



DIALOGUE AS A SOURCE FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN MUSLIM AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN A SECULAR STATE

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Abstract

In his speeches and writings, Fethullah Gülen stresses the role of democracy, peace, dialogue, and tolerance in the development of peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim peoples. Some Western concepts of national identity connect tolerance with the submission to the values of a majority. But, as Gülen explains, ‘Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them’. He points out that dialogue decreases our disagreements with one another. This paper considers dialogue about the formation of common secular identity (national or regional) as a tool for the development of peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in a secular context. Such dialogue aims to develop a new dual identity, one which is connected with religious identity and the other which reflects membership in a secular nation. The paper describes the role of interfaith dialogue in developing tolerance and a common secular identity with respect to religious identity. Such a dialogue must involve participants in a discussion of the values, needs, and traditions of each religious group as well as the possibilities for the creation of a common identity concept that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all religious groups. This new common identity resolves contradictions between region and secular state, changes people’s conceptions of themselves as members of different groups in conflict to members in a much more inclusive group, and makes attitudes toward other religious groups more positive, even if they have had a long history of offences. On the basis of a new positive balance of religious and secular values, of differences and similarities, all members of the new group can build positive attitudes toward each other.

1. Introduction

In his speeches and writings, Fethullah Gülen stresses the role of democracy, peace, dialogue, and tolerance in the development of peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. Some Western concepts of national identity connect tolerance with submission to the values of a majority. But, as Gülen explains, “Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them”(Gülen 2004a).

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As Gülen repeatedly stresses, to overcome violence and hate, people of different religions and faiths must develop an atmosphere of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence and engage in dialogue. He stresses that dialogue decreases our disagreements with one another.

This paper analyzes Fethullah Gülen's approach to dialogue and tolerance and uses it as a framework for the development of a dialogue considering the formation of a common secular identity (national or regional). The paper argues that it is possible to negotiate different identities and shows how to employ dialogue as a tool for reconciling identity differences. The aim of a dialogue like this is the development of a peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim groups within a secular context. Such a dialogue leads to the development of a new dual identity with one component connected to religious identity and another component that reflects membership in a secular nation. The paper concludes with a summary of the role of interfaith dialogue in the promotion of national and international tolerance, peace, and mutual understanding.

2. Gülen's Approach to Dialogue

Since the early 1980's, Gülen has developed an approach to inter-religious understanding and has formulated a framework for an Islamic approach to interfaith dialogue. "Gülen, in his career as a state preacher in Turkey and as an inspirational scholar and teacher to people throughout Turkey and beyond, has championed dialogue as a necessary commitment and activity in the contemporary world" (Carroll 2007:12). Through his "dialogue" with other thinkers and writers with different perspectives, Gülen showed the importance of dialogue in the process of revision of knowledge by focusing profoundly on the issues of peace and human life. Gülen formulated his conception of dialogue within the framework of the religio-philosophical worldview of Islam, which protects humanity and categorically forbids any disrespect for it. "Gülen... has a clear vision of human greatness, of the traits that define great human beings, those who actualize in themselves the highest and best of human potential" (Carroll 2007:38).

Even though Gülen acknowledges the differences between the West and Muslim countries, he sees no innate incongruity between Islam and democracy in general. He shows that both approaches have a basic commitment to human beings and their essential rights. Thus, dialogue between people of different cultures and faiths could bring mutual understanding, respect, and dedication to justice. "Dialogue means the coming together of two or more people to discuss certain issues, and thus the forming of a bond between these people. In that respect, we can call dialogue an activity that has human beings at its axis" (Gülen 2004b). Dialogue about identities does not require the acceptance of another group's way of life or values, nor does it provoke assimilation. It offers an opportunity to understand the beliefs, ideas, and positions of others, as well as the basis of their identity. "Accepting all people as they are, regardless of who they are, does not mean putting believers and unbelievers on the same side of the scales. According to our way of thinking, the position of believers and unbelievers has its own specific value... I have such strong feelings and thoughts about him this does not prevent me from entering into dialogue with someone who does not think or believe the same." (2002a).

