists can be looked upon as a show of political manoeuvring by the opposition against the governing AKP Party. Relations with Israel, especially in the military field, remain one defining characteristic of the Kemalist/secularists of Turkey. The Mavi Marmara caused a major embarrassment as nine Turkish citizens were killed by their supposed friend and ally, Israel. Therefore, the position for the secularists appeared awkward and they preferred to keep a low profile, weakening the national outrage in the period following the raid.

Nevertheless, the secularists reminded the government of its military commitments and obligations, stressing Turkey's position as a NATO member and ally. They criticized the new direction of Turkey's foreign policy describing it as warming to Hamas and Iran.<sup>444</sup> On Iran, the AKP, in cooperation with Brazil, attempted to follow its vision of "Zero Problems" in resolving the nuclear stand-off between the West and Iran. Turkey wanted diplomacy to take precedent and avoid a regional war that might engulf the entire region. For Hamas, the Turkish government approached Hamas as an elected government that resulted from the 2006 Palestinian national elections and its foreign policy did not intend to ignore an elected government in Palestine. To the Palestinians, the attitude of the AKP government represented a more balanced course than previous Turkish governments. In the past, Turkey, under the secularist military, had seen the region through the paradigm of security and the Turkey-Israel interests and relations. However, the Mavi Marmara

incident represented a growing tendency of the sympathies of Turkish society towards the immediate region. Thus, the more recent course of Turkish diplomacy introduced a new trajectory from that of the reign of the secularists.

Secularists in Turkey argued that Turkey must “maintain its diplomatic stature regionally especially with Israel in order to play the role of mediator”.<sup>445</sup> This reflects the argument of the Gulen Movement, discussed above. The diplomatic stature of Turkey in the Middle East before the turn of the new century was considered to be limited compared to the era of the AKP government. In fact, Turkey was often criticized during summits of the previously known the Organization of Islamic Conferences for being disinterested in Muslim affairs. The lingering images of Turkey that vividly stayed with Palestinians and Arabs were of the military exercises and training that regularly took place between Turkey and Israel in the Mediterranean Sea and on Turkish soil. However, with the advent of the twenty-first century, Turkish society and government evolved out of that relationship with Israel. Society in Turkey has, largely, re-embraced its Islamic values in a country of Muslim majority. The ‘melting pot’ concept of Turkish nationalism, moulded and indoctrinated by the statist and secularists, had not in reality delivered the rights associated with diversity and pluralism in multi-cultural Turkey. After the elections of AKP in 2002, the government of Turkey aimed at a forging policy that reflected its constituency within the newly emerging society as well as its place in the immediate neighbourhood.

In a similar tone, secularists accused the AKP government of damaging relations with Egypt and agitating the Arab street before the Mavi Marmara incident. Thus, although the Mubarak regime placed hurdles in the way of the activists seeking to enter Gaza, including IHH and other INGOs, the secularists blamed IHH for jeopardizing relations with Egypt in 2009 when the organisation attempted to break the blockade of Gaza by going overland to the Rafah gate. The Egyptian authorities used force against the Turkish activists, preventing their entry to Gaza for many days. After a long wait in Al Arish, the nearest Egyptian town to Rafah, about sixty kilometres away, and media pressure on the Egyptian government, the activists were allowed to enter Gaza, although only for two days. The secularists, for their part, blamed IHH for damaging relations with the former strongman Mubarak. It appeared that Turkish secularists would prefer to maintain the status quo in the region, including full relations with the Israeli and Egyptian regimes regardless of the suffering of the Palestinians, thus, raising ethical and moral questions concerning human rights and the defence of democracy.

It is possible to draw a close comparison between Turkey’s secularists on the one hand and the Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, and Jordan governments, on the other. Had the secularists in Turkey maintained their absolute hold on power, most likely the Mavi Marmara could not have materialized from civil society in the first place and the old status quo in Turkey would have maintained a favourable line with Israel. Overall, the secularist governments of Egypt and other Arab countries have aggravated the situation by sweeping various issues and crises “under the carpet” for a long time

whereby the Palestine question was consistently overlooked and ignored by governments in the region. In the ensuing absence of social justice and corruption, Islamic civil society focused society's energies on creating a just society, addressing poverty, inequality, high unemployment and corruption. Regional sentiment tends to perceive secular governments, in Turkey or Arab countries, as a by-product of the military tutelage and does not necessarily see this as a problem; an attitude that is reflected in the acceptance of the Israeli military occupation over Palestinian land and people.

The Mavi Marmara, initiated by IHH, was a more decisive way of dealing with the Palestinian situation and the Gaza embargo. With the mounting urgency of the situation in Gaza, human rights advocates were raising their voices. As one woman activist from Belgium expressed her feelings on why she joined the Mavi Marmara in the first place: "Can't someone do something about it?"<sup>446</sup> To the Palestinians, the Mavi Marmara signified someone doing something. Some may agree and others may disagree with the ethos underlying the Mavi Marmara expedition, as we have seen from the intense ensuing debates that took place in Turkey. To reduce the expedition to a mere object of political expediency would not be just to the larger symbolism the sailing entailed. The intention was much larger. The level of sympathy and motivation among the activists underlined a deeper sense of refusing to succumb to the prevailing double standard of the international community on the Palestinian question. If the whole project was nothing more than a political fiasco as critics put it, how one can explain the large support of the community and the people in preparation for the Mavi Marmara and the flotilla, with more than fifty nationalities participating. Yet, the eventual confrontation on the high seas presented serious questions as to what would be the best course to take to deal with the situation it created.

Thus, the reactions to the expedition were varied. IHH knew that it was heading towards challenging Israel; however, it did not expect the magnitude of military fire power applied during the raid. Violence was predicted and that is why the flagship carried a large number of media personal and outlets, with Al Jazeera broadcasting live around the clock until the moment of the raid. A large space on the Mavi Marmara was dedicated to the purpose of connecting the world with the flotilla. Some kind of violent outcome was probably predictable. Provocation was inevitable. IHH did challenge and Israel reacted with lethal fire. Pondering the aftermath, what could have been done that can be thought of as a better way? The two approaches of IHH and KYM are different; yet, both humanitarian methods are very similar in terms of generating funding strictly from a large segment of communities across Turkey and the humanitarian programs themselves are also similar. However, IHH takes on the political issues of human rights while KYM avoids politics. The question of Palestine is highly political as it is. In terms of principles, it is difficult for a Muslim to remain neutral as far as the question of Palestine is concerned. So, what is the way forward? What is the best way for Muslim NGOs, in particular? At the end of the day, Muslim NGOs cannot avoid issues of oppression, injustice and human rights. These are real

issues that need to be tackled in order to move forward and bring about the desired peace. In the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara, Muslim NGOs and civil society organizations will evaluate the incident so that a new momentum is realized in the pursuit of achieving justice, peace and human rights.

## **6.2 Reaction outside Turkey**

### **6.2.1 The Palestinian Reaction**

For the Palestinians in Gaza, the Mavi Marmara brought global attention to the blockade that had been affecting daily life for years, in addition to a new perception of the regional role of Turkey. In the days following the attack, the world's attention re-focused on Gaza, highlighting the human cost of the siege and questioning its legality, the consequent humanitarian crisis and the political impasse.<sup>447</sup> Israel began to feel intense global pressure concerning the imposition of the blockade. Global media attention also focused on Egypt's role in the siege, causing embarrassment and unease to Mubarak. From within the siege, the inhabitants in Gaza saw in the Mavi Marmara a sense that the world conscience had finally awakened. For the following months and years, the Palestinians came to embrace the Mavi Marmara message and memory, especially of those who were killed or injured, and of the others who risked much by being on board. A commemorative monument was constructed in the Gaza fishing port where the Mavi Marmara was supposed to arrive. Palestinian civil society responded through numerous activities and projects from advocacy by human rights NGOs for the Mavi Marmara victims and their families to cultural and arts events in Gaza celebrating the meanings and symbolism of the flotilla. The incident also influenced Hamas, helping it to escape its diplomatic isolation and to be recognised as "a victim of Israeli cruelty and violence".<sup>448</sup> Its rival, Fatah, the Nationalist Palestinian Movement, condemned the Israeli attack but felt side-lined by the whole drama as world attention and sympathy seemed to have consolidated the position of the Hamas movement. To the Palestinians, a realization was developing that understood the new Turkish role to be changing towards the Palestinians whereby society, government and Erdogan looked poised to search for a just approach as defenders of justice in the region.

The military raid on the Mavi Marmara increased attention on Israel's role in the humanitarian plight of Palestinians. World media scrutinized the siege; and Israel justified it as a means to prevent arms being smuggled into Gaza. Despite this, the new global attention revealed a new reality in Gaza where normal and regular consumer items were prevented from entry. Some of these prohibited items were spaghetti, jam and children's toys.<sup>449</sup> The breaking story of the Mavi Marmara raid and the Gaza siege attracted front page coverage. Al Jazeera ran numerous stories, commentaries and analyses on the subject. Turkish media focused almost entirely on one story; the Mavi Marmara and the Gaza siege. The scenes on board the attacked humanitarian ship showed a striking contrast between the uniformed military and the killed and injured civilian volunteers.

