

Allegations of Cloaked Identity Usage:

**Examining the Unfounded
Charges Against Girls
Detained in the May 7
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Introduction

On May 7, 2024, Turkish authorities launched a controversial operation targeting 53 individuals including 15 schoolgirls aged 13 to 17, accusing them of affiliations with the Gülen movement. This mass detention shocked the public and raised serious concerns among human rights organizations. The operation's focus on minors, many of whom were merely engaging in ordinary educational and social activities, highlighted the increasing misuse of counter-terror laws to suppress dissent in Turkey. The resulting indictment, which was issued on 10th June 2024, portrayed these girls as part of an organized structure, with one of the primary accusations being the alleged use of cloaked identities, such as pseudonyms or nicknames, within their social and educational environments. This charge, against only 6 of the 41 defendants, presented as evidence of clandestine and conspiratorial behaviour, formed a significant part of the case.

The indictment's reliance on such accusations exemplifies the broader context of Turkey's recent legal and political landscape, where ordinary behaviours are frequently criminalized in efforts to delegitimize specific social or religious groups. The use of alternative names, whether as nicknames, pen names, or pseudonyms, has deep roots in human history and cultural practices worldwide. This practice is often tied to the need for privacy, self-expression, or protection in adverse circumstances. In Turkey, these motivations are particularly relevant given the long history of state repression against certain religious and ideological communities, including the Gülen movement.

Throughout history, the use of alternative names has been a practical and symbolic tool for countless individuals, including artists, writers, and activists, to navigate societal pressures and safeguard personal freedoms. Figures like George Orwell, Voltaire, and Pablo Neruda adopted pseudonyms to express themselves without fear of persecution, while others like Mark Twain and Lewis Carroll sought to create distinct identities for their work. In the Turkish context, this practice has also been widespread, driven by cultural traditions, political repression, and the need for personal safety. For example, Turkish literary figures such as Nâzım Hikmet and Orhan Veli Kanık used pseudonyms to circumvent censorship and societal restrictions.

The accusation that the schoolgirls used cloaked identities fails to consider these broader cultural and historical dynamics. Rather than evidence of criminal activity, the use of alternative names in their context appears to be a natural response to societal

pressures and the fear of profiling or persecution. This report aims to explore the phenomenon of cloaked identity usage, demonstrating its prevalence and normalcy across various contexts, and argues against the criminalization of this practice without evidence of malicious intent. By examining both historical and contemporary examples, it seeks to highlight the dangers of conflating protective or creative behaviors with illicit activities, particularly in politically charged cases like the May 7 operation.

Cloaked Identity Usage in broader concept

The use of names that are not registered on a person's official identity can be expressed with many terms that serve different purposes: codename, alias, pseudonym, nickname, cover name, false name, and monikers. These names take shape according to various needs, such as security, privacy, freedom of expression, social affiliation, or recognition. Although each term has its unique function and field of use, at its core lies the redefinition of an individual's identity unofficially or ensuring privacy in a specific role. The usage should be evaluated according to the nature and purpose of the situation.

Many renowned individuals around the world have used aliases or pseudonyms for different purposes. This is particularly common among artists, writers, and political figures, who can hide their identities, create a new persona, or present a different appearance by using pseudonyms. Some well-known examples in this regard are:

1. **Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens):** The American author known as Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens, adopting his pen name from a nautical term used by workers on the Mississippi River. His works written under this name made a significant impact in the literary world.
2. **George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair):** Known for his famous works "1984" and "Animal Farm," the English writer hid his real name, Eric Arthur Blair, and wrote under the name "George Orwell." Orwell chose this name, especially for his political writings, to conceal his real identity and ensure his safety.
3. **Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson):** The author of the children's book "Alice in Wonderland," Carroll used this pseudonym to separate his identity as a writer from his profession as a mathematician.
4. **Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel):** The famous American children's author used the name "Dr. Seuss" instead of his real name, Theodor Geisel. This alias supported his successful career in children's literature.
5. **David Bowie (David Robert Jones):** The famous English musician David Bowie used his stage name to avoid confusion with Davy Jones, a member of the popular band The Monkees at the time.

6. **Lady Gaga (Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta):** The globally recognized singer Lady Gaga adopted this stage name to create a distinct and striking persona in the music world.
7. **Stan Lee (Stanley Martin Lieber):** Legendary Marvel Comics writer Stan Lee chose a shorter and more memorable name than his real name, Stanley Lieber. Initially viewing comic writing as a temporary job, he later became known worldwide by this name.

