Rethinking Tawhid and Tolerance: A Theological Study of Fethullah Gülen in the Context of Plural Societies

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi konsep tauhid dalam pemikiran Fethullah Gülen sebagai fondasi teologis bagi toleransi aktif dalam masyarakat plural. Latar belakang penelitian ini adalah meningkatnya intoleransi berbasis agama di berbagai negara, termasuk Indonesia, yang menunjukkan perlunya pendekatan teologi Islam yang inklusif dan transformatif. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka kualitatif dengan analisis tematik terhadap karya-karya utama Gülen serta literatur ilmiah tentang teori twin tolerations dan active tolerance. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa Gülen menafsirkan tauhid secara relasional, yaitu sebagai prinsip etis yang menghubungkan hubungan spiritual kepada Tuhan dengan tanggung jawab sosial kepada sesama manusia. Konsep cinta (mahabbah) dan kebebasan berkeyakinan dalam pemikiran Gülen tidak hanya bernilai spiritual, tetapi juga menjadi dasar praksis sosial melalui pendidikan, dialog antaragama, dan pelayanan lintas budaya dalam Gerakan Hizmet. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemikiran Gülen membentuk kerangka Islamic public theology yang kompatibel dengan demokrasi dan multikulturalisme. Kontribusi orisinal penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi antara kerangka teologis sufistik dan teori toleransi politik modern, serta penyajian model teologi Islam partisipatif yang dapat diterapkan dalam kebijakan sosial dan pendidikan inklusif.

Kata kunci: Tauhid Relasional; Fethullah Gülen; Toleransi Aktif; Teologi Publik Islam; Gerakan Hizmet.

Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the concept of tawhid in the thought of Fethullah Gülen as a theological foundation for active tolerance in plural societies. The research is motivated by the rising tide of religion-based intolerance across

various countries, including Indonesia, highlighting the need for an inclusive and transformative Islamic theology. The method employed is qualitative literature research with thematic analysis of Gülen's key works, alongside scholarly literature on the twin tolerations theory and active tolerance. The main findings indicate that Gülen interprets tawhid relationally-that is, as an ethical principle linking spiritual connection with God to social responsibility towards fellow human beings. The concepts of love (mahabbah) and freedom of belief in Gülen's thought are not only of spiritual value but also serve as the foundation for social praxis through education, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural service within the Hizmet Movement. The study concludes that Gülen's thought constitutes a framework of Islamic public theology compatible with democracy and multiculturalism. The study's original contribution lies in integrating a Sufi theological framework with modern political theories of tolerance, and in presenting a model of participatory Islamic theology applicable to inclusive social and educational policy.

Keywords: Relational Tawhid; Fethullah Gülen; Active Tolerance; Islamic Public Theology; Hizmet Movement.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the global landscape has witnessed a significant surge in religious intolerance and violence. This phenomenon is not confined to Western countries-marked by the rise of Islamophobia in the aftermath of international conflicts such as the war in Gaza (Khater, Albakjaji, and El Baroudy 2024; Sunar 2017) but has also spread across Southeast Asia. In this region, high religious diversity does not necessarily correlate with social stability. In Indonesia, for instance, the Pew Research score on religious freedom was just 1 out of 4 in 2020, reflecting the considerable social and legal pressures faced by minority groups (Hakim, Qurbani, and Wahid 2023).

Reports by the Setara Institute and research by Yusuf et al. (2020) indicate that religious intolerance in Indonesia has actually increased alongside the rise of exclusive religious claims. According to these findings, participation in intra-faith activities-such as halaqah or closed religious study groups-tends to reduce tolerance towards non-Muslims (Prasetyo and Halimatusa'diyah 2024). In Aceh, for example, violence against minority religious adherents is often legitimised by local religious authorities who reject pluralism (Nasution, Asari, and Al-Rasyid 2024). This indicates that radicalism does not only pose external threats but is also rooted in rigid theological understandings of tawhid and interreligious relations.

At the global level, the Global Trends in Religious Violence report also demonstrates that states restricting religious freedom are more prone to religious violence, including attacks on places of worship, civil conflict, and transnational terrorism (Saiya 2015; Zellman and Malji 2023). Indonesia is

no exception. Although its constitution guarantees religious freedom, the implementation on the ground remains marred by discrimination, particularly against unofficial religions and communities with differing interpretations (Bagir et al. 2020; Fenton 2016).

