THE DEATH OF FETHULLAH GULEN:

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN TURKISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA



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ADVOCATES OF SILENCED TURKEY

AST is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt, not for profit charitable and educational organization based in New Jersey, USA exclusively for defending human and civil rights.

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INTRODUCTION

On October 20, 2024, Fethullah Gülen, the founder of the Hizmet Movement/ Fethullah Gülen Community, passed away in the United States. The passing of such an influential global figure garnered widespread attention in both Turkish and international media. The language, tone, and structure of the reports published in international and Turkish media were significantly different. Uupon comparing the reports in these two spheres, one might get the impression that they are describing two entirely different events or individuals.

This report compares and evaluates the differences in news language, content, and construction regarding Gülen as reflected in Turkish and international media. It conducts a critical discourse analysis of the news published between October 20-27, 2024 by examining language, tone, use of visuals, and choice of headlines. Discourse is inherently tied to ideology, power, and politics because it constitutes linguistic practices that translate into actions. Critical discourse analysis is a method used to uncover the ideological structures, social biases, and power dynamics underlying media language.

This study examines leading newspapers and news websites in international media. In Turkey, it examines the top 50 most-read news sites along with a limited number of social media posts from a critical discourse analysis perspective.

The study reveals that Turkish media's discourse regarding the death of Fethullah Gülen, as shaped by the ruling authorities, is concentrated on two main themes: religion and nationalism. Within the framework of Islamic discourse, the media employs terms such as 'pig,' 'pit,' 'ritual,' and 'ceremony' to demean and exclude Gülen and his followers, and it uses expressions like 'traitor,' 'national traitor,' 'terrorist,' and 'leader of F*tö' to stoke nationalist sentiment.. In other words, the government and its media use two distinct themes in their narrative: one religious and the other nationalist. Through

these two themes, the government shapes public thought and knowledge, constructing criminal profiles while legitimizing its own actions.

In contrast, international media framed Gülen's death around his role as a spiritual leader and educator, presenting it in a more neutral tone.



Who is Fethullah Gülen?

Fethullah Gülen, born in 1938 in the Pasinler district of Erzurum, Turkey, was an Islamic thinker, preacher, and author. From an early age, Gülen demonstrated a keen interest in religious education and, in 1959, began his role as a preacher under the Directorate of Religious Affairs. His deep religious knowledge and effective oratory skills earned him a wide following, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, he actively worked to promote ethical development in society, emphasizing the importance of education.

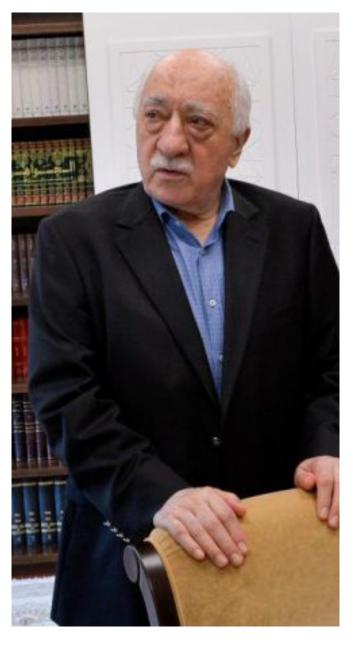


the In 1980s and 1990s, Gülen gained prominence for founding schools and educational institutions. initiating a global education movement. These schools, operating in numerous countries, are part of what is known as the Gülen Movement. The movement is active in areas such as education. intercultural dialoque, social responsibility projects. 1999, Gülen moved to the United States due to health problems and resided there until his death. During the 2000s, the movement's international activities intensified, leading to the implementation of educational dialogue projects and numerous countries. Gülen's efforts to bring together people of different religions, cultures, and nations gained

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significant attention during this time. His writings and speeches, focusing on education and religious teachings, have been widely recognized, attracting a global audience from diverse perspectives and cultures.

In 2013, a corruption scandal involving six ministers and the family of Turkey's Prime Minister led to tensions between the Hizmet Movement and the ruling AKP government. To divert attention from their misconduct. AKP officials targeted the Hizmet Movement, accusing it of attempting to establish a parallel structure within the state. Following the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the movement faced even more severe accusations. Gülen denied involvement in the coup and called for an international commission to investigate the incident, expressing his willingness to accept the findings of such a body. However, the Turkish government rejected his proposal. Gülen is widely known for his



extensive body of work, which includes numerous articles, books, and lectures. His works focus on themes such as ethics, education, tolerance, human rights, and social responsibility. Gülen's ideas and the activities of the Hizmet Movement have garnered support from various sectors. Fethullah Gülen passed away in 2024 in the United States.