At the street level in Gaza, the Mavi Marmara meant a renewal of hope for the lifting of the siege and a significant turning point in the long struggle. One Palestinian columnist in Gaza wrote, “the Mavi Marmara is one of the most remarkable incidents of contemporary history ... After a century of humiliation and subordination, the Mavi Marmara renewed the hope (*Tajdid Al Amal*) of challenge, victory and realizing goals”.<sup>450</sup> The writer expressed a Palestinian sentiment of not expecting much from official Arab governments. The fact that the Mavi Marmara hailed from a democratic country with a Muslim majority and in partnership with a global flotilla crewed by members of civil society brought a new and fresh dimension to the struggling Palestinians. As the commentator added, “the Mavi Marmara was about a form of solidarity and morality motivated by brotherhood and human solidarity”.<sup>451</sup>

On the night of the attack on the Mavi Marmara, many Palestinians in Gaza stayed glued to TV screens to remain informed of the developing story. Live coverage reached the living rooms of residents of Gaza as well as the larger Arab audience in the Mashreq and the Maghreb. The hours preceding the attack at four in the morning felt long and tense. From time to time, the Al Jazeera reporter on board provided updates on the activities of the ship and interviewed several people. Meanwhile, people in Gaza held the hope that the Freedom Flotilla would make it safely to the shores of their city. Many thought that could mean the beginning of the breaking of the siege. Expectations were high but many were worried that some danger might be inflicted on the ship on the way; that Israel would attempt to block the way or simply harm the ships and activists. Palestinians are not strangers to such treatment.

To Palestinians, the attack on the Mavi Marmara did not look very different from the violence and military interventions on civilians’ daily life in Gaza or the West Bank, with military checkpoints spreading between towns and villages throughout the latter; although the residents of Gaza face even severer conditions as the siege prevents people from traveling, trading and so on. The sailing of the Free Gaza Flotilla metaphorically faced a sea barrier with deadly consequences. The global participants sailing in the six boats experienced some violent hours and days whereas, as one Turkish woman participant on the Mavi Marmara said, their experience informed them in a deep way as to what Palestinians have been going through for decades.<sup>452</sup> The incident, she said, forced her to reflect and rethink about her own country Turkey and the region generally. She explained further how dangerous and insecure the region seemed to her.

Back in Gaza, immediately after the attack, a number of civil society groups and members of the public organized demonstrations and gatherings. Palestinian civil society activists condemned the attack and demanded the lifting of the siege and free access to the sea from Gaza. Crowds gathered in the Port of Gaza where the Mavi Marmara was supposed to arrive that day. The crowds carried Palestinian, Turkish and other flags of the countries that the international members of the Flotilla came from. Palestinian children threw roses in the sea as a tribute to those killed the night

before. For many Palestinians, what happened on the Mavi Marmara was very painful and sad.

However, following the Mavi Marmara attack, Hamas began to be recognised as a victim of Israeli violence and cruelty. This was to help the Islamic movement ease itself out of political and diplomatic isolation.<sup>453</sup> As stated in an article published months after the incident in the influential American journal, *Foreign Affairs*: “[the raid] accelerated Hamas’s escape from diplomatic isolation with more and more countries casting Hamas as the victim”.<sup>454</sup> The comment indicated further repercussions of the Mavi Marmara as it has always been the aim of Israel’s policy to isolate the Islamic Movement, especially after it won the 2006 Palestinian national elections. The latter therefore presented a prospect that would worry Israel as the new situation would provide Hamas with reinvigorated confidence and improve the Palestinian position in general. Since Hamas’ election to the Palestinian Parliament, Israel became determined to stop the new Palestinian momentum inspired by the democratic results. The siege on Gaza was meant to achieve such a goal and punish the Palestinians for the choice they made in 2006. Four years later, the Mavi Marmara brought the siege to public attention and revealed its story and details. In a sense, the Mavi Marmara was sailing not solely to break a siege imposed on a civilian population but a siege on democracy itself.

As for the reaction of the Palestinian National Authority on the raid, the PNA strongly condemned the attack and President Abbas declared a three day mourning in Palestine. Ziyad Abu Ein, former Palestinian Minister for Jerusalem Affairs declared “We have a crazy leadership in Israel” . A Fatah Parliament member from Gaza condemned the attack and said the world should condemn it.

In commemoration of the event, Palestinians built a large monument at Gaza Port with names of those killed on the Mavi Marmara engraved in marble stones in Arabic and Turkish, along with engravings of the Palestinian and Turkish flags. Palestinian government officials from Hamas and other Palestinian movements attended the anniversaries of the event. On the first anniversary, a high ranking official from Hamas stated that the Palestinian cause was not only a Palestinian one but had become a Turkish and global cause in the pursuit of the end of oppression.<sup>455</sup> Local people attend the event every year in honour of victims of the Mavi Marmara. Children carry signs written in Arabic and Turkish promising not to forget the sacrifices of the activists and throw flowers and roses in the Mediterranean waters in memory of the nine activists who were killed.<sup>456</sup>

During these events, Palestinian human rights activists have called for further legal and political actions. Politically, they called for ending of the illegal siege which constituted a form of collective punishment “prohibited under Article 33 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War”.<sup>457</sup> Gaza activists demanded the international community, as assignees to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to “fulfil their legal and moral obligations, apply the rules

of international law and put a just end to the suffering of the Palestinian people”.<sup>458</sup> A statement was released by the PCHR explaining that, as the UN fact-finding mission on Gaza reported, Israel had managed to escape the consequences of its actions with impunity. The statement explained that escaping legal accountability has been “a key factor in the perpetuation of violence in the region and reoccurrence of violence”.<sup>459</sup> This is why Palestinian human rights groups urged Turkey to conduct a judicial trial against those responsible for the killing on the Mavi Marmara.

Palestinian civil society responded to the Mavi Marmara and played an active role in advocating the rights of victims. The Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), an advocacy organization, well-known locally and internationally, issued a statement right after the raid describing it as “a crime which involved the use of excessive and lethal force and resulted in the killing of nine civilian solidarity activists and the wounding of at least fifty others”.<sup>460</sup> The PCHR referred to what happened as an Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara in international waters whilst it was sailing towards the Gaza Strip with a humanitarian cargo for the residents of Gaza. The advocacy group demanded that “those crimes be fully investigated and those responsible held to account”.<sup>461</sup> The report also demanded that Israel be held responsible for the killing and injuring of human rights activists and that international law be applied and respected.<sup>462</sup>

A couple of years later in May 2012, the PCHR welcomed the indictment by a Turkish court of four senior Israeli military commanders charged for the killing on the Mavi Marmara and demanded that the law be applied and upheld. Following this, on May 26th, 2014, the Istanbul Seventh Court of Serious Crimes issued an arrest order for the four Israeli generals: former Israeli military Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi; Major General Amos Yadlin, Head of the Navy; Vice-Admiral Eliezer Marom; and former head of Military Intelligence, Brigadier General Avishia Lev. The Istanbul court felt it appropriate to request an Interpol Red Notice for the four generals.<sup>463</sup>

As a result of reaction to the incident, both Israel and Egypt came under pressure, thus, easing restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Israel allowed more humanitarian trucks to Gaza, permitting some construction material to enter Gaza. The Egyptian government decided to allow more operational hours at Rafah gate, which used to shut down for weeks on end. After the incident, the border opened five times a week, for the first time in years allowing a minimal level of regularity in border access time. Later, the situation at Rafah improved significantly when Egypt elected its first civilian leader in modern history, Mohammad Mursi. Before being deposed by the military in July 2013, President Mursi allowed the border crossing to open daily without interruptions. Civil society groups from different countries travelled to Gaza freely through the Rafah gate using Cairo International Airport, crossing the Suez Canal and driving through the Sinai Desert to reach Gaza after a five hour drive. Yet, the favourable change at Rafah crossing came to an abrupt end when the Egyptian military seized power on July 3rd, 2013 and the

Rafah crossing immediately stopped operating, the closure being even worse than in Mubarak's days.

Thus, for Palestinians, a new image of Turkey began to materialize after the incident with the realization that Turkey was shifting towards the Palestinians with Erdogan standing out as a defender of a just cause. One Palestinian columnist wrote: "What Turkey has introduced to the Palestinians cause exceeds what the official Arab governments did for us".<sup>464</sup> The contrast could not have been more striking when Mubarak, the leader of the largest and most powerful Arab country, closed the border access against Palestinian civilians while Turkey was continuously demanding the lifting of the siege. Other Arab leaders, including the king of Saudi Arabia, chose to be silent regarding the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Consequently, Erdogan's stature rose to new heights among the Palestinians. Turkish flags and pictures of Prime Minister Erdogan could be seen everywhere in Gaza after the incident: At the Rafah gate itself, two large flags - Palestinian and Turkish - welcomed visitors entering into Gaza from Egypt. On buildings and shops, Turkish flags were to be seen and posters of Erdogan were on display for sale in front of shops. Restaurant and coffee shops in Gaza were named "Freedom Flotilla Cafe", "Istanbul Coffee House" or "Mavi Marmara Café". Palestinians clearly felt connected with Turkey and identified with Erdogan as a leader whom they looked upon as having stood up for them against the unjust international system.

