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Schooling, Islamization, and Religious Mobilization in Turkey

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Scholars of Islamist mobilization commonly rely on typological explanations to interpret the motivations, strategies, and goals of religious activists. Such explanations often characterize Islamist movements as "political" or "militant" when they contest state power, and as "civil" or "apolitical" when they do not. This dissertation seeks to overcome the prevailing typological tendencies in the literature and to rethink the conventional dichotomies of the political and the social. The dissertation examines a religious pedagogical movement in Turkey that eschews conventional institutions of politics, and focuses, on the surface, on "teaching religion to fellow Muslims." In doing so, it aims to explain why, how, and with what consequences social movements challenge the state's monopoly over forming and reforming individuals, their morality, subjectivity, and culture. The dissertation draws on eighteen months of fieldwork in Turkey in formal and clandestine sites of religious socialization and pedagogy, one hundred interviews with key local and national actors, and archival work in national libraries. The

dissertation makes three contributions to the study of social movements, politics, and social change. First, it advances the social movement literature by documenting how presumably non-political movements that appear on the surface to be concerned with moral reform are in fact deeply political and transformative in nature. Second, it deepens and broadens theories of social and cultural reproduction by demonstrating the centrality of a relatively understudied field—the field of religious socialization/pedagogy—to struggles over creating "orthodoxy" or "correct" forms of knowledge. Third, by extending the study of religious mobilization to a traditionally secular political system, it enlarges the scope of the literature on Islamization, pietism, and sociopolitical change and lays the groundwork for future comparative studies.

The dissertation of Zeynep Ozgen is approved.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# A NOTE ON TURKISH AND ARABIC WORDS USED IN THE TEXT

Turkish and Arabic words are in italics throughout the text. There are two exceptions to this rule: (1) I italicize certain key terms that recur frequently throughout the text – such as madrasa, ulema, cemaat, tarikat, Imam-Hatip –the first time they appear, but not thereafter. (2) I do not italicize the proper names of religious groups such as Menzil, Nur, İskenderpaşa or of places like the İsmailağa mosque.

When Turkish or Arabic terms are first introduced, I provide a standard English translation. Throughout the text, however, I continue to use the original Turkish or Arabic words in italics in cases where there is no adequate English equivalent. For example, *sohbet* refers to an informal get-together where a religiously-versed person provides religious commentary on Qur'anic or contemporary topics to listeners. Because there is no exact translation of the term in English, I used the Turkish term throughout the text. The same applies to the term *Ağabey*. The word literally means "older brother"; however, it is a culturally complex term inscribed with layers of connotations involving power, hierarchy, and benevolent will, which helps organize social relations within the family and in broader society. Therefore I retain the original term in italics throughout.

I indicate the plural form of Turkish terms with the addition of an *s* to the singular form, i.e. *Imam-Hatips* rather then *Imam-Hatipler*; *cemaats* rather than *cemaatler*. In a few instances, I use English transliterations of commonly known terms, such as jihad, madrasa, or da'wa. However, in most cases, I use the Turkish transliterations of Arabic terms; i.e. *Sünnet* rather than *Sunnah*; *Hadis* rather than *Hadith; Vakıf* rather than *Waqf*. I include below a glossary of Turkish and Arabic words that are used in the text. Unless stated otherwise, all translations belong to me.

# GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TURKISH AND ARABIC TERMS

*Ağabey/Abla:* Terms used to respectfully address an older male or female sibling.

*Abdest*: Ritual ablution conducted before daily prayer or reading the holy book

*Ahlak*: Moral and ethical norms and conduct.

*Besmele*: The shortened noun for the Qur'anic phrase "in the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate" that begins every chapter (sûre) in the Qur'an.

*Bilim:* Science. In the Turkish context, the term specifically denotes secular (i.e. non-religiously derived) knowledge.

*Cemaat*: Literally means "community"; in daily language it is used to refer to the several sub-branches of the Nakşibendi Sufi order, such as the Menzil cemaat, İsmailağa cemaat, Nur cemaat, Süleymancı cemaat, İskenderpaşa cemaat.

*Da'wa* (in Turkish *Davet* or *Çağrı*): Invitation to Islam

*Dernek*: Civil society association.

*Dersane*: Private prep course that prepares students for nation-wide high school and college entry exams.

*Diyanet*: The Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey, founded in 1924 after the abolishment of the caliphate to oversee issues pertaining to Islamic faith, rituals, and worship; to administer state mosques; and to provide Qur'anic education.

*Edep*: Cultural norms that regulate conduct.

*Ezan*: Call to prayer.

*Farz*: Obligatory act in Islam.

*Ferace*: A loose, one-piece, black outer garment that reaches down to the ankles and flows over the arms.

*Fıkıh*: Islamic jurisprudence.

*Gençlik etüt merkezi*: Youth study center.

*Hadis*: The prophet's authoritative sayings.

*Hafız*: Someone who memorizes the Qur'an.

*Haram*: That which is prohibited.

*Helal*: That which is permitted.

*Hoca*: Literally means a teacher, but also used to address a religious teacher/preacher.

*Huşu*: Literally means "to obey, submit, or be motionless" especially in the presence of authority. The term is also used in the Qur'an as a desirable mode one should attain during prayer, being in an emotional state of deference, awe, and affection to gain God's blessing.

*Imam-Hatip*: State-sponsored religious public school.

*İlahiyat*: School of Divinity.

*İbadet*: Acts of worship, religious observance.

*İlm:* Islamic knowledge or sciences. Islamists often use the term to refer to knowledge, symbolically denoting the position of Islamic episteme to encapsulate all knowledge in the universe.

*İlmihal*: The fundamental principles of Islamic worship.

*İman*: Faith.

*Jihad* (in Turkish *Cihad*): Literally "to strive, effort, labor." The term refers to internal or external efforts to be a good believer or to inform others about the faith of Islam.

Although it is sometimes translated as "holy war" in the West, with connections to physical war, jihad does not always refer to war, and does not necessarily need to be carried out by "sword" when it does.

*Kardeş:* The term used to refer to one's younger sibling (male or female).

*Manevi Zayıflık/Boşluk*: Moral weakness, moral emptiness; absence of love and fear of God.

*Maneviyat*: The ability to commit one's mind and emotions to the love and fear of God, religious devotion.

*Madrasa* (in Turkish *Medrese*): A school where Islamic sciences are taught. In earlier centuries material sciences were also taught there.

*Müftü*: Religious jurisconsult

*Namaz*: Daily ritual prayer, obligatory five times a day.

*Nakşibendi*: The most influential Sufi order in Anatolia starting at the end of 15th century in the Ottoman Empire and surviving through modern Turkey.

*Nefs*: Bodily appetites; desires of the flesh.

*Sheikh*: Spiritual master or leader of a Sufi order.

*Sheikh ul-Islam* (in Turkish *Şeyhülislam*): The highest religious authority in the Ottoman Empire; the head of Islamic scholars known as *ulema*; and the chief superintendent of elementary and secondary schools.

*Siyer*: Study of the life of the prophet.

*Shar'ia* (in Turkish *Şeriat*): The system of moral precepts and legal procedures based on the Qur'an's edicts and Muhammed's exemplary acts and authoritative sayings known as *Sünnet* and *Hadis*. The term is often translated as "Islamic law" in English.

*Sıbyan mektebi*: Traditionally these were elementary schools in the Ottoman Empire. Today, they are generally illegal religious preschools, which were reinvented by Islamists in Turkey.

*Sohbet*: An informal get-together where a religiously-versed person provides religious commentary on Qur'anic or contemporary topics to listeners. A *sohbet*-giver can be an Islamic scholar, preacher, or teacher, but also a non-specialist who simply has more religious knowledge and rhetorical skill than an average individual.

*Sünnet*: Exemplary acts of the prophet.

*Tanzimat*: Literally "reorganization," the term refers to the reform period in the Ottoman Empire starting in 1839 and ending in 1876.

*Tarikat*: A sufi order.

*Tebliğ*: Conveying, informing, or delivering Islam's message, the one true religion, to non-believers.

*Tesettür*: A generic name for female Islamic dress, most commonly associated with a combination of an ankle-length button-down outer coat and headscarf that can be either tucked in to the coat or left over the bosom.

*Ulema* (singular *Âlim*): An Islamic religious scholar.

*Ümmet*: Islamic community.

*Vacib*: A recommended act.

*Vakıf*: (Arabic Waqf, plural Awqāf): A pious endowment.

*Zekat*: Religious tithe.

*Zikir*: A form of mystic worship, done in groups or alone, silent or aloud, in which one repeats the various names or praises of Allah; an essential part of tarikat activity.

# ABBREVATIONS

AP: Justice Party
AKP: Justice and Development Party
CHP: Republican People's Party
CUP: Committee of Union and Progress
DİB : Presidency of Religious Affairs
DYP: True Path Party
MSP: National Salvation Party
RP  : Welfare Party

# INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: Graduates celebrating their completion of an Islamic homeschool program. The banner reads: "The best word is Allah's book, the best path is Muhammed's path. Photo: Author

On an early Saturday morning, May 10, 2012, one hundred and thirty-six boys and girls between the ages of eight and eleven streamed into the spacious auditorium and toward the stage of the Bağlarbaşı Conference and Cultural Center in Üsküdar, a conservative district in Istanbul. Some of the boys were wearing skullcaps, while the vast majority of the girls were wearing long-sleeve blouses and long skirts paired with mono-color headscarves. The Bağlarbaşı Conference Center has become an increasingly popular venue in Istanbul for a range of vibrant Islamic cultural and social events because of the hospitality of the district's Islamist mayors and the symbolism of its Islamic-Ottoman inspired architectural style. It is laid out in the shape of an eight pointed-star (a common motif in Islamic architecture) and has a domed roof, rounded

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windows, and walls covered by Islamic geometric patterns similar to many of the grand mosques in Istanbul.

As the children entered the auditorium and streamed down the aisles, they passed rows of seats filled with family and friends who were beaming with pride to celebrate their accomplishment. The children were there to be recognized for having just completed a rigorous "Homeschool" (*Ev Okulu*) program. For three full years, in groups of 8-10 that rotated between students' houses, they attended this program every Saturday during the school year and every weekday during summer recesses. In these three years, the students learned from a series of children's books designed explicitly for this homeschooling program by an Islamist publishing house. They studied Qur'an recitation, the fundamentals of worship (*ilmihal*), the prophet's life (*siyer*), and religiously-inspired ethical norms (*ahlak*).[1] Instruction was provided by female teachers who hold no more than an elementary school diploma and have no formal pedagogic training. Instead, most of the instructors have advanced religious education from one of the many formal or informal Qur'anic seminaries that have spread across Istanbul and the rest of Turkey over the last three decades.

The daylong event began shortly after the auditorium was filled completely with about eight hundred people. The majority of the invited guests were female friends, neighbors, siblings, and mothers of the graduating children—all of them dressed in Islamic attire (*tesettür*) with long overcoats paired with printed headscarves either wrapped tightly around their necks or billowing over their shoulders and chests. The event opened with a Qur'an recitation by two ten-year old

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[1] The Evangelical homeschooling movement in the United States inspired the homeschooling project in Turkey and the term was directly imported from it (Author's interview notes with one of the founders and financiers of the homeschool, May 28, 2012). However, unlike in the United States, homeschooling in Turkey does not provide full-scale academic education, but instead focuses only on religious training as a supplement to regular education. Thus, all Turkish children enrolled in a homeschool also continue their education in public or private elementary/secondary schools. For the characteristics of the American Evangelical homeschooling movement, see Apple (2011).

girls who had won the Qur'an reading competition held by the homeschool. The reading was then followed by a series of didactic skits put together by the teachers and performed by the children. Through these enactments the children demonstrated the religious knowledge they had acquired. But the performances also delivered a profound message about a sociopolitical project that seeks to create an alternative, more religious society, under a political system that has been historically averse, if not openly hostile, to the place of Islamic institutions, norms, and practices in the secular nation.

One performance in particular, titled the "Transformation Box" (*Dönüşüm Kutusu*),[2] stood out as a powerful and evocative carrier of this message. In the pitch-dark auditorium, the skit began with spotlights centering on a six-foot tall rectangular box covered in silver Mylar paper at the center of the stage. Around the top of the box colorful LED lights were strung, while the front was decorated by two large red stickers. The first showed a roof and chimney, the second the initials "EO" (for *Ev Okulu* or homeschool). Below the roof, moreover, was inscribed the word *Matik* (the suffix given in Turkish to words that indicate automation), indicating that the box was not just a homeschool but a "homeschool-o-matic"; a machine capable of disassembling, transforming, and remanufacturing the material that passes through its chamber. As soon became clear, this machine-house actually was a metaphorical replica of the homeschool and its transformative powers.

As the skit unfolded, a fantastic story was told about ten children whose lives were transformed after they passed through the "*Ev Okulu Matik*." The skit followed a generic three-stage process: first, the student-actors enacted a certain – invariably unreligious – skill, habit, or avocation as Mozart's charmful Rondo Alla Turca played in the background, creating the

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[2] The Turkish term "*geri dönüşüm kutusu*" actually means a "recycling box." The title therefore is a play on words. By removing the word "*geri*" (which translates into "back") the intended purpose is to suggest that the box does not transform used materials back into their original state, but instead serves to make new materials from used ones that originally had different purposes.

impression of an ordinary day. Second, they walked into the box and disappeared from sight. As they did so, the music was abruptly cut short by blaring robotic sirens and flashing LED lights. This science fiction-like environment symbolized the process of the physical, mental, and social transformation the children underwent inside the machine-house. Finally, as the children emerged from the box, their disposition had been reconstituted – invariably along religio-ethical lines – and Mozart's sonata continued from where it had left off, imparting a sense of normalcy to this new orientation in the children's life within the ebb and flow of an ordinary day.

The concrete elements of this transformation in skills, dispositions, and avocations can be gleaned from the first three acts of the performance. In the first act, a girl wearing a white dress and pink headscarf appeared in the middle of the stage with a Turkish alphabet book reading aloud "A, B, C, etc." Following her interaction with the machine-house, she emerged with a Qur'an in her hand reading aloud first the Arabic alphabet "Alif (ا), Be (ب), Te (ت)" and then reciting in Arabic the al-Fatiha (the verse that opens the Qur'an and is considered the greatest verse of the holy book). The critical intervention of the homeschool, the skit suggested, led to the conversion of a once secularly (and by implication poorly) schooled girl into a more educated, rounded, and better person, indicated by her increased aptitude for reading Arabic and reciting the Qur'an. In the second act, a young boy is seen drinking water while standing. After his passage through the box, he emerged drinking water while sitting (some religious scholars suggest that drinking water while sitting was a practice of the prophet Muhammed). The act symbolized the reformation of not only competencies but also ordinary habits with the help of the homeschool following the example of the prophet. In the third act, a boy slid into the middle of the stage on his knees like a rock star with a guitar he pretended to play. He emerged from the box in a contrasting bodily posture with more stability, character, and tameness, playing a reed flute called a *ney,* which is a primary instrument in mystic Sufi music and dear to many Islamists

for its significance in classical religious heritage. The act symbolized the deep change in the individual's psyche (manifested through bodily behavior) and his hobbies (demonstrated by the instrument) after the discovery of Islamic-Ottoman cultural heritage at the homeschool and the ensuing religious restructuring of identity.

The effect of the homeschool, however, extends beyond students' private lives and into professional achievements and social relations. In another skit, for example, the children demonstrated increased academic performance at school because of religious study at the homeschool where they acquire discipline and a stronger work ethic. In a last example, the transformation of individuals' social relations from egoistic to solidaristic behavior, a central requirement for ethical regeneration in what Islamists perceive a morally degenerate secular society, was represented in an interaction between three girlfriends. On a rainy day, one girl walks with her umbrella, while two others without umbrellas get wet. However, after emerging from the box, or receiving training in religiously inspired ethical norms at the homeschool, she extends her umbrella to them, giving up her personal comfort for the collective good. Student-actors then consummated the skit with a *hadis* (authoritative saying of the Prophet) on a large banner they unfurled in front of the *Ev Okulu Matik*: "The best word is Allah's book, the best path is Muhammed's path."

The homeschool is one among many clandestine religious education sites in Turkey created in 2003 by a group of self-described Islamist teachers and publishers who are periodically hired to consult on or publish religious children's books by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), the state office that oversees religious affairs in Turkey.[3] Although no other institution except the Diyanet is legally authorized to provide religious education, the homeschool is quite well known to the Diyanet, which continues to have

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[3] From here onwards, I will refer to this institution in its shortened form in Turkish as Diyanet.

close connections and business relations with its founders. This ambivalent relationship, emblematic of the broader historical pattern of interaction between the state and religious groups in Turkey, lies at the heart of Islamists' success to pursue a project of Islamizing society.

Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the late 90s, Islamist actors in Turkey pursued what I will call a "dual strategy" to transform the individual, society, and the state. This strategy relied upon, on the one hand, working *within* the system: infiltrating formal institutions, securing positions in key parts of the state bureaucracy, judiciary, police, education ministry, and presidency of religious affairs; establishing solid connections with elites; and securing state or private funding. On the other hand, it depended on working *outside* the system: creating alternative, informal, and even illegal institutions of religious socialization, pedagogy, and welfare; providing material resources to followers; and connecting with larger constituencies through small groups of volunteers. The first component of this strategy – the colonization of parts of the state bureaucracy – enabled Islamists to gain *legitimacy* in a traditionally secular environment that is often inhospitable to religion. They used their formal positions to expand and control official institutions of religion such as local mosques, religious public high schools, and Qur'anic seminaries, and to steer state institutions toward a more permissive stance toward unofficial institutions of religious education. The second component of this strategy – the creation of an underground network – provided Islamists with *autonomy* to transmit traditional Islamic knowledge and to cultivate a religious ethos. They expanded activities by opening informal dormitories, seminaries, homeschools, madrasas, and mosques. This dual strategy evaded the conundrums of operating in only one sector, enabling Islamists to avoid the threat of the state's intrusion and harassment aboveground and the threat of marginalization and persecution underground. Following a dual strategy, therefore, provided Islamists with both

*legitimacy* and *autonomy*, allowing them to pursue their project of institutionalizing religion and Islamizing society.

This dual strategy is motivated by the Qur'anic concept *tebliğ*, the responsibility to convey Islam to others, and on the collective efforts of what I will call the *tebliğ movement*. Central to the *tebliğ movement*, as elsewhere in the Middle East, has been a rapidly growing and remarkably robust system of religious socialization and pedagogy that includes both aboveground and underground elements.[4] The homeschool, an underground education site, is an instance of this movement and a window into the Islamist sociopolitical mobilization in Turkey and the greater Muslim world that this dissertation aims to examine and analyze.

## Tebliğ and the tebliğ movement[5]

What is the relationship between rapidly growing religious education sites and religious mobilization in Turkey? Despite the state's claim to a monopoly over institutions of socialization and pedagogy, how have Islamist movements been able to reach and recruit followers through educational sites? What are the broad elements of a sociopolitical project of Islamization? And what are the long-term consequences of a renewed emphasis on religious education for shaping the perception and practice of Islam in everyday life? These are some of the questions I will explore in this dissertation through an ethnographic and historical account of a complex network of legal and illegal education sites that is part of the broader tebliğ movement. For eighteen months between 2010 and 2012, I conducted fieldwork in official and clandestine sites of religious socialization and pedagogy in Istanbul, worked in the national libraries in Ankara, and

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[4] Other critical domains of the broader *tebliğ movement* include welfare services, religious institutions (i.e. mosques), media, civic associations, businesses, and professional organizations. This research acknowledges the crucial importance of these areas for *tebliğ* work, but aims to complement studies of these domains by bringing into sharper relief the central role played by education for religious mobilization.
[5] From this point forward, I will not italicize "tebliğ movement."

interviewed key local and national actors in both cities to trace the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of the key role of religious socialization within the tebliğ movement in particular and the broader project of Islamization in general.

The tebliğ movement is not an isolated case within Turkey but part of wider sociopolitical mobilization in the Islamic world, variously referred to as an Islamic "trend," "awakening," "resurgence," or "current," that emerged in Muslim societies from the Middle East to Southeast Asia beginning sometime in the 1970s. This process exhibited itself foremost in the visible roles religion assumed in the public sphere (Casanova 1994), ranging from the increased visibility of Islamic dress to religious print media to moralistic welfare associations. [6] But it also became evident in the extraordinary growth and popularity of religious sites of preaching and pedagogy. Both of these processes, especially the latter, have great resonance in Turkish society. Beginning in the early 1980s and accelerating at the end of the 1990s, Turkey witnessed the emergence of a vast network of legal, semi-legal, and illegal religious education sites; a dramatic increase in enrollment at Qur'anic seminaries, religious preschools, homeschools, dormitories, student houses, youth study centers, and madrasas; the growing popularity of gathering/Qur'an reading houses (as alternatives to state mosques); the proliferation of religious pedagogical journals and books; and the increasing adoption of religious dress and gender segregation in religious public high schools. This religious reconstitution of the educational landscape is the result of efforts by Islamist actors who were inspired by the notion of *tebliğ*.

According to activists, this specific focus on religious education was not coincidental but developed in reaction to three interrelated problems in Turkish society: (1) the political reconstruction of religious education; (2) the ethical erosion of social institutions; and (3) the

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[6] While the visibility of Islam in public spaces increased in the late 1970s, the strategy of re-islamization of society dates back much further—it was the strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, for example, founded in 1928.

spread of egoistic instead of solidaristic values among individuals. The root cause of these problems, on their account, has been the gradual marginalization of religion in shaping the nature and content of individual action and social ethos in Turkish society. Activists believe that the secular system transformed religious knowledge into an objective body of knowledge or a collection of historical stories with no significant authority to intervene in daily life and encourage piety, morality, or worship among individuals. They contend that as the influence of religion became more negligible in modern life, social institutions—i.e. the family, education system, neighborhood, friendships, or business relations—became more susceptible to external, anti-religious trends such as individualism and hedonism. Activists also criticize the increasing practice of "humanistic" rather than pietistic activities among the modern individual. By "humanism," activists understand a set of principles that prioritizes individual choice over social needs and seeking happiness through consuming material things rather than through praying and worshipping. Islamists aim to reverse these trends by using new and reconstructed modes of religious socialization and pedagogy to reeducate the individual, strengthen private and public morality, and make Islamic orthodoxy an organizational principle of society by mobilizing the concept of *tebliğ*.

*Tebliğ*, literally "to convey, inform, or deliver a message," is a Qur'anic term that indicates Allah's assignment to Islam's prophet the duty to spread his message to the peoples of the world.[7] Beginning in the mid-90s, the term was appropriated by strands of Islamists as a

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[7] In terms of meaning and function *tebliğ* and *da'wa* are similar, although the latter is more commonly known in the Arab Middle East. Both are Qur'anic terms used to justify proselytizing efforts in Islam. *Tebliğ*, or delivering a message, refers to the responsibility to tell or inform non-Muslims about the true religion, Allah, and his Prophet Muhammed's message. *Da'wa* on the other hand, means to call someone to something, hence an invitation of non-Muslims to the path of Allah. It is rare in the Arab Middle East to employ *tebliğ* in Islamic law in reference to the calling to Islam. Instead, jurists use the term *da'wa* to refer to invitation and teaching of Islam. This is primarily because the term refers to a particular time in the prophet's life, from his designation as a prophet until his death, when he invites people to religion. Known as the Period of *Da'wa* (*Davet Zamanı*), this time period spans the last 23 years of the prophet's life. Parallel to the contextual usage of the term, Western scholars have generally studied socioreligious

conceptual framework to build an Islamic society from below in Turkey. In the process of

incorporating *tebliğ* as an organizing concept of sociopolitical mobilization, however, Islamists

removed the term from its classical connotation and redefined both its messenger and audience.

In the Qur'anic context, *tebliğ* is primarily designed as a responsibility of the prophet

Muhammed. Turkish Islamists redefined the term as an obligation incumbent upon not only the

prophet but every pious Muslim to inform and encourage other Muslims to pursue a life in

accordance with Islam. This reasoning was driven by the idea of 'mutual responsibility'

emphasized in several *hadis*.[8] In the Qur'anic context, the term *tebliğ* originally referred to the

responsibility to inform non-Muslims about the true religion. Yet, Turkish Islamists expanded

the audience of *tebliğ* to nominally Muslim members of society, whose lives have been

discordant with Islamic edicts. If fellow Muslims fail to align their conduct with Islam, they are

believed to be in need of instruction as much as non-Muslims.[9]

Islamists also draw on two additional Qur'anic concepts "*irşad*," providing guidance and

direction in the true path, and "*emr-i bi'l ma'rûf ve nehy-i anil münker*," inviting others to

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activism in the Middle East and Muslim Africa under the heading *da'wa* rather than *tebliğ*. For case
studies on the da'wa movement in the Muslim world, see Deeb (2006); Hirschkind (2001, 2006);
Mahmood (2005); Wickham (2002). However, in contexts like India, Pakistan, Thailand, and Indonesia
where the term *tebliğ* is dominant, socioreligious activism is studied under that rubric (for an exception
see Metclaff 1998, 2004). For case studies in these countries, see Horstmann (2007); Reetz (2006);
Valentine (2008). Since the term *tebliğ*, not *da'wa*, has been employed by religious activists in Turkey to
refer to their mobilization efforts, I also adopt the term *tebliğ* to describe and analyze the Turkish Islamist
sociopolitical movement.
[8] Some exemplary *hadis* from which the responsibility of *tebliğ* are derived include: "Two believers that
lend support to each other are like a pair of hands that wash each other clean"; "The believer is the mirror
of his fellow brother"; "Help your brother whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed one." These *hadis*
underline the personal responsibility of one believer toward the other, whether in terms of helping him to
purify by controlling desires of his flesh and ("washing each other's hand"), reflect on his (non-Islamic)
behavior ("being a mirror"), or preventing him from committing a wrong ("oppressing others"). These
personal interventions are believed to encourage a change in behavior, eventually aligning individuals'
lives with the standards of Islam. For the relevance and justification of these *hadis* for conducting *tebliğ*
in the Turkish context see, Taşgetiren (2011[1990]:152–66).
[9] Reinterpretation of Qur'anic concepts to justify or organize religious sociopolitical activism is not
peculiar to Turkish Islamists. Similar undertakings can be observed across the Muslim world. For
exemplary work, especially on the reinterpretation of the concept *da'wa*, see references on footnote 5.

goodness and right conduct and forbidding them from indecency. Activists employ these

concepts, found in many Qur'anic verses, to provide a doctrinal reasoning for social mobilization

with the larger goal of building an Islamic state and society.[10] The entrenchment of these

principles is believed to have generated the historical rise and flourishing of Islamic civilization;

their abandonment, in contrast, is believed to have led to the state of decline the Muslim world is

still suffering from today. According to activists, education, especially of those who are

nominally Muslim but not actually pious, in the proper understanding and practice of Islam is the

most efficient tool of *tebliğ* and is epitomized in various institutions of Islamic socialization and

pedagogy such as the homeschool.

It is important to make clear, however, that no Islamist activist would refer to his or her

work as part of an overarching "tebliğ movement"; nor is the movement run by a central

administrative apparatus. Instead, this is an organizing concept I draw on to analyze activists'

collective yet disparate efforts to Islamicize society. Islamist actors are united not by an

administrative unity, but by an ideational solidarity. By "ideational solidarity," I mean an

overarching framework of shared ideas and goals about the need to reeducate, reform, and

ultimately transform fellow Muslims by exposing them to Islamic standards of appropriateness in

a social context that is shaped by the political and moral principles of secularism, which is often

averse, if not openly hostile, to the centrality of religiosity in social life.[11] The term "*tebliğ*" is

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[10] When I say a "religious activist," I am referring to two kinds of actors: (1) those that are politically conscious and actively engaged in developing and enacting various projects of religious socialization to bring about Islamization, and (2) those that contribute to such efforts without being able to articulate the political or social implications of such projects but rather understand their role as enabling the survival of Islamic identity in a secular state and society. However, as the dissertation aims to show, both types of activities are *political* in nature and contribute to larger individual, social, and political transformations whether individuals explicitly think of their activities as political or not.

[11] Asef Bayat (2005:901–2) uses a similar formulation, "imagined solidarity," to refer to fragmented, even competing, Islamist groups who nonetheless share similar interests in making religion central and dominant in public life to engender a religo-political change.

the theoretical framework for religious activity and the "tebliğ movement" the outcome of ideational solidarity.

Although the foundations of Turkey's tebliğ movement can be traced back to the 1980 military coup, its systematic articulation began following the 1997 military coup and developed to maturity in the 2000s. Prior to 1980, the Islamist project in Turkey rested on a narrower and survival-oriented aspiration: saving a threatened identity (Islamic identity) and institution (religious education) from a traditionally secular and historically repressive political system.[12] Beginning in the 1980s, however, Turkish Islamists broadened their struggle from keeping alive a marginalized identity to enacting a larger transformation of society along Islamic lines.


**Sociopolitical Islamization and pedagogic movement in a changing political context**

Sociopolitical Islamization rests on a threefold program: (1) rebuilding the moral edifice of Turkish society by reeducating the individual according to Islamic standards, (2) normalizing the presence of piety in public life, and (3) making religious norms collective and self-reinforcing, hence institutionalized. According to Islamists, the success of this program hinges first and foremost on increasing the knowledge and consciousness of individuals about Islam—

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[12] This urgency for survival was most clearly articulated in the words of Said-i Nursi, the spiritual leader of the Nur movement, who argued in 1929 "this is not the time for *tarikat* (Sufi order) but the time for saving the faith." With this statement Nursi emphasized the imperative of preserving and revitalizing religious identity rather then organizing for social or political goals. He explained this view further in the ninth volume (*Kastamonu Lahikası*) of his magnum opus Epistles of Light (*Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*). He stated (1995[1936-43]:189): "This time (epoch) requires a great restorer (Islamic scholar or heir to Muhammed) for both faith and religion, for social life and shar'ia (system of law based on Qur'an's edicts and Muhammed's authoritative deeds and actions known as *Sünnet*), for public law and Islamic politics. But the duty to preserve and renew faith (*hakaik-i imaniyeyi muhafaza ve tecdid vazifesi*) is the most sacred and greatest of all. Compared to this, [creating an Islamic system of] law (shar'ia), social life, and politics remain second, third, or fourth [in importance]." However, this preoccupation with "saving faith" that informed most Islamist activism during republican history is not to deny that Islamists lacked political aspirations prior to 1980. But the secular state's assault on religion, especially in the early decades of the republic, forced Islamists to devise strategies to survive rather than to engage in larger political projects. In this vein, it is also telling that the first openly Islamist political party did not (and could not) emerge in Turkey until 1969.

its doctrinal foundations, moral prescriptions, and day-to-day practices. This is because successful Islamization requires a deep social foundation, which ultimately depends on the formation of a particular type of individual. It is for this reason that religious education has constituted the central aspect of the tebliğ movement.[13]

Following the 1980 military coup, as the Turkish state ideologically and institutionally opened itself to Islam and an Islamized version of Turkish nationalism, religious movements simultaneously converged toward being more statist and nationalist rather than transnational and radical (Tuğal 2009a:77). An unintended consequence of this process was the emergence of non-state actors as contenders for the state's moral authority and pedagogic technology. The Turkish state's integration of religion into official institutions, especially educational institutions, to buttress its legitimacy and power against radical Islamist challenges, created competition and contestation over the production and consumption of religious knowledge. The state's embrace of religion to control Islam's political message inadvertently broadened its mass appeal and inspired religious actors to imagine it in an equally political way.[14] Islamists responded by creating a parallel subterranean system of religious socialization and pedagogy, which served not only to transmit "traditional" Islamic knowledge that is often at odds with the state's interpretation but also to pursue a broader process of sociopolitical Islamization.

To be sure, the expansion of public literacy, electronic media, and the publication market has granted greater access to exegetical texts and "lay" interpretations that could be mustered to contest the state's authority over the production and dissemination of moral/religious knowledge

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[13] Throughout the dissertation, I will use the term "pedagogic movement" as a shortcut to refer to the pedagogical dimension of the tebliğ movement. But this should not be understood as a separate movement.

[14] For a good analysis of the region-wide trend, see Hefner (2006:32–4). For competition over the use of religion by national regimes to increase their legitimacy and power and by religious activists to claim ownership of the correct interpretation of religious symbols and institutions in Muslim states, see Eickelman and Piscatori (1996:3–21). For a case study within the field of education, see Starrett (1998:3–19; 230–43).

(Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Eickelman 1992; Hirschkind 2006; Abu-Lughod 1993; Meyer and Moors 2005). But a more critical reason was the ability of religious groups to adapt to a volatile institutional environment and avoid control by an encroaching state. The last three decades, much like earlier Republican history, have been marked by a politically unstable environment for Islamists in which the state alternated between suppressing and accommodating religious activism.[15] In relatively more permissive periods (i.e. 1980-97 and 2003 to the present), religious activists expanded activities wherever possible – within the informal and the public spheres; in more hostile periods (i.e. between 1997 and 2003) they retreated underground. The result was not the defeat and marginalization but the transformation and the flourishing of religious activism. This is because it was precisely within this context of institutional ambivalence toward Islam and Islamists' demands that religious actors have been able to create and expand alternative repertoires of socialization and pedagogy both within official sites of religious education and outside of them.

The dual strategy outlined above enabled actors committed to an Islamic revival through *tebliğ* to develop quietly and gradually a remarkably robust network of religious education sites. On the one hand, they increased their influence within the public Imam-Hatip (Imams and Preachers) schools, Qur'anic seminaries, and the Diyanet, and, on the other hand, they developed a subterranean system of religious education. Through their position within the Imam-Hatip schools, Islamists gained official *legitimacy* for the advanced study of religious education in a

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[15] This process is tightly linked to the military interventions that have shaped political life in Turkey over the last three decades. After each military intervention, the ensuing institutionalization of state authority and ideology restricted or expanded the boundaries of religious activism. Following the 1980 coup, the state embraced an ideology known as the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (*Türk-İslam Sentezi*). From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, religious actors were appeased or co-opted and the result was the expansion of religious activism. Following the 1997 coup, the state adopted an ideology known as Anti-Religious Extremism (*İrtica karşıtlığı*). Islamists were heavily suppressed and religious activism contracted. Following the coup attempt in 2007, the state embraced an ideology of Religious Nationalism (*Dinsel Milliyetçilik*), the effect of which was once again the expansion of religious activism.

secular state. Through their work in the underground, activists gained *autonomy* to teach their version of Islam and to create pious subjectivities. Operating only aboveground would have meant state scrutiny and loss of autonomy; operating only in the underground would have risked marginalization and repression. Adopting a dual strategy, therefore, not only avoided the shortcomings of each but also enabled them to maneuver between the two areas depending on the institutional constraints of the broader political environment. Following this dual strategy, Islamists successfully linked the formal and informal segments of pedagogic mobilization under the broader tebliğ movement. In the end, this system has increased both the legitimacy and autonomy of Islamists', enabling them to increase personal and public piety and to Islamize society.

## Sociology of Islamist activism and social movement theory

The Islamists' dual strategy of mobilization has implications that go beyond debates over the place of religion in public or political struggles in Turkey. This dissertation is located at the intersection of two broad scholarly traditions: Islamist activism and social movement theory, on the one hand, and theories of social and cultural reproduction, on the other. It aims to build on and contribute to both bodies of work.

A dominant analytical tendency among Turkish scholars is to characterize their object of study in binaries. Islamist movements are interpreted as either vertical or horizontal, political or civil, revolutionary or spiritual, state-centric or society-centric (Göle 1996; Kara 2008; Kentel 2005; Yavuz 2003). This approach is often informed by the observable aims and material organization of movements. Hence, it is often understood that when actors explicitly target state power through formal organizations like political parties they are political movements, but when they focus on education, charity, social service – or broadly on the promotion of civil society –

they are civil-society movements. Because Turkish Islamists have seldom challenged state

authority openly, but instead chosen to organize within civil society, many scholars conclude that

the Islamic Revival beginning in the 1980s in Turkey was a reflection of a flourishing civil

society against a rigidly secular state (see especially Göle 1996). Some variants of this view

suggest that what has taken place is the secularization of Islam (Yavuz 2003); moderation and

harmony between Islamists and the state (Turam 2007); a search for comprehensive

democratization (Atasoy 2009); or the consolidation of democracy in Turkey (Özbudun 2006).

The problem with such accounts is not that they privilege a focus on civil society, but that

they interpret Islamist movements as expressions of what actors subjectively claim them to be. In

other words, it is an analytical mistake to take the subjective interpretations of movement

participants as analytic concepts of interpretation.[16] I contend that the separation of Islamist

movements into these neat categories reproduces just that kind of tendency. While focusing on

actors, their self-image, and their stated motivations is important, it is not sufficient. The

dissertation argues that it is crucial to locate actors' putatively non-political or civil practices

within the broader field of political struggles to draw out the potential implications of this

dialectic for sociopolitical transformation—hence the need to transcend typological explanations.

The examination of Turkish Islamists through cultural typologies is not surprising given

the similar trends in the conceptualization of other Islamist groups in particular and broader

social movement theory in general. Traditionally, scholars of Islam have explained religious

movements as practicing "political" or "militant" Islam when they contest state power (Fuller

2004; Juergensmeyer 2003; Kepel 2003; Roy 1994) and as practicing "civil," "reformist," or

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[16] For a tendency to think with folk categories and the problem of distorting the object of study through taking rigidly objectivist or subjectivist positions in social science see Bourdieu (1990:122–39). For its further elaboration see the Introductory essay by Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:2–59). For a critique of this common practice in sociology, especially in the study of identity broadly conceived, and an exposition on the dichotomy of 'categories of practice' and 'categories of analysis' see Brubaker (2004).

"interest-group" Islam when they do not (or cannot) contest political authorities (Abootalebi 2003; Hefner 2000; Okruhlik 2005; Rubin 2003).

The recent rise of social movement theory as a popular framework to understand Muslim politics furthered rather than weakened the reproduction of such typological approaches. This is because a similar conceptual division persists within social movement theory. Whereas traditional social movement theory (and its variants) focused on groups that target the institutions associated with the proper domain of politics (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978), other influential strands, such as new social movement theory, prioritized the study of movements that engaged in the creation of identity (Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981).[17] It is therefore not coincidental that the scholarship on Islamist activism, inspired by some version of (traditional or new) social movement theory, reproduces this often-implicit distinction of Islamist movements as "political" or "nonpolitical."[18] There have been two general implications of this scholarly tendency. One is to privilege the study of dramatic events, violent attacks, or political organizations over more mundane but equally important spaces of political action (for a good critique see Soares and Osella 2009:8–10).[19] When social movement scholars look at the culture and identity related work of activists, on the other hand, they mostly consider them as instrumental tools for "framing" grievances (see for instance Wiktorowicz 2003:25–7). The other

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[17] For a skillful review and critique of this conceptual division within social movement theory, see Tuğal (2009b).

[18] However, there are two kinds of exceptions to this common tendency. First, some scholars suggest that even though certain movements organize in non-political domains such as mosques, schools, or associations, they have political aspirations. Hence, working within civil society does not defy contending political power; on the contrary, it may strengthen such aspirations. See for some exemplary work by Abdo (2000); Berman (2003); Butko (2004); Salvatore and LeVine (2005); Tuğal (2009). I would also add to this list Bayat (2007) despite the citation above. Second, many others study Islamist politics or Islamization outside the framework of social movement theory. These works aim to show how religious actors, whether working from above or from below, aspire to bring about religo-political change by transforming society and politics. See for example, Deeb (2006); Moaddel (2005); Tepe (2008); White (2002).

[19] However, some social movement scholars do focus on nonpolitical or mundane areas of daily life to study religious activism. See for example work by Clark (2004); Singerman (1996, 2004); Wickham (2002).

is to interpret the rise of Islamist movements in the Muslim world as the "awakening of civil society" and a path to democratization in authoritarian contexts (Howard 2010; Ibrahim 1998; Ben Néfissa and Milani 2005; Norton 1995). Inspired by this framework, studies of Turkish Islam also separate the study of "political" or "radical" movements that engage the institutions of the state from a variety of other "nonpolitical" or "identity" movements (Aras and Çaha 2003; Eligür 2010; Göle 1996; Karmon 2003).

Looking from this perspective, the tebliğ movement presents a challenge to sociological theorizing on Islamist movements. The tebliğ movement neither engages conventional institutions of politics, i.e. seeking judicial concessions from the state, nor employs traditional methods of mobilization, i.e. protests or marches. On the contrary, it eschews them. The concerns of the tebliğ movement instead include individual self-fashioning and ethical cultivation, a program it often pursues outside the purview of the public sphere. Given this picture, it is tempting to interpret the tebliğ movement as yet another case of an identity movement disinterested in the larger field of politics. This reading changes, however, if we broaden our conception of politics beyond the domain of official institutions and conventional strategies. When we do so, it becomes more obvious that the activities of the tebliğ movement, which aim to render an alternative conception of morality and subjectivity natural to the organization of society, are issues squarely located in the domain of modern politics. This is because building certain forms of morality and subjectivity are of central concern to the modern nation-state, the construction of its power, and the maintenance of its hegemony. Rather than benign encouragement for self-enhancement, the project of creating ethical subjectivities holds far-reaching implications so far as it directly confronts the interests and institutions of the nation-state.

The first analytical contribution of the dissertation, therefore, is to help rethink the conventional dichotomies of the political and the social as well as the political consequences of social movements. By documenting the personal, social, and political implications of putatively nonpolitical movements and their transformative powers, it aims to offer a new perspective on the concepts of power, struggle, and sociopolitical change.[20]

Thus, despite its focus on issues of pedagogy, piety, and moral self-reform, the tebliğ movement can not be reduced to an expression of a vibrant Islamic civil society against an authoritarian state. At its core, the tebliğ movement is a deeply political and reconstructive movement. To be sure, most of its participants describe their pedagogic activities as nonpolitical, even anti-political. This is because they consider making political comments or talking about politics with their audience as divisive and outside the proper field of Islamic education. Taking their descriptions at face value, however, risks allowing popular descriptions to dictate scholarly interpretation. Interpreting the tebliğ movement as solely focused on civic service and devoid of political motivation, a popular discourse Islamists embrace, would be to mistake actors' purported intentions (i.e. a concern with personal-spiritual transformation but not social and political transformation) for reality itself.

In modern societies, political struggles are seldom waged only within the confines of formal institutions. Issues of morality and subjectivity, indeed, constitute primary domains of political contestation and struggle. Saba Mahmood explains why:

> To the extent that all aspects of human life (whether they pertain to family, education, worship, welfare, commercial transactions, instances of birth and death, and so on) have been brought under the regulatory apparatuses of the nation-state … [religious movements'] efforts to remake any of these activities will necessarily have political consequences…In other words, it is not that the pietists have "politicized" the spiritual domain of Islam (as some scholars of Islam claim) but that conditions of secular-liberal modernity are such that for any world-making project (spiritual

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[20] Others have also pointed out the need for integrating institutional and cultural perspectives in the study of social movements. See for example, Auyero (2003); Derluguian (2005); Tuğal (2009b). My work speaks to this call.

or otherwise) to succeed and be effective, it must engage with the all-encompassing institutions and structures of modern governance, whether it aspires to state power or not. (2005:193–4)

Even when movements do not openly contest state power, their moralistic or pedagogic visions through which they engage the nation-state's project, "laying claims over the subjectivities of its citizens" (Kaplan 2006:8) to naturalize authority, are in and of themselves political.[21] It is quite telling, then, that the Turkish state, as well as others in the region (the most well known case is the Egyptian state), has constantly deployed its military and police forces to combat moralistic activities of Islamists, especially in the field of education.[22] Any attempt to typologize this movement as "reformist" (as they call themselves) or "identity-oriented," therefore, would be to miss a whole array of struggles, contestations, and motivations with far-reaching consequences both in the social and political spheres.

One promising way of studying this movement is through the study of what is fashionably termed the "micropolitics" of religious activism, or by locating actors' putatively "non-political" or "civil" practices within the larger field of political struggles. Anthropology more than sociology has been at the forefront of this research agenda by concentrating on everyday forms of religious activism through pious voluntarism (Deeb 2006), vernacular politics (White 2002), veiling movements (El Guindi 1999), cassette sermons (Hirschkind 2006), mosque movements (Mahmood 2005), and alms and charity work (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). These studies follow the lead of Asad, who suggested that the analytical object of an anthropology of Islam should be "discursive traditions" (1986:14), or historically contingent and locally variant interactions between people, institutions, and texts that create distinctive power structures and relations (see also Abu-Lughod 1989:297). The micropolitics of religious

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[21] For a review essay on struggles over alternative moral worldviews as political struggles, see Hitlin and Vaisey (2013). For a more specific discussion of the politicization of broad domains of life, including the moral, under the nation-state system within the case of the Middle East, see Hirschkind (1997).

[22] See my discussion of military coups and ensuing policies in Turkey Chapter 2. See also Starrett (1998:1–13) for a good example on Egypt.

activism, therefore, focuses on the study of struggles for power and attempts to create "orthodoxy" or "correct" forms of knowledge. No other domain is as central to the struggles over the creation of "correct" knowledge and morality than the domain of education, broadly conceived as socialization and pedagogy. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on actor's presumably non-political practices of "teaching religion to each another," as a means of creating orthodoxy, or an alternative vision of morality and political philosophy. It argues that it is only by contextualizing contestations within the field of struggles, which is in essence political, that we can begin to draw out the potential implications of this dialectic for broader sociopolitical transformation.

## Social and cultural reproduction

The relationship between institutions of power and pedagogy has long occupied the interest of social theorists. Many have conceived of the production and transmission of knowledge as vital political acts because of its centrality to an actor's (whether the state or otherwise) construction of power. Marx (1978) captured this premise through the notion of ruling ideas; Gramsci (1971) in the concept of hegemony; Foucault (1977) through the system of microphysics; Bourdieu (1977) at the intersection of pedagogic action, cultural reproduction, and domination; and Bernstein (1975) with his theorizing on critical pedagogy and symbolic control. These theorists agreed that those who control the apparatus of knowledge production, or education broadly conceived, can control the economy of information, create orthodoxy, and make and unmake legitimate types of cultural capital.

"Struggle for the mastery of the human soul" wrote Durkheim ([1938] 1977:234) can be traced through the "struggles and conflicts which have arisen between opposing sets of ideas" in history, above all those that aim to make a revolutionary idea—whether educational, moral,

religious, or political—central to the organization of society (13). From this perspective,

religious and secular movements constitute two sides of the same coin. Both are essentially

concerned with socialization of the "human soul" into a particular cosmology, morality, and

political philosophy. Both regard the instruments of pedagogy as a vital tool in the "education of

the will" as much as the "education of the intelligence" (Durkheim 1977:266). And finally,

current struggles today in the Muslim world, as much as the Western world, over the regulation

of private and public ethics, belong to a historical interaction between secular and religious

forces that can be traced back at least as far as the Enlightenment. In the modern era, however,

secular movements succeeded. They did so by leveraging the institutions of the nation-state,

foremost mass education, to shape people's understanding of the social and political contexts

enveloping them (Benei 2008; Starrett 1998). The centrality of education in the construction of

nation-state and its nationalism is best captured in the words of Gellner (2008[1983]:33–4), who

suggested that monopoly over legitimate education was more critical to the survival of the

modern nation-state than its monopoly over legitimate violence:

> ….Education….is of the very first importance for the political sociology of the modern world; and its implications have, strangely enough, been seldom understood or appreciated or even examined. At the base of the modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor. Not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) *doctorat d'état* is the main tool and symbol of state power. The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence. When this is understood, then the imperative of nationalism, its roots, not in human nature as such, but in a certain kind of now pervasive social order, can also be understood.

Control or influence over pedagogic powers is central precisely for the same symbolic reason to

religious movements: for not only the construction of legitimacy but also the formation and

reformation of the human material along a desired social order, whether movements seek state

power or not. The tebliğ movement is no exception.

Beginning in 1923, the ability of Islamic structures "to reproduce themselves by

producing agents endowed with the [necessary] system of predispositions" (Bourdieu 1990:56)

was cut short in Turkey by a small cadre of revolutionary elites who executed the most extreme program of de-Islamization the Muslim world has ever seen. At the heart of this process was an ambitious plan for the *étatization of education*, or increased control of political authority over the domain of socialization and pedagogy. The republican elite changed the alphabet from Arabic to Latin; closed centuries-old colleges of Islamic sciences or madrasas; banned printing and reading books in the "old" (Arabic) script, including the Qur'an; outlawed institutions of folk Islam, the Sufi orders; removed the word *ulema* (Islamic scholar) from the Turkish lexicon; and replaced the word '*ilm* (Islamic knowledge) with the word *bilim* (secular knowledge) to affirm the superiority of secular over religious sciences within the educational hierarchy. Deprived of any official pedagogic mechanism to reproduce themselves, Islamists' primary struggle in the early decades of the republican period centered on keeping alive an identity, which was in danger of descending into irrelevance at best and disappearing entirely at worst. Beginning in the 1980s, however, due to the changing international and domestic conditions I briefly discussed earlier, Islamists embraced a program of sociopolitical transformation of society from below through the tebliğ movement. Institutions of religious socialization and pedagogy became a central domain to the successful enactment of this project.

All political actors recognize the conservative as well as the transformative powers of education. This is because educational institutions are central to the creation and spread of "orthodoxy" (Asad 1986:15), or historically contingent knowledge and practices that validate certain conceptions of the individual and the world, while marginalizing others. But educational institutions do more than that. They also impart a sense of naturalness or non-arbitrariness (Bourdieu 1974), while perpetuating the domination of one group, i.e. secularists in modern Turkey, over others, i.e. Islamists. Although institutions of socialization have been a primary concern for theories of education, the study of religious education as a domain of struggle,

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domination, and contestation has fallen under the radar of many theorists. As Gregory Starrett

(1998:12) observes:

> The trinity of ethnicity, class, and gender has consumed nearly all the attention of critical
> theorists of education. Systematic critical treatments of the reproduction of religious traditions are
> conspicuously absent. This is partly, of course, because of the immediate and overriding gravity
> of ethnic, class, and gender inequality in the U.S. and Western Europe, where most educational
> sociologists have worked. But it is also because the sense in which there is an intriguing
> "inequality" at stake in religious socialization – one that cannot entirely be subsumed under the
> rubric of socioeconomic class or gender – is less immediately clear.

In other words, the creation of orthodoxy is about the constitution of certain power relations.

Depending on the actor's perspective, it either reproduces the "inequality" between groups or

establishes a new form of "domination" of one group over another. To be sure there is a large

and vibrant literature on Islamic preaching and pedagogy, again mostly by anthropologists, on

the role of new forms of Islamic education in challenging political and religious authorities

(Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Eickelman 1992; Hefner and Zaman 2007; Horvatich 1994;

Abu-Lughod 1993). But political sociologists who have much to say about struggles over

institutions of knowledge, religious or otherwise, in undermining dominant orthodoxies and

constituting new relations of power are sorely missing in these debates. The dissertation aims to

help fill this gap.

The second contribution of this dissertation is to show the centrality of religious

education sites to Islamists' ground-up vision to contest and transform existing orthodoxies,

dispositions, and social relations with alternative ones as a means of enacting larger political

change. In fact, one of the main findings of the dissertation is that religious education sites have

been at the forefront of Islamization by promoting the conversion of nominal Muslims into "real"

believers. This process flows in two directions: first, it aims to increase one's religious skills and

sensibilities. The children who learned to read the Qur'an or to play the reed flute at the

homeschool are exaggerated representations of those efforts to make individuals acquire an

aptitude to be religious. Second, it includes the naturalization of new power relations and expectations. Specialized actors (imams, preachers, *sohbet*-givers[23], oath-receivers[24]) become authorities of reference and guidance who instruct people on Islamic standards of appropriateness, such as the correct donning of Islamic dress, values on gender segregation, ways of public conduct, preferable economic relations, or alternative modes of entertainment. As such, successful Islamization and sociopolitical transformation hinges on institutionalizing religiosity as an organizing principle of the individual, society, and the state. By "institutionalizing religiosity," I mean making religious references, categories, and practices central, natural, and pervasive in individual orientation, as well as social and political life. At the individual level, this process entails making religious behavior an ingrained disposition of the individual, who then needs no external intervention to realign his everyday life with religious edicts. At the societal and political level, it involves rendering symbols, values, and precepts of pietism widespread, encompassing, and self-reproducing—hence institutionalized.

