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*Transnational religious actors
and international order
– the case of the gülen movement*

Abstract: This paper seeks to illustrate how religion can affect international relations and international order. Given that religion has been neglected as an important factor in political science, and then in theories of international relations, this paper will try to provide a modest contribution to the study of religion in the theory of international relations by analyzing the influence of transnational religious actors on the existing international order. The transnational religious actor analyzed in this paper is the Gülen Movement – Hizmet Movement. Hizmet Movement is a transnational Islamic movement formed in the Republic of Turkey in the 1960s by the former Turkish Imam Muhammad Fethullah Gülen. Today, this Islamic movement has many institutions, organizations and members around the world. The Gülen Movement aims to create a transnational society – the Golden Generation of Ideal People (Altın Nesil), and thus represents a challenge for the existing international order.

Key words: Transnational religious actors, international relations, religion, international order, The Gülen Movement

Introduction

Today, as in the past, there are many factors that affect society and politics. One of the important factors and a phenomenon that influences politics is religion [Jevtic 2007; Јевтић 2009: 18]. However, political science has long neglected the influence and significance of religion on politics and politics on religion. This fact was shown by Steven Kettell in his research entitled “Has political science ignored religion?” [Kettell 2012]. Also, we must emphasize that religion is an important factor in IR, especially if we consider the transnational character of religion. David Wessels notes religions of Islam, Christianity as well as Buddhism as global or transnational

[Wessels 2009: 323-340]. However, theories of IR for a long time did not consider religion to be an important factor that can affect the international arena and IR. Theories of IR were formed according to the secular principle and had their origin in the Westphalian Peace of 1648, ending the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The four pillars of the Westphalian system of IR are: 1. States are considered the sole legitimate actors in the international system, 2. Government do not seek to change relations between religion and politics in foreign countries, 3. Religious authorities legitimately exercise few, if any, domestic temporal functions, and even fewer transnationally 4. Religious and political power, or church and state, are separated. As we can see, sovereign states are key actors in IR, while religion and politics are separate [Shani 2009: 308-322].

As we have already stated, theories of IR have long neglected the significance and influence of religion on IR. Philpott writes in support of this fact. Namely, Philpott conducted a survey that included four main (mainstream) journals of IR. He came to the conclusion that only six scientific works of a total of 1600, published in the period from 1980 to 1999, dealt with religion as an important factor in IR [Philpott 2002: 66-95]. In addition to Philpott, Hassner has also done research, although the difference between their researchs is that Hassner did the analysis of books dealing with the study of religion in IR. Namely, Hassner came to the conclusion that only one book on the mentioned phenomenon in IR was published over a decade, more precisely one in the 1970s, one in the 1980s, and one in the 1990s, while since 2002 we find six books that are published annually, and relate to religious issues in IR [Hassner 2011: 37-56]. However, since September 11, 2001, things have been changing and religion is gaining significance and providing a fresh perspective on the study of IR. This fact is slowly being explained in an increasing number of scientific, academic works that are studying religion in IR. Among them, those include studies by Jevtić, Veković, Haynes, Johnston and Cox, Petito and Hatzopoulos, Thomas, Gopin, Fox, Gözaydin, and many others.

In order to determine whether religion can be incorporated into the theories of IR, which are predominantly secular, this work will use a study by Nukhet A. Sandal and Jonathan Fox entitled "Religion in International Relations Theory – Interactions and possibilities" [Sandal and Fox 2013]. This study has made a significant contribution to the study of religion and politics, especially to religion and IR. With this study, Sandal and Fox tried to make a significant contribution to understanding religion as a multidimensional phenomenon that affects IR. The authors tried to integrate religion into the theory of IR in this book, cataloging

various ways, in which religion can influence IR. This catalog of the ways in which religion can affect IR includes: religious view of the world, religious legitimacy, religious states, non-state religious actors, transnational religious movements, transnational religious issues and religious identity. In their study, the authors, through the prism of five main theories of IR, attempt to integrate religion into the theory of IR. These five major (mainstream) theories of IR are: Classical Realism, Neorealism, (Neo) Liberalism, the English school and Constructivism. In the context of the ways in which religion can influence IR, the authors of this study cite the importance and influence of transnational religious movements on IR and the international arena. And as this paper is based on the analysis of the transnational Islamic movement – The Gülen Movement, we find that this study is important.