A Brief History of the Hizmet Movement or the Gülen Community

The Hizmet Movement, also known as the Gülen Community, emerged in Turkey during the 1960s as a social movement focused on the fields of education, culture, religion, and community service under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen. The movement began with Gülen spreading religious education through sermons and lectures, that promoted moral values to improve society. Themes such as tolerance, peace, the importance of education, raising morally upright generations, serving humanity, and fostering social solidarity were central to Gülen's teachings, and they quickly resonated with a broad audience. However, the Gülen Movement faced criticism for its divergence from traditional religious orders and sects, particularly due to its emphasis on education and its support for the public presence of women.

From the 1970s onward, the Hizmet Movement became increasingly active in social and educational fields within Turkey. Its supporters initially established tutoring centers and student dormitories, aiming to provide educational support to economically disadvantaged students, strengthen young people's education, and nurture individuals with high moral standards. By the 1980s, the movement's influence grew significantly, leading to the establishment of numerous private schools. The success of these schools in Turkey spurred the opening of schools abroad, resulting in a global education network. The Gülen Movement became internationally recognized for its educational initiatives, particularly in regions such as Central Asia, Africa, the Balkans, Europe, and the United States. This global network was perceived as a positive force in he promotion of education worldwide.



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Beyond education, the Hizmet Movement also expanded its activities into media, healthcare, business, and civil society. The movement reached a wide audience through media outlets such as Zaman newspaper and Samanyolu TV. t established its own financial resources and received support from numerous businesspeople. By the 2000s, the movement's influence within Turkey had grown substantially, and it became known for its intercultural dialogue projects and its emphasis on interfaith tolerance.

However, beginning in the 2010s, tensions arose between the Hizmet Movement and the Turkish government, which was increasingly uncomfortable with the movement's critical stance. Despite this conflict, the Hizmet Movement has continued its educational and cultural activities around the world.



METHOD

This study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its method. CDA examines the impact of social and political contexts on media discourses and reveals how ideological and sociopolitical structures are reproduced. This study analyzes the language used in reports about Fethullah Gülen's death by Turkish and international media organizations, focusing on neutrality and political discourse. The goal of the analysis is to identify the ideological stance of each media outlet and understand their influence on societal perceptions.

The research encompasses 201 articles from the 50 most visited Turkish news websites and 18 YouTube broadcasts published between October 20 and 27, 2024. On the international side, 34 reports from leading news outlets such as The Washington Post, AFP, Reuters, and The Economist were examined. Additionally, the headlines and accompanying visuals of 15 Turkish newspapers published on October 21, 2024, were evaluated.

FINDINGS

Constructing Nationalist and Religious Discourses Through Gülen's Death

This critical discourse analysis examines how Turkish and international media reports about Fethullah Gülen's death shaped their narratives, focusing on the language used and the perspectives offered. Sources presented different views on Gülen's legacy and death, reflecting diverse ideological and political angles. These sources are divided into two main categories: Turkish Media and International Media.

Turkish Media: Turkish media sources predominantly adopted a critical stance toward Gülen, characterizing him with terms such as "terrorist" and "traitor." Notable examples include:

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Yeni Şafak: In a column titled "A Pig's Pit Ceremony," İsmail Kılıçarslan used highly derogatory language to portray Gülen as a negative figure both religiously and politically.

NTV: Coverage emphasized internal strife within Gülen's movement following his death, leadership disputes, and security concerns, portraying Gülen's legacy as a threat to Turkey.

These sources commonly depicted Gülen as harmful to Turkey, suggesting that his death brought relief to the country. They also employed conspiracy theories and speculative narratives, framing Gülen's death as part of "hidden plans."

International Media: International media adopted a more neutral tone, highlighting Gülen's spiritual and social contributions. Examples include: Reuters: Described Gülen as "a Turkish cleric living in exile in the United States," employing impartial language and discussing his movement in a broader social context.

The Economist: Focused on Gülen's efforts to transform Turkey and his ideological motivations, emphasizing his intellectual and religious identity.

These international outlets framed Gülen as a spiritual and ideological figure with broad influence rather than a direct threat to Turkey, highlighting his religious and social impact rather than political controversies.

National Perspective: Analysis of Turkish Media

Reports in the Turkish media regarding Fethullah Gülen's death align closely with the political discourse of the ruling government. Turkish media has generally portrayed Gülen's death through a lens of "othering" and antagonism, presenting him as an enemy. The overall narrative reflects his death as a positive development for Turkey's security and social stability. Two dominant discourses were identified in Turkish media coverage of his death: nationalist discourse and religious discourse. Media outlets used terms like

"enemy," "traitor," and "terrorist" to depict Gülen, aiming to establish a collective "us" versus "them" sentiment among the public. The language employed in these reports often constitutes "hate speech." While constructing nationalist discourse, religious arguments or exclusionary expressions based on faith were also utilized to reinforce the religious narrative.