At the beginning of the year 2013, Erdogan announced his intention to visit the Gaza Strip in May of that year. This generated a wide response among Palestinians as well as opposition by other Palestinian groups. The visit was highly anticipated and came as welcome news for the Palestinian populace, especially in Gaza. Hamas considered it a significant political sign, carrying a message regarding lifting the siege and a call for solidarity with the Palestinian cause. However, the Palestinian nationalist Fatah faction protested the visit of Erdogan. Fatah's position highlighted the different political positions between the two largest Palestinian political movements, Hamas and Fatah. Indeed, Fatah condemned the proposed visit by Erdogan, asserting that it did not carry any real prospects for Gaza or lifting the siege. One Fatah representative in Gaza played down the visit as well as other solidarity visits in previous years as nothing but personal public relations stunts without serious political value for lifting the siege or intervening positively in reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas. The Fatah official was careful to point out the good relations between Turkey and the Palestinian Authority, but he questioned why Erdogan did not consult with President Abbas about the visit to Gaza in the first place. "It is unfair for Gaza to become a photo-opportunity setting and be used for personal gratification", the Fatah leader in Gaza said.<sup>465</sup> Describing it as a "mere adventure", he advised the Turkish Prime Minister to change his mind because such visits "consolidate the position of Hamas".<sup>466</sup> From the Palestinian public perspective, the attack against the intended visit by Erdogan represented a shameful outcome. Such reactions exacerbated a general sentiment among Palestinians in Gaza



who perceived the rival political party, Fatah, as a partner in the siege on Gaza. It is an indication of the degree to which internal political decadence had reached a low point. Fatah's position against foreign dignitaries and sympathizers visiting Gaza was shared by Israel as well and, for Palestinians to see the positions of both Israel and Fatah being compatible on this issue, created painful concern. These political differences continued till the reconciliation of the two parties in 2014.

The disparity of attitudes over foreign visits to the besieged Gaza, including the proposed one of Erdogan, reflected a serious lack of ethical politics. One Hamas member of Parliament, Ismail Al Ashqar, denied in early 2013 that foreign visits to Gaza deepened the Palestinian political division. He reasserted that such visits contributed to ending the suffering of people and lifting the siege in the long run, asking: "Does Fatah wish to maintain Gaza as it is?" Al Ashqar continued that Turkey, being an important regional player, had the right to maintain links with the Palestinian cause, its Arab neighbourhood and the larger Muslim world and stated that, "Turkey will always defend the Palestinian cause".<sup>467</sup> Furthermore, Gaza received sympathy from many quarters internationally, Muslim and non-Muslim. The president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, Yousuf Al Qaradawi, and a number of renowned Muslim scholars visited Gaza before the Egyptian military take-over in July 2013. Non-Muslim high profile personalities, such as Jimmy Carter and Naom Chomsky, also visited Gaza. Numerous global civil society organizations visited and presented a moral case which boosted the morale of the civilian population.

In May 2014, Hamas and Fatah announced a reconciliation deal and declared officially the end of the political division that had plagued the Palestinian political domain for seven years. A new unified government was announced based on technocrat officials. This event constituted a major shift in Palestinian politics where for the first time both Fatah and Hamas agreed to work together at governmental level and mend their political differences. As for the planned visit by Erdogan, it never materialized as, by the end of May, 2013, the Gezi Park / Taksim Square pro-democracy demonstrations had taken place causing further political disruption in Turkey. In addition, the military take-over in Egypt in July of the same year, and the subsequent severing of diplomatic ties between Turkey and Egypt, weakened any potential chance of Erdogan visiting Gaza.

To summarise, Palestinians in Gaza had watched the sailing of the Free Gaza Flotilla in the hope that the voyage would crack open the military blockade. In the following days, sympathy was expressed by the Palestinians for the victims and their families, and global media focused attention on the story of the raid attack and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Coming under international scrutiny, Israel eased the blockade and Mubarak's Egypt eased the opening of the border gate at Rafah. Life did not change completely for the entire population of Gaza; however, a partial sense of relief was evident as the blockade eased under the more watchful eye of the world media. The incident helped Hamas to break from the diplomatic isolation imposed since winning the national legislative elections in 2006. Turkey and Erdogan became

the new symbol for standing on the side of justice and for defence of justice for the Palestinians.

### 6.3 Israel and the US

As the news of the Mavi Marmara broke, a crowd of Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv waving flags and banners while others staged a “victory celebration” in front of the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv. These demonstrators saw in the attack on the Mavi Marmara, not only “a victory” against the flotilla, but also a victory for Israel in being able to maintain the blockade against Gaza. On a beachfront near Tel Aviv, demonstrators chanted slogans like “Death to the Arabs!” and “Well done IDF [Israeli Defence Forces]!” in Hebrew. A heated argument erupted when a young woman responded to a man arguing for the blockade, justifying it as preventing “terrorists like Hamas” from “harming Israel”. The young Israeli woman asked in return if every child and woman were terrorists in Gaza. Some of the demonstrators reacted angrily: “You know what Israel army is guilty of? Of not wiping out the whole ship and killing everyone or burning it”, screamed one onlooker. The woman shouted back, “Israel attacked and killed unarmed civilians”. Overwhelmed by demonstrators, they turned and shouted back: “Death to Leftists! Death to Leftists!”<sup>468</sup>

Several hours after the attack, the Mavi Marmara and other Flotilla boats were forced to anchor at the port city of Ashdod, twenty kilometres south of Tel Aviv city. One by one, the Mavi Marmara passengers, Turkish and international, came down from the ship handcuffed, looking tired and exhausted. The Israeli military took the activists to prisons for interrogation and questioning. There were ambulances at the port waiting to carry the dead bodies and the injured. Local and international media also lined up at the port in front of the docked ships when the Israeli military escorted the activists to prisons. One Turkish activist, Mohammad Ali from Istanbul, was shot in the foot during the raid; but the Israelis took him to prison. According to him, he received rough treatment on the way to prison. His injury needed surgery and, although the Israelis offered treatment, the Turkish volunteer refused and insisted on returning back to Turkey for the surgery.<sup>469</sup>

Israeli media reported the story of the Mavi Marmara with headlines such as those in the website of Israel National News: “The IDF’s Naval Commando encountered extreme violent resistance when it boarded the ship and ended up killing nine of the people on board”<sup>470</sup>. Two years later when Israel presented an official apology to Turkey over the Mavi Marmara, a headline read, “National Security Advisor *en route* to Turkey to talk with families of dead terror activists”.<sup>471</sup> The blockade of Gaza was assumed to be justified by reports such as, “the Mavi Marmara was one of six in a flotilla illegally attempting to break Israel’s maritime blockade of Gaza”.<sup>472</sup> Under the title, “Flotilla of Blood”, a propaganda video was released by Israel. It described IHH as using “naive girls” as human shields in the hope that Israel would kill or injure them so that world’s sympathy would be in favour of IHH.<sup>473</sup> In another Israeli report, the incident was referred to as “the Mavi Marmara illegal

flotilla”.<sup>474</sup> A couple of years later, Israeli media would give its narrative of the Mavi Marmara as “the nine dead were among a group of armed men who attacked IDF soldiers boarding the vessel to direct it to Ashdod port”.<sup>475</sup>

Officially, Israel attempted to use diplomatic means via its Foreign Ministry to promote its version of the attack on the Mavi Marmara. The Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, expressed “regret for the loss of life” and stated that Israel had tried all means possible to avoid such result, pointing out that Israel tried to stop “this provocation through diplomatic channels”.<sup>476</sup> He continued by saying that the aim of the organizers was “violent and the result was violent, their method was violent and the result unfortunately violent”.<sup>477</sup>

A document published by Israel’s Foreign Ministry, one month after the attack on the Mavi Marmara, gave the official narrative of the attack. The document said that Israel tried to “control the vessels participating in the flotilla by peaceful means and in an orderly fashion in order to enforce the blockade”.<sup>478</sup> The official statement further described how the incident unfolded by providing a certain version of events. It stated that “Israeli personnel attempting to enforce the blockade were met with violence by the protesters and acted in self-defence to fend off such attacks”.<sup>479</sup>

Israel’s ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, tried to link the flotilla to a terror network. He told US media, “the organization that is leading the effort, has been identified by the CIA as closely linked to Al Qaeda”. The ambassador cited accusations that IHH supporters chanted ‘Death to the Jews’ as the participants boarded the Mavi Marmara. IHH organizers denied that such actions happened. The ambassador added that Israel offered to deliver humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, but the organizers turned down the offer. For their part, however, the organizers repeatedly mentioned the many items that the government of Israel prohibited from entering Gaza

On the other hand, Davutoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister, reacted quite strongly to the incident and the Israeli narrative, stating to the UN assembly after the raid that “Israel no longer has legitimacy in the eyes of the international community”. The Turkish diplomat condemned the attack on the Mavi Marmara and the killing of his fellow countrymen and the injuries to activists, adding: “I am distraught by the fact that Israeli defence forces stormed a multi-national ship with civilians and others, carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in international waters. Israeli actions are in breach of international law”. He added, “in simple terms, it is a tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a state. It has no excuses, no jurisdiction whatsoever. A nation-state that follows this path has lost its legitimacy by the international community”.<sup>480</sup>

Criticism within Israel against the way the Israeli military handled the Mavi Marmara pointed towards a failure in dealing with the flotilla. Uri Avneri, a leading leftist, former member of the Israeli Parliament and a peace activist, was asked the

question: “Are you convinced this was an aid flotilla?” He answered, “No doubt.” Aveneri protested against the Israeli government’s attitude against the flotilla. He suggested that the ships could have been stopped and searched and then allowed to go on.<sup>481</sup> He argued that Israelis should protect Israeli soldiers from the Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, and the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, asserting that in any other country the head of the navy would resign after such consequences as the operation was disastrous.<sup>482</sup>