Academic research on tolerance in Islam has expanded significantly, encompassing theological, sociological, and cross-cultural practical dimensions. Three main strands of previous studies are particularly relevant to this research. First, studies on Islamic theology and principles of tolerance affirm that values such as compassion, justice, and coexistence are deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith. Scholars such as Ushama (2018), Elius et al. (2019), and Alotaibi (2021) highlight tolerance as a theological principle derived from the Prophet Muhammad's practices and the Ahl al-Dhimmah tradition. This view is also supported by hermeneutical approaches to Qur'anic verses on pluralism (Galadari 2012; Kadivar 2021; Takdir and Sumbulah 2024). However, most of these studies remain normative and fall short of reconstructing tawhid as a practical axiological foundation in multicultural contexts.

Second, literature on pluralism and Islamic moderation within socio-political frameworks frequently discusses the concept of rahmatan lil alamin and Islamic cosmopolitanism as responses to radicalism (Basid et al. 2024; Campanini 2021; Hasyim and Hasanuddin 2023). These concepts are also reflected in interfaith dialogue initiatives in Southeast Asia (Khan et al. 2020), as well as in Alfred Stepan's theory of twin tolerations (Solomon and Tausch 2020; Veković 2019) and Mohamed Fathi Osman's notion of active tolerance (Adelman, Verkuyten, and Yogeeswaran 2022; Nasih et al. 2024). While rich in interdisciplinary discourse, few studies have systematically integrated these frameworks into the conceptual and methodological structure of Islamic theology.

Third, research on the thought and movement of Fethullah Gülen has extensively explored his contributions to interfaith dialogue, global education, and modern spirituality through the Hizmet Movement (Conway 2014a; Ebaugh 2010; Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022). Studies by Balcı (2014) and Çelik et al. (2015) have shown how values of cosmopolitanism and social service are manifested in practice. However, these works tend to be sociological in nature and do not specifically examine how tawhid-as a core theological principle-is reformulated by Gülen as the ethical foundation of active tolerance within democratic states and pluralistic societies.

This research seeks to reconstruct the concept of tawhid in Fethullah Gülen's thought as a theological foundation for active tolerance in multicultural societies. Specifically, it aims to address scholarly gaps left unaddressed by previous studies through three main contributions. First, it

examines tawhid not merely as a metaphysical doctrine in Islam but as a relational ethical principle that governs the relationship between human beings and fellow creations of God. Second, it integrates Gülen's thought with Alfred Stepan's theory of twin tolerations and Mohamed Fathi Osman's concept of active tolerance to formulate a model of participatory theology applicable to democratic contexts. Third, it proposes a theological approach that is not only normative but also practical-emphasising love, freedom of belief, and peaceful coexistence as comprehensive expressions of faith in plural societies.

This study proceeds from the argument that tawhid, as conceptualised by Fethullah Gülen, is not merely a transcendent theological doctrine, but also a relational ethical framework that fosters active tolerance in diverse societies (Gülen 2004c; Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022). Gülen interprets tawhid as an acknowledgment of God's oneness alongside the recognition of the diversity of His creation, thereby rendering its implications both spiritual and socio-political (Gülen 2011; Saritoprak and Griffith 2005). Building on this view, the research argues that a relational and Sufi-inspired interpretation of tawhid, as developed by Gülen, contributes to the formation of an inclusive, dialogical, and non-violent religious ethic. Furthermore, when contextualised with Stepan's twin tolerations (2000) and Osman's active tolerance (1996), this yields a theological model of tolerance that aligns with democratic systems in pluralistic societies.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design to explore the reconstruction of tawhid theology as the foundation for active tolerance in Gülen's thought. The unit of analysis comprises Gülen's theological ideas as expressed in his writings and his responses to religious pluralism, contextualised within the dynamics of religion–state relations and multicultural society. The qualitative method is chosen to enable deep understanding of meanings and concepts, rather than quantitative measurement. The primary data sources include Gülen's books, essays, and sermons, while secondary data come from peer-reviewed journal articles, including discussions on twin tolerations and active tolerance. Data collection is carried out through systematic documentation and literature searches, and data analysis is conducted thematically, highlighting key categories such as relational tawhid, love (mahabbah), freedom of belief, and interfaith dialogue within a democratic framework.