Nationalist Discourse

Turkish media consistently described Gülen with harsh terms such as "terrorist leader" or "traitor," which formed the foundation of the narrative. Phrases like "terrorist," "traitor," and "died stateless" were prominently used to strengthen nationalist sentiments. These expressions aimed to elevate the government to a victorious position by framing Gülen as a defeated enemy. A closer examination of individual news outlets highlights these tendencies more clearly:

- ➤ Hürriyet: The newspaper described Gülen's leadership even in reports about his declining health as that of a "terrorist leader." For instance, a report on the clearance of Gülen's room framed the event as if targeting an "enemy"
- ➤ Haber7: This outlet amplified statements from leaders of the ruling AKP and MHP, emphasizing that Gülen died "stateless" and his body would not be brought to Turkey. Additionally, the report framed Gülen's death as a "national achievement," reinforcing the nationalist discourse by associating Gülen with a threat to national interests NTV: This media outlet presented Gülen as an "other" through labels such as "terrorist leader" and "FETO leader," extending this othering to anyone who sympathized with or supported him.

Milliyet: The newspaper shared comments by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan, reiterating the government's commitment to combating terrorism. The inclusion of intelligence reports further painted Gülen as a threat within the subtext.

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TRT Haber: As the state broadcaster, TRT framed Gülen's death as a relief for Turkey, using terms like "terrorist" and "traitor." This narrative aligned closely with government policy, legitimizing it through its language and framing.

En Son Haber: This outlet highlighted the organizational shifts within Gülen's movement post-death, describing these changes as a positive development for Turkey. The narrative frequently referred to Gülen's death as a "hopeful" outcome aligned with Turkey's national interests

TGRT Haber: This outlet reported Gülen's death within the framework of government statements, emphasizing Turkey's fight against FETO. The alignment with state policy reinforced the government's narrative.

Karar: The newspaper analyzed the impact of Gülen's death on Turkey's national security, discussing its implications for power dynamics within his movement. The use of terms like "organization" created an image of the Gülen movement as a "national threat"

Takvim: With a mocking tone, Takvim described Gülen's death using terms like "traitor" and "terrorist leader." The outlet framed his burial in the U.S. as "historic justice" and presented the event as a national victory to cultivate nationalist sentiment.

Yeni Çağ: Yeni Çağ evaluated Gülen's death as a victory for Turkey, labeling him as a "traitor" and "terrorist" while attributing his death to internal turmoil within the movement. The newspaper framed Gülen not as a religious figure but as a threat to national interests. From a critical discourse perspective, Yeni Çağ's language appears to aim at intensifying societal resentment toward Gülen and his movement.

Posta: Posta emphasized Gülen's death using descriptors like "terrorist" and "traitor," portraying him as a threat to Turkey. The outlet's narrative aimed to reinforce negative perceptions of the Gülen movement in public discourse.

TV100: TV100 focused on the diplomatic aspects of Gülen's death, highlighting funeral preparations and security measures in the United States. The coverage indirectly suggested the need for Turkey to strengthen its stance against Gülen, legitimizing the government's actions against the movement as necessary.

Gazete Duvar: Gazete Duvar echoed sentiments similar to Milliyet, quoting statements by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan and Minister of Justice Yılmaz Tunç. The newspaper reported that Gülen's death would not lead to complacency in counterterrorism efforts, and the struggle against the movement would persist. The language subtly legitimized state violence against Gülen and his movement.

Vatan: Vatan described Gülen's death in the U.S. as a betrayal and a tragedy, portraying him as a traitorous figure to Turkey. This framing supported the creation of a collective "us" identity in opposition to Gülen, further fostering hostility against him and his movement.

Internet Haber: Internet Haber predominantly covered Gülen's death through the lens of national security and interests. The phrase "stateless terrorist" was used to depict Gülen as a figure without allegiance. The repeated use of "stateless" reflects a broader effort to create a divisive "us vs. them" narrative in Turkey.

Haber Global: Haber Global analyzed Gülen's death in the context of U.S.-Turkey relations. The outlet discussed how his burial in the U.S. resonated in Turkey and speculated on potential leadership struggles within the movement. The report critiqued the perceived role of the U.S. in supporting Gülen, fostering anti-American sentiment among readers.

Gerçek Gündem: Gerçek Gündem interpreted Gülen's death as symbolic of the movement's failure, describing it as "the tragedy of a stateless traitor." The narrative included details of the funeral process, employing a dismissive tone. This portrayal aligned Gülen with pro-American sentiment, aiming to reinforce the Turkish government's

desired image of him as an adversary.

Süper Haber: Süper Haber covered Gülen's death with a sensational tone, focusing on the funeral's specifics. Expressions like "buried stateless" were used to frame Gülen as a figure without belonging. This language contributed to nationalist discourse and sought to legitimize injustices against Gülen and his movement, appealing to Turkey's nationalist audience.