The Israeli leftist accused the official policymakers of a lack of foresight in dealing with neighbours and regional powers such as Turkey. He described the way Israel was dealing with the Mavi Marmara incident as “stupidity” and causing the resulting negative outcomes with a regionally important country like Turkey. The reference was made in relation to the prospect of losing Turkey as a friend because the military establishment of Turkey had previously enjoyed special relations with its military counterpart in Israel. The criticism pointed out that the move against the Mavi Marmara came at a crucial time for Turkey as a regional superpower when the AKP government wanted to play the role of a mediator between Israel and the Muslim world. A role that seemed to signal a welcoming sign to the majority of people in the region, primarily the Arabs, compared to the passivity of pre-AKP Turkey. After the Mavi Marmara, Israelis began to sense that Turkey was being united, perhaps over decades, against Israel.<sup>483</sup> And that Turkey was gradually moving away from Israel and approaching closer to Iran. For the AKP, the move towards Iran was mainly characterized by mediating between Iran and the West in peacefully resolving the stand-off relating to the nuclear issues and avoiding a military confrontation. Turkey was worried that a violent outcome would engulf the whole region into unimaginable violence, which Turkey was very concerned to avoid. Meanwhile, leftists in Israel began to feel the intensity of global criticism against Israel. With the memory of the ‘Operation Cast Lead’ still fresh, world public opinion began intensifying against Israel for the war on Gaza and the continuing imposition of the blockade. Liberal Jews in the West saw Israel’s behaviour as a disaster; believing that the people in Israel and the government were “moving forward with the blindness of the people of Sodom and that people are oblivious to an outside world which is increasingly hating Israel.”<sup>484</sup>

### *i The Politics of Apology*

Just before boarding his plane back to the US after a visit to Israel in late March, 2013, President Obama reportedly intervened to facilitate a phone call in which Prime Minister Netanyahu apologized to Erdogan. During the phone call, Netanyahu apologized to Erdogan for the killing of the nine Turkish citizens and the harm done to the activists of the Mavi Marmara and the rest of the flotilla.<sup>485</sup> This fulfilled one of three conditions that Turkey had put forward as prerequisites for restoring normal diplomatic relations between the two governments. After the Mavi Marmara incident, Turkey had removed its ambassador and kept diplomatic relations with Israel to their lowest level and it had declared three conditions necessary to restore and normalize

relations with Israel: an apology from Israel, financial compensation to families of victims and the lifting of the siege on Gaza. Netanyahu's apology was the first time that Israel apologised.

However, at the public level, it was reported that most Israelis did not agree with the apology. In the summer of 2013, following the apology, a poll was conducted in which seventy one percent of Israelis were against its having been made since respondents believed that Erdogan's motivation was anti-Semitic.<sup>486</sup> To the majority of Israelis, the apology was new as they were not used to seeing their government express apologies for military actions executed in the past. Israel has always been able to evade international sanctions and escape unpunished for numerous actions involving bombing civilians whether in Lebanon or in Palestine. To the people of the region, Israel's ability to maintain this attitude was possibly mainly due to the immense political cover provided by a number of US administrations.

Israeli leftists provided an intriguing perspective on the apology affair. Aveneri, the leftist former Israeli parliamentary member, published a different account one month after the public announcement of the apology. He claimed that the apology was actually "already formulated more than two years ago", adding that "the Israeli army begged the government to accept it".<sup>487</sup> Moreover, he asserted that the main obstacle against the apology was due to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who vetoed the move. Netanyahu avoided a political showdown with Lieberman as the latter was the chief of a major political party and Netanyahu relied on his support in Parliament. Obama's visit appeared as the right occasion since Obama fits the image of a mediator. But why was the deal announced at the last minute of the US president's visit, only minutes before boarding the plane? According to Aveneri, this seemed to convey that when Netanyahu came to apologize "it was all done on the spur of the moment in a telephone conversation initiated by Obama".<sup>488</sup>

Immediately after the apology was announced publicly in late March, an Israeli Defence Ministry spokesperson stated that a negotiation team was to travel to Ankara.<sup>489</sup> One Israeli media outlet reported that the national security advisor, Yaakov Amidor, was scheduled to travel to Turkey on April 23rd, for "discussions with the relatives of terror-supporting activists who were killed on board the Mavi Marmara".<sup>490</sup> Amidor was to be accompanied by a special envoy, Joseph Ciechanover. Israeli media stated that relatives of the dead activists were demanding one million dollars each; however, the Israeli army replied that Israel was prepared to compensate each family with 150,000 dollars to each family.<sup>491</sup> The same report talked about how high demands by families would "complicate the prospect for restoration of diplomatic relations between the two former allies".<sup>492</sup> According to the Israelis, this concern turned out to be one of the major obstacles in restoring relations. However, the families insisted on their demand for the lifting of the siege as well as the full financial compensation, which Prime Minister Erdogan had consistently demanded in order to restore diplomatic relations with Israel.

Meanwhile, Lieberman, who was known as a right-wing Zionist, reminded Israelis why he was against the move by Israel to apologize to Turkey over the Mavi Marmara affair. He wrote on October 19th, 2013: “My opposition on an apology to Turkey is not new. I expressed it clearly, before and after the fact. I thought and explained it would not lead to an improvement in relations between the countries but only hurt Israel’s status in the area, and play into the hands of the extremist elements in the Middle East, including Turkey, under extremist Islamist Recep Tayyip Erdogan.”<sup>493</sup>

For his part, Erdogan consistently repeated the demand to lift the siege on several occasions in Turkey and on the global stage.<sup>494</sup> Israel rejected the demand arguing that it constituted interference in Israeli internal affairs. Israeli criticism went as far as calling the demand an “indirect attack on its national security.”<sup>495</sup> In retrospect, the demand by Erdogan was the first of its kind in which a regional leader publicly and bluntly spoke of lifting the blockade on Gaza and turned it into a condition for restoring relations with Israel. Not one single Arab government had made such a demand before, although it is true that during Arab summit meetings statements condemning the Israeli blockade had been publicly announced over the previous few years. Thus, extracting an apology from Israel would have a far-reaching effect on the regional stature of Erdogan. Despite that, Israel seemed to focus its attention beyond the apology and towards “a regional power game” that included Iran and Syria where the cooperation of Turkey was desired and sought after by the security establishment in Israel.

Thus, the politics of apology extended beyond the bilateral sphere of Turkey and Israel to include Syria and Iran with significant implications for regional security. As the Assad regime was waging full military power against his own people across Syria, Assad took notice of the apology and strongly condemned both Turkey and Israel, accusing the two governments of plotting to topple him from power. Assad angrily voiced the question, “Why did not Netanyahu apologize in the past years?” “What changed?” The bewildered Syrian president went on, arguing that it was the changing situation in Syria that prompted the apology.<sup>496</sup> As Syrian cities and life were engulfed with regime violence, Assad’s instinct was to cling to power for survival, though at the high cost to civilians since a month after the apology, Israel launched a massive aerial attack on an important military facility in Damascus during the first week of May, 2013. Only a few days after the attack, Israeli officials issued a statement that, beyond a shred of a doubt, indicated the reason why Israel went ahead with the apology to Turkey. The large Israeli daily paper, Yedioth Ahronoth, reported that Israeli political and security officials stated the apology allowed Israel to work more freely in Syria, without fearing a confrontation with Turkey.<sup>497</sup> That day, the people of Damascus woke up in the early morning hours to massive explosions that lit up one part of the city with spectacular fire coming out from the famous Qasioun Mountain overlooking the capital of Syria. Yet, Israeli officials had more in mind than

just Syria. This was Iran. Israel was seeking military cooperation with Turkey against Iran.<sup>498</sup>

Israel did not waste time in eyeing up Turkish military cooperation for future preparations to confront Iran militarily. Thus, immediately after the apology, Israel chose the Chief of National Security, Yakoov Amidor, as the leading negotiator for settling the Mavi Marmara affair with Turkish authorities. The choice of the person for the sensitive mission was significant. Once in Ankara, Amidor made it clear to Turkish authorities of his intentions and demands. One of Israel's largest newspapers followed the visit and reported that the crux of the negotiations "aimed essentially at establishing a strategic offensive force on Turkish soil" before the launching of a military attack on Iran against its nuclear program.<sup>499</sup> During the visit, the high profile military officer suggested the stationing of advanced missile systems to be positioned on the north east of Turkey. Amidor suggested that Ankara was worried about Iranian nuclear weapons. Moreover, Israel wanted to use a Turkish military base, Akenchi, to allow the Israeli air force to access Turkish airspace. In return, Turkish pilots would receive pilot training in Israel.<sup>500</sup> The main issue that Israel was after was the military targeting of Iran.

In Turkey, Erdogan lambasted Israel for the aerial attack against Syria and condemned the attack, labelling it as "absolutely unacceptable".<sup>501</sup> However, despite the condemnation and rhetoric, it was difficult for both governments to ignore what was going on in Syria; even if they did not necessarily concur on many issues. Israel, for its part, could no longer rely on Arab states dictators who had worked closely with Israel before the Arab Spring. The United States was becoming weary and weaker after the two wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. Turkey appeared as an obvious option for Israel to work with and apply policies, especially security ones.<sup>502</sup> The desire for Israel to seek Turkey was clear, however, relations with Turkey had turned bad. Consequently, Israel tried to look for new partners to consolidate security relations with surrounding countries around Turkey, trying to compensate some of the strategic loss with Turkey. However, Turkish long established military cooperation with Israel throughout the past decades could not simply and fully be compensated for by countries like Greece, Azerbaijan or Bulgaria; the strategic weight and importance of Turkey outweighs that of those countries combined.