The conflicts between European governments and Muslim minorities in the past several years have made clear the necessity of dialogue about vital issues of tolerance, identity and religion in society. As Carroll stresses, "We may isolate ourselves and craft the arc of our lives into familiar orbits of people who look, think, speak, believe, and pray like us, but such isolation or minimizing of difference is not workable over time. In today's world of global connectedness, we must develop the capacity to



dialogue and create relatedness with people vastly different from us. Part of that project involves finding ideas, beliefs, purposes, projects, and so forth, on which we can achieve resonance with each other” (Carroll 2007:11). In his article *Tolerance in the Life of the Individual and Society*, Fethullah Gülen points out that “Today, more than anything else, our society is in need of tolerance... our citizens in European countries can only live in harmony in those countries by means of a vast atmosphere of tolerance” (Gülen 2004a). For Gülen, dialogue, tolerance, and trust reinforce each other: tolerance is the acceptance of differences that arise from dialogue in order to pursue the larger goal of cooperation. “Hostility is unacceptable. Relationships must be based on belief, love, mutual respect, assistance, and understanding instead of conflict and realization of personal interest. Social education encourages people to pursue lofty ideals and to strive for perfection, not just to run after their own desires. Right calls for unity, virtues bring mutual support and solidarity, and belief secures brotherhood and sisterhood. Encouraging the soul to attain perfection brings happiness in both worlds” (Gülen 2002a).

Gülen has not only helped develop the conception of interfaith dialogue, but has actively contributed to the development of concrete action across the globe. He personally brought about several initiatives that strengthened connections among people and cultures involved in conflict. “Our ongoing activities are for the good of all humanity. They should not be considered limited to our own country, Turkey” (Gülen 1993). Thus, in the late 1980’s, Gülen initiated dialogue between Greeks and Turks in Turkey in order to discuss discrimination and prejudice against the Greeks. He established good relations with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew. This dialogue brought hope and positive change for Greeks in Turkey. Gülen also supported education in Armenia and encouraged Turkish businessmen to establish a high school in Yerevan. A similar school was also established in Moscow. Activities such as these emphasize the prospects and importance of interfaith dialogue.

3. Negotiating Identities

As theories show, people sharing the same identity believe they have similar fates and interests and, in some cases, share a mutual experience of deprivation and aggravation due to another group. Identity groups like these establish the common goals of improving their social situation and of reinforcing ingroup loyalty and support in order to achieve their aims. Radical religious identity leads to the clear recognition of intergroup differences and can even reinforce the willingness of group members to perceive others as enemies, encouraging them to fight for power and resources. The negotiation of a national identity aims at bringing together previously incompatible identities within a larger, common group concept that would be mutually acceptable to everyone and would connect all groups and parties. As Kelman (1997b, 2001) stresses, the possibility of negotiating and changing identity rests on two facts: (1) identities are not zero-sum concepts like territory and resources; and (2) as social constructs, they can be reconstructed and redefined. “In fact, the reconstruction of identity is a regular, ongoing process in the life of any national group. Identities are commonly reconstructed, sometimes gradually and sometimes radically, as historical circumstances change, crises emerge, opportunities present themselves, or new elites come to the fore” (Kelman 1997b:338).

Undoubtedly, national identities contain some core elements that cannot be negotiated: a sense of peoplehood, attachment to the land, confidence in history, and commitment to culture and religion (Kelman 2001). In order to protect the essential components of identity, only a few central elements can be reconsidered and redefined. To reduce intergroup tensions and develop a common



understanding, these elements can be discussed and negotiated during specially organized workshops.

One of the basic assumptions of the theory of protracted identity-based conflict is that basic needs are not negotiable and that people need universal justice. In reality, basic needs and conceptions of justice are also identity-based concepts, and their meaning depends on the meaning and structure of particular ingroup identities. Security, freedom, and community have different meanings and are perceived in various ways among people with different social identities. Even for the same person, a basic human need can have a different meaning depending on which social identity is most salient for that individual at that moment.

Conceptions of justice also differ among groups. For some, justice means revenge and prosecution of perpetrators; for others, it suggests reimbursement in terms of money, contributions, or labor. In other cases, people can be satisfied with truth and reconciliation committees where people who have committed violence confess and admit their crimes, and some communities are ready to forgive the perpetrators if they show their commitment to peace. The study conducted in Uganda (Pham et al. 2005) has showed that four groups within the country (the Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, and Soroti regions) have different perceptions of justice. Nearly half of the respondents perceived “reconciliation” as “forgiveness” (52%). Thirty-one percent defined justice as trials; however, the respondents in Soroti showed only 15 percent agreement with this statement. For one-third (35%) of people in that region, justice meant reconciliation, while only 12 percent and 3 percent of Gulu and Kitgum, respectively, agreed that justice was reconciliation. Eleven percent of all respondents associated justice with “truth and fairness,” while 22 percent of the respondents in Kitgum saw this association.