I believe this process is best captured by the term "banal religion." My use of this term is inspired by Michael Billig's concept of "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995), denoting the mundane, taken-for-granted, and pervasive power of nationhood as an ideological habit and organizing principle of daily life. Following a similar logic, I suggest that religion becomes "banal" when it is an "endemic condition" (6), an unnoticed principle and practice that pervasively shapes the individual and the flow of everyday life. Institutionalizing religiosity is a program to make religion banal. This entails making religious knowledge and practice deeply internalized, to the

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[23] A *sohbet* is an informal get-together where a religiously-versed person provides religious commentary on Qur'anic or contemporary topics to listeners. A *sohbet*-giver can be an Islamic scholar, preacher, or teacher, but also a more ordinary, non-professional person who has some religious knowledge and rhetorical skill than an average individual.
[24] Receiving an oath is a rite of passage and requirement for membership in a Sufi order, or *tarikat*. Traditionally, sheiks received oaths from newcomers. Today, however, due to the increased number of participants, others are appointed by their sheik to perform this role.

point that it retreats to the unconscious, so that as a structuring principle it is rarely commented upon or at best forgotten. I suggest that the survival of banal religion as a mode of conduct and organizational principle does not depend on outside intervention, but self-reproduction.[25] In other words, banal religion relies upon ordinary individuals reproducing its requirements routinely without the need for other individuals or organizations to interfere or remind what needs to be undertaken. What other domain could be more central to the inculcation of behaviors that teach individuals to reproduce the requirements of a particular moral order other than education?

I contend that institutions of religious education are critical sites precisely for this reason; they teach individuals to undertake and reproduce religious practices, ideas, and meanings so that they become taken-for-granted, unmarked, and banal. In doing so, some of these sites function like Goffman's "total institutions," encompassing arenas that subject an individual's identity to "untraining" and "retraining" (Goffman 2007[1961]:13) to accomplish cultivating an alternative conception of the self. But this conception goes beyond the individual experience. Following Billig, I argue that religious identity should not be conceived only as "an inner psychological state" but as "a form of life" (69), which consequentially shapes the individual as well as society and the state. The main role of institutions of religious education is to inculcate banal practices, which over the long run contribute to the reproduction of society as robustly Islamic.

**Context and method**

Islamist mobilization in Turkey is nested within a complex network of formal and informal institutions. However, it is the informal rather than the formal sphere that constitutes the

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[25] This idea draws from theories of neo-institutionalism, which suggest the establishment of a social convention, political principle, or organizing norm, hence their institutionalization, depends on their routinization, self-activation, and standardization among practitioners rather than collective mobilization to remind them to follow an expected norm. See especially Jepperson (1991, 2001); Meyer (2010).

epicenter of Islamic activism, reflecting both the prevailing nature of social relations and the political history of the movement. As in other Muslim societies, personal connections and informal relationships tend to be more important than formal ties in Turkey. Islamists deliberately organize in informal sites so as to tap into these strong, pre-established, and pervasive personal networks (see also Singerman 1996). Like other religious movements in the region, Turkish Islamists historically suffered from sustained periods of repression. Building informal sites is a natural outcome of being embedded in an inimical environment where visibility entails vulnerability. As a result of such social and historical experiences, Islamists in Turkey, as in the rest of the Middle East, organize through localized, flexible, and secluded institutions outside the boundaries of formal organizational spaces (see also Wiktorowicz 2003:22–3). The tebliğ movement is a quintessential example of this sort of organization. But doing fieldwork in such reclusive, mostly underground, and complex networks can pose difficult issues of access and trust. The structure of my fieldwork and strategy for data collection is a response to these challenges.

I studied the tebliğ movement in a series of official and clandestine religious education sites located in conservative and generally lower middle class or poor districts on the Asian side of Istanbul. My original site was an Imam-Hatip school located in a poor southeastern district on the Asian side. At this school, I worked as an "intern teacher" from the beginning of the 2011 academic year through the end of 2012. I was never officially appointed; this was a deliberate choice, negotiated with the principal, in order to avoid provoking suspicion and conspiracy theories that often permeate conservative settings in Turkey.[26] The official intern status was important to gain legitimate access to classrooms, students, administrative offices, teachers' meetings, parents, cultural events in and outside of school, and eventually invitations into the

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[26] My research, however, was conducted by official research permission from the Ministry of Education.

homes of teachers and students. A few months into the research, I explained to all the teachers and students that I was a researcher, but many continued to address me as *Hocam*, or my teacher, throughout my time at school.[27] The interactions with the teachers and students yielded not only important data but also contacts into other realms of the tebliğ movement.

Although the study of official sites – Imam-Hatip schools or state Qur'anic seminaries – provided some insights into Islamist mobilization, they were ultimately inadequate. Decades of persecution ultimately motivated Islamists to create autonomous and loosely connected informal networks of religious education sites quite invisible and inaccessible to outsiders. But being a teacher at an Imam-Hatip, an organization deeply tied to these informal and clandestine sites, helped give me access to and enabled me to study the tebliğ movement in its entirety. In addition to observing the Imam-Hatip, I conducted regular participant observation in a formal boarding Qur'anic seminary for girls (*yatılı kız kuran kursu*). I attended classes, social events, sohbets, and graduation ceremonies in the seminary. I also spent many hours with instructors, young and old, at their homes, at social get-togethers, or in cafes. The local *müftü* (religious jurisconsult) I met through a teacher at the Imam-Hatip arranged my study at the seminary. Thanks to his reference, the instructors and students were welcoming and open, unlike some teachers in the Imam-Hatip who were quite suspicious about my presence at the school despite the official research permission I had from the Ministry of Education.

The third arena of regular observation I pursued was a women's sohbet in a series of mosques close to both the Imam-Hatip and the seminary. Although I did not cover myself at the Imam-Hatip or the seminary—except when the situation called for it (i.e. during Qur'an

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[27] The term *hoca* historically has been used in Muslim countries as a title for professionals in education, religion, and bureaucracy. In the Ottoman Empire, the term was used to refer to a teacher, which almost always meant a Muslim religious teacher. In contemporary Turkish, the term can refer both to a schoolteacher in secondary or higher education and to a religious teacher or preacher, either male or female. Finally, the term is a means of addressing a learned person respectfully.

recitations)—I always wore Islamic dress (*tesettür*) at mosque sohbets. The sohbets were conducted by a group of women preachers from one of the most stringent Islamic groups (İsmailağa cemaat). Therefore, I took extra care not to appear out of place. Unlike in the Imam-Hatip and the seminary, I made no close friends in the mosques but only intermittent contacts, due to the nature of the setting and lack of personal connections inside the group.

The fourth and highly important source of data was my frequent visits to informal and illegal preschools, madrasas, religious home schools, dormitories, reading houses, and semi-formal youth study centers, prep courses, and dormitories. I reached many of these sites through friends at the school and the seminary, who often accompanied me for my interviews. Because most were clandestine sites, and did not "exist" officially, many informants felt more comfortable talking when they had a known-person alongside a "researcher." While I paid recurrent visits to some sites (the preschool, home school, dormitory, and reading house) as I befriended some individuals in them, I made only single visits to others (the madrasa and prep course) due both to time constraints and to the nature of my relationships with people at those sites. These semi-formal and informal sites provided an array of crucial data ranging from actors' critiques of the secular system to objectives of Islamist mobilization to methods of recruitment and persuasion of new comers. This data also helped me draw a map of the tebliğ movement as organized through semi-formal and informal networks of religious education.

In addition to field notes drawn from participant observation, I also collected textual and audio material including textbooks, classroom materials, teachers' manuals, pamphlets, posters, photographs, videos, and children's books on Islam and education. Finally, I conducted about a hundred semi-structured interviews with various actors, including teachers and principals from the Imam-Hatip and secular schools; instructors at Qur'anic seminaries, the madrasa, and preschools; administrative staff at dormitories and youth centers; high school and divinity school

students; graduates of these schools; and their parents. While the majority of interviews were recorded, I could not record a handful of others because of the respondents' request (or occasional dysfunction of my digital recorder); but in both cases took extensive notes during and after the interviews.

Additional data for my research came from secondary literature and some primary source materials I collected in two national libraries in Ankara. The secondary literature includes studies of the Ottoman madrasa system, the political and military history of Turkey, Islamic movements, and Republican policies toward Imam-Hatip Schools and Qur'anic seminaries. Primary source materials include official reports, memoranda, and legislation on cultural and educational policies following the 1980 and 1997 military coups and legislation, circulars, and reports from the Education Ministry. These enabled me not only to construct the historical trajectory of religious education in modern Turkey, but also to identify the different actors involved in religious education debates, how they justified their positions with respect to the purpose and organization of religious education, and what was at stake in these debates and programs. I also met with and interviewed bureaucrats from the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education officials, divinity school professors, and representatives from religious think tanks who were involved in drafting, restructuring, or disseminating governmental or nongovernmental religious education programs and curricula. These interviews helped me to understand the behind-the-scenes processes of policy making and advocacy not reflected in the public debate. While ethnographic accounts of movement activists enabled me to draw a portrait of the tebliğ movement in the present, the historical and secondary-source data helped me reconstruct a systematic account of the emergence and development of the movement in the last three decades.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The four substantive chapters analyze the historical origins and contemporary manifestations of the tebliğ movement. Chapter 2 focuses on the historical context of political contestations and struggle over the conquest and control of institutions of socialization and pedagogy both by the state and the Islamist actors in Turkey. Three key structural issues characterize the history of political struggles: 1) struggles over the autonomy of the religious field from the state institutions; 2) institutional ambivalence of the state toward religious actors; and 3) formation and execution of the dual strategy of Islamization. From the late Ottoman to the early Turkish republican period, the process of *étatization*, or the state's increasing control and penetration of social or economic arenas formerly administered by autonomous groups has been most brutally waged in the religious field and against its historic power holders. One of the major stakes of competition in this process was the monopolization of pedagogic power in general and the control of religious education in particular. The chapter provides a sustained account of the state's attempt to wrest autonomy from religious actors (both in pedagogic and other fields), and later religious contenders' attempt to re-conquer lost autonomy as a means of analyzing contemporary struggles.

Chapter 3 draws a portrait of the tebliğ movement from the perspective of its participants. According to religious activists, the tebliğ movement emerged in reaction to three interrelated problems in Turkish society: (1) the reconstruction of religious education along secular lines; (2) the ethical erosion of social institutions; and (3) the corrosive influence of humanism. The root cause of these problems has been the gradual marginalization of religion in shaping individual action and collective ethos in Turkish society. The chapter examines objectives of mobilization at the political, social, and individual level and studies their interrelations by drawing on ethnographic accounts from different educational venues such as an after-school course, an

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illegal dormitory, a theater play in a Qur'anic seminary, and a women's sohbet in a mosque. The chapter shows why and how pedagogy became one of the core components of the tebliğ movement, with a central place in the project of the Islamization of society.

Chapter 4 undertakes a case study of an Imam-Hatip school as a means of analyzing the role of these schools in the tebliğ movement. The chapter first explains the historical and political struggles over religious education and how Islamists used these struggles to legitimize advanced religious study in a militantly secular state. Next, the chapter focuses on the concrete pedagogic strategies employed to create the ideal Muslim youth out of high school students. To this end, it studies various settings, including the teacher's lounge, lectures, and Friday sohbets where a program for nurturing three properties (leadership, morality, discipline) in students is discussed or enacted. The chapter aims to demonstrate that even though Imam-Hatips are state-sponsored schools closely regulated by the state, they constitute an integral part of the tebliğ movement. This is because over the decades the schools have been infiltrated and captured by movement activists who have used them to increase mass production of pious citizens and as the main grounds of recruitment. Both of these factors enabled the survival and triumph of Islam in a secular society. The chapter suggests that the main trends of the tebliğ movement can be seen within the Imam-Hatip, making it an important formal and state-sanctioned carrier of Turkey's Islamist movement.

Although Imam-Hatip schools are the most conspicuous sites of religious education, they are nested within a larger network of semi-formal and informal education sites. The tebliğ movement relies on these broadly diffused sites—perhaps even more than Imam-Hatip schools—to deepen religious knowledge, cultivate a religious ethos, and moralize society. Chapter 5 reorients the empirical focus of the dissertation toward these less conspicuous, though ultimately more crucial, sites of socialization and discipline. Unlike the formal school system run by an

overarching administrative unit (i.e. the education ministry), semi-formal and informal religious education is characterized by a nexus of loosely connected institutions that provide doctrinal and social training to the youth. The chapter maps out the legal status of formal, semi-formal, and informal education sites and the interactions between three levels of pedagogy. Under each category, it focuses on several exemplary contexts. Overall, the chapter looks at each of these sites to demonstrate how, through verbal and performative instruction, visible and invisible forms of persuasion, and spontaneous and deliberate means of discipline, training in Islamic knowledge and nurturing of religious subjectivities are achieved.

The conclusion summarizes the main components of the tebliğ movement as well as the contributions of the dissertation to the theories of social movements and social and cultural reproduction.

# CHAPTER 1:

# POLITICAL STRUGGLES OVER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FROM THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD TO THE PRESENT

In the past few decades, institutions of religious socialization and pedagogy have become the central domain of mobilization for the tebliğ movement. These more recent trends, however, are rooted in a larger historical context of political contestation over the control of those institutions both by the state and the Islamist actors in Turkey. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s was an era of radical change as Turkey's new leaders initiated a revolutionary program to modernize the country. During this time, a small group of nationalist elites dismantled the institution of the Caliphate and launched the most extreme program of de-Islamization the Muslim world has ever seen. One of the main pillars of this program was to secularize the educational system, a system perceived to be backward and regressive under the Ottoman Empire and one of the causes of its decline and fall. The nationalist state demonstrated extraordinary success in erasing the Ottoman's educational legacy and shaping new generations of secular Turks. However, it failed to prevent contestation over the principle of secularism and the extension of secularist rule over social domains—a critical one being education— which had previously been administered by local and religious authorities. Instead, it generated extraordinary resistance from these non-state contenders who adopted a series of efforts to preserve and later expand religious education in secular Turkey. This larger historical context of political contestation and struggle over religious education is the subject of this chapter.

The chapter will focus on three key dimensions that characterize the history of contestations in Turkey. The first dimension is the struggle over autonomy of the religious field from the state institutions. Expansion of the boundaries of state's involvement in diverse arenas of social life is a primary topic in the state building literature and a persistent characteristic of the

modern state which has co-opted or seized legitimacy, authority, and resources from an array of historical contenders including landlords, religious bodies, and local governors in the process of establishing its own administrative and symbolic power (Gorski 2003:164–6; Loveman 2005:1658; Weber 1994[1919]:315). From the late Ottoman to the early Turkish republican period, the process of *étatization*, or the state's increasing control and penetration of social or economic arenas formerly administered by autonomous groups (Jerre 2001:10) has been most brutally waged in the religious field and against its historic power holders. One of the major stakes of competition in this process was the monopolization of pedagogic power in general and the control of religious education in particular. The chapter provides a sustained account of the state's attempt to wrestle autonomy from religious actors (both in pedagogic and other fields), and later religious contenders' attempt to re-conquer lost autonomy as a means of analyzing contemporary struggles.

The second dimension is the institutional ambivalence of the state toward religious actors. In the Republican period, the state has pursued a strategy in which it has simultaneously – and rather paradoxically – been hostile toward religious groups while also accommodating them. This ambivalence is manifested in the state's alternation between seeking to diminish the power of religious institutions (and the religiosity of the citizens) versus seeking to harness the power of religious institutions (and the religiosity of the citizens) . The chapter documents the coexistence of such opposing approaches in order to challenge the established narrative that treats Turkish modernization as a history of struggle between a "repressive state" and a (religious) "civil society," where winners and losers can easily be located in distinct categories. Instead, the chapter suggests that this ambivalent relationship, which appears on the surface to be a protracted war, is not a zero-sum game, but one of negotiation and realignment.

The third dimension is the formation and execution of the dual strategy of Islamization discussed in the first chapter. This strategy is a function of, on the one hand, the state's alternating attitude toward Islamists and their demands, and, subsequently, the resulting volatile institutional environment within which Islamists have been forced to operate; and, on the other hand, the extraordinary political circumstances, such as changes in the electoral system (i.e. the transition to multi-party politics in 1946), civil conflicts (i.e. widespread street violence in the 1970s), or military coups (i.e. 1980, 1997) that, often unintentionally, engendered favorable conditions for Islamists. The chapter demonstrates that Islamists also had been quite ambivalent toward the state. In such a volatile environment, it was only by working both *within* and *outside* of the state, by working within state institutions and by circumventing them, that Islamists could harness the requisite legitimacy as well as autonomy to pursue a project of sociopolitical Islamization. The chapter focuses in particular on their activities within the system: their ability to infiltrate formal institutions, capture key parts of the state bureaucracy, and use their positions to influence public projects (building mosques, schools, seminaries), as well as public opinion.

These three dimensions cut across and help define each of the periods of political contestation and struggle over religious education under consideration in the chapter. The chapter begins by discussing the main pillars of Ottoman education and analyzes how Ottoman-era struggles portended subsequent struggles in the republican era. The bulk of the chapter then traces the struggle between dominant classes and challengers in the republican period as they unfolded through the domain of religious education.


**The Ottoman madrasa from the early-modern to the modern age**

Until the process of reform began in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (1839-1908), religion was the uncontested core element of the Ottoman

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education system. Three key aspects of the educational system – pedagogy, administration, and funding – rested on religious foundations. According to the Ottomans, the source of all knowledge was divine (Atay 1983:102), and the primary purpose of education was to teach religion. A child needed to know how to read the Qur'an and principles of Islam before learning anything else – even the skills needed to work in a practical occupation (Doğan 1997:413; Unat 1964:1). In fact, being versed in the Qur'an, with preference given to memorizing it, was a measure of enlightenment and civility. The study of religious sciences was the only alternative to ignorance – a pedagogic view that was not only commonsense, but also a formally endorsed political program.[28]

During the early-modern age (from the Empire's foundation in the 1300s through the reform period in 1839), educational activity was embedded in religious establishments inside and outside of the state apparatus. The administrative overseer of education at all levels was the Office of Religious Affairs (*Meşihat Makamı*). The director of this office, the Sheikh ul-Islam (*Şeyhülislam*), was simultaneously the highest religious authority in the Empire, the head of Islamic scholars (*ulema*), and the chief superintendent of elementary and secondary schools. Although the state provided legal oversight, education was not a routinely and institutionally provided state service. Instead, financing and day-to-day administration were undertaken by *vakıfs* (pious endowments). Education was largely a religious charity activity initiated by politically and socially influential personalities—to gain God's blessing as much as to harness power and prestige. Sultans, sultans' wives, pashas, notables, and civilian elites established educational institutions and provided private endowments known as vakıfs for their operations.

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[28] The primacy of religious education was formalized early during Ottoman rule and then reaffirmed periodically over time. In the first written legal text of the Ottoman state, the *Fatih Kanunnamesi* (1459) formalized education in the Empire by introducing a new system of madrasas. Sultan Mustafa II's 1702 decree ordered that children not be sent to guilds to learn craftsmanship before receiving religious education. Even during the period of reform in the Empire, Sultan Mahmud II made primary religious schooling mandatory in his 1824 and 1826 decrees (Unat 1964:1–2).

The legal personality of a vakıf is based on a charitable trust that holds the donated endowment in the form of buildings, cash, or land to fund and administer the institution (McCarthy 1997:116–7). Holding endowments separate from the state treasury provided vakıfs with considerable autonomy and insularity from state intervention in matters such as designing curricula, hiring of teachers, or choosing pedagogic methods (Koçer 1970:14).

Until changes were made in the nineteenth century, a two-pronged school system provided education in the Empire: 1) primary education was provided through elementary schools (*sıbyan mektebi*) and 2) intermediary and advanced education was provided through Islamic colleges or madrasas. Elementary schools enrolled children—both boys and girls—between the ages of four and six to study for two to three years free of charge. In contrast to modern bureaucratized school systems, elementary schools had an informal structure. Classes were not taught according to standardized curricula, and schools were neither built nor regularly supervised by a state office. Instead, residents in each neighborhood contributed funds for their construction, the local mosque imam taught classes, and the religious jurisconsult (*müftü*) of the neighborhood oversaw the school on behalf of the Sheikh ul-Islam. The schools primarily taught Qur'an reading and recitation and did not focus on students understanding the meaning of the text. Principles of religion, prayer verses, and praying five times a day were also taught. The emphasis on a religiously-oriented primary education followed from uncertainty about whether a child would eventually continue education; therefore at a minimum, children had to gain the love of Allah and the Qur'an during their formative and "submissive" years (Khaldûn 2005[1969]:421-6).[29] Besides their traditional role, elementary schools constituted a preparatory stage for children who would continue their education in the madrasas. Up until the nineteenth

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[29] If parents wanted their children to become a *hafiz* (someone who has memorized the Qur'an), a requirement to become an Islamic scholar, those students were tutored further to memorize the holy book from front to back. It was thought that young children could memorize the Qur'an with ease because they were still considered to be a "blank slate."

century, one's social standing was measured through the amount of religious education they received.

The madrasa was the higher institution of Islamic sciences in the Ottoman Empire. All madrasas provided training in religious subjects including Islamic jurisprudence (*fıkıh*), sources of the law (*fıkıh usûlü*), Qur'anic interpretation (*tefsir*), didactic theology (*kelam*), words and deeds of the Prophet (*hadis*), Qur'an recitation (*kıraat*), and Arabic grammar (*nahiv*). Some also taught positive sciences such as astronomy, philosophy, logic, geometry, math, history, and geography.[30] Like elementary schools, madrasas were funded and administered by vakıfs; but unlike the former, madrasas admitted only male students, and for a longer period—twelve years—of study. Madrasas did not charge tuition and daily meals and monthly stipends were provided to students. Over time, madrasas developed into larger complexes, with classrooms, student and instructor dormitories, libraries, dining halls, administrative offices, and mosques. The primary function of the madrasa was to train individuals for the state's religious establishment whose members were called ulema. Members of the ulema included the Sheikh ul-Islam, judges, madrasa professors, sultans' teachers, doctors, and religious functionaries. The ulema wore special garments and had certain privileges including immunity from execution and imprisonment (Akyüz 2011:75). To become a member of the ulema class, one had to graduate from the highest madrasas in the Empire.

The Ottoman state provided legal guarantees to madrasas throughout the empire while using those it financially supported through Sultans' or governors' vakıfs (as opposed to nonstate notables' vakıfs) as important tools of political legitimization and influence over targeted populations (Hoexter 1998:476). With territorial expansion into the Muslim world from the mid-

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[30] The classical Ottoman madrasa system trained not only Islamic scholars. Specialized madrasas were established, especially during the tenure of Süleyman the Magnificent, including madrasas of Medicine, Hadis, Qur'anic Recitation, and Mesnevi (*Dârültip, Dârülhadîs, Dârülkurra, Dârülmesnevi*) (Özyılmaz 2002).

fifteenth to sixteenth century, the Ottoman state identity moved away from balancing syncretic religious elements to gradually adopting a coherent Sunni orthodox outlook (Barkey 2008:70–1; Kafadar 1996:60–117). In the changing demographic and cultural landscape, the Ottoman state refashioned itself as a Muslim empire and madrasas were crucial for providing a religious basis for this image. Sultan Mehmed II founded and established control over eight madrasas (known as the *Fatih Medreseleri*), entrusting them with reproducing and popularizing the state's official identity and ideology (Akyüz 2011:65–6). Other sultans sponsored madrasas to train loyal cadres of functionaries who sustained the dominance of the imperial center in the peripheries. State officials also founded madrasas in both big cities and small towns to promote the legitimacy of a Turkic-Muslim dynasty's rule, especially among polyglot Muslim groups.[31] In addition to using madrasas to further its political interests, the Ottoman state, like other Muslim states, used them to help establish Sunni orthodoxy, both against the influence of heterodox Sufism, Shi'ism, and Christian missionary activity in the Eastern territories and within the populations newly converted to Islam in the Western frontiers (Hodgson 1974, 2:45–9; Hoexter 1998:477).

But the religious establishment including the madrasa, the ulema, and the Sheikh ul-Islam were not mere appendages to the state. For one thing, the head of madrasas, the Sheikh ul-Islam, occupied a prestigious position within the imperial council, which was symbolically equal to the Grand Vizier. Importantly, he could issue documents of legal opinion (*fetva*) that could contradict, in theory, the sultan's decrees. In periods of political turbulence, and especially during the nineteenth century, the ulema and their institutions influenced popular opinions and organized dissent against the center (Deringil 1999; Hanioğlu 2008; Kushner 1987). Additionally, madrasas, especially the more conservative ones, led resistance efforts against

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[31] The ulema had to reconcile imperial decisions with the orders of Islam.

Ottoman centralization efforts in the education system in the nineteenth century (Bein 2011).[32]

Many state officials and sultans chose to appease or to not "touch" the madrasa establishment (Unat 1964:79) by establishing alternative, "modern," schools. However, as more secularly oriented nationalist cadres ascended to power following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and consolidated their position after the 1913 coup d'état, they succeeded in marginalizing the role and influence of madrasas and eventually stamped out the ulema's control over education.

**Ottoman reforms during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries**

Beginning with the *Tanzimat* (reorganization) period in 1839 and accelerating after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the Ottoman state began increasing its control and jurisdiction over various fields of social life, especially the religious field—a process I referred to earlier as *étatization*. This process included wrestling autonomy and authority from traditional power holders, including the Sheikh ul-Islam, the ulema class, and local Sufi orders. *Étatization* of education, law, and endowments followed from the gradual but decisive removal of the Sheikh ul-Islam's religious authority over education, judicial authority over the courts, and jurisdiction over pious endowments. The state established close control over the members of the ulema through creating salary and pension systems, and over the local Sufi orders by placing their leaders, known as sheiks, under a new department called the Council of Sheiks to oversee the compliance of all activities with the law. More specific elements of usurpation of institutional powers included the creation of a Ministry of Education that seized the administrative power of the Ottoman-era Office of Religious Affairs to preside over religious schools; a Ministry of Justice which took control of religious courts and appointed, supervised, and dismissed its judges (*kadis*), the largest sub-group of the ulema class; and a new Department of Foundations

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[32] It should be noted that there were also reform-oriented ulema and madrasa students.

established under the Ministry of Finance to control and manage all financial affairs and properties of vakıfs and religious schools and mosques they sponsored (Shaw and Shaw 1977:306–7).

The étatization of education was one of the most obvious, and contested, examples of the state's expropriation of legitimacy, authority, and resources from a historically powerful and relatively autonomous group of actors. State officials partly attributed Ottoman military defeats, the loss of territory, and scientific lag behind Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the Empire's outdated educational system. In response, the state opened Western-style professional schools and modern secondary and high schools, while increasing its control over traditional elementary schools and madrasas. The penetration of the educational field unfolded on two levels. On the one hand, the state exerted its administrative power over madrasas by changing their curriculum, structure, and evaluation methods.[33] It introduced mandatory life sciences into the madrasa curriculum in 1910; opened new vocational madrasas to train preachers (*Madrasat'ül-Vaızin*) in 1912 and imams and orators (*Madrasat'ül-Eimme ve'l Hutaba*) in 1913; imposed examinations to test the competence of graduates; united new madrasas in 1919 (*Madrasat'ül-İrşâd*); and brought all other madrasas under a three-level system (*Dâr'ül-Hilafet'il-Aliyye Medresesi*) in 1919. On the other hand, the state increased its control over the production and dissemination of knowledge by constructing a new educational system in which its three pillars—the pedagogy, administration, and financing—rested upon a more secular foundation (Doğan 1997:442; Hefner 2007:14). This included foregrounding positive rather than divine knowledge in curricula; establishing a Ministry of Education to administer new schools rather than the Office of Religious Affairs (later the Ministry would take control of

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[33] Despite being the central institution of education, the madrasa system did not reform its teaching methods or undergo significant reformation until the end of the nineteenth century. Over time, madrasas also moved away from teaching physical sciences and focused mainly on Islamic sciences, so much so that those who studied physical sciences were seen as unfaithful (Koçer 1970:12).

religious schools); and drawing funds from a ministerial budget as opposed to the vakıfs.[34]

Similar to other Muslim states at the time, these preferences reflected a general decline in the prestige of religious knowledge within the educational hierarchy (Eickelman 2007:141–6), and a change in social perception as being educated in Western-style schools, not traditional madrasas, became the new measure of high social standing. New schools were also crucial for training professionals for a rapidly expanding state bureaucracy (Hanioğlu 2008:102; Somel 2001:3–7). Over time, graduates of new schools formed the new middle class and their views came to occupy an increasingly central position in the political, military, and intellectual life of the Ottoman state. As a result, the ulema and their schools faced a declining reputation among new middle classes even though they continued to be popular among the urban poor, students of rural origins, and villagers in Anatolia well into the Republican period.

Beginning in the twentieth century, Ottoman educational reforms generated intense public controversy, especially concerning the future of the madrasa. Many reformist ulema, madrasa students, and Islamic intellectuals agreed that madrasas needed major reform. Mehmed Âkif, the renowned poet and Islamic intellectual, criticized the madrasa for failing to train scientists and philosophers like Ibn-i Sina or al-Gazali. Âkif hoped for an education system that could synthesize the sciences of the West with the dictates of the Qur'an, as well as national values (Akyüz 2011:307–8). Until 1913, the nationalist press and intellectuals close to the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) also shared reform projects for the madrasa. However, in the politically uncertain context of Balkan Wars, military defeats, and World War I, these

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[34] Though traditional and the new Western-style of education diverged from one another in important ways, each retained elements of the other. The curriculum of the new schools included religion classes and students were taught how to do daily prayers and ritual ablution (Akyüz 2011:329). The reformed curriculum of madrasas, included classes on zoology, sociology, hygienic practices, math, and psychology in addition to traditional Islamic sciences. Many respected ulema taught religion classes in the new schools, while several prominent intellectuals, including Turkist ideologues Ziya Gökalp and Ahmet Ağaoğlu, taught at reformed madrasas (Bein 2011:61–2).

groups began to cast doubt on the madrasa's necessity. While some groups launched vicious

attacks on the madrasas calling for their complete abolition, pragmatists recommended the

creation of a unified education system where madrasas would not be abolished but become part

of the state school system, sharing the same administration and curriculum with other schools

(Bein 2011: 56-8). In the annual congress of the CUP in 1916, Ziya Gökalp, the Turkist thinker

and prominent ideologue of the Committee, who was influenced by Durkheim's views on the

French model of unified education system, stated:

> the most harmful men for the country emerge from the madrasas. Madrasas ruin the morals of the
> youth they claim to educate. What sets us off from other nations? There is only one reason for
> this: while other nations' education [system] has a national [unified] character, our education
> system is mixed, multi-headed….with madrasas, missionary schools, and Tanzimat [new-style]
> schools" (Kösoğlu 2005:179).

According to Gökalp, the *Tanzimat* system superficially adopted the ideas and institutions of the

West before removing or reforming the old. As a result, the *Tanzimat* regime created a

precarious duality—not only in education but also in other domains of social and political life—

that could in the long run impair secularizing reforms and deepen the already existing cleavage

between the state and the masses (Shaw and Shaw 1997: 303). As a panacea, Gökalp

recommended a unified, national education system under the purview of the national state (via

the Ministry of Education). Gökalp's recommendation, which was articulated after the

establishment of the Republic, created bitter battles and unsettled questions about the place of

religion in national education, but more generally about the influence of Islamic institutions,

norms, and practices in Turkish society that endure to this day.


**Education in the new republic**

Debates over the status of madrasas continued during the formation of the new

government in Ankara in 1920s. In the early years of the republic, the nationalist elite did not

appear hostile to the continuation of madrasas. Debates during the first parliament reflect a

plurality of opinions on the subject and uncertainty at the time about the direction to be taken.

Three days after its opening in April 26, 1920, ulema members of the Grand National Assembly

submitted a joint proposal to the Assembly. The proposal suggested entrusting the supervision of

educational affairs—as in the Ottoman state—to the Commission on Islamic Affairs, later named

the Ministry on Islamic Affairs and Religious Endowments (*Şer'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*), the

administrative body that replaced the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam. The proposal sparked heated

discussion on the division that religious versus worldly education had created since the

nineteenth century. The speech of Hamdullah Suphi (Tanrıöver), a well-known Turkist literary

figure and future minister of Education, represented the general sentiment among nationalists:

> Every nation receives religious education and upbringing (*dini terbiye*). Our children will get it
> too.…However, everywhere in the world education has two components. Depending on the
> occupation we choose, [educational] institutions train us. Some of these occupations are religious
> by nature; others are worldly.…Chemistry, philosophy, agriculture classes belong to the second
> type. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs can make suggestions on religious education to the Ministry
> of Education. The Ministry of Education designs and applies programs to train our children based
> on the occupation they will choose. However, we should not mix the two; if we do, conflicts arise
> and harm both sides (Ayhan 1999:5).

In traditional madrasas, the separation Hamdullah Suphi delineated between religious and

material sciences was considered superficial and trivial. Material sciences were part and parcel of

religious sciences, and all knowledge was a manifestation of the Creator's power and grace.

However, for the nationalist elite trained in new schools under the influence of positivist and

evolutionary philosophies, the fusion of religious and material sciences was not only undesirable

but also wrong. Such epistemologically distinct stances toward the sources of knowledge

culminated in a critical question during parliamentary discussion: should education in the new

republic be national (*milli*) or religious (*dini*)? For the pious and ulema members there was no

question. Islam was not an obstacle to modern education; on the contrary it was central to it.

Mustafa Takî Efendi, a respected religious scholar from Sivas and regular contributor to leading

Islamic publications at the time (including *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, *Sebilü'rreşad*, ve *Beyanü'l-hak*), articulated this view:

> Unlike other religions, our religion is not a hindrance to material progress. Our religion is conducive to material progress. Because other religions were not conducive to material progress, they [Europe] had to separate religion from worldly affairs….However, if we separate religion from worldly affairs, we will lag behind [the civilized world]. For example, we consider those who studied in new schools as alien-minded (*ecnebi fikirli*), God forbid, as unbelieving. Students of new schools, on the other hand, regard the madrasa students as bigoted and good-for-nothing (*mutaassıp ve hiçbir şeye yaramaz*). Therefore, a cleavage of ideas manifests itself within the nation (*millet*). We have to unite these two positions. Since our religion is not a hindrance to material progress, and even encourages it, there is no problem in mixing religious education and material education. In fact, it benefits everyone (Ayhan 1999:5–6).

In response to these demands voiced by religiously oriented parliamentarians, the government passed a bill in 1921 to open new madrasas (*Medaris'i İlmiye*) in Anatolia. During a trip to Konya in 1923 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic and its first president, visited Konya's famous madrasa (*Dâr'ül-Hilafet'il-Aliyye Medresesi*), observed lessons, and delivered a speech praising the madrasa's education methods and principles. However, after the Republic was established, this favorable attitude toward madrasas and religious education began to wane. Atatürk was certainly weighing the alternatives in his mind and also debating them with scientists and intellectuals around him. İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, a renowned pedagogue and the first provost of Istanbul University (*Darülfünun*), reports in his memoirs that during a meeting in February 1924 Atatürk asked his opinion about the new education system – should the Republican education be national or religious in essence? In response Baltacıoğlu answered: "Religion is a social institution. It lives in reality, among the people. However, the state does not have to teach it in its schools. State education should only be national. Reforms should secularize the institution of education and obliterate the roots of the tree of bigotry and fanaticism" (Bilgin 1980:42). Baltacıoğlu was reflecting the general sentiment among nationalist secular elites: institutions of religious education, foremost madrasas, were regressive and the cause of the Ottoman's decline. The only antidote to the nation's underdevelopment was secular education.

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Beyond its primary utility (i.e. turning peasants into "Turks" (Weber 1976)), national education was a key political tool for training vanguard citizens in defense of the fragile republic against reputedly reactionary, anti-secular, and unpatriotic worldviews, which were perceived to be located in the madrasas.

Baltacıoğlu's statements reflect not only the desire to centralize, étatize, and secularize religious educational institutions, but also the nationalist secular elites' broader interest in differentiating state's boundaries – what Philpott (2007:507) calls "foundational legal authority" – from the religious field. This state-building process includes demarcating "the extent of each entity's authority over the other's basic prerogatives to hold offices, choose its officials, set its distinctive policies, carry out its activities, in short, to govern itself" (see also Stepan 2000). In Turkey's revolutionary context, this process took the form of an aggressive program to étatize the foundational legal authority of religious actors and institutions. The government abolished the Caliphate, closed the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Religious Endowments, and replaced the latter with a significantly less-powerful Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). Meanwhile, it abolished the Islamic courts and replaced Islamic canon law with secular law to eliminate the judicial authority of religion.

The étatization of education reached its apex starting in March 1924, a month after Atatürk's exchange with the renowned pedagogue, and continued through the early 1930s under the newly elected national parliament whose members were handpicked by Mustafa Kemal (Zürcher 2004:242–59). On March 3, 1924 the parliament passed the controversial "Unification of Education Law" (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*) – the first of eight revolutionary laws – bringing all schools (including madrasas) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.[35] The law

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[35] Eight Revolutionary Laws were later put under special the protection of 1961 and 1982 constitutions so as to prevent them from being modified. These laws "whose legality cannot be questioned" according to clause #153 of the 1961 constitution and clause #174 of the 1982 constitution are the following: (1) The

reasserted the state's power over the still-plural and "multi-headed" education system that Gökalp had criticized almost two decades earlier. A few days later, the new Minister of Education announced his decision to close down all 454 madrasas.[36] As an alternative to the madrasa, the government immediately established 29 state-run Imam-Hatip (Imams and Preachers) high schools and opened a Faculty of Theology in Istanbul University to train religious scholars and functionaries who could preach a secularized public Islam. All madrasa students were transferred to either new secondary and high schools or Imam-Hatip schools, and the madrasa teachers were given the option to teach in new Imam-Hatip schools or secular public schools (Öcal 1994:47–51). New Imam-Hatip schools enrolled 1,442 students, but by 1931 only 177 of them graduated (60).

Even though the government's declared intention in 1924 was to rehabilitate religious education through state-controlled curricula and Imam-Hatip schools, it progressively took a different course. Until the early 1930s, the *étatization* of religious education was replaced by the *repression* of religious education through both direct and indirect measures. The government eliminated formal religion classes from elementary and secondary state schools in 1927; removed Arabic and Persian language classes from secondary school curricula in 1929; closed all Qur'an courses in 1929; shut down all Imam-Hatip schools due to an alleged lack of interest

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1924 Unification of Education Law; (2) The 1925 Hat Law; (3) The 1925 Law closing convents and dervish lodges; (4) The 1926 Clauses of the civil law on the conduct of marriage agreement; (5) The 1928 Law to use Arabic numerals; (6) The 1928 Alphabet Law; (7) The 1934 Law abolishing titles and by-names; (8) The 1934 Law on "Prohibited Garments."

[36] The minister argued that closing madrasas was necessary because they were not only stagnant and obscurantist places of education but also safe heavens for draft-dodgers. During the Ottoman times, madrasa students were exempt from military service, which was a point of contention among the supporters and opponents of the madrasa. This debate continued into the early years of the republic (Öcal 1994:32–9).

in 1931; and finally turned Istanbul University's Faculty of Theology into an institute under the Education Faculty in 1933 (Kaplan 1999:159–60).[37]

The attack on unofficial sources of religious education took course by outlawing Sufi orders (*tarikat*), devaluing the symbolic capital of the ulema, and changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin. Historically, Sufi orders and their sheiks had not been part of the Ottoman religious establishment in the center, but they had been highly influential and popular in the countryside—especially in teaching the philosophy and practice of religion in the image of idiosyncratic Sufi traditions. The law aimed at decimating these religious actors, who were characterized as promoting obstructionism among the rural population.

While the regime eradicated the "unofficial ulema" – Sufi sheiks – by outlawing their houses of teaching and learning, Sufi convents (*tekke*), it marginalized the "official ulema" by stripping away their symbolic capital. The title "ulema" was formally removed from the official lexicon, and the special clothes and headgear the ulema wore as a sign of distinction were prohibited or limited to use in worship places for ceremonial events (Bein 2011:106–7). The regime cracked down on unofficial Qur'an courses, arrested, exiled, and even executed some former ulema and imams who continued teaching religion. Changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin rendered learning the Qur'an and reading Ottoman canonical literature on religion highly challenging, if not impossible. Moreover, efforts to translate the Qur'an into Turkish and use it in worship and ritual further aimed to nationalize and control religion and its pedagogical sources (Bora 1998:118).

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[37] The broader process of de-Islamization followed from government policies targeting the other pillars of religious authority. The government abolished the Caliphate, closed the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Religious Endowments, and replaced the latter with a significantly less-powerful Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). Meanwhile, it abolished the Islamic courts and replaced Islamic canon law with secular law to eliminate the judicial authority of religion.

In the next decade, the single party regime consolidated its power and eliminated virtually all legitimate venues of traditional Islamic learning.[38] According to the founders, the new system was the only antidote to the perceived backwardness of society and reactionary forces resisting the zeitgeist of secularism and modernism. The Unification of Education Law and other measures aimed to trivialize the role, ranking, and influence of religious schooling and obliterate what Gökalp and others characterized as the "precarious dichotomy" between religious and worldly-knowledge and lifestyles. However, it never succeeded in doing so.

**Struggles in the early republic and beyond**

The period of the Kemalist One-Party state (1925-45) is traditionally interpreted as one of authoritarianism and repression. State building is regarded as having been conducted through a "top-down, center-out process" (Loveman 2005:1662), where the Kemalist state, using dictatorial measures, reconstituted all fields of social life, expropriated the administrative roles of traditional authorities, and fashioned new legitimate actors. Even in the period of multiparty democracy (1946-present), these accounts imply, such authoritarian tendencies continued to influence subsequent state policies toward oppositional actors and their demands. In no arena were these processes more palpable than the religious field (Atabaki and Zürcher 2004; Tunçay 2000; Zürcher 2004).

Such accounts of state building and consolidation of political power are not wrong, but they are incomplete. This is because the systematic focus on state making from above tends to obstruct a view of the formation of autonomous fields from below, as well as the ambivalent relationship between the two levels. All modern states, including the Turkish state, project an

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[38] The only official religious education in the early republican period was carried out through nine Qur'an courses, opened in 1932 as a result of the persistent work of Rifat Börekçi, the first president of *Diyanet*, to train functioneries for this institution (Kara 2008:60–84).

image of centralized control; however, they constantly have to negotiate with social actors over the boundaries of state and other social actor's autonomy. The imposition of the state's administrative control over social fields and groups, even in most centralized nation-states, seldom result in zero-sum games. Oppositional actors often develop strategies to mitigate or avoid the efforts of the state to infringe on their ideational and material interests and to restore their autonomy. Therefore, even when a given—i.e. religious—field is reconstituted from above in appearance, social actors may still develop and enjoy autonomy in their day-to-day existence.

In the following sections, I will explore the tension between *nominal state control* and the religious field's *de facto autonomy*, as well as the ambivalent practices of the state toward religious groups and the dual strategy Islamists developed to restore their endangered autonomy. I will especially focus on their work *within* the state, the struggles to infiltrate, capture, and colonize formal state institutions, especially the Diyanet, the Ministry of Education, Imam-Hatip schools, Qur'anic seminaries, and the state mosques.

## A clandestine world

The rigid secularism of the early regime alienated and silenced religious segments, but it also provoked various forms of resistance against the social and ideological monopoly of the center. Conservative masses perceived the Unification of Education law, and more broadly 'secularism' as a deliberately anti-religious program (Bilgin 1980:47). More hardline groups even considered the new regime atheist and on par with the communist Soviet Union. As the state stepped up its assault on religious orthodoxy, conservative and hardline Islamists withdrew underground to carry out religious education. Until Turkey's transition to a multi-party democracy in 1950, Islamists conducted educational activity tactfully and quietly away from the official gaze. Despite many risks, unofficial religious scholars taught religion in private homes,

ran Qur'an courses, and even opened Sufi convents (*tekke*). Even more striking in this context was the state's inconsistent response to this religious activity. During some periods, the state used its gendarme and law enforcement agencies in the countryside to crack down on illicit educational activity. During other periods, it ignored or turned a blind eye on them – in both the countryside and urban areas. The memoirs of unofficial ulema and official reports indicate that the state was well aware of these currents; nonetheless it chose not to stamp them out altogether.[39] The shifting law enforcement against religious activity was partly due to the state's unwillingness to disestablish religion completely (Davison 2003), as it was itself interested in reproducing an official religion to cement Turkish national identity and to promote moral education and social control in the new republic. Moreover, the state was aware that despite its revolutionary program of secularism, it was still ruling a deeply conservative and religious society to which it had to make concessions, especially to Sufi mystics, in order to avoid complete loss of legitimacy (Çakır 2002:19–20).

In the hostile environment of the early republic, institutions of religious socialization and pedagogy did not disappear entirely, but instead retreated underground. Severe restrictions on Islamic study, reading or reciting the Qur'an in Arabic, or printing booklets in Arabic prompted efforts to construct alternative sites of religious education. Opponents of the repression of Islamic education began to organize around clandestine Sufi networks and sheiks as early as the 1930s. Out of the sight of public authorities, they formed informal study circles in private homes, local mosques, or small workshops that became venues for madrasa-inspired Islamic studies. The former ulema and Sufi sheiks who neither had a place nor a desire to be within the Diyanet took control of this network of unauthorized and intensive religious study. As religious brokers filled

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[39] See, for example, some memoirs by Kara (2000), Sarıcan and Öcal (2003), and Zaim (2008); historical examples of clandestine work of former ulema in Kara (2008:109–15); and an official report, Ahmet Hamdi Akseki's 1950 "Religious Education and Religious Institutions" (for the full report, see Ayhan 1999:531–6).

the educational vacuum left by the disappearance of state institutions (i.e. Imam-Hatips, Qur'anic seminaries) especially in the countryside, they launched a discreet yet efficient campaign to train a new generation of students in traditional Islamic knowledge and doctrine. More broadly, in matters of worship, ritual, and everyday conduct, these alternative ulema, more than the state's officially sanctioned religious personnel (under the umbrella of the Diyanet), influenced and guided the conservative segments of Turkish society.

Despite being outlawed, certain aspects of both Ottoman-style elementary schools and madrasas persisted in the new republic. In the countryside, the unofficial ulema created their own programs for teaching the Qur'an, training people who memorized the holy book (*hafız*), and inculcating religious practices. Children between the ages of four and twelve studied in formally non-existent religious elementary schools (*sıbyan mektebi*) in mosques under the instruction of former ulema now employed by the Diyanet and called imams.[40] This constituted one of the early examples of the tension between nominal state control and the de facto autonomy of religious actors. While the state wrestled formal power away from the former ulema by putting them on a state payroll system, renaming them as "imams," and organizing their activity under a highly bureaucratized institution (the Diyanet), it could not prevent them from conducting more informal activities in more discreet locations. The republic's imams continued training students secretly in religious sciences and traditional Islamic practice that were often at odds with the state's official Islam (see also Bein 113-5). Under the supervision of the state's imams, children learned reading and reciting the Qur'an without understanding its meaning; principles of religion; prayer verses; and ritual prayer (Kara 2000:32–4). After studying for a few years, those male students interested in Islamic sciences continued their education in informal madrasas. Most old madrasa buildings were confiscated and converted into public schools by the state. Therefore,

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[40] Children would later attend official elementary schools as it was required by law.

illit madrasas had to be located elsewhere, usually local mosques or private homes. As in traditional madrasa lessons, though now in a less systematic fashion, children studied Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'an recitation, Arabic grammar, and the Prophet's deeds. In addition to turning local state mosques into locations of elementary and intensive religious education, actors also used them to shelter illegally non-local students who moved from their village to study under a certain imam. These students were accommodated in the upper floor of mosques and their daily food was provided by surrounding neighborhoods (39)—important practices that further exemplify religious actors' efforts to expand boundaries of religious autonomy.

Two developments played a key role in turning these humble madrasas into full-scale seminaries of advanced religious study in the ensuing decades. First, the growth of Sufi networks, despite state repression, contributed to expansion of religious education. Although they were technically outlawed in 1925, several branches of the prominent Nakşibendi Sufi order continued their de facto existence in the new republic, another important example of social autonomy. Like madrasas they went underground when conditions were unfavorable and came aboveground when circumstances were more conducive. But they never disappeared entirely. Sufi orders became crucial actors in financing and administering various types of Islamic seminaries and reproducing Islamic identity in secular Turkey. Second, the state's decision to open Qur'anic seminaries after 1946, along with its employment of informal madrasa graduates, enabled, perhaps unintentionally, the growth of religious education. Becoming part of the state religious establishment allowed these formerly illicit groups to use their formal positions to influence and perpetuate religious education.

The best case to illustrate this point is that of the Süleymancı network. Already in 1946 there were many active clandestine Qur'anic seminaries. The most popular of these were run by

students of an influential Nakşi sheikh, named Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (Çakır 2002:135).[41] His group, which came to be known as Süleymancılar, decided to come above ground after the state transitioned to a multi-party system in 1946. But more interestingly, hundreds of the students they trained took jobs in the state, forming the new personnel of the Diyanet as Qur'an instructors, imams, orators, and jurist consults. In the next decades, Süleymancılar used their positions in Diyanet to create an extraordinary network of state-sponsored Qur'anic seminaries, some of which were modeled after the Ottoman madrasa curriculum (Kara 2008:114). This case illustrates three important aspects of the political struggles between the state and non-state religious actors. The first is the tension between central control and local autonomy. Despite heavy state repression and many risks, groups continued to open and run both official and unofficial networks of seminaries, training a new generation of individuals in Islamic sciences. The second is the ambivalent relationship that became emblematic of the pattern of interactions of the state toward religious groups and of religious groups toward the state throughout republican history. The state employed clandestine seminary graduates; while these "oppositional" religious actors, by taking state jobs, paradoxically both reproduced and subverted the state's ideology. The third is the penetration and capture of formal state institutions, such as the Diyanet by religious actors, who aimed to increase their position and influence within the state. Many other Sufi groups followed in the path of Süleymancılar: while working mainly in the underground, they also worked aboveground to penetrate and capture traditional sources of power, which they in turn used to increase their legitimacy to shape public projects (building mosques, schools, seminaries), as well as public opinion. A slow but cumulative effect of this process over the long run was to re-gain some lost autonomy.

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[41] Unfortunately, exact numbers do not exist given the circumstances under which they operated.

## The controversies over Imam-Hatip schools

The state's ambivalence toward underground religious education went hand-in-hand with a similarly vacillating attitude toward formal religious education. Following World War II, a changing international context and growing domestic demand caused republican elites to begin shifting their position toward religion and religious education. They realized that the continuation of restrictive policies would threaten single party rule. In its historic congress in 1947, the Republican People's Party (CHP) made a series of stipulations to ease restrictions on religious activity. From 1947 until its defeat in the first multi-party election in 1950, the CHP began to implement these measures. This constituted the first of many "revisions" of the early republic's militant policies toward religious education. Yet the legacy of the single party regime, which simultaneously suppressed and allowed religious education within and outside of the state education system, would continue during subsequent decades, even after the CHP had long left power.

One of the most significant relaxations in religious education policy was the reinstatement of the Imam-Hatip school that had been shut down shortly after the 1924 Unification of Education Law.[42] CHP hardliners, however, were apprehensive about the return of intensive religious study to the secular republic, and convinced the government to reopen Imam-Hatips not as schools but 10-month courses. By labeling them 'courses' instead of 'schools,' it was hoped Imam-Hatips would not evoke memories of the madrasa. As militant secularists and the CHP lost power over the following decades and conservative center-right and Islamists gained more influence in national politics, the courses were renamed Imam-Hatip schools in

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[42] In addition to reopening the Imam-Hatips schools after its 1947 congress, the government also opened a Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University; reintroduced mandatory religion classes into the state-wide elementary school curriculum; and reopened the tombs of several Ottoman-Turkish religious figures which had formerly been closed to the public.

1951 (*İmam-Hatip okulu*), and then Imam-Hatip high schools in 1973 (*İmam-Hatip lisesi*) making them at least nominally equal to secular high schools. In these decades, Imam-Hatips became the target not only of symbolic contestations over proper naming and renaming, but also of political, legal, and pedagogical battles over their formal duration, status, and function. To this day, no other school in Turkey has stirred more public controversy than Imam-Hatips. Why is this the case?