One Israeli perspective saw that the bilateral problems between Turkey and Israel were bigger than the Mavi Marmara. An editorial in the major Israeli daily, Haaretz, argued that even if the Turkish conditions were met by Israel, the problem remained with the leader of Turkey, Erdogan. Moreover, it suggested, the notion that the Mavi Marmara affair would be ended by the apology was wishful thinking as Turkey was looking for regional leadership. Thus, the Mavi Marmara was seen as an excuse. It stated that Erdogan sees himself as having a leadership role for the Muslim world, a kind of neo-Ottoman Sultan".<sup>503</sup> Furthermore, the Prime Minister of Turkey was considered to be eyeing the presidential post in 2014 and trying to change the Constitution. All that, according to Haaretz, is linked to the rhetoric of the Mavi

Marmara. Thus, a genuine return to bilateral relations between the two countries would be difficult for external and internal reasons for Turkey.<sup>504</sup> This Israeli perspective seems to overlook a new development that has been taking place in Turkey. In Turkey, the Mavi Marmara, to a large extent, forced the people to re-examine the country's position with Israel and the region. It seems unlikely that in the foreseeable future relations with Turkey would return to the pre-Mavi Marmara era. A survey conducted in Turkey, after the Mavi Marmara, indicated that the majority of respondents considered Israel as a strategic threat to Turkey.<sup>505</sup> However, Israel tends to ignore public sentiment preferring to rely more on hard-core institutions of power, mainly the security and military elites. Israel prefers to see the region through the scope of military and economic activities. For example, the peace treaty with Egypt, the Camp David Accords, stayed within the confines of state control and elitist diplomacy; Egyptians and Israelis never really experienced public exchange and cooperation at meaningful level publicly. Thus, relations have been described between Israel and Egypt as cold and the two countries have remained alienated from one another for the past few decades. With Turkey, a similar discourse could prevail in defining a 'cold peace' between Turkey and Israel despite increasing trade relations. The Mavi Marmara incident compelled large segments of society in a country known for its patriotism to reflect and question future relations with Israel.

Aside from the apology, differences between Turkey and Israel continued over the remaining two conditions; compensation and lifting the siege on Gaza. On the compensation issue, the two negotiating teams met and discussed the issue.<sup>506</sup> At one point in the negotiations, Turkish officials warned Israel regarding the ongoing talks, indicating frustration over the way the negotiations were proceeding. The warning stated that "[Israel] must not engage in any horse trading in discussing compensation for the Mavi Marmara raid".<sup>507</sup> Turkish families of victims stated clearly over and over that compensation talks with Israel would be meaningless without lifting the siege and refused to drop the lawsuit against Israeli military commanders until their demands were met. However, the Turkish government announced that it would not seek the consent of the families in its negotiations with Israel. The Turkish officials, according to a report by Today's Zaman, the Turkish daily, stated that the lawsuit would be dropped unless the two countries reached a consensus.<sup>508</sup> Dropping the lawsuit was backed by a Constitution article according to the Turkish daily, which stated that "the Turkish Constitution makes it clear beyond reasonable doubt that if there is a contradiction between laws and international treaties in the case of legal disputes, the superiority of the latter is unquestionable".<sup>509</sup> But, the families of victims remained steadfast in upholding their position.

IHH reacted swiftly in response to the prospect of dropping charges against Israeli military officers. The leader of IHH, Bulent Yildirim, announced at a press conference that, "no one has the right to do so. The people of Turkey, of the world, will not let this happen. We will not let this happen."<sup>510</sup> As the organizer of the Mavi Marmara, IHH communicated with media about the victims' frustration with the slow



procedures of the court and the worrying potential of the Turkish government to ignore the conditions of compensation and lifting the siege on Gaza. Reports were circulated at that time, around summer of 2013, that the government might strike a deal with Israel, compromising the two remaining conditions. IHH protested, stating Israel was behaving with disrespect to any judicial system by “killing anyone and not getting punished for it”. Especially since the Mavi Marmara case has such a large amount of evidence and witnesses. As the leader of IHH asked: “Israel murdered nine people live on TV. What other evidence is the court waiting for?”<sup>511</sup>

Thus, in 2012, sensing a possible impasse with Turkey, Israel looked for new strategic partners beyond the immediate region. Thus, it worked to establish new partnerships with Greece, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and India.<sup>512</sup> The Jerusalem Post in Israel reported on the “rebirth of Israel’s so called periphery doctrine”.<sup>513</sup> This was a strategy of Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister, who had attempted to look for partners beyond the Arab world, such as the Shah of Iran and Turkey. Leiberman, the Israeli Foreign Minister, called such strategic moves, “achievements”. However, what had followed this policy was new arms deals with countries described by Israel as periphery.<sup>514</sup>

Therefore, the Israeli government concluded new arms and trade deals with Greece and Azerbaijan. The Greek authorities bought four hundred Israeli bomb-precision upgrade kit systems at a cost of 150 million dollars. On trade issues, Israel announced, through its Energy Minister, Uzi Landau, the “axis of Greece, Israel and Cyprus” in exploring and utilizing the newly discovered gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean Sea; a move that would alarm and prompt the Turkish side to act. As to Azerbaijan, it has become one of Israel’s top five trading partners. Currently, Israel buys forty percent of its energy from Azerbaijan. The two governments signed a weapons deal of 1.6 billion dollars whereby Israel was to provide drones and missile systems to Azerbaijan. The new deals provoked anger from the Azerbaijan’s neighbours, especially Iran who condemned the policy of Azerbaijan. On Israel’s part, it was a message of defiance to Turkey in strengthening relations with Turkey’s immediate neighbours. Despite that, strategic relations with Turkey cannot be replaced by smaller and more distant countries like Greece and Azerbaijan. Thus, the Mavi Marmara appeared to have changed the dynamics of the geopolitical configuration of the region. Through the incident and its ramifications, national, regional and global civil society demonstrated a fresh and important role in influencing regional politics and dynamics. The US felt pressured to intervene to play a role between its close allies; Israel and Turkey. The apology may have been uttered for various political considerations; but the trajectory of bilateral relations would need the US to attempt to intervene in the dispute.

## *ii The US Reaction*

The official reaction of the US was mild in tone and fell short of a condemnation of the killings. President Obama expressed regret over what happened and asked for an investigation on the matter. The US reaction, in general, was described as a “mild display of concern”.<sup>515</sup> In addition, President Obama urged for “a new approach to Gaza”.<sup>516</sup> The US Senate did not comment on the Mavi Marmara travesty but it urged the White House to investigate IHH itself. Eighty-seven US senators signed a letter on June 21st, asking the White House about the possibility of designating IHH as a “foreign terrorist organization”.<sup>517</sup> The senators deferred to Israel’s view that IHH was supporting Hamas and the charity organization had links with Al Qaeda.<sup>518</sup> IHH in Istanbul defended its position as a humanitarian NGO helping people in many countries all over the world but the Senate insisted on linking IHH to terrorism; a move greatly influenced by the pro-Israel lobbying of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the American media. It is worth mentioning that the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, condemned the raid in clearer terms than those of the Americans, saying, “it was completely unacceptable”.<sup>519</sup> The American political establishment, however, appeared offended by the Mavi Marmara incident, and by watching its ally, Israel, being condemned by many sides at a global level. In response, the Congress tried to do whatever possible to politically protect Israel at this juncture. Ultimately, the US began to re-reconsider its bilateral relations with Turkey.

Thus, on the bilateral military level, cooperation between the US and Turkey began to experience a certain level of deterioration after the Mavi Marmara. Turkish newspapers, such as the Daily Taraf and Today’s Zaman, reported that the US had cancelled the delivery to Turkey of ten Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), known as drones, making clear the importance of these to Turkey in combating terrorism.<sup>520</sup> The US congress cancelled the deal claiming that the chief of Turkish Intelligence, Hakan Fidan, disclosed the identity of ten Iranians who were allegedly working for Mossad, Israel’s spying agency.<sup>521</sup> The US questions regarding Fidan can be traced back to the incident of the Mavi Marmara when the Turkish National Intelligence Organization, (MIT), decided to suspend relations with Mossad because of the raid. Following this, the MIT allegedly shared information about the Israeli agency with Iran.<sup>522</sup> In response, the US Congress decided not to accept Ankara’s request for drones. In Turkey, the cancelation was perceived as a punishment against Turkey and the Mavi Marmara.

In spite of the claims expressed by Congress, the US government, particularly the State Department, wished to play down the affair. It stressed that Turkey was a close ally of the US and that the two countries had worked together on various issues, chief among them counter terrorism. Eventually, however, the decision by Congress held force and the UAVs soon became an important “tactical weapon”, not only in Turkey, but around the world in the field of “counter terrorism”.<sup>523</sup> Within Turkey, some saw the latest US Congress actions as revenge, attempting to tarnish the

country's international image. The government of Turkey appeared to be blamed for triggering the Mavi Marmara expedition to confront Israel.<sup>524</sup>

US Foreign Secretary, John Kerry, visited Turkey in April 2013 after the Israeli apology. During a press conference in Istanbul, the issue of the Mavi Marmara was dominant. Kerry expressed sympathy with the victims of those killed on the Mavi Marmara. He went further by expressing empathy with the victims' families, showing understanding for their grief and drawing a comparison with the victims of the Boston marathon terrorist attack earlier that same year. In this respect, Kerry said, "And nobody -- I mean, I have just been through the week of Boston and I have deep feelings for what happens when you have violence and something happens and you lose people that are near and dear to you. It affects a community, it affects a country. We're very sensitive to that."<sup>525</sup> It was a sign of compassion from the US diplomat, at the same time aiming at restoring relations with Turkey with a personal touch on the whole affair. But, Kerry's comments were met with anger in Israel.<sup>526</sup>

"Kerry on LSD when he linked the Islamic genocidal terrorist murderers to the Boston Marathon", responded one Israeli columnist.<sup>527</sup> Kerry's comments were described as a "jarring comparison" between those victims of IHH and the Boston marathon. The attack on Kerry went on by accusing the American Foreign Secretary as likening the Israeli military to the Islamic Boston marathon terrorists. The critics dug into Kerry's past, accusing him of committing personal atrocities during his military service in Vietnam. The Times of Israel waged another inflammatory attack against Kerry: "It is never helpful when a moral equivalency is made confusing terrorists with their victims as our American friends were made all too aware once again last week, the only way to deal with the evils of terrorism is to wage an unrelenting war against its perpetrators wherever they may be."<sup>528</sup> The paper described Kerry as being confused about the Turkish victims being terrorists. On a pro-Israeli site in the US, the Blaze, a headline read, "Kerry slammed for comparing Families of Gaza Flotilla incident with Boston Bombing Families".<sup>529</sup> The site went on to accuse Kerry of ignorance and that his statements would encourage the Turks not to be reconciled with Israel. The commentary then asked, "Would Americans accept an apology from those who staged the Boston attack?" And answered "Of course not".<sup>530</sup>

This can be seen as a battle over control of the narrative of the Mavi Marmara. Pro-Israeli groups in the US remained vigilant to serve the interests of Israel in promoting a certain narrative over the Mavi Marmara. One American writer commented on the criticism against Kerry, saying "[Kerry] forgot rule number one; never question the sacred Israeli narrative".<sup>531</sup> The critic continued, "Kerry questioned one verse in one chapter from the book of the Sacred Israeli Narrative".<sup>532</sup> For the Palestinians, the battle for the quest of telling their own narrative has been a struggle for more than sixty years.