Out of all the respondents in the study, 24 percent thought that reconciliation required confession, while 23 percent said that reconciliation was connected with “togetherness, unity, and peace.” Only 9 percent associated reconciliation with a traditional ceremony. The understanding of human rights also varied among the respondents: 29 percent said that human rights meant a “life with peace and security and without fear”; more than one-third of them mentioned freedom of speech, 21 percent mentioned dignity, 18 percent noted socioeconomic rights, 16 percent cited justice, and 12 percent mentioned freedom of movement.

Understanding of the different meanings associated with concepts like justice, reconciliation and basic human needs can help to reconcile different identities, even conflictual ones. An identity negotiation workshop includes a dialogue which considers differences in the meaning of these basic concepts, and which develops ways for their accommodation. Because of variations in the perception of basic human needs and justice among different groups, it is possible to negotiate these concepts among groups in order to develop new common perceptions and a new identity which reconciles existing identities.

The process of identity negotiation in a workshop setting has been described by Kelman (1982, 1997b, 2001, 2004) as an informal, unofficial progression of give-and-take among groups whose ideas of their respective national identities conflict with one another. In this paper I describe negotiation processes that are designed to create a new common identity or reconcile conflictual identities. Such a practice can be organized into different forms, ranging from mediation between ethnic groups in the self-determination process of creating a new nation, to the redefinition of identity through reconsidering history, and from negotiations among political leaders to discussion workshops in communities.



Kelman (2001) describes negotiation of national identity within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He stresses that each group perceives its own relationship to land and history, the defining element of identity, as its exclusive right, rejecting the claims of the opposing group as illegitimate. To overcome this, the parties have to “accept the possibility that certain elements of identity may be *shared* with the other, acknowledging that the other also has a profound attachment to the land, anchored in authentic historical ties to it” (Kelman 2001:193). Sharing the land requires developing common elements of identity as well as an understanding that land can belong to two groups simultaneously. As Kelman describes in his work, the Israelis and Palestinians began to accept a shared concept of land but failed to perceive Jerusalem as a mutual element of their identities.

The example of Morocco shows that national identity can be negotiated in two ways: through an exchange among the new nationalist elites, and by stressing characteristics and traditions common for all groups. A vision of a national Moroccan identity was developed during a negotiation led by the king as a compromise among various visions of the elite (for a more in-depth analysis, see Mezran 2001).

One of the most important problems for newly independent Morocco was a confrontation between the mainly urban Arab Istiqlal and the Berber tribes of the interior. During its period of dominance, the Istiqlal government forced the assimilation of the Berbers into a larger Moroccan identity. A Berber was defined as a man who had never been to school, and the Istiqlal goal was to change the Berbers’ identity, language, and way of life to fit its Arab nationalist model. Between 1956 and 1958, the Istiqlal Party developed policies to impose a dominant Arab identity on the Berber parts of Morocco. All local leadership posts were held by Arabs; the Berber college, established by the French, was transformed into an ordinary school; Berber-language broadcasts were prohibited. These Istiqlal policies soon led to Berber uprisings against the Arab-dominated government and its policies.

King Mohammed realized the importance of creating a common concept of Morocco’s national identity and decided to act as a mediator in order to facilitate agreement around the various competing concepts of identity. The concept of national Moroccan identity had various meanings among different parties, including the Arabist party, the Islamist conservative portion of the Istiqlal party, the Democratic Party, the Berber socialist Popular Movement, and secular republican Marxist groups. Instead of acting as a party in this conflict over identity, Mohammed V declared himself a national leader and symbol of national unity. He aimed to develop a shared national identity and to unite fragmented elites under the monarchy. To make the negotiation process more compelling, the king himself intervened as the mediator at the center of numerous competing visions and interests.

A series of meetings with the leaders of all the competing groups was organized to discuss visions of national identity and to find common ground for a final agreement. The basic concept of national identity which emerged included three main components: Islam, Arabism, and Moroccanism. Moroccan Islam became the central component of the uniting national identity. Mohammed V stressed the strong connection between Islamic and democratic principles, the “innovative” role of Islam in society, and its function as a basis for national identity.