Results and Discussion

1. Tawhid as a Theological Foundation for Tolerance

The formal object of this subsection is Fethullah Gülen's theological thought on tawhid and its relevance in fostering interreligious tolerance within pluralistic societies. The data were obtained through a critical reading of Gülen's major works, such as Love and Tolerance (2013), Emerald Hills of the Heart (2004a), and Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance (2004c), as well as academic sources that emphasise the connection between the doctrine of divine unity, the value of love (mahabbah), and interfaith social relations.

In his Sufi-oriented interpretation, Gülen explains:

"Tawhid means unifying, regarding as one, believing in God's oneness or unity, and sincerely accepting the reality that there is no deity but God."(Gülen 2004a)

This statement indicates that tawhid in Gülen's thought does not end at the metaphysical level but serves as an ethical–spiritual foundation that reinforces humanism and social responsibility. Gülen further asserts:

"To love God is to love His creation. Harming others, degrading other beliefs, or promoting hatred contradicts the very essence of divine unity." (Gülen 2004a)

Accordingly, tawhid functions as a theological principle that demands active engagement in building dialogue, peace, and interfaith coexistence. This relational interpretation of tawhid is strengthened by Gülen's reading of Surah al-An'ām [6]:108, which forbids insulting the deities of other religions. Gülen presents this verse as Qur'anic evidence underscoring the importance of respecting religious differences in multicultural societies (Jalaluddin 2023). In Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance, he stresses:

"We should have such a tolerance that we are able to close our eyes to the faults of others, to have respect for different ideas, and to forgive everything that is forgivable..." (Gülen 2004c)

This perspective is not only rooted in normative Islamic texts but also supported by contemporary reflections within the discourse of social theology. Said notes:

"Gülen's thought demonstrates a dynamic within contemporary theological discourse that emphasises love and morality as the basis for social relations in multicultural societies." (Said 2015)

Table 1. Comparison of Tawhid: Classical Theology vs Fethullah Gülen

Aspect	Classical Theology	Fethullah Gülen
Definition	Theoretical dogma of divine oneness	Unity of faith and love for fellow beings
Vertical Relationship	Servant's relationship with God	Spiritual foundation and personal piety
Horizontal Relationship	Seldom addressed	Emphasised through love, dialogue, and social ethics
Social Implication	Normative and individual	Ethical, inclusive, and peace-building
Attitude towards 'Others'	Exclusive and defensive	Inclusive, non-violent, and respectful of difference
Key References	Al-Ash'ari, Al-Maturidi	Gülen, *Emerald Hills*, *Toward a Global Civilization*, etc.

In summary, the comparison between tawhid in classical theology and in Gülen's thought illustrates a shift from a doctrinal framework to an ethical-relational approach. Classical theology tends to emphasise dogma and the vertical relationship between humanity and God, whereas Gülen highlights the social and relational horizontal dimension. Tawhid, in this context, goes beyond metaphysical belief and becomes an ethical foundation for active involvement in interfaith peacebuilding.

The key patterns emerging from this analysis reveal that:

1. Gülen integrates both vertical and horizontal dimensions in the concept of tawhid;
2. Tawhid becomes a basis for active social ethics, not passive belief;
3. Love (mahabbah) and compassion (rahmah) serve as the principles connecting faith with social action; and
4. The relational interpretation of tawhid serves as a theological response to exclusivism and intolerance in contemporary society.

These findings suggest that Gülen's interpretation of tawhid offers a new trajectory for constructing an inclusive and socially responsive contemporary Islamic theology. By formulating tawhid as an ethical basis rooted in love, compassion, and respect for difference, Gülen expands the meaning of faith from doctrinal abstraction to humanistic praxis (Said 2015). This approach aligns with global trends in public theology that emphasise the

role of faith in promoting social justice and interreligious harmony (Abu Shamiy 2003; Esack 1977).

In the context of rising intolerance and religious exclusivism across the globe-particularly in Southeast Asia (Al-Qurthubi 2009; Hakim, Qurbani, and Wahid 2023)-Gülen's notion of relational tawhid provides an important alternative. It serves not only as a theological framework for building social cohesion amid diversity but also as a spiritual foundation for rejecting religious violence and fostering interfaith dialogue (Turam 2004; Yavuz 2018).