A few days after his statements, Kerry urged Prime Minister Erdogan to delay visiting Gaza during the summer of 2013.<sup>533</sup> Ever since the Mavi Marmara, Erdogan made it a point to highlight the crisis in Gaza and, at the beginning of 2013, the Turkish leader had announced his intention to visit Gaza under siege; a move that would certainly become a milestone event for the Palestinians and the region at large. Sensing the visit's implication in terms of undermining Israel's siege on Gaza, the US worked to derail this intended visit. When Kerry expressed his concerns for Israel by asking the Turkish leader to postpone his visit, Erdogan responded in characteristic manner: "I will be going to Gaza",<sup>534</sup> adding that Kerry's remarks were "not nice".<sup>535</sup> For Kerry's part, the US diplomat justified his position by saying that the timing of the trip would jeopardize the prospects of the peace process; Erdogan's visit might be seen as a distraction to the peace efforts. However, the peace process has been going on since 1994. To the Palestinians, the US has had all the time needed to seal a deal but it has never materialized. By May of 2014, after numerous visits to Israel and with an immense amount of time and energy, the American Foreign Secretary announced that the peace negotiations were about to fail. Prior to that, in May 2013, Erdogan had wanted to use his political weight to facilitate the lifting of the siege. However, his visit to Gaza did not materialize due to both internal and external political developments taking place from the Gezi Park protest in Turkey to severed relations with Egypt.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: Global Civil Society and Future Prospects**

The Mavi Marmara challenged the status quo of the West and Israel using the tools and means of civil society. Such an achievement may carry serious concerns among the elite establishment of the West. The sailing implied new possibilities for Palestinians to embark on a course to a new wider horizon by connecting directly with the larger social forces at Muslim and global levels. In more mundane terms, the sailing also opened the possibility of connecting physically by sea with the outside world. The sea outlet has been closed off to Palestinians since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967, including the fishermen in Gaza who have been restricted to a three-mile fishing zone. For decades, the exercise of exit and entry for Palestinians has been entirely up to Israeli decisions. The ships of the flotilla presented a turning point that threatened the Israelis' absolute control over the civilian population. When an occupying power becomes accustomed to absolute military control over a civilian population, it is harder to let go of the control. Such a controlling power acts frantically once a crack of the light of freedom glimmers on the horizon. Here, the questions are: Is there going to be a post-Mavi Marmara legacy? Has civil society, Muslim and non-Muslim, opened up the possibility of widening the crack for freedom by utilizing the means of civil society? How are the Palestinians going to meet the challenges and opportunities made available by Muslim and global civil societies? It is a prospect that could carry a viable potential for shaping a just future vision for Palestine and the region through Muslim and global societies.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

#### 7.0 Introduction

This research project was started a few months before the wave of change, known as the Arab Spring, which swept through much of the Arab world in early 2011. Mass public protests began in Tunisia and peaceful demonstrations followed in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. For the first time, the common people became a crucial factor in politics and events in the region.

The research focused mainly on the contemporary situation in Turkey through a case study of the Mavi Marmara incident. At the time of the expedition, Arab countries were looking on Turkey as a "model" or "example". The Mavi Marmara became the flagship of the Freedom Flotilla in May, 2010, aiming to sail straight to the shores of Gaza, Palestine, to deliver humanitarian aid and break the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip. This was the first time since 1967 that a civil society-based actor tried to sail directly to the Gaza coast. Consequently, Turkey became perceived by the people of the neighbouring regions, especially the restless Arab youth, as an important example of a country with a civil society that played a significant role, domestically, in the democratization process and, globally, in the field of humanitarian work and human rights.

In Gaza, two wars erupted during the process of this research; the Israeli siege on Gaza being one of the main reasons for these recent wars and other outbreaks of violence. The Freedom Flotilla tried to break both the siege and the concomitant political deadlock by using civil society means to relieve the mounting pressure on the Palestinian civilians, which was particularly harsh after the war of December 2008 - January 2009. Since then, two more wars have followed, in 2012 and 2014, exacerbating the immense humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Currently, after seven years of military siege and three wars, the Palestinians continue to demand freedom, including the lifting of the siege, the opening of border crossings and the use of the seaport and airport. The war that continued for fifty-one days during the summer of 2014 was the longest of all Israeli-Arab conflicts. Despite that, the same situation and conditions remained almost unchanged, continuing to threaten the security and the possibility of a peaceful outcome. The lifting of the siege remains the Palestinians' most important demand.

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla, in collaboration with global civil society, suggested an alternative way to break the siege on Gaza using civilian ships carrying volunteers, journalists, activists and humanitarian aid. However, dramatic events

unfolded on the international waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The incident is highly relevant to the role of Muslim civil society, involving both its transnational role in the region and collaboration with global civil society. This not only reinforced the image of Turkey as having a vibrant civil society, impressive economic success and a viable democratisation process; more importantly, particularly in the context of this thesis, it also illustrated how Muslim values played a visible and significant role in the newly emerging Turkey. Civil society manifestly played a crucial role in this and, consequently, the new Turkey and the Mavi Marmara with its quest to aid the Palestinians and challenge the siege, appealed to the people of the region. This concluding chapter discusses the findings of the research and expands upon their significance.

### **7.1 Diversity of Muslim Civil Society in Turkey**

When discussing civil society in Turkey, one cannot overlook the internal dynamics whereby society has played a decisive role in shaping the Turkish domestic polity and external outlook. In this respect, a people-centred approach is the key to understanding the changes in Turkey and perhaps, albeit more recently, those in the surrounding region. This approach is well expressed in the civil society organisations and NGOs experiencing a significant increase within Turkey, and also extending humanitarian relief and development aid transnationally. At the heart of the civil society phenomenon in Turkey is the revival of Islamic values, ethics and morality. Modern Turkish scholars and activists, such as Said Nursi, Fethullah Gulen and Necmettin Erbakan articulated the Islamic teachings that nourish the individual's spirituality and value system. The internal transformation of individuals' values is understood to be the start of more far-reaching change. Social and religious movements have joined the revival of the Islamic values of responsibility, mutual assistance, mercy, defending the weak and justice. Such movements include the Sufi order of Naqshbandi, the Gulen Movement, Milli Gorus and others. Decades of tremendous effort during the turbulent twentieth century have been exerted in rebuilding the individual as well as society. The goal is to create a synthesis between Islam and modernity by mitigating problems in state-society relations by increasing political participation, reinvigorating Islamic values, tackling modern consumerism and enlarging society for self-empowerment and establishing justice within society. Such changes were also intended to transform society beyond Turkey in the neighbouring regions, particularly in relation to the Palestinian issue.

Turkish civil society demonstrates the significant implications of these, which are particularly relevant to countries in the Muslim world. As many Muslim societies are undergoing change and reforms, the issues raised by the debate between secularist and Islamic discourses currently occupy a central place in the course of events. The case of Turkey is notable because secularism is clearly defined as the guiding ideology of the state. The Constitution is secular and the state administration accords with this. Moreover, the dichotomy between secularism and Islam presents a clear

contrast in the Turkish setting. The process of engagement between the two sets of values has revealed lessons and events to learn from and reflect upon. Muslim civil society began the process of change through grassroots activities that included self-empowerment and mobilizing people for a larger share of public space. Thus, Islamic discourse in Turkey came to the forefront in support of democratization and social change in Turkey. Islamic civil society organizations became active in numerous areas from politics and social services to humanitarian relief and development, seeking to create the necessary social cohesion from grassroots levels. After decades of a military-dominated nation-state and top-down administrative policies, civil society has responded to consolidate the various ethnic and religious communities in the country. Yet, differences circumscribe Turkish Muslim civil society and polity, as discussed below.

The political process in Turkey is currently progressing along four main lines; Kemalist-Nationalist, Islamist, Islamic, and the centre-right. Kemalists are known as ideologically secularist whilst the Islamist approach is often identified with the followers and supporters of the late Necmettin Erbakan, founder of the Milli Gorus movement, since their political opinions and outlook are seen as reflecting Islamist views. The Justice and Development Party is a centre-right party with a Turkish agenda that is sympathetic to Islam. The Gulen Movement defines itself as an "Islamic discourse" and considers Islam important to society and people's values. In this, it includes Sharia as important to the state but believes the government should function through civic politics based on practical ways of governance. Despite that, politics in Turkey is both pervaded with Islamic values and clearly defined by them. Consequently, the Turkish polity is progressing towards accommodating Islamic values but not to becoming an Islamic state. In light of this, careful references are used to distinguish between Islamist and Islamic approaches, and between secular and secularist. These distinctions are crucial to an understanding of the ongoing civil and political debates within Turkish society.