To mediate differences between the Arabist Istiqlal and the Berberist Popular Movement, the king developed the idea of Moroccan Arabism, stressing that the vast majority of Moroccans are not pure Arabs but rather Arabized Berbers. As a basis for territorial nationalism that would unite different elites, Mohammed V developed the conception of Moroccanism (*Marocaineté*). This national



territorial idea became the main content of a new Moroccan national identity that encompassed, but never denied, local Arab and Berber as well as tribal and urban identities.

Using these three concepts, King Mohammed developed agreement among all the rival groups. He conducted his negotiations on the basis of an “issue” framework, approaching the development of a common identity by discussing single issues. As Mezran (2001) describes, “in dealing with the democratization issue, he [the King] acted in such a way as to appease each party within this framework while asking concessions of others. Thus, in exchange for their consent to the formation of a National Consultative Assembly, the King offered to the left wing of the Istiqlal a wide agrarian reform. To the Berbers, after secret negotiations the monarch offered recognition of their political party, the Popular Movement. On another table, in exchange for their acquiescence on the Berber issue, the King offered to the Istiqlal the implementation of a wide campaign of Arabization through the school development program to be held in Arabic and to the Berbers wider representation in the army and in the bureaucracy.” (156)

Thus, while negotiating a new national identity, the king of Morocco invented the concept of “Arabized Berbers” and satisfied the most important concerns of Arabs (such as teaching Arabic in all schools) and Berbers (recognition of political party) within the framework of a unified nation (Byman 1997; Mezran 2001).

In addition to being an integral part of nation building, the negotiation of identities is also essential in the process of developing peaceful coexistence between former adversaries. Conflictual identities have to be reconfigured to accommodate a new type of intergroup relations and to accept multiple meanings of events. Such a step-by-step process of re-creating identity, demanding the cooperation of both parties, characterized the negotiations between France and Germany after the World War II. These negotiations focused on overcoming the conflictual past and accentuating the two nations’ commonalities through a process of mutual reidentification: “brothers who have engaged in a long fratricidal war” (for a more in-depth analysis, see Rosoux 2001).

For centuries, French and German people had negative stereotypes of one another, perceiving each other as unfriendly and aggressive. As Rosoux (2001) stresses, in the last century, the French associated the German and Prussian identities with “barbarism”, a concept further tied to Protestantism in the eyes of Catholics and militarism in the eyes of Republicans. The French considered the Germans physically and intellectually inferior as well as morally uncivilized. The Germans, on the other hand, accused the French of lacking fundamental public and private ethical norms and religious beliefs. The Germans perceived their nation as dynamic and prosperous, while describing France as weak and decadent. This mutual hatred and opposition were inflamed by numerous wars and conflicts. These negative perceptions became a significant part of each nation’s identity, stressing differences and opposition between the two nations.

In 1958, Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer decided to redefine the relationship between France and Germany. This required a reconsideration of perceptions and memories, the reconstruction of a common past, as well as the development of a basis for the common interpretation of future events and collaborations. This process necessitated the acceptance of the complexity contradictions of the past as well as an understanding of the other party’s meaning of events and actions.

Between 1958 and 1962, de Gaulle and Adenauer had several meetings aimed at overcoming the negative perceptions rooted in past events and at achieving reconciliation. They stressed that the former enemies were determined to become friends. One of the most crucial steps was understanding



and officially recognizing the sufferings of the other nation. The new changes in German national identity included a confrontation with the past and acceptance of responsibility for the most difficult episodes of national history. De Gaulle also recognized the negative actions of France and described Germany as a “great nation.” Both nations decided not to emphasize the conflictual past, but instead to highlight the solidarity that also characterized relations between them. The history of war and conflict between the French and Germans was redefined as a common past of collective suffering, and both nations became brothers who had mutually endured a common tragedy.

In Ukraine, I conducted workshops with community and NGO leaders on negotiating the meaning of national identity and sources for the formation of a new common identity. The participants discussed the values, needs, and traditions of each ethnic group and the possibilities for the creation of a common identity concept that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all groups. By using the appreciative inquiry method, I encouraged the participants to think about possible actions which might help lead to national identity formation. A catalogue of such actions was created and several activities were developed in the participants’ communities. Among them were celebrations of holidays of other ethnic groups, the Common Culture festival, and the Day of Crimea. One of the most amazing initiatives was the creation of a collage of the elements of Common Culture in several schools. Students drew different objects that characterized their culture and then created a wall collage that included all the ethnic groups of Ukraine.