The aforementioned news outlets reinforce nationalist rhetoric through the use of terms such as "terror," "counterterrorism," and "homeland," legitimizing illegal actions against Gülen and his supporters in the eyes of the public. The construction of identity and the "othering" of the Gülen movement are particularly evident in Turkish media. For example, platforms such as Haber7. com, Hürriyet, Yeni Çağ, and Posta label Gülen as a "traitor to the nation" and portray his death as a societal threat. These outlets aim to evoke fear and anger in their readership by designating Gülen and his supporters as "dangerous others." By emphasizing counterterrorism narratives, they perpetuate the perception of the Gülen movement as a continuing threat.

In Turkish media, Gülen and the Hizmet Movement are systematically constructed as the "other" within societal identity. Media organizations present Gülen as a figure "threatening Turkey's unity and security," employing a "us versus them" dichotomy. For instance, NTV's coverage of the "Room 251" detail, alongside imagery of military camouflage and patrols, symbolically strengthens the threat perception associated with the Gülen movement. The nationalist rhetoric also extends to newspaper headlines. Words such as "traitor," "ringleader," and "terrorist" were prominently featured in headlines across these publications. Additionally, the photos selected by these newspapers were deliberately chosen to demean and disparage Gülen, further bolstering the narrative against him.









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Nearly all of the aforementioned newspapers used an edited version of a video featuring Gülen during a period of severe illness. The selection of such a photo contributes to the constructed narrative of "othering" and serves as a tool to demonize and demean Gülen in the public eye.

Insome reports, Turkish media employs speculative and mysterious language, portraying Gülen and his community as a secretive organization. This choice of language simultaneously ostracizes and labels them as enemies. The use of QR codes for entry at Gülen's funeral, attended by approximately 20,000 people, was a security measure due to the high turnout but was portrayed in Turkish media as a sign of a secretive

organization. Outlets such as Sabah, NTV, A Haber, and Sözcü are notable examples.

Analysis of Specific Media Outlets:

Halk TV: This outlet analyzed the U.S.'s stance and Turkey's reactions to Gülen's death while critically examining details of the funeral arrangements. It emphasized narratives suggesting U.S. protection of Gülen, fostering an anti-American sentiment among readers. This rhetoric bolsters the perception of the U.S. as a "hostile nation" and indirectly implies that Turkey should strengthen its position in foreign policy following Gülen's death in the U.S. (halktv.com.tr).

Onedio: Onedio took a humorous approach, combining social media reactions and conspiracy theories to present the event with a lighter tone. Stories, including QR code entries at the funeral, were presented with sarcastic and dismissive language that reflected public sentiment in Turkey.

Sabah: This outlet framed the story of Gülen's burial in the U.S. around a narrative of a "life of betrayal." It emphasized details like QR code entry at the funeral, portraying the event as criminally suspicious. References to the security measures at the funeral highlighted Turkey's longstanding legal actions against Gülen, subtly reinforcing the image of Gülen and his movement as secretive and like a criminal organization.

Takvim: Takvim speculated that U.S. intelligence was involved in Gülen's death and suggested that his burial location remains concealed. By focusing on details like the undisclosed burial site, Takvim propagated theories of "intervention by secret forces." These expressions align with other outlets like Sabah and Halk TV, aiming to criminalize Gülen and his movement.

Aydınlık: This outlet associated Gülen's death in the U.S. with the Western world, critiquing the West for its weak stance against FETÖ (the Turkish government's term for Gülen's movement). The narrative reinforced nationalist rhetoric by portraying the U.S. as a protector of the Gülen movement.

A Haber: Similar to Sabah, Takvim, and Halk TV, A Haber focused on details like the use of QR codes at the funeral, aiming to perpetuate the notion of the Gülen movement as a "secret cult."

Sözcü: The newspaper Sözcü reported on the funeral details with an emphasis on elements such as entry via QR codes, presenting the situation in a tragicomic tone. Sözcü used dismissive language that aimed to reduce the gravity of Gülen's death and diminish the influence of the movement in the public eye.

Haber 3: Haber 3 conveyed details about Gülen's funeral preparations and developments within the community using a speculative tone, attempting to add a mysterious dimension to the event. Similar to many of the aforementioned sources, Haber 3 sought to portray the Gülen Movement as a secretive organization by using enigmatic language.