The National Outlook, or Milli Gorus, faded away due to its perceived Islamist agenda because the Turkish electoral majority declined to be locked between two opposing ideologies, secularist or Islamist. Similarly, the Kemalists lost popularity and, consequently, the AKP has gained a majority in Turkish elections over the last decade. The current president of Turkey, Erdogan, and the party of the AKP can be compared to the late Adnan Menderes and the Democratic Party of the 1960s; both were democratically elected and worked towards a government with less ideology and more pragmatism.

The Mavi Marmara expedition illuminates the emerging role of Turkish civil society beyond Turkish borders. While much attention has been paid to the internal role of civil society within Turkey in terms of democratization and humanitarian activism in the country, the incident represents a defining moment for the transnational role of Turkish civil society outside its national borders; namely, that it takes the role played by civil society one step further, that is, into the arena of human

rights and the related political sphere. Thus, this defining moment relates to how Turkish people envision Turkey's place in the world, now and in the future. The Palestinian question is an integral part of Turkish society for historical, religious and cultural reasons. Despite the fact that the Palestinian question is known to be deeply part of Turkish society, secularists, Islamists and Islamic organizations hold differing views on the issue. The revival of Muslim values led to the formation of proactive NGOs and this resurgence of civil activities motivated people to connect with other Muslim societies outside Turkey. The plight of the Palestinians motivated such NGOs/activists to organize humanitarian and development projects in Gaza and the West Bank. Consequently, the Palestinian issue was brought back into Turkish society and became more significant with the increase in democratization and the expansion of civil society. Thus, the Mavi Marmara incident can be well understood within the context of social change in contemporary Turkey.

## **7.2 The Significance of the Mavi Marmara Flotilla**

The Turkish civil organization, IHH, played a role that can be described as transnational on three levels; humanitarian, developmental and political - or, more specifically, that of human rights. This may seem a wide range of responsibilities for one NGO. Clearly, the title of the organization, the Foundation for Freedom, Human Rights and Humanitarian Relief, indicates both the humanitarian and the political. IHH relies greatly on its religious and human capital for its activism which is widespread at the local level. Islamic values provide a central impetus for its workforce, volunteers and local supporters and donors, who are aware and supportive of the three levels of activity of the organization. Further, the three levels are a reflection of how the local communities perceive "good work", be it charity work or good deeds, etc. As manifested in charity work, good work to a Muslim first and foremost means lifting oppression. However, invoking fairness and equality requires the ability to implement a different way of thinking, a new approach. Due to this, some NGOs, such as Kimsu Yok Mu of the Gulen Movement, might find the actions and attitudes of IHH too political, aggressive or out of sync with the contemporary norms.

IHH saw the siege on Gaza as a simple question: Why keep a civilian population dependent on humanitarian aid while no one attempts to bring an end to an illegal siege? In answer to this, the NGO became the main organizer of the Mavi Marmara. Sailing directly towards the coast of Gaza, IHH knew that it was heading towards a confrontation with Israel but not to the level of expecting that several people would be killed. An attack by the Israelis was predicted, which is why the Mavi Marmara ship carried a large number of media personnel and outlets. Some kind of violent outcome was predictable and IHH wanted to ensure the world should see it. Provocation was an aspect of the incident manifest on the part of both Israel and the Flotilla. IHH challenged and Israel reacted with lethal fire. Nine Turkish citizens were



killed and tens injured. Pondering the aftermath, how might it have been done in a better way?

The Mavi Marmara caused much internal argument and passionate debate within Turkey, which reflected the social and political realities of the country. Even among Islamic movements inside Turkey, opinions differed with regard to the incident. The Gulen Movement criticized IHH and viewed the challenge of breaking the siege as too political and dangerous. In particular, the well documented views of Fethullah Gulen, caused a sharp debate between IHH and Kimsu Yok Mu. Although both organisations are similar in their methods of generating funding from communities across Turkey and of implementation of humanitarian programs, IHH holds political issues relating to human rights close to the heart, while, Kimsu Yok Mu focuses solely on humanitarian activities and avoids politics. Yet, the question of Palestine is highly political. Considering the situation, it would be difficult for a Muslim to remain neutral on the issue. Thus, what is the way forward? What is the best path for a Muslim NGO to take? Is the IHH approach the right way? As an Islamic organisation that chooses to avoid politicized issues like human rights, the Gulen Movement took a contrary perspective to IHH on the Mavi Marmara. However, such differences demonstrate a healthy diversity among Islamic civil society organizations.

Moreover, the differences among the various civil players illustrate the diversity of actors within Turkish civil society that are competing and aspiring to influence the identity of the future Turkey. The AKP looks towards the neighbourhood of the Arab world as well as a multi-polar world rather than focusing on joining the EU, while the Gulen Movement sees Turkey's future identity very differently, seeking to anchor Turkey in Europe whilst being Islamic in lifestyle. Such discussions are certainly bound to create sharp disputes among the many social actors involved; each envisioning Turkey differently. Thus, the Mavi Marmara expedition became part of, and intensified, this complicated debate.

In fact, the Flotilla brought the possibility of a new approach to mitigating and solving the complex issues surrounding the Palestinian question; and the prospect of such a civil alternative may have provoked or even unsettled the conservative political establishment at international and global level. One cannot ignore that fact that the Arab/Israeli conflict has persisted from crisis to crisis and consumed generations of different leaders. Are global civil society and the effects of the Mavi Marmara able to introduce new changes? In relation to this, Muslims cannot deny their share of reactionary tendencies evident in the presence of absolutist monarchies and political oppression. However, Muslim societies are much more than a monarch or sultan. People matter and count within Islamic societies, particularly so in a globalized age. Societies and social forms of living experience constant change. Moreover, Islam traditionally sees beyond the restricted boundaries of a nation-state. We see our contemporary world attest to a similar understanding where national borders gradually fade away within globalization. We seem to be evolving much as "communities" do,

existing as individuals in this vast world and yet affecting each other directly and indirectly. The sailing of the Mavi Marmara can be seen as representing how far global "communities" in their various manifestations can transcend borderlines and connect with a fellow community under oppression. The Mavi Marmara was, in a sense, a floating village sailing with the intention of relieving another oppressed fellow community. Those men and woman on board sailed to save trapped people from a land-based piracy. Yet, the political waters seemed more treacherous than those of the open sea. However, for the first time in the recent history of the region, a non-state actor, a civil society organization, was able to challenge the status quo in a political arena where states traditionally wield almost complete control over the course of events.

The Mavi Marmara brought the attention of world media and shed a light on the siege of Gaza as well as on the urgent issues of the humanitarian crisis and political impasse, whilst also questioning the legality of the siege itself. After the Mavi Marmara, the blockade was weakened from both the Israeli and the Egyptian sides. Israel felt intense global pressure against its policy of the imposition of the blockade as the fate of the flotilla highlighted the injustice inflicted on the Palestinians. The sheer number of activists and diversity of the participants and organizations involved made the Mavi Marmara a significant turning point. Thus, the world began to be aware of Gaza as an area subjected to a stringent, military siege. In addition, a new perception surfaced with the realization that a new Turkish role was materializing, and leaning towards Palestine.

In undertaking the expedition, Muslim civil society and its global counterparts worked on consolidating a global network of humanitarian and development activities in order to answer the needs of those besieged in the Gaza Strip. The Mavi Marmara represented a wide array of global activists, expressing the "horizontal" nature of the international civil community. For the Palestinians, they saw this type of international activity as a demand for the lifting of the siege. The opposition is defined with Palestinian and global society, local communities and the Freedom Flotilla, on one side, and the government of Israel and those of the US, the EU and others who followed suit, on the other. Non-state actors, like IHH and the Flotilla, can often influence strategic options. The Mavi Marmara highlighted the idea that individuals and communities shared much in common despite differences in religion, nationality or ethnicity.

The Palestinian issue has been used politically by surrounding Arab regimes. In Egypt, despite the crackdown on democracy and the abuse of human rights, the regime found room to manoeuvre so as to use the Palestinian question as part of a political game that legitimized the government in the eyes of the Egyptian public and the wider Arab community. Egypt pursued a mediating function to claim its "traditional" role as a power broker in Palestinian affairs, bringing it both prestige and legitimacy. Arab regimes, whether dictatorship republics or absolute monarchies, have always used the Palestinian cause as a political pawn to serve their own ends,

while asserting their own high-handed internal security against their people ostensibly to defend their nations from enemies. Syria is an example of this in its positioning itself as a pivotal support for the Palestinians and advocating resistance against Israel, yet, committing horrific crimes against its own population.

### **7.3 Envisioning the Muslim Role in a Globalised World**

The future of the Muslim world needs to be envisioned by Muslims on the premise of both the optimism and the reality of the “possible”. This requires encouraging the necessary intellectual skills and socio-political tools to adequately assess the contemporary global situation without compromising the potentiality of the moral and ethical character of Islam to contribute to the wellbeing of the human community. World affairs are largely administered according to concepts relating to the nation-state which date back over several hundred years. However, contemporary reality with its concomitant accelerated globalization is bringing the conventional wisdom and legitimacy of the nation-state and its borders into question. Can the concept of the nation-state, from the most powerful to the most inadequate, keep up with this enormous increasing interconnectedness? In relation to this uncertainty, while Muslims relate to and live in nation-states, to dismiss the larger Muslim identity that transcends these would be to overlook the global characteristic of Islam. The present personal identity of a Muslim comprises both the national and the Muslim. Historically, Islam is more of a society than a state or government, whereby the related social institutions, from the purely religious to social support facilities, operate, function and are funded independently from the state.