4. Identity Dialogue

Identity dialogue aims to transform dominant identities into multiple identities with polymodal meanings. The structure of narratives that are based on the perception of “They as an enemy” and that reflect negative attitudes, feeling, and stereotypes, can be replaced by a new structure rooted in a nonviolent self-image. This type of dialogue has to involve participants in a discussion of the values, needs, and traditions of each religious group and the possibilities for the creation of a common identity concept that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all religious groups. This new common identity resolves contradictions between religion and the secular state, expands people’s conceptions of membership from exclusive groups in conflict to a single more inclusive group, and makes attitudes toward other religious groups more positive, even in spite of a long history of mutual offences. On the basis of a positive balance between religious and secular values as well as differences and similarities, all members of the new group develop positive attitudes and stereotypes of each other.

The first step for identity reconstruction involves increasing awareness of the role of identity in conflicts, of We-They perceptions, and of collective axiology which leads to violence. Stories of different conflicts and violent actions, analyzed through the prism of identity, provide insights about salience and dominance of identity, alterations of perception, misbalanced and projective axiologies, and accepted or expected aggressive behaviors. It is important that the cases of conflict discussed at this stage of the workshop be dissimilar to the conflict in which the participants are themselves involved. Similar events and situations will provoke comparisons and strengthen negative attitudes and emotions. The more distinct the cases are from the participants’ experience, the lower the resistance to understanding the possibility of misperceptions. Thus, in Crimea, where conflict developed between Muslim Crimean Tartars and Orthodox Russians, the discussion of conflict in Bosnia exacerbates strong negative feelings and aggravates aggressive attitudes toward other ethnic



groups. On the other hand, the discussion of conflicts perceived as very different from the Crimean situation, such as discriminative practices in the Dominican Republic or violence in Sudan and Rwanda, allows for more objective analysis which increases the understanding of the roots of vicious actions and which facilitates changes in perceptions, leading to the recognition of aggressive behaviors of one's own group.

The recognition of the violent actions of one's ingroup, as well as the human rights of outgroups, poses a threat to ingroup identity, which rests on the idea of "positive We–negative They". As Gülen stressed, "Many Muslims, even educated and conscious ones, believe the West seeks to undermine Islam with ever-more subtle and sophisticated methods... Western colonialism is remembered. The Ottoman State collapsed due to European attacks. Foreign invasions of Muslim lands were followed with great interest in Turkey. The gradual "transformation" of Islam into an ideology of conflict and reaction or into a party ideology also made people suspicious of Islam and Muslims... For interfaith dialogue to succeed, we must forget the past, ignore polemics, and focus on common points" (Gülen 2002b). Dialogue also can change the negative perception of Muslims: "This negative image has been fed to the world and now we must once more communicate the essential facet of Islam to those who are presumed to be civilized, using the principle of "gentle persuasion" (Gülen 2004b).

The acknowledgment of negative ingroup actions requires reviewing and reconceptualizing ingroup identity in ways that always invoke strong resistance. Ingroup members have a strong desire to defend their positive self-image and defy negative information that can destroy it. Stressing other positive components of the group's identity, such as cultural heritage, deep traditions, history of peaceful coexistence with other groups, and so on, can help preserve a high level of self-esteem and ingroup pride.

Such narrative intervention has to emphasize the positive features in the self-description of an ingroup, such as "peaceful people," "value of tolerance," "open-mindedness and understanding," and "pleasure of forgiveness." These features always exist in the self-descriptions of all peoples and serve as powerful sources of self-esteem and pride. As Gülen points out, "I can and do say that peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance are fundamental to Islam" (Gülen 2004c). He continues: "Indeed, peace is of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences which are bound to specific reasons and conditions. In that respect, we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or for humanity" (Gülen 2004b).

As Gülen describes, "Another aspect of establishing and maintaining dialogue is the necessity of increasing the interests we have in common with other people. In fact, even if the people we talk with are Jews and Christians, this approach still should be adopted and issues that can separate us should be avoided altogether" (Gülen 2004c).