F5 Haber: F5 Haber addressed Gülen's death with dramatic and sensational language, particularly framing the funeral preparations as "secret plans." This

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approach aimed to incite suspicion and curiosity about the Gülen Movement in an attempt to delegitimize it. (f5haber.com)

Summary: In the Turkish media, news about Gülen's death was predominantly framed with an exclusionary and demonizing tone, often bordering on hate speech, even in outlets claiming to be opposition voices. While large media groups aligned with the government's narrative, dissenting voices emerged, albeit briefly and at a cost. For example, Yeni Asya newspaper's editor-inchief, Kazım Güleçyüz, was arrested for publishing a condolence message for Gülen. Güleçyüz's message became a stark example of the media's intolerance toward dissenting perspectives. His message read:

"Fethullah Gülen has passed from the world of trials to the realm of the afterlife. The accusations against him will now be judged in the hereafter. Reiterating our wish for the cessation of injustices that have caused much suffering under the pretext of these accusations, we pray that God treats him with mercy and justice. Condolences to the community."

Stigmatization Through Religious Discourse:

Fethullah Gülen and his movement represent a new form of social movement in Turkey, offering a distinct perspective compared to other religious communities and orders. Unlike other religious organizations, the Gülen Movement placed significant emphasis on formal education and pioneered in this field. It also stood out by supporting women's presence in public spaces, setting it apart from other religious communities. For these reasons, Gülen faced criticism and obstacles, particularly from political Islamist circles during his time in Turkey.

The demonization of the Gülen Movement became more pronounced following the July 15, 2016, coup attempt. Political Islamist circles and media outlets close to them interpreted and framed the news of Gülen's death through the lens of these past tensions and prejudices.

Yeni Şafak (İsmail Kılıçarslan's Opinion Column): The headline "The Funeral of a Pig in a Hole" is an example of extreme vilification concerning Gülen's death, as mentioned above. The term "pig" in this article not only serves as an insult but also carries a deeper, exclusionary religious meaning due to its prohibition in Islam. Similarly, the use of the term "hole" to describe the grave of Gülen, a leader of a religious movement, embodies exclusion, denial, and degradation based on religious discourse.

In Islam, a grave is seen as a spiritual waypoint for the afterlife, carrying significant religious value. The phrase "funeral in a hole" in Yeni Şafak reduces the funeral and burial process to a qualitatively worthless and mocking level. The newspaper uses its language to exclude a religious leader based on religious grounds.

The term "pig" reflects the animosity of certain political Islamists toward Gülen and his movement. The phrase "funeral in a hole" conveys a tone of mockery and expresses a sense of joy over the death, as the word "ceremony" connotes festivity, grandeur, and a celebratory moment.

Milli Gazete: Milli Gazete examined Fethullah Gülen's death from an Islamic perspective, describing him as "a figure who harmed religion." Reflecting some of the most pronounced criticisms by political Islamists, the article emphasized that Gülen acted against Islam and claimed that they had been opposing him since the 1990s. Through this narrative, Milli Gazete aimed to validate its long-standing criticisms of Gülen and to reinforce its own political and religious stance.

Time Türk: Time Türk framed the reports about Gülen's death in the United States through an Islamic lens, presenting the event within a religious and ideological context. By describing Gülen as "a figure who harmed religion," the outlet developed a narrative appealing to the religious sensitivities of its audience.

Akit: Akit employed a religious tone in its coverage of Gülen's death, describing him as a "tyrant" and a "traitor." The newspaper emphasized his

alleged opposition to Islam, aiming to foster an image of Gülen as an enemy of the faith among its readership. Using this language, Akit sought to portray Gülen as an anti-religious or even anti-Islamic figure.

Summary: The language used in the above sources also appeared prominently in their newspaper headlines. Phrases like "Devil" and "Bottom of Hell" were employed to stigmatize and demonize Gülen. These terms underscored a broader narrative of exclusion and vilification against Gülen and his movement, drawing heavily on religious discourse to amplify these perceptions.

Religious Discourse and Stigmatization in Turkish Media

Pro-government media outlets in Turkey have approached Fethullah Gülen with a dismissive and exclusionary tone using religious arguments. These outlets aimed to portray Gülen as sinful or anti-Islamic, employing language that contradicts the Islamic principles they claim to uphold. In some instances, they presented themselves as arbiters of heaven and hell, passing judgment on Gülen's spiritual fate.

Several media outlets also linked Gülen's death to the imagery associated with the July 15 coup attempt, combining this narrative with religious discourse. Newspapers used visuals filled with flags, cannons, and weapons to vilify Gülen and his movement, constructing a new "us" identity in contrast to the "enemy." These visuals and expressions reinforced nationalist rhetoric while simultaneously feeding both nationalist and religious narratives through martyrdom symbolism.







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Analysis of Fethullah Gülen's Death in International Media

International media outlets approached Gülen's death with a more neutral tone, presenting the event in a balanced manner by emphasizing its social and religious aspects. Unlike Turkish media, international outlets focused on Gülen's religious and societal impact, describing him as an ideological and spiritual figure. They highlighted his humanitarian, religious, and political contributions, offering insights into his legacy.