Furthermore, there are globally renowned individuals who have used aliases due to pressure. These individuals chose to hide their real identities by using nicknames, alias or pseudonym to protect themselves from political, social, or cultural pressures or to ensure their safety. Some notable figures who stand out in this regard are:

1. **Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet):** French writer and philosopher Voltaire used the alias "Voltaire" instead of his real name to express his critical thoughts and political satire more freely. He faced severe pressures, especially due to his works criticizing the French aristocracy and the Catholic Church, and used different names for protection ([Source](#)).
2. **George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans):** The English author Mary Ann Evans published her works under the pseudonym "George Eliot" due to the exclusion of female writers. Given the strong biases against women's writing in the 19th century, she used a male pen name to ensure her work was taken seriously ([Source](#)).
3. **Pablo Neruda (Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto):** Pablo Neruda, born Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, adopted his pseudonym partly to sidestep his father's disapproval of his literary pursuits, as his father was not supportive of a career in poetry. He chose the name "Pablo Neruda" inspired by the Czech poet Jan Neruda. Later, as his political involvement deepened, particularly with Chile's Communist Party, Neruda's pseudonym also served as a protective measure, allowing him to express dissenting views more freely, especially during his periods of political repression and exile under authoritarian regimes. His works often included strong socio-political themes, and his stance against fascism and imperialism made the pseudonym both a form of personal identification and political statement ([Source](#)).
4. **Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen):** The Danish author Karen Blixen used the pen name "Isak Dinesen" to write freely, particularly in English, distancing herself from societal expectations in Denmark and reflecting her years spent in Africa ([Source](#)).
5. **Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë siblings):** The Brontë sisters published their literary works under the pseudonyms "Currer Bell" (Charlotte), "Ellis Bell" (Emily), and "Acton Bell" (Anne) to avoid prejudice

as female writers. Due to restrictive social norms of their time, they preferred these pen names ([Source](#)).

These individuals, using cloaked identities to avoid societal pressures or for security reasons, managed to overcome the restrictive social and political barriers of their time and reach a wider audience with their works. This illustrates how pseudonyms can be used as a strategic tool to protect freedom in literature, philosophy, and politics.

Therefore, it would be inaccurate to associate every instance of using a nickname, alias, pseudonym or even codename directly with criminal activities. Without considering the context and reasons behind the usage, associating each case of using cloaked identities with crime or even terrorist activities oversimplifies the issue and carries the risk of misinterpretation.

Cloaked Identity Usage (if any) in the Context of the Gülen Movement

1. Religious Freedoms in Turkey and the Development of the Movement in Turkey

Evaluating the history and development of the Gülen Movement in the context of the pressures faced by religious groups in Turkey since the 1960s is crucial to understanding its growth. Turkey's structure based on Kemalist secular principles aimed to entirely exclude religion from the public sphere. This policy began with the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the closing of madrasas, and the banning of religious symbols and institutions, shaping the view that religion belonged only to the private sphere of individual conscience. Consequently, religious groups faced restrictions in the public domain for many years, with intense state pressure applied to structure society within a secular framework (Source: Mustafa Akyol, Turkey's Troubled Experiment with Secularism, [source](#)).

Although a more liberal period began in Turkey after the 1961 Constitution, the pressures on religious people were interrupted by significant political events, such as the military coups of 1971 and 1980. Following each coup, restrictions and bans on religious groups increased. In particular, under Article 163, which was implemented after the 1980 military coup, religious communities and sects were repressed on the grounds of "activities contrary to secularism"; in this context, many religious groups were removed from public office, and severe sanctions were imposed on those who wanted to express their religious identity in society ([source](#)). This article, strengthened with criminal sanctions aimed at keeping religious identities away from the public domain, led to the exclusion of a devout social group from the public domain until the 1990s.

The "post-modern coup" of February 28, 1997, marked a period when pressure on devout groups reached its peak. During this period, the government formed under the

leadership of the Welfare Party was overthrown by a military memorandum, resulting in severe sanctions against the devout, such as the headscarf ban and the closure of *imam-hatip* schools. This period saw not only individuals who simply wanted to practice their religion but also those who sought to participate in education and public service face difficulties. During this process, devout individuals were isolated from society by being deprived of various educational and employment opportunities. These pressures led religious communities to develop strategies based on secrecy to protect their identities and avoid state repression ([source](#)).

Although some reforms were made in the early 2000s, pressures on devout individuals continued in various forms. Particularly, attempts to associate some religious groups like the Gülen Movement with terrorism by the political authority in Turkey made concealing religious identity even more necessary. This historical process explains that the choice of some Gülen Movement sympathizers to use different names e.g. nicknames from time to time can be understood as part of an effort to protect themselves from repression and maintain their identities.

