



BOOK REVIEW

**Bariş Pehlivan and Bariş Terkoğlu,
Metastaz – Bariş Pehlivan and Bariş Terkoğlu,
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Angelo Francesco Carlucci

In the years following the coup attempt on the 15 July 2016, Turkey assisted to a rebirth of the interest about the Sufi religious orders and communities. The Sufi master Fetullah Gülen and its community played an active role in the events of the failed coup. In addition, the police investigations unearthed a network of corruption and clientelism that involved both members of the Gülen community (FETÖ) and the personnel of the Turkish govern and public service. These events contributed to increase the sense of suspect and distrust that the general public feels towards the Sufi orders and communities in Turkey. Because of this, after the failed coup the press market has assisted to the rising of publications that uncover the connections between politics and religion in Turkey. This book, *Metastaz*, belongs to this new editorial current.

A little mention to the authors: Bariş Pehlivan and Bariş Terkoğlu are two journalists of the well-known news portal OdaTV, which has been described as «harshly critical of the government». Both the authors of the book were repeatedly criticized for their works and had to defend themselves from several accusations, which sometimes have even led them to be arrested.

With these premises, it is easy to understand that this work is highly controversial and triggered numerous debates in Turkey between the supporters of the two journalists and those who accused them of writing false charges or even of inventing what they report. As to this book, no doubts of possible inventions are admitted: in it, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu mention tribunal acts, judgements and declarations that are easily verifiable and whose authenticity is unquestionable. It is not to the present book review to ascertain the good faith of the authors or the quality of their sources of information, but, all considered, it seems that the above-mentioned accusation of inventing their probes cannot be charged against the authors of this book.



The title, *Metastaz* (“metastasis”), evokes the idea of something foreign, extraneous, that grows inside a body – something akin to an illness from which to be liberated. These are the lenses through which the two journalists implicitly describe the Sufi communities: no accent is put on their very point of view, nor they are even described. Far from being just religious assemblies, therefore, the Sufi communities appears instead as foreign bodies insinuated deeply in the state, in order to acquire power and wealth and to create a «parallel state» (Pehlivan and Terkoğlu, 2019, 64, 105).

The first chapter starts well offering a very unsettling example of the Sufi communities’ penetration within the state’s organs: it is reported that inside the police academy’s mosque in Istanbul, the recruits are regularly heard reciting a Sufi prayer belonging to the tradition of the Menzil community. The reader is thus induced to believe that this order has penetrated deep inside the Turkish security forces, and the loyalty of the police to the state is put into question.

But it seems that the police is not the only state’s organ in which the Menzil community has planted its seeds: the second chapter of the book, in fact, addresses the issue of the connections between the Menzil community and the Turkish health ministry. This office had been at the center of some judicial inquires, as the former minister Recep Akdağ was charged of offering contracts and employing workforce coming from some private enterprises and structures belonging to the Menzil sect. The authors, other than offering new insights to the issue of Akdağ’s management, suggest that the same is happening in the current administration, as the current Health Minister Fahrettin Koca allegedly has established the same networks with the Iskenderpaşa community (Pehlivan and Terkoğlu, 2019, 69).

Again, the third chapter revolves around the Menzil community. In this section, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu try to explain why, despite the inquires described in the previous chapters, no member of this brotherhood has ever been tried or even interrogated in relation to the facts cited in the previous chapter. Moreover, some inquires involving the brotherhoods, the authors suggest, would have been stopped or hindered by the intervention of high officials in Justice ministry. See, for example, the case of Fikret İnan, a well-known entrepreneur bonded to the Gülen and the Menzil communities, who was accused of corruption and bribery. Pehlivan and Terkoğlu demonstrates how no one of the people involved in the case, with the exception of İnan himself, payed for their crimes. It is implicit, in this case, that the pressure of the brotherhoods over the judiciary has slowed down the processes and protected the accused.

The fourth chapter of the book revolves around a report that the Turkish secret services would have delivered to the office of the Prime Minister before the failed coup on 15 July 2016. This report would have warned the government against the danger represented by the penetration of the Gülen community among the state’s personnel and organs, security forces and army included. Nonetheless, this important document seems to have been ignored by the PM’s office, with the consequence that the government was unprepared against the overthrow attempt. Eventually, the authors offer their bitter



considerations: despite the continuous warning of part of the press and even the security forces, other Sufi communities too have penetrated within the state's organs and are even becoming more powerful than the FETÖ.

An evident example of their rising power, also in economics, is provided in the fifth chapter. Here are described the various ways in which the state has dealt with the *Yazıcılar* ("writers"), a community whose rites and traditions descend from the bigger order Nur (the same from which the FETÖ derives its own religious ideology). This chapter, which inaugurates the section of the book in which are described the relationships between the state and the various Nur-derived groups, depicts the *Yazıcılar* as one of the groups which actually tried to compose the fracture between the government guided by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Gülen community. Indeed, an open hostility between the state and the communities would have meant a dangerous instability and uncertainty that would have affected both the institutions and the religious groups. Despite their efforts, however, the situation evolved along a different path, so that the *Yazıcılar*, together with a part of other Turkish Sufi communities, managed to replace the Gülen community among the institutions and the state bureaucracy.

This aspect of the relationship between the AK Party and the Sufi communities is further explored in the sixth chapter, where it is clarified how even the top ranks of the Turkish governing party, the AK Party, used to have relationships with members of the Sufi orders or personalities close to them. What is even more unsettling is the fact that the President Erdoğan himself seems involved at a personal level, and no member of the AK Party accused to have a relationship with the FETÖ was removed from his/her office or public charge. Given this state of affairs, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu's final consideration is that it is unlikely that all the inquiries and investigations that involve a Sufi community will be performed within the frame of justice and equity.