Certainly, much of the controversy surrounding Imam-Hatips had to do with the legacy of religious education in the Ottoman Empire. Both secularists and conservatives associated Imam-Hatips with the same historical institution, but understood something different about its legacy. The secular national elite of the CHP was resolved to distance Turkey from what they claimed were the stagnant institutions of the Ottoman state. And in their eyes, Imam-Hatips embodied the stagnant and regressive legacy of the Ottoman education system. Imam-Hatips were a throwback to the madrasa with its medieval sources of knowledge, worldview, and symbols, which were now thought to hold little if any place in the secular republic. For conservative elites, on the other hand, the madrasa was remembered as the upholder of Islamic-Ottoman civilization, and Imam-Hatips represented an opportunity to carry the Ottoman madrasa system over to the Turkish republic. They were seen as the only legitimate institution that could provide for the advanced study of religion in a hostile political environment and push back against the republic's anti-religious pedagogical policies. Debates over the name, nature, and purpose of these schools reflected the deeply contested visions of and unresolved questions over religion's place in education and more generally the role of Islamic institutions, norms, and practices in the secular nation.

From the 1950s until the 1980 military coup, republican anxieties and conservative reactions were manifested in two types of struggles. The first struggle was over the question of

the legal status of Imam-Hatips—whether they were vocational or general secondary schools. Insignificant as it may seem, categorizing the schools one way or the other was closely tied to battles over restoring or perpetuating the tainted legitimacy and prestige of religious education. According to conservatives, classifying Imam-Hatips as regular public schools implied the state's acceptance and legitimation of advanced religious study in a secular state. Since educating the "nation" is the state's primary duty, Islamic education must lie at the core of this duty. An extension of this view was that just as in Ottoman times, the new state should institutionally support religious training of citizens. More importantly, placing Imam-Hatips in the same category as regular schools would grant religious knowledge equal status with positive (non-religious) knowledge, a view that had been challenged by the rise of modern secular education within the scholastic hierarchy. It was hoped that making Imam-Hatips "general" schools would restore the tarnished reputation of religious erudition and enable their graduates – educated in both the religious and natural sciences – to work not only in the "narrow" religious field but also in other non-religious fields. Conversely, defining Imam-Hatips as vocational schools, a view supported by secularists, could keep them in a subordinate position and help limit their potential social and political effects. As vocational schools, Imam-Hatips would train a "limited" segment of students for low-prestige jobs like wood-working, shoe-making, or plumbing. Removing them from the center of general education would limit their legitimacy and prestige.

Secularist anxieties over the legal status of Imam-Hatips can be gleaned from several official documents of the period. For example, a 1958 report prepared by the Turkish National Education Commission warns the government against the current and future dangers Imam-Hatip schools could pose:

> …Since their opening, religion classes in Imam-Hatip schools are taught by a group of madrasa holdovers (*medrese döküntüsü bir kadro*)….who inescapably bring the *spirit of the madrasa* with them. This is a [good] situation for those who desire to revive the madrasa under a new name. But the state needs to take measures because of the form these schools may take and the dangers this

may create for the future of the country....On the other hand, Imam-Hatips are opened as religious vocational schools but they function like general secondary schools, because the majority of their graduates do not work as religious functionaries. If these graduates are given the chance to go to university, this will indicate that two kinds of secondary schools exist in the country. Since the *Tanzimat* period, half of the Turkish elite emerged from modern schools, while other half came from the madrasa. Because of the bitter experience of the last hundred years in our country, resulting from the constant struggle of two competing groups of intellectuals and mindsets, we should not allow these two social poles to reemerge. Turkey has to be a nation united firmly around [Atatürk's] revolutionary reforms.[43]

Published more than three decades after the madrasas were closed, this report shows that the continuation of the "madrasa spirit" through Imam-Hatips was still feared by the republican elite. The report also echoed the late Ottoman struggles to eradicate the dangerous duality in education, underlined by Gökalp and others. By 1958 there were only a total of 17 Imam-Hatip schools that graduated 193 students (Baloğlu 1990:136)[44]. Since the number of graduates was too small to talk about a meaningful trend, the report largely reflected secularists' fears for the future. To prevent the anticipated outcome, the report recommended tilting the balance in favor of non-religious classes in religious vocational schools. This could eliminate not only the madrasa spirit but also the educational dichotomy that preoccupied the Ottoman-Turkish elite for a century.

Islamists, on the other hand, challenged the idea that religion is simply a distinct field of expertise. Since religion cannot be reduced to a vocation, religious education cannot be understood as a "vocational" form of learning. Best exemplified in the words of Nurettin Topçu, a well-known educator and devout intellectual, this view sees religion as a mindset, an emotion, and a constitutive part of life that needs to be present in every individual action and social interaction:

> I want to point out the meaninglessness of religious education in our elementary and secondary schools [including Imam-Hatips and non-religious schools]….Simply teaching principles of religion does not mean teaching our children the spirit of religion. Religion is not a realm of action separate from our own behaviors. It is not even a field of expertise that should be taught in

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[43] "Türkiye Eğitim Milli Komisyonu Raporu," (Ayhan 1999:168) (italics mine).
[44] Up to that year schools had a total of 3,476 enrolled students (Baloğlu 1990:136).

separate classes. The right thing is to teach religion in every class, to provide it through every topic in classes on philosophy, history and literature…. Religion is a vaccine that needs to be injected into all our emotions, behaviors, and existence….Today no [good] Muslims remain in the Islamic world, and everybody dislikes the small minority that exists. Unlike today's version, we need to turn religious education toward the direction of God (Topçu 2011[1960]:179–80).

As an alternative to the "vocational" model, Nurettin Topçu and others proposed organizing them as general secondary schools under the name of Islamic Institutes. Islamists did not succeed in changing the formal name of Imam-Hatips; nonetheless, in the next decade they accomplished having Imam-Hatips re-categorized as general secondary schools.

Soon after the 1960 military coup, another secular-leaning commission under the Ministry of Education prepared a national educational planning report. Reflecting the liberal spirit of the era, the report included both self-criticism and a reform program for the Imam-Hatips. The report was in line with Topçu's idea that these schools should be categorized as general secondary schools. With a majority vote the commission rejected closing down 15 of the 19 Imam-Hatip schools, a proposal that was being debated in parliament at the time. Its first recommendation to the Ministry was especially striking: "The Ministry of Education *has to decide* whether to accept or not the presence of religious education in Turkey at the secondary school level."[45] Besides criticizing the ambivalent approach of the state toward formal religious education, the report alluded to the status of Imam-Hatips as general schools providing advanced religious education in the secular republic – a view highly disfavored by ruling CHP circles. In a second clause, the report put forward a quite controversial proposition: turning Imam-Hatips into boarding schools and drawing resources from Sufi orders and their vakıfs, many of which had already been quietly supporting the schools since their opening. After the 1960 coup, the newly formed CHP government did not close any Imam-Hatips, but restricted their number to the extant 19 schools. It did not actively seek the support of vakıfs but it did turn a blind eye to their

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[45] "Din İle İlgili Eğitim ve Öğretim Komitesi Raporu," (Ayhan 1999:173) (italics mine).

funding of Imam-Hatips – an act that demonstrated yet another case of its ambivalence toward formal religious education.

The second struggle was over the length of the Imam-Hatip program; whether Imam-Hatips should provide education for 4 years (from 9th through 12th grades) or 7 years (from 6th through 12th grades). This conflict reflected the interest of both the state and religious actors in early education, which has made early education a key battleground for half a century. For all political movements—secular or otherwise—seeking to transform individual subjectivities, getting early access to that subjectivity is a matter of vital political interest. This interest stems from a pedagogic assumption, shared by both secularists and Islamists, that views children as universally more receptive and malleable than adults; as inclined to passively acquiring physical and mental dispositions; and as eager to mimic others in the process of getting ready for membership in adult society. The implication is that the primary socialization one receives early on constitutes the foundation for all habits and beliefs later in life.[46]

This linear model of child development, in fact, is the foundational principle of both religious and secular-nationalist pedagogy. In Islamic tradition, this view is best articulated in the writings of Ibn Khaldûn, the 14th century Muslim scholar. According to Khaldûn, the education of the young in the Qur'an should start at an early age, because the first impressions a child gets through the study of the Qur'an will provide them a lasting belief in Islam, a scaffolding for all beliefs and habits developed in adult life, a virtuous orientation, and blessings in the other world.

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[46] The series of assumptions that have informed religious and secular projects have also been dominant in early pedagogic theories of childhood. Although a review of theories of socialization and child development is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is warranted to make a brief reference to the literature. Early accounts of child psychology adopted a linear view of child development, assuming a process of gradual, stage-by-stage acquisition of knowledge and of physical and mental orientations that will eventually turn them into adults. More recent studies have challenged this assumption, showing that children do not automatically acquire cultural habits or follow adults. The early learning process is more complex and conditioned by cultural forces rather than universal principles. For a comprehensive discussion of these debates, see Hirschfeld (1998); Kaplan (2006); Winegar and Valsiner (1992).

Khaldûn, much like other early Islamic scholars, understood childhood as a time of uncritical reception and passivity, when it is easier to discipline them in Islamic knowledge and religious habits without facing much resistance (Khaldûn 2005[1969]:421–26).

Like the Islamic tradition, the nationalist-secular tradition embraces the view that childhood is a stage of malleability and indoctrination. The modern state's penetration and ordering of every sphere of human life, including the subjectivity of its citizens, has been manifested in the education of the "nation's children," a prerequisite to the stability of the modern state (Benei 2008). In the secular-nationalist tradition, children are seen as the purest form of human material that should be molded with the ideals and traits of the "nation." They occupy a critical place in nationalist imagery as they constitute the "object of the historical destiny of a nation, and as the subject of the political vitality of the state" (Kaplan 2006:10). This is certainly why the creation of fraternal citizens out of children has become the universal task of the nation-state; and early education has become the critical tool of socialization into the national community. For both secular and religious actors, it is of utmost interest to reach and shape human material at an early age.

Struggles over the academic length of the program in Imam-Hatips were closely tied to these assumptions and concerns over the timing of early religious education. According to the secular-minded proponents of the 4-year scheme, exposure to religion from an early age – precisely when, according to religious pedagogy, children are required to start learning Islam and memorizing the Qur'an – would excessively socialize children to religion. Too much religious education would create excessively pious children, susceptible to influence by parents, neighbors, or relatives to become sympathetic to religious orders and follow the lifestyle they encourage. Postponing exposure to a later age, however, could protect children from manipulation. Second, a significantly downsized 4-year education could provide just enough

knowledge for children to learn the basics of religion, but insufficient knowledge to become an expert on the subject. This view squarely fit republican ideas, which allowed Islam to be studied in new Turkey, but eliminated the method of in-depth, extended, and original-text based study, all of which were indispensible aspects of Ottoman madrasa education.

Proponents of a 7-year scheme, on the other hand, knew the importance of starting early, as many had done themselves. It is precisely for these reasons that they believed Qur'an education needed to start early. According to Islamists, a 7-year program could alleviate some of the drawbacks of secular education and still provide a meaningful, comprehensive, and intensive Islamic training at a relatively early age (about age 12).[47]  In response to the CHP's inclinations to downsize Islamic education, Nurettin Topçu (2011[1960]) states in the introduction to his collection of essays that "the malady of our age is the absence of faith and volition (*iman ve irade hastalığı*)" As a remedy, he underlines the necessity of providing children with pious education early on:

> Religion and moral education are the most vital causes of our era. Our destiny is
> firmly tied to the next generation's moral and religious character. However, today their character
> is weak and slim (143).… In order to elevate our culture of morality and piety, we need to
> provide it in schools. But it is obvious that we can't teach religion in a single class. Religion
> classes should start with elementary schools, teaching children religious lessons and morality. In
> junior high, we should introduce classes on comprehensive Islamic civilization and the
> fundamentals of religious doctrine [faith and worship]. In high school, excerpts from the Qur'an
> and Islamic philosophy should be taught. (151).

Voicing the ideals of religious groups, Topçu saw great dangers in a shortened Islamic education among the youth. Diametrically opposed to his counterparts in the secular camp, he advocated state-led mobilization for methodical and serious study of Islam from elementary to high school

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[47] It should be noted that the most essential religious education is that of the memorization of the Qur'an. This arduous and long training traditionally begins somewhere between ages 6 and 9, often even before children begin elementary education. Although the proposal to start intensive religious education with Imam-Hatip schools in 6th grade may be late by this standard, a 7-year program seems to be the best option in a country where secular elementary education is mandatory and not open to dispute.

and beyond.[48] Shortly after Topçu published his essays a second military coup was staged in 1971. Instead of expanding religious education as he and others desired, the new government narrowed it by closing down the middle grades of Imam-Hatips and reducing them to 4-year vocational schools. However, despite this initial setback, Imam-Hatips entered their golden years beginning in 1973 due to a changing political context. The extraordinary growth of the Imam-Hatips in the next decades was closely tied to two changes in the political field.

During the late 60s and 70s, a set of extraordinary political circumstances, rising violence in the streets between the militant left and the right and political infighting in the parliament between the center-right (AP) and center-left (CHP) parties, paved the way for the ascendance of a small but disproportionately influential Islamist and ultra-nationalist party to power. For the first time in republican history, an openly Islamist party, Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (MSP), became a coalition partner in 1973, because the center-right refused to enter a coalition with CHP. This was the first of many fragile, short-lived, and polarized coalitions that ruled the country until the end of the decade, which ended with a third coup in 1980. Coalition partners were ideologically quite variegated and shared little in common except their ardent stance against communism. In return for their participation in the government, small parties like Erbakan's Islamist MSP could infiltrate and colonize key ministries, the most important one being the Ministry of Education. MSP facilitated the firing of hundreds of ministry personnel and their re-staffing with party loyalists. The period from 1970 to 1980 was the first decisive decade, when Islamists' strategy of working *within* the state—the capture and colonization of formal institutions like the ministry, Imam-Hatip schools, and Qur'anic seminaries—was achieved in full scale.

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[48] I will demonstrate concretely both of these classificatory struggles over naming and framing Imam-Hatips through a case study of an Imam-Hatip school in Istanbul in chapter 4.

Necmettin Erbakan held great interest in the Imam-Hatip schools, seeing them as source

of cadres and electorate for a growing Islamist political movement beginning in the late 60s. The

first critical change occurred during the Erbakan's tenure as the small coalition partner, when he

convinced the government to overturn the 1971 military coup decision to refashion Imam-Hatips

as 4-year schools, restoring their status as 7-year schools in 1974. This resulted from a change in

the legal status of Imam-Hatips through Article 32 of the 1973 Basic Law on National Education

(*Millî Eğitim Temel Kanunu*). The law re-categorized Imam-Hatips as general secondary

schools—not vocational schools—and in an important clause stated that the schools' function

were to "implement preparatory programs both for religious occupations (*mesleğe*) and for

higher education (*yüksek öğretime*)".[49] With this language the law provided the grounds to move

Imam-Hatips away from their narrow vocational status toward a general secondary school

category (while ironically keeping their vocational character). If students could study intensive

religion in high school but become doctors or engineers later, this in effect meant religious

knowledge commanded equal status with non-religious knowledge, and that the secular state was

equating advanced religious training with non-religious study in its schools. Reaffirming the

republican elite's fears of educational "duality" and restoring the tarnished reputation of religious

education, the law decided the first classificatory struggle in favor of Islamists.

The second and more consequential change came with the increasing influence of the

Islamist party within the government in the next decade. For his part, Erbakan facilitated the

opening of twenty-nine new Imam-Hatip schools during his short tenure in government,

increasing their number from 72 in 1971 to 101 in 1974. The presence of Islamist parties in the

next several coalition governments became pivotal in the institutionalization and spread of

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[49] Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu, madde 32, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1973,
http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/temkanun_1/temelkanun_1.html

Imam-Hatips as 7-year general secondary schools, even though a "vocational school" discourse was always kept active to ward off secularist accusations. Starting in the late 1960s, and accelerating in the mid-70s, the number of Imam-Hatip schools grew at a steady rate. Between 1975 and 1977, under the watch of center-right, Islamist, nationalist coalition governments (known as *Milli Cephe*), the number of Imam-Hatips more than tripled in size from 101 to 334 schools.[50]

## Islamist activism in a hospitable context

When the political context became favorable, especially during the 1960s and 70s (with a brief interruption immediately after the 1971 coup), religious groups started both expanding their underground activities and also relocating some of the clandestine and rural structures to more public and urban arenas; for example by turning illegal Qur'anic seminaries and dormitories into formal ones. In addition to their activities *outside* the system, groups also continued to work *within* the system, accelerating the dual strategy of mobilization. Religious activists benefitted from Islamist leaders' position in high politics, where they facilitated activists' penetration and capture of another critical state institution, the Imam-Hatip schools. As in Ottoman times, religious groups built several vakıfs, the most well known of which was the Ilim Yayma Vakfı (Society to Spread Religious Knowledge) to push growth and control of Imam-Hatips.[51] Vakıf's educational mobilization was carried out with the encouragement or even cooperation of the

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[50] Between 1975 and 1980, the total number of enrollment in Imam-Hatips increased by 410 percent from 48,895 to 200,300 students. In the same period, all vocational schools had a 61 percent growth rate in student enrollment, whereas in Imam-Hatips this number was 289 percent (Çakır et al. 2004:64-5).
[51] It is important to note that the establishment of some pious vakıfs predate even 1960. However, their real influence was felt in the changing, more favorable, political context of the 60s through 70s, and in the second half of the 80s. Other important religious institutions include the Imam-Hatip Alumni Association (ÖNDER) and Ensar Vakıf.

extant governments (or least some of their coalition members). This unexpected collaboration, perhaps a precursor of a more institutionalized one to come in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, constitutes another good example of the ambivalent relationship between the state and religious groups. In the hospitable environment of the 70s, vakıfs constructed hundreds of Imam-Hatip schools some modeled on the Ottoman madrasa as full complexes with libraries, student and teacher dormitories, cafeteria, prayer, and ablution rooms. They also provided free daily meals, distributed monthly stipends, and invited students to study religion outside classroom hours under revered Sufi sheiks. Many of the students they trained later became teachers themselves in these schools. It was thanks to that ambivalent context Islamists could work with and through state institutions to increase their influence and pursue their project of strengthening the role of Islam in public life, starting with its educational edifice.

Imam-Hatips became a viable educational option for poor families from the countryside who could not afford to send their children to school unless supported by an external source like a vakıf. Such schools were also preferred by conservative, generally immigrant, families in cities who were skeptical of the state's secular system where religious education was looked down upon and where boys and girls were instructed together in mixed classes. In this sense, Imam-Hatips became schools of pious, conservative, rural students from middle, lower middle, and working class backgrounds.

Beginning in the 1960s, Islamist vakıfs and associations launched a series of grassroots campaigns to construct new schools, repair old ones, build adjacent dormitories (for non-local students), and increase awareness among religious segments to open more Imam-Hatips and enroll more students (Yavuz 2003:125–7). The push for schools from the bottom up was so strong that in some cases, even though incoming governments did not want to open new schools, religious groups constructed and donated new buildings to be opened as Imam-Hatip schools.

According to the law, if a person or a charity established a condition on the type of donated school, i.e. that it be an Imam-Hatip, the Ministry of Education could not open it as another type of school (Çakır, Bozan, and Talu 2004:72). Moreover, vakıfs cultivated and spread what they called an Imam-Hatip spirit (*Imam-Hatip ruhu*) by organizing periodic events, collecting donations, and providing scholarships to students. These associations played a key role in mobilizing the social support behind the Imam-Hatips. In addition to financing new schools, repairing old ones, and building adjacent dormitories, vakıfs also acted as pressure groups, lobbying governments and center-right and ultra-right parties to open new schools or at least not close existing schools in return for their electoral loyalty. Vakıfs' activities exemplify religious actors' efforts to expand boundaries of religious autonomy. They were able to strive and gain some of the lost autonomy by promoting the advanced study of religion in a secular state and increasing their legitimacy in the eyes of the state and also the broader public.

Lastly, vakıfs served as a public forum for conservative, religious, and nationalist thinkers, public intellectuals, and businessmen to come together (Yorulmaz 2011:167) and debate projects to regenerate religious life, to combat the spread of communist ideas, and to secure political representation within the existing parties (or to establish new ones). They became venues for these actors to formulate an intellectual framework for the Islamist movement in Turkey. One intellectual, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, who had close ties to the prominent members of vakıfs, had the greatest influence over these groups. Kısakürek provided Islamists with a paradigmatic program to revive religion in Turkey, at the heart of which lay the reform and correct education of the youth along religious lines.

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), was a Sorbonne-trained philosopher (although he never completed his degree) and poet, who emerged as the most profound ideologue of the Islamist movement following a personal crisis and encounter with the famous Nakşibendi Şeyh

Abdulhakim Arvasi. After Kısakürek refashioned himself as an Islamist intellectual, he offered a counter-Kemalist reading of Turkish history and deeply influential Islamist political program in his journal The Great East (*Büyük Doğu*) starting in 1943. In his work, he severely criticized the secular republic's admiration of the West and the subsequent crisis of morality it descended into. Kısakürek was also deeply interested in the education of the youth who could spearhead the renaissance of a new Turkish state and society through the guidance of Islam, sharia, and Sufism. Like Mustafa Kemal, he wrote an "Oration to the Turkish Youth" and beginning in 1949 he traveled throughout Anatolia, meaningfully starting in the city of Samsun (where Mustafa Kemal began organizing the War of Independence), delivering a series of lectures to mobilize the youth and put his political program into action (Duran 2001:212). One of his important lectures was titled "The Youth We Desire" (*Özlediğimiz Nesil*) delivered in 1969. Kısakürek suggested that the success of any political project hinges on the instruction of the youth in proper forms of socialization and knowledge because young people, in his view, embody the moral and cultural principles of society and reproduce them for subsequent generations (Kısakürek 2012[1964]:92–3). His prescriptions on how to nurture an ideal youth with the requisite qualities were deeply influential in shaping the Islamist pedagogic movement. From Kısakürek, Islamists inherited both a conceptual framework to diagnose maladies of the existing order and an action plan to rehabilitate them with the help of a vanguard youth.

According to Kısakürek, young generations were in a state of ignorance and moral corruption, because they had lost their connection to a great tradition and its bearers—the young Companions of the prophet (Kısakürek 2012[1964]:92–134). Teenagers had become apolitical, mindless, and animalistic. They had neither ideals nor shame because they were now unbelievers. Lacking shame (*haya*), young women dressed in mini skirts and young men and women found it acceptable to embrace freely in the streets (124–5). However, the kind of youth,

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which would carry on the Islamist "cause," (or in his terms "*davamız*") needed the knowledge to distinguish the profane (*küfür*) from the sacred. Kısakürek, like secularists, perceived childhood/adolescence as a period of control and receptiveness, an object of pedagogic instruction and an agent of social mobilization. Similar to others, he believed the hearts of young people were like empty containers waiting to be filled with Islamic faith. Their physical energies, on the other hand, should be controlled and channeled toward both carrying out the "cause" and then serving as its custodians (93). In reforming the existing youth and creating a vanguard among them, then, it was essential to nurture the necessary qualities in them through an agent, like a religiously-informed person. These essential qualities range from training one's feelings in increasing the love and fear of God to enduring risk and uncertainty for the movement to emulating the morality of the prophet.

According to Kısakürek, the ideal youth is shy, yet disciplined and committed. They can control bodily appetites (*nefs*). They unconditionally submit to sharia and do not attempt to question its premises with reason. They are ready to self-sacrifice for a cause (i.e. the spread of Islam) that is greater than themselves (i.e. personal pleasure). This analytic reconstruction of the teenager, as custodian-believer, became a powerful template for Islamists over the years. His prescriptions were passed down to newer cohorts of Islamists and were taken up by younger segments to emulate. The Society to Spread Religious Knowledge became one of the most important Islamic vakıfs in carrying out the program of the Kısakürek.

## 1980 military coup, changing religious landscape, and new actors

During the 1960s and 70s, political liberalization created an environment of activism, enabling many right and left wing groups to mobilize through legal and extra-legal organizations. On the right, militant nationalist and religious groups supported anti-communism, Turkish

nationalism, and anti-capitalism. Although Islamists did not engage in the street fighting, they ideologically aligned with ultra-nationalist and conservative groups. On the left, mostly Latin American inspired anti-imperialist para-military groups propagated for a socialist revolution. The militarism of the left clashed with the militarism of the right, often in the streets and college campuses, during the late 1960s and 70s.

The ensuing civil war in the streets and campuses ended with the intervention of the military on September 12, 1980. The military coup took a series of measures against political activism that unintentionally tilted the balance in favor of Islamist political movements and religious education. Some commentators suggest that the primary rise of Islamist movements in the 90s should be traced back to the conservative ideological system the coup regime embraced and the opportunity spaces it opened (Eligür 2010; Toprak 1990). While the 1980 coup certainly played an important role in the further development of Islamist movement, the conventional approach understates the importance of the previous organizational activities of Islamists up to that point and the converging interests between the political, educational, and cultural doctrines of the coup regime and religious groups in post-1980 Turkey. The coup's contribution to the rise of the Islamists therefore might be better characterized as an unlikely convergence of interests at an opportune time between the military and Islamists, which ended up generating a series of unintended yet beneficial consequences for the latter.

Following the military coup, as the Turkish state ideologically and institutionally opened itself to an Islamized version of Turkish nationalism, religious movements simultaneously converged toward being more statist and nationalist rather than transnational and radical (Tuğal 2009a:77). This made possible an overlap in agendas between the military and Islamists, even though this would only last for a brief period. The coup regime institutionalized a religo-nationalist credo, called the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, to accomplish three goals: re-discipline

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what they saw as a rebellious youth; suppress the left; and fight against "divisiveness," broadly

defined.[52] The coup regime saw the production of a "secular religious" citizen who obeyed the

state, feared God, and submitted to authority the authority of the family, Islam, and the military

as an antidote to the political instability that had prevailed in the 1970s (Bora and Can 2004:175;

Toprak 1999:4). The political conservatism of the coup regime paralleled that of Islamists even if

the latter did not agree with the whole program of the coup makers.[53] In addition, despite

avoiding direct involvement in street violence, Islamists adopted the anti-communist, anti-liberal,

statist, and religio-nationalist doctrines of the right, all of which later added to the post-coup state

ideology. In line with the military's program, Islamists agreed that the youth fell prey to foreign

ideas such as humanism and liberalism; communism was the worst of all evils; and divisive

ideologies such as Kurdish nationalism had no place in Turkey (Çakır 2002:74). But if the

political conservatism of the coup regime and religious groups overlapped significantly,

individual conservatism was the field in which the real alignment of military and Islamists

programs, although unintentionally, would materialize.

First of all, Sufi orders had long been engaged in inoculating the youth with principles of

faith, responsibility of worship, and respect for institutions of authority like the family and the

state. Islamists were preaching those values that the military regime was extolling—even if only

on pragmatic grounds—for "restoring" national unity. Second, during the 1960s and 70s several

influential Nakşi sheiks, including Mehmet Zahit Kotku and Reşit Erol, dedicated substantial

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[52] The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was not the creation of the military. Its roots lie in the 1970s when it
began to crystallize as an intellectual current around a think-tank called Intellectuals' Heart (*Aydınlar
Ocağı*). Intellectuals' Heart was established in 1970 by a group of Turkist and Islamist university
professors to create a theoretical framework for the Turkish Right (Toprak 1990:15).
[53] One area of disagreement was the military's stress on Kemalism as a unifying idea. The coup makers
ideologically opted for a right-wing interpretation of Kemalism that placed the unity of the state,
discipline of society, and respect for authority at the center of politics (Bora and Taşkın 2006). Even
though Islamists did not openly challenge this idea in the precarious coup environment, they did not
openly embrace it either as they have been historically averse to Kemalism.

activity to keeping university students away from what they considered "dangerous ideologies." Many rural students were streaming in to Turkey's cities for university education and were lured by liberal and socialist discourses of justice and equality. Although such principles of justice and equality are also the hallmark of Islam, the communist and socialist ideologies in which these discourses were packaged were difficult to embrace for the Muslim youth. Sufi orders and Imam-Hatips kept the devout youth out of the streets by marking the distinction between Islam's notion of justice and equality and that of "destructive ideologies."

Both the coup makers and religious groups agreed that pre-1980 political chaos was a result of the absence of moral guidance, which in the Islamist lexicon corresponded to a popular term "devotional emptiness" (*manevi boşluk*), or the absence of love and fear of God, especially among the university youth. A common view at the time argued that if the youth had been better trained in religion and morality, they would not have risen up against authority. Many agreed that an education and culture policy with a renewed emphasis on religion and morality could provide a purpose to the youth who had been led astray by (Godless) ideologies of Leninism and Maoism.

The new education and culture policy was formulated in a series of reports, some of which were commissioned by the coup regime, while others were written by some religious-nationalist intellectuals' own initiatives even when such activity was highly restricted.[54] Most

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[54] Four reports, two conference proceedings, and parliamentary proceedings from the 1981-82 period are highly significant for their impact on subsequent policy decisions. The reports are: "*Din Eğitimi Çalışma Grubu Raporu*" (Report of the Religious Education Working Group) Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı (February 6, 1981); "*Din Eğitimi Raporu*" (Report on Religious Education) Yüksek İslam Enstitüsü Temsilcileri (May 7, 1981); "*Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi*" (Religious Education and Instruction in Turkey) Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (1981); "Milli Kültür Özel İhtisas Komisyonu Raporu" Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı (DPT) (September 6-8, 1982). Conference proceedings are: "*I. Din Eğitimi Semineri*" (First Annual Religious Education Seminar) Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi (April, 23-25 1981), "*Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi*" (National Education and Religious Education) Aydınlar Ocağı (May 9-10, 1981). The parliamentary proceedings on the proposed Article 24 on religious education in August-September 1982 also provide important insights into the new education program. The main content of the reports, conference and parliamentary proceedings can be accessed in Ayhan (1999).

well-known among these documents is the State Planning Organization's (DPT) 1982 report on national culture. The report was prepared by a general committee, whose members included prominent intellectuals from the Intellectuals' Heart (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), a religious-nationalist think-tank established in 1970 by a group of Turkist and Islamist university professors to create a theoretical framework for the Turkish Right.[55] The report of the sub-committee on religion and morality was produced by a group of nationalist-religious divinity professors and chaired by a pan-Turkist religious philosophy professor close to the Intellectuals' Heart, Süleyman Hayri Bolay. The sub-committee aimed to provide a theoretical framework for the new religious education policy. The report started with a sociological analysis of the causes of pre-1980 anarchy in Turkey and the root cause of the problem:

> According to our national statistics, the proportion of literate individuals in prison is higher than that of illiterate individuals. What does this indicate? Those who get educated at state schools commit more crimes, break the law….It is only natural to obtain such results from an education system that pushed aside religious cultivation of the soul [*maneviyat*]. This means, our education system left the youth deprived of moral discipline and respect for authority learned in the family, through tradition, and from religion.[56]

According to committee members, the current education system not only did not inculcate religion in youth, but it also did not teach them to submit to authority, a natural requirement of family, tradition, and religion. As a panacea to the educated youth's (read university students') unruly leanings, the report articulated a social engineering project in line with the principles of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis:

> Right now, it is necessary to have religious and moral education [along] with national and historical consciousness. First, we will motivate our people with those [principles]. Then, we will increase the number of "model humans." Without cultivating the human soul, material development will be insufficient….Raising "model humans" will enable [social and economic] development and prevent harmful philosophies and ideologies. These types of people have to dominate society.[57]

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[55] Those members included Prof. Sulhi Dönmezer, Prof. Erol Güngör, and Prof. Ayhan Songar.
[56] "*Din ve Ahlak Alt Komisyonu Raporu*," (Report of the sub-Committee on Religion and Morality) Milli Kültür Özel İhtisas Komisyonu Raporu, p. 543 (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı 1982).
[57] "*Din ve Ahlak Alt Komisyonu Raporu*" (Report of the sub-Committee on Religion and Morality) (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı 1982:544).

The idea of the "model human" was developed by Mehmet Kaplan, a Turkish literature professor and a leading intellectual of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis movement in the 70s. According to Kaplan (1963:56), a "model human" is a young person from an Anatolian village, who receives education in one of Turkey's urban universities, but returns back to village to enlighten the common folk and transform them. The "model human" demonstrates his love for God through service for people. Kaplan believes that such a person could only emerge from religious communities. The concept of "model human" did not materialize fully in the newly developed national education curricula, but the dominant themes of Kaplan's formulation – creating a model (devout) individual, pious service, transforming society – constituted the pillars of the Islamists' project of building an ideal Muslim and by extension Muslim society over the next two decades.

The report made further suggestions to ban alcohol advertisements on TV, increase religious programs on the national state television channel (*TRT*), support religious publications, develop policies to protect the Turkish-Islamic family structure, conduct parent-training programs to enable them to teach religion to children, introduce religious education in pre-school, provide religious education for children of Turkish immigrants in Europe, and introduce mandatory religious education in state schools.[58]

Another highly influential document in the post-coup conjuncture emerged from the "National Education and Religious Education" conference with the participation of more than sixty professors, statesman, and former ministers. Organized by the Intellectuals' Heart in May 1981, the conference aimed to influence public opinion and lobby the coup regime to introduce mandatory religious education in secular schools and protect the legal status of Imam-Hatips. In

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[58] "*Din ve Ahlak Alt Komisyonu Raporu*" (Report of the sub-Committee on Religion and Morality) (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı 1982:548–75).

the opening remarks, the Heart's president Prof. Süleyman Yalçın stated that the turmoil Turkey

passed through had resulted from a lack of spiritual and moral education among the youth. The

purpose of the conference, therefore, was to develop proposals to fill this vacuum in the

education system.[59]

Three key proposals emerged from the conference. First, the participants unanimously

agreed that religious education in state schools had to be mandatory. The general view was that

children are untainted and pliable so when they arrive at a schooling age the state has to take the

responsibility for transforming them into nationalist and pious citizens. Participants employed a

series of metaphors from baking to underline the role of religious education:[60]

> The goal of primary education is to knead the heart of children with clean yeast, so that they
> become citizens loyal to their State, Nation, and their values…Injecting in the heart of children
> the religious idea of love [love of God]….is possible by providing a nourishing religious
> education.[61]

Filling the heart of children with love for God, it was argued, was possible by introducing

mandatory religion classes in primary education and elective Qur'an classes in secondary

education. However, for some participants, kneading children into the desired shape had to start

earlier. According to one participant, "children unconsciously learn cultural values of society in

his/her family. Religious feelings, concepts of state, homeland, and nation emerge at a young age

[between 0-6]…religious knowledge learned in school cannot be as deeply rooted as the one

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[59] *Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi*" (National Education and Religious Education), Aydınlar Ocağı May 9-
10, 1981 (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:12–3).

[60] "*Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi*" (National Education and Religious Education) (Aydınlar Ocağı
1981:246)

[61] Referring to the role of education with images of dough and baking is a common pedagogical
articulation in Turkey and is analyzed thoroughly in Kaplan ( 2006:60–1). In the conservative-religious
political post-coup environment religion was added to this metaphor. Thus in the parliamentary debate on
religious education in August-September 1982, one of the members (Nedim Bilgiç) states: "….in order to
learn religion well, our children should be kneaded with religious education and become a full dough.
Meaning, religious education has to be mandatory at all levels – in elementary, secondary, and high
schools." Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi, c. IX (1.9.1982), (Ayhan 1999:283).

taught prior to it. Therefore, religious education has to start in pre-school and its dose should incrementally increase until high school."[62]

The second proposal of the conference was to increase religious education in non-religious schools. Echoing early republican anxieties, participants stated that the existing system reproduced a precarious educational dichotomy between two types of worldviews. But contrary to the republican solution that proposed making secular views dominant, this group recommended making religion dominant in the education system. Drawing inspiration from Nurettin Topçu two decades earlier, who saw religion not as a separate field of expertise but a body of knowledge infusing all aspects of human life, participants advised establishing a total, comprehensive, and long-term religious education – not only in separate classes but also as part and parcel of other classes. Hence, whatever was taught in non-religion classes would not contradict but only reinforce religious knowledge.[63] The dangerous educational dichotomy would be resolved in favor of religion.

The third proposal centered on protecting the legal status of Imam-Hatips and improving their conditions and numbers. A common view was that Imam-Hatips had not only been the least affected by the political turmoil of the 1970s, but that they also produced the most patriotic and rule-abiding citizens in the country.[64] Like nineteenth century Ottoman reformers, many thought that Turkey's underdevelopment was a result of its failed education system. Unlike their predecessors, however, participants offered a different solution for national progress:

> For many years we looked up to our teachers for national progress. However, Europe achieved progress by first training their priests. And so, if we want to accomplish economic development, moral and spiritual development, national and cultural development, we have to train good *imams* and *hatips* (imams and preachers), and make them leaders of society. This is only possible by

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[62] "*Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi*" (National Education and Religious Education) (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:303–4).
[63] "Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi" (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:401–2).
[64] "Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi" (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:273, 302). For the historical roots of this argument see, Turan (1978).

training a generation of devout, vigilant, ethical young people in our Imam-Hatip schools. We need to increase the quality of education in Imam-Hatips.[65]

At the time of the conference, rumors were spreading that the coup regime and its ministry of education was planning to turn Imam-Hatips into 4-year schools and reduce their numbers. Conference participants unanimously opposed such action. The final declaration made sure to underline the importance of maintaining a 7-year program and increasing the number of schools.[66]

In the following months several conference participants, prominent members of the Intellectuals' Heart, and committee members of the State Planning Organization's 1982 national report were appointed to key positions in the state bureaucracy, the state television channel, the 1982 constitutional committee, and universities.[67] With these appointments, the coup makers indicated their willingness to draw from prevalent nationalist-religious ideology for creating a new political, cultural, and educational system. But if the general ideological features of the post-coup political environment in Turkey were becoming increasingly obvious, their specific outcomes for religious education remained in doubt. This was mainly because of the ambivalent approach the state had toward religious groups, which oscillated between allowing and suppressing religious initiatives in Turkish society. Despite opening an unprecedented amount of space to religion in state ideology, policy, and institutions, the coup makers remained highly suspicious of Islamist movements. In 1981, they cracked down on student dormitories of the

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[65] "Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi" (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:407).

[66] "Milli Eğitim ve Din Eğitimi" (Aydınlar Ocağı 1981:423–4).

[67] The most important appointments were the following: Intellectuals' Heart members Prof. Yılmaz Altuğ and Prof. Şener Akyol became members of the 1982 constitutional committee; president of the Intellectuals' Heart Prof. Salih Tuğ became the dean of the Istanbul University Divinity school, Tarık Somer the president of Ankara University, Hikmet Tanyu the dean of the Ankara University Divinity schools; other members or sympathizers such as Prof. Zeynep Korkmaz, Ayhan Songar, İbrahim Agah Çubukçu, Hasan Eren, İsmet Giritli, and Altemur Kılıç became members of the state channel's (TRT) board of management; yet others like İbrahim Kafesoğlu, Altay Köymen, Bahaettin Ögel, Hakkı Dursun Yıldız, Faruk Sümer became the members of the Atatürk Culture, Language, History High Council (Basmacı 2009:69–72).

Süleymancılar group and stepped up surprise inspections of Qur'anic seminaries in several cities in Anatolia. Furthermore, rumors were spreading about overturning the legal status of Imam-Hatips and decreasing the number of schools. These fears were not unwarranted.

Together with the directives of the National Security Council, the administrative office of the generals, the Ministry of Education prepared a report titled "Religious Education Working Group Report" shortly after the coup.[68] The report underlined the growing influence of religious currents in Imam-Hatip schools and recommended introducing mandatory religion classes in public schools to decrease popular interest in Imam-Hatips. According to the report, various conservative teachers had infiltrated into Imam-Hatips and they were using their position to propagate extremist (religious) ideologies. Moreover, in the name of building and repairing schools, Islamist vakıfs, which the report referred to as a "group of bigots," were thought to have taken control over the schools.[69] In order to limit these developments the report suggested reconstituting Imam-Hatips as vocational schools, reducing school numbers, limiting enrollment, and creating special Qur'an memorization (*hafızlık*) programs to train a small number of elite individuals to memorize the Qur'an (*hafız*).[70]

Yet despite the suspicions outlined in the report, the lobbying of Intellectuals' Heart members and other conservative groups bore fruit as the coup regime eventually opted for educational policies favorable to Islamists. First, the 1983 coup constitution introduced mandatory religion classes in all state schools (Article 24). Second, the legal status of Imam-Hatips and school numbers remained untouched. Third, Article 33 of the Basic Law on National Education was modified to allow Imam-Hatip students' entry to higher education. Lastly, female

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[68] "Din Eğitimi Çalışma Grubu Raporu" (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1981).
[69] "*Din Eğitimi Çalışma Grubu Raporu*" (Report of the Religious Education Working Group) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1981:48,65–8).
[70] "*Din Eğitimi Çalışma Grubu Raporu*" (Report of the Religious Education Working Group) (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1981:69).

students were allowed to wear headscarves on college campuses. It was certain that the coup

regime had an interest in using religion for various purposes: to create a broadly shared national

religion, to legitimize its rule, to discipline a rebellious youth, to control religious extremism. But

even as they incorporated religion into their political agenda, they remained deeply disturbed by

the Islamic revolution in Iran and the religious activities of Sufi orders in Turkey. They would

support religion but only in its "Turkish" form in an effort to control its influence and prevent the

revolutionary currents that had been sweeping across the region from affecting Turkey. With

such ambivalent policies, it would be inaccurate to characterize the regime's policy as a

conscious policy of top-down Islamization. If anything, top-down Islamization was an

unintended and unlikely byproduct of the coalescence of interests. The opening of the state to

Islam from above by providing legitimacy to religion, religious education, and religious

movements would enable and accelerate a process of Islamist mobilization from below over the

next three decades.


**The 1997 coup and the Islamists' shift to underground activity**

In the post-1980 period, Islamism gained momentum with a concomitant mobilization at

three levels – cultural, social, and political.[71] Cultural Islamism, the emergence of an intellectual

and artistic field of Islam, flourished with the coming of age a new Islamist intellectual stratum

that was inspired by earlier conservative-traditionalist intellectuals, although they were more

urban and modern in outlook than their predecessors. Mushrooming Islamic journals,

newspapers, books, publishing houses, radio stations, and TV channels contributed to this trend.

Social Islamism, the set of associational activities that targeted civil society, grew with the

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[71] This is not to suggest that these three forms of Islamism are separate from one another. On the contrary,
they are deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive.

extraordinary wealth accumulated by the Sufi orders thanks to the post-1980 neo-liberal economic policies that favored smaller entrepreneurs, in addition to historical support of big business. Many members of these Sufi orders became the new bourgeoisie of the Islamist movement and owned private schools, dormitories, media outlets, business corporations, national banks, hospitals, foundations, and charity organizations. They contributed to the Islamization of society through educational and charity activities. Political Islamism, although occasionally curtailed by the military or secular judiciary up through the mid-1990s, won significant political victories at the local, regional, and national levels.

Despite the coup regime's ambivalent approach to the religious field, or perhaps precisely because of it, the late 1980s and early 90s saw increased visibility of Islamist movements in Turkey's political and social arenas. By the end of the 1980s, the unlikely coalition between the military and nationalist-Islamists came to an end. While the military withdrew its support from the Intellectuals' Heart and grew increasingly wary of Islamist movements, the ruling right-wing Motherland Party replaced Turkish-Islamism with a neoliberal vision of a "new world order." And as the Islamist Welfare Party gradually raised its political profile in local and national elections, it ceased to need nationalists for its political project (Basmacı 2009:78–82).

Toward the end of Motherland Party's tenure and during the 1990s, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis lost steam but its conservative and religious spirit continued to influence educational policy. Between 1981 and 1985, no new Imam-Hatip schools were opened, while between 1985 and 1990 only 24 new schools were opened. Despite this small growth in school numbers, the enrollments increased by 45 percent from 200,000 to about 300,000 students. This incongruence between the growth rate of schools and the rate of enrollment was a result of a new formula the ruling center-right and later Islamist parties adopted: while new schools were opened they were not registered. Instead, an unregistered new school became a section of an existing school in

another district or city. With this clever formula, more schools than the official statistics indicate were opened. It seems center-right parties aimed to accomplish two things with this policy: First, as part of conventional patronage politics, they allowed schools to open to bolster their popularity in the eyes of the electorate who now had another attractive choice in the Welfare Party. Second, they continued opening schools in previously leftist districts and cities – following in the footsteps of the coup regime – to cultivate and popularize conservative, religious, and traditional values.[72]

Imam-Hatips continued growing during the early 90s. In 1995, for the first time in Turkish history, a professedly religious party, Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party, won a plurality of the vote (21%) in national elections and became the largest party in the parliament (with 158 parliamentarians in a 550-seat parliament). Unable to form a government by itself, however, Erbakan joined forces with Tansu Çiller's True Path Party and served as prime minister in the new government. Not surprisingly, one of the most dramatic leaps in the history of schools took place during the short tenure of this coalition government (June 1996 - June 1997). In 1996 the government opened 174 new schools, increasing the number to a total of 600 schools, which enrolled 511,000 students, 9.3 percent of all high school students (Çakır et al. 2004:103). This state-sponsored expansion of schools is another important example of the Islamists' success to work from within; penetration and capture of traditional sources of bureaucracy to further their project of reasserting Islam's place in a secular society.

The rise of the Islamist movement in political, social, and educational fields was cut short by a military coup in 1997. Unlike their predecessors who supported a religiously-motivated ideology to legitimate the coup in 1980, the generals adopted an anti-religious ideology to

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[72] During the 90s, the True Path Party leader Tansu Çiller utilizied this formula the most, becoming the second prime minister after Süleyman Demirel to allow unregistered Imam-Hatip schools to open. Though there is no record of "unregistered" schools, these two are well known among Islamists for having deliberately increased the number of school numbers by this clever "formula."

legitimate their intervention in 1997. This ideology identified the increasing visibility and influence of religious movements as a threat to the secular republic. Starting prior to the intervention and continuing after it, the military undertook a sustained campaign to popularize an ideology of "anti-religious extremism" (*irtica karşıtlığı*)[73] within the media, judiciary, universities, and big business.

As has been customary with Turkey's military coups since 1971, the political re-orientation of the 1997 post-coup system entailed changes in the field of religious education. The military issued a memorandum to the government requiring first and foremost to increase mandatory primary education to eight years and turn Imam-Hatips into 4-year schools.[74] Similarly, the minimum enrollment age at boarding Qur'anic seminaries was increased to 15 and at summer schools to 12. It was hoped that postponing religious exposure to a later age would prevent religious groups from socializing children from an early age into religion.

Two processes played a key role in the construction of the post-coup regime: 1) the increasing state control, or étatization, of the non-state sources of religious education, and 2) the competition between the state and Islamists over the provision of welfare services. State control was achieved by transferring all private dormitories and schools owned by religious orders to the Ministry of Education. The competition over welfare led the state to provide social services for school children as a way of breaking the Islamists' monopoly and popularity. The secular elite had been somewhat late in realizing that a key aspect of the success of religious movements was the organized efforts of Islamists to provide shelter, food, and scholarship to rural students who came or were brought to cities to study in Qur'anic seminaries or Imam-Hatips. Imitating this

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[73] The word *irtica*, from Arabic *rüca'a*, refers to "returning back to the past, or bringing the past back to the present." In the secularist lexicon, it is used to denote Islamic extremism.

[74] A few months after the coup (July 1997), the Board of Higher Education (YÖK) artificially lowered the university exam coefficient given to Imam-Hatip students to prevent them from entering higher education other than their own designated field – divinity.

strategy, the post-coup regime created "boarding elementary schools" (*pansiyonlu ilköğretim okulu*) in cities. These schools provided shelter, food, and clothes to poor children from rural areas who would otherwise seek out dormitories – mostly owned by Islamists – while studying. Between 1997-99, the Ministry of Education opened 100 boarding elementary schools. In some cases, the military itself provided sections of its own guesthouses in city centers to be used as dormitories. Another measure was to create a shuttle system (*taşımalı eğitim*) between home villages and towns for students who had no middle schools in their village. By driving them to school in the morning and bringing them back in the afternoon, the system aimed to prevent children from staying in Islamist-run dormitories, the cheapest and most accessible places for school children to stay in towns.

Soon after the coup, an extensive campaign was waged to crack down on the institutions and activities of Islamists. Many Imam-Hatip principals and vice-principals were arrested for allowing female students to wear headscarves against the law; female Imam-Hatip teachers were laid off for refusing to take off their headscarves; Qur'anic seminaries run by religious groups were closed down and administration of their dormitories were transferred to the Ministry of Education; covered female students were not allowed on college campuses; and several Islamist associations were banned. Female students who refused to uncover had to drop out or chose to wear wigs (some on top of their headscarves). These extraordinary measures started showing their effects soon. The number of enrolled students in Imam-Hatips dropped from 511,000 in 1995-96 to 178,000 in 1997-98—nearly a 65 percent decrease. This downward trend continued until 2003 when the percentage of students among general schools reached 2.3 percent, a number last seen in 1971 (Çakır et al. 2004:68–70) .

The 1997 coup constituted the second most severe trauma for popular religious sectors, following the closure of madrasas and authoritarian secular measures back in the 1920s. As

occurred in 1924, the de-legitimation of religious activity after 1997 pushed religious education and activism underground. The coup significantly disenfranchised religious actors and curbed religious activism. However, it could not eliminate them altogether. Like the 1980 coup, the 1997 coup generated a series of unintended, but once again beneficial consequences for Islamists given the flexible relationship they had developed with the formal institutional environment over decades.

First of all, state suppression of religious education forced Islamists to come up with creative ways of teaching religion and continuing their activism. For example, the İsmailağa group, one of the most stringent Sufi groups in their interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadis*, reinvented the Ottoman elementary school, *sıbyan mektebi* (see section 1 of this chapter), creating and spreading a network of illegal preschools across various neighborhoods in Istanbul and later the country. The schools enrolled children between ages four and seven five days a week, teaching them the Arabic alphabet, prayer memorization, the 99 names of Allah, and easy and short hadiths of the prophet Muhammad. Although there were no reliable numbers for these schools, at the time of my fieldwork, I was told that there was one religious preschool in every neighborhood of Istanbul's conservative districts. In other cases, Islamists took inspiration from American conservatives' home schools. Covered female teachers who were laid off because of their headscarves drove this movement. Away from the prying eyes of public officials and in the privacy of homes, they started programs for weekend homeschooling. The informal schools enrolled children above the fifth grade, precisely when they had begun Imam-Hatip schools under the pre-1997 system.

Additionally, the restrictions on Imam-Hatips led to the involvement of new actors, young girls, to partake in religious mobilization. Since many families now decided to withdraw their girls from Imam-Hatips because they could not cover, this generated an extraordinary

demand for education in formal or informal Qur'anic seminaries where girls could cover. In the post-coup period, for example, groups increased the number of both types of seminaries for girls by converting male courses into female courses and building new ones. They also decided to invest in "girls' education" by preparing girls for their future role as pious, skillful wives and mothers. They introduced new programs like home economics including child development, cooking, diction, and setting a dinner table. These programs became a success – since girls could get a good education without needing to continue in state schools – and contributed to a rising demand for Qur'anic seminaries. Islamists also recruited those graduates for the movement.

Thus from the perspective of Islamist movements there were two unintended yet beneficial consequences of the coup. First, pushing religious activities underground where Islamists enjoy considerably more autonomy, the coup created incentives to move religious education to an earlier age rather than a later age. Contrary to what the generals aimed to accomplish—postponing religious socialization to a time when children are not as easily impressionable—they ended up having children learn even earlier. Second, the coup accelerated the involvement of young girls, who had previously been peripheral to Islamic activism up until then. It is well known that during the 90s, women had been highly active in the rise of the Islamist movement and particularly the Welfare Party (Arat 2005; White 2002). Now a new group of young, Islamically well-trained girls would become important reserves from which the movement could draw. Although the coup was exceptionally traumatic for the Islamists, it unintentionally pushed them to create new ways of reproducing themselves in the underground, while getting ready to emerge as more powerful actors in the next decade aboveground.