2. Pressure and the Use of Different Names

The pressure on religious communities in Turkey has naturally had profound impact on members of the Gülen Movement as well. Due to the state's strict control over public officials, individuals associated with members of the movement faced risks such as being dismissed from their jobs or exiled. Therefore, some individuals within the movement preferred to use different names to protect their privacy in personal gatherings or meetings. The use of these names was limited only to a protective reflex and was not aimed at any illegal or secret action. Furthermore, the use of aliases among Gülen Movement members is extremely rare and generally tied to personal concerns, like fears of exclusion or potential harm. Most members openly use their real names and participate publicly in society, as the movement's structure does not rely on secrecy or clandestine actions.

3. Different Names and Terrorist Activity

The limited use of nicknames among members of the Gülen Movement to protect against state repression does not serve to create a "dual identity" or conduct terrorist actions, as in recognized terrorist organizations. This usage is directly related to the longstanding pressures faced by faith-based groups in Turkey. Legally, it is clear that such protective reflexes should not fall within the scope of terrorist activities. The occasional use of different names by members of the Gülen Movement does not constitute an element of crime; rather, it is an attempt to avoid oppression. Considering the movement's peaceful nature, it is impossible to interpret this as terrorist activity.

4. Emergence of Allegations of "Codename" Usage and Its Relation to Political Process

Allegations regarding the use of “codenames” by Gülen Movement volunteers first surfaced in investigations launched in 2015, following intensified government pressures against the movement after the corruption investigations in 2013. The corruption operations carried out by the judiciary and law enforcement against high-level officials in December 2013 turned into an intense campaign of accusations against the Gülen Movement, labelled by the government as “an entity infiltrating the state.”

During this period, government officials introduced the claim that sympathizers of the movement were organized secretly using codenames. However, such allegations had not appeared in official documents or indictments until 2015. According to an article in the Yeni Şafak newspaper ([source](#)), codename usage appeared for the first time in an indictment prepared in 2015, presented as part of ongoing investigations at that time.

In this context, while the use of different names for social or religious reasons was previously recognized by society and not associated with crime, after 2015, it began to be approached from a different perspective under the influence of the political climate. The emergence of the codename allegation is interpreted as part of an effort to criminalize the movement by accusing its members of terrorism. These allegations, fuelled by current sensitivities and political conflicts, have emerged as a strategy to turn a previously accepted practice of name usage into a criminal element.

The Purpose and Function of Codename Usage in Terrorist Organizations

Terrorist activities are defined as organized and illegal actions that aim to achieve political, ideological, or religious goals through acts of violence against civilians or state entities. While these activities aim to instil fear and chaos in society, they also include recruitment, fundraising, and propaganda efforts for the organization. Terrorist organizations assign codenames to their members to maintain secrecy and evade security measures. Codenames allow individuals to hide their real identities, protecting them from legal pursuit and enhancing security within a terrorist organization.²

The function of codenames allows individuals to form a “dual identity” that reflects only their terrorist persona, enabling them to act on behalf of the organization while remaining concealed. This way, individuals become more difficult to track or monitor legally. Codenames also reinforce organizational hierarchy and operational role distribution, allowing members to hide their identities at higher levels of security.

² For instance, Cemil Bayik, co-chair of The Kurdistan Communities Union (Kurdish: Koma Civakên Kurdistanê, KCK) and executive council member of outlawed PKK, is known as Cuma by his codename, and this practice is common within PKK. https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cemil_Bay%C4%B1k

However, although some members of the Gülen movement have occasionally used different names than their real identities, evaluating this within the scope of terrorist organization activities is inaccurate.

The Culture of Name Usage in Turkish Society and Alternative Names within the Gülen Movement

1. Middle Names, Family Names, and Nicknames: Culturally Common Name Usage in Turkish Society

It is common in Turkish society for individuals to have multiple names. These names may include middle names given by family members or respect names assigned by elders. Traditionally, a middle name is a second name recognized by the family or social circle, often referring to an individual's characteristics or family connections, and is used widely in everyday life even if not reflected on official documents. For example, many writers and journalists bring this multiple name culture into their professional lives by publishing under various names.

2. Cloaked Identity Usage in Publishing Activities

Journalists and writers, within this cultural context, have used various pen names. For example, journalist Fehmi Kuru published his columns for a long time under the name "Taha Kivanç"³; this name usage may have aimed to express a different perspective or establish a unique connection with readers. Similarly, in 1980s, Fethullah Gülen published some of his works under the name "Abdulfettah Şahin," aiming to reach a broader audience among different social segments by using various names.