In stark contrast to the accusatory and harsh tone of Turkish media, international outlets used impartial and explanatory language to report Gülen's death. Examples include:

- Reuters (reuters.com): Reuters described Gülen as "a Turkish cleric living in exile in the United States," focusing more on his religious and social aspects than political conflicts. This portrayal framed Gülen's death as the loss of a religious leader rather than a political figure.
- The Washington Post (washingtonpost.com): The Washington Post characterized Gülen as "Erdoğan's rival" and contextualized his life within his exile in the U.S., exploring broader historical and political dimensions. The publication also acknowledged Gülen as a religious leader and highlighted the impact of his death on Turkish-American relations.

International media also analyzed the implications of Gülen's death on Turkish-American relations and the political landscape in Turkey:

• **BBC (bbc.com)**: BBC explored how Gülen's death could influence Turkey's political atmosphere, analyzing the movement's effect on the dynamics of opposition and governance in the country. The report offered insights into the tensions between Turkey and the U.S. resulting from Gülen's presence in the latter and speculated on how his death might impact these relations.

 The Times: The Times identified Gülen as Erdoğan's opponent and analyzed how his death might affect Turkey's power struggle. It examined the government's stance on Gülen's legacy and its potential influence on public opinion, placing the event within a broader political context.

International media framed Gülen's death as a significant event with social, religious, and political dimensions. They underscored its implications for Turkish-American relations and Turkey's internal political climate, highlighting the multifaceted impact of Gülen's legacy on both domestic and international stages.

International media outlets reported on Fethullah Gülen's passing using impartial and principled language, which was further reinforced by the visual materials they selected. These outlets, including The Economist, BBC Turkish, Reuters, and Al Jazeera, adopted a multidimensional and balanced approach to covering Gülen's life, presenting him as a cleric, educator, and activist. Alongside examining his impact in Turkey, they highlighted his global initiatives.

The visuals accompanying their coverage typically featured simple and dignified portraits of Gülen, reflecting the human aspect of the story while showcasing journalistic professionalism. For instance, The Economist described Gülen's passing with the following statement:

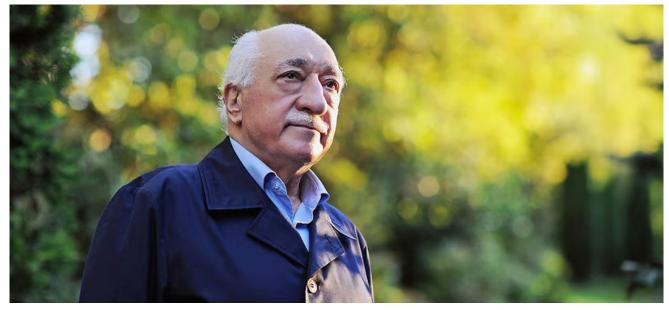
"The life of Fethullah Gülen, a scholar, teacher, and activist who sought to transform Turkey through the most nuanced means, has come to an end." This portrayal offers an impartial assessment of Gülen's influence on Turkey's social, cultural, and religious fabric. The visual paired with the report conveyed a symbolic theme that captured the essence of Gülen's life and contributions. In essence, the presentation demonstrated the commitment of international media to the principles of objective journalism.

In summary, the presentation of Fethullah Gülen's death in Turkish and international media highlights a stark contrast, with international media reflecting its neutrality in both language and visual choices.









Reflections of Gülen's Death on Social Media Platforms

This section examines the reactions and content generated by users on social media platforms regarding Fethullah Gülen's death. Social media has become a critical tool for gauging public sentiment, especially during events like this, through the rapid dissemination of narratives, conspiracy theories, and humorous content.

Gülen's death elicited varied responses on social media, ranging from anger to sarcasm:

Twitter: On Twitter, many users approached Gülen's death with ironic and humorous tones. Under hashtags like "F*TÖ leader died," some posts generated humor through speculation about the funeral, while others adopted a directly derogatory and dismissive tone. These humorous posts framed Gülen's public image in a belittling manner.

Instagram and Facebook: On these platforms, visual humor (e.g., memes about funeral details) and sarcastic commentary gained prominence. References to the QR code system for attending the funeral were particularly highlighted to downplay the seriousness of Gülen's movement.

Social media also became a breeding ground for conspiracy theories, suggesting that Gülen's death was part of a "covert operation." These theories aimed to evoke public anxiety by insinuating the involvement of "hidden forces."

Twitter: On Twitter, claims circulated that the U.S. was attempting to conceal Gülen's death or that the death itself was fabricated. Some users speculated that Gülen had been protected by U.S. intelligence and that his body had been secretly moved elsewhere. Such theories propagated the notion that Gülen's death was part of an anti-Turkey maneuver by the U.S.