It is precisely the possibility of the creation of an alternative state and a new world order by transnational religious movements, which is the basis for the seventh chapter of Sandal's and Fox's study based on Constructivism [Ibidem]. Sandal and Fox come to the realization that Constructivism is the most suitable and most flexible theory of IR that has the potential to incorporate religion into IR [Ibidem: 181]. But, we must note that Alexander Wendt, the most important theoretician of Constructivism, did not give space to the study of religion in the theory of IR [Wendt 1999].

In this paper we will associate ourselves with a “new” model of Islam – “moderate, modern Islam,” by Muhammad Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet Movement. The research question that we are trying to answer here is: Can the transnational religious actors (The Gülen Movement) be a challenge to the existing international order?

1. Transnational Religious Actors and International Order

The process of globalization and technological innovation has spurred the growth and the influence of many state and non-state actors on IR and international order. Since the 1970s, the influence of non-state actors in the international arena has increased. Therefore, the international system is no longer solely determined by relations between sovereign states, but also by other non-state actors and transnational movements that have become important in international affairs. This results in a new outlook on the international order, since it is based on key actors – sovereign states. These non-state actors, actively involved in international processes, stimulated by globalization, technological innovations, communications and the media, are transnational corporations and organizations. In addition, religious actors also

become visible and influential. Namely, since the 1970s, transnationalism has grown, and the growth of new opportunities for non-state, transnational actors, including transnational religious actors [Haynes 2001: 143-158]. Religion is one of the essential elements of transnational actors and therefore arouses growing interest in studying and analyzing the influence of religion on IR [Taşkaya 2011: 37].

Transnational religious actors, according to Shani, can be defined as non-state actors who represent certain religious teachings and have an active relationship and relationships with other actors in other countries or international organizations. Shani believes that the transnational identity of these actors can be a potential challenge, both positive and negative, for an international order dating back to the Westphalian Peace [Shani 2009: 308-322].

Shani and Haynes agree with the claim that transnational religious actors influence the international order. Haynes points out that transnational religious actors have the potential to “undermine” the sovereignty of states, which are key actors of IR and international order [Haynes 2001: 143-158]. Haynes, believes that by using „soft power“ transnational religious actors, can create conditions for establishing a transnational civil society [Haynes 2009: 43-69]. Gözaydin also emphasized the use of religion as a “soft power” in IR, especially in the Republic of Turkey [Gözaydin 2010].

By using “soft power”, transnational religious actors seek to promote a “positive” image of the values and ideas they advocate. To understand how transnational religious actors use “soft power” we will first present what “soft power” means. Namely, the term “soft power” was coined by Joseph Nye and he defined it in the following way: “soft power is the ability to get what we want with attractiveness, rather than coercion and payment” [Nye 2004]. This is achieved by an attractive image of ideas and values, culture and politics. In addition, Nye emphasizes that certain “qualities” are needed for “soft power” to influence and attract others. What is also significant is that the use of “soft power” is much cheaper and more attractive than the use of “hard power”. “Soft power” instruments are public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, ideology and attractive values [Ibidem; Taşkaya 2011]. Transnational religious actors are important users of religion as „soft power” in IR. They influence IR by using the power of their ideas as well as the media that allow them to spread their „positive” message globally and create an opportunity for establishing a transnational society [Taşkaya 2011]. Transnational civil society consists of groups and organizations, from various countries, working together

to create a society outside the borders to achieve their goals. The possibility of creating a transnational civil society, by transnational religious actors, presents an alternative and a challenge to the Westphalian international order, as well as to the secular liberal model of a global civil society [Shani 2009: 308-322].

To see how transnational religious actors can influence the international order, we will first explain what the international order represents. International order is a regime characterized by the acceptance of certain values and norms of behavior, including certain actors, rules, mechanisms, and understanding. Therefore, international law is the central category of the concept of international order, as well as various international institutions and organizations, such as the United Nations Organization and the World Trade Organization, which seek to develop and promote it, Haynes said. The concept of an international order is based on two pillars:

1. International acceptance of certain values and norms, including international law
2. The development of institutions that seek to expand and develop an international order.

Haynes says that since the end of the Cold War, the international order has relied on the primary Western values and norms, as well as the following goals: liberal democracy, human rights and capitalism. However, as we have already mentioned, globalization and the development of technology and communications, there is the strengthening of transnationalism, especially religious (Christian and Islamic), which aims to create a transnational society. Haynes believes that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is also a challenge to Western values and the existing international order [Haynes 2009: 43-69].