Thus, Gülen's thought enriches Islamic theological discourse by integrating Sufi values, the ethics of love, and social commitment into the understanding of tawhid. This concept not only broadens theological comprehension of divine oneness but also lays the groundwork for a peaceful, inclusive, and transformative model of Islam in pluralistic societies.

2. Gülen's Theology of Love and Social Ethics

The formal object of this subsection is Fethullah Gülen's thought on love (mahabbah) as a theological foundation and social ethic underpinning peaceful coexistence within pluralistic societies. This study is based on a critical reading of Gülen's major works, such as Emerald Hills of the Heart (2004a), Love and Tolerance (2013), and Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance (2004c), which consistently emphasise love, empathy, and freedom of belief as moral principles and forms of social praxis within the Hizmet movement.

Gülen states:

"Love is the most essential element in every being, a potent source that binds individuals to one another and to existence as a whole." (Gülen 2004c).

This concept positions love not merely as an individual spiritual quality but as an ontological force and social ethic connecting human beings with one another and with the universe. He elaborates:

"To love humanity is a requirement of loving God. Without compassion, one cannot be truly religious." (Gülen 2004c).

This indicates that, within Gülen's thought, love and compassion (rahmah) are tangible expressions of faith and function as bridges between personal piety and social responsibility.

In Gülen's vision, love also serves as the foundation for the Hizmet movement's social activism, especially in the areas of education and interfaith dialogue. Hizmet schools around the world, as Aydin (2013) describes, are positioned as "islands of peace" fostering empathy, tolerance, and cross-cultural openness. Karakas (2008) underscores that Gülen's social ethics are

grounded in universal values, while Conway (2014a) designates love as "the ultimate virtue" within the framework of Islamic public ethics.

The principle of freedom of belief is also central to Gülen's interpretation of Qur'an 2:256 (al-Baqarah), which he renders as:

"Faith imposed is no faith at all. Real faith blossoms through freedom, persuasion, and empathy." (Gülen 2004c).

This view not only rejects religious compulsion but also lays the foundation for empathetic and egalitarian dialogue.

Furthermore, Said (2015) views Gülen's thought as an effort to broaden the horizons of Islamic public theology by integrating love, morality, and diversity. In this context, love is not merely a matter of personal spirituality, but a transformative social principle that directs religious movements towards active roles in fostering social harmony.

To clarify the distinctive features of Gülen's approach, the following table contrasts the concept of love in classical Sufism with that in Gülen's social theology:

Table 2. Comparison of the Concept of Love: Classical Sufism vs. Fethullah Gülen

Aspect	Classical Sufism (al-Ghazālī, Rumi, ʿIrāqī)	Fethullah Gülen
Meaning of Love	Spiritual path to God	Transformative social energy
Spiritual Function	Purification of the soul, *fanāʾ* in God	Basis of faith and social relations
Social Dimension	Contemplative and personal	Dialogical, practical, and public
Empathy and Forgiveness	Symbols of divine compassion	Ethics of service and tolerance
Attitude towards Diversity	Not central	Inclusive, non-violent
Key References	Ibn ʿArabī, Rumi	Gülen(Gülen 2004a, 2004c), Karakas (2008)

The table reveals that Gülen shifts the concept of love from a mystical, personal realm to a socially operative praxis. This approach expands love into an ethical principle governing interreligious and intercultural social engagement.

From the examined data, four key patterns emerge in Gülen's conceptualisation of love as a foundation of social ethics.

First, love in Gülen's thought is not merely a personal affection or individual spirituality but a universal principle driving social action. It forms the basis for active engagement in society-through education, service, and interfaith dialogue.

Second, Gülen's concept of love is deeply empathetic. He emphasises that true love must manifest in empathy, forgiveness, and respect for difference. This is evident in his narrative of active tolerance and non-coercive religious engagement. Hence, love in Gülen's framework demands active involvement in creating peaceful and open social spaces.

Third, love serves as a bridge between faith and public ethics. In this framework, faith is not measured solely by ritual observance but by one's commitment to noble social values. Love links personal belief with social responsibility in plural societies.