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YouTube: Content creators on YouTube presented theories about "secret plans" surrounding Gülen's death and alleged that his funeral was being clandestinely protected by U.S. authorities. These videos often aimed to foster suspicion, portraying Gülen and his movement as part of a criminal structure.

Gülen's death also spurred both supportive and critical commentary:

Facebook Groups: In groups aligned with the Gülen movement, users expressed grief over his passing and praised his religious teachings. Supporters emphasized his legacy and expressed intentions to uphold his values.

Twitter: Conversely, critics on Twitter celebrated Gülen's death, framing it as a victory for Turkey. These comments reinforced the narrative that Gülen had harmed Turkey and that his passing marked liberation for the country.

Through these social media reactions, Gülen's death became a polarizing event, further amplifying divides in public sentiment.

Gülen's Death Reflected Through Social Media Trends and Hashtags

Fethullah Gülen's passing received extensive coverage on social media platforms through various hashtags and trending topics. Notably, users on Twitter came together under specific hashtags to express their emotions regarding Gülen's death:

#F*TÖLeaderDied: This hashtag became a hub for posts incorporating humor, criticism, and conspiracy theories about Gülen's death. Users openly shared their thoughts about Gülen under this tag, often employing derogatory language.

#HizmetWillContinue: Supporters of the Gülen movement used this hashtag to emphasize their commitment to preserving Gülen's legacy. These messages conveyed the belief that the Hizmet movement would persist even after his death.

CONCLUSION AND OVERALL EVALUATION

his analysis highlights the contrasting ideological and discursive frameworks of Turkish and Western media in reporting Fethullah Gülen's death. Turkish media predominantly portrayed Gülen as a "terrorist leader" and societal threat, while Western media framed him as a "persecuted opposition figure" in Turkey. Turkish media adopted an exclusionary and hostile tone, while Western media used a more neutral and empathetic narrative. These discursive differences reveal how media outlets reflect power dynamics within their socio-political contexts, shaping audience perceptions.

Turkish Media's Narrative

Turkish media's alignment with governmental rhetoric led to reports saturated with nationalist and religious language. Gülen and his movement were subjected to "othering," "demonization," and "dehumanization," without presenting any deep exploration of his ideology or viewpoints. Gülen was labeled a "traitor," a "terrorist," and "harmful to Islam." This approach further reinforced societal biases and a polarized "us versus them" mentality. Visual elements such as flags, weapons, and military imagery were used extensively to associate Gülen with terrorism and bolster a nationalist sentiment among readers. This contributed to collective animosity toward Gülen and his followers while legitimizing governmental actions against the movement.

Western Media's Narrative

Western media, in contrast, focused on Gülen's contributions as a religious leader, educator, and advocate for dialogue. Publications such as The Economist, BBC, and Reuters underscored Gülen's humanitarian impact and intellectual legacy, offering a multidimensional view of his life and work. Visuals accompanying these reports, often simple portraits, reflected a professional and respectful journalistic tone. Western outlets also emphasized Gülen's global influence and his role in education and intercultural dialogue, framing him as more than a national figure.

Implications of Media Narratives

The divergent narratives of Turkish and Western media highlight their ideological biases and the power dynamics influencing their discourses. The Turkish media's exclusionary language has deepened societal divisions and fueled polarization, presenting Gülen and his movement as existential threats to national identity. Western media's balanced coverage offered a broader perspective that allowed readers to develop a more nuanced understanding of Gülen's life and contributions.

This research underscores the role of media in shaping public perception and societal discourse by revealing how reporting styles influence collective attitudes toward figures like Fethullah Gülen. The emphasis on nationalist and religious rhetoric in Turkish media served to consolidate societal unity against a common "enemy," while Western media fostered a more global and multifaceted narrative, highlighting the complexities of Gülen's legacy.

The criticisms of Gülen and his movement in Turkish media heavily utilized religious language, creating societal division by appealing to public faith and values. Discourses fueled by religious arguments reinforced the perception that Gülen and the Hizmet movement diverged from Islamic principles, fostering a sense of religious hostility among readers. This trend also raised the troubling issue of using Islamic sanctities as a tool for societal division. Some media outlets adopted a "demonizing" tone in addressing Gülen's death by portraying him as an anti-Islamic figure. This approach reveals a paradox, where religious rhetoric is weaponized in ways that conflict with the ethical principles of the faith itself.

Polarization and Hostility in Turkish Media

Turkish media's coverage of Gülen's death reflected a strong process of "othering" and hostility. The language and visuals used in reporting deepened societal polarization. These narratives aimed to provoke feelings of hatred and animosity toward Gülen and the Hizmet movement among the general public, exacerbating societal divides. The alignment of media narratives with government rhetoric undermined social harmony and tolerance. Furthermore,

the suppression of dissenting voices and alternative perspectives led to a homogenized media landscape, highlighting the lack of democratic values within the Turkish media environment.