By stressing peaceful images of the ingroup and the outgroup simultaneously, dialogue can provoke supporting narratives that describe the ingroup's peaceful history and glory as well as positive situations in interethnic relations. Such storytelling by different constituents of each group will reinforce these narratives through complimentary ideas. The positive emotions produced during the dialogue workshops will strengthen the formation of peaceful self-concepts, with an emphasis on tolerance, reconciliation, and goodwill.

To turn such models into positive attitudes and actions, the intervener has to take the next step: form a common, overarching identity that can lead to the de-escalation of conflict. Common or shared



identities can reduce intergroup hostility by minimizing attention to ethnic/racial/religious differences and instead creating the sense that all involved are “one unit.” Sources for an overarching identity can be found in a common geographic location, common national ideas, shared community problems, and so forth. For example, Gülen shows the similarities of democracy and Islam: “In democratic societies, people govern themselves as opposed to being ruled by someone above. The individual has priority over the community in this type of political system, being free to determine how to live his or her own life. Individualism is not absolute, though. People achieve a better existence by living within a society and this requires that they adjust and limit their freedom according to the criteria of social life... As Islam holds individuals and societies responsible for their own fate, people must be responsible for governing themselves” (Gülen 2002a).

By asking questions about positive present and future developments and the possibilities of collaboration with others, the intervener can reinforce the formation of a common identity. The intervener’s task is to facilitate the creation of narratives of productive partnership, which are based on peaceful concepts of the ingroup and which emphasize possible positive images of outgroups.

The formation of a new common identity is possible only if ingroup members do not perceive that the new overarching identity being created poses any danger or threat to their primary identity (ethnic/racial/religious).. If values, core ideas, or new identity needs contradict the possible (perceived) values and ideas of the existing identity, a new circle of violence can begin as a response to this sense of threat. The intervener has to construct the concept and perception of the new common identity very carefully, using narratives of existing collaboration and situations of successful teamwork. By asking such questions as “What can we do together to make our future better?” and “What can we do for our children?”, practitioners can shift the emphasis of narratives from past opposition to mutual understanding, mutual responsibilities, and the mutual defense of human rights among former enemies. In this case, the concepts of a peaceful ingroup and of a new “We-ness” will be developed simultaneously and will reinforce each other.

5. Conclusion

In his teaching and writing, Gülen constantly stresses the necessity of dialogue as the way to overcome differences and bring about peace to society. “People with different ideas and thoughts are either going to seek ways of getting along by means of reconciliation or they will constantly fight with one another.... In fact, our nation should have this dynamic today and should give it priority; it should represent tolerance to the world because our glorious ancestors captured the hearts of people by means of tolerance and became the protectors of the general peace. The longest period of peace in the Balkans and the Middle East, which have always been volatile areas, was realized with the enduring tolerance of our ancestors. From the moment that tolerance and those great representatives left history, this region became void of peace and contentment...At the same time, our citizens in European countries can only live in harmony in those countries by means of a vast atmosphere of tolerance” (Gülen 2004a).

The formation of a peaceful common identity requires a set of actions that includes increasing identity awareness, re-conceptualizing salient identities, negotiating a common identity concept, and forming a civic and multicultural meaning of national identity. The construction and understanding of national identity can be created by the facilitation and mediation of an *ongoing dialogue* among representatives of ethnic and religious groups. Gülen points out essential



components of the process of dialogue, including the recognition of the ingroup's violent actions and the human rights of the outgroup, and focusing on common points. He also stresses the importance of emphasizing the positive features in the self-description of an ingroup, such as "peaceful people," "value of tolerance," "open-mindedness and understanding," and "pleasure of forgiveness." Gülen argues that no interfaith dialogue will be successful without increasing interest in the values and ideas that people have in common and without an understanding of the similarities between democracy and Islam.

Dialogue about the meaning and content of a common national identity also includes discussion of and planning for specific actions in specific regions that must be achieved in order for the successful formation of this identity to take place. The formation of a national identity with an emphasis on multicultural and civic meanings will help to construct a society with (1) equal rights for all ethnic groups and adequate resources to maintain their ethnic culture and (2) a distinctive non-ethnic civic culture with peaceful coexistence and civic responsibility among all citizens. A new common identity would include elements of the particular ethnic and religious identities and common goals, values, and aims. It would be based on the reconciliation of past grievances, with an emphasis on future mutual development and peaceful coexistence within the state. As Gülen stresses "we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or for humanity" (Gülen 2004b).