Muslims and non-Muslims often enter into debates about Islamist concepts like the ‘Umma’ and ‘Khalife’ restoring past empires and such like. Such terms have brought confusion and misunderstandings that can lead to internal strife within the Muslim world, as well as distrust by non-Muslims. Muslims, for their part, bear a responsibility to define the changes necessary within their own countries. These are far-reaching since most Muslim governments are either authoritarian or weak. Moreover, many are backed and supported by the West and the United States. The modern nation-state may be described as being in collapse; modern society is in disarray. In Syria, for example, people are brutally massacred and destroyed as global powers fight over geopolitical interests on Syrian turf. Palestinians remain oppressed under an illegal Israeli military occupation despite tens of UN resolutions which fail to be implemented. Moreover, to cover up injustices, now, is to ferment bigger injustices for the future. Clearly, people whose “hands are in fire”, that is, the oppressed, cannot afford the luxuries of those with their “hands in water”, that is, the rest. Hence, the dangers and risks to individuals in Gaza and to Palestinian society’s security are liable to create repercussions on a global scale. The international community needs to be re-appropriated back to the people; to the common societies of different nations in order for the people to fully exercise their rights and duties as global citizens. To be effective, the ownership of a meaningful international

community should belong largely to non-state actors. Thus, social groupings in their various forms of associations, NGOs and civil society organizations pave the way for a leading role of civil society in this. To maintain and sustain the necessary momentum, non-state actors need to focus on society's resources. The more independent material resources are from the state the less dependent non-state actors become. In Turkey, the rise of the AKP expressed some of the possibilities of civil society power in terms of the transition to democracy and social empowerment.

#### **7.4 Gaps in research and suggestions for future research**

The research did not cover the legal battle between IHH and Israel which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover, there is a need to study the global networking whereby IHH, and similar Muslim NGOs, collaborate and establish partnerships with non-Muslim NGOs. Moreover, the research could not cover the important topic of the Islamic spiritual and historical social roots supporting social justice. It would be interesting to study more about historical figures like Al Ghazali and his call for the security of society or "social security" as far back as the twelfth century. He argued that the wellbeing of spirituality alone cannot be achieved without establishing a just system for people and fairness in life. Islamic history is rich in scholarly work, like that of Al Ghazali, on Islamic institutions and foundations, such as waqf, that contributed to the independence of society and the development of social justice, equality and social peace.

One important area of research that would be relevant for further examination is the larger aspect of the democratization process in Turkey and the role of civil society in this. It would be interesting to look at how Muslim civil society is tackling the sensitive issue of minorities in Turkish society as part of the ongoing democratization process, particularly the Kurdish issue. The role of civil society in regard to this needs to be explored in order to understand how NGOs in Turkey are dealing with vital issues such as internal social cohesion, pluralism and solving development problems in marginalized areas like the east of Turkey. This would be especially beneficial for civil society organizations in Arab countries where sectarian violence is erupting, such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The fact that the Kurdish question in Turkey is progressing is significant as, for many decades, the turbulent relations between Turkey and its Kurdish minorities had seemed impossible to resolve. In this respect, recent Turkish commentators and scholars are pointing towards active Islamic NGOs as being able to fulfil a leading role in implementing social service programs in the Kurdish eastern parts of Turkey.

Furthermore, contemporary development practice has proven its shortcomings in terms of people's dependency on aid and the drastic effects on the integrity of national institutions being entangled in the politics of foreign aid and corruption. Consequently, development agencies need to look for alternatives. Official bilateral

aid can be politicized and subject to abuse through corruption. However, in seeking new partnerships with local societies, development agencies can implement development plans and gain many concrete advantages: needing less financial sources when teaming with local NGOs, including Islamic NGOs, and winning the trust of local communities. The deteriorating social conditions in much of the Muslim world demand a sense of urgency in further investigating the field of Islamic economics and its link to development in its fold; the promotion of social justice and the progress of infrastructure. The value of justice is of vital importance in Islam; thus, scholars need to link this with practical application in an economy that aims at social justice and economic wellbeing. Equally important is study of the historical backgrounds of Islamic local governance. This could further understanding of how communities can depend on their own means for local development by relying on Islamic principles of mutual trust, solidarity and common welfare.

## Notes

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- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.14
- <sup>19</sup> Hanafi Hasan. 'A Reflective Islamic Approach', in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*. Edited by Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka, Princeton University, 2001, p.182
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.182
- <sup>21</sup> Tamimi, 2001, p.4
- <sup>22</sup> Zakat means alms giving. It is one of the five pillars of Islam where a Muslim must pay annually 2.5% on savings of more than one year.
- <sup>23</sup> Esposito, 1992, p.209
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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.65
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.66
- <sup>32</sup> *Al Namouthaj al Turki* refers to harmonizing Islamic values with the political process and the business of government. It involves a participating civil society and less confrontational and violent political development and economic progress.
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- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>37</sup> Munir Baalbaki and Rohi Baalbaki. *Al-Mawrid Dictionary: English-Arabic, Arabic-English*. Beirut, Dar Ilm Lilmalyeen, 2003, p.528
- <sup>38</sup> Qaradawi, 2008, pp.25-26
- <sup>39</sup> Quran 22:77.

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- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 3:115.
- <sup>41</sup>Quran.muslim-web.com Available at <http://quran.muslim-web.com/?lang=en>.
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- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp45-46.
- <sup>46</sup> Quran 2:265.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid.,2:261.
- <sup>48</sup>Qaradawi, 2008 pp33-45.
- <sup>49</sup> Quran 3: 92.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., 47.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., 47.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid., 2:2-3.
- <sup>53</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.46.
- <sup>54</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.47.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p.46.
- <sup>56</sup> Quran 34:39.
- <sup>57</sup> Quran 16:97.
- <sup>58</sup> Quran 3:133-134.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 3:14.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 23:61.
- <sup>61</sup> Quran 76: 8-9.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid., 28.
- <sup>63</sup>Quran 99-7.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., 4:40.
- <sup>65</sup>Sahih Bukhari, Book 73, Hadith No. 52. Available at <http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith>.
- <sup>66</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.42.
- <sup>67</sup> Bukhari, Hadith No. 870. Available at <http://sunnah.quran.com/view/urn/25340>.
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- <sup>69</sup>Qaradawi, 2008.p.29.
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- <sup>71</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.29.
- <sup>72</sup> Quran 18:95.
- <sup>73</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book 43, Hadith No. 626. Available at <http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith>.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid., 3:104.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., 107:1-3.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid., 69:33-34.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., 89:17-18.
- <sup>78</sup>Qaradawi, 2008.p.28.
- <sup>79</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.29.
- <sup>80</sup> Quran 68:10-12.
- <sup>81</sup>Quran 68:12
- <sup>82</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, p.35.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid., p.35.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>85</sup>Masnad, Hadith No. 1454, Available at <http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith>.
- <sup>86</sup> Quran (60: 8)
- <sup>87</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, pp36-37.
- <sup>88</sup>Bukhari, Hadith No. 2363, Available at <http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith>.
- <sup>89</sup>Qaradawi, 2008, pp37-38.
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- <sup>95</sup> Termethi, No.1956, Available at <http://www.searchtruth.com/searchHadith>
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- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp.41-42.
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### Appendix: Schedule of Fieldwork Interviews

Date	Country (City, town, locality)	Institutions, office, etc
October 15th to November3rd 2011	Istanbul  Ankara	IHH (The Foundation for Freedom, Human Rights and Humanitarian Relief)  KYM (Kimse Yok Mu)  Bab Al Alam NGO  IHH Ankara Turkish Parliament in Ankara, meeting with MPs  Denise Fenere NGO  Mehmet Fateh University  The Center for Civilizational Alliance, Istanbul



<p>November 4th to November 24th 2012</p>	<p>Gaza Strip  (Gaza City, Khan-Younis, Rafah)</p>	<p>IHH Office in Gaza Sites of implemented projects and programs by IHH: Beit-Hanoun Hospital in north of Gaza Strip. Vocational centers for women in Khan younis and Rafah. Training center for youth employment in Gaza City. Site projects in Jabalyia refugee camp, north of Gaza.</p> <p>Meetings with a Palestinian NGO implementing KYM programs in Gaza.</p> <p>Observing joint cooperation among Palestinian NGOs partners and Turkish NGOs,</p> <p>Meetings with Western-funded NGOs in Gaza; Save the Children, Mercy Corps, Dan Aid.</p>
<p>March 26th to March 30th, 2013</p>	<p>Istanbul  Ankara</p>	<p>Meetings in Ankara:  KYM Office in Ankara.</p> <p>Vice Chairman of the Republican People's Party. AKP Parliament members The Parliament of Turkey Academics Visiting field work of KYM</p> <p>Meetings in Istanbul: Meeting leaders of MUSIAC Business Organization. Meeting Officials of TUSKON Business Organization.</p>
<p>March 5th to March 12th. 2014</p>	<p>Istanbul</p>	<p>Meetings in Istanbul</p> <p>Religious minority leaders.</p> <p>Intellectuals and opinion leaders</p> <p>IHH office</p>

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October 1st to November 20th 2014	Gaza Strip, Palestine	Meetings with IHH staff in Gaza for update after the war summer 2014.  Meeting with humanitarian workers from local and international NGOs  Meeting with Volunteers in the war-devastated areas along the border between Gaza and Israel. Meeting with academics and opinion leaders.
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