**The 2007 soft coup and end of secular supremacy**

The landslide electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (henceforth AKP) in 2002 took some secular elites, the military, and the judiciary by surprise (although some secular center-right elites and liberals were supportive). Despite an extensive public campaign to delegitimize Islamist parties, ban leading figures, and close associations, courses, and schools, a break-away group from the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement, the first Islamist political movement that had carried the Welfare Party to power, formed the core of a new party. Prominent members of the movement and former members of the Welfare Party including Bülent Arınç, Abdullah Gül, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan led AKP as a single party government into the parliament. AKP continued to increase its vote in the next two elections, having since become the longest ruling democratically elected single party in Turkey. The rise of a pro-Islamist party helped Islamists recover from the trauma of 1997, but it did not bring immediate relaxation. In its first two terms, AKP remained under strict public scrutiny and was the target of secular suspicion. However, its fortunes started to turn in 2007.

Alarmed by the increasing influence and power of the AKP, the military moved to intervene once again in 2007. Instead of a direct intervention, however, this time the General Staff issued an announcement on its web site stating that once again anti-secular currents were on the rise and the Turkish military would exercise its constitutional right to protect secularism against any force. Unsurprisingly, the "e-memorandum," as it was referred, built its arguments around religious socialization of children once again. The rise of "religious reactionism" (*irtica*) was evidenced by school children's participation in Qur'an reading contests instead of national children's holiday (*23 Nisan*) and wearing of headscarves on the prophet Muhammad's birthday celebrations. Unlike previous ones, however, this was a failed coup. The memorandum was not

only an attempt to prevent the election of AKP founder, Abdullah Gül, as the 11th president of the Republic, but also to promote an anti-AKP public campaign. It could not accomplish either.

The ascendance to the presidency by Abdullah Gül constituted a turning point for AKP, helping it consolidate it formal governmental powers (by removing a Presidential veto as obstruction to legislation) and complete the process of staffing the state bureaucracy, judiciary, police, board of higher education, and even the military with their supporters. The Ministry of Education was no exception. Since 2002, one of the AKP's main supporters, the Gülen group, a spin-off group from the main Nur movement, has increased its presence and influence in the ministry.[75] In addition to appointing Hüseyin Çelik, a sympathetic follower of Said-i Nursi (the group's deceased spiritual leader) as the minister, many Imam-Hatip graduates were employed as top administrative officials, middle-rank appointees, and school teachers within the ministry (Özgür 2012:147).

After winning a third term in 2011, AKP made a decisive move to undo the 1997 coup regime's eight-year-mandatory-education law, and by extension the restrictions on Imam-Hatips. In March 2012, with a supermajority in parliament, the AKP passed a hastily prepared new education law known as the "4+4+4 law," increasing compulsory schooling to twelve years. However, with a clever twist the law divided these twelve years into three four-year increments and refashioned Imam-Hatip schools as 8-year schools (even though Imam-Hatips were originally for 7 years) – hence the label "4+4+4." This "more democratic and flexible" law, as the prime minister and education minister stated later, enabled students to decide on their future job by letting them choose between a regular or a vocational school in the second grade.[76] In special cases, children were allowed to continue their education from home after completing the

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[75] It should be noted that Gülen group beganve begun systematically losing their privileged position in the state bureaucracy beginning in 2014 due to growing competition and political tensions between the ruling AKP and Islamic community led by Fettullah Gülen.

[76] http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/748472-444te-merak-edilenler

middle four years. The law also inserted three elective courses – Qur'an reading, the life of the prophet Mohammed, and values education – into the public school curriculum.

Just like every other reform, the law was politically motivated, and religious education was a central arena for the dominant group to showcase its power and vision. The passing of the legislation was symbolic of how far AKP had come in consolidating its powers, imposing its views over secular sectors, and encroaching upon the anti-religious principles of national education. While in 2005 there had been debates about eliminating the 1980-coup-implemented compulsory religion classes, in 2012 the government was able to introduce elective Qur'an classes into the public school curriculum.[77] But the law was no sudden creation. It had been in the making since AKP came to power in 2002. Many Islamist unions and civil associations had been lobbying the government to turn Imam-Hatips into 7-year schools. In the 16th National Education Council in 2008, for example, similar proposals were included in the final declaration. The key was to implement the reform at an opportune moment, which came only after AKP won a national election for the third time in 2011.

The law stirred heated public controversy. The secular media contended that the primary motivation was to provide intensive religious education to children with the hope of replenishing and strengthening the social foundations of the Islamist movement that had been significantly truncated by the 1997 coup (for public debates see Finkel 2012). In many ways, the fears were not unwarranted. First of all, there was no pedagogical justification for starting children in school at age six. However, for Islamists there was a common but unsaid justification. As discussed earlier, Qur'an memorization has to start early, and the previous system would not allow this. One motivation was to get children to Imam-Hatips as early as possible. Since Erdoğan and his circle came from the Imam-Hatips and Qur'anic seminaries, they knew that religious pedagogic

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[77] http://www.sabah.com.tr/Egitim/2012/03/30/14-maddede-yeni-egitim-yasasi

principle very well. Second, the system would deepen the integration of the more religiously

educated into the national university system. Since 1997, many students had been dropping out

of school after the mandatory eight years, so as to continue in Qur'anic seminaries (and not go to

university). The 4+4+4 system enabled full time enrollment in seminaries after eight years, but

also permitted maintaining a formal "student" status by enrolling individuals in a public high

school weekend section.[78] Therefore, students could now go to high school without actually

going to school full time. Instead, they could study in Qur'anic seminaries and still earn a high

school diploma, gaining the right to go to university. All in all, the 4+4+4 law constituted yet one

more step toward the legitimation of advanced study of religion in a secular state, while also

expanding the boundaries of autonomy for religious actors.


**Conclusion**

Three main conclusions can be drawn from the political and cultural struggles over the

control of institutions of religious education in Turkey. First, the contestations over religious

education in modern Turkey are a manifestation of the larger struggle between a centralizing

state that over time expropriated the authority, legitimacy, and resources from previously

autonomous religious actors to establish its own power and hegemony, and the efforts of those

nonstate actors to reconquer lost autonomy and legitimacy. The nature of these struggles,

however, has not been zero-sum, as is commonly argued, but rather a protracted process of

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[78] Weekend sections—known in Turkish as *açık lise*, or literally an "open high school"—provide regular high school training to those individuals who at some point had to drop out of school and never earned their high school diploma, but nonetheless decide to obtain one later. The Education Ministry oversees this weekend training by employing the buildings and teachers (who get paid extra) from regular state high schools. Source: http://www.aol.meb.gov.tr/ana-sayfa.asp.

negotiation and reconstitution. While the state increased its control and penetration of the religious field, religious actors also regained some of their autonomy.

Second, the most precise term to capture the nature of institutional contestation and negotiation is "ambivalence," of the state toward religious groups. Throughout republican history, this chronic ambivalence was characterized in the state's attitude toward Islamists' and their activities by making institutional openings in some decades (i.e. 1950, 1960, 1980) and closings in others (i.e. 1930, 1971, 1997).

Third, the evolution, adaptation, and flourishing of the classical institutions of religious education in a secular state resulted from religious groups' flexibility and their ability to pursue a dual strategy that helped them adapt to changing institutional environments. Central to this dual strategy was also the "ambivalence" of the religious groups toward the state. Islamists moved between obeying state authority in some periods and rejecting it in others. They took state jobs that required them to reproduce the state's ideology, but they also subverted the rules and laws when they could. Islamists continued working *within* the system to increase their legitimacy and influence. They strove to infiltrate, capture traditional sources of power in state bureaucracy and sought to subvert the state agenda from within, as well as in state schools, mosques, and seminaries. Islamists also worked *outside* the system to increase their reach and power. They expanded activities in the underground by opening and running a wide network of informal, even illegal, seminaries, dormitories, preschools, homeschools, or reading houses. They learned to adopt in order to avoid control by an encroaching state. This dual strategy provided them with several advantages: adaptability, flexibility, legitimacy, and most importantly autonomy. The result was the transformation and flourishing of both aboveground and underground sites of religious education, which would become central to Islamist mobilization and the tebliğ movement in the post-1980 period.

# CHAPTER 2:

# OBJECTIVES OF THE TEBLİĞ MOVEMENT

The main goal of this chapter is to analyze the specific objectives of the tebliğ movement in Turkey. According to religious activists, the tebliğ movement developed in reaction to three interrelated problems in Turkish society: (1) the political reconstruction of religious education; (2) the ethical erosion of social institutions; and (3) the harmful influence of humanism on individuals. The root cause of these problems, by their account, has been the gradual marginalization of religion in shaping the nature and content of individual action and collective ethos in Turkish society. Islamists aim to reverse this trend by using new and reconstructed modes of religious pedagogy to reeducate the individual, strengthen private and public morality, and create a social awareness in support of an Islamic lifestyle. Although the tebliğ movement does not openly and directly seek to change the political system, the chapter aims to show that one of the implications of such mobilization is the formation of a social foundation on which political actors can later build. Whereas for some participants this is a conscious motivation, for others it is not. This has to do with both the variety of activists involved and also the complexity of the sites through which they operate (see also footnote 10). Finally, this is because, as I suggested in the introduction, most Islamists would not refer to their work as part of an overarching social movement, although their disparate efforts and programs contribute greatly toward collective efforts to strengthen role of Islam in public life. In this sense, pedagogic mobilization focuses not on encouraging people to establish a political party or demand the institution of Shari'a law instead of secular law (although they may eventually do so), but rather on increasing religious consciousness so as to create a social foundation that can lead to the transformation of such institutions in the long run.

The tebliğ movement entered its golden years only after the election of the AKP in 2002, but its institutional groundwork was established beginning in the early years after the 1980 military coup. The last three decades have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of the financial resources, constituencies, and institutional capacities of the movement. The chapter draws on ethnographic accounts of movement activists in the present. However, it does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of the present state of the movement. There is no doubt that the political context has been changing rapidly; however, reshaping individual subjectivities is a long-term project. Therefore the chapter's ethnographic observations, although situated in the present, aim to give a systematic account of the reasons behind the emergence of the movement retrospectively.

The chapter begins by laying out the institutional actors of the tebliğ movement. This section focuses on the legal personality of religious groups, in the form of foundations and associations, and analyzes the competition between them as they organize through formal or informal channels. The second and larger part of the chapter draws a portrait of the movement by examining the goals of pedagogic mobilization at the political, social, and individual level and by studying their interrelations with one another. The chapter uses interviews and ethnographic accounts from different educational venues as a way of presenting activists' point of view on the perceived problems and solutions at these three levels.

## Institutional actors: the role of *cemaats* and *vakıfs* in the tebliğ movement

Although I have been referring to the tebliğ movement in the singular, it is important to underline that it is far from a uniform social movement. In fact, a broad constellation of *cemaats*,

or sub-branches of the Nakşibendi *tarikat* form the movement.[79] Moreover, these groups, which oftentimes compete with one another, are not united by an administrative apparatus but instead are united by an ideational solidarity. By "ideational solidarity," I mean an overarching framework of shared ideas and goals about the need to reeducate, reform, and ultimately transform fellow Muslims in a social context that is shaped by the political and moral principles of secularism, which is often averse, if not openly hostile, to the centrality of piety in social life.

These groups act through two primary vehicles: religious foundations (*vakıfs*) and civil society associations (*derneks*). Although tarikats were formally banned during the early republican period, they nonetheless continued to maintain a de facto existence in the form of foundations and associations. While a cemaat has no formal legal status, a foundation or an

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[79] Often used synonymously in popular and scholarly accounts, *tarikat* and c*emaat* are in fact two different terms that need to be kept separate. A Tarikat, or Sufi order, is a pre-modern structure that derives its philosophy and practice from the mystic tradition of Islam, known as *tasavvuf* (it is important to note that I am only referring to the mystic tarikats, not the legalistic ones that were prevalent during the Ottoman Empire's later period). Guided through a chain of successive masters, or sheikh, whose lineage (called *silsile*) reach through time all the way to Muhammed, tarikat teachings are passed on to followers (*mürid*) through mystical practices and rules pertaining to daily conduct. Arriving at the end of 15th century to the Ottoman lands and surviving through modern Turkey, the most influential tarikat in Anatolia has been that of the Nakşibendi. In addition to the Nakşibendi tarikat, several smaller Sufi tarikats in Anatolia have survived to this day such as Halveti, Mevlevi, Kadiri, and Bektaşi. Cemaat, or literally community or collectivity, on the other hand, is a modern structure that emerged after the establishment of the republic. A cemaat is different from a tarikat in two respects. First, cemaats are generally communities that emerge out of a tarikat. In this sense, they can be considered sub-branches of a tarikat. For example, in Turkey the most well known of such groups, some of which I also worked with, include İsmailağa cemaat, Erenköy cemaat, Süleymancılar cemaat, Menzil cemaat, İskenderpaşa cemaat, and Nur cemaat. Second, cemaats have different levels of attachment to the mystical practices of a tarikat. While some cemaats like Menzil still today adhere to mystical practices, others like Nur cemaat do not. This is partly because leaders of such cemaats have often created their own schools of thought that transcend narrow tarikat practices. For example, although the leader of Nur cemaat, Said-i Nursi, was educated in Nakşi lodges in Eastern Anatolia, he transcended Nakşibendism through a new school he established—popularly referred to as Nurculuk—that is based not on mystical practices but on reinserting Islamic faith into everyday practices. I find it most accurate to use the term cemaat for religious groups that derive their doctrinal principals from the Nakşibendi tarikat, hence act as its sub-branches, while they remain either somewhat committed or not committed at all to Nakşi mystic practices. For a good historical account of the Nakşibendi tarikat in Anatolia see Algar (1976); Atay (1996); Mardin (1994). For an overview of cemaats in Turkish see Çakır (1994); in English Yavuz (2003). From here onward, I will not italicize these two terms.

association does. It is only through establishing an association or a foundation that a cemaat can turn itself into a social actor.[80]

The two primary fields of action for foundations and associations are charity and education. Both are critical to the realization of Islamist goals; the former is instrumental in reaching out to different constituencies, while the latter is important in instructing people in the knowledge and practice of Islam. Foundations and associations are key institutional actors in the tebliğ movement, not only because they fund, administer, and carry out educational activity on behalf of a particular cemaat or serve as conduits between those who want to receive Islamic education and those who want to support it financially, but also because they are the only legitimate venues for reaching out to greater constituency to relay Islamic messages.

The various foundations and associations often compete with one another within the field of religious education, mainly due to their different approaches to theological and doctrinal issues, their different structures of authority, and sometimes their different target audiences. Yet despite the rivalry, there is an implicit division of labor among activists. For example, while some groups focus on *deepening* religious knowledge through intensive one-on-one study in seminaries, others focus on *widening* it through outreach and recruitment in religious public schools and other educational venues. Whereas some operate primarily in informal underground circles, others work on organizing through formal aboveground channels. For example, groups such as İsmailağa or Menzil cemaat conduct a good deal of their educational activism through a dispersed network of clandestine preschools (*sıbyan okulu*), Qur'anic seminaries (*madrasa*), dormitories, weekend schools, and mosques; other groups such as Erenköy, Süleymancılar, and Gülen cemaat generally choose to work through officially registered Qur'an courses, dormitories,

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[80] For a good discussion of the distinctions and the role of foundations and associations in Turkey's Islamist mobilization, see White (2002:199–211).

youth study centers (*gençlik etüt merkezi*), tutoring courses (*dershane*), and private elementary and high schools.

It is important to note, however, that it is difficult to separate these groups neatly into those that operate in the formal versus the informal sphere because even those who conduct activism through formal channels also operate through several informal sites I will discuss in chapter 5. Moreover, at a broader level, all groups possess persistently informal elements of organization. Weekly sohbets (religious lessons given by a learned person), for example, are central to all groups for socializing and training their participants, and they are almost always performed in informal spaces such as in the privacy of homes, backrooms of stores, the basement of neighborhood mosques, or on the top floors of youth centers or student dormitories. Yet even though participants in the educational movement employ an array of different means, they all respond to similar problems that they think have been plaguing Turkish society for the past century.

## Objections and objectives of the tebliğ movement

According to religious activists, the tebliğ movement in Turkey arose in reaction to three interlinked problems in politics, society, and the individual. In this section, I briefly introduce them before discussing each at greater length using data from my field sites and interviews. The first problem identified by activists has been state interventions into religious education since the founding of the Turkish republic. On the one hand, the republic diminished the former weight and significance of Islamic education and replaced it with weaker religious training that is inadequate for passing on religious tradition to new generations or training religious scholars. On the other hand, the secular system transformed the content of religious knowledge, presenting it as an objective body of knowledge or a collection of historical stories with no significant

authority to intervene in daily life and encourage piety, morality, or worship among individuals. In other words, religion became something to be learned about, but not practiced. Activists point out that pedagogic mobilization emerged in part to mitigate the adverse effects of this political reconstruction of religious education by Turkey's secular authorities.

The second problem activists highlight is what they describe as a moral crisis that has afflicted Turkish society in the last three decades. This crisis stems from the peripheralization of the role of religion in organizing social institutions. Religion became a specialized field of knowledge that coordinated the issues of worship, ritual, and prayer, rather then representing a broad historical tradition that informed and infused the principles of individual action and collective ethos. As the influence of religion became more negligible in modern life, social institutions—i.e. the family, education system, neighborhood, friendships, and business relations—became more susceptible to external, anti-religious, trends such as individualism and capitalism. These trends encouraged a non-pious life by placing materially rather than devotionally-motivated practices and worldviews at the center of social institutions, thereby contributing to the erosion of social morality and modesty. The tebliğ movement developed to resist this trend; to reform the morally-debased institutions of Turkish society; and to close the gap between contemporary society and the society in which the Companions of the prophet lived (*sahabe toplumu*).

The third problem identified by activists is similar to the second problem, but refers instead to the harmful influences of anti-religious trends on the modern individual rather than on social institutions like the family. Activists criticize the increasing practice of "humanistic" rather than pietistic activities among the modern individual. By "humanism," activists understand a set of principles that prioritizes individual choice over social needs, satisfaction of the flesh rather than obedience to God's orders, and finding happiness in consuming material

things instead of praying and worshipping. Broadly categorized under the rubric of egoism, hedonism, and consumerism, such tendencies are believed to create self-interested individuals, who represent a fundamental threat to the realization of genuine Islamic community (*ümmet*). Since religion is a collective as much as an individual state of mind, emotional orientation, and ritual practice, the pursuit of self interest—understood mainly as seeking material pleasure— undermines the construction of an Islamic society. Another common refrain by activists is that these tendencies have led to the development of what the participants call "devotional weakness" (*manevi zayıflık*) in individuals. Seen as the ultimate cause of everything from lower academic grades and test scores to unsuccessful marriages, devotional weakness leads individuals to experience unfulfilled lives. According to activists, the only antidote is to increase the moral capacitates of the individual through religious education.

In what follows, I analyze these three interlinked problems respectively as articulated by the participants within the movement. I aim to provide a portrait of the tebliğ movement perhaps best characterized by their objections to the status quo and their objectives to reinvigorate religious education as a means of providing a better alternative.

## Political secularism and the resurgence of a tradition

On a crisp Spring afternoon in Istanbul in 2012, I sat down with Fehmi[81] in a small smoke-filled tearoom on the back side of a library frequented by theology students and researchers. Fehmi is a young divinity faculty member in his mid-thirties. In addition to his regular job at the university, he teaches at a religious Tutoring Center[82] that runs an official

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[81] All names are pseudonyms.
[82] To protect the privacy of the institutions, I refer to them only with their functional role, such as a 'tutoring center,' or a 'pious vakıf.' I only use the formal name of large religious vakıfs, such as İlim Yayma Vakıf, whose activities are publicly well-known and widely advertised.

tutoring program for undergraduate theology students.[83] The Center was established in 2006 by

the İlim Yayma Vakıf (Society to Spread Religious Knowledge). The Center's program is

modeled on the upper-level Ottoman madrasas of the sixteenth century, combining Islamic and

Western sciences to train elite religious scholars. Based on a four-year curriculum, the program

teaches from the actual books used in classical Ottoman madrasas such as Islamic jurisprudence

(*Fıkıh*), the sources of the law (*Fıkıh usûlü*), authoritative sayings and teachings of the Prophet

(*Hadis*), Sufism, and classical Arabic. The program puts great emphasis on being able to read

classical texts of Islamic sciences in their original language. In addition to the classical madrasa

training, the program provides classes on political sociology, social theory, logic, economy, and

English.

The emulation of the madrasa system, however, is not restricted to the use of a similar

curriculum and reading material. The Ottoman madrasa is also resurrected in terms of its

physical space and organizational principles. The tutoring center is located, significantly, in a

former madrasa in a neighborhood of Üsküdar. This madrasa was built as a higher-order madrasa

specializing in the science of hadis in 1570 (*Dârülhadis*) and recently renovated and restored to

its original form. Students receive training in the same cells once used as classrooms by madrasa

students.[84] This deliberate effort to run the classes in a former madrasa or to adorn rooms with

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[83] In Turkey, there is a prevalent sense that schools – especially high schools – are often inadequate in preparing students academically. Families that can afford it often pay for supplementary tutoring, whether in the form of one-on-one private lessons or through corporate tutoring centers (*dershane*). The center Fehmi works for is based on a similar logic, although it is exceptionally rare to find tutoring centers that cater to college students. Therefore, the existence of this and many other similar programs represent Islamists' dissatisfaction with state controlled post-secondary divinity education, and the efforts to supplement (or sometimes circumvent) it with other training.

[84] Another physical similarity with the Ottoman madrasa is the classroom decoration. In several classes of the Center, for example, Arabic calligraphy spelling out *Vahid* (The One), one of the beautiful names of Allah and an Islamic sign testifying to his singularity, hangs above the teacher's desk. All formal tutoring centers, however, are required by law to hang state-approved frames, specifically above the teacher's desk, such as the national anthem or the portrait of Atatürk. It is not clear whether the Ministry of Education's controllers inspect the tutoring center at all, but this small change in classroom decoration, in fact, demonstrates the institutional autonomy Islamists enjoy.

religious calligraphy does not only emanate from a nostalgia for a "lost" past, but also from a desire to impart a sense of historical continuity with Ottoman madrasa education and to distinguish the Center from institutions associated with republican education.

The historical alignment in physical space is complemented by an affinity in organizational rules. Like the higher-order Ottoman madrasas, the Tutoring Center accepts only a small number of bright students to the program (there were seventy continuing students at the time of my fieldwork), who study free of charge, stay in adjacent dormitories, and receive monthly stipends. In return, they are expected to study hard, complete the 4-year program, and continue on to advanced degree programs in Islamic studies and later fill positions in divinity schools.

My conversation with Fehmi started with a discussion of the disappearance of the Ottoman madrasa in the new republic and its implications for religious learning and teaching thereafter. According to Fehmi, the long-term harmful effect of that ideological program was the emergence of a weak religious education system – at the divinity schools (*İlahiyat*) and the Imam-Hatips, the replacements for higher-order and lower-order madrasas respectively – which could neither transmit general religious knowledge to newer generations properly nor train good Islamic scholars. Not coincidentally, he reminded me that all well-known religious scholars in Turkey have additional training from either a "madrasa" (the actual term he used, referring to the fact that madrasas still "exist") or family. He argued that in order to train more sophisticated religious scholars, the program they run is vitally important. Fehmi, however, was careful to note that the Tutoring Center does not claim to be an alternative to state-supervised divinity education. Rather, it considers its activities a corrective and supplement to the current system. Fehmi highlighted two issues that are the main concerns for the center and for the broader tebliğ movement. First, he said:

At the divinity school (*İlahiyat*), students learn about Islamic sciences through Turkish sources. Students do not read or discuss [classical] texts in any of these classes. In fact, students can't do it, because they are not familiar with the vocabulary, concepts, or the other [classical] sources to consult. This is a significant concern [that a divinity student cannot read original texts from the Islamic sciences]. We have 1400 years of Islamic scholarly tradition. We have to be able to read [these texts], criticize them, and bring them to the present. Therefore, we need to return to a classical education [in the form of the Ottoman madrasa]. At the divinity school teaching is based on the professor lecturing. However, in a madrasa teaching is based on [students] reading books. What we offer is a book-centered approach, meaning we only read classical texts in their original language. We teach how previous Islamic scholars used concepts. And we show other available sources. We do not need to repeat what is already given at divinity school. Instead, we have to complement it. We and other Centers [he counts the names of four similar tutoring centers] try to do this in one way or another.

At first reading, Fehmi's comment may be understood as a commonsense critique of the general college education system in a society in which state-provided higher education is generally regarded as poorly run, inadequately equipped in its material and intellectual resources, and therefore incapable of training well-rounded individuals. However, a more careful assessment reveals a distinctive discourse, which is widely shared by religious activists in a variety of settings. This discourse has less to do with popular concerns about a general deficit in the educational system and more to do with a specific concern about the alternative religious pedagogy that the secular republic tried to establish. According to this second assessment, Fehmi's comment could be seen as a reflection of an enduring discontent with the state's redefinition of religious study in the new republic. As the critique goes, during the foundational period the state transformed the internal logic of classical education, eliminating the requisite method of in-depth, extended, and original-text based study, all of which were indispensible to Ottoman madrasa education. The result was a significantly diminished form of religious education that familiarized students with Islamic sciences, but did not train them to become Islamic scholars. According to Fehmi, this is most obviously demonstrated in students' inability to read and understand classical texts in their original language, which denies them access to 1400 years of accumulated knowledge in Islamic sciences. Tutoring centers like this aim to alleviate this deficiency by building students' intellectual capacities to learn and, as Fehmi said,

to bring to bear on the present the classical texts. The acquisition of such skills is critical to engaging in a dialogue with a long and glorious scholarly tradition that the new republican education marginalized at best and encouraged students to forget at worst.

Fehmi's critique of secular religious education, however, is not confined to inadequate training in technical skills. He and the Center have a second and larger concern about the adverse impact of current religious education on students:

> Our students say that they are not satisfied with the divinity school training; some even say that they were more pious in Imam-Hatip. This is because students have suspicions about their professors; they don't consider their professors real religious scholars (*gerçek alim*). What the professors teach contradicts what they do [in their daily lives]. Professors teach the daily ritual prayer (*namaz*), but when the call to prayer (*ezan*) is recited they do not go to the mescit to do the ritual prayer with their students. The problem is professors do not act like real religious scholars because they are not required to within a secular education system. In the Ottoman madrasa, the teacher would set an example. He would definitely pray with students. In fact, once you were in such an institution [madrasa] you could not think or behave any different. Moral instruction [as much as technical education] was part of such a system. For example, the famous hadis scholar Buhari wrote his magnum opus in twenty years. Why? Because he would write each hadis after doing the whole-body ritual ablution (*gusül abdesti*). Today this seems utopic to students. But if the student had seen his professor do that, he would have normalized it. Today such moral instruction has lost its currency. Because, secular education [of the Islamic sciences] does not want this. The job-definition of a professor does not include such things [moral instruction, setting a model]. But certainly, the madrasa professor saw this an essential part of his job. When we were in the process of establishing the Center, we looked into how these things were being done in a madrasa. We asked: "how did the Ottoman madrasa train a [real] religious scholar?"

In comparing the contemporary divinity professor to the ninth century hadis scholar Imam al-Buhari, Fehmi is comparing a pedagogic approach that treats religion as a scientific, aloof, and objective body of knowledge divorced from spirituality, ritual obligation, and practice, to one that sees religion as a lived experience where religious teaching or writing is not only about passing on a tradition of knowledge but also about setting an example to encourage piety and morality among others. The problem today, according to Fehmi, is that religious education is not concerned with teaching students how to become better Muslims. In his eyes the secular system reduced religious education to a technical training that has no connection to devotional practice or morality. Students are taught religion as a body of objective knowledge, but they are not

encouraged or expected to incorporate it into their mindset, habits, social interactions, and daily lives. On the contrary, it often gives rise to confusions and suspicions regarding how one should live religion. In Fehmi's view, the fact that students feel more pious before entering divinity school demonstrates this. Because they observe professors who teach but do not practice what they teach, students do not receive the moral instruction critical to becoming a devout Muslim.

The Tutoring Center responds to this problem by creating a learning environment that is conducive to cultivating both the intellectual and the moral Islamic self. The Center does this by taking the madrasa as a model, not only in its formal academic curriculum, but also in the other aspects of its approach that treats learning as a total experience. It emphasizes not only learning but also living religion in one's everyday life. Teachers in the center care about becoming good role models just like madrasa professors. Overall, the Center tries to reverse the principles associated with current religious education that reduced it to a vocational education, a formal profession, instead of a complete training in improving one's ethical, bodily, and intellectual competencies along religious lines.

Fehmi's worries are commonly found across other educational movement initiatives. Although these initiatives share the same framework of goals and strategies to deepen religious knowledge and widen religious lifestyle among Muslims, their patterns of organization or target audiences can be different. I met Mukaddes, the supervisor of a clandestine dormitory, in a social get-together of a group of female administrators and teachers from an official boarding seminary for girls. Mukaddes was close friends with these women, because they all worked for the same cemaat, which runs both the formal Qur'anic seminary and the clandestine dormitory. Unlike these women who run the formal educational activity of the cemaat, however, Mukaddes was in charge of one of its informal "services." This cemaat established a Vakıf in the mid-1980s to administer and finance several such seminaries and dormitories both for girls and boys.

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A tall, well-built woman with a bright face and healthy cheeks in her early forties, Mukaddes was more confident and articulate than most activist women I met in the group. She did not find it strange to talk extensively about the dormitory, even though I was – on the surface – studying only "existing" sites of religious education. For her and other women in the group, it was normal that the activities of the cemaat were straddling both legal and illegal arenas of pedagogic activity and they all thought it was important for me to understand both, especially the side Mukaddes called 'non-formal education' (*yaygın eğitim*). Hence she extended a warm invitation to me to visit the dormitory.

The dormitory is located in a newly-constructed apartment complex in the middle of a peripheral, conservative, and immigrant neighborhood on Istanbul's Asian side. There are three buildings in this small gated complex and from the outside the dormitory blends in seamlessly with two other apartments. But if the complex preserves its image as an ordinary residential apartment building from the outside, it looks quite different on the inside. Three large red carpets decorate the hallway before which everybody must remove their shoes. The ground floor also includes announcement boards and Arabic calligraphy on the walls, a designated apartment for boarding teachers, and an administration office. This five-story building hosts seventy-two female undergraduate students, while an adjacent building one street above hosts an additional thirty undergraduate students, all of whom study at the same divinity program in Istanbul. Mukaddes was appointed by the Vakıf as the supervisor of this "dormitory complex" in 2009.

The dormitory business has humble beginnings. The Vakıf began establishing small informal dormitories for male and female students at the end of late 90s, mainly on the Asian side of Istanbul. With the increasing fortunes of the Vakıf (both materially and politically after 2002 thanks to its good connections to the AKP) and the growing demand from families, it later

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transformed this informal dormitory initiative into a larger enterprise[85] that is now able to serve several hundred students at a time.[86] The girls' dormitory is a case in point. It began in two small apartment units in Üsküdar to serve twenty-five female students. Due to increasing demand and the Vakıf's financial capacity, it moved to a mid-size building before finally settling in its current location, where the Vakıf now rents an entire building for 11,000 Turkish lira (about $5,500) a month. Its purpose is to create an environment exclusively dedicated to the dormitory away from the prying of potential neighbors or outsiders. Like Fehmi's tutoring center, the dormitory provides after-school classes on correct reading of the Qur'an (*Tashîh-ı Hurûf*), Qur'anic interpretation (*Tefsir*), life of the Prophet (*Siyer*), and Qur'an recitation from memory (*Hafızlık*). Unlike the Center, the dormitory also provides mandatory Saturday seminars on communication techniques, psychology, and cooking.

According to the activists, the historical catalyst for the emergence of such clandestine structures was secularist efforts to marginalize and suppress the advanced study of religion. In such an environment, they had to take matters into their own hands, starting generally with a handful of religiously learned people who volunteered to give lessons to a few interested students in informal venues. Mukaddes explained the rationale behind the growth of non-formal education sites, including theirs:

> During Ottoman times, the state provided madrasa education. However, after the republic [was established], this system disappeared with [the introduction of] secularism. But it does not matter how much they try to ban [religion] or try to jail us; we have to perform our daily ritual prayer (*namaz*), pay attention to dressing in accordance with Islam (*tesettür*); be aware of what is

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[85] Even though the Vakıf does not make any profit from its dormitories, it runs them like businesses. It has a central management office in Üsküdar, appoints a group of paid personnel to manage each unit, assigns auditors to check up on individual dormitories regularly, and runs the network through a hierarchical organization of administrators, teachers, and help staff.

[86] Although it is almost impossible to provide exact numbers due to a lack of transparency, the Vakıf has been running, only on the Asian side of Istanbul, a total of five large dormitories for male and female students each accommodating 100-150 high school, undergraduate, and graduate students at a time. In addition, the group has been funding and running four youth centers, about thirty student houses, and sixty mosque courses that provide training to hundreds of elementary and secondary school students (from author's field notes).

prohibited and permitted (*haram ve helal*); and be respectful of others. You cannot separate Islam from life. Therefore, Qur'an courses, non-formal education sites (*yaygın eğitim kurumları*) can never disappear. If it is allowed, people would do it openly; if it is banned, a couple of religious teachers (*hocas*) would come together, rent a small room, make a division of labor, like "you teach Qur'an, I teach Hadis" and they would manage to provide the education. Non-formal education never ends, but maybe changes form because we have to pass our religion on to our children, even though we also want them to have good careers by getting a professional [non-religious] education.

Echoing Fehmi, Mukaddes points to the deep disappointment with and resistance against the closure of the madrasa system. She too associates the madrasa with a comprehensive learning experience, where one was taught not only the general rules of worship but also habits of appropriate attire, principles of morality, and necessary regulations in society; in essence, how to live a proper pious life. However, the establishment of a new political and social system that derived its organizational principles from secular rationality instead of religious theology pushed individuals, determined to live and teach others to live a pious life, to create new, and often clandestine, places of religious study. What is critical in Mukaddes' reflection is the resilience of the tebliğ movement in a historically volatile institutional context. As Mukaddes describes, because this context has long been hostile to religious life, the tebliğ movement was forced to adopt a clandestine strategy, organizing in private locations away from the public gaze. But when the institutional context became more favorable, as in the present, the movement relocated these initiatives from private to more public spaces. At the end, it is both the *commitment* of the tebliğ movement 's participants and the *adaptability* of its institutions that has enabled the survival and flourishing of the movement since its emergence about thirty years ago.

The formal tutoring center and the informal dormitory represent alternative models from the wide spectrum of institutions the tebliğ movement run. Regardless of the loci of their operation—whether in an official or unofficial capacity—Islamists create these alternative, or "complementary" spaces as they insist, to alleviate the detrimental effects of an education system that puts a higher premium on positive rather than religious knowledge. Finding this separation

redundant, Islamists provide a *total education*, like the Ottoman madrasa, with its focus on both Islamic and non-Islamic sciences; on intellectual as much as spiritual training; and on moral along with bodily instruction is what is required to establish and live the religiously-informed life.

**Moral disintegration and pious salvation**

The growth of the tebliğ movement is also a reaction to what is perceived to be the moral disintegration of Turkish society. According to many activists, starting with the institutionalization of secular modern values and accelerating after the information revolution (i.e. spread of internet) in the last three decades, Turkish society entered a state of advanced moral decline. The primary reason behind this ethical regression is the gradual peripheralization of religion in shaping the nature and quality of relations among people. As people disassociate their lives and relationships from the standards of Islam, they become susceptible to the corrupting influences of what participants called individualism (*bireycilik*) and capitalism (*kapitalizm*). Even though activists used these concepts broadly, and sometimes imprecisely, they all understood such trends to represent exogenous forces seeping into Turkish society and tending to uncouple ordinary life from the dictates and regulations of Islam. According to activists, these trends have plagued all major social institutions, leading to a moral crisis within the family, educational system, neighborhood, and business relations. As many suggest, rehabilitating a religious ethos and strengthening morality within larger social institutions can reverse this current slide toward anomie.

The discursive critiques of contemporary society and the prescribed solutions may be best understood through an ethnographic account of a theater play staged in a Qur'anic seminary. The play depicts two concurrent worlds through two versions of the same family – one shaped by the

forces of individualism (or modernism), and the other by religion. The play presents these two alternative families as caricatures of degeneration and perfection, but nonetheless captures the Islamist theory of moral disintegration of social institutions and the possibility of regeneration through restoring piety. In what follows, I present some excerpts from this play that was prepared and acted out by the seminary students.

At around one o'clock after lunch on a Monday afternoon in April 2012, approximately one hundred seventy students as well as some Qur'an instructors and I descend to the *mescit* (small mosque) of a Qur'anic seminary run by the Erenköy cemaat. This is a formal seminary for girls (*yatılı kız kuran kursu*) and it is located in the distant and poor outskirts of the northwest border of Istanbul's Asian side. Plays are generally staged on Thursday evenings in celebration of the coming of Friday, the Muslim holy day, but there is a change in the program this week and we are in this mescit-turned-theater to watch a play on Monday afternoon instead. Students sit on the green-carpeted floor facing the stage and wait anxiously as they hear the hurried noises of preparation behind the black-curtain-covered stage. The theme of today's play is "prescribed cultural codes of conduct" (*adab-ı muaşeret*), and the actors are eight students from the advanced Qur'an memorization class (*hafızlık ihtisas sınıfı*)[87].

In addition to their entertainment purpose, plays are used to impart social critiques.. They also aim to increase the awareness of students about the "correct" path to follow when they are confronted with social problems or general prescriptions if they are already entangled in them. But in case the underlying messages are not fully understood, each play begins, gets interrupted, and ends with a touching music and the clarification of the general message. This is why before the curtain opens, along with a soft music in the background, a speaker appears with a

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[87] The advanced Qur'an memorization class is the capstone class of a four-year Qur'an memorization program in this seminary. At this stage, all students have already memorized the Qur'an and they restudy Islamic sciences to refresh their knowledge and prepare for graduation.

microphone in front of us. The interlocutor, also a student in the same class, greets the audience and proceeds with a moral story from an interaction between the prophet and his Companions: "One day some of his Companions come to the prophet and complain that they eat their meals, but they never feel full. They want to learn why this is the case. The prophet asks them whether they eat their meals individually, instead of in a group. When the Companions say they eat individually, he urges them to eat together as a group and start every dinner with *besmele* (the Qur'anic verse, 'in the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate')."

The speaker laments that today our society experiences a similar dissatisfaction. This is primarily because people have forgotten about the advice of our prophet and prioritized individual pleasure and lifestyles over communal living. The result is the disintegration of families and the decline of modesty, especially among women, while she makes no mention of male modesty. She continues reading from the paper in her hand: "Households are dominated by quarrels and distress. The streets are filled with broken glass [because people get angry and throw things at each other, breaking the windows]. Women especially have lost their shame. The verse orders to all of us: 'And tell the believing women to cast down their looks and guard their chastity, and not to display their ornaments except what is visible (hands, face and feet), and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosom' (Nûr sûre, verse 31). In order to fulfill religious obligations [such as head-covering], we need to also follow the customs of the Prophet and his Companions (*sünnet*), recommended virtuous acts (*mustahab*), and cultural norms of conduct (*adap*)." The speaker then introduces the play by stating, "Here are some disappointing scenes from our modern-day life where cultural norms of conduct (*adap*), exemplary customs of the Prophet and his Companions (*sünnet*), and religious obligatory acts (*farz*) are completely forgotten."

The black curtain opens slowly as the audience is taken into a chaotic household on what is portrayed as an ordinary morning. In the first part of this two-part play, we witness the plight of a modern and unhappy family. In this traditional family of three—the father as the breadwinner, the mother as the housewife, and the daughter as a high school student—the family members cannot communicate normally, they only yell and snap at each other, as they try to get ready to get out the door for the day. The elements of disorder are further revealed in the physical space, which is presented as an unkempt, dirty house; and by each person failing to fulfill their expected role. For example, the daughter refuses to tidy up her bed or serve tea to her father (an act of deference in Turkish culture); the mother loosely ties her headscarf or protests having to prepare breakfast; and the father complains about having to leave money with his wife. The three family members are not only discourteous toward one another; they are also interested in doing things alone. Unlike the Companions of the prophet, everybody eats their breakfast separately. Moreover, each person is focused on his or her own self-enjoyment; the daughter wants to hang out with her friends after school and the mother plans on going dress shopping. Disorder, lack of respect, and the pursuit of individual self-interest, however, are not limited to relations in the family. In the next scene we are taken to a classroom, where relations between the teacher and the students are equally contemptuous. The teacher yells at the students and they talk back to the teacher. As expected, individuals also fail to perform their roles. Students do not prepare for class and lie to the teacher by saying "we could not study, because the power was out." The teacher meanwhile does not know the material she is supposed to cover and she cannot answer questions that are posed. The students are shown laughing at her. In another scene, the arrogant individual is represented through a student who mocks others for being unable to answer exam questions and shows off her knowledge with overweening pride.

After this caricaturized presentation of the degenerate modern family and school system, both of which are populated by self-absorbed individuals, the speaker returns to the stage and interrupts the play. She speaks again to draw attention more directly to why we—as a society— came to where we are and what an alternative, more desirable life would look like. The same sentimental music fills the *mescit* as the speaker softly starts explaining that society's current problems arise from distancing ourselves from the prescribed ethical codes our faith dictates. She suggests that individuals can attain a more moral life by following the now-forgotten example of our great forebears, the Ottomans, whose greatness emerged precisely from their insistence on upholding Islamic faith. This is what she said while drawing examples from the past and recommending solutions for the present:

> Our forbearers (*ecdadımız*), the Ottomans, had a superior spirit because they were filled with the love of religion (*iman aşkı*) and they were disciplined by Islamic morality (*İslam ahlakı ile ahlaklanmışlardı*). With these superior spirits, they created a superior society. Let's talk about our ancestor's unsurpassed morality. At home, nobody, including children, ate their meals separately, and nobody started before the eldest person began eating. In the evenings, family members organized sohbets (religiously informed conversation). Women addressed their husbands as Lord, Sir (*Efendi, Bey*) [as a sign of deference]. People engraved our prophet's *Hadis* "Cleanliness is half of faith" into their hearts and then framed and hung it on their walls. O children of Fatih! (*Evlad-ı Fatihan*) [the Ottoman conquerors of the Balkans], after listening carefully to these few examples among a thousand we presented to you, take a look at where we were and where we came today (*nerden nereye geldigimize bir bak*). After that, shake yourself off. And to regain those virtues, start walking in the footsteps of your forbearers with resolution. O God, bestow upon us some of that superior ethic (*adap*) our dear forbearers adapted from our prophet, peace be upon him.

Before moving onto the second part of the play, I want to highlight three themes from the interlocutor's remarks that are illustrative of broadly-shared sentiments within the tebliğ movement. First is the idea that the formation of an honorable society is predicated upon the adoption of religious morality in everyday life. Ottomans became an admirable society not because of their military might or administrative capability, but because of their ability to build society's moral edifice on the principles of Islam. As a result, from the content of evening discussions to the cleanliness of a household to gender relations, Islamic modes of conduct

permeated and organized every aspect of daily life. Second is the view that the submission of women and children to their husbands and elders is critical for an orderly society. The speaker invokes the terms used to address a husband – "Lord, Sir" – not only to confirm the power hierarchy between man and woman, but also to underline female deference to male authority as a general requisite of societal harmony; meanwhile she makes no remarks about respectfully addressing women as a requisite of establishing order in society. Third is the idea of the link Ottomans had to the Islamic tradition reaching back through time all the way to the moment of revelation and eventually God, a tradition which was cut off by the establishment of the new Republic in 1923. The speaker implies this in the last part of her speech, as she prays for regaining some of that morality the Ottomans had acquired through their connection to the prophet as a result of holding the title Caliphate – a connection that is lost in the contemporary age. She implores the listeners to consider the distance between where Turkish society was in its glorious past and where it is today. The panacea is the restoration of an ethical life – one built on Islamic morals as in the Ottoman times – and the cultivation of the necessary knowledge in religion and religiously driven moral norms (*ahlak*).

The play resumes after this long didactic interjection. The second part begins with a reinterpretation of the same morning in the same household. However, in this rendition, we witness a quiet, serene morning and a clean, tidy house where people engage one another with religiously infused words and conversations, all signs of proper and better conduct. The mother ties her headscarf neatly and as she prepares breakfast she calls on her husband, "Hayrettin *Bey* [Sir], you are going to be late for work," the husband replies "ok, I am coming *inşallah* (if God wills it)." The daughter comes to the kitchen and proceeds immediately to serve tea to her father. Following the prophet's recommendation, they all sit down together to eat breakfast before which the father says the *besmele* ("in the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate").

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During breakfast, the father tells a story from the life of the prophet and leaves home by thanking his wife for breakfast. A similar respectful and religiously inspired attitude permeates the classroom. The teacher begins the class with a prayer from the Qur'an. After that she gives the students a quiz with questions on "the indicators of a person with good ethics" and all the students answer each question correctly. The teacher concludes the class by saying "a moral person (*ahlaklı insan*) gains the love of fellow people in this world and the pleasure of Allah in the thereafter." The same tranquil environment also characterizes the evening as the family eats dinner together and the father organizes a sohbet afterward. As the play ends, the speaker appears for one last time to summarize the main points and say a prayer. Her prayer goes as follows: "O God, we are unfortunately living in the same age with those youth [the one's from the first half of the play who were non-pious, self-indulgent, and disrespectful]. But we are among the ranks of those others who work hard to deserve your merit."

The significance of the play resides certainly not in its artistic features, but in its ability to reveal a whole array of assumptions, objectives, and solutions of the tebliğ movement. Many Islamist activists share a similar disdain for the effects of modern life, an admiration for a bygone era, and a belief in the transformative power of a religiously-guided life. The play implies that the marginalization of religion—largely due to the advent of modern and secular values—resulted in dysfunctional social institutions as shown in the family, school system, and by extension society at large. Along with most Islamists, the students-turned-screenwriters share the belief that religion has transformative powers in a society broken apart by irreligiousness. This is best represented in the depiction of the tranquil and happy household after individuals reconstitute themselves through the guidance of Islamic faith and prescribed ethical codes. The play also exemplifies the disapproval of—and even disdain for—non-pious lifestyles. The

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students present having to live in the same era with other non-pious youth as a source of torment, which they hope to overcome by their dedication and hard work to obtain God's pleasing.

The critique of modern society through the critique of the family and today's youth is not limited to Islamists embedded in non-state institutions. Even those who are part of the official state system share similar views. Among others, Mesut is one of those Islamists who has strong opinions about the issue. Mesut is a teacher in his early thirties in the Imam-Hatip school where I worked. He is a tall man with a rough-and-tumble style who lives in a poor and religious neighborhood. Mesut graduated from an Imam-Hatip school and studied Turkish language and literature in a university in Istanbul. Since high school, he has been a committed supporter of the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement and its former leader Necmettin Erbakan. Although he was never interested in being actively involved in politics, he worked in the movement's youth branch (*Milli Gençlik Vakfı*) volunteering in local election campaigns during his college years. Mesut expressed an interest in living in an Islamic state, though he was disappointed with self-proclaimed Islamic states like Saudi Arabia. When I met him in 2011, he was regularly attending sohbets organized by male teachers from the Imam-Hatip on Thursday evenings and was teaching classes on the prophet's life (*siyer*), fundamentals of Islamic belief (*itikat*), and morality (*ahlak*) in two neighborhood mosques during summer recess.

Since Mesut is deeply interested in both politics and sociology, our conversations at the teacher's lounge usually centered on the current political and social issues of Turkey. It was a politically heated time, as the AKP government had recently passed the controversial "4+4+4 legislation" to reform the education system.[88] I asked Mesut his opinions about this education legislation debate. Although he was critical of the policy's hasty implementation with inadequate infrastructure, overall he was pleased with it. He decided to take the opportunity to send his

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[88] See chapter 1 for the content of the legislation.

daughter, who was in fourth grade at the time, to Imam-Hatip after finishing that year. He

thought that the law was a corrective to the controversial closure of the middle grades of Imam-

Hatips after the 1997 coup, which laid the groundwork for the formation of what he called a

"degenerative youth". Even though we were talking about the law, the topic quickly evolved into

the condition of youth in Turkey and the institution of the family. In his usual argumentative

style, he explained:

> What protects a people, a society from excessiveness or misdoing? *Maneviyat* [devotional spirituality, the ability to commit one's mind and emotions to the love and fear of God]. Now, the state [after the 1997 coup] eliminated children's chance to get religious education right when their desires of the flesh (*nefs*) awaken [6<sup>th</sup> grade]. What happened? Our children grew up without knowing their religion. This had serious social consequences. In fact, this youth [this generation] is finished (*bu gençlik zaten bitmiş*). The situation is obvious. Because the youth did not get this [religious] education, they have no morality (*ahlak*) or cultural norms of conduct (*edep*). Schools are filled with student violence, quarrels, fights over girlfriends. A generation without *maneviyat* (love and fear of God) was raised. It was not like that before the February 28 coup [meaning children had better morals, religious feelings]. Similarly, today families are all broken. Divorce rates are sharply increasingly. But if you give religious education, *manevi* education, these things don't happen. This is why the [AKP] government wanted to pass the legislation immediately.

Mesut is deeply troubled with the situation in Turkish society. Like the students in the Qur'anic

seminary, Mesut links the moralistic decline of society to weakened religious education.

However, while the students showed in the play what they consider to be the outcome of this

decline—an ethically debased society—Mesut provides an analysis of the process of how this

debasement came about. This Islamic analysis of social change follows from the political

discontent I articulated in the previous section. According to this view, the new leadership of the

Turkish republic cast away the religious-moralistic worldview of its forbearers, at the center of

which was the classical trilogy of Islamic theology: faith (*iman*), worship (*ibadet*), and morals

(*ahlak*). While faith and worship constitute the requisite practices of belief in God and ritual

aspects of worship, morals comprise the core set of principles to organize proper etiquette

between individuals and to sustain a virtuous society. However, both the founders of the republic

and its self-designated custodians, the military, conceived of religious education only in its

narrow sense of teaching faith and worship without regard to its moral edicts. This inability to understand the far-reaching benefits of Islamic education – i.e. the creation of individuals who have the ability to commit their mind and emotions to the love and fear of God, or *maneviyat* – made it easier for state officials to intervene in religious education especially when they saw it as a threat (i.e. the 1997 coup) to secular ideology. Mesut articulates this view through his criticism of the secular intervention that stripped the education system of its ability to cultivate devotionality in students.

The root cause of moral decline is the marginalization of religion and religious education in organizing individual relations and social institutions. Whether organized through Qur'anic seminaries or state schools, participants in the tebliğ movement aim to reverse this trend. Their broad objective is to reintegrate religious conduct into the organization of social relations and rehabilitate pious morality within the institutions of society.

## Hedonism against the pious self

The third reason, according to religious activists, for the rise of the tebliğ movement is what movement participants call the growth of "hedonistic tendencies" within the individual. Understood as an aberration in one's character, these tendencies lead to a desire to pursue individual pleasure instead of God's pleasure as the ultimate purpose of life. Many of the movement activists condemn what they perceive to be a recently growing type of personal orientation in Turkey; one that denies a central role to morals and religious precepts in the organization of one's life and relations, while exalting self-interest, personal gain, and worldly indulgence. This type of character develops when individuals are inclined to three concurrent tendencies: prioritizing individual choice over social needs (*egoizm*); deriving happiness from the satisfaction of the flesh (*hazcılık*); and becoming addicted to consumerism and pretension

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(*tüketim ve gösteriş*). This putative problem is closely related to the second issue, the 'moral degeneration' I discussed above, but since the tebliğ movement puts great emphasis on the reform of the 'individual' in addition to 'social institutions,' a separate analysis at this level is warranted.

Movement participants suggest that in the last several decades, the content of individual motivation and belief has been greatly altered by growing trends of egoism, hedonism, and consumerism in Turkey. Such trends encourage a reorientation of the individual toward seeking hedonistic and material pleasures rather than devotional (*manevi*) pleasures obtained from earning the favor and blessings of God. The result is devotional weakness (*manevi zayıflık*) due to absence of love and fear of God.[89] For many, devotional weakness is the source of all kinds of problems from low academic achievement to failure in personal relations. The Turkish youth is especially seen as susceptible to these trends. As discussed in the previous section, the issue of "youth" is a matter of great concern to religious segments of society and the desire to create a more religious society is almost always justified by the current "condition" of Turkey's youth. Strengthening individual character with religious knowledge and morals is seen as the antidote against the degeneration of youth. In what follows, I will illustrate these critiques and describe the proposed solutions through an ethnographic observation of a woman's sohbet and a graduation ceremony in a Qur'anic seminary.