The seventh chapter further explores this issue, describing how, other than the AK Party members, also other public officials involved with the FETÖ went unpunished after the investigations conducted following the failed coup.

In the eight chapter, the authors describe that the profits coming from the state's acquisition of the Gülen's TV channel *Samanyolu TV* and the newspaper *Zaman* after the failed coup have disappeared from the public records. Who actually acquired these funds and in favor of what (or whom) they were spent is still an open question.

In the ninth chapter, the issue of the report on the danger represented by the Sufi brotherhoods returns to be examined. The two authors investigate more in depth the connection between the secret services and the FETÖ. It is hinted in the chapter that the report was *actually written* by the secret services, but a deviated section of the Turkish intelligence colluded with the FETÖ would have made it disappear: that would likely be the reason behind the lack of any strategy or operation against the FETÖ before the 2016 coup attempt.



The tenth chapter revolves around the figure of Bilal Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's second child. In the course of the chapter, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu describe how happened that the son of the President of Republic has business contacts with personalities involved in the FETÖ investigations. It is unknown the actual range of relationship between Erdoğan's son and the FETÖ, but it is left implicit that neither the President of Republic's family is immune from having contacts with questionable personalities.

In the eleventh chapter, the relationship between the business world and the Sufi communities is analyzed more in depth. In the course of the chapter it is described how, during the inquires, some enterprises and businesses belonging to the TUSKON, which were accused to have contacts with the FETÖ, were not able to report a clear management of their funds. Given this state of things, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu retain that these well-known enterprises (as for example the clothing-retail company LC Waikiki) were involved in the FETÖ networks but tried to clean out their accounts and tax ledgers when the investigations started. Their purpose was to avoid more serious run-ins with the law. Nonetheless, traces of these contacts can still be found in their registries, if you know where to look.

In the twelfth chapter, the two authors describe the well-known issue of a company which was not able at all to clean out the traces of its relationship with some questionable groups: the Ülker, a very old and important Turkish manufacturer of food products. Pehlivan and Terkoğlu explain that the inquiries about the Ülker are actually far older than the rising of the Gülen community, dating back to 1996. Nonetheless, its involvement with the financial banks and funds belonging to the FETÖ networks was established only in occasion of the 2013 investigations against the Gülen group. It must be noted that, despite the investigations and the compromising of its image in the eyes of the general public, Ülker was not discontinued nor it seemed to have slowed down its activities, as its product are still consumed in very large numbers.

The thirteenth chapter is focused on a very serious question that the two authors pose: how many activities and buildings did the Gülen community own, and what happened to them after the failed coup? To answer this question, they explain how actually most of these properties still belongs, in a way or another, to persons near to Gülen himself; indeed, with the help of corrupted officials and judges, the preacher did not suffer any real economic decline even after the failed coup.

The fourteenth chapter is focused on the Turkish public television and radio service, the TRT. It is described how, between the 2007 and 2014, the Sufi orders, and in particular the ones related to the Nur community, managed to practically take control of this public service, as the 84% of the personnel employed by the TRT belonged to the community. The authors explain that it is unlikely that, after the failed coup, all this personnel has been removed. Consequently, it is possible that still nowadays the public radio and television company is actually filled with members of these religious communities.



The fifteenth chapter of the book ends this examination of the relationship between the religious brotherhoods and politics, describing the efforts of the Turkish Court of Cassation in fighting the leftovers of the FETÖ. Indeed, the press and the public are not alone in retaining that members of the group are still present in the public service and the institutions. These fears are shared also by the Turkish police who still chases them everywhere. The authors describe how, despite the efforts of the security forces, the struggle against them is still ongoing.

The sixteenth chapter centers on the relationship between the religious brotherhoods and the *Diyanet*. The authors explain that the actual relationship between this institution and the religious orders has always been somewhat nebulous and unclear, as there are various examples of a cooperation between these institutions despite any formal or legal recognition of the Sufi communities by the state's organ. The authors say that, given this state of things, any relationship or contact between the *Diyanet* and the Sufi groups is strictly illegal.

The seventeenth chapter explores the means through which Fetullah Gülen's messages were made available to its followers. (It must be reminded here that the preacher lives in the USA and the Turkish justice has issued a warrant against him even before the failed coup as he was accused of corruption and other offences). The circulation of his communications and discourses has actually been illegal since then, but nonetheless it was capillary. The authors try to describe the system that allowed Gülen to maintain contact with his network, a factor that maybe even contributed to the organization of the coup.

In the final chapter, Pehlivan and Terkoğlu offer their final remarks, trying to explain as the Turkish state is still making a mistake in allowing the religious communities to getting involved in the state's institutions and public sector.

Summing up, the reading of this book is undoubtedly meaningful in order to get documented about the collusion between a part of the Turkish politics and the Sufi communities. In addition, the book explains also the inquires that unearthed all those clientelist and corruption networks that resulted from the penetration of the FETÖ among the public sector. Speaking of these issues, the book describes the relationship between the state and religion only in a very unfavorable way: no benefit of the doubt is left to the reader. Indeed, after the reading of "*Metastaz*", what actually remains is the implicit description of *all* the Sufi brotherhoods as dark, illicit societies with unclear purposes. No difference is made between the FETÖ (currently a terrorist organization) and the other, real Sufi brotherhoods. The unstated message of the authors is that, for Turkey's sake, it is necessary to get rid of all these religious groups, starting from purging the institutions and the state's bureaucracy from their penetration. Overall, "*Metastaz*" offers a complete insight of the issue of the debatable relationships between the government and Sufi orders in Turkey – but it could be also said that the value of this inquiry is quite limited due to the implicit but palpable hostility of the authors towards the Sufi brotherhoods.



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