Jonathan Fox states that fundamentalist movements, especially Islamic, are trying to create a world-class religious society that knows no boundaries. Fox states that transnationalism is their goal. Some of these movements are limited by the borders of the state they are based in while many of them are trying to expand the movement internationally [Fox 2009: 273-292]. One of the transnational religious movements that is active in today's world and influences the international arena is the transnational Islamic Movement – The Gülen Movement of the former Turkish Imam Muhammad Fethullah Gülen. Accordingly, this paper seeks to show how the Gülen Movement poses a challenge to the existing international order.

2. The Gülen Movement as Transnational religious movement

The Gülen Movement (The Service) was formed in the 1960s in the Republic of Turkey by the former Turkish Imam Muhammad Fethullah Gülen [Лончар 2017]. Gülen is the former Turkish Imam, preacher and writer. Wagner holds that Gülen represents one of the most influential Islamic leaders in today's world [Wagner 2013]. However, Yavuz thinks that Gülen, founder of Hizmet Movement, is "a stranger in his own land, a political and spiritual exile in his birthplace, as well as not fully at home in any particular era. He is a stranger (garip) steeped in anxiety, a religious critic, a social innovator. However, he is much more than observer; he is a builder, shaper of ideas and leader of his own movement" [Yavuz, 2013: 26]. The followers of Gülen call him „Hocaefendi“. It may be translated as „esteemed teacher“ or „master“. Also, this name refers to one who has "supreme religious authority" [Yavuz 2003].

The Gülen Movement is formally declared as a social, Islamic, "non-political" movement aimed at promoting certain values and ideas, among which are: the idea of "modern, moderate Islam", quality education, interreligious dialogue, tolerance, democracy, nonviolence, and the idea of establishing a bridge between Islam and the West [Ebaugh 2010]. The goal of this movement is to create the transnational society – the Golden Generation of Ideal People (Altın Nesil). The key difference between this movement and other Islamic movements is that this movement uses a specific method of action. Namely, this movement uses "soft power" and aims to spread a "positive" image of its activities and ideas through the construction of educational institutions and organizations, in order to attract as many supporters and sympathizers as possible. Yavuz thinks that the Gülen Movement, while predominantly promoting "Western values," seeks to portray a "positive image of Islam", most notably to the West and the Americans [Holton and Lopez 2015: 24].

A significant fact is also the one, pointed by Angey. Angey holds that "the Gülen Movement is unusual in the sociology of transnational social movements for its informality and its culture of secrecy" [Angey 2018: 54]. Namely, Hizmet Movement has no official representative office, address or bank account. All activities in Hizmet Movement are based on "the voluntary will" of the members of the movement. The members of the movement are gathered in three circles. The first circle are sympathizers, the second circle are members while the third circle is made of workers. The movement is mostly made up of volunteers and students, from middle and upper class, with an average age between 25 and 30 years. Dumovich holds that "these students believe that it is their duty to represent

Islam outside Turkey, especially in countries where Hizmet (both the movement and its message) is still unknown” [Dumovich 2019].

The Gülen Movement is funded by Turkish businessmen, parents of students and members of the movement. The members of Hizmet Movement allocate from 10% to 70% of their income for the functioning of the movement [Лончар 2017]. Cemal Uşak, the former president of The Journalists and Writers’ Foundation (one of the institutions of Hizmet Movement) said in an interview: “The main sources of this movement are Qur’an, our prophet and then Mr. Gülen but that is not to say money is not important. How else could we open up so many schools?” [Watmough and Öztürk 2018: 41].

The Gülen Movement expanded beyond the borders of the Republic of Turkey in the nineties and formed organizations and institutions around the world. Today, the institutions of the Gülen Movement can be found in Central Asia, in the Balkans, Europe, Africa, Australia, as well as in the United States, where the leader of Hizmet Movement, Gülen, has been living since 1999 in self-imposed exile. Tungul notes that “while in the West the movement focused on interfaith dialogue and building a positive image of Islam, its activities in the Central Asia republics, the Balkan countries and some African countries were more directly to increase the influence of Turkish nationalism and Islam“ [Tungul 2018].

An important fact that relates to this movement is that this Islamic transnational movement, as well as its leader, Gülen has been charged with the coup attempt in the Republic of Turkey in 2016. Namely, the Turkish government, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has accused the Islamic Movement of corruption and attempts to take over power in the Republic of Turkey. The Turkish government has accused the Gülen Movement of corruption in key institutions of the Republic of Turkey (military, police, media, education sector and judiciary) and declared the Gülen Movement as the Fetullah Gülen’s terrorist organization (FETÖ) in 2014 [Holton and Lopez 2015]. However, Gülen has dismissed these accusations and is still in the United States, which refuses to extradite him to the Republic of Turkey, due to the lack of evidence for organizing the coup attempt [Yavuz and Balci 2018]. In addition to charges of organizing the coup attempt, the Gülen Movement has also been charged with organizing the murder of the Russian ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, Andrei Karlov, in December 2016 [Lončar 2018: 177-192].