Walking through the bustling downtown of Ümraniye (a district on the Asian side), I turned on to a quieter side street toward one of the popular mosques in the neighborhood to attend a women's sohbet. The sohbet does not in fact take place at the mosque, but in an informal *mescit* at the entrance floor of an adjacent apartment building reached through the mosque's

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[89] Respondents also use a related term "devotional emptiness" (*manevi boşluk*), to refer to the lack of fear of God in organizing one's life. In the rest of the chapter, I will use the two terms interchangeably as did the respondents.

courtyard. The sohbet is organized by a group of female preachers (*hoca*) from the İsmailağa cemaat. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon, small groups of women, many wearing full-body-length black veils (*siyah çarsaf*), begin to stream in to the building both through the mosque's courtyard and from the narrow street behind the mosque. The female followers of the İsmailağa cemaat wear this black two-piece veil, which covers them from head-to-toe (similar to the Iranian chador), as a requirement of membership. Many also pull the head covering toward the middle of their face and clip it with a pin to conceal their mouths, which are thought to represent female genitalia. Known as the most stringent Sufi group in their interpretation of the Qur'an and the prophet's exemplary deeds (*Sünnet*), the İsmailağa cemaat has a large following in the greater Ümraniye area, many of whom are from poor and low-income backgrounds. In addition to the black-veiled women, there are also a variety of women with the more common religious dress (*tesettür*), with long skirts, printed headscarves tightly wrapped around the neck, and ankle-length outer coats (*pardesü*). Although the majority of women are middle-aged, a handful of high-school and college students as well as women with young children regularly attend the group's sohbet.

The female preachers who organize the sohbet are generally between forty and fifty years of age and have minimal formal education; some, for example, only have an elementary school diploma. They receive religious training often at what the members call a "madrasa," or the cemaat's illegal boarding Qur'anic seminaries for girls (as well as boys).[90] Many of the female preachers run their own madrasa, located either in the same apartment building they reside in or in a separate building in their neighborhood. Besides their occupation with the madrasa, these female preachers have a busy schedule as they rotate between several informal *mescits*, like this

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[90] Although a handful of the İsmailağa seminaries – or madrasas – are registered with the Diyanet, the predominant majority of their courses are run illegally, often in member-donated apartment buildings-turned-seminaries that can host 10 to 150 students depending on the available number of units in those building.

one, delivering sohbets three or four days a week. There is a hierarchy between the female preachers as the most prominent ones come from families within the inner circle of the İsmailağa cemaat with good connections to its leader Mahmut Hoca, or Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, a state-appointed former imam of the İsmailağa mosque in Istanbul's Fatih district (hence the name İsmailağa cemaat). As a result of hard work under a revered preacher and good fortune, some ordinary students of the madrasa can also become a preacher, run a madrasa, and/or deliver sohbet.

Today's sohbet is given by a popular female preacher by the name of Nermin, but she is stuck in traffic and therefore late to the meeting. Before she arrives, a lower-level preacher passes the time by making announcements to elicit donations for a new madrasa, to advertise the cemaat's monthly magazine (*Kasr-ı Arifan*), and to remind cemaat members to keep up with their assigned daily prayer, known as *zikir*.[91] There is a program in this informal *mescit* every day of the week including general public sohbets, member-only sohbets, devotional/spiritual lessons (*manevi ders*), and Qur'an reading and recitation classes. On average, the *mescit* holds about 100-150 people and because today is the sohbet for the general public it is packed. I enter the *mescit* before the sohbet begins. Women sit on the green and red-carpeted floor in groups and make small talk, perform the afternoon prayer, or count prayer beads while waiting for the preacher. When Nermin Hoca[92] enters the room, the women gather their attention and turn toward the elevated podium that she ascends. Nermin Hoca sits behind a desk on the podium and

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[91] *Zikir* is a form of mystic worship where individuals, silently or aloud, repeat various names or praises of Allah. *Zikir* is seen as an important tool for cultivation of the mystic self, as well as enhancing dedication to the cemaat, its leader, and its philosophy. A member is generally assigned a certain number of *zikir* to recite everyday. The number of *zikir* to be completed daily can range from 5,000 to 21,000 repetitions of the same word (such as Allah, SûbhanAllah, Bismillah, Estağfurullah). The higher level an individual attains in the cemaat, the more *zikir* she/he has to recite.

[92] I will refer to her the way she is addressed in the community. The term Hoca (preacher) is attached to a person's name, hence Nermin Hoca, as a sign of respect to a learned person, religious or otherwise. For the semantic use of the term, see my footnote in Introduction, fn. 27.

attaches a small microphone to the edge of her black veil. Nermin Hoca is in her mid to late fifties and is a passionate, persuasive, and exceptionally fast-paced speaker. Like her audience, she also has an accent, attesting to her low formal educational background and parochial roots. However, she is very experienced in elocution, as she paces herself well depending on the content of her talk, pitching her voice up, and often shouting the dramatic parts of the stories, while softening her tone and even whispering when she is reminding the audience about a disregarded obligation, drawing out lessons, or advising the audience to follow a particular practice. There is no pre-designated topic for the sohbet, as Nermin Hoca decides on what she wants to talk about on any give day. Topics can range from theological issues of faith to practical aspects of worship to current problems in family and society. She enlivens her talk by drawing on the normative deeds of the prophet and his Companions or anecdotes from her own life.

In this cemaat's sohbets, Islamic messages are often conveyed by talking about retributive justice in the afterlife. Preachers often create an atmosphere of anxiety and fear among their listeners in order to propagate their views of how one should pursue an Islamic lifestyle. They do this with stories that illustrate an assortment of gruesome tortures fallen individuals will receive in hell, and the unreachability of heaven if one fails to follow the prescribed edicts of Islam. Nermin Hoca is no different. Early in her talk, she stirs great anxiety in the audience, as evidenced in their emotional reactions, with a theatrical description of the experiences of a 16-year old girl in hell. The story she describes is about a young girl who passes away and goes to hell to pay for her sins. In hell, she is thrown into a large cauldron of boiling oil. Each time she emerges out of the cauldron, a piece of her skin falls off; but when the skin scabs, she is put back in the hot oil again. According to Nermin Hoca, God ordered this punishment because the girl used to look out of her apartment window when her veil, loosely wrapped, showed parts of her hair and neck. As the passers-by saw her hair and flesh, she

incurred many sins. The audience listens carefully and occasionally utters emphatic cries at the

fate of the young girl. The hoca draws out the larger message—the dangers of improper

covering—as she completes the story with a prayer. The group joins the hoca in this small prayer

with the hope of preventing a similar punishment for themselves.

As in the retributive justice stories, youth are the main protagonists in several other

sohbet topics and the primary targets of religious reform. Because young people are most

susceptible to the anti-religious trends that are seen as having become increasingly prevalent in

Turkish society, the preacher devotes a good amount of her time to instructing her audience in

the skills they need to develop to train pious children. Nermin Hoca urges all mothers first to

discipline their own temptations and minds before setting examples for their children. She

contends that today the youth have material satisfaction but they suffer from "moral emptiness"

(*manevi boşluk*) because of insufficient religious training. She illustrates her point and the lesson

to be taken with an anecdote. She explains:

> Fifteen years ago, my dear sisters, I was invited to someone's house in Bağdat Caddesi [an upscale neighborhood on the Asian side] one day to give a sohbet. I entered the house and what did I see? A group of fancy women (*süslü kadınlar*), who just came from the coiffure with their hair done, make–up on, nails polished, and wearing mini-skirts; clearly women not on the path of God. I said to my self 'oh well, what can I tell you? where can I start?' Then I said, 'ok, I will talk about faith (*iman*).' I delivered my talk and at the end, a tall blonde girl approached me. She said: 'hoca, please help me! I studied in the best school; my parents sent me to a private college; my family put three keys in my pocket – the key to my own house, to my car, and to my office. I have money to travel with any boyfriend I want. However, [here she imitates her with a woeful voice] I am unhappy, I am hungry [emotionally]. My family did not give me devotionality (*maneviyat*), did not put that feeling in me, so I feel hollow inside; devotionally empty. I liked your sohbet very much. Your messages pierced through my heart. What can I do? If you say cover, I will do it.' That girl and I sat down and cried together. We then exchanged our phone numbers. Later, she came to our madrasa and we taught her [to read] the Qur'an. Do you know what happened to her now, fifteen years later? She became a preacher and she gives sohbets on podiums like this one.

The audience responds in a loud emotional uproar at the end of the story and praises Nermin

Hoca's rescue of the young girl. The story nicely maps out the predicaments of modern

individuals as understood by the tebliğ movement, as well as the movement's prescriptions to

alleviate their dilemmas. Modern youth, represented in the image of a blond girl who just came from the coiffure with styled hair and polished nails, are interested in outer material appearance rather than inner character. The three keys the girl receives, on the other hand, indicate the freedom of today's youth from the burdens of material scarcity. Unlike earlier generations, today's young people tend to earn money, status, and comfort without having to struggle for them as much. However, this material comfort is contrasted with a spiritual discontent. According to movement activists, the plight of modern youth lies precisely in the distance between the image of a satisfied person on the outside and the reality of a deprived person on the inside. But note that members of the movement understand this deprivation in terms of the lack of love and fear of God, or what they commonly refer to as "devotional weakness" (*manevi zayıflık*), rather than the lack of psychological well-being, quality of life, or personal happiness. The antidote to this putative problem is to cultivate a strong devotionality (*maneviyat*), or a set of feelings that align the individual's thought and emotion with devotional spirituality or commitment to the love and fear of God. However, as Nermin Hoca shows by way of quoting the young girl, the ability to commit one's self to God does not emerge spontaneously from within. Rather, it is "put" into or nurtured within the individual by an agent (in this case, the family). In other words, devotionality is a set of emotions and thoughts that can be nurtured only with the help and guidance of a religiously-learned or aware person. Therefore, the agents and institutions of religious education—whether a preacher in a women's sohbet, a supervisor in a student dormitory, or an instructor in a Qur'anic seminary—play a critical role in fostering the creation of devotionality in an individual. However, this is not an easy process. It not only requires a reorientation toward more serious study of religion, but also a reconstitution of an individual's conception of pleasure and sociability. The case of this young girl is a good example. Once a non-pious girl who drew pleasure from investing in her appearance, traveling to

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various places, and befriending women "not on the path of God," she undergoes an extensive transformation to acquire devotionality, which helps her re-envision what is satisfying in life. Pleasure is now derived from covering a once fancy physical appearance, learning to read the Qur'an, befriending more pious people, and training others to acquire a similar set of ideas.

If this young girl represents the moderate dangers of pleasure-seeking, the modern teenager presented in a slideshow that I will discuss next embodies the other, more extreme, threat of decadence in society. Movement participants fear that the complete absence of devotionality prepares a fertile ground for individuals to seek greater, and certainly more dangerous, hedonistic pleasures. As articulated by many, these tendencies range from listening to pop music, watching TV, and shopping in malls to dating, smoking, drinking, and taking drugs. Today's teenagers are especially thought to be susceptible because they have grown up in a sociopolitical environment permeated with the principles of individualism and consumerism, rather than pietism. Activists heavily criticize these principles, because they not only discourage the cultivation of devotionality, but also weaken whatever little devotionality individuals have today. They believe that when religion retreats from the conscience of the individual and ceases to cultivate morality, individuals err toward worldly pleasures to fill the void. According to movement activists, this problem can be resolved by reeducating the youth to discipline the bodily appetites (*nefs*) and by training a new generation dedicated to learning and then teaching to others the requirements of a pious lifestyle. This socio-psychological critique of a hedonistic youth is a ubiquitous feature of all facets of the tebliğ movement, which can perhaps best be seen through a commencement ceremony at a Qur'anic seminary.

The five-story Qur'anic seminary has a large *mescit* at the top floor. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, groups of young seminary students, Qur'an instructors, female friends, mothers, and sisters of students stream into the *mescit*. What is about to take place is one of the most

important events of the academic year in this seminary: the commencement ceremony of a select number of students who studied for several years to memorize the Qur'an. The commencement, (known in Turkish as "*Hafızlık Cemiyeti*," literally "A Gathering of Qur'an Memorizers"), is held to honor a small group of students who have completed memorizing the 604-page holy book from front to back. With this ceremony ten students will earn the title *hafiz*, someone who has memorized the Qur'an, and wear crowns bejeweled with glass crystals—a tribute to the successful completion of the requirements of the program. As in a commencement ceremony in a Western university, the students put on identical garment, proceed to an elevated podium one by one as their name is announced, and receive a diploma from their supervisor. But unlike Western universities, there is no diploma or official degree granting legal recognition.[93] Qur'an memorization is one of the most informal features of religious education, as most *hafiz* never take the formal exams to earn an official title. Rather, the high social and cultural capital procured through such training is what students value. A *hafiz* is regarded as a "living Qur'an," and a moral leader of his/her society who can transmit the Qur'an orally from one generation to the next. Such social and cultural capital endows students with respect and many opportunities within the pious networks of the broader tebliğ movement.

The commencement starts with the welcome speech of a seminary teacher, and proceeds with live religious music, a theater play on the rewards a *hafiz* will earn in the afterlife, and recitation of religious poetry. More than a mere graduation event, however, the commencement is a very important pedagogical tool for training its spectators—other Qur'an students, their friends, and families—in the importance of cultivating devotionality. In fact, the entire event rests on the distinction between the benefits of a life spent cultivating the thoughts and emotions of spirituality and a life wasted with the pursuit of material interests that one can not count on to

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[93] If a student prefers to obtain an official title as a *hafiz*, they have to take and pass a series of oral exams administered by the Diyanet.

avoid punishment in the afterlife. Among many pedagogic practices, one of them especially stands out: the speech delivered by the seminary's superintendent Alime Hoca and the Power Point show that accompanies her speech in the background.

Alime Hoca, a tall, youthful, and easygoing woman in her early forties, has been the superintendent of this Qur'anic seminary since 2006. She herself is a *hafiz* who studied at a formal Qur'an course in İzmir in the 1970s. She graduated from an Imam-Hatip school by attending its distance education program. After marrying, she attended college and obtained a diploma from the department of Turkish Language and Literature at a university in Istanbul. During college, she continued giving Qur'an lessons at various formal and informal educational sites. Alime Hoca is a committed activist in the tebliğ movement. She expresses her views via her monthly column in the journal of the cemaat that owns the Qur'anic seminary. Her articles focus on things Muslims need to do to "construct an Islamic society" (*İslam toplumun inşası*), a phrase she uses frequently in her writings. Her articles generally criticize society for digressing from the guidance of the prophet's exemplary deeds (*Sünnet*); warn readers about the dangerous influences of technology and urbanization; and lament the weak commitment of some pious people to the practice of religion.[94] Alime Hoca also writes instructive articles for women on the proper rules of covering in the family supplement of the same magazine.

Despite her youthfulness and curiosity about the world, Alime Hoca is a very conservative woman. For example, she is very strict about gender segregation to the extent that she does not allow her sons (she has three) to welcome any female guests (regardless of their age) at her house. Nor does she allow her husband and children to have a TV at home because

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[94] She has written, for example, that family members suffer from psychological problems because they eat dinner while watching TV instead of conversing with one another; that relations between relatives are weak because people choose to go on summer vacations instead of visiting each other more often; and that relations between urban residents are more disrespectful because people eat their meals in restaurants while disregarding others who can watch them but can't afford to buy a similar meal.

she thinks that it invites people to commit sins. Her strictness is also reflected in her clothing. In the seminary, she always wears a loose, black outer garment, generally one-size too large, to hide her contours. This one-piece cloth (*ferace*) reaches down to the ankles, flows over her arms, and is matched with a large dark colored veil that stretches down her chest and back. However, for the ceremony she is also dressed up like everyone else, wearing a well-tailored, ankle-length overcoat and a chiffon black headscarf covering her hair and neck and tightly tucked into her overcoat.

When her name is announced, Alime Hoca walks to the podium with a piece of paper and a microphone in her hand. Before she starts her talk, the lights are dimmed and a white presentation screen rolls down from the ceiling. A soft music begins and a Power Point show is started. To my surprise, Alime Hoca does not focus her talk on the esteemed role of Qur'an memorization in transmitting religious knowledge; the significance of the title *hafızlık* in the revered scholarly tradition of Islam reaching back to the time of the prophet; or the heavenly benefits promised to a *hafiz* in the afterlife. Rather, her speech emphasizes what she considers the desperate condition of modern teenagers and the role of the *hafiz* in spearheading a renaissance of morals. She compares what she sees as the 'poverty' of modern, idle teenagers to the 'worth' of assiduous *hafizs* on the road to gaining God's blessing to lead others in the same path. She estimates the current time to be the last epoch before the doomsday (*ahir zaman*) mentioned in the Qur'an[95] because of the prevalence of moral corruption and hedonism in society. She describes modern society as a morass from which these rare individuals, *hafiz*, emerge. Every sentence she reads simultaneously appears on the slides accompanied by

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[95] Two exemplary Qur'anic verses about the time period before the doomsday are: "But, they deny the Hour, and for those who deny the Hour, We have prepared a flaming Fire" (Furkan sûre, verse 31), and "And when it was said: "Verily! Allah's Promise is the truth, and there is no doubt about the coming of the Hour," you said; "We know not what the Hour is, we do not think it but as a conjecture, and we have no firm convincing belief (therein)" (Casiye sûre, verse 31).

illustrative pictures. Below I quote an excerpt from her speech and provide in brackets short descriptions of some slides to capture the content and power of her presentation:

> They are the *hafiz* of this epoch before doomsday (*onlar ahir zaman hafizları*). When their peers are dragged into a whirlpool [the slide shows a group of teenage girls dressed in revealing clothes, making a toast at an open-air bar], *hafizs* hold tightly to the rope of the Qur'an and Islam. When some of the youth fill their minds with popular music [the slide shows a young girl with a headset, eyes closed, sitting on a sofa listening and singing along], they listen to Qur'an recitation from masters on their MP3s. When many teenagers kill their time shopping, watching TV, or surfing on the Internet [the slide shows a young girl with many bags in her hand at a shopping center and a guy playing a computer game], they are worried about not having enough time to memorize assigned pages [of the Qur'an]. When many teenagers wrap their pillows tightly and sleep in day after day [the slide shows a blonde girl in deep sleep], *hafizs* are up early at their desk fighting against the sleep weighing on their eyes by dashing cold water on their face. When some teenagers are drowned in the swamps of smoking and drugs [the slide shows a young man injecting heroin into his arm], they are like roses in this muddied society opening to become its leaders. When the masses lose their chastity for a fleeting love [the slide shows a broken glass spilling red wine], they are in love with the honor of being 'living Qur'ans.' They resist many provocations from their friends and family against their commitment [the slide shows a person walking lonely in an icy forest]. As society moves rapidly away from its essence and becomes estranged to its [religious] values, *hafizs* are set to win the legendary struggle of this age. Those young girls committed to carrying the Qur'an from generation to generation will be the leaders of society. May God aid them in their sacred mission in this time of temptation.

This comparative analysis, situated in an anticipated apocalypse, draws on widely held ideas about the role religion should play in reforming the modern teenager, and by extension society. The tebliğ movement understands teenagers to be the key carriers of societal trends, whether in periods of social decline or regeneration; therefore teenagers represent both a hazard and a hope for society. This distinction between a dangerous and a righteous youth is elucidated further through a list of environmental tropes the slide show deploys, mostly used in the pejorative sense: current society is characterized as soiled because it is filled with mud (*çamur*); teenagers swirl (and eventually drown) in a whirlpool (*girdap*); smoking and drugs are compared to getting sucked into a swamp (*bataklık*); and those dedicated to memorizing the Qur'an are portrayed as roses (*güller*) blossoming in adverse circumstances. At a more meta-level, these metaphors reproduce the long-standing dichotomy all monotheistic religions invoke at some point in their

history between the idea of piety as somehow indicating the cleanliness of the soul and impiety denoting its dirtiness.

The cleanliness of one's soul here is measured by how much a person can control and discipline the feeling of love. This is because love is a double-edged force that can either undermine the integrity of the individual, and by extension community, or buttress its sanctity and morality. According to the activists, feelings of love have potentially pernicious influences if they are oriented toward the opposite sex, especially outside the institution of marriage. This kind of love is dangerous because it is considered to be a "fleeting love" (*gel-geç bir sevda*) that can result in premarital sex (*zina*) – a major sin in Islam. Note, however, that what is at stake here is the fact that women's sexuality is compromised, not men's; as in some parts of the Middle East, in Turkey women's lack of chastity is seen as a danger to the community's purity.[96] This idea finds expression in a slide from the power point presentation that accompanied Alime Hoca's speech: a dramatic image of a shattering wine glass frozen in space. As broken pieces spread around, red wine spills all over the place. At first sight, it is unclear why love for the opposite sex is represented through a wine glass. It may simply indicate that both have something to do with pleasure. However, a careful look at the picture reveals the dangerous consequence of love: the loss of virginity. The glass breaks like a girl's hymen and the red wine spills like the bleeding that ensues. An undisciplined love may destroy the chastity of the individual (especially of women), as well as the community. The alternative to this fleeting and earthly love is the permanent and immaterial love for the Creator one can gain by assiduous study of the book—like the *hafiz* does. This preferable form of love is depicted in the next slide:

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[96] Many excellent feminist studies have shown the close cultural association between women's sexuality and the community's purity. I will not go into a lengthy discussion of this cultural reasoning, as it is beyond the scope of the chapter. For a theoretical analysis of the topic see, Nagel (2001) and McClintock (1995); for an excellent discussion of the issue in the Middle Eastern context, see Mahmood (2005:102–13).

an open Qur'an in the middle of which sits the jeweled crown of a *hafiz*. Movement activists

recognize the allure of romantic love, especially for young girls. Therefore, they turn every

opportunity, such as a welcome speech, into a pedantic treatise to de-legitimize certain feelings

while naturalizing others. This speech is one among a whole arsenal of educational tools they

employ to underline the importance of training feelings so that one can make the critical switch

from the love for the opposite sex to the one for God.

The tebliğ movement understands immorality and hedonism in broad terms; not only in

the love for another person, but in more mundane activities such as shopping, using the Internet,

or sleeping. It is important to underline, however, the movement does not condemn these

activities when they are a necessity – a term always measured against Islamic criteria for its

proper definition. In fact, Qur'an instructors prepare most of the theater plays I discussed above

(or commencements like this one), by searching the Internet for instructive YouTube videos,

religious songs, or poetry, because they are instrumental in inculcating religious thoughts and

habits. Likewise, on the weekends instructors take students out shopping for basic needs; but

only for two or three hours so that during the week students are not distracted from studying the

Qur'an by having to go shopping. In other words, the movement understands any activity, even

the most mundane, to be self-indulgent unless it is geared toward fulfilling Islamic edicts and

gaining God's pleasure and forgiveness.

As discussed in the two examples above, the women's sohbet and the seminary's

commencement, members of the tebliğ movement contend that a moral renaissance will be

possible only by increasing devotionality or the love and fear of God (*maneviyat*) and

disciplining the bodily appetites (*nefs*) – the two pillars of piety. Moreover, they believe that this

must start with the youth and from there expand into the rest of society. The reinvigoration of

religious habits and sentiments, however, does not take place spontaneously, as the example of

the young blonde girl with three keys in her pockets who blamed her parents for not "putting" these feelings inside her shows. As I discussed there, it is only by the instruction and guidance of religiously learned people that devotional habits and sentiments can be nurtured within the individual. Therefore, the tebliğ movement uses religious training for two purposes: first, to create a venue for those who discover the necessity to increase their religious knowledge and skills such as that young girl; and second, to train a select group of people, such as the *hafiz* at the commencement, who can supervise other individuals in increasing their religious skills. Individuals can lack the love and fear of God or succumb to bodily appetites through engaging too much in pop music, shopping, or smoking, but they can ultimately attain an alternative life in the leadership of the *hafiz*.

## Conclusion

The tebliğ movement aims to deepen religious knowledge, strengthen private and public morality, and create a new religious subjectivity in secular Turkey. As such it contributes to building an Islamic society from below. The emergence of the tebliğ movement is a reaction to what activists consider three interlinked problems in society: professionalization of religious education study, moral decline of social institutions, and the spread of hedonistic tendencies among individuals, especially among youth. Religious education has a central role to play in reversing this current trend. What is required are efforts to train individual feelings and strengthen devotionality and discipline the bodily appetites. The goal of the tebliğ movement is to teach individuals a set of tools through which they can increase their religious knowledge, improve their knowledge of ritual practice, and learn to be more moral. Overall, increasing the capacity of individuals to make this switch from the love of worldly gains to that of God is crucial because the formation of a moral society ultimately depends on the formation of a

particular type of individual. The next chapter maps out different pedagogical strategies

employed by movement activists to realize these goals across a variety of education sites in the

context of Imam-Hatip schools.

## CHAPTER 3:

## FORMAL SITES OF ISLAMIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN IMAM-HATIP

The tebliğ movement relies on an elaborate network of formal, semi-formal, and informal religious education sites in Turkey to deepen religious knowledge, cultivate a religious ethos, and moralize society. This chapter examines the most salient formal site of this network, the Imam-Hatip school, through a case study. The main thrust of the chapter is that even though Imam-Hatips are state-sponsored schools, they constitute an integral part of the tebliğ movement. There are three reasons for this. First, cemaats have organic relationships with Imam-Hatips. Cemaat vakıfs singlehandedly enabled the survival and flourishing of Imam-Hatips through constructing new schools, repairing old ones, building adjacent dormitories (for non-local students), and increasing awareness among the pious population to enroll their children in Imam-Hatips. Second, the core group of activists, volunteers, and sympathizers of the tebliğ movement are predominantly Imam-Hatips graduates. Third, Imam-Hatip education by virtue of its substantive content supports the principles of the tebliğ movement. Both are concerned with the formation of pious subjectivities and by extension the regeneration of Islam in a secular society. The main trends of the pedagogic project within the tebliğ movement therefore can be seen within the Imam-Hatip, making it an important formal and state-sanctioned carrier of Turkey's Islamist movement.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the domain of morality and subjectivity are of vital interest to both the dominant groups and contenders for power. In Turkey, the struggle of rival pedagogic projects to shape subjectivities has been waged most conspicuously over Imam-Hatip schools. That chapter demonstrated that in this struggle, Islamists have gradually infiltrated the Imam-Hatip schools and successfully steered them away from their original purpose – training regime-friendly religious functionaries and creating a national public Islam – and toward becoming

institutions that legitimate advanced religious study in a hostile secular environment. Especially after the 1980 coup, the state's brief embrace of religion to encourage "secular piety" and to control Islam's political message inadvertently inspired and enabled religious actors to imagine and employ these important sites in a similarly political way.

Imam-Hatip schools have attracted significant interest on the part of scholars. However, much of the interdisciplinary literature focuses on the historical or contemporary characteristics and contributions of these institutions to religious study in Turkey. Since this is not the primary concern of this chapter, and is stated elsewhere in detail, I do not provide a systematic description of the curriculum, textbooks, or administrative structure of the schools. Instead, I use an ethnographic case study to examine the types of political struggles that are waged, the pedagogic undertakings that are devised, and the various consequences of these processes for Islamic mobilization in particular and Islamization of society in general.[97]

My case study takes place in an Imam-Hatip that I will call Nesimiye, located in a poor southeastern district on the Asian side of Istanbul. In Nesimiye, I worked as an "intern teacher" from the beginning of the 2011 academic year through the end of 2012. I observed classrooms, students, administrative offices, teachers' meetings, parents, and cultural events at the school, and I also visited the homes of many teachers and students. As an intern teacher, I also on occasion provided English lessons and career advice to students.

The chapter comprises four sections. The first section reconstructs the historical trajectory of Nesimiye and in doing so provides an example of how the struggles over the naming and framing of Imam-Hatips that I described in Chapter 2 have actually unfolded in practice. It shows in particular how Islamists used these struggles to legitimate advanced religious study in a strictly secular state. The next section looks at the school's efforts to

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[97] For more descriptive accounts of these institutions, see Aydın 2010; Ayhan 1999; Dinçer 1998; Öcal 1994; Özgür 2012.

naturalize and routinize religious habits and dispositions within the domain of public education –

an institutional site built in principle on secular philosophy rather than Islamic theology.

The third section turns its focus to students, the main targets of the Islamist pedagogic project. It

draws a portrait of students by focusing on their social, cultural, and political sensibilities. The

fourth and last section focuses on the concrete pedagogic strategies used to turn high school

students into ideal Muslim youth. To this end, I describe various settings where a program for

nurturing three properties (leadership, morality, discipline) in students is debated or enacted. The

chapter concludes by underlining the general contributions of the schools to the broader

pedagogic movement and Islamic mobilization.


## A brief history

The conservative working-class district where Nesimiye Imam-Hatip is located has been

a destination for rural peasants migrating from the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia since the

1960s. The district (population 11,058) has gradually acquired an Islamic character after several

cemaats moved into the district and opened a wide array of formal Qur'anic seminaries and

informal Islamic schools following the 1980 military coup. In fact, the Imam-Hatip is nested

within a larger network of formal and informal institutions of religious socialization and

pedagogy, reflecting this religious reconstitution of the educational landscape in the district since

the late 1980s. For example, the immediate environment of the school is surrounded by four

large formal Islamic seminaries (housing 150 students on average), a dozen informal cemaat

houses, or private apartments that assemble college and high school student to live and learn

religion together, one religious youth center, and a series of informal religious study houses run

by different cemaats (see chapter 5 for a discussion of these sites). The presence of these

institutions around the school is no coincidence given the large reservoir of students, as cemaats

see it, enrolled in the school who are potential recruits and participants. Nesimiye is one of the largest Imam-Hatips in Turkey, with 3,000 regular students, 1,200 formal weekend-school students (*açık lise*), and 120 teachers.[98]

Nesimiye Imam-Hatip did not begin in the form it assumes today – in a large seven-story building, which hosts three thousand students. Rather, it was founded in 1994 in the basement of a nearby mosque. The fact that Nesimiye began in a mosque may appear unusual (indeed this origin is known only to a handful of people), but many Imam-Hatips had similarly modest and informal beginnings. During the 1980s and early 1990s Islamists successfully lobbied center-right parties, in return for electoral support, to open more Imam-Hatips without drawing secularists' attention. As I explained in chapter 2, they accomplished this by having center-right parties open new schools without registering them. Instead, an unregistered new school became, on paper, a section of an existing school in another district or city. Most of these schools were later granted the status of a separate school, generally right before national elections.

The idea of opening a new "section" of an existing school emerged from a practice used occasionally by the Ministry of Education, as a way of stretching its inadequate resources. When the physical capacity of, for example, an elementary school is inadequate to accommodate the number of enrolled students in a given year, a few classrooms of the school can be located in another district school temporarily. This short-term solution has been used by the ministry from time to time. However, Imam-Hatips have used the same technique to increase the availability of religious education without increasing the actual number of schools, thereby evading secularist suspicions. As a result of this tacit deal Islamists cut with the center-right parties, more schools

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[98] Weekend schools—known in Turkish as *açık lise*, or literally an "open high school"—provide regular high school training to those individuals who at some point had to drop out of school and never earned their high school diploma, but nonetheless decided to obtain one later. The Education Ministry oversees this weekend training via employing the teachers who get paid extra from regular state high schools. Source: http://www.aol.meb.gov.tr/ana-sayfa.asp

than the official numbers indicated were opened in the 80s and 90s. Nesimiye Imam-Hatip is a case in point.

In 1994 İlim Yayma Vakıf, the primary Islamist vakıf that financed the growth of Imam-Hatips (see chapter 2), was allowed by the Ministry of Education to build four Imam-Hatip schools on the Asian side of Istanbul. However, they could only be built as "sections" of the Üsküdar Imam-Hatip, a larger well-established school in a central conservative district on the Asian side. Ironically, these four schools, including Nesimiye Imam-Hatip, not only did not have a building but also did not initially have any students. Therefore, students needed to be "collected" from other Imam-Hatips and schooled in temporary informal locations.[99] Through what were technically considered 'student transfers,' school officials rounded up one hundred and fifty students and began educating them in the mosque basement in the middle of the academic year. In the meantime, İlim Yayma began constructing the current campus. By the time the school inside the mosque moved to its current campus in 1996, Nesimiye Imam-Hatip had become a "real" school, thanks to the national elections that had taken place in 1995. Continuing today, the school property technically still belongs to İlim Yayma rather than the Ministry of Education; therefore the foundation is able to maintain an office (*İlim Yayma ilçe şubesi*) within the school, where it holds its monthly meetings. More importantly, this provides an important example of how religious groups have been able to establish themselves within state schools and

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[99] "Collecting" students from schools in other districts, counties, or villages was a common practice in Imam-Hatips, especially in newly opened schools that risked being closed for lack of students. A former principal of an Imam-Hatip described this practice of "collecting-students" in an interview. In 1993 this person became the principal of an Imam-Hatip in a small county of Ankara known as Elmadağ. As usual at the time, the school was opened as a "section" of another larger Imam-Hatip in the county of Mamak. However, because it was hastily opened after the academic year started, the school had no students. In order to prevent closing, the local jurisconsult (note, not the principal) traveled village-by-village convincing parents and elementary school teachers to send children to the "new" Imam-Hatip. At the end, he collected two hundred students who could fill two classrooms for each of the junior high school grades (6th, 7th, 8th grades), and thereby prevented the Ministry of Education from shutting down the school. Able to acquire and maintain the required enrollment number, the school then became a "real" Imam-Hatip right before national elections in 1995 (author's interview notes, April 2012).

reach out to students, parents, and teachers through formal channels, although no civil

association is allowed to establish a "branch office" in any public school.


## Pedagogic struggles in practice

Nesimiye Imam-Hatip offers a nearly ideal case to observe the deeply contested visions

of religion's place in education in particular and the tension between the *nominal* state control

and the religious fields' *autonomy* in general. These issues coalesce around two key contestations

that have unfolded throughout republican history: (1) the legal status of Imam-Hatips—whether

they are vocational or general secondary schools; (2) the length of the program—whether they

should have a 4-year (from $9^{th}$ through $12^{th}$ grades) or 7-year (from $6^{th}$ through $12^{th}$ grades)

program. As I demonstrated in chapter 2, the first struggle centers on the competing religious and

secular visions to restore or eradicate the legitimacy of advanced religious study in a secular

state.[100] While labeling them as "general" schools would enable their graduates – educated in

both the religious and natural sciences – to work not only in the "narrow" religious field but also

in other non-religious fields, defining them as "vocational" would contribute to their further

marginalization and limit their potential social and political effects.

The second struggle centers on the opposing visions over the appropriate age of exposure

to religion. While the 4-year scheme, according to secularists, will prevent religious

oversocialization and children's manipulation into adopting religious lifestyles from an early age,

the 7-year scheme, according to Islamists, is absolutely essential to the study (and memorization)

of the Qur'an to provide them a lasting belief in Islam, a virtuous orientation, and blessings in the

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[100] With advanced religious study, I do not refer to the face-to-face and original-text based study that characterized much of the madrasa education. Rather, I refer to the continuous and extensive study of religion as part and parcel of the general curriculum and provision of mass training in religion through public schools.

other world as many Muslim scholars suggested. The case of Nesimiye demonstrates the unfolding of these unresolved debates up until the current period.

Officially Imam-Hatips were established as vocational schools to train regime-friendly imams. In reality, apart from a handful of students and teachers, no one considers this education as specifically vocational. Formally, they are opened, supervised, and monitored by the Ministry of Education. But substantively, they are autonomous in many practices, such as gender segregation, veiling, ritual practices, use of space, etc. In what follows, I elaborate on these dichotomies.

Many students recounted to me in various ways that they did not believe they were receiving a meaningful vocational education; for example, many struggle with Arabic, they don't always understand what they are reading in a Qur'anic verse, or they don't feel prepared to be a religious functionary. Hence, students are immersed in religious learning, but they neither regard their training in "vocational" terms nor enroll to become a religious functionary in the first place. Several teachers made similar observations to me about the lack of a truly systematic religious training for their students. What accounts for this paradox?

The discrepancy between what the schools are designed for and what they are actually willing to provide can be explained by the victory of Islamists in the first classificatory struggle: by their success in steering the Imam-Hatips away from their original purpose – "vocational" schools that train regime-friendly religious functionaries – and toward becoming "general" secondary schools that legitimate the advanced study of religion in an inimical secular environment. A conversation with a veteran religious sciences teacher that started with the topic of Friday prayer and evolved into graduates' prospects demonstrates this shift:

> On Fridays, we assign male students the task of delivering the Friday sermon. This is certainly good practice for those who want to become an imam. However, it certainly doesn't work for girls. First of all, we need to get rid of more than half the school's population. Girls constitute two thirds of all students, but they cannot become imams. Second, students do not receive vocational

training here. They come here not to become imams, but to obtain a regular high school diploma. Upon graduating, they will either work as a low-level civil servant in a local municipality or maybe enter a university if they can pass the entrance exams. Also, students come here because it fits parents' preferences – girls can cover, girls and boys are in segregated classrooms and corridors. Parents send their children to these schools only with this condition. Otherwise, few come to these schools to be an imam, perhaps a tenth of all students.

These well-articulated observations about disproportionate female enrollment or non-religious job prospects are significant because they represent widely shared views among both teachers and students about school's current status. But they are also important for revealing an array of presuppositions concerning the role, purpose, and prestige of religious education. Despite decades of struggle to classify Imam-Hatips as "vocational" rather than "general" schools, the teacher's observation (that students go to Imam-Hatips to obtain a regular high school diploma) indicates that on the ground, these protracted struggles have been settled in favor of Islamists. Imam-Hatips are not in fact what they were designed to be. The prevailing understanding of Imam-Hatips as general schools suggests the restoring to prestige of religious education in an inimical pedagogic environment; the elevation of religious knowledge to equal status with nonreligious knowledge, a view that had been challenged by the rise of modern secular education; the state's institutional support for training citizens in religion sciences; and most importantly the legitimation of advanced religious study in a strictly secular state. But this understanding of Imam-Hatips also points to the incorporation and naturalization of the practice of religion within the physical, experiential, and moral bounds of national public education – an institutional site founded upon secular positivism that is inhospitable to religion, a topic I will turn to in the next section.

The second struggle, the 4-year versus the 7-year scheme, has also great resonance in the case of Nesimiye. Since the school was established in the early 1990s, it was not spared from experiencing the most traumatic incident of this decade for Islamists, the 1997 coup. The coup was the last offensive secular elites launched against Islamists, primarily through the field of

education. The heaviest blow the coup makers dealt to Nesimiye and other Imam-Hatips was to refashion them as 4-year schools, to postpone exposure to religion to a later age and cut off cadre supply to Islamist movements.[101] Similar to the same painful experiences other Imam-Hatip staff and students underwent in the post-1997 period, several court cases were brought against Nesimiye's principal and vice-principals for allowing female students to wear headscarves against the law; many female teachers were laid off for refusing to take off their headscarves; and covered female students were banned from continuing their education unless they uncovered.[102] While some had to drop out, others continued by removing their headscarf or wearing wigs. As in the case of other large Imam-Hatip schools in Istanbul, for months on end the police were stationed outside the school to enforce the law and journalists flocked to the area to document its application. But these are all well-publicized stories about the plight of Imam-Hatips during the 1997 offensive. What is less known is how Islamist actors of the school, responded to these coup directives both in the immediate post-coup period and once they regained political power through the election of AKP in 2002 – most of which were intact up until 2012 – to subvert the those rules and evade control.

During the immediate post-coup period, Nesimiye staff gave up on the local autonomy many Imam Hatips enjoyed under favorable governments (which, for example, would tolerate wearing the headscarf despite the law) and chose to abide by the directives. They fired female teachers who insisted on covering and convinced female students and their families to remove their headscarves. They appeased the authorities – the bureaucrats and school inspectors of the

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[101] It is well-established that many Islamist groups drew their cadres from Imam-Hatip graduates. The most well-known case is that of the National Outlook (Çakır 2002).

[102] When I talk about the law, I am primarily referring to the Ministry of Education's Imam-Hatip bylaw, "*Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı İmam-Hatip Liseleri Yönetmeliği*,"8/29/14 9:37 PM (2009) the primary official document that establishes the principles of internal governance for Imam-Hatip schools. Historically, this statute has been changed several times by incoming sympathizing governments or military coup makers. It can be accessed through the Ministry's web page, http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/imamhatliseyon_1.html

Ministry of Education – by applying the coup-imposed rules for Imam-Hatips. However, this attitude changed dramatically after AKP came to power in 2002. Following the elections, AKP re-staffed the Ministry of Education, whose top cadre now consisted almost entirely of Imam-Hatip graduates. The new bureaucrats of the ministry gradually restored the local autonomy of Nesimiye and other Imam-Hatips, for example by quietly ceasing to enforce the headscarf ban, deliberately ignoring the idiosyncratic practices of schools such as gender segregation that had no place in the law, or even reporting false reviews from annual school inspections. This behind-the-scenes support of the ministry for Nesimiye (as much as for other Imam-Hatips) in subverting the law and regaining autonomy are captured well in a dinner conversation between a group of uncovered teachers from the school.

Nesimiye had a small group of uncovered teachers who were in their late-thirties and mid-forties and had worked at the school between 10 and 17 years. Since none of them were religious per se, they initially had reservations about working at an Imam-Hatip. Over time they got used to being in an overtly religious context, but nonetheless remained skeptical of some of the practices that endure to this day. As they were close friends, they liked going out to dinner once every month after school to relax, socialize, and chat about the workplace and colleagues. On a cold winter evening, I joined one of these dinners. One topic of conversation was the Ministry's annual inspections of the school. Mine, a social sciences teacher, recollected two different forms of inspections conducted by the Ministry of Education – one during the coup regime, the other during the AKP regime:

> Following the 1997 coup, inspectors (*müfettişler*) from the ministry regularly came to school. They would question us [uncovered teachers] in the principal's office on whether covered teachers were abiding by the rule and removing their headscarves. However, later [after the AKP came to power], bizarre investigations started taking place. I remember once inspectors were conducting an annual inspection. Administrators rounded up unveiled students from ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades and brought them to the conference room. They also told us – all unveiled teachers – to come to the conference room. They said to me, "you are going to teach something to this class now and the inspectors will listen to you." I was taken aback. Students are all from different grades; they know different things. I said, "What can I teach?" They said, "we don't

know, come up with a topic, teach something about psychology." So right there, I found a topic and started teaching. After I taught for ten minutes, they said, "it's enough, now Esra [the natural sciences teacher] you come up to the board and teach." While we took ten-minute turns teaching to this "class," the inspectors photographed us and the students. Then they wrote a report to the Ministry saying, "the education (including the dress code) in this school is carried out according to the laws."

This comparative depiction of ministerial inspections provides important insights into the political struggles between secular and religious actors and the alternative strategies the latter developed to survive in an institutionally volatile environment. Even though the generals succeeded in turning Imam-Hatips into 4-year schools, they could not entirely transform and/or make them peripheral. For one thing, by choosing to appease rather than openly defy the secular authorities, Islamists avoided complete marginalization. For another, once AKP came to power, they were able to recover their autonomy, which is key to their ability to entrench and routinize religious practices within a public school. To be sure, incorporating religious routines and cultivating pietistic habits hinge not only on the autonomy of local actors (i.e. school's administrators) but also the support of sympathetic national actors (i.e. ministry bureaucrats) in a risky political environment. The theatrical enactment of "secular" principles (i.e. students abiding by the headscarf ban) in the school's conference room and the deliberate false reporting are indicative of the national actors turning a blind eye while local actors subvert unfavorable institutional rules, a common strategy employed by Islamists throughout republican history. However, in periods of increasing political pressure, the continuity and vitality of religious practice depends on adapting to changing contexts. It is to those practices that I turn now.

## Domains of naturalization of habits

Why is local autonomy important to Imam-Hatips? I contend that it is the only possible way religious actors can naturalize and routinize religious habits and dispositions within the

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domain of national education – an institutional site built on the principles of secular philosophy rather than Islamic theology. At first sight, a language of routinizing religious habits may sound odd in a school established to teach religion. However, it becomes less so when one compares doctrinal approaches to teaching religion within the context of Imam-Hatips. Many theologians make a distinction between teaching *of* religion, which aims to inform individuals about religion, and teaching *for* religion, which aims to make people religious (Hull 1992; Kutlu 2001; Selçuk 1991). While the former seeks to impart religion as an objective body of knowledge, which an individual can then decide whether to believe or practice, the latter is about transmitting religious knowledge with the purpose making people more pious, the quintessential approach of missionary groups.

By increasing their influence and control over the schools, Islamists steered schools away from their original purpose – teaching of religion to a select group of individuals who would become religious leaders – and toward using schools for mass production of pious individuals who could help resuscitate religious identity in a secular country. This certainly does not mean that every graduate of Imam-Hatip becomes pious. But it is the hope and project of religious actors that many will turn to piety and decide to "carry the flag of Islam," as captured in the words of Kısakürek (2012[1964]:92–3). I would like to provide a few examples of how they try to do this within the context of the school. To this end, I will focus on three key domains of naturalization: space, physical appearance, and daily practice.

The first domain through which Imam-Hatips have been able to incorporate and render personal and social habits of a certain – religious – order natural and routine is through the organization of physical space. A common view in Islamic ethical doctrine presumes that close interaction between unrelated men and women might lead to immoral behaviors or wrong

relationships; hence they should minimize their interactions.[103] Following this principle, the

administration imposes a strict Islamic protocol of conduct, although there is no requirement in

the law to segregate physical or social space based on gender. But it is Islamic doctrine, not the

law, administrators take as a point of reference.

Every section of the school building – including but not limited to classrooms, corridors,

and stairways – are separated by gender. Female classes and activities are located on the upper

floors while those for male students are located on the lower floors. Female students have to use

a separate staircase (on the west side of the building), as do the male students (who use the one

through the middle of the building). They also eat in a dining hall that is divided by a floor-to-

ceiling wall. During recess, male students interact with each other in the front courtyard of the

building facing the main street, while female students use the courtyard behind the building. This

design allows for double-seclusion of the girls; from the internal hazard of the male students'

look and the external hazard of the male passersby's gaze. In addition to segregating space in this

manner, the school also takes complementary measures to prevent unintentional encounters. For

example, males' corridors that face the lower-floor staircases girls use to go up and down are

gated off by large, solid, metal doors that remain locked at all times. And the hall monitor who

has to relay a message from administrators can only visit classrooms that contain students from

his/her gender.

This rigid separation of space is reinforced through the control of social interaction.

Many male students told me that they face tremendous pressures from teachers to 'stay away'

from girls, a precaution taken to prevent their interaction outside school hours. They are

discouraged to look at or talk to girls, even to their own family members who may attend the

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[103] The Qur'an demarcates the terms of conduct between unrelated men and woman for example in Nûr sûresi, verses 30-31. For further explanation of this view through Qur'anic verses see, Hamidullah (2010:239–58). On the opinions of Muslim jurists on the topic see Bennett (2005:129–55).

same school. The same applies for girls. If they attempt to interact, the teachers or administrators reprimand them severely. In a few cases, some students told me that the administrators have slapped them. Several male teachers even go so far to instruct male students not to sit on a chair a female student or teacher sat before them, because it is believed that the warmth left by a female might potentially arouse sexual feelings in the young men.[104]

A similar physical organization shapes teachers' interactions. The teachers' lounge is unofficially divided into two parts; on one side covered women teachers sit separate from both uncovered female teachers and male teachers. Unless they absolutely need to, the two groups try to avoid visiting each other's side or having sustained interaction. The handful of uncovered female teachers, who tend to group together, are also occasionally pressured by male teachers to abandon their table and move to the side where covered female teachers sit. All in all, the school successfully exploits the holes in the bylaw to incorporate and routinize the Islamic practice of gender segregation in a formal educational setting. Most importantly, this arrangement structures the general perception of students on how different genders should interact in a given social space.

Another key domain through which religious habits and pious conduct are normalized and reproduced is the dress code, and more specifically veiling. Like many other Imam-Hatips, Nesimiye has been violating the dress code by allowing both female students and teachers to wear the headscarf in a public institution. Even though the bylaw states that students and teachers could cover only during Qur'an classes, at the time of my research, ninety-nine percent of all

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[104] The idea derives from the Islamic jurisprudence that perceives women in a distinct position and ability to provoke sexual desires in men, the latter believed to be naturally less in control of their carnal passions. Therefore, as much as women are required to conceal their sexuality, men are expected to stay away from situations that might increase their (uncontrollable) sexual appetite

students and female teachers remained covered at all times.[105] Veiling is one of the key

pedagogical mechanisms through which an alternative, more pietistic, lifestyle is incorporated

into the culture of education and the routine of everyday life. When the social environment

facilitates the practice of a religious edict and the majority of students perform it, this encourages

behavioral change in those who are already inclined to the behavior but also imposes a

formidable pressure on others who are not actively practicing. Two remarks, one from a younger

and other from an older Nesimiye student reveal these attitude-changing pressures.

A tenth-grade female student told me that she originally did not want to go to an Imam-

Hatip. She was very talented at pencil drawing and wanted to enroll at a fine arts high school.

However, her father preferred her to study at an Imam-Hatip, because he said, "you will never

wear the veil if you don't go to an Imam-Hatip." She came to school unveiled the first year, and

then "decided" of her own account (she emphasized that) to cover. She said proudly, "nobody

can pressure me about what to do, otherwise I do the opposite." Despite this rhetoric of

independence, her seamless and quick transition from one stage of being (unveiled) to another

(veiled) suggests the effect of the Imam-Hatip as an institution in inculcating pious conduct, or

what Meyer calls "taken-for-granted nondecision" (Meyer 2010: 5). The idea is that an

institutional environment with its cultural scripts of the 'normal' and the 'deviant' has the

capacity to project influence over its members, even though individuals experience these

resultant decisions as their own inspiration. Like this student, I interviewed many young girls

who "choose the correct and required action" (*ibid*) like veiling without actually making a

decision.

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[105] Shortly after I completed my fieldwork (at the end of 2012), the ruling AKP government lifted the ban (in June 2013), allowing Imam-Hatip female students to cover in all classes. The government lifted the ban for female teachers later in the same year as well.

But a handful of individuals were able to grasp the effect of pedagogical practices on normalizing and encouraging specific cultural forms. A remark from a former Nesimiye graduate, who had recently completed her bachelor's degree in psychology, reveals how the school's efforts to render specific cultural practices hegemonic lead to changes in one's actions: "The [social] environment is very important, it has a profound influence on individuals. Take the issue of veiling. The school generates major changes in an individual (*okul insanda büyük değişikliklere neden oluyor*) because individuals are affected by their peers. If ten girls enter the school unveiled, only two will leave unveiled when they graduate." This statement was part of a longer conversation I had with the student as we strolled through the girls' courtyard. A smart and well-spoken girl, she made this statement with knowledge and confidence rather than as anecdotal evidence. And perhaps due to her background in psychology, she was quite mindful of the emotional and behavioral influence the Imam-Hatip system has over both the pious and unpious student. As her comment implies, a religious school – just like a secular one – is a key pedagogical site to impose specific cultural representations, marginalize others, and convince individuals to switch to normatively acceptable behaviors, values, and attitudes. Nesimiye Imam-Hatip is no exception to this general rule.

The third domain through which religious habits and pious conduct are routinized and reproduced is in the area of ritual and ordinary practices. Pious actors strive to intertwine ritual and ordinary practice to eliminate in their life the distinction between religious and non-religious activity. This fusion can be observed especially well during the insertion of ritual practices such as ablution (*abdest*), daily prayer (*namaz*), and Islamic dress (*tessettür*) into the rhythm of mundane activities. Such a fusion undermines the confinement of religious practice to an allocated place, i.e. ablution in the washroom, prayer in the mescit, veiling in Qur'an class. More broadly, it strives to turn all spaces into a means of fulfilling the conditions of piety. Another part

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of the dinner conversation I had with the uncovered teachers provides clues into some of the

ritual practices at school – both subversive and transformative. The topic was initiated again by

Mine, the social sciences teacher, narrating her first visit to the school:

> After I received the formal note from the Ministry that I was appointed to this Imam-Hatip, I decided to visit the school and introduce myself to the principal and other administrators. When I arrived, the principal wasn't in his room. I started waiting in the vice-principal's office while talking to other administrators. Then, a man wearing high-heeled wooden slippers (known as *takunya*, traditionally worn at a mosque for ritual ablution) entered the room. The loud noise of his heels could be heard all the way back through the corridors. He had his pants rolled up to his knee and his shirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He had a white face-towel slung around his neck and hanging on both sides. It seemed like he had just taken a ritual ablution in the washroom, and been walking in the corridors in this outfit. The vice-principal turned to me and said, 'this is our principal.'