This tradition is not a recent phenomenon. Many Turkish writers and poets in the past used pseudonyms to freely express their work or to reach readers under a different identity. For example, the famous poet Orhan Veli Kanık sometimes used "Mehmet Ali Sel" in his writings and translations; Nâzım Hikmet, to avoid censorship, published works under the pseudonyms "Orhan Selim" and "Mümtaz Osman." Additionally, Peyami Safa used "Server Bedi" in his detective novels, and romantic novelist Muazzez Tahsin Berkand wrote under "Hanımeli," reaching a different readership. These pseudonym usages allowed writers to express themselves freely, escaping the restrictive social and political pressures of their time.

3. Alternative Names on Social Media

A similar trend is seen on social media. For instance, Ahmet Hamdi Çamlı, who is currently a member of parliament for the AK Party, opened a Twitter account under the name "Yeliz," showing that pseudonyms provide flexibility in communication on social media ([source](#)). Some individuals affiliated with the Gülen Movement have also

³ See Fehmi Kuru's personal blog: <https://fehmiyoru.com/tag/taha-kivanc/>

used different names on social media or within communities, aiming to protect their privacy and maintain relations with others more comfortably.

4. Alternative Names for Religious or Social Reasons: Names Given by Elders or Respect Names

In Turkish society, names given by religious leaders or family elders hold a special place in a religious or spiritual context. Traditionally, in some families, names recommended or given by religious or family leaders are assigned to a child, believed to bring a spiritual influence on the individual. These names are often used to express an individual's religious identity or family role. In religious communities, it is common for a person to have a name that is widely accepted within the community alongside their official name. It is known that both Said Nursi, who inspired Fethullah Gülen, and Gülen himself gave or suggested names to certain individuals.

5. Usage of Different Names to Resemble Religious Leaders

In Turkish society and particularly in religious traditions, the longing for heroes and the deep respect shown to the Prophet's companions have significant influence in name selection. With this cultural understanding, individuals' prominent character traits are often associated with the honourable and righteous figures of the past. For example, a person known for honesty, a strong sense of justice, and protecting the rights of others has often been compared to Umar ibn al-Khattab (also spelled Ömer in Turkish), who is historically considered a symbol of justice in Islamic sources. In such examples, phrases like "like Ömer" have led to that person being addressed as "Ömer" while his real identity is still known to people. Thus, "Ömer," used as a nickname, became not only a name but also an expression of character for that person. This reflects a societal practice of aligning symbolic names with individuals who embody those values and is seen as a form of respect and reverence within the social context.

In conclusion, the diversity in name usage within Turkish society facilitates an understanding of individuals' use of different names. Associating this directly with criminal activity ignores the socio-cultural background of individuals and prejudices or even convicts them without committing any crimes.

6. Using Nicknames to Prevent Name Confusion

In Turkish society, it is quite common to use alternative names or nicknames to avoid confusion among individuals with the same name. This is especially seen in environments where people with the same name are present within the same group or class. In this tradition, an addition may be made to individuals' names, or they may be referred to by a completely different name to distinguish them easily. A prime example of this is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The name "Kemal" was given to Mustafa Kemal by his teacher during his military school years, where there was another student named Mustafa. His teacher added the name "Kemal" to differentiate him from other

students. This example demonstrates how assigning a new name can become an expression of respect or new identity in situations of name similarity.

Conclusion

This study offers a detailed perspective on the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of name usage, addressing how these practices are perceived within a society and the various reasons for different name usages. Particularly in countries like Turkey, where religious and ideological identities can face various forms of social pressure, the use of alternative names emerges as a strategy in the search for self-protection and ensuring freedom of expression. The different functions and meanings of these names, such as "codename," "alias," and "pseudonym," provide an essential distinction in understanding the cultural and individual motivations behind each name.

In Turkey, name usage has long been a tool for individuals to strengthen their social affiliations and protect themselves from oppression. In the socio-cultural context, the occasional use of different names such as alias or pseudonyms by sympathizers of the Gülen Movement can be understood as a natural protective reflex arising from the fears of being profiled and blacklisted by the state, exclusion and repression that devout segments in Turkey have faced throughout history. Alternative name usage, beyond being a method for individuals to hide their identities to avoid social or legal pressures, is based on personal or collective needs for security, privacy, social recognition, or being known by a different identity.

In conclusion, associating every different name usage directly with illegal activities or elements of crime can lead to both an oversimplification of the issue and misinterpretation. Thus, it is clear that in criminal allegations related to name usage, it is necessary to consider the context and motives. Regarding the Gülen Movement, the reasons behind individuals concealing their identities, without considering the movement's historical background and pressures on religious freedom in Turkey, could lead to wrongful judgments and biases. Taking into account the diversity and historical roots of name usage within society, evaluating each case of different name usage in terms of context and content will lead to fairer and healthier outcomes.



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