Fourth, Gülen shifts from the contemplative orientation of classical Sufism toward a proactive social praxis. Through an operationalised concept of love, he integrates Sufi teachings into social transformation efforts, making them relevant in contexts of globalisation, multiculturalism, and growing intolerance.

The findings of this subsection show that the concept of love (mahabbah) in Gülen's thought represents a transformation of Sufi spirituality into a transformative social ethic based on empathy, tolerance, and human responsibility. Love is not merely understood as an emotional experience or personal devotion, but as a universal principle that grounds social praxis in education, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural service, as embodied in the Hizmet movement (Ebaugh 2010; N. Mohamed 2014). This thought is rooted in the universal values of Sufism yet driven by a cosmopolitan and public vision, as emphasised by Karakas (2008) and Conway (2014a). Gülen's view that "Faith imposed is no faith at all" (Gülen 2004b) reinforces the link between love, freedom of belief, and respect for diversity-making it a foundation for an inclusive Islamic theology responsive to the crisis of intolerance (Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022; Said 2015).

Thus, in Gülen's framework, love functions as a bridge between faith and public ethics, and as a conceptual alternative for the development of Islamic public theology oriented towards social justice and global peace (Aydin 2013; Greg Barton, Weller, and Yilmaz 2013; Yavuz 2003).

3. Tolerance in Practice: The Gülen Movement

The formal object of this subsection is the manifestation of the principle of tolerance in the social practices of the Hizmet Movement inspired by Fethullah Gülen, particularly in the areas of interfaith dialogue, cross-cultural education, and community service. Data were obtained through a critical

examination of Gülen's principal works, such as Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance (2004c) and Love and Tolerance (2013), as well as contemporary academic studies on Hizmet's global expansion and contribution (Aydin 2013; N. Mohamed 2014).

Gülen (2004c) affirms:

"We should have such a tolerance that we are able to close our eyes to the faults of others, to have respect for different ideas, and to forgive everything that is forgivable."

This statement is not merely normative, but forms the core ethos of the Hizmet Movement, which emphasises active tolerance and practice as integral to a living faith. This principle is embodied in character education, humanitarian action, and interfaith dialogue programmes across the globe.

Aydin (2013) notes that Hizmet schools, even in conflict zones such as Nigeria, function as "peace islands"-multicultural educational spaces that cultivate values of love, empathy, and tolerance among students of different religions and ethnicities. These findings are supported by Karakas (2008) and Mohamed (2014), who highlight how the educational philosophy of Hizmet is explicitly designed to nurture global citizens who uphold peace, religious freedom, and intercultural dialogue.

A defining characteristic of the movement is its rejection of violence and ideological coercion. Gülen cited in (Ebaugh 2010) underscores:

"No true Muslim can be a terrorist, and no terrorist can be a true Muslim."

In addition, his interpretation of Qur'an 2:256 ("There is no compulsion in religion") serves as a theological principle that rejects violence in the name of faith and affirms the importance of freedom in belief. This approach is implemented through interfaith dialogue forums that engage religious leaders and international communities (Greg Barton, Weller, and Yilmaz 2013; Ridwan 2022).

Table 3. Implementation of Tolerance Principles in the Gülen Movement

Field of Practice	Example of Implementation	References
Education	Multicultural schools in Nigeria and East Africa	Mohamed (2014); Aydin (2013)
Interfaith Dialogue	Interfaith forums in the United States and Europe	Long et al. (2022); Barton et al. (2013)
Media and Publishing	Peace-oriented, non-confrontational publications in many languages	Ebaugh (2010)
Response to Extremism	Public denunciation of religious violence	Gülen (2011); Ebaugh (2010)

These findings demonstrate that tolerance in the Hizmet Movement is not merely rhetorical but has been institutionalised as a value system realised through transnational social practices. Hizmet-affiliated schools serve as sites of interreligious and intercultural encounter, while interfaith dialogue forums function as effective social bridges that mitigate polarisation. Even in regions with histories of conflict, this approach has fostered harmony and inclusive interaction (Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022; Setiyadi 2013).

From the data analysed, four main patterns emerge in the articulation and practice of tolerance within the Gülen Movement.

First, tolerance is institutionalised through education. Hizmet schools serve not only as platforms for knowledge transmission but also as arenas for character formation grounded in love, empathy, and respect for diversity (Aydin 2013; Y. Mohamed 2014).