Another teacher, Şerife, who had been listening quietly until then, jumped in: "It is true. The

school administrators are a little weird. For example, you sometimes need to go to the vice-

principal's office to ask a question or get something. When you open the door, there are often

three men or three behinds [here she draws three circles in the air with her finger], facing the

back and lined up on small carpets performing the ritual prayer." The rest of the women laughed

softly and naturally, indicating that this was a common site to see. Waiting for the humor to

dissipate, Şerife continued, "It is really inappropriate to do these things so openly. It is not a

comfortable environment [for us] to work, we find ourselves in awkward situations. It is not just

administrators, but also teachers who pursue similar practices. I also observed on several

occasions male teachers doing the ritual prayer on couches in the teacher's lounge. In other cases,

some female teachers use part of the tea-room (where people come to get tea during recess) as a

prayer room for single or collective worship.

These observations are significant for exemplifying the autonomy local actors enjoy in

transforming the use of spaces. The school is not only a formal workplace, but also a space for

the realization of devotional conduct. In fact, through merging ritual and daily duties, the school

is transformed into an extension of one's home or a mosque where one pursues a personal act of

worship to earn God's blessing as much as a professional act of teaching to earn money. Hence it becomes "normal" to walk around the school corridors with high-heeled slippers and a towel just like one does at home, or to pray communally in the teacher's lounge just like in a mosque. In addition, the union of one's behavior in private with one's duty in public renders these spheres identical in nature and eliminates the distinctions there may be in the moral and social principles governing each. Since Islamists understand religion as a whole way of life that cannot be confined to one's private affair at home or mosque, religion has to be part and parcel of what one does in a given day to earn his/her living. Ritual practices unsettle one of the core premises of secular positivism – the separation of conduct between the private and the public. Instead, they help make both spheres morally equivalent and socially continuous.

The school, therefore, is a critical institutional site where habits and dispositions of a particular cultural, moral, and political system are naturalized and routinized. Due to its mission of authoritatively organizing knowledge and addressing a captive audience, it is able to structure certain understandings of morality, gender interaction, and even everyday routine. Imam-Hatips establish the hegemony of religiously acceptable behaviors, values, and attitudes not only by teaching a religious curriculum, but also by organizing social space, privileging certain dress codes over others, and encouraging the fusion of religious and non-religious practices within the institutional boundaries of the school. However, subversive pedagogic strategies that enable Islamists to transform social relations and physical spaces for the attainment of piety are only possible because of the autonomy enjoyed by school administrators. In such an environment, Islamists can take advantage of the lack of central control and openly subvert the law. But if pedagogic practices are obvious, their consequences for Islamic mobilization are not. How are the school's efforts to naturalize an alternative – religious – lifestyle received and reproduced by

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students? What are the social, cultural, and political sensibilities of students? Do they partake in the efforts of the greater tebliğ movement? I discuss these issues in the next section.

**Students**

Many of Nesimiye's students come from low-income families. Some have a noticeable accent, bruised or scratched skin, and ragged clothes. In most families, the father – if employed – is the breadwinner and makes a living in a low-skilled job such as a construction worker, shuttle or truck driver, assembly technician, private security guard, furniture maker, farmworker or in a low-level civil servant job, as a municipal office assistant or imam. Families follow what teachers – or the more religiously lettered – refer to as "traditional religion," defined by veneration for Sufi masters and spiritual powers, guided by superstitions, and practiced with stringent commitment to formulaic worship and piety. In many families, the father, the mother, or both are affiliated with a religious cemaat and attend sohbets, volunteer or participate in cemaat-organized activities, and donate or receive support from cemaat resources (in monetary or other form). Those more involved may actively work for a cemaat by supervising, teaching, or cooking at a cemaat-run Qur'anic seminary, engaging in fund-raising activity, or representing the Sufi master by providing religious lessons or assigning "spiritual homework" (*manevi ders*) to followers as authorized by the master. Generally, female siblings and the mother are covered and other siblings study religion in one form or another.

I would like to draw a picture of the students by focusing on their social, cultural, and political sensibilities. This I believe would help us to understand the dynamics of cultural production and social reproduction, as well as to locate students within the broader tebliğ movement. However, following critical educational sociologists (Giroux 2006:3–45), I do not assume a simple mechanical reproduction of the dominant orthodoxy (religious or otherwise).

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Rather, I contend that relations of persuasion and reproduction are dynamic and mutually constitutive, and that causality works in two directions: Students embrace and reproduce values and dispositions of social, cultural, and political conservatism because they are socialized into them at Imam-Hatips, but also students from socially pious, economically poorer, and politically conservative families tend to go to these schools in the first place, which reinforces their conservative dispositions and preferences exposed at the school. In all likelihood schools are both a cause and a consequence of social, cultural, and political conservatism manifested in individuals' dispositions, worldviews, and relations. To make these points more clear, I will focus on three interactions that are broadly representative of such sentiments and orientations among students.

*social sensibilities*

Students, like their teachers, parents, and the broader tebliğ movement, view non-religious educational environments – especially the secular public school – as places of profound moral laxity and chaos; they see them as microcosms of broader society, which is plagued by a similar calamity. According to students, such un-pious social contexts, much like the rest of Turkish society, is shaped by pedagogies of secularism, which normalize mixing with the opposite sex, being unveiled in public (for girls), not prioritizing the study of the Qur'an or following the example of the prophet (*Sünnet*)—in short, living outside the standards of Islam. Moreover, the normalization of un-pious values encourages, according to students and activists alike, the pursuit of un-pious pleasures – such as dressing freely, flirting with the opposite sex, listening to music, playing soccer, smoking, or drinking. The consequence of attending a regular school is the formation of a type of personality defined by devotional weakness and inability to fear God (*manevi zayıflık*). In contrast to the disorder and pollution outside, Imam-Hatips are

thought to provide an environment of order and protection. Some of these themes are nicely illustrated during a conversation about gender relations I had with four female students from Nesimiye.

At the end of a school day, I met Hatice, Gülsüm, Ayfer, and Berat at a café in downtown Ümraniye. The girls were close friends from school even though they all belonged to different cemaats. Hatice's family was affiliated with the Gülen cemaat; Gülsüm belonged to the Okuyucular branch of the Nur cemaat; and Ayfer was a committed member of the Menzil cemaat. Berat was in the process of joining the Menzil with the encouragement of Ayfer. At the time, they were all preparing for the university entrance exam. Except Hatice, the rest, like many Imam-Hatip students, were going to Gülen cemaat-run prep courses (*dersane*) known as FEM. Since many Imam-Hatip students also go to FEM characterized by rules like those of Imam-Hatips with respect to gender segregation, veiling, etc. The girls contrasted non-cemaat run prep courses, as an embodiment of moral laxity, with their experience at the Imam-Hatip. Their reflections reveal a set of social dispositions that were cultivated in the Imam-Hatip and reproduced in their discourse and daily conduct.

*Hatice*   : The prep course I go to is not run by a cemaat. I find the social environment very strange. There is no spiritual/devotional environment like that of the Imam-Hatip (*manevi olarak İmam-Hatip'teki ortam yok*). The topics students talk about, the clothes they wear, the [gender] relations they engage in are very different.

*Berat*   : In elementary school, girls and boys, we were all mixed. Back then we regarded it as normal.

*Gülsüm*  : When I first came to the Imam-Hatip, I said to myself: "what kind of an environment is this [in terms of gender segregation]? In what age are we living? However, over time I got used to it.

*Berat*   : Yeah, when you see it over and over again, you get used to it.

*Gülsüm*  : In fact, I started liking this [gender segregation] more. Because, the environment in which each person [man and woman] talks should be different.

*Ayfer*   : For example, in elementary school we could talk about everything with guys; because we saw them like girls. However, it is not like that anymore. We know what we can and cannot talk about, we reached an awareness, and we have to watch our behavior .

*Hatice*  : I, in fact, do not see this [gender segregation] as an unfavorable practice. If teachers do not draw the line, students are incapable of drawing it (*öğretmenler çizmezse, öğrenciler bu sınırı çizemiyorlar*). I see it at the [non-cemaat run] prep course. Male and female students walk hand-in-hand, make jokes, or touch one another.

*Gülsüm*  : In fact, three of us just talked about it yesterday: "how would we turn out, if we didn't study

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|  |  | at an Imam-Hatip but a regular [secular] school?" |
|---|---|---|
| *Berat* | : | We would be just like them. |
| *Gülsüm* | : | Absolutely! We would become like them, we wouldn't be able to draw the line *if somebody else [i.e. teachers] didn't tell us*. School really helps draw the line, puts things in order. If we had gone to a regular school, we wouldn't have the veil, ritual prayer, etc. |
| *Berat* | : | Thank God we went to the Imam-Hatip! The environment is very important. It also says in the Qur'an: "keep your sight away from the forbidden (*"gözlerinizi haramdan sakının"*) (Qur'an 24: 30). There is a purpose to all of this. |
| *A*[106] | : | What do you think the purpose is? |
| *Hatice* | : | The purpose is to put us us on the right path and keep us there. Our teachers know what is right and wrong. They know that this is how it's supposed to be; they have many years of education. |
| *Ayfer* | : | They [financers of Imam-Hatip], the schools, have a greater purpose for raising a pious generation (*dindar bir nesil yetiştirmek gibi bir amaçları var*). Everything has to be formed according to the rules of the Qur'an (*herşeyin Kur'ana uygun şekilde oluşturulması gerekiyor*). |

These sentiments, which I encountered regularly among Imam-Hatip students, demonstrate the process of change and adaptation, as well as the reproduction of the system of dispositions the Imam-Hatip inculcates within individuals. Even though the exchange centers on the topic of gender relations, the underlying distinctions between the intrinsic worth of religious versus non-religious dispositions apply to other topics and domains. Here it is important to point to the functions of these classifications both in developing the social sensibilities of individuals and in contributing to the broader tebliğ movement. First of all, the exchange shows the central role of the religious project in unsettling hegemonic (secular) understandings of "normal/abnormal" and "moral/immoral" and replacing them with religious understandings. Until they came to the Imam-Hatip, the students did not see anything wrong with gender mixing, especially in the context of school. In fact, when they first started, they considered the practice "primitive," as captured in Gülsüm's question: "in what age are we living?" However, the school's ability to reorder established categories (foremost through the physical segregation I discussed earlier) eventually made the students incorporate religious orthodoxies. It naturalized alternative ways of thinking and acting and induced complicity. Most importantly, however, it made them think with

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[106] A refers to the author.

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religious categories to understand and to impose an order on the environment around them. Ayfer describes this as "reaching an awareness," which results in constant vigilance regarding one's *words* (i.e. "we know what we can and cannot talk about [with men]"), *sights* (i.e. "the Qur'an says keep your sight away from the forbidden"), and *behaviors* (i.e. "we have to watch our behavior").

Second, the exchange demonstrates the students' reproduction of a central critique of the tebliğ movement: that the secular environment lacks necessary conditions for the pursuit of a pious life and therefore leads to the ethical debasement of society. This critique is enacted through the discussion of the mixing of sexes in secular educational contexts like non-cemaat run prep schools or regular public schools. According to the students, the mixing of sexes poses a threat to the ideal order of society because it allows for the transgression of religiously ordained categories of the permissible and prohibited. Such discourses of threat, danger, and pollution, as Mary Douglas argues, "do not indicate something about the actual relation of the sexes….but [should be] interpreted as symbols of the relation between the parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system" (1966:4). Religious law separates and demarcates categorical fields of interaction, as nicely illustrated in Berat's words: "the environment in which each person [man and woman] talks should be different." The idea is that different sexes should interact mainly with their own sex in order to protect the ideal categories of a religious system. A secular system, on the other hand, violates these categories and leads to the formation of a type of morally degenerate individual manifested in their interactions with the opposite sex, when joking or touching each other.

Lastly, the students' conversation reveals the function of another prominent discourse within the tebliğ movement in shaping their own self-understanding and personal capacity. The students repeat a popular refrain among Islamists, which holds that individuals are inherently

weak and dependent. This is best represented in the words of Gülsüm, who feared being like students in the secular school because she (and her friends) would not be "able to draw the line if somebody else [i.e. teachers] didn't tell" them. By "drawing the line," Gülsüm means being guided by correct religious practices, such as veiling, gender segregation, and ritual prayer. This passing remark has very significant implications. On the one hand, it naturalizes a system of hierarchy between the religiously trained, i.e. teachers, and the rest of society, who are seen as lacking religious training. It also mandates the former to dictate to the latter how they are supposed live their lives. On the other hand, it shapes the self-perception of individuals as incapable and uncontrollable, and therefore in need of being guided and molded in the image of a hegemonic (religious) order to prevent his/her occasional lapses from righteousness. Overall, these remarks indicate that there is an active process of social production and cultural reproduction at the school in which a certain set of social sensibilities that confirms to the goals of the greater tebliğ movement are being inculcated: "raising a pious generation, according to the rules of the Qur'an."

*cultural sensibilities*

In Nesimiye Imam-Hatip, students, much like their families and some of their teachers (especially the religious sciences teachers), inhabit a cultural world—ranging from aesthetic preferences, to sources of knowledge, to rules of personal and public conduct—that takes its references from Islamic tradition, Ottoman heritage, and Arab culture. This doesn't mean that they do not interact with non-Islamic sources of culture.[107] However, it is the Islamically-guided cultural norms, objects, and practices rather than secularly-informed sensibilities, that predominate the life of students and their families. These inclinations can be symbolically

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[107] On the relationship of Imam-Hatip students with pop culture see Saktanber (2002:254–76).

observed within a range of sites including the physical decoration of classrooms, teacher-student interactions, common extra-curricular activities, or popularly followed newspapers, literary work, and music.

One striking illustration of the dominance of Islamic and Eastern cultural sensibilities is the popularity of the Islamist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (whose life and political philosophy I briefly discussed in Chapter 2). At Nesimiye one can encounter Kısakürek's portrait, framed poetry, and various books in classrooms, corridors, and offices. Students recite his poetry, commemorate his birthday in classroom billboards, and inscribe his quotes in notebooks. The importance of Kısakürek lies not only in his intellectual role in theorizing Islam as a political ideology, but also in his ability to create a counter-hegemonic cultural vocabulary built upon Eastern and Islamic heritage against a Westernized secular regime. One encounter with a group of students illustrates the embrace of this counter-hegemonic cultural orientation.

Early in my fieldwork, one of the English teachers invited me to her tenth grade class to practice with students. When I walked into the dimly-lid classroom, an immediate excitement filled the room. The girls, both curious and enthusiastic about having a visitor, started bombarding the teacher with questions. The teacher explained that we would have a conversation class and each student will get to ask one question to me in English. After the teacher managed to calm down the girls, we started the conversation. One of the first questions, as typical, was "what are your hobbies?" Trying to keep my answer simple, I began by saying "I most enjoy reading." The next question was a follow-up, "what is your favorite book?" Both because I genuinely love literature and to provide a Turkey-neutral answer (so not to provoke an ideological perception among students) I said "I like reading Russian literature." The students looked disconcerted as if I had said something very unusual. The energy that had pervaded the class five minutes ago disappeared and an uncomfortable silence filled the room. In order to

break the silence, I tried to propel the conversation vainly, "do you know any Russian classics?" Another long awkward silence ensued. Then, rather unexpectedly, one of the students from the back seat scoffed, "We [actually] read Necip Fazıl Kısakürek." The entire class broke into a long loud laughter.

The two opposite gestures in this brief interaction, a long silence followed by a long laughter, exemplify key cultural tendencies within the younger segments of the Islamist community. First, the confusion on students' face and the lingering silence demonstrate the girls' unfamiliarity, symbolic as it is, with an epic cultural genre of the modern age. Most students (even though certainly not all) lack a literary disposition – one that the secularist project tried but failed to cultivate – that does not take its references from Islamic tradition. Perhaps more importantly, the student's mocking comment at the end demonstrates the familiarity of the young members of the Islamist community with the "Islamic/secular dichotomy," a dichotomy that constitutes the main axis of sociocultural struggle in Turkey. Even though she doesn't know the content of Russian classics, the student immediately understands that I am referring to a non-Islamic literary tradition. Because I cited a foreign literature associated with the West, my answer was taken to indicate a "secularist" stance.[108] Then, to counterbalance my comment, she evokes what she thinks is its "opposite." The laughter is emblematic of both their pride in their own identity and their cynicism toward the idea that it is only a naïve outsider like me who can think that Russian classics rather than Islamist poets like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek could be more relevant to the sociocultural imaginations of religious students.

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[108] It is important to note that the connotations of Russian/Russia are precarious in Turkey because of the legacy of the Cold War. Not only among the religious groups, but also in broader society, the term "Russia" invokes negative sentiments due to its association with communism. "Russian" is a curse word in most of Turkey; and Russians are seen as "communists," "atheists," and potential invaders. My comment, therefore, might have also inadvertently invoked all these images.

*political sensibilities*

The third domain I want to analyze is the formation and reproduction of political

sensibilities. In most cases, the conservative social and cultural sensibilities among Imam-Hatip

students are translated more or less faithfully into political ones. The most conspicuous site to

observe these inclinations is that of electoral preference. During my fieldwork, I did not

encounter a single person who liked or planned to vote for center left, right-wing Kemalist,

socialist, or nationalist left parties.[109] In fact, all the students, teachers, and parents I came to

know supported religious/conservative parties.[110] But party preferences are inadequate by

themselves to understand the formation and reproduction of political sensibilities. Therefore, I

focus here on actual narrations of students, which capture better the thought process and

formation of political visions. Below, I draw from a long conversation I had with two eighteen-

year-old male students, whose views echo those widely shared among other members of this

community.

Furkan and Edip were senior students with a profound interest in politics. Furkan

belonged to the Halveti *tarikat* and always wore traditional *tarikat* attire for men including baggy

pants (*şalvar*), long traditional robes (*cübbe*), and thick round skullcups (*takke*) outside of

school. He studied in an illegal madrasa for three years between elementary and junior high

school and worked in various mosques around Nesimiye as a substitute imam during summer

recess. He regularly gave sohbets in his neighborhood and toured Anatolia during summers to

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[109] There is some recent work on Imam-Hatips that challenges the idea of pedagogic-political
determinism; the idea that every graduate of the school turns out to be politically conservative and
religious, especially in terms of voting preferences. See for example Özgür (2012). Although I agree that
the relationship between education and political preference should be seen as one of correlation rather
than linear causation, I'm inclined to believe (and my fieldwork suggests) that negative cases (receiving
conservative education and following left/liberal politics) prove an exception rather than the rule. In the
great majority of cases, the values students are socialized into translate into (conservative) values they
either already posses or come to follow later in their political choices.
[110] These include the Felicity Party (the former Welfare Party), and the Justice and Development Party
(AKP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the Great Unity Party (BBP).

invite non-Muslims to Islam (he claimed to have already converted 8 Jews and 12 Christians). He wanted to become an imam after graduation. Edip was formerly a member of the Yazıcılar branch of the Nur cemaat, where he learned to write in the Ottoman script and produced hand-written copies of Said-i Nursi's book Epistles of Light (*Risale-i Nur*). He later joined another offshoot of the Nur cemaat, the Gülen group, having received material support from them. He stayed in their dormitories for a small fee and planned to study Islamic sciences at a university in Saudi Arabia with the financial support of the Gülen group. I had several conversations with the two of them both inside and outside of school. In one conversation, they explained to me their ideas about religion, history, and politics and their aspirations for an Islamic state and society in Turkey. Their analysis, especially that of Furkan, delineated the religious activists' critique of secular society and their strategy for building an Islamic state and society.

*Edip*:   Republican leaders closed medreses, Sufi convents; made people devotionally/spiritually weak (*manevi olarak zayıf*) and they did this overnight by changing the alphabet (from Ottoman to Latin). I think this was very clever of them. They started from the best domain [literacy, education].
*Furkan*: Now it is our turn.
*A*       : What do you mean "it is our turn"?
*Furkan*: I mean, instead of changing the alphabet we need to change [the state of] ignorance (*bu cahilliği ortadan kaldırmamız lazım*).
*A*       : Can you explain what you mean by "ignorance"?
*Edip*    : He means ignorance of divine guidance.
*Furkan*: For example, five years ago I used to play soccer all the time. After I started going to the mosque and the convent [regularly], I lost my interest in it. I began saying, instead of playing soccer and wasting my time, I should pray and worship instead to collect the benefit [of God's grace].
*A*       : You spoke earlier about changing people. How do you think you can do this?
*Furkan*: It needs to be done without [psychological or physical] pressure but by persuasion (*baskı değil ikna yoluyla olması gerek*). All cemaats are in fact doing this, especially through sohbets. If you try to do this through the state, people will feel a psychological pressure on them. When the state is conquered, it has to force people to wear the veil, go to convents; close down theater houses and football stadiums (d*evlet ele geçirildiği zaman kapanacaksınız, dergâhlara gideceksiniz, tiyatroları, futbol sahalarını kapatacaksınız denilir*). And this will create resistance [on the part of people]. Instead, we need to create a perception over people (*insanların üzerinde bir algı yaratmak lazım*). I believe this is a better strategy. With the changing of the people, the state will eventually have to change, because whatever inclination a people has, the state has to follow in that direction (*millet nasıl bir yönelim içerisinde ise devlet de o tarafa yönelmek zorundadır*).
*Furkan*: Look for example at the Republican founders. They conquered the state but it was not enough. They had to conquer the people too, because they were afraid the old system would return. Therefore, they had to change people's mindset (*düşünceyi değiştirmemiz lazım dediler*). How did they do that? They established a new education system that can change the people

(*milleti değiştirecek eğitim sistemini kurdular*). Creating a new perception happens through education. We need to start constructing the building from the bottom.

*A*    : What does "the building" in your sentence refer to?

*Furkan*: It refers to God (*Hak*) and Shari'a (rules of God). It means we educate children, lay the infrastructure, and prepare the environment. Then Islam will come.

This excerpt, from a conversation with Edip and Furkan that lasted several hours, reveals various elements of students' political orientations as well as the reproduction of the central tenets of the tebliğ movement. Both Edip and Furkan are deeply disappointed by the current condition of secular Turkish society, which they describe with a Qur'anic term, "*cahiliye.*" *Cahiliye* refers to pre-Islamic Arabian society, which was characterized by ignorance and lack of guidance from God. The term was popularized in the revivalist Islamist thought of Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian activist and ideologue of the Muslim brotherhood, who proposed instituting Shari'a to correct modern societies' turning away from Islam. Edip and Furkan incorporate this political formulation as a way of addressing what they see as the main problem in Turkish society – devotional/spiritual weakness. But note that they use *cahiliye* to characterize the condition of society and the individual. They echo the Islamist activists I discussed in chapter 3, who see the modern individual not only as incognizant of religion but also indulgent in worldly pleasures, whether through playing soccer or going to theater plays. Furkan's own transformation is striking in this sense. Once an avid soccer player, he came to consider it a waste of time after beginning to attend the mosque and the Sufi lodge (*dergah*) regularly. In fact, tarikats put a lot of emphasis on refashioning daily routines or hobbies as an indicator of dedication to religion. They urge individuals to strive to remove all sorts of worldly desires from their heart – including love of soccer – and replace them with the love of God. Recall that this program was symbolically represented in the graduation ceremony of the homeschool, where students demonstrated their changing hobbies after interacting with the "homeschool-o-matic." Furkan's transformation is another example in this regard, attesting to the power of religious organizations (whether an

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Imam-Hatip, a mosque, or a Sufi lodge) in changing personal priorities, ordinary habits, and hobbies.

Another important feature of this conversation is its delineation of the strategy through which Edip and Furkan, like the broader tebliğ movement, aim to transform the state and society into an Islamic one. Note that they do not consider authoritarian policies, propaganda, violence, or agitation as the most viable methods. In fact, in other parts of the conversation, they indicated their disdain for the Saudi and the Iranian state for maintaining stringent regimes that force people to adopt Islamic life styles. Instead, they see education, broadly defined, as the most powerful tool for creating a new common sense, or in the words of Furkan, "a new perception." According to them, the founding fathers of Turkey conquered the state but quickly realized its inadequacy for transforming society. Therefore, they used one of its critical instruments, education, to structure new conceptions of the self and society, and to enlist popular support behind their conception of an ideal (i.e. secular) political order. According to them, it is now time for Islamists to do the same.

Following the example of Turkey's founding fathers, Furkan underlines the second component of the Islamists' dual strategy: building education sites to cultivate a religious ethos through education. Underlying this strategy is a particular pluralist theory of the relationship between state and society. According to activists', the state is constrained by the moral, ideational, and cultural spirit of individuals in a given society and its various institutions are embodiments of a nation's belief system, cultural values, and social relations. Hence, capturing state power ultimately hinges on capturing the imagination and common sense of the people. If the Islamist movement can get people to adopt a counter-hegemonic common sense, or "change people," this will eventually generate upward pressure to "change the state." These remarks indicate the reproduction of various elements of the political Islamist project by some Imam-

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Hatip students. This is not to suggest that these views articulated by Edip and Furkan are supported by every Imam-Hatip student. However, they do capture the dominant sentiments that I encountered during my time there.

Many students considered themselves lucky to study at an Imam-Hatip instead of a regular high school because of the moral chaos there; those at the English conversation class who liked reading Kısakürek rather than Russian classics; and those who wanted to institute Shari'a and an Islamic state in Turkey together provide some clues about the characteristics of the ideal Muslim youth, or the "pious generation" Islamists aimed to create over the years. How they tried to do it is the topic of the next section.

## Cultivating the ideal youth: leadership, morality, and body

The tebliğ movement took upon itself the task of rearing new generations of religious youth imbued with alternative sources of socialization and religious knowledge. As discussed earlier, Imam-Hatips became one of the primary sites through which this program was put into action.[111] If the proximate reason for opening Imam-Hatips was to teach religion to future generations, they ultimately became venues to train an ideal youth to restore the religiously-learned to their rightful position of influence, not only in religious but also in social and political matters. Since the 1980 coup, this Islamist program has rested on a three-pronged approach: creating custodians, restoring morality, and disciplining behavior. In what follows, I will analyze this program through the example of Nesimiye Imam-Hatip.

*Practitioners, leaders, custodians*

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[111] This program was also extensively carried out in informal sites, which I discuss in chapter 5.

The first pedagogic strategy of the tebliğ movement has been to make teenagers custodians of religious knowledge. According to the pedagogic movement the young are potential practitioners, leaders, and custodians of the Islamist 'cause' who will not only keep alive a marginalized and silenced identity and tradition but also spread it to the people around them, pass it on to future generations, and defend it against potential future assaults. The ideal youth must have a multi-dimensional skill set: As a practitioner, s/he has to know religion better than others; as a leader s/he has to be knowledgeable about society and politics; as a custodian s/he needs to preserve and teach Islamic knowledge to others, through what is known as "service," or *hizmet* (more on this below). Imam-Hatips are ideal places to cultivate these skills. For example, one day in a Qur'an class I observed students practicing reading some Qur'anic verses. The verses stated the importance of patience and prayer in the face of hardship (Bakara sûre, verses 153-56). The teacher explained that praying was the best antidote for pain, especially for the pain of losing a loved one, but that people don't always take this attitude. The teacher explained that instead of seeing this life as a test for the other world and bearing pain without complaint (*sabırlı olmak*), they revolt against God (*Allah'a isyan etmek*).[112] Carrying on despite hardship (*sabır*) is an elevated virtue in Islam. The idea is closely associated with the belief in God's grace to predetermine events (*kader*), which is beyond the comprehension of human reason, and should therefore remain unquestioned. He urged students to learn the Qur'an well, so that they can guide others to adopt the correct—religiously informed—attitude in the face of hardship. The teacher continued, "Yes, you have to know how to do the ritual prayer (*namaz*) correctly. Because other people are not Imam-Hatip graduates like you, they may do it wrong.

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[112] The particular verses he talked about read as: "O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient…..And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah , and indeed to Him we will return."" (Bakara sûresi, verses 153, 155, 156)

However, they will look up to you and emulate you in performing the ritual prayer accurately…But more importantly, an imam is not just a person who leads the community in ritual prayer. An imam – a male or female – is a person who leads society, helps them gain the right perspective. We will guide people in society. This is what it means to be an Imam-Hatip graduate. Being an imam is not just an institutional profession. Rather, men and women must be imams of society."

In this short pedagogic lesson, the teacher lays out the dual qualities Imam-Hatip students should have: First, they should be exemplary practitioners of religion (i.e. doing ritual prayer correctly), and second, they should be leaders of society (i.e. guiding others on proper thought and action). The leadership of an imam has significant historical precedents not only during the Ottoman Empire (to which I alluded in the first chapter), but also in the broader Muslim world. In the absence of an institutionalized clergy, as found in Christianity, the religiously-learned have traditionally acted as both clerical and communal leaders in Muslim societies (Hefner 2006: 5). The teacher is evoking this long tradition (and connecting his students to it)—a tradition in which an imam is both the perfect example for the faithful and the opinion-shaper of the community. It is also significant that the teacher rejects a gendered depiction of the imam. He extends the duty of teaching religion and guiding people along Islamic virtues to both men and women. In this way, he also responds to a common critique against Imam-Hatip schools: 'if women cannot be imams, why do they enroll so many girls ?' According to the teacher, the imamate cannot be reduced to a narrowly conceived vocation, which has a role only in a mosque. Rather, he argues it is a social responsibility both pious men and women must undertake for broader social reasons. Moreover, note that this pedagogic articulation challenges the secularist imagery of the modern youth. While the teacher's conception urges the leadership of the religiously learned, the secularist project has long aimed to achieve the opposite: removing the

influence of religiously learned (i.e. ulema) over how people should think and act. This lesson also echoes the dominant sentiments at the graduation ceremony of those that had memorized the Qur'an that I analyzed in chapter 3. There as well, exemplary practitioners of religion were at the same time portrayed as leaders of society.

This clerical/communal leadership role, furthermore, can over time be translated into political leadership. In Turkey, Imam-Hatip schools have been the target of considerable suspicion for nurturing politically motivated students. Indeed it is no secret that the schools have been hotbeds of religio-political activism, providing cadres to Islamist political movements and parties over the decades. The cadres of the National Outlook movement and the Welfare Party as well as the top leadership of the AKP are all Imam-Hatip graduates. Although politics is seldom, if ever, an object of discussion in Imam-Hatips, the nature of education certainly shapes the political sensibilities of students.

In Imam-Hatips, as in the Ottoman educational philosophy, being versed in the Qur'an is understood to be a measure of literacy and enlightenment, and religious proficiency is a necessary quality for occupying positions of management. The complex relationship between religious education and political leadership is exemplified in an exchange among three teachers from Nesimiye. The setting for this exchange is the teachers lounge. While I was talking to a teacher waiting for his next scheduled class, two others joined the conversation. The first and second teacher in the conversation belong to the National Outlook tradition, the third one, although he considers himself independent, has some connection to the Erenköy cemaat.

*Kazım*  : For me, if religion does not shape my life, does not intervene and organize social relations, it should not be considered as religion. A Muslim must solve the problems of society. Can a [religiously] ignorant, unlearned person (*ilimsiz insan*) produce solutions [for society]?  Islamic scholars describe a[n ideal] Muslim as a bird. One of his wings carries the knowledge of the material world, and the other carries knowledge of Islamic sciences. Therefore, in Imam-Hatips we teach both.
*Hamid*  : Ottoman education taught religion to children, filled their hearts with religion. Religiously trained youth measure all their behavior according to that which is prohibited and permitted (*haram ve helal*). For example, before 1980 there was anarchy in Turkey. Young people joined

political groups, but those who studied at Qur'anic seminaries or Imam-Hatips were never involved in anarchy. Did anyone receive harm from the religiously trained youth?

*Neşet* : No they did not. It is not more than a slight exaggeration to say that others [the religiously untrained] become glue-sniffers (*tinerci*). [113]

*Kazım* : But if you give excessive religious education, they can be radicalized and become terrorists [referring to al-Qaeda type of groups].

*Neşet* : Exactly! If there were no Imam-Hatips, children could have easily fallen into the trap of radical groups. Here we give proper religious education.

*A* : Do your graduates join political movements?

*Neşet* : Of course. This is part of the [schools'] purpose (*tabi biraz da amaç o*). Our graduates will shape society (*toplumu şekillendirecek*).

*Hamid* : Look at all the mayors, governors [and national politicians] around us; they are all Imam-Hatip graduates.

*Kazım* : Yes, transforming society, if necessary, can be through politics.

This exchange complements the views of the Qur'an teacher I cited above on the leadership of the Imam-Hatip graduate in society. In this formulation, in addition to his clerical/communal role, an Imam-Hatip graduate is assigned a political responsibility – formulating solutions and administering policies with the intention of transforming society for the better. By providing a double training in worldly and other-worldly matters, the school produces ideal Muslims out of Imam-Hatip students. They acquire the necessary competency to be not only clerical but also political leaders.

A key property of religious education shared by most pedagogic movement participants and represented in the teacher's exchange above, is that it provides both a disciplinary program and a leadership program. According to this view, religious education is disciplinary because it instills internal limits within people who otherwise lack an ability to know what is right and wrong and get attracted to disorder (i.e. join street politics) or drug addiction (i.e. become glue-

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[113] In this sentence, the teacher is echoing a recent speech by prime minister Erdoğan, in which he suggested that the purpose of his government was to raise a religious generation (*dindar gençlik*). In response to his critiques, Erdoğan made a categorical distinction between those who are learned and unlearned in religion, depicting the latter as destined to become delinquent because of a lack of religious upbringing (*dini terbiye*). Erdoğan had said in his speech: "if you don't want children to be religious, do you want them to be glue-sniffers?" Later in the speech, he also sarcastically demanded the early Republican regime to give an account of its policy in 1930s: "What did you want from Imam-Hatips? Why did you close them? Did you close these schools because no anarchists emerged from them?" For his full speech, see http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/-dindar-degil-de-tinerci-mi-olsunlar-/siyaset/siyasetdetay/07.02.2012/1498840/default.htm

sniffers). This formulation distinguishes between a vision of the religiously-schooled as measured and restrained and the religiously-unschooled as unruly and impulsive. Such a distinction in return justifies the moral prerogative of the pious to lead and supervise.

Religious education is also leadership training because graduates become agents of religious knowledge who can intervene and organize social relations to help people in this world and also encourage devotion and piety to help save their souls in the other world. A critical issue, however, is the amount of religious education provided: while too much can radicalize the youth, too little can immoralize them. The proper dose, however, as is offered in Imam-Hatips according to these teachers, can create the ideal Muslim capable of shaping and transforming society according to the standards of Islam. As evidence, they point to the fact that the current government in Turkey, both at the local and national level, is staffed by many Imam-Hatip graduates who have been collectively working toward achieving such an agenda.

The ideal youth embodied in the Imam-Hatip student is not only the perfect practitioner of religion and the leader of society, but also the custodian of religious knowledge. Muslims regard teaching religion as a form of earning God's grace in its own right. Passing knowledge on to others is also deemed important for preserving the authenticity of Qur'anic edicts and preventing incorrect practice or interpretation. For these reasons, conveying religious knowledge to others is understood to be incumbent upon those who study it intensively and learn it well, like Imam-Hatip students. The contemporary pedagogic movement combined these duties in a concrete program called "service," or *hizmet*, to society and to God.[114] The word denotes voluntary dedication to transmitting religious knowledge to others and more broadly aiding

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[114] Some religious groups, foremost Gülenists, appropriated the term *hizmet* to distinguish themselves from other Islamist activists, for example, by calling themselves the *Hizmet Movement*. However, all religious groups use the term as a general label to refer to activities geared toward spreading religion. In this context, I use the term *hizmet* as a generic term popular among all Islamist groups, not only a prerogative of Gülenists, to refer to piety activities.

organized religious groups in their efforts to realize this goal. This is understood to be a service to society, because it enlightens fellow Muslims about their salvation; this is a service to God because it spreads his word with the goal of pleasing him. Islamic education in Imam-Hatips, by its very nature, puts emphasis not only on learning but teaching religion to others.

The desire for service is in fact very popular and common among Imam-Hatip students both discursively and practically. Most students take it as their duty to teach religion to others; this is what it means to be custodian of religion. But the way service is performed may vary. For some students, service is a calling that requires professional commitment; for others it is an extra-curricular activity that can go hand-in-hand with a full-time job. Remarks by two classmates at the Imam-Hatip on their future plans illustrate the self-ascribed duty to perform "service" among the younger segments of the Islamic community and the different ways this can be done. Ayten, a reserved and quiet eleventh grade student, told me that after much soul-searching she decided to dedicate her life completely to teaching Islam: "I initially thought about going to medical school. However, only after studying in an Imam-Hatip did I fully decide what I should do. I have to walk in this path [of Islam]. Imam-Hatip education is good but not enough, so I need to further my training in Qur'an memorization and Arabic in a madrasa. I am planning to study theology through distance learning [to avoid a gender-mixed university environment] and then I will take the oral examination of Diyanet. After I immerse myself deeply in Islamic sciences, I will teach it to others, and make them more conscious [about religion] (*insanları bilinçlendirmeyi istiyorum*). I also want to encourage Christians and Jews to join Islam. Some of them are searching. I can help them. Showing people the truth is my duty."

Ayten's close friend Beren, who is more outgoing and confident, differs in the way she wants to serve Islam. In the same conversation, she told me the following: "I have been contemplating my future a lot recently. On the one hand, I like to be social. On the other hand, I

want to be on the path of God. For example, I would like to study interior architecture. However, in this profession you work very closely with men. I am concerned about being able to carry out both tasks, even though I am very confident in myself. I am thinking about familiarizing the ignorant [non-practicing Muslims] with Islam. There are many Muslims, but they are not acquainted with Islam properly. And there are those who do not know it at all [non-Muslims]. I want to spread Islam very much (*İslamiyet'i yaymayı çok istiyorum*)."

These statements indicate similar passions to train others through "service" (*hizmet*), albeit in different ways. For Ayten, transmitting religious knowledge requires advanced study of religion beyond a narrow high school education. Her sentiments point to the substantial time she spent thinking and coming up with a plan to deepen her own knowledge and to identify target groups she will eventually reach out to. According to her, this "duty" has to be a full-time commitment. For Beren, on the other hand, teaching religion can be combined with a regular profession. This however creates some anxiety for her as it requires being able to balance her desire to have a career, which requires her to 'be social,' meaning to be in close proximity to the opposite sex, with her commitment to be on 'the path of God', which she understands to include female seclusion and unmixing with men. Compared to her friend, Ayten is less clear about how she will go about teaching religion even though she knows she wants it to be a part of her life.

Service is not only a discursive commitment but also an active practice. Many students I talked to perform service through their work in different cemaats. For example, some work in the Gülen movement taking the duty of, what they call, an "older brother" (*Ağabey*), a metaphorical role adopted from the Turkish family, where a mature and learned person leads younger and less experienced ones just like in a traditional family an older brother – due to his age and experience – is expected to guide and supervise his younger sibling(s). As an *Ağabey*, the student gives sohbets to younger followers, meets regularly with his peers to plan future sohbets, participates

in various meetings, and goes to his own *Ağabey's* sohbet. Other students carry out service, for

example, in the Erenköy or Menzil cemaats by teaching in cemaat-run courses. These are

generally Qur'an courses organized in various cemaat-sympathetic mosques on the weekends.

Although some students may be paid in the form of pocket money, most are volunteers who do it

free of charge. Whether discursively or in practice, the important point is in all of these instances

students take on the responsibility of being custodians of Islamic knowledge by passing it onto

future generations. They claim a self-assigned duty not only to learn but also preserve and teach

religion to others.

*Mind-body matrix*

The second and third pedagogic strategies of the tebliğ movement to create an ideal

Muslim youth are to reform their moral character and discipline their behavior. I will analyze

these two strategies together because, as activists persistently emphasize, realizing the former

ultimately hinges on accomplishing the latter. According to members of the pedagogic

movement, moral reform of the youth is only possible on the basis of a disciplinary training of

the self. Such training targets modification of the mind, as well as behavior, to align thought and

action with the Islamic standards of appropriateness. Imam-Hatips represent one of the key

institutional sites in which religious morality through disciplinary training is established. To this

end, religious knowledge is used in discreet ways to transform students' bodily behavior by

teaching alternative norms of demeanor and appearance in areas including hygiene (i.e. ritual

ablution), organization of time (i.e. ritual prayer), dress (i.e. veiling), and gender interaction (i.e.

non-mixing). Among these, I will focus on two examples within the case of Nesimiye – ritual

prayer (*namaz*) and veiling (*tesettür*) – which are the most profound and consequential acts for

altering character and behavior, mind and body, through a disciplinary regimen.

In Nesimiye, there is a general conviction among teachers that young people lack proper moral character and ethical habits. Echoing the broader pedagogic movement, teachers explain the alarming spread of immorality by the absence of *maneviyat*, or the fear and love of God among young people. Their solution to the problem is to institute a devotional regimen that alters existing behaviors and introduces new ones into students' daily routine. I will demonstrate these beliefs and strategies through two ethnographic accounts. The first centers on a series of conversations that took place in the teacher's lounge between different groups of teachers on the importance of ritual prayer. The second focuses on a sohbet delivered by a student at school on the issue of proper attire for Muslim women.

When I visited school for the first time after winter break, I encountered two unusual practices. New loudspeakers were placed in student dining halls, as well as corridors, and a group of male students were assigned to recite the call to prayer everyday. The Muslim call to prayer (*ezan*) is called out five times a day, two of which (noon and afternoon calls) fall within school hours. It was those two calls to prayer that students started reading everyday.[115] Moreover, the calls were broadcast at a discomfortingly high decibel, forcing people to take notice and stop their conversations. This new practice was not only unprecedented in its effort to turn students into surrogate imams, and the entire school into an extension of a mosque, but also in its aim to encourage everyone, especially students, to do the ritual prayer by creating an environment of pressure with the aid of an attention-grabbing broadcast.

The second noteworthy practice was the advertisement of the prophet's *hadis* through the plasma screen TVs hung in every floor, originally used for administrative announcements. Among his many sayings, however, the school focused on transmitting those concerning the importance of ritual prayer: "Certainly, between the believer and the profane is the abandonment

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[115] Traditionally, students at Nesimiye never read calls to prayer but they had volunteered to deliver the Friday sermon as a practice for future vocational jobs.

of the ritual prayer" or "The most virtuous deed is the ritual prayer performed at the appointed time."[116] Since all the TVs were centrally placed, these new announcements could not go unnoticed. The sayings reminded passersby of the virtues of ritual prayer, and, like the calls, they were aimed at encouraging prayer. I was struck by these overt messages to place prayer at the center of students' daily life and decided to ask several teachers what had happened since the semester began. In the following few pages, I provide an account of several conversations between teachers and myself. These discussions highlight the practical as well as the doctrinal rationale behind the common view that prayer is a solution to perceived problems in life that range from academic incompetency and moral deficiency to a lack of work ethic and a failure to fulfill daily tasks. The first conversation begins with a young Arabic teacher, in her late twenties, who is explaining to me the background of the effort to encourage prayer as it first came up in a teachers meeting: "The main topic of the last teachers meeting was students' weak academic record. We talked about why students had scored so low on their practice tests in preparation for the nationwide university entrance exams (*YGS*). Some teachers suggested that students are unsuccessful because their *maneviyat* is weak. In order to solve this problem, they suggested taking active measures to make students acquire the habit of ritual praying (*namaz alışkanlığı kazandırılmalı*). We decided to assign one teacher to every grade, who will lecture students on the merits of ritual prayer periodically, invite them to go up to the *mescit* [to pray] together, and identify appropriate [male] students to recite the call to prayer."

At first, I was unable to make sense of the link the Arabic teacher made between academic success and students not praying. Sensing my confusion, she explained further, "you know, students are pretty unmotivated, and some lack [religiously driven] ethical norms

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[116] The *Hadis* read in Turkish as: "*Muhakkak ki, kişi ile şirk ve küfür arasında namazın terki vardır*" and "*En faziletli amel, vaktinde kılınan namazdır*"

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*(ahlaktan yoksunlar)*. [Teachers] lament this fact and we thought the best way to solve the problem would be to make students adopt ritual prayer as a more regular habit." In addition to using prayer to address students' academic shortcomings, the young teacher was now suggesting to use it to restore moral character. I inquired why they thought ritual prayer could alleviate these seemingly unrelated problems. She paused for a second to collect her thoughts, and went on: "first of all, the Qur'an talks about ritual prayer a lot. Religion is, in fact, built upon ritual prayer. Moreover, ritual prayer structures an individual's perception of time in their daily life. Most importantly, by appearing before God [five times] every day, people become habituated to giving an account of their actions. As a result, they stay away from immoral actions."

These observations are significant for demonstrating the interdependent relationship the Arabic teacher establishes between religious obligation, personal character, and human productivity. In this view, the anxiety surrounding the future of students stems not only from students' lack of devotional commitment and ethical conduct but also academic success. This three-fold deficiency justifies intervention into the lives of students, starting with the reorganization of their physical routine and perception of time. According to the teachers, a punctual and disciplined body, which can perform ritual prayer at the appointed time, can undertake other activities that also require repeated and regular practice such as preparing for national exams. Performing the ritual prayer, however, not only has the potential to increase students' academic achievement; it has a second effect: it allows one to learn efficient time use, a skill that is essential to be successful in the modern world. Daily prayer becomes a tool for increasing one's aptitude to allocate time across one's daily activities effectively. This is true both for structuring everyday life to realize God's will as well as for other more mundane tasks. In addition to its positive influence over the material body, ritual prayer is also connected to improvement of the immaterial soul. The Arabic teacher assumes that prayer may encourage

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students to justify their daily actions to an authority higher than themselves, thus generating changes in their moral character. This habitual account-giving is expected to instill *maneviyat* (fear and love of God) if it is absent, and strengthen it if already present but weak, which in turn will help students acquire moral virtues and abstain from immoral conduct.

This matrix of mind-body transformation to encourage piety, morality, and productivity becomes clearer through another conversation in the teachers' lounge. This time I asked a young Islamic jurisprudence teacher in his early thirties and a soft-spoken didactic theology teacher in his mid-forties, both of whom have masters degrees in Islamic sciences, to elaborate further on the efforts to get students to pray more regularly. The jurisprudence teacher began the conversation, "Kids that come to this school do not understand the necessity of work. They lack a work ethic (*çalışma disiplininden yoksunlar*). However, Islam orders work. An individual gains discipline by doing the ritual prayer, and this is reflected in his/her work discipline. The reason for encouraging ritual prayer at school is to ensure that prayer discipline extends to work discipline."

The didactic theology teacher, who was listening to his colleague carefully, picked up where his colleague left off to elaborate further: "We believe that if a student performs regular ritual prayer, they will be morally influenced and their academic success will increase. This is because when individuals fulfill their obligations to God, they earn a sense of responsibility. And this beautiful trait – being responsible – gained through prayer, translates into fulfilling tasks in other fields of life, such as studying. There is an explicit verse in the Qur'an about this: 'ritual prayer keeps you away from wrongdoing.'[117] It is very important to have an awareness of God at all times; it helps us be conscious of our [every] action."

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[117] The teacher is referring to the Ankebût sûre, verse 45. It reads: "Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, [ritual] prayer keeps [one] away from immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows what you do."

This conversation exhibits two key premises of the pedagogic movement on how to create the ideal Muslim youth who will have skills for both virtuous practice and market competition. First of all, the requirement to regularly bring one's self to the presence of God is expected to transfer the individual from a state of indifference to one of cognizance. This is not to say that individuals do not know God at all; rather they do not know how to fulfill God's will in everyday life, because their level of cognizance has been low or nonexistent. Regular communication or "account-giving" through prayer, however, induces in the individual the habit of measuring and assessing one's intention, thought, and action against the standards of religion at all times. This "communication" with God also instills in students a sense of outer control (watchful eyes), which otherwise is lacking. The outcome is an invisible and powerful design of checks that acts spontaneously before any misdemeanor is committed.[118] Overall, the repetition of such practices is anticipated to entrench in one's mind and character a religiously informed morality.[119]

Second, the conversation points to the role of prayer in creating highly valued market qualities – a work ethic and responsibility, which are critical for competing in the modern economy. In this view, prayer does not simply enable the fulfillment of religious obligation or collecting merit with God, but also serves a utilitarian purpose: it makes individuals more productive and competitive. This view renders religious ethic and work ethic mutually constitutive, where the existence of the former becomes a guarantor of the latter. This is because discipline acquired through the regular performance of the sequenced prayer gestures and words is understood to create skills transferable to other fields of life. These skills will in return enable

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[118] The idea is very similar to Foucault's (or Bentham's) Panopticon, the hypothetical architectural structure for surveillance of prisoners, which can simultaneously discipline and reform behavior before any infractions are committed. See Foucault (1995): 201-09.
[119] On the importance of repetitive bodily practice in creating moral dispositions, see Mahmood (2005): 135-39.

students to perform assigned tasks in fields as seemingly unrelated to worship as national exams, college attendance, and workplaces. As such, prayer eliminates the epidemic of sluggishness among modern teenagers and becomes a tool for transforming idle students into pious hard-working adults. It is only normal then that pedagogy would be mobilized – through broadcasting the calls to prayer or the prophet's sayings – to generate this requisite skill set among students. A good work ethic and God's watch will eventually create the disciplined pious teenager, in one word, the ideal Muslim youth. This narrative, moreover, once again confirms that the Imam-Hatip is not conceived solely as a vocational school. It is conceived as a school training religiously guided individuals who can participate in all areas of the economy, including the state, bureaucracy, and business.

Another key field for reforming moral character through disciplining behavior is the instruction of individuals in Islamic standards of dressing. The pedagogic movement does not expect that believers will adopt Islamic dress spontaneously as an extension of their commitment to religion. Rather, they view it as one of the main subjects of pious instruction, and additionally an important means of nurturing the virtue of *maneviyat*. Therefore, the movement places high premium on teaching proper Islamic dress to current and prospective believers. Although there are prescribed rules for men's dressing in Islam, the emphasis is usually put on women's dress because Islamic doctrinal tradition commonly entrusts the protection of a community's morality with the control of female chastity (Mahmood 2005: 110-11). But veiling, popularly understood as covering one's hair, is more than aligning one's explicit appearance with the order of religion. It is also an implicit statement about a "total way of life" that derives its motivation from living up to the standards of God, best accomplished through perfecting one's *maneviyat*. It is no coincidence that as the tebliğ movement broadened its struggle from keeping alive a marginalized identity to enacting a larger sociopolitical transformation, it also strove to modify

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common references to Islamic dress. Over time, the popular term for referring to a pious woman as "*başörtülü*," a woman with a head cover, evolved to "*tesettürlü*," a woman concealing her contours from head to toe (generally with an overcoat), to highlight this renewed commitment to a "total way of life"– both externally and internally. In this vein, *tesettür* became a marker of distinction that claims morally superiority to modern depictions of the (fetishized) female body. It also became a tool of resistance against secularist accusations that women's dressing is a manifestation of domination and unequal gender relations.

A wide range of data from Nesimiye confirms these suppositions. In the rest of the section, I will recount an ethnographic vignette of a class interaction based on a sohbet delivered by a student on the issue of veiling. In providing this piece of data, my aim is also to show the reproduction of the pedagogic movement's goals not only by teachers but also by students. As discussed earlier, a sohbet is an informal lesson in which a religiously-learned person draws from Qur'anic verses, the prophet's sayings, and ethical stories from the prophet and his Companions' lives to improve the knowledge and performance of the audience in the classic trilogy of Islamic theology—faith, worship, and morals. In the classroom context, a sohbet becomes a pedagogic tool for training the sohbet-giver herself (a student), by increasing ability to convey religious knowledge to other students.