3. The goal of the Gülen Movement – The Golden Generation of Ideal People (ALTIN NESİL)

The ultimate goal of the founder of Hizmet Movement, Gülen, is to create a new world order. To support that claim, we will present a quotes from his book “The Statue of Our Souls: the Return of Islamic Thought and Activism” which reads: “We do not believe that anything new will emerge from the tatters of capitalism, or the fantasy of communism, or the debris of socialism, or the hybrid of social democracy, or old-fashioned liberalism. The truth of the matter is that, if there is if there is a world open to a new world order, it is our world” [Gülen 2005a: 24]. „From America to Europe, from the Balkans to the Great Wall of China and the heart of Africa, indeed, almost everywhere, faith, hope, security, and therefore, peace and contentment will be experienced once more under the umbrella of Islam. The whole of humanity will witness a new world order that is far beyond imagination“ [Ibidem: 3].

As we see, Gülen invites his followers to the possibility of creating a new world order, which according to him is the creation of an inclusive civilization, the so-called The Golden Generation of Ideal People (Altın Nesil). The ideal people are “people of the service”. These are people who will be educated and religious, modern and „tolerant”. Gülen believes that those who want to reform and change the world must first change themselves [Gülen 2005b: 105]. “The students of today will become the governors, judges, administrators as well as business people of the future. That is to say, today’s businessmen and other influential figures used to be simple students too [Watmough and Öztürk 2018: 44]. “Findley, notes by ,shaping the students’ personhood (kişilik) and identity (kimlik), the goal is to craft a golden generation (altın nesil) of Turks who can be producers, not consumers, of modernity” [Ibidem].

As we find, for Gülen the ideal man must be educated, he must work on himself, but he must also be religious. Gülen was an active participant as well as organizer of conferences on interreligious dialogue. However, the interreligious dialogue he represents is a dialogue between monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) [Лончар 2019: 219-229]. Polytheists and atheists do not fit into his idea of a new world order, which means that the world that Gülen strives to create is extremely elitist and exclusive. Whether this new world order, shaped by the Gülen Golden Generation of Ideal People, inspired by „modern, moderate Islam,” is a challenge for an existing international order based on sovereign states, will be analyzed in the next part of this work.

4. The Gülen Movement as a Challenge for the existing International order

In order to determine whether the Gülen Movement, the movement of “moderate, modern Islam“, presents a challenge to the existing international order, we will analyze two key factors of international order. First, we will analyze the concept of sovereignty in the Western and Islamic traditions, and then we will analyze the difference between international law and Islamic law. These analysis will be key for us to answer the question: Do transnational religious actors (in our case Islamic) represent a challenge for the existing international order?

The international order implies “a system of relations in the international community that is coordinated with international law aimed at securing world peace and functioning of the economy” [Аврамов 1990; Јевтић 2009: 231]. As the existing international order, founded by the Westphalian Agreement, is based on sovereign states, we will present the understanding of sovereignty in the Western tradition, as well as the understanding of sovereignty in the Islamic tradition. Since the Gülen Movement declares itself as an Islamic movement, it is precisely for this reason that we consider it necessary to examine whether the Islamic concept of sovereignty is identical to the Western one, which is accepted in most countries around the world.

Namely, in the Western tradition, sovereignty, in political theory, is the ultimate overseer, or authority, in the decision-making process of the state and in the maintenance of order. [Encyclopaedia Britannica]. Also, Bealey advocates that „A state becomes sovereign when other states recognize it as such” [Bealey 1999: 306]. This understanding excludes any kind of influence of non-state actors. In the Islamic tradition, the concept of sovereignty is interpreted differently than in the West. „In Islam, sovereignty is defined as *hakemiya* (ar. *hakemiya*) and it refers to the one who has the supreme power in an Islamic society, and he is called *hakem* (ar. *Hakem*)” [Јевтић 2009: 188]. The bearer of the highest authority and legislator in Islamic doctrine is God, Allah, says Miroljub Jevtić [Ibidem]. „In the Muslim Holy Book of the Qur’an, God is explicitly described as Al-Malik, in the meaning „ruler” (sovereign), or as Al-Malik al-Mulk, in the sense of „bearer of eternal power” (sovereignty) [Потежица 2006; Ђурић and Ајзенхамер 2011: 311-338]. This understanding of sovereignty is accepted in the entire Islamic theory and transcends all divisions in the Islamic community. Therefore, the Islamic state must be based on God’s law- the Shariah law [Ibidem]. It is precisely this different notion of the concept of sovereignty in the Western and Islamic traditions that sends us a significant signal that existing international order could be challenged by Islamic religious actors who do not separate faith from the state.