International Media's Neutral Perspective

Unlike Turkish media, international outlets portrayed Gülen as a religious leader and social figure, adopting a more neutral perspective. These reports provided a broader context by focusing on Gülen's impact on U.S.-Turkey relations, his religious legacy, and the education movement. These characterizations allowed global audiences to view Gülen not just in the context of Turkey but as a figure with significant religious and social influence worldwide.

Distinct Narratives in Media

This analysis reveals a stark contrast in how Turkish and international media, as well as social media, approached the narrative surrounding Gülen's death: Turkish Media: Emphasized national security concerns by aligning closely with government rhetoric, and employed divisive nationalist and religious language.

International Media: Adopted a broader perspective, highlighting Gülen's religious and social legacy while maintaining a neutral tone.

Social Media: Served as a space for public emotional reactions that ranged from criticism to speculation and support.

Moral Decay in Public Discourse

This study also sheds light on the moral degradation reflected in Turkish society's reactions to Gülen's death. The inability to maintain human decency, even in the context of a funeral, underscored a profound societal issue. Political scientist and author Herkül Milas summarized the situation succinctly:

"The shock I experienced was not about the death but about what was done and said in Turkey afterward. Truly bizarre things were expressed - things that shouldn't be said about even an enemy. It's a shocking reflection of Turkey entering a pathological state."

These statements highlight the moral collapse within parts of Turkish society, where hostility and divisive rhetoric overshadow basic human decency.

The media's framing of events significantly influenced societal perceptions. Gülen's death exemplifies the Turkish media's bias, demonstrating how narratives are shaped by ideological perspectives and presented to readers. The stark contrast between Turkish and international media reveals the profound impact of ideological alignment on news framing, reflecting broader issues of societal polarization and moral decay in public discourse.

In addition, criticisms of Gülen and his movement have utilized religious rhetoric to create divisions within society based on beliefs and values. Narratives fueled by religious arguments reinforce the perception that Gülen and his movement deviate from Islam, constructing a sense of religious "enmity" among readers. This approach brings the risk of using the sanctities of Islam as a tool for division. The demonizing tone adopted by some media outlets in their coverage of Gülen's death, portraying him as an un-Islamic figure, creates a contradiction with the religious rhetoric employed.

In summary, the Turkish media's coverage of Fethullah Gülen's death has been characterized by a strong process of othering and demonization, with language and visual elements serving to deepen societal polarization. These narratives aim to incite feelings of hatred, anger, and hostility toward Gülen and his movement among broad segments of society, further exacerbating social divides. Media narratives about Gülen's death, aligned with the ruling party's stance, have undermined social harmony and tolerance. The suppression of dissenting voices and alternative perspectives has led to a homogenized media discourse, exposing a media structure that is inconsistent with democratic values.

In conclusion, this stance in Turkish media serves as a significant example of how nationalist and religious rhetoric can fuel societal divisions. The narratives constructed around Gülen's death call for a deeper examination of the media's role, its power, and its ability to influence public perception, as well as the dynamics of societal identity construction and the impact of political authority on media.

In contrast to the Turkish media, international media have portrayed Gülen as a religious leader and social figure with a more neutral perspective. By focusing on issues such as his impact on U.S.-Turkey relations, religious legacy, and educational initiatives, international media have provided a broader perspective. This characterization allows international audiences to recognize Gülen not only from a Turkish perspective but also as a figure with religious and social influence worldwide.

This analysis reveals a distinct difference between the narratives presented by Turkish and international media, as well as social media. The Turkish media emphasize the importance of the event in terms of national security, while international media highlight the religious and social context from a broader perspective. Social media, on the other hand, emerges as a platform for public emotional reactions, criticisms, and speculations.

This study also highlights the moral decay within Turkish society following Gülen's death. The erosion of the virtue of human decency, even in the context of a funeral, reflects a societal decline. Political scientist and author Herkül Milas summarized this reality aptly:

"What shocked me was not the death itself, but what was done and said afterward in Turkey. Truly bizarre things were expressed—things that shouldn't be said even about someone considered an enemy. This was a big shock for me. I didn't expect this. It shows that Turkey has entered a pathological state. There is no other explanation. It's a pathological situation."

Ultimately, the insults and false narratives about Gülen do not diminish his character or spiritual leadership, but they starkly reveal the moral collapse within society.

This research demonstrates how the framing of events by the media can influence public perception and the impact of differing narratives on society. Gülen's death serves as a crucial example of the bias in Turkish media, illustrating how events are shaped and presented through an ideological lens to the audience.



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