A young and conservative theology teacher in her late thirties, Nevin, invited me to one of her tenth grade classes to listen to a popular exercise students conduct every week. Early in the week Nevin assigns a topic to a student, who prepares to deliver an in-class sohbet on Friday afternoons – the holy day for Muslims. This week's topic is on veiling. The sohbet starts with the presenter introducing the topic while standing in front of the class with a piece of white paper in her hand. The sohbet proceeds in a highly energetic and spontaneous atmosphere. Both Nevin and the students interrupt the presenter to bring in alternative scenarios, offer their own

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viewpoints, or discuss historical or contemporary applications from other societies. In my account, however, I will focus mainly on the presenter's speech and Nevin's insertions to clarify or elaborate on her points. The presenter starts by criticizing a series of extensively cited arguments that women's dressing is a tool for oppression. To convince the audience through an alternative explanation, she draws from a popular motif among Islamists:

> We sometimes hear that modest dress is only ordered for women [indicating Islam's unegalitarianism toward genders]. Or they say "Muslim [men] cover up women's beauty" [implying that men oppress women]. These are very wrong arguments. Our beauty is like a jewel. A beautiful jewel is always put in a jewelry box for protection. Our veil is like that box. The purpose of this practice is to protect us from dangerous looks [with sexual intentions] (*kötü bakışlardan korumak*). I want to read a Qur'anic verse [on veiling] to make it stay with you better: 'Tell the believing women to cast down their looks and guard their chastity, and not to display their ornaments except what is visible (hands, face and feet), and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosom….And let them not stamp their feet to make known their ornaments' (Nûr sûresi, verse 31). This verse is self-evident, but let me explain to you what it means to say 'let them not stamp their feet.' The verse is ordering that it is not enough to cover from head to toe. Women also have to make every effort not to attract notice. For example, we should watch how we walk on the street, we should be careful not to make noise [by stamping our feet], and arouse [the sexual of feelings of] others [i.e. men]. Covering is a religious obligation (*farz*) upon every believer (*mü'min*). Allah did not leave it up to our decision to cover or not or the style of how to cover.

When the student pauses for a second, Nevin chimes in:

> In the past [in Anatolia], women used to wear anklets [with sonorous bells attached] (*hal hal*) to make noise as they walked and make their "ornaments known" [saying this un-approvingly]. Today women wear pumps and high heels [to attract notice]. As a woman, even I turn around and look. We should not draw attention [of others, especially men] by wearing [noise-making] shoes or putting on too much perfume. If our shoes make noise, how are we going to live according to the provision of this verse? We need to go to a cobbler and get him to hammer a rubber scrap on the heel. This way we forestall the attention of others if our shoes make noise.

I would like to highlight two features of this initial excerpt that are illustrative of the general tendencies within the pedagogic movement. The first is the juxtaposition of competing historical discourses on body and gender relations to establish the truth and superiority of Islamic practice. It is important that the student starts her sohbet by debunking secularist arguments, which understand the veil as an instrument used to reach at something (i.e. dominating women) other than protecting the body. According to the student, such anti-Islamic views present the veil as a tool for controlling women's sexuality and maintaining man's domination over women, hence as

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a tool to perpetuate patriarchal gender relations. However, these views cannot comprehend the historical and moral significance of the tradition of veiling, which not only serves women but also the rest of society. Implicit in the student's critique is a comparison of two "discursive traditions" (Asad 1986) – secular and religious – each with their distinct understandings of the normal, permissible, and uncontestable. The Islamic discursive tradition rests on canonical texts (Qur'an, *Hadis*), which instruct distinct bodily and cultural orientations; the followers of this tradition are expected to reproduce these orientations through their own lives (see also Mahmood 2005: 115). This tradition entrusts the protection of women to men as ordered by God; perceives women to be the main agent of sexual provocation; and therefore confers responsibility on women for keeping their attractive qualities out of sight.[120] Secular discursive tradition, on the other hand, rests on the canonical texts of liberal humanism and enlightenment; asserts the unique agency of both men and women; and rejects practices of "entrusting" or "covering" women as instruments of female subjugation (also see Asad 2003). According to the student, it is the former tradition that is morally superior and that a pious Muslim woman should follow. Note that the student does not perceive the status of women in Islam to be one of inferiority. On the contrary, she relies on a popular allegory among Islamists to reassert her superiority – women are like precious jewelry. Yet, this esteemed status does not lend itself to an agentic capacity to decide the best way to present one's own body in public. This is exemplified in her words, "Allah did not leave it up to our decision to cover or not, or the style of how to cover." Rather, it is the discursive tradition of Islam that ultimately establishes the *correct* practice and condemns

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[120] One of the most cited sources of "entrusting women to men" is the the Last Sermon of the Prophet. In his sermon, the prophet states: "Remember that you have taken them [women] as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission (*Siz kadınları, Allah'ın emaneti olarak aldınız ve onların namusunu Allah'ın emriyle helal kıldınız*)…..And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste." For women as agents of sexual provocation see, Mahmood (2005:106–13). For the responsibility to cover see, Qur'an Nisa sûresi, verse 31 (Qur'an 24:31).

*incorrect* ones (Asad 1984: 15) by appealing to authoritative texts. The student demonstrates this idea by citing a well-known verse from the Qur'an. As such, she anchors her defense of veiling in this distinctive discursive tradition that understands male protection and female seclusion – rather than female autonomy and gender equality – to be the precondition of a virtuous society.

The second crucial aspect of this exchange is its emphasis on the conundrums of achieving the virtue of modesty in society. Like the broader pedagogic movement, both the student and Nevin perceive covering as a total way of life that cannot be confined to outer appearance (for example, when the student says 'it is not enough to cover from head to toe.'). Covering must also encourage consistent monitoring of one's intentions and demeanor to fulfill Islamic modesty, and by extension gain God's favor. According to Nevin, however, women lose sight of this dictate due to fads in society. If in the past it was wearing anklets, today it is wearing pumps or perfume that take women off the path of piety. Especially modern society's dominant trend of women being present in public creates challenges to pursuing Islamic propriety. In modern secular Turkish society, it is acceptable, even desirable, to walk or dress in ways that highlight one's sexuality rather than one's modesty. In order to reverse this trend, Nevin offers creative solutions for women such as hammering noise-muffling rubber scraps on their heels or reducing the amount of perfume they use, in addition to following Qur'anic verses on how to dress. In the student's and Nevin's perception – as in the rest of the pedagogic moment more broadly – veiling is not only an Islamic style of dress, but an important means of transforming one's mind and body to become more devout. Even as elementary an activity as walking, therefore, becomes a crucial arena for demonstrating one's commitment to modesty and piety.

If the first aim of Islamic pedagogy is persuasion by establishing the authority of religious tradition, the second is correction by way of reviewing incorrect forms of conduct. In

the next segment of the sohbet, the student – and Nevin – lay out the erroneous practices of

covering in order to teach its principles:

> We have to follow the standards of covering. Both men and women have to cover their [body] parts [as] ordered in the verse. Ok, we know that we have to cover to obey God's order. But in some regions and villages [of Turkey], girls cover to obey customs and traditions. This is because they are not conscious that this is a religious obligation (*farz*), a command of God. Their practice is wrong. And then there are those who cover because they think they look pretty in a veil, and match it with eccentrically patterned, eye catching dresses [or overcoats]. Again they do this, because they don't know God's order. We have to dress according to his order. We should not tarnish our true intention (*niyetimizi bozmamalıyız*). We need to do this only with the intention of getting his blessings (*Allah rızası için kapanmalıyız*).

Nevin interrupts the presenter once again for clarification:

> In the past, our mothers (and grandmothers) were not conscious enough (*eskiden annelerimiz çok bilinçli değildi*). They used to wrap their hair loosely [often with a thin head cover made out of cotton, known as *tülbent*], tying the ends at the top of the head. This would leave both sides of the hair [above the ears] and the neck exposed. But later they learned that this was wrong, they understood 'I can't cover in the way of my own choosing,' and that there is a standard form one needs to follow. [The rule is] you won't show any hair, you won't show the silhouette of the hair [by wearing transparent veil], you will wrap thoroughly [to hide the neck] (*Saç gösterilmeyecek, içi gösterilmeyecek, düzenli bir şekilde bağlanacak*). So the point is, first we cover for the blessing of God (*Önce Allah'ın rızası için örtüneceğiz*), then we need to meet the conditions properly [to gain the promised blessing] (*Sonra gerekli şartları yerine getireceğiz*).

These critiques of customary practices offered by the student and Nevin outline a key distinction

between a notion of covering as a cultural/aesthetic habit and covering as a pious act. This

distinction lies at the heart of the pedagogic program and is widely used in various other

pedagogic settings. According to the critique, covering simply out of custom or aesthetic concern

is detrimental to achieving devoutness in one's life. This is because when people cover, they take

tradition or beauty rather than divine order as a point of motivation. However, covering has to be

an integral part of devotional practice in order to perfect one's *maneviyat*. Covering that is

uninformed by this purpose reproduces a cultural practice but does not improve one's capacity to

love and obey God. It is important to note that both the student and Nevin see these wrong

practices as a result of people's ignorance rather than, let's say, defiance. By ignorance, they

mean lack of religious training in pious conduct. Implicit in their lesson is the idea that

instructive practices, such as the one offered in this classroom, will help individuals move from a position of ignorance to one of cognizance. Nevin elaborates this idea further in her insertion. According to her, all who came before her generation – mothers and grandmothers – were lax in performing religious obligation; they left part of their hair uncovered or their neck visible. This is because they lacked the correct understanding or training in religious conduct. At a deeper level, Nevin's retrospective critique exemplifies the changing course of religious pedagogy and Islamists' struggle in the new republic. I argued earlier that the movement at its incipient stages was concerned with the survival of a precarious identity, rather than its formulaic practice. However, as Islamists were able to broaden their struggle to enact a sociocultural transformation of society, they began to impose a stringent program of religious practice and a vision of Islam that marked prior customary practices as erroneous; modified popular understandings of pious dress; and created more "correct" forms of conduct. This is precisely where a renewed emphasis on the pedagogic training of Muslims came in. Nevin herself is a product of this training. And unsurprisingly, she celebrates the transformation of her own mother, who in her words "learned that this [her style] was wrong and that there is a standard form [of covering] one needs to follow."

In addition to instructing students on the proper religious motivation to covering, this sohbet helps them perfect the correct style of covering, as propagated by the movement. This is exemplified in the extra diligence Nevin employs to show students the requirements of covering. These include: 1) wrapping the veil tightly around their face so that not a single hair is shown, 2) avoiding veils made of thin fabric to prevent the shape of hair from being visible, and 3) hiding the neck completely with the loose ends of the veil. Certainly these instructions were not created by Nevin, but borrowed from the tebliğ movement. Yet, her systematic, step-by-step directions show the extent of the movement's success in transforming an unselfconscious religio-cultural

practice with a variety of applications (as in Anatolia) into a stable, standardized, formulaic

praxis that can be disseminated in curricular modules like this one.

Since modest Islamic dress is not confined solely to covering one's hair, but the entire

body (except hand, feet, and face) as I discussed above, the presenter comes back to instruct

fellow students in further prohibitions: "Other things we should not wear are pantyhose – no

matter how thick they are, they show the contours of our legs; pants for the same reason

[showing the contours of the hips and legs]; and transparent, tight dresses that reveal bodylines.

These are all prohibited (*haram*) and our prophet has specific instructions against them."[121] With

these remarks the student ends her sohbet, and Nevin wraps up the topic in her usual didactic

tone with two further remarks to ensure the message is fully understood:

> Girls, imagine this as if you are taking the national university exam (YGS). You will be tested in math, chemistry, physics, Turkish, etc. If you can score above a certain mark, you will pass the test [and be placed in a college]; if you score below a certain mark, you will fail. In the same way, God will look at [the proper conduct of] your ritual prayer, fasting, dressing and will assign you positive or negative points. If the positive points outweigh the negative ones on the "scale of deeds" [a Qur'anic concept] (*amel terazisi*), you will go to heaven; if the negative points outweigh the positive points, you will go to hell. All in all, God orders women to cover not to put them through hardship. On the contrary, he wants them to be in public. But he wants them to take their righteous place in society with their personality rather than their sexuality (*Allah kadınların toplumdaki yerini dişiliği ile değil kişiliği ile almasını istiyor*).

These final comments are important because they echo the views of the tebliğ movement on the

issues of women's access to education and public life. Nevin is not advising students to stay at

home or not get educated in order to live according to the standards of Islam. On the contrary,

she suggests they think about the entire system of Islamic practices in terms of a university

exam, attesting to the centrality of university attendance in their life and its necessity in today's

society for upward mobility. But in using this powerful analogy, she implicitly reminds students

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[121] The student is referring to two *Hadis* of the Prophet as his "instructions." The first one is an order against inappropriately (transparently or tightly) dressed women: "…There are those dressed but [still] naked women (*giyinmiş çıplaklar*). They lead others astray…They will not get the smell of heaven, let alone enter it." The second one concerns not wearing pants: "Those women who try to look like men, those men who try to look like women are not from us."

that no action can be detached from the requirements of religion. Women can attain a position in public, yet only on the condition of concealing their sexuality and by displaying the standard measures of Islamic modesty. With the possible exception of some orthodox Sufi groups, one can argue that such a formulation fits with the general discourse of the tebliğ movement well. All in all, like ritual prayer, appropriate Islamic dress is believed to reform one's moral character. This is because through such disciplined behavior, the pedagogic movement aims to create a stronger Islamic subjectivity and a generation of exemplary Muslim youth out of Imam-Hatip students.

## Conclusion

Imam-Hatip schools have been at the center of much political contestation throughout Republican history. In this chapter, I have argued that an ethnography of an Imam-Hatip can provide a rich account of the political struggles that are waged and the pedagogic projects that are devised. I also tried to demonstrate that Imam-Hatips are critical institutions for observing the central aspects of the broader tebliğ movement within formal religious education. In this sense, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Imam-Hatips constitute an integral part of the tebliğ movement, and that they reproduce key tendencies, discourses, and practices of the movement. This finding should come as no surprise given the organic connections between the schools and the broader field of religious actors. However, it is still important to demonstrate the consequences of these processes for Islamic mobilization in particular and Islamization of society in general. Schools' integral position within the Islamist movement is critical not only because students supply cadres of legitimate activists, but also because they reproduce the spirit of the movement. This spirit is important for keeping Islamic activism alive. In terms of the Islamization of society, the role of schools is significant because of their position as the main

formal agents of knowledge transmission. I demonstrated that this knowledge is not contained within the bounds of school itself, but ideally, is also communicated to others. This is reflected well, for example, in the efforts of students to undertake "service" and be custodians of religion.

In addition to the changing role of *Imam-Hatip* schools, the post-1980 period also witnessed an extraordinary increase in informal religious education sites in Turkey. Public religious education provided the much-needed legitimacy to Islamists, but by the standards of religious activists, it remained too limited. Therefore, without openly challenging the public school system, activists quietly began developing an alternative subterranean world of intense religious education. A renewed emphasis on religious education within alternative sites has been central to the efforts of Islamist groups to reorganize everyday life along Islamic lines. It is to these sites that I turn my attention in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 4:

## SEMI-FORMAL AND INFORMAL SITES OF ISLAMIZATION

Although Imam-Hatip schools are the most conspicuous sites of religious socialization and pedagogy, they are nested within a larger network of semi-formal and informal education sites. The religious pedagogic movement relies on these broadly diffused sites—perhaps even more than Imam-Hatip schools—to deepen religious knowledge, cultivate a religious ethos, and moralize society. This chapter reorients the empirical focus of the dissertation toward these less conspicuous, though ultimately more crucial, sites of socialization and discipline. The semi-formal and informal segments, much like the rest of the pedagogic sites, emerged in reaction to the three perceived problems in Turkish society I described earlier – the marginalization of serious religious study, the ethical deterioration of social institutions, and the individual slide toward hedonism. Underlying all three critiques is a general resistance to the secular regime's efforts to marginalize the influence of religion in individual conduct and social life. The pedagogic movement aims to counteract the harmful effects of these policies through its use of a comprehensive network of formal, semi-formal, and informal religious education sites.

Unlike the official public school system, which is – in principle – highly centralized and run by an overarching administrative unit (i.e. the Ministry of Education), semi-formal and informal religious education is characterized by a nexus of loosely connected institutions that provide doctrinal and social training to the youth. As such, religious education is a "decentered" (Starrett 1998: 89) structure, originating not from one, but various sources such as preschools, student dormitories, weekend schools, youth centers, prep courses, and madrasas. Once involved in one of these institutions, a student is likely to circulate over time in the broader network of Islamic religious education. This chapter explores how this decentered network has been

constructed and utilized for enacting the broader project of sociopolitical Islamization. The empirical material of the chapter focuses on the second component of the dual strategy— working *outside* the system, creating alternative institutions of religious socialization to cultivate a religious ethos. However, I will connect this material to the first component of the dual strategy—working *within* the system, infiltrating and capturing key parts of the state bureaucracy, in order to draw a full picture of how Islamists worked to institutionalize religion and Islamize society.

The chapter begins by mapping out the legal status of formal, semi-formal, and informal education sites and the interactions between the three levels of pedagogy. Next, it outlines the structure and purpose of semi-formal and informal sites. Under each category, it focuses on several exemplary contexts: for semi-formal sites, a youth study center and a prep course; for informal sites, a religious preschool, an informal weekend course, a cemaat house, and a madrasa. For each of these exemplary semi-formal and informal sites, I discuss the pedagogical strategies used to cultivate the pious individual. I seek to show how, through verbal and performative instruction, visible and invisible forms of persuasion, and spontaneous and deliberate means of discipline, training in Islamic knowledge and nurturing of religious subjectivities is achieved.

## The legal status of religious institutions

In Turkey the study of religious mobilization through pedagogy predominantly centers on Imam-Hatip schools and legal Qur'anic seminaries. This focus is not unwarranted. Imam-Hatips have been the loci of ideological training and recruitment for both activists and followers in the Islamist political movement. It is widely understood that the Islamist movement has been closely tied to the Imam-Hatips and Qur'anic seminaries. While heavy state intervention in the form of

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curriculum control, school closures, and persecution of staff have weakened these schools during certain periods, permissive environments in other periods have strengthened them. As a result, this persistent cycle of repression and toleration toward Imam-Hatips and Qur'anic seminaries has played an important role in the trajectory of the pedagogic movement.

This picture changes, however, when we broaden our conception of mobilization beyond the domain of formal institutions. While on the surface pedagogic mobilization appears to take place mostly in the formal arena, the extensive network of semi-formal and informal education sites is an equally important site of religious activism. The elastic, decentralized, and local nature of these sites enables Islamist activists to continue transmitting religious knowledge, disciplining students, and recruiting volunteers outside of formal institutions. This domain provides strategic depth that allows activists to sustain mobilization during times of restrictive or repressive state policy. Instead of a narrow focus on formal institutions, therefore, a more accurate account of pedagogic mobilization emerges if it is studied at all three levels: formal, semi-formal, and informal.

The three levels of religious education sites cannot always be separated by neatly defined boundaries, but they can be distinguished roughly as follows. Religious education sites are formal when they are run and financed by the state, or at least recognized, registered, and inspected if not funded by the state. Imam-Hatips are the quintessential example of the former, cemaat-run but state-registered Qur'anic seminaries of the latter. Religious education sites are semi-formal when they are located within officially existing institutions but are nonetheless designated for a purpose other than the provision of religious training. Examples include a dormitory for secondary or higher education, a private elementary/high school, a prep course for nation-wide exams, or a youth center. Finally, religious education sites are informal when they escape official registration all together, and therefore formally do not "exist." Examples include

weekend home-schools or shared student houses specifically founded for the provision of religious training. These sites not only are informal, but are technically illegal when they act as alternatives to their officially existing counterparts. Examples include religious preschools (*sıbyan mektebi*), unregistered *madrasas* (Qur'anic seminaries), and gathering/Qur'an reading places (*toplanma/okuma evi*). These unregistered sites constitute parallel structures and alternatives to state preschools, Qur'anic seminaries, and mosques. Figure 1 outlines the three-tiered system of formal, semi-formal, and informal education.

Figure 2: Institutions of religious education by legal status

| Formal institution providing religious education | Semi-formal (legal institution but not to provide religious education) | Informal/Illegal |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Imam-Hatip school | Prep courses | Preschool (sıbyan school) |
| Qur'an course of Diyanet (daily and/or boarding) | Private elementary/high school (cemaat-owned) | Weekend religion course/ Homeschool |
| Qur'an course of a cemaat (daily and/or boarding) | Dormitory (secondary school) | Student house |
| | Youth Center (after-school tutoring) | Older sister/brother house |
| | | Madrasa |
| | | Dormitory (for college students) |
| | | Study house (students may stay) |
| | | Reading house (like a mosque) |
| | | Meeting place (like a mosque) |

This three-tiered system facilitates Islamist mobilization in several ways. First, it enables the transmission of religious knowledge in times of increased state scrutiny or repression of formal institutions. When Imam-Hatips were targeted by the state following the 1997 coup, for example, traditional training retreated to less obvious sites to ward off potential interruptions in individuals' religious learning and socialization. Second, semi-formal and informal sites provide increased autonomy for activists. In the privacy of such contexts, Islamists can deliver alternative messages that often run counter to official discourses more easily. Third, and most important, semi-formal and informal settings like madrasas or student houses constitute a domain of education that the state can not effectively regulate or scrutinize. Based on this broadened conception of education, I demonstrate that the success of the pedagogic movement hinges on the development of the subterranean world of semi-formal and informal education sites. The next two sections analyze different elements of this world.

## Semi-formal sites of Islamic education

For movement activists there is a compelling reason for creating separate yet interlinked zones of education such as semi-formal or informal sites. The movement uses informal sites for religious doctrinal training and cadre recruitment. As I will demonstrate in the next section, socialization, persuasion, and discipline are very successful in small and intimate study groups. Likewise, identification and training of people who will later assume leadership roles in the group are also easier to carry out in informal settings. As useful as it is, however, working through a small group strategy is inherently limited. Most participants are already inclined toward the type of religious orthodoxy being taught or resolved to participate in the *tebliğ* activity. What is more difficult is the ability to move beyond a religious group's core

constituency and reach out to broader social circles. Semi-formal venues aim to accomplish just that.

In principle, semi-formal institutions are designed to offer a service completely unrelated to Islamic training. The most typical examples include youth study centers (*gençlik etüt merkezi*), prep courses (*dersane*), and student dormitories (*öğrenci yurdu*). Within the legal framework of the state, their professed purpose is respectively to support secondary/high school students in their day-to-day homework; to prepare them for the high school or university entrance exams; and to provide room and board to high school and college students who come from out of town. Especially the first two institutions are often located in the close vicinity of formal religious sites such as mosques or Imam-Hatip schools, but they do not openly claim to, and in fact legally cannot, provide religious education. In fact, they tend to resemble certain aspects of a secular public school. They all have non-religious academic schedules, regular classrooms, libraries, computer labs, non-religious extracurricular activities, paid administrative personnel, (movement-appointed) inspectors, and on-the-job-training for instructors, inspectors, and administrators. However, this explains only part of their purpose. Less well known is that all cemaat-run youth study centers, prep courses, and dormitories provide religious education. Semi-formal institutions are important venues for outreach without conspicuous propaganda that could evoke suspicions. Hence, Islamists use informal education sites to *deepen* individual piety, while they use semi-formal ones to *widen* their constituency. In this way, they are able to introduce both religion and the movement to broader segments of Turkish society. In the following two examples, one drawn from a youth study center run by the Erenköy cemaat and the other from a prep course run by the Gülen cemaat, I illustrate these outreach activities.

**Youth study center (*gençlik etüt merkezi*)**

On a spring afternoon, I visited one of several centers in Ümraniye, run by the Erenköy cemaat. This Youth Center is located on a six-story building on a side street across from a popular mosque in the main market area of the district. The center occupies the top four stories of the building complex. Administrative offices are located on the first of these four floors; classrooms, computer labs, and hobby rooms are located on the next two. But if the building preserves its image as a formal youth center on the lower floors, it looks quite different when one arrives to the top floor, which looks like a large living room. The room is covered with wall-to-wall, clean, beige carpets before which everybody must remove their shoes. Several sofa beds line the sides of the walls. Administrators told me that this floor is used for three things: 1) as a *mescit* both for practice and worship, 2) as a religious sohbet room, and 3) as a sleeping place for the mosque students who are invited to weekend "retreats" at the center. Needless to say, all students are male to avoid any potential gender interaction. In fact, this center (like other semi-formal ones) does not offer any courses to female students.

This particular youth center provides a great example of how interaction between efforts at the state and local levels has resulted in the expansion of religious education sites in recent years. On the one hand, it is the outcome of Islamists' capture of key positions in the state bureaucracy, including in Diyanet and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (*Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı*). For example, the former president of Erenköy cemaat's Hüdayi Vakıf has occupied one of the three vice presidencies of Diyanet since 2010. On the other hand, it is the result of efforts to build alternative sites of socialization at the grass roots level. In this example, as in others, capturing key positions in the state helped create opportunity spaces from above for the cemaat to expand from below.

Opening youth centers is traditionally a prerogative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and local municipalities. Despite their abundance and underutilization, the Erenköy cemaat not only convinced the Ministry to open its own centers, but also to receive the Ministry's official title, "youth center". The cemaat's effort to locate its centers within a legal framework shows two important tendencies. The first is the caution of the cemaat to secure formal status for the centers so as to enable their long-term survival. The second is the competition it engages in to provide an alternative to other state sponsored centers (i.e. explicitly non-religious ones). When I visited the Ümraniye center in 2012, it was its second active year. Since then the cemaat had established four more youth centers in the poor, outer districts of Istanbul's Asian side, including Dudullu, Samandıra, Yavuztürk, and Sultantepe.

Like a regular public school, the center has full-time paid administrative personnel, including a principal, secretaries, and teachers. The center's standard monthly expense is about 15,000 TL ($7000). Since it cannot charge tuition, the funds to support its operations come from public donations in the form of religious tithes (*zekat*) and from the Hüdayi Vakıf. However, administrators told me that they also expect small contributions from parents (in the amount of 50 TL ($25) a month). At the time of my research, the center had ninety elementary and secondary school students between the ages of nine and fourteen.[122] The students are expected to attend the center five days a week, two hours every day before or after school. During this time, they have a designated schedule that includes doing homework, attending a character education class, and undertaking some extra-curricular activity like sports, chess, language, acting, or traditional handcrafts. In this scheme, as one can observe, there is no explicit training, or even reference to religion. So why would one think of this center as a semi-formal site of religious

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[122] The center later expanded its curriculum and started enrolling students from Imam-Hatip high schools.

education? Two male teachers, both of which have bachelor's degrees in divinity, and were

educated in Erenköy courses and dormitories on the side, explain:

*Halim*   : This is a youth study center. We don't have religious education here. In fact, it is illegal to provide Qur'an recitation or fundamentals of worship (*ilmihal*) classes. At most, we offer character education that teaches [religious] morals, having a purpose [in life], respecting parents, and loving one's country. Also, families from all segments of society [religious and secular] send their children. We do not want to draw reactions from [non-religious] parents by giving Qur'an classes. They can say to us, "I did not send my kid here for this."[123]

*Süleyman*: Yes, there are no [explicit] religion classes here. However, we give religious training through our own example – in the way we live and act. For example, we have a mescit upstairs. When it is time for daily prayer, we invite children to join us. Whatever environment you are embedded in, you eventually take its form [*hangi ortamda olursan ona göre şekillenirsin*]. Or when I see students in the corridor, I always ask how they are, I joke and chat with them. Our prophet has a *Hadis* about this "A good friend is like a seller of [perfume]. When you interact with him, you also smell pleasant (*üzerine misk siner*); but when you interact with a bad friend, you get his evil and smell."[124] We created a beautiful [social] environment here and we believe being in this environment affects students positively. I mean we not only believe, but also observe its impact [on children].

Due to the sensitivities surrounding religious education, the center is careful not to present its

motivation as teaching religion, even if this might be the case. In fact, as Halim quickly points

out, it is illegal to provide religious training in a youth center. Instead of an explicit curriculum,

the center employs what educational sociologists refer to as a hidden curriculum (Anyon 1980;

Illich 1970). One side of this program rests on "character education," a seemingly neutral

concept popularized by Islamist pedagogues in the last decade that weaves the core values of

Turkish society with Islamic morality. Note that the teacher pairs virtuous conduct with

patriotism and modern values of society, such as having religious morality as well as individual

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[123] The center informally offers short training courses in religion including Qur'an reading, verse memorization, worship training, and sohbets to kids whose parents ask for. However they are very careful not to propagate this openly as part of the center's program, and only provide it to students whose parents request it. At the time of research, out of ninety students, only fifteen participated in this religious training.

[124] The full version of the hadis reads as: "The example of a good companion and a bad companion is like that of the seller of musk, and the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows. So as for the seller of musk then either he will grant you some, or you buy some from him, or at least you enjoy a pleasant smell from him. As for the one who blows the blacksmith's bellows then either he will burn your clothes or you will get an offensive smell from him." (al-Bosnawi 2014).

purpose, harboring love for one's parents (a central order of the Qur'an) as much as for one's country. In an effort to avoid secularist suspicions, the concept of 'character education' became a catchword among Turkish Islamists for teaching religion without labeling it as such.

The other side of this hidden curriculum focuses on setting an example to encourage piety. Unlike a traditional religious education site, i.e. a Qur'anic seminary, the center is not interested in doctrinal training. Instead, it aims to inculcate piety through the performance of socially expected, routine interaction. As captured in Süleyman's response, the center's teaching of piety presupposes an inextricable association between religiously prescribed action and ordinary social conduct. According to this understanding, not only ritual practice but also daily interactions, such as greeting and exchanging pleasantries with others, constitute arenas for developing and demonstrating one's piety and morality. These virtues are symbolized in the persona of the teacher. He sets an example by himself going to prayer, but also by greeting and joking with his students. In sum, both sets of actions become tools for improving and displaying one's piety.

At a more profound level, this formulation understands children as formless, receptive materials that can be shaped and molded into the appropriate form, a conception I discussed earlier on the foundational principles of religious pedagogy (chapter 2). This claim is demonstrated through the prophet's advice on keeping good or bad friends. When a person is situated in an environment where s/he interacts with those who have noble manners, such as going to prayer or greeting others (because they are pious), they will be transformed into individuals with similar traits. For Süleyman, the center provides exactly that environment with the goal of accomplishing such a transformation in the long run.

A question kept occurring to me during my long interview with the teachers. For religious training, the Erenköy cemaat has numerous Qur'anic seminaries, mosque courses, and

student houses (that I examine in the next section). So why did they need to take such an indirect and perhaps painstaking route? Süleyman answered this question, through which he also explained the second, and more important, purpose of the center:

> With this youth center we want to enlarge our framework. I mean we want to appeal to more people from a variety of backgrounds, from different segments of society. Other venues of religious education [i.e. mosque courses] are narrow. You have the same students; you do the same things [i.e. teach Qur'an]. But it is not like that here. There is a broad circulation. In addition, everybody [pious or non-pious] can send their children. Of course, we do not discriminate between pious and non-pious families. But we feel like pious people already take care of the [religious] education of their children. The main group of children that needs to be attended to is the one whose parents do not care [about religious training]. We need them, but they need us too.

Semi-formal institutions of religious training like this youth center are critical to Islamist movements, because as Süleyman explains, they are designed to "enlarge their frameworks." In other words, they provide a means to reach out to a greater variety of people, not only the pious. Süleyman points to the inherent constraints of informal education in sites more explicitly geared toward religious education; they are small and limited in reach. Semi-formal sites, on the contrary, are dynamic and expansive, which makes them more conducive to connecting with ideologically variegated constituencies. This does not mean that informal space is unimportant; rather, it means that each space has its own merits in their contribution to Islamist mobilization.

Lastly, the dichotomy Süleyman draws is worth underlining. According to him, it is not only Islamists who need newcomers, but also the unpious who need Islamists. The children of unpious families in particular are understood to be at risk because of being deprived of religious training. When the center facilitates the education of what they understand to be the (religiously) illiterate, this enables them to work against un-pietistic attitudes within families and society. Centers like this, then, should properly be considered as part of the semi-formal aspect of Islamist mobilization to introduce both religion and the movement to a broader segment of Turkish society.

**Prep course (*dershane*)**

The second example of a semi-formal institution are prep courses (*dershane*), where religious movements have also been actively involved. Prep courses are privately owned institutions that prepare students for nationally administered high school and college entrance exams. Due to the quality deficit in public schools and the increased competition for winning one of the limited spots at good high schools and universities, prep courses have become increasingly popular in the last three decades. Today about two million high school seniors take the college entrance exam and more than a million of those are enrolled in a prep course.[125] This amounts to a $2 billion sector where approximately 51,500 teachers work (Yücel 2013). Since the late 1980s, this lucrative sector has also attracted some cemaats. In addition to providing opportunities to finance their operations, an unexpected by-product of the business has been the opportunity it provides for recruiting new members or sympathizers and for propagating the moral teachings of the movement to broader segments of society. Certainly not every student who studies at a prep course becomes an activist or sympathizer. But some do. Prep courses bring Islamists into contact with a large number of students, families, and teachers, which makes them an indispensible site for outreach activities.

Among all cemaats, the Gülen group has been the most powerful and heavily invested in the prep course business.[126] According to one estimate, out of 4,000 prep courses in the country, Gülen-affiliated businesses own roughly thirty percent or about 928 prep courses (Thalji 2014: 4).[127] Like other semi-formal and informal education sites, prep courses offer benevolent services

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[125] See for example, Ebaugh (2009:96); also Thalji (2014:4).
[126] Another major actor in this sector is the Süleymancılar cemaat.
[127] In 2014, the AKP government decided to close prep courses, including the Gülen's, which on the surface aimed at eliminating the "educational inequality" between those who have access to this service and those who do not. However, it is widely believed that the real reason is the tug-of-war between the ruling AKP party and the Gülen group over the political future of the country. By taking this step, it is

to poorer students such as academic support with little or no charge, or accommodation in nearby cemaat-affiliated dormitories. However, Gülen's prep course enterprise differs from those in one important respect: in its commercial aspirations. Unlike other cemaats who carry out Islamic education with almost no monetary gain, the Gülen group has sought to turn a significant financial profit. More importantly, the group has been able to interweave its business interests with its socio-religious interests. For example, Gülen's prep courses offer additional, one-on-one tutoring (*soru çözme*) and practice tests (*deneme sınavı*) to students who subscribe to the daily Zaman, the flagship of the Gülen cemaat's media. In fact, this drive has enabled the group to amass significant wealth over the years, while increasing its political and social influence in Turkey.[128] Gülen's wealth accumulation in general and the prep course expansion in particular should come as no surprise given its close connections – at least until 2014 – with the ruling AKP. The Gülen cemaat represents one the most successful practitioners of the dual strategy, especially its first component, working within the system. Since the AKP's rise to power, Gülenists infiltrated and captured several top offices in the police, judiciary, and the Ministry of Education. They then used these positions to increase their influence within the state while expanding their autonomy outside of it. The semi-formal prep courses and the informal student houses that I analyze in the next section are prime examples of this dual strategy that helped them bolster their power while re-strengthening the place of Islam in society.

I characterize cemaats' prep courses as semi-formal institutions of religious education for two reasons. First, like youth centers or student dormitories, prep courses are designed to offer a service completely unrelated to Islamic training. They do not openly claim, nor are they legally allowed, to provide religious education. Nonetheless, they do. Second, like other semi-formal

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believed that AKP hoped to strike a heavy blow against the financial and human sources of the Gülen group (Gursel 2013); (BBC 2014).
[128] The group was able to accomplish this by placing some of its graduates in key positions in key state offices like the judiciary and the police.

sites they also carry out outreach and recruitment without conspicuous propaganda to avoid

public suspicion. They accomplish this in part by using private student houses called "Older

Brother/Older Sister houses" (*Ağabey/Abla Evleri*), which are organically attached to the prep

courses (I explore this in detail in the next section). They carry out the former—religious

training—through regular sohbets they offer between classes. They undertake the latter—

outreach and recruitment—through training sympathetic students in "service" (*hizmet*) within

private student houses. The largest network of Gülen's prep courses is called FEM.[129] In the next

few pages, I will provide an ethnographic account of a sohbet I attended at a FEM located in a

poor suburban neighborhood close to the Nesimiye Imam-Hatip. A 17-year-old female student

from Nesimiye, who was preparing for the university entrance exam at the time through FEM,

arranged my visit. She enjoyed attending their sohbets regularly provided between classes and it

was to one of these sohbets that she invited me.

The FEM is located in a poor neighborhood on the second and third floors of a rundown

commercial building. From the outside it looks no different than an ordinary prep course, where

scores of hustling students come in and out every day to get tutoring. Inside, however, from its

physical set up to teachers' and students' attire to extra-curricular activities, there are obvious

indicators of its Islamic orientation. As in Nesimiye, the course enforces strict gender

segregation. The second floor is allocated to male students and the third to female students with

separate teams of male and female teachers assigned to each group. Despite the signs outside that

read "academic meeting room" (*zümre odası*), the central room on each floor is designated as a

*mescit*. The room is covered in wall-to-wall carpeting and shoes are regularly piled up outside

with groups of students inside rhythmically doing the ritual prayer. The misleading signs point to

the group's efforts to subvert unfavorable institutional rules (prohibition of a *mescit* in a prep

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[129] This is not a pseudonym.

course), a strategy frequently employed in these semi-formal sites. In addition to its physical

setup, the Islamic character of the course is apparent from teachers' and students' attire. Almost

all female teachers and more than half of female students are covered, a proportion one would

not ordinarily encounter in other prep courses. Lastly, the extra-curricular activities – foremost

sohbets – attest to the orientation of the prep course as a center not only of tutoring but also of

Islamic teaching and recruitment.

Sohbets are carried out in a medium size, nicely decorated and fully equipped conference

room with an elevated podium, lectern, projector, and smart board. The room has about 200

seats, but for that day's sohbet fewer than half are occupied. The sohbet differs from other

cemaats' sohbets in several ways. First of all, there is no designated *hoca* (religious

teacher/preacher) who delivers the sohbet. Instead, two course teachers play a series of short

video clips by projecting them on the screen. Second, the religious orientation of the sohbet is

interspersed with business propaganda. During my fieldwork, I found that this practice was

unique to Gülenist institutions. Half the video clips introduced the audience to the cemaat's

international schools, advertised its daily Zaman, and encouraged "service" (*hizmet*) on behalf of

the group, while the other half focused on Islamic doctrinal teaching through recorded sermons

of Fettullah Gülen.

Among these, I will focus on one video that invites the audience to "service" (*hizmet*).

Before proceeding, however, I would like to explain briefly the two meanings of *hizmet*. As

mentioned earlier, *hizmet* is an umbrella term employed by diverse strands of Islamists to refer to

piety activism. In the most generic sense, it connotes working (individually or within organized

religious groups) to familiarize fellow Muslims with their religious responsibilities and to

increase attachment to religion in their daily life. However, for Gülenists, *hizmet* is not limited to

working for religion. It may also mean taking up assigned duties, in or outside of Turkey, whose

purpose is generally furthering the movement's monetary, social, or political interests although it is never represented as such.  For example, the movement has sent many of its graduates overseas to teach at one of their international schools or to carry out social activities. Although these activities do not have direct religious content, they are also understood as *hizmet*, which indirectly contributes to the Gülen group's accumulation of profit unlike any other cemaat. Hence, with specific reference to the Gülen group, one should understand the term *hizmet* in its dual meaning: encouraging religious duty and pursuing the movement's material interests. Different videos in the sohbet encouraged both aspects of *hizmet*. However, due to its relevance to the broader interests of my research, I will only analyze the video based on a short clip from a Tom Cruise movie, "A Few Good Man," that focuses on encouraging the first meaning of *hizmet*.

The three-minute video, entitled "Tom Cruise is at Service" (*Tom Cruise Hizmette*), has a voiceover in Turkish. As will become clear, the voiceover is not a direct translation of what is actually being acted out on the screen. Through the voiceover Tom Cruise is depicted as a member of the Nur cemaat, of which the Gülenists constitute one branch. The clip starts with the Tom Cruise character, Lt. Daniel Kaffee, pulling up with his car to a newspaper stand on the side of a busy city street. He greets the seller by saying "Selâmün Aleyküm," (Peace be on you), an Arabic greeting popularly used by Islamists in Turkey as well as elsewhere in the region.[130] Kaffee has come to purchase a book called "The Words" (*Sözler*), the first volume of *The Epistles of Light* (*Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*), the magnum opus of Said-i Nursi, the spiritual leader of the Nur movement. In the next scene, Kaffee and his friend walk in a park as his friend pushes a stroller with a baby girl observing her surroundings. His friend laments the fact that he has not

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[130] This greeting is not limited to Islamists. In everyday exchange, the term is commonly used, especially among older people. However Islamists take great care in using the term to greet each other, rather than more popular "merhaba" (hello!), to indicate their religious sensibilities.

been attending spiritual/devotional lessons (*ders*) for several weeks because his childcare responsibilities are heavy. To help compensate for his friend's missed practices, Kaffee suggests they perform the afternoon prayer together and then go to a spiritual/devotional lesson of the *Hoca* (teacher, preacher) in the evening. When his friend hesitates (thinking about his children), Kaffe turns to his friend with a determined face and quotes a line from Said-i Nursi: "you cannot escape death and the time of death is hidden."[131] Finally, he convinces him to meet at the mosque for the evening prayer before they part. But right before getting in the car, Kaffee turns to his friend one more time to reiterate his responsibility: "Our master (*Üstadımız*) recommends reading the Epistle of Sincerity (*İhlâs Risalesi*) [the part of the collection that discusses "service"] once every fifteen days." When his friend asks "why?" Kaffee pauses, opens his arms, and cries out passionately: "this is imperative for the salvation of our faith" (*İmanımızın kurtulması için bu şart*).

This video clip generated sporadic laughter in the audience (indeed it is laden with humor on purpose to help facilitate its acceptance among the young and not necessarily religious audience), and it contains several instructive messages. In his early movies Cruise played characters driven by their youth, passion, and determination, which according to activists, makes him an appropriate model to emulate. For Gülenists these three properties are indispensable for the cultivation of religious habits and dedication to service (i.e. teaching religion to others) with the broader purpose of reinvigorating faith in society. It is hoped that the example of a young Tom Cruise, refashioned by the voiceover as a passionate worker for service who speaks just like the pious youth (with *Selâmün Aleyküm* and other religiously infused language) will resonate with the students. By recasting Cruise in this voluntary role, the activists also depict an ordinary day in the life of a pious teenager at service. The elements of involvement is revealed in his

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[131] İman ve Küfür Muvazeneleri, 13. Söz (Said-i Nursi 2007:67). The Turkish translation reads: "*Ölüm öldürülmüyor ve ecel gizlidir.*"

desire to buy Said-i Nursi's work, his skillful invocation from Nursi's thick books when the context calls for it, and his determination and hard work to convince a friend who is neglecting his spiritual activities to return to lessons.

Besides the material representation of a service volunteer, the clip has three implicit philosophical messages. The first is the idea of upholding one's religious responsibilities at all times, which can easily be neglected due to the pressures of modern life. The friend represents the dilemma of the modern man consumed with everyday concerns at the expense of his religious and spiritual development. When the clip gives Nursi's line "you cannot escape death and the time of death is hidden," it is evoking the idea that since no one knows when death will come, it is important to strengthen one's devotional/spiritual skills to accrue merit with God and to ward off otherworldly punishments even when one is entangled in daily responsibilities. Service in this context means encouraging and reminding this duty to fellow Muslims when they forget or disregard it.

The second message concerns the naturalization of new social relations and figures of authority in daily life. According to the activists, service aids in the cultivation of religious knowledge, but this knowledge emerges not only through mandatory religious acts (i.e. praying and fasting) but also through voluntary acts such as following a preacher. Nicely representing this idea is the fact that the friend's sense of guilt comes not from failing in his *obligatory* religious duty (i.e. ritual prayer), but from neglecting his *optional* religious activity (i.e. spiritual lessons). This representation contains an important lesson. When mandatory and voluntary religious acts are equalized in significance and purpose (i.e. their share in the salvation of the individual), the result is the emergence of distinct positions of power and social hierarchies. The preacher becomes a new and important source of authority, a figure of respect that needs to be

followed and whose teaching must be incorporated into one's life along with mandatory obligations.

The third message is the idea that "service" in this world, making fellow Muslims more pious, is linked to "salvation" in the other. This association between work and redemption has been the chief aspect of the Nur movement starting with the teachings of Said-i Nursi. The idea is captured in the last segment of the video where the character Kaffee quotes Nursi once again: "Our master recommends reading the Epistle of Sincerity (*İhlâs Risalesi*) … [because] this is imperative for the salvation of the faith." The Epistle of Sincerity (1995:159–167) is one of the important chapters of Nursi's collection where he offers a broadened concept of "activism": fulfilling religious edicts as much as pursuing piety activism to increase the religious awareness of other Muslims. To this end, in the Epistle of Sincerity Nursi delineates an analytical framework for Islamic collective action. According to Nursi, collective action, which he represents under the rubric of "service," aims at gaining God's appreciation with sincerity (*ihlas*) rather than material or worldly benefits. Nursi sees the nurturing of three qualities, brotherhood (*kardeşlik*), unity of purpose (*gaye birliği*), and unity of mission (*vazife birliği*), among the faithful as essential to the success of the service movement (1995:161). He denounces competition for personal gain and urges cooperation between his followers like cogwheels in a factory. Followers draw from each other's skills and channel each other's behaviors toward service to reach the ultimate goal, the resuscitation of Islam in Turkey. When they can accomplish the three requirements they become like one body, or as Nursi says, they can "see with each other's eyes or hear with each other's ears" (*ibid*). Reading the Epistle of Sincerity, as Kaffee recommends to his friend, is important precisely because it enables individuals to understand why they are undertaking service. By weaving activism and redemption, the video provides an otherworldly justification for worldly action, while warding off concerns that

budding activists may have about the logic of religious service. A place for training as well as propaganda, the Gülen prep courses seize opportunities like this *sohbet* to reach out to students and their families and to encourage them to both live and spread Islam.

The semi-formal sector of religious education provides Islamists with invaluable venues to reach beyond their core constituency to a broader audience. Places like youth centers, and especially prep courses have proved so vital that today groups like the Gülen cemat have built their entire recruitment edifice upon theses networks.[132] But operating only aboveground is inherently limited. It not only means having to conform to state policy and being subject to state scrutiny, but also losing autonomy. Therefore, building a third sector, or what I call "the informal sector of religious education" has been crucial for the reproduction and transmission of religious knowledge. It is to these sites that I turn my attention now.


## Informal and illegal sites of religious education

Informal religious sites attest at once to both the strong and vulnerable position Islamist movements occupy within the broader educational landscape. On the one hand, groups have been able to develop an extensive network of clandestine education sites through which they have secured autonomy. Thanks to this autonomy, activists have been able to transmit "traditional" Islamic orthodoxy, inculcate the type of piety the republican state has long strived to eliminate, and recruit cadres. On the other hand, groups have been forced to build these networks to avoid periodic bouts of repression by the state. The very creation of this system illustrates the precarious position movements have to work from in order to survive. The result has been a

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[132] It is not clear how several groups, especially Gülenists, could recruit new members without these semi-formal sites. As one student from the Imam-Hatip asked: "if they close down prep courses, how will the Gülen movement find new members?" At the time of this research, the government was in fact preparing to take such a step due to a belated power struggle between the Gülen group and itself.

robust, wide-ranging, and decentered subterranean network critical to the survival of both religion and Islamist movements in a secular institutional context.

Although it is impossible to enumerate the full range of groups and their informal sites, it is possible to delineate the most common and important ones. Informal religious education is provided at all academic levels including preschool, elementary, secondary, high school, and university levels. This unofficial education system does not reject the official (national) system wholesale. Rather, it interacts with state sponsored educational sites in important ways; for example, by having children trained both in the regime's schools and in informal spaces. In the pages that follow I will draw a portrait of this subterranean world through a series of ethnographic vignettes from four key sites: a religious preschool, a weekend course, a student house, and a madrasa. In doing so, I will move through sites created for different age cohorts, from young children to secondary school and college students.

Figure 3: Levels and types of religious education sites by cemaat

| Types of Religious Education sites by Cemaat | Levels of Religious Education | | | | |
| | Preschool | Elementary-Secondary | High School | Undergrad | Graduate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Erenköy* | | • Youth Center<br>• Weekend-mosque course | • Dormitory<br>• Religion course (weekend)<br>• Qur'anic seminary<br>• Cemaat house (student house) | • Dormitory<br>• Cemaat house (student house)<br>• Meeting place (like a mosque) | Tutoring center |
| *Süleymancılar* | Preschool | • Prep course<br>• Dormitory | • Prep course<br>• Dormitory<br>• Qur'anic seminary | • Dormitory<br>• Qur'anic seminary (advanced) | Dormitory |
| *İsmailağa* | Preschool | • Madrasa (beginner/Qur'an memorization) | • Madrasa (beginner/Qur'an memorization) | Madrasa (advanced) | |
| *Menzil* | Preschool | Reading House (like a mosque) | • Reading House (like a mosque)<br>• Qur'anic seminary | Qur'anic seminary (advanced) | |
| *Milli Görüş* | Preschool | | • Education Center<br>• Cemaat house (older sister/brother house) | Cemaat house (older sister/brother house) | |
| *Gülen* | Preschool | | • Prep course<br>• Dormitory<br>• Cemaat house (older sister/brother house) | Cemaat house (older sister/brother house) | |
| Non-cemaat groups | | Home school (weekend) | | | |

**Religious preschool (*sıbyan mektebi*)**

"Qur'anic schooling of a Muslim child starts when s/he is 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days old. At this age their minds are empty; and they will practice later whatever they learn now." This pedagogic principle quoted by countless activists, points to a central trend within the tebliğ movement. In Islamic tradition the Qur'an is regarded as the basic instructional text, and the foundation for all beliefs and habits one develops later in life. I discussed the religious pedagogic theory earlier (in chapter 2) through the writings of Ibn-i Khaldûn, and the idea that the first impressions a child gets through the study of the Qur'an will provide them with a lasting belief in Islam, a virtuous orientation, and blessings in the other world. Moreover, training under sustained adult discipline at a young age is thought to ensure a better transmission of Islamic knowledge; a result that may not occur during adolescence or after children leave home (Khaldûn 2005[1969]:421–26).

In the Ottoman Empire, a child would start schooling symbolically when they arrived at 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days of age.[133] The first day of school in a child's life was celebrated with a small festival in the neighborhood with the child dressed up and touted around the neighborhood on a horse accompanied by classmates.[134] The child would then be taken to the neighborhood school called a *sıbyan mektebi*; literally, children's school (but note the similarity between the school name and the title of the section – the name given by Islamists to religious

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[133] It is important to point out here the similarity between this symbolic school age in the Ottoman Empire and the "4+4+4 Law" I discussed in chapter 2. Although I have no official source, many of my informants told that the Ottoman rule is well known among Islamists and that it is not a coincidence that the lobbyists behind the law – Islamist actors – were inspired by the Ottoman tradition. This may also explain why during debates over the law that no officials could explain publically what the rationale for dividing twelve years of mandatory education into four-year increments was. It is likely that an open public reference to Ottoman practice in republican education policy might have led to backlash on top of all the controversy the law already had created.

[134] In Ottoman, the festival was called "*Âmin Alayı*" (A group who says Amen!) or "*Bed'i Besmele*" (Beautiful Besmele).

preschools). After kissing the imam's hand (an act of deference to older and wiser people in Turkish culture), the child would symbolically receive their first education by repeating after the imam the first few letters of the Arabic alphabet (Kara and Birinci 2012).