Second, interfaith and intercultural dialogue become tangible expressions of the commitment to active tolerance, realised through interreligious forums and multicultural collaborations that build cross-border social networks (Balci 2018; Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022).

Third, the movement explicitly rejects violence and ideological coercion. The principle "there is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) forms the theological foundation for empathy, forgiveness, and the rejection of extremism (Gülen 2004b; Said 2015).

Fourth, there is an integration of Sufi teachings and social praxis: love (mahabbah) and compassion (rahmah) are not only spiritual experiences but are manifested in public service and global solidarity (Conway 2014a; Karakas 2008).

These findings indicate that the Gülen Movement has succeeded in operationalising the values of tolerance into concrete and transformative social structures. This approach transcends normative boundaries by establishing educational institutions and interfaith dialogue spaces that actively nurture peaceful coexistence amid global diversity. The principles of love, empathy, and freedom of belief are not confined to moral discourse but serve as the framework for social action, extending into education, intercultural interaction, and responses to extremism. By integrating Sufi teachings with public ethics, Hizmet offers a model of Islamic tolerance that is not only compatible with the principles of pluralism but also relevant as a peaceful strategy in confronting contemporary challenges of radicalism and social fragmentation.

4. Discussion: Twin Tolerances and Active Tolerance

This study finds that Fethullah Gülen's thought on tawhid, love, and tolerance forms a coherent framework of social theology that is operational

within plural societies. The concept of relational tawhid serves as an ethical foundation integrating vertical relations with God and horizontal responsibility towards fellow human beings. Love (mahabbah) is positioned as a driving principle of public ethics-spiritual yet also manifest in social praxis through education, service, and interfaith dialogue. The principle of active tolerance, as embodied in the Hizmet Movement, is realised through multicultural educational institutions, interfaith forums, and a rejection of violence and ideological coercion. These three core findings demonstrate a transformation of theological doctrine into a transformative social ethic relevant to democratic and multicultural contexts.

These findings stem from Gülen's grounding in the Sufi tradition, in which faith is understood not only as individual belief but also as active engagement in building peaceful social life (Conway 2014a; Karakas 2008). Gülen interprets tawhid not merely as the doctrine of divine oneness, but as an awareness of the interconnectedness of all creation, which demands love and respect towards others (Gülen 2004a, 2004c). Accordingly, mahabbah and rahmah are concrete expressions of true tawhid. In response to the rise of global extremism, Gülen advocates active tolerance as a contextual expression of faith-not passive or neutral, but constructively building spaces for interreligious engagement (Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022; Said 2015). The implementation of these ideas through the Hizmet Movement shows that the spiritual dimension of Islam can be articulated institutionally and across cultures, as values such as freedom of belief, empathy, and inclusive education are promoted as collective ethics for pluralistic life (Aydin 2013; Ebaugh 2010; Y. Mohamed 2014).

This study reveals both continuity and innovation in the existing literature on tolerance in Islam. Like Ushama (2018) and Alotaibi (2021), who affirm that compassion and justice are embedded in normative Islamic traditions, this research confirms that such values are indeed integral to Gülen's thought. However, what distinguishes Gülen is his reconstruction of tawhid as an ethical foundation for active rather than merely normative or passive tolerance. In this sense, the study enriches the discourse initiated by Kadivar (2021) and Galadari (2012) on pluralism in Qur'anic interpretation by demonstrating its practical expression in the global and multicultural context through the Hizmet Movement.

Moreover, this research moves beyond the sociological approaches that commonly characterise studies of Hizmet (Aydin 2013; Balcı 2014; Ebaugh 2010) by emphasising the theological foundations underpinning the movement. It also addresses a conceptual gap in previous studies that rarely connect the reconstruction of tawhid with Alfred Stepan's theory of twin tolerations (2000) and Mohamed Fathi Osman's concept of active tolerance

(1996). Hence, this study not only explains how the Gülen Movement functions socially but also asserts that the movement is rooted in an ethical, inclusive, and cosmopolitan theological reading.