Namely, obedience to God, as prescribed by Islamic law is fundamental. Esposito notes that, in Islam, law is a fundamental religious doctrine, as in Judaism, while theology is the queen of science in Christianity [Esposito 2003: 141]. Muslims believe that their primary task is to spend their entire lives fighting to establish God's will in their private and public life. They see themselves as God's representatives with God's order, which is to establish God's rule on earth. Therefore, the purpose of political authority in Islam is to embody the divine message. The ideal Islamic state is the one based on God's law [Ibidem: 152].

The second aspect of our analysis demonstrate the differences between international law and Islamic law. International order is based on international law, which rests primarily on Western values and is the central category of the international order. Even though the Gülen Movement calls for certain Western values, this movement finds its source in Islam, and therefore we find it important to make an analysis of the differences between Islamic law and international law.

“Islamic law originates in two mayor sources: divine revelation (wahy) and human reason (aql). This dual identity of Islamic law is reflected in its two Arabic designations, Shariah and fiqh. Shariah bears a stronger affinity with revelation, whereas fiqh is mainly the product of human reason”, notes Esposito [Esposito 1999: 107-108]. The goal of Islamic law is the realization of God's will on earth, the expansion and defense of the Muslim community. Islamic law is based, first, on the relationship between people and God, more precisely on God-worship, and secondly, on the actions of people among themselves, more precisely on social relations [Esposito 2003: 141]. Although there are divisions in Islam, as well as in Christianity, what are common in Sunni and Shiite Islam are certain sources of Islamic law.

“Islamic law is the same as any other: a system of rules that regulates the behavior of Muslims in a particular domain and non-Muslims living in territories under administration inspired by Islamic law” [Јевтић 2009: 231]. As we have already stated, law is the main doctrine in Islam, not theology as in Christianity. The first and fundamental difference between international law and Islamic law is that Islamic law is divine – *Ius divinum*. In Islam there is no law created by the state. Islamic law is based on religious sources. Another characteristic of Islamic law is that Islamic law is personally and not territorially based, and therefore obliges Muslims wherever they live, including territories which are not governed by Islamic law [Ibidem: 232].

In addition, we have to note that “The Shariah law does not have a special international law, but that segment of legislation is just one part of the Shariah law aimed at regulating relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, wherever they are. This means that in Islamic law there is no difference between national and international law” [Ibidem: 233]. However, in the Shariah law we find a part dealing with IR and this part is called *Siyar* (ar. Siyar). Siyar is a special branch of the Fiqh. „According to the Fiqh, the whole world should become one single state with the Qur’an as a constitution and a caliph as the head, in the Sunni Islamic variant, or the Imam in the Shiite” [Ibidem: 234-235]. Islamic law divides the world into two parts: the world of Islam and the world of war. Thus, the current state, or more precisely, the current relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are a temporary state of affairs until the creation of a unique Islamic state with the purpose of establishing God’s rule and „lasting peace” on Earth [Ibidem: 235]. As we find, international law largely contradicts Islamic law, which is divine and presents a challenge for sovereign states, and therefore a challenge for the existing international order.

Conclusions

In the end, it remains only to confirm that religion plays an important role today, both in political science and in IR. This is primarily demonstrated by the transnational character of religion. Namely, globalization and growth of communication between people and societies have also caused the growth of transnationalism. This has led to the growth of the influence of many non-state actors, including religious actors in the international arena. As religious actors (in our case Islamic) have transnational goals, this requires further analysis related to their influence and importance on the international arena and international order. The transnational religious actor analyzed in this paper is the Islamic Movement, the Gülen Movement, which aims to create a transnational society and establish a new world order that is significantly different from the current international order. A key feature of the new world order promoted by Gülen and his movement is that it consists of, above all, educated and religious people. Religious people will strive for the realization of their religion, in our case Islam. As Islam has a different starting point of the concept of sovereignty and law from the Western tradition, we find, that the differences between these two concepts indicate our research question. Thus, the Gülen Movement is a challenge to the existing international order. This paper was aimed at providing a modest contribution to the study of religion in the theory of IR and contributing to its further development.

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