The interpretation of these findings suggests that Gülen's thought articulates a form of Islamic theology that substantively integrates transcendent spirituality with transformative social action. By understanding tawhid as an ethical relation that bridges human–divine and human–human interactions, Gülen repositions the doctrine of divine unity within the domain of praxis and proposes a model of religious engagement that is responsive to the dynamics of multicultural societies. Within this framework, relational tawhid emerges as a theological alternative to exclusivist models of religiosity that often contribute to social polarisation and religiously motivated violence (Al-Qurthubi 2009; Saiya 2015).

In addition, the study affirms that love (mahabbah), empathy, and freedom of belief are not peripheral values but foundational pillars of Islamic public ethics according to Gülen. His integration of Sufi values with religious inclusivism offers a participatory model of theology that is not only compatible with democratic systems but also relevant in responding to global challenges such as radicalism, intolerance, and social disintegration. In this regard, Gülen's vision expands the field of Islamic public theology, traditionally dominated by normative–legalistic approaches, by offering a transformative ethic grounded in active spirituality (Conway 2014b; Esack 1977).

Reflections on these findings indicate that the theological model developed by Gülen offers a constructive path toward building a tolerant plural society, while also posing several conceptual and practical challenges. On one hand, the concept of relational tawhid and a theology of love offers an inclusive paradigm capable of reducing extremism and strengthening interreligious and intercultural solidarity, as evidenced in the practices of the Hizmet Movement through multicultural education and interfaith dialogue (Aydin 2013; Y. Mohamed 2014). On the other hand, this approach may face resistance from conservative groups who view the reinterpretation of tawhid as a deviation from classical orthodoxy. Moreover, the implementation of these principles in societies with exclusive legal and social frameworks-such as Indonesia and Turkey-requires state policy support and institutional reform to allow Sufi values to be systematically operationalised. Therefore, although Gülen's theology is proactive and cosmopolitan, its success remains contingent on socio-political acceptance and civic spaces that support dialogical and non-coercive expressions of faith (Bagir et al. 2020; Conway 2014a).

Based on these findings, several policy recommendations may be proposed to implement Fethullah Gülen's theological principles within broader social contexts.

First, governments and educational institutions should integrate value-based education grounded in relational tawhid and the ethics of love into national curricula to foster a generation that is tolerant, empathetic, and non-violent.

Second, ministries of religion and interfaith platforms are encouraged to adopt the inclusive dialogue model developed by the Hizmet Movement as a reference in designing effective and sustainable interfaith forums (Greg Barton, Weller, and Yilmaz 2013; Long, Ismail, and Yaakob 2022).

Third, to counter religious extremism, the state should expand public space for religious narratives that emphasise love, compassion (rahmah), and freedom of belief-as emphasised in Gülen's thought (Gülen 2004b). This can be achieved through support for civil society organisations engaged in peace education, religious literacy, and interfaith service.

Finally, international collaboration is needed to promote cosmopolitan Islamic values in global forums as part of cultural diplomacy, demonstrating that Islam can serve as a constructive moral force in facing the challenges of radicalism and global social fragmentation (Esack 1977; Karakas 2008).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Fethullah Gülen's thought on tawhid, love (mahabbah), and tolerance constitutes a theological framework that is not only normative but also operational within pluralistic and democratic societies. By interpreting tawhid relationally-as a principle integrating vertical devotion to God and horizontal responsibility towards fellow human beings-Gülen offers an inclusive and transformative model of Islamic theology. The concept of love as a public ethic, along with the praxis of active tolerance through education, interfaith dialogue, and social service, as embodied in the Hizmet Movement, illustrates that Islamic spirituality can be institutionalised into social policies and frameworks that support peaceful coexistence.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its reconstruction of tawhid as an ethical foundation for active tolerance in multicultural societies, and in the integration of Gülen's thought with Alfred Stepan's theory of twin tolerations and Mohamed Fathi Osman's notion of active tolerance, within the framework of Islamic public theology. This approach expands Islamic theological discourse beyond doctrinal abstraction toward social praxis, opening new possibilities for the development of a participatory,

cosmopolitan, and responsive form of Islamic public theology-capable of addressing global challenges such as radicalism and religious exclusivism.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations. Its focus on literature-based inquiry and qualitative analysis limits the exploration of field-level praxis from a more empirical perspective. It does not evaluate the concrete impact of Gülen's theological model across different national contexts. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate ethnographic approaches or cross-national case studies to assess the real-world effectiveness of this model of tolerance across diverse socio-political settings.

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