Contemporary Islamist pedagogic practices are rooted in this historical trend – both in the philosophy of Muslim scholars and the Ottoman example. According to activists, the success of Islamic schooling – measured by cultivation of a religious subjectivity – depends on beginning at an early age. The first reason is the idea that instruction in ethical and devotional behavior will take deeper roots in one's character if they receive training beginning at a young age. The second, and more implicit reason, according to activists, is that control and authority over an individual is easier when they are younger. Like early Muslim scholars, Turkish Islamists associate childhood as a stage of receptiveness and submission. Hence, it is possible to take advantage of this "amenability" to religious instruction, as Khaldûn writes, before an individual enters the "follies" of adolescence (424).[135]

Up until the 1997 military coup, the only formal venue through which Islamist segments were able to procure early religious education was through summer mosque courses. After the 1997 coup, however, enrollment in a mosque course was restricted to age 14 and above to postpone exposure to religion to a later age, just as Imam-Hatips were reduced to 4 year schools (beginning age at 14).[136] However, the unintended consequence of this decision was to encourage activists to create a vast network of illegal preschools (*sıbyan mektebi*), which started exposing children to religion even earlier, at age 4. It was foremost the İsmailağa cemaat that resurrected the idea of religious preschool from the Ottoman times to resist the coup's arbitrary

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[135] The perception of childhood as a time of acquiescence and passive reception is not peculiar to Islamist pedagogy. One can find similar notions in secularist pedagogy as well. See for example Sam Kaplan's superb study on the subject (2006b).
[136] Similar to other restrictive laws, this law was contested and recently reversed under the AKP government in 2012. Currently, children can enroll in summer mosque courses starting at age 5.

prohibition and to continue religious education without the need for formal state schools. Following the coup, these illegal schools grew rapidly in the conservative and poorer districts of Istanbul such as Fatih, Ümraniye, Dudullu, Beykoz, and Sultanbeyli where the İsmailağa cemaat has a large following. There are no available numbers, but I was repeatedly told that in all these districts one could find a religious preschool in every neighborhood.

I studied one of these religious preschools in a poor neighborhood in a central Asian district. Unlike a typical preschool in a standalone building, it was located in an unmarked apartment in the basement level of a residential building. The female principal lived in one of the rooms with her two children and converted the other two rooms into classrooms. Five days a week, for five hours a day, 24 children between the ages of four-and-a-half and six came to this dimly-lid, moldy-smelling apartment to receive instruction in Qur'an reading and recitation, prayer verses, and religious morality. Teachers used children's alphabet books in Arabic and morality books with pictures specifically prepared for sıbyan schools by Islamist publishing houses.

The principal of the school, whom I will call Nalan, was a short, talkative, and open woman in her early 30s. She has been working in illegal religious preschools for many years though she has no formal training in child development. In fact, coming from a conservative immigrant family, where girls are not expected to go to school, she received only an elementary school education. Her religious knowledge came from two years of study in an Erenköy cemaat-run formal boarding Qur'anic seminary and one year in an İsmailağa cemaat-run informal madrasa. After marrying, Nalan decided to teach the Qur'an to neighborhood women and work in religious preschools in order both to do *tebliğ* and to earn an income. But when her husband started gambling, incurring debts, and beating her up, she fled home with her two small children and later divorced. She rented this apartment for 450TL ($200) a month, hired another teacher

and a cook, and started this small business to make a living. She belongs to the Menzil cemaat, and many parents from this cemaat send their kids to her. The school, however, is not sponsored or affiliated with the cemaat as Nalan prefers to keep her cemaat and business activities separate.

The spread of illegal preschools, an important example of Islamists' strategy to work *outside* the system, would not have been possible unless they also worked *within* the system. In the early 2000s, İsmailağa's preschools were frequently raided by the police. Principals and teachers – some of whom were Nalan's former acquaintances – were arrested, and schools were shut down. However, as the AKP regime switched from a neutral to a favorable attitude toward the cemaats, especially after the consolidation of its powers with the 2007 presidential election, it granted them free reign in the preschool business, as in many other domains of religious preaching and pedagogy. Following this tacit approval, some cemaats like the Süleymancılar opted for opening formal religious preschools, while others like İsmailağa or freelancers like Nalan continued with the illegal ones. In most cases, the AKP government expanded the boundaries of autonomy for religious groups by turning a blind eye on their activities, ignoring efforts ranging from the introduction of "character education" classes that had no place in the formal curriculum of Süleymancılar preschools to Nalan's illegally run course.

During one of my visits to Nalan's preschool, I sat down on a small stool behind her and the kids to watch one of the day's lessons. The classroom had colorful walls covered with stickers, and eight children were sitting around two small play tables with stools. The children did not acknowledge my presence until Nalan left the room to grab a book. When they recognized me, instead of a "hello!", they greeted me with a prayer verse (*Sübhaneke*) they had memorized recently. First one girl started, and then the others joined her as in a chorus. Surprised by this unexpected greeting, I searched for an appropriate response. Right at that moment, Nalan returned and the class resumed. On this day, the students were practicing 50 of the 99 beautiful

names of Allah (*Esmâ ül Hüsnâ*) they memorized earlier. With the direction of Nalan, they

started swaying from side to side, chanting loudly in Arabic: "*Allah, er-Rahmân, er-Rahîm, el-*

*Melik, el-Kuddüs….*"[137] Nalan joined in the chorus to motivate them, but unsatisfied with the

level of excitement, she encouraged them: "Louder! Louder! I can't hear you." The children

increased their volume to the point that they were now almost screaming. When they arrived at

the 50th name, they stopped. Nalan then gave a new assignment. She said: "now recount the 40

*Hadis*." Without faltering and in unison they began screaming again, this time in Turkish: "Islam

means good morals"; "cleanliness is half of faith"; "you shall not enter Paradise without

believing [in God]."

After this exercise, the children left the room to take a break, while Nalan and I talked

about the curriculum, program, and drills of the school. She explained with a happy and proud

expression on her face:

> The curriculum moves from memorizing the Arabic alphabet to reciting aloud small parts of the
> Qur'an to reading the entire Qur'an from front to back (*hatim etmek*). They complete this program
> in about two years. On the side, they memorize prayer verses, God's beautiful names, the
> Prophet's sayings, and religious morals (*ahlak*). I teach the alphabet [she shows the book here] by
> assigning each letter to an object, Alif (ا) as in Apple, Be (ب) as in Baby, Te (ت) as in Telephone
> … And I teach prayer verses through gymnastics.

At this point, she got up from her chair and started moving her legs and arms as if in a workout

class while reciting a prayer verse in Arabic:

> I put my arms up and say "all the salutations, prayers, beautiful things belong to Allah"
> (*Ettehiyyâtü lillâhi vessalevâtü vettayibât*). Then I extend my arms to both sides and say "Peace
> be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy and blessings of Allah (*Esselâmü aleyke eyyühen-Nebiyyü
> ve rahmetüllahi ve berakâtühüh*). When I teach it this way, they do not forget. In fact, they do not
> struggle learning the alphabet, prayers, or the Qur'an. You need to start religious education very
> early, because their brains [minds] are open (*beyinleri çok açık*). Also, they do not resist or
> question what you ask them to do.

Certain aspects of this class as well as Nalan's remarks provide clues about pedagogic

mobilization in particular and the tebliğ movement in general. The method of instruction, as

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[137] The names read in English: "the Greatest Name, The All Beneficent, The Most Merciful, the Absolute
Ruler, the Pure One…."

throughout the Muslim Middle East in the past and present, relies primarily on rote memorization. In the early years of Islam, the preservation of the Qur'an depended on its memorization by the prophet's Companions. In fact, the book did not take its written form until several years after Muhammed's death (A.D. 632), during which time memorization and verbal recitation were the sole means of transmitting it to succeeding generations (Boyle 2004:11–12). Over time, the emphasis on "mnemonic possession" (Eickelman 1985:64) became a central aspect of Qur'anic schooling and a source of prestige for the possessor. In prevailing Western understandings of education, memorization is devalued, and seen as entailing a lack of creativity and true understanding of a text's content. The children's ability to repeat mechanically 50 names of Allah without having any clue about their meanings might seem to support such a view. In religious preschools, however, the quality of education is not measured by a student's comprehension of the material. Rather, its success is judged by whether or not children acquire the interest, inclination, and skills to enter and meet the expectations of a religious society. Nalan's word-associations, gymnastics, and disciplinary instructions are all part of a pedagogy that aims to cultivate a religious subjectivity in the child before s/he can join adult Muslim society. In fact, many of the elements of success can be observed already in this classroom. The children's greeting of a guest with prayers, command over religious material both in Arabic and Turkish, and flawless recitations all point to the incipient stages of a religious subjectivity that the pedagogic movement has sought to create.

Another important aspect of the class, captured in Nalan's last two remarks, offers further insights into the tebliğ movement's project. Nalan, like others, presupposes that children are a blank slate upon which anything can be inscribed (i.e. "their brains are open"). Along with the broader movement, she shares the view that children are passive and controllable beings because they lack agency to withstand or reason (i.e. "they do not resist you"). These two presuppositions

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about children's relationship to knowledge and authority constitute the foundation of the tebliğ movement's project to forge pious subjectivities from an early age. On the one hand, building a religious subjectivity means increasing one's religious skills and aptitudes such as Qur'an memorization or recitation. On the other hand, it indicates creating strict subjection to the authority of the teacher, to the expectations of Muslim society, and to the code of the book, all of which help the individual acquire a pious subjectivity. Not surprisingly, a variety of activists across different age cohorts, socioeconomic backgrounds, and doctrinal groups articulated to me the importance of accessing a child early – whether through preschools, homeschools, or other courses – to control their relationship to knowledge and authority.

What is key here is that the timing of education, a theme I discussed earlier. The idea is that as time goes by, it becomes more costly for the movement to make individuals adopt or switch to a religious lifestyle. Therefore, if activists can reach individuals early on, i.e. when they are very young, they can teach them to take on a religious life more easily. But if they reach individuals after they get older, the costs of switching become higher because the ability to convince them becomes more difficult. It is for this reason that the issue of the age of first instruction commands a paramount place in the tebliğ movement and explains the remarkable resources dedicated to early religious education, not only by İsmailağa cemaat but by every single Islamist group.

Besides serving as an example of an informal site, Nalan's illegal preschool business also reveals one last insight about the character of the tebliğ movement. Nalan's operation attests to the elastic, local, and voluntary character of the tebliğ movement that enables activists like her to reach out to a wide group of people. Nalan's preschool turns into a women's Qur'an study place in the afternoons and a boarding seminary for young girls during summers when children are off from school. Between 4-6 pm every day, a group of six women come to study Qur'an recitation

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with her. Between June-August every summer, a group of thirty-five girls from neighborhood Imam-Hatip schools come to advance their Qur'anic knowledge and other religious sciences under her guidance. Although Nalan is always in need of income due to being a single mother, she is also genuinely interested in undertaking *tebliğ*. She deeply cares about teaching the Qur'an, as she used to collect random women from the street to join her Qur'an reading group or to invite Alevi women in her apartment to study Qur'an with her.[138] She explained this to me with a proud voice: "Indeed, people's [women's] behavior and life change after they learn [to read] the Qur'an. For example, they renounce their habits, restrain useless visits to neighbors [a common pastime activity among Turkish housewives]; instead they stay at home and study the Qur'an. They do their [household] chores more correctly, use their time more efficiently."

The fact that Nalan's "school" serves as a preschool, women's study, and girls' course shows why these types of informal education sites are so important to the broader tebliğ movement: they are flexible, they can multifunction, and they target local communities. Nalan's ability to teach young children, adolescents, and older women demonstrates the variety of publics she is able to reach and teach how to fulfill the requirements of a pious life.


## Informal weekend course (*haftasonu yaygın eğitim kursu*)

If a parent does not know about a religious preschool or does not want to send their children at such a young age, cemaats try to appeal to them through other informal courses, designed for older children. Although less intensive than religious preschool education, these

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[138] Alevis are a heterodox Muslim community in Turkey with divergent religious practices from mainstream Sunni orthodoxy. Some segments of the Alevi community do not read the Qur'an, utilize mosques as places of worship, or perform religious obligations such as the ritual prayer, fasting, etc. For a good history and practice of Alevism see Martin van Bruinessen's (2013). Since orthodox Sunnis consider Alevis as nonbelievers or heretics, people like Nalan's effort to teach the Qur'an to an Alevi are informed by a proselytizing mission.

courses are still effective in cultivating religious skills because of the relatively young age group the participants are still at. In this section, I analyze a network of weekend courses for elementary school children run by the Erenköy cemaat.

At the end of the school day on a June afternoon, Bilal, a seventeen-year-old Nesimiye Imam-Hatip student, and I took a crowded public bus from Nesimiye to downtown Ümraniye. Bilal is a very kind, curious, and talkative student with a beautiful voice when reciting the Qur'an. He comes from a low-income family (his father is a construction worker) and lives in a distant northeastern suburb of Istanbul. Bilal is eagerly involved in the educational activities of the Erenköy cemaat, and offered help with my research by introducing me to the cemaat's informal weekend courses.

Outside the school, Bilal volunteers at his neighborhood mosque where the Erenköy cemaat is active.[139] In this cemaat-friendly mosque, imams have allowed the Erenköy group to conduct informal, unregistered, three-hour weekend Qur'an courses during the winter.[140] In summers, the Diyanet provides daily, three-hour Qur'an courses in every mosque across the country. These weekend winter courses for children between ages ten and thirteen, however, are an invention of the Erenköy group and have no precedent within the Diyanet program. Bilal is too young to teach here, but for the last three years he has been helping the cemaat-appointed teachers by listening to children's Qur'an recitation and correcting their assignments. Since

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[139] In Istanbul, much like the rest of Turkey, certain mosques are closely affiliated with, and in some cases controlled by, certain cemaats. There are several reasons for this. Foremost, mosques are locally more accessible and relatively easier to be infiltrated by cemaats than any other formal state institution. More specific reasons may include the location of a given mosque; for example being in a certain neighborhood that is heavily populated by a particular cemaat. Or a mosque imam's prior connection with a certain cemaat might cause him to be favorable to cemaat activity (like running a Qur'an course) in the mosque. In any case, all formal mosques are under the official jurisdiction of the Diyanet and no other group is technically allowed to open a mosque or control existing ones. Yet this is not always the case. There are not only informal or alternative mosques in Turkey (see for example Tuğal 2009:448), but also cemaats exert influence over state mosques.

[140] Informal weekend courses are similar to homeschools in terms of their set up, function, and content. The only difference is that while homeschools are conducted at private homes, informal weekend courses are carried out at mosques.

former teachers of his mosque course were recently appointed as administrators of the entire course network in greater Ümraniye, Bilal was able to set up our meeting.

Despite their seemingly fragmented structure, the weekend courses are run by a remarkably centralized administrative system. The cemaat divides the Asian side of Istanbul into three administrative zones, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, and Ümraniye, each with a coordination office, registry system, and designated personnel (i.e. directors, teachers, and controllers) who reports back every week to the cemaat's central educational office. I met Adem and Ziya, both of whom are graduates of divinity schools in their early thirties, in one of those coordination offices. Adem and Ziya are in charge of sixty courses and six hundred students (each course has 10 students) in the Ümraniye zone, where Adem acts as the supervisor of course instructors and Ziya as the inspector of courses. Weekend courses are offered in three locations: neighborhood mosques, the offices of a local association (*dernek*), and private homes. In a three-hour course, male children between the ages ten and thirteen receive lessons in Qur'an reading and recitation, character training, and rules of worship. What is important to note here is that the group uses its own educational books, developed by the group's own pedagogues and produced by it's publishing house rather than Diyanet's, called "Gardener" (*Bahçevan*) for character training, "My Beautiful Religion" (*Benim Güzel Dinim*) for rules of worship, and even a children's card game "Absolute Ethics!" (*İlla Edep*), for entertainment. This preference implies the open competition cemaats engage in with the official establishment in transmitting religious knowledge. It also points to the autonomy cemaats enjoy in carrying out independent and unregulated religious training.

A similar form of liberty pertains to the selection of course instructors. Rather than drawing from Diyanet-trained teachers, the cemaat recruits college students who stay at its dormitories or student houses. The cemaat provides a modest scholarship to these students, 150

TL ($70) per month, conditional upon teaching in a weekend course. The cemaat also takes great care in training the instructors through motivational seminars, weekend retreats, and internship programs. Candidate teachers attend classes with experienced teachers and learn how to teach religion to young children in an actual classroom environment. The cemaat also arranges monthly breakfasts to collect regular reports from instructors. Once appointed to a course, the instructor is ascribed the title *Ağabey*, literally Older Brother.

*Ağabey* is a "complex conceptual structure," to borrow from Geertz (1977:10), inscribed with layers of meaning involving power, hierarchy, and benevolent will to organize social relations both within the Islamist movement and broader society. Since the term is central to the cemaat's educational program, a brief description of its cultural origins and practical function is warranted. Typically, the term is used as a relational concept to address older male figures in various contexts. The most common context is in the family, where the term refers to more senior male siblings who have peculiar rights and responsibilities.[141] Older brothers – due to their age and experience – are thought to be wiser, more mature, and capable of guiding and supervising their younger siblings.[142] This compassionate patrimonial responsibility naturally comes with certain entitlements. In return for his care and guidance, a younger sibling, or *kardeş*, is required to show love, respect, and obedience to his *Ağabey*. At its core, the term organizes

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[141] There is also an equivalent term for the senior female child in family called, *Abla*, literally Older Sister. Although the *Abla* is also entrusted with power over younger siblings in a traditional family structure, it is foremost the *Ağabey*, with the most power due to patriarchal notions of superiority of older men over both women and younger men in Turkish culture.

[142] The concept actually organizes a multi-tiered hierarchy within social settings so that for example in a family with four male siblings the oldest serves as *Ağabey* to them all, the second oldest serves as *Ağabey* to the other two, the third oldest serves as *Ağabey* to the youngest one, and the youngest has three *Ağabeys* but does not hold such a status in relation to any of his brothers. The same relational hierarchy exists within cemaats as well, as I described below.

vertical power relations and legitimizes authority of older over younger children within a traditional family.[143]

In sustaining pedagogic mobilization, Islamists like the Erenköy cemaat have imported and successfully exploited the organizational and hierarchical power of the term *Ağabey*.[144] In the cemaat as a whole, adolescents may serve as *Ağabey* to younger children, college students to adolescents, older male members to college students, and so on. Within the weekend course environment specifically the term constructs and reinforces a fictitious patrimonial authority of the old over the young just like in a family. By calling instructors *Ağabey*, rather then teacher, the group aims to forge an intimacy, bond, and trust between otherwise unrelated individuals. By emulating the language traditionally used in the family, the cemaat-run course recasts itself as an extension of the home, where a similar distribution of roles and powers is entrenched. Instructors acquire the authority of an older brother to guide and socialize young members into desirable behaviors; and students acquire the role of young siblings who would love, respect, and "listen" to their instructor, or *Ağabey*. This setup provides exceptional access to the personhood of a student by movement activists. This access in turn helps the movement inoculate religiously expected behaviors with ease and accomplish its goal – cultivating a religious subjectivity among the young and nominally Muslim members of society.

In order to obtain this crucial access to the privacy of a student, the course package includes a once-a-month retreat, or "sleep-over" with one's *Ağabey* and fellow group members in a designated home, office of a local association, or cemaat-run student house. The purpose of the sleep-over is, on the one hand, to replicate the material environment of a student's home to

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[143] In other social contexts the term is commonly employed, especially between two unrelated males, where a younger man uses it to address an older one respectfully.
[144] Although I will describe the usage of the term within the Erenköy cemaat here, the *Ağabey*—and later as we will see the *Abla*—system is not peculiar to the specific cemaat under discussion. All religious cemaats have similar systems in aiding educational mobilization.

remove the formality between *Ağabey* and student; and on the other hand, to emulate a student's

emotional environment to forge intimacy and trust between the *Ağabey* and younger students.

Once the instructor occupies a position in the student's life similar to his real (or fictitious)

*Ağabey*, he acquires significant authority to reshape and mold him into the religious form desired

by the movement. The remarks of Adem and Ziya point to the concrete aspects of the *Ağabey*

system and its impact on children:


*Adem* : Once a month, we will arrange a place, one of the cemaat's student houses or local offices, for students to stay. The instructor and students eat dinner, watch TV, play the religious card game (*İlla Edep*), or hold a sohbet in an environment away from formality (*resmiyetten uzak*), like in an *Ağabey - kardeş* (older brother-younger sibling) environment. This is where student transformation happens (*öğrenci dönüşümü burada oluyor*). Because the *Ağabey* and student establish a strong dialogue, the student becomes attached to his *Ağabey*. The *Ağabey* teaches him how to sit down and stand up (a Turkish idiom for good manners); how to sleep, and perform the ritual prayer. We win the students over here [at the sleep-overs] (*biz öğrencileri burada kazanıyoruz*). This hands-on teaching is more effective than unidirectional lecturing. We get the most effective results [from staying and teaching] at homes (*asıl verimi evlerde alıyoruz*).

*Ziya* : Indeed, we advise the instructors: "first, endear yourself to children. You don't need to hold a lecture at all. Children like to play games or be allured by fun things like outings. Provide these first. We can give what we want [to them] more easily later. Hence, we start by trying to affect children psychologically (*biz önce psikolojik olarak çocukları etkilemeye çalışıyoruz*). We tell the student: "this is your *Ağabey*, see him as your real *Ağabey* (*o ağabey senin gerçek ağabeyin gibi olsun*). You can share everything with him." The most important thing for the student is to love his *Ağabey*. After this, he follows what he does; he models himself after the *Ağabey's* identity. For example, when the *Ağabey* performs the ritual prayer (*namaz*), the student inscribes this in his brain. He says to himself: this *Ağabey* is a good person, I should do what he does; so I should perform the ritual prayer like he does." He goes home and does the prayer. You get the real transformation then. He wants to be like his *Ağabey*. The most important thing in formal education is consistency. You have to take care of the student for a long, extended period of time. And when you reach that point, you complete the business of reshaping the child (*çocuğun şekillenmesi*).

Ziya and Adem's comments are striking for two reasons. First, they delineate with extraordinary

precision the creative pedagogy that underlines the movement's long-term goal – remaking

individual subjectivities. The idea is that rather than just formal public encounters in a classroom,

informal interaction in a student's personal space – i.e. home – can shape their dispositions and

actions more effectively. However, this type of contact requires replicating the material and

emotional environment found inside one's home. This is where the creativity of the *Ağabey*

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system comes in. The *Ağabey* is a critical actor who transforms the formal schooling experience of a student into an informal habituation process through which he cultivates an alternative set of religiously inspired behaviors and dispositions. The instructor accomplishes this first by taking on a surrogate role, an older brother, who unlike his teacher can access a student's most personal space. Once this fictive position becomes emotionally and socially legitimate in the eyes of students and families, the instructor can now assume the rights and responsibilities of a real *Ağabey*. In return for his supervision, he will receive the love and respect of the student who hopefully will also model himself after his *Ağabey*.

Second, the responses of these young activists draw on a wide array of pedagogic goals that exemplify the social aspirations of the movement. These goals are not simply aspirations, but also linked to concrete action and outcomes. As I alluded to above, the activists draw a distinction between a pedagogy of ordinary lecturing in a public context, i.e. a classroom, and a pedagogy of hands-on practice situated in a private context, i.e. a home. The locus of teaching in public versus private contexts roughly coincides with the idea of pedagogic access to a student's outer self in the formal sphere (in a classroom) as opposed to his inner self in the informal (in his home). Rather than the former, activists believe it is the latter area where pious work toward inculcating certain values is more productive. Accordingly, the intimate cultivation in one's private sphere is thought to bring about the desired goals, referenced by terms such as "transformation," "winning over," or "reshaping" of students. This program's systematicity and efficacy are indicated by a figurative language of entrepreneurship that activists draw from such as getting effective results (*verim almak*), having consistency (*istikrarlı olmak*), influencing psychology (*psikolojiyi etkileme*), completing business (*işi bitirmek*). Overall, through these articulations activists provide the contours of the movement's short-term strategy and long-term project.

Lastly, I would like to situate this discussion within the pedagogic movement's objections to the secular system and its proposed alternative. I believe this shows more concretely how informal weekend courses constitute an instance of broader pedagogic mobilization. Toward the end of our interview, Ziya enunciated their objections and objectives concretely:

> The person we try to influence, God knows, is influencing how many other people around him. We believe that reshaping society (*toplumun şekillenmesi*) is achieved like this. If the person you re-form is reaching out and re-forming a few people around him, then it continues as a process of succession (*bu bir silsile halinde devam eder*). For example, an instructor trains ten kids. Even if only three out of those decide to follow in his path [teach religion to others] and instruct 20 other students, you have now reached a circle of 60 people. This is like throwing a stone to a small pond, which then forms ripples. What we do is to throw a stone […] Our purpose is not to spread Islam; everybody we deal with is already Muslim. In reality, everyone knows the [eternal] truth (*herkes zaten gerçek doğrunun ne olduğunu biliyor*). When they ask their conscience "what should I do, what should I not do," they can find answers. But this is precisely where our problem begins. We cannot find the [conducive] environment to ask this question to our conscience or we grow up in very different [non-religious] environments (*Vicdanımıza soracak bir ortam bulamıyoruz veya çok farklı ortamlarda yetişiyoruz*). Our purpose is to help individuals ask those questions.

Ziya's comments point to a set of important ideas shared by participants in the pedagogic movement: the critique of the contemporary secular system and the strategy for change. First of all, these views are situated within a worldview that considers leading an ethical life with the purpose of pleasing God the purpose of personal and collective efforts. When he says "what should I do, what should I not do," he is essentially referring to whether or not one should undertake the moral reorganization of their life – from devotional practices to ethical conduct – to fulfill God's orders. Although each individual has a potential to align their life with religion, activists like Ziya think that this potential remains at an unformed stage that cannot motivate the desired action instinctively. Rather, the individual's potential to become religious should be nurtured in appropriate contexts that are informed by the principles of Islamic morality. Conversely, if individuals grow up in "different," (read secular) and impious environments, they lose their potential to become religious. The pedagogic movement aims to reverse this trend by

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building a conducive environment to nurture this potential, in this case, an informal weekend course.

The second aspect of Ziya's comment indicates the idea of individual transformation through slow and systematic work to bring about meaningful societal change. According to activists, piety-related work – cultivation of religious subjectivities – is a gradual but cumulative process. The effects may seem negligible at any given time, but they become powerful over the long run in generating far-reaching transformations. Therefore, educating a small group of children is not an isolated event, but is thought to hold larger implications for the rest of society. The metaphor of throwing a stone refers to just that. One instructor teaches a group of students, among whom a few take up his role. They pass it on to others, who take it yet to others. Therefore, the effect of the stone hitting the water is not one blip, but instead a series of ripples that disrupts the status quo across a much larger area. Finally this idea of a move from the individual to society, or a bottom-up strategy, widely shared across different Islamist groups, concentrates on transforming individual dispositions as a means of reinvigorating religion in private and public life and enacting larger sociopolitical change.

## Cemaat houses (*cemaat evleri*)

The next category of religious education sites target high school and college students. As I demonstrated, the purpose of informal sites for young children is to introduce them to religion and essential skills for the conduct of a pious life. The role of sites for teenagers, instead, is to deepen religious knowledge and help them perfect religious skills such as correct ritual prayer, veiling, and Qur'an recitation to help them fulfill the requirements of a pious life. Thus, while the sites discussed up to this point – sıbyan schools and weekend courses – seek to introduce

religious knowledge and skills to the life of an individual, the next set of sites I will discuss –

cemaat houses and madrasas – aim to solidify them.

Cemaat houses are popular and widely available sites of informal education for teenagers.

They generally consist of private apartments shared by three to six students where older residents

teach Islamic ethics, rules of worship, and the cemaat's tenets to younger residents or visitors. As

I have already shown, bringing individuals to live in a "private house" where they are guided by

their older peers is an important tool of the tebliğ movement. I also alluded to the elements of

this practice in the previous section. A cemaat house facilitates the creation of an environment of

intimacy, emulation, and supervision; the access to the personal sphere of the individual; and the

constitution of positions of influence and authority over the targeted audience. The extensive

network of such private spaces exemplifies once again the flexible, decentralized, and local

character of the tebliğ movement. There are two common types of cemaat houses: (1) student

houses (*öğrenci evleri*) and (2) older brother/sister houses (*ağabey/abla evleri*). While the former

board 5-6 students with the oldest training permanent residents, the latter board 2-3 students who

rotate in training visiting and short term residents. In this section I will discuss two different

cases of cemaat houses: a student house of the Erenköy group and an older brother/sister house

of the Gülen group.


*student houses (öğrenci evleri)*

The Erenköy cemaat's student houses share many similarities with their informal

weekend courses I discussed earlier. The cemaat runs student houses in three administrative

districts, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, and Ümraniye, each containing on average 10 houses. A senior

college student called an *Ağabey*, who lives in the same unit, supervises the residents, which

consists of five male high school or college students. The cemaat does not charge students and

pays for their expenses including board, bills, books, and transportation. The average rent of a house per month is 900-1000 TL ($450) and bills cost 500 TL ($240). In some cases, parents provide support in the form of donations. Each house has a title named after an Ottoman sultan or Sufi poet, such as Suleiman the Magnificent (*Kanuni evi*), Abdul Hamid (*Abdülhamit evi*), and Rumi (*Mevlana evi*), whose biographies the residents are expected to know in detail and draw lessons from.[145] Every week residents are required to attend the Qur'an class taught by an Imam-Hatip teacher, listen to a sohbet delivered by the cemaat's senior members or leaders, and visit the tombs of Sufi saints, historic mosques, or dervish lodges to learn about Islamic and Ottoman history and culture. But expectations from students are not limited to narrow participation in these educational events. They include strict commitment to "service," or working at different levels and locales of *tebliğ* designated by the cemaat. All student residents have to volunteer for educational or social piety work including at youth centers, public soup kitchens (*aşevi*), or foodstuff distribution locations (*erzak dağıtım yerleri*) run by the cemaat's Hüdayi Vakıf. However, according to activists, this religo-social commitment cannot be obtained before individuals strengthen their piety. One of the most symbolic yardsticks of piety is punctual and correct performance of ritual acts such ritual ablution (*abdest*) and prayer (*namaz*). The ability and desire to perform ablution and prayer nurtured in earlier ages in the family, mosque, or weekend courses is perfected in later ages at cemaat houses. In the next section, I use the case of Yahya, a thirty-two year old member of the Erenköy cemaat, to explain how the cemaats facilitate this perfection.

Yahya is an administrator at an Erenköy-run publishing house that produces religious children's books. A very eloquent and collected young man with incisive pedagogic insights,

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[145] Suleiman the Magnificent was the longest reigning Ottoman sultan during the 16th century whose tenure was revered by Islamists for bringing the Empire to its Golden age. Abdul Hamid was the late 19th century Ottoman Sultan admired by Islamists for reinvigorating religion, or pan-Islamism, as the new ideological framework for a declining empire. Rumi was a 13th century Persian poet and Sufi mystic.

Yahya spent his entire student career at various Erenköy dormitories and student houses from

sixth grade until his graduation from divinity school at an Eastern Anatolian university. After

completing his degree, the cemaat appointed him to a managerial position within its network,

overseeing informal weekend courses and student houses in the administrative zone of Üsküdar.

Due to his personal experience and administrative duties, he is in a distinct position to observe

the stages in a participant's acquisition of ritual acts like ablution and prayer. As Yahya explains:

> Children learn ritual acts through imitating (*taklit*) others, like his *Ağabey*. Take ritual ablution. Initially, he rushes the ablution, washes half of his arm; splashes water all over himself. But his *Ağabey* shows him how to do it. Imitating his *Ağabey*, over time, he starts doing it correctly. Therefore, a behavior that starts with pure imitation later becomes automatic, natural (*İlk başta taklitle başlayan bir hareket ileride otamatik, doğal bir hale geliyor*). The same is true with ritual prayer. Teenagers lack discipline [to pray regularly], but after [staying in the houses] they acquire it. The *Ağabey* explains why they should do it. He tells them "Prayer keeps you away from wrongdoing."[146] God checks on you five times a day, you do not have time to sin, you are under review.

Yahya shows that nurturing a religious subjectivity hinges not only on instilling doctrinal and

moral orientations but also increasing one's skills in the punctual and correct execution of ritual

acts. Under the supervision of a religiously mature person, like an *Ağabey*, children and

teenagers improve their initial knowledge and move from learning to perfecting physical acts

foundational to religiosity. More broadly, Yahya's reflections corroborate the general idea of

mind-body transformation through ritual acts. In the Imam-Hatip chapter, I discussed a set of

debates over the moral reform of the youth on the basis of a disciplinary training of the self.

Yahya's comments build on the same logic: the practice of ablution and prayer, also understood

as "coming to the presence of God," will induce a sense of alertness and moral propriety, which

will create a particular self aversion to immoral actions. According to Yahya, a child or a

teenager with some awareness or practice of religion is not yet at a level to be truly pious. The

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[146] Yahya is referring to the Ankebût sûresi, verse 45.

real piety comes with perfection of both external behavior as well as internal orientations along

Islamic standards. The context of the student house is crucial to its accomplishment.

At this point I ask Yahya how administrators know whether students really observe ritual

prayer. His answer is striking:

> We know everything, because we receive secret reports from *Ağabeys* about who is praying and who is not, who is doing the ritual ablution late, who is not doing it at all. The reports say, for instance, 'this student has trouble doing the prayer or ablution.' So we make a visit to their house, talk to the student in private, ask why he is missing his prayer. He says 'I was busy studying at home, or my friends did not remind me at school.' We ask him, 'would you like us to help you out?' (*ister misin sana el uzatalım*?) He says 'of course,' in fact, he can't say no. Then we start pursuing him, making regular phone calls to the home to check up, reminding him about the prayer time, urging the *Ağabey* to take him to the mosque. The important thing is that an individual should make a return [to religious responsibilities] and they can. We believe we should win over every individual.

This "surveillance system" deployed both with and without residents' knowledge to increase

their religious performance reveals many clues about the tebliğ movement's project. First,

religious transformation is predicated on the pursuit of a strict bodily regimen that generates a

particular personhood. The idea is that repeated exercise of a certain behavior – prayer – leads to

the fixing of a certain (virtuous) intellectual and emotional orientation about the self and its

relation to others. Each move reinforces the previous, entrenching not only a behavioral routine

but also a mental disposition. This practice has strong parallels with what Saba Mahmood found

in her work on the piety movement in Egypt, where mosque participants are encouraged to

perfect their external ritual behavior, such as prayer, to attain internal transformation (2005:121–

35). As Mahmood shows, "external performative acts (like prayer) are understood to create

corresponding inward dispositions." Turkish Islamists share a similar vision. They believe that

ritual acts such as ablution and prayer are not simply religious prescriptions but pedagogical

exercises essential to constructing religious subjectivities.

Second, the pedagogic movement applies a two-tiered surveillance system to secure the

adoption and continued performance of religious behavior. At the first level, the movement

imposes through *Ağabey* lectures and sohbets an invisible pressure toward self-discipline. "Self-

discipline is like an internal police," as one of the Imam-Hatip teachers told me, "when you

obtain a strong religious education there is no need for a real police to watch or correct your

behavior." Since control comes spontaneously and directly from within, it renders redundant any

external intervention to align one's behavior with Islamic standards. But not everybody has the

self-discipline to adopt the required set of behaviors. Thus, at a second level the movement

places a visible and stricter control on delinquent individuals through a set of appointees (i.e.

Yahya, one's *Ağabey*), documentation systems (i.e. secret reports), and institutions (i.e. cemaat

houses). Clearly, external surveillance requires a complex infrastructure and indicates the

willingness of movements to invest an extraordinary amount of resources into creating the type

of person they believe is desirable.

But what exactly does the pedagogic movement gain from a teenager's perfect practice of

ablution and prayer? This brings me to my last point on the purpose of student houses. I will

elaborate this through Yahya's response to my question on the financial sources of piety work.

When prompted, Yahya explained to me:

> The president of the [cemaat's] vakıf's board owns a textile business. His cousin, also a board
> member, owns a supermarket chain. You know after 1839 (declaration of the Tanzimat Decree),
> Western notions of personal enrichment, money accumulation, passing one's wealth to his
> children became the norm. These people [president and his cousin], however, aim to use their
> wealth for educational activities, like student houses. It is like in the time of our prophet. The
> prophet had a group of Companions (called *Ashab-ı Suffe*) who did not work because they were
> fully engaged in education [learning and teaching Islam]. The prophet procured their livelihood.
> Some people will earn money and some will educate. Our informal education system is modeled
> on the prophet's. Take for example one of those Companions, Islam's first teacher Mus'ab bin
> Umeyr (who was sent to Medina by the prophet to educate recently converted Muslims). In
> Medina, Mus'ab carried out *tebliğ*, teaching ritual prayer, fasting, and Islam's worldview to the
> society around him. We want to do the same. *Our purpose is to raise new Mus'abs.* We do not
> train students just to get into university. We have larger goals. We are raising individuals who are
> going to remind Islamic values to their environment, reiterate them to people around him (*İslami
> değerleri çevresine hatırlatacak, onları tekerrür edecek insanlar yetiştiriyoruz*). Our students do
> not act with "individualism," do not attend birthday parties, go to places with alcohol. They
> regard sexual relations out of wedlock as dynamite placed under Turkish society. We do not have
> the luxury to forget Islamic values. Every system except Islam has been tried: Communism,

Buddhism, Christianity, Enlightenment [ideas], but none of them succeeded. Every value system is destined to change but Islamic values cannot change and have to be preserved.

Yahya's remarks delineate nicely how a teenager's perfect practice of ablution and prayer are linked to a range of goals that extend from creating ethical subjectivities to shaping societal trends to transforming politics. Correct execution of ritual acts is a prerequisite for the formation of a religious subjectivity, which in turn is foundational for attaining the three goals to which he alludes. The first goal is to train pious individuals who can educate those in their environment in the knowledge and practice of Islam. This idea resonates with an earlier trend I discussed in the context of the Imam-Hatip, where students are expected to be exemplary practitioners of religion (i.e. doing ritual prayer correctly) in order to be leaders of society (i.e. guiding others on proper thought and action). Like the Prophet's young companions who study religion in a designated room (*Suffe*) in Mescid-i Nebî in Medina before being ready for *tebliğ*, teenagers study religion in designated cemaat houses before becoming ready to be the carriers of Islam to people who are only nominally aware of their religion. The second goal is to intervene and change societal trends through the help of pious teenagers. The idea is that cemaats aim to reverse moral deficiencies such as "personal enrichment, money accumulation, passing one's wealth to his children" in an irreligious society by training virtuous individuals who will uphold moral values and eventually replace the un-virtuous ones. The third goal is connected to the implications of individual and societal transformation for the political system. Yahya's last remarks, shared broadly across religious segments, suggest a bottom-up change from the individual to society to politics. Compared to socialist, religious, or liberal systems, Islam is understood to be a superior political system. However, its correct implementation requires the embrace and spread of its doctrinal and practical principles, first among individuals and then within broader society. This dynamic scheme that moves from educating individuals to changing society to transforming politics, as articulated by Yahya, constitutes the centerpiece of the tebliğ movement.

*older brother/sister houses (ağabey/abla evleri)*

The second type of cemaat house I would like to analyze are Older Brother/Sister houses (*Ağabey/Abla evi*) that board 2-3 college students in charge of training younger, more transient guest residents, who are high school students. The idea of an Older Brother/Sister house directly builds on the notions of power, hierarchy, and benevolence encapsulated in the concept of *Ağabey* I analyzed earlier. Whereas an *Ağabey* guides young male children and teenagers, an *Abla*, literally older sister, supervises females (see also footnotes 20 and 21). Needless to say, the *Abla* bears the same rights and responsibilities as the *Ağabey* who guides and socializes younger members into Islamic behaviors and virtues. The ultimate goal of the Older Brother/Sister is to cultivate a religious subjectivity among the younger and nominally Muslim members of society. Although other cemaats have similar structures, the Older Brother/Sister house is largely an invention of the Gülen group. This informal network of houses is also a good example of the group's adherence to both components of the dual strategy. Even when cemaats work within the system, one of the most successful being Gülenists due to their ability to penetrate state offices since 2002, it is clear that they still feel the need to work outside the system through student houses or prep courses to pass on non-state sanctioned religious knowledge and to resuscitate Islam in society. There are no available statistics on their numbers, but like the illegal preschools, I was told that these informal cemaat houses are found in almost every neighborhood. Not surprisingly, they are mainly clustered around high schools and FEM prep courses. In this section, I will mainly focus on Older sister houses in my analysis.

Gülen group's cemaat houses are organized hierarchically within a given city. Each cemaat house, neighborhood, and district has a principal "*Abla*," or older sister. The "district *Abla*" (*bölge ablası*) is a full-time employee who sends weekly/monthly memos to "neighborhood *Abla*" (*semt ablası*) who in turn relays them to "house *Abla*" (*ev ablası*) about

where they need to hold the next sohbet, what topics they should talk about, and which books of Fettullah Gülen they should read to guest students. Each house also has a "House Mother" (*ev annesi*), who is a neighborhood resident with time and money and is in charge of voluntarily restocking groceries or other material needs of the house. Houses are named after common Turkish female names like Light (*Işık*), Star (*Yıldız*), or Homeland (*Sıla*). The adoption of this "family" metaphor and the feminine hierarchy within cemaat houses aims to forge a surrogate link with one's own family. Again, as in the student houses, this pedagogic articulation renders indistinct the boundaries of one's own home and the cemaat house, private and public, making students an indivisible part of the religious community, instead of only their family.

The cemaat also organizes throughout high schools in a given district. Each *Abla* is assigned a classroom and is responsible for training that classroom's students if and when they come to her house. The duties of an *Abla* consist of tutoring students in their schoolwork, teaching them how to do ritual prayer and giving them a sohbet. The guest students are generally recruited through FEM courses, where teachers are responsible for identifying and inviting students to a nearby *Abla* house. Amine and Behiye are two sisters at the ages of eighteen and twenty-two who have studied at Nesimiye Imam-Hatip and also stayed (short term – on weekends each month) at *Abla* houses for several years during secondary school. Their experiences reveal the array of practices of cemaat houses and the profound effects they can have in furthering the aims of the tebliğ movement.

Amine and Behiye live in a poor neighborhood not too far from Nesimiye Imam-Hatip. Although they are not officially members of any cemaat, they have ties to the Gülen group. Amine went to FEM during university exam preparation and Behiye at the time of my research was staying in their dormitory and also going to FEM (later Behiye got into their private college, *Süleyman Şah Üniversitesi*, on scholarship). During their high school years in Nesimiye, Amine

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and Behiye regularly went to the cemaat's *Abla* house. They explained to me the social context

of an *Abla* house and its impact on students in a long conversation in the courtyard of Nesimiye

on a warm June afternoon. Behiye started with an enthusiastic tone:

> An *Abla* house is just like a normal two or three bedroom apartment. We used to go in groups, and stay over one or two nights [on weekends]. In fact, my group was big and we used to sleep in two's on sofa beds. We had a lot of fun. We would chat with friends, they serve you tea and food, they give you a sohbet, you do the prayer collectively, they create a beautiful environment for you to socialize.

When I asked the girls to elaborate some more on the social context and it's relation to religious

practices, Amine jumped in:

> Certainly, the [social] context is very important  (*ortam çok önemli*) because it has a major influence on the individual (*insan üzerinde çok büyük etkileri oluyor*). Take for example the issue of veiling (*örtünme*) or ritual prayer (*namaz*). The majority of people who start [to come the houses] uncovered, eventually cover up.

At this point, Behiye interrupted her:

> The girls who come to an Older sister house do not know the importance of ritual prayer (*Abla evine gelen kızlar namazın önemini bilmiyorlar*); they do not perform it regularly; or they do not perform it at all. When you go to the house everybody does the prayer. You yourself may not, but you know that it's a religious obligation (*farz*). Then you feel bad, and start doing it [regularly]. More than anyone else, a person is most influenced by her peers, her social network.

In order to elucidate Behiye's point, Amine gave an example from her own experiences:

> When I began going to an *Abla* house I was not performing the ritual prayer. I started [praying] later and by the time I graduated from high school, I changed as a person [became more pious]. Your parents would say "do your prayer"; but they are parents, you don't want to listen to them. However, when you do it collectively in an *Abla* house, it has a bigger [and long-term] impact. As they say: if you lie down with the blind, you get up cross-eyed (*körle yatan şaşı kalkar*).

Amine and Behiye's dialogue meticulously demonstrates the social dynamics and subtle

pressures of "conversion" from nominal to real Muslimhood. *Abla* houses offer alternative

spaces of 'practice' and 'friends' in a society dominated by less religious people and trends

where it is difficult for teenagers to pursue a religious life. It is no coincidence that both Behiye

and Amine were neither cognizant nor disciplined about ritual prayer until they encountered a

social environment where they were taught and accompanied in prayer, and socially rewarded for

being pious. In its essence, the concept of cemaat house draws from basic socialization theory where a social context and experience develops an individual's personality. The *Abla* house constitutes a social context, which makes the norms, expectations, and practices of a particular social system pervasive and dominant, facilitating their adoption by newcomers. The effect of such socialization can be life changing, as Amine describes in her narrative. After a sustained period spent at *Abla* houses, she adopted the discipline and desire to pray; in other words she "changed as a person." She articulates her evolution through the proverb "if you lie down with the blind, you get up cross-eyed," suggesting that when individuals associate with people who have certain practices, they acquire similar habits or become like them.

Amine and Behiye's remarks lay out the pivotal role of the cemaat house in initiating and overseeing the process of personal conversion from nominal to substantive religiosity. However, their narration leaves unexplained the content or quality of religiosity attained, which cannot be deduced simply from observing one's formulaic practice of ritual acts like prayer. Even though one performs prayers punctually and correctly, what does this external appearance of religiosity actually indicate about its content or "quality" ? Another Nesimiye student, who was a committed member of the Menzil cemaat and had been going to an *Abla* house since sixth grade, explained a common answer that I heard to this question. She explained that while she had been performing ritual prayer regularly, she acquired a different, more profound, kind of religiosity after she began going to an *Abla* house. This kind of piety was predicated on the cultivation of an emotional experience of sincerity and deference called *huşu* that one is expected to feel when coming into the presence of God:

> I have been praying since junior high school. However, my prayers were not filled with *huşu*. After starting to visit my *Abla,* [the quality of] my prayers changed. In explaining the importance of a [ritual] practice, my *Abla* would never say: "this practice is important, so you should do it." Instead, she would link it to concrete examples. For instance she would say: "God Almighty is inviting you to prayer. Think of this as if your prime minister is calling you to his presence; how privileged would you feel. How can you not go? How can you miss such an opportunity?" In

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creating *huşu* in prayer, my *Abla* would give more examples: "think about how a soldier would appear before his general; in the uttermost state of sincerity, respect, and neatness." This is the deference aspect. She would explain the love aspect as such: "all [kinds of] love emanates from the love of God. You are coming to the presence of the creature that you love the most; you have to have an affection for him [*ona muhabbet duymalısınız*]; your heart should turn toward him." I used to take so much pleasure from this [kind of] explanation. And I would be greatly influenced by it (*Ablam bu şekilde anlatıyordu ve bu benim çok hoşuma gidiyordu, çok etkileniyordum*).

Underlining the student's account is a conception of holistic religiosity that can only be attained by interlinking material performance, i.e. punctual and correct execution of prayer moves, to emotional orientation, i.e. strengthening feelings of sincerity, fear, respect or *huşu*. The term *huşu* means to obey, submit, or be motionless especially in the presence of authority. The term is also used in the Qur'an as a desirable mode one should attain during prayer: being in an emotional state of deference, awe, and affection to gain God's blessing.[147] What is noteworthy in the student's narrative is her specific reference to the "creation" of *huşu*, an emotional experience that does not arise spontaneously but has to be learned from a religiously versed person. In teaching these emotions the metaphor the *Abla* plays up is "appearing before a prime minister or military commander." In a society where patrimonial authority and deference are crucial elements of all vertical social relations, such power-driven motifs are effective in motivating individuals, as the student acknowledges at the end. It is also important to underline that this benevolent hierarchy is not deemed oppressive but natural, even fortunate. Just as one would feel a mixture of respect, fear, and love in the presence of his/her prime minister or military commander because it is a "privilege" to be called upon, one needs to have the same emotions appearing before God. The idea informing these drills is that the formation of a religious subjectivity ultimately hinges on making the transition from formal, external religiosity based on formulaic performance to holistic religiosity informed by both material and emotional practice.

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[147] The specific verses that refer to *huşu* in prayer include Hadid sûre, verse 16; Müminun sûre verse, 1-2; and Bakara sûre, verse 45.

In sum, the cemaat house – whether in the form of a student house or an older sister/brother house – is a crucial case of the tebliğ movement motivated by similar critiques of the social and cultural tenets of society and similar goals to replace them. Cemaat houses provide a space of practice and guidance insulated from the pressures of anti-religious trends in society from dating to consumption to personal enrichment. The goal is to combat these anti-religious trends by strengthening one's religiosity. Cemaat houses not only teach teenagers and young adults the patience, focus, and self-discipline needed for correct and punctual practice of rituals, but also a set of emotions deemed advantageous for attaining a holistic religiosity and gaining God's pleasure. In doing so, their program works toward realizing the broader goals of the tebliğ movement.

## Madrasa

The last informal site of religious education I will analyze is the madrasa. A reclusive and esoteric establishment, contemporary madrasas are often located in unmarked apartments away from popular city districts. No ads, schedule of classes, enrollment information, administrative offices, teachers, or staff are known to exist. Yet there is a vibrant madrasa network in Istanbul. In essence what I am calling "madrasa," in line with the label given by activists, is simply an illegal boarding Qur'anic seminary.[148] In the last three decades the İsmailağa cemaat popularized the term "madrasa" to refer to its seminaries, while distinguishing them from legal, state-sponsored Qur'anic seminaries.[149] The spread of madrasas accelerated after the 1980 military coup, first in the geographical heartland of the cemaat in the neighborhood Fatih Çarşamba and

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[148] The madrasa I examine in this section should not be confused with the publicly well-known yet likewise unofficial madrasas in the South East especially in Siirt Tillo and in the East in Erzurum.

[149] Despite sharing similar critiques of the official system with İsmailağa, no other cemaat uses the specific term "madrasa" to refer to their seminaries of Qur'anic education.

later in the conservative and poor districts of Istanbul including Bayrampaşa, Ümraniye, Dudullu, Beykoz, and Sultanbeyli.

The spread of İsmailağa's madrasas, just like its illegal preschools, is another good example of Islamists' strategy to work both within and outside the system. The extraordinary expansion of the madrasa network was only possible with the infiltration of Diyanet with İsmailağa-friendly officers, especially in its local offices. Local jurisconsults have been quite aware of the illegal madrasa expansion. In many cases, jurisconsults registered the seminaries on paper, while allowing them full autonomy in appointing instructors, designing curricula, and enrolling students for longer than the legally permissible time. Such local favors successfully removed Diyanet's control over the madrasas. The outcome has been the cemaats' gaining of critical leverage in challenging the state's monopoly over the interpretation of religion in particular, and expansion of the boundaries of religious autonomy in general.

The opening of madrasas was encouraged by İsmailağa's spiritual leader Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, who ordered his disciples to "open one madrasa for girls and one for boys in every neighborhood, and I promise you Islam will come then" (*Her mahalleye bir kız, bir erkek madrasasi açın size İslam'ın geleceğine söz veriyorum*). İsmailağa has an extremely inflexible interpretation of the Qur'an and *Sünnet* (prophet's exemplary and authoritative deeds) and the madrasa is one of the most aggressive institutions of the tebliğ movement, where the professed goal is to train service volunteers through a demanding disciplinary program, who will in turn help restore Shari'a in society. Due to its dual character (proselytizing but unpermissive), it is easy to enter but very difficult to stay in a madrasa and the broader cemaat.

Unlike other cemaat seminaries, which organize by geographical district, İsmailağa madrasas are organized according to their Hoca (religious teacher/preacher) who constitutes a node in a network of different types of madrasa (see below). Across Turkey the cemaat has 170

female Hocas in charge of one or more of the four different types of unregistered Islamic courses they may open, including preschools (*sıbyan mektebi*), beginners courses (*ibtidâ kursu*), Qur'an memorization courses (*hafızlık kursu*), and advanced courses (*tekâmül kursu*).[150] Typically, an individual begins the madrasa after junior high school (age 14) at a beginner's course for three years.[151] If she is interested in becoming a Hoca, she continues on to the advanced course for another two years before obtaining an unofficial diploma (*icazet*). Most madrasas are established in unmarked apartment buildings consisting of one, two, or more units donated by wealthy residents of a given neighborhood. I analyze this illegal Qur'anic seminary system through a series of ethnographic accounts of two İsmailağa madrasas for females.

The two largest madrasas of İsmailağa, one for beginners and one for advanced levels, are located in a district on the European side of Istanbul densely populated by followers of the İsmailağa cemaat. The madrasas have no names—only door numbers—and despite their invisibility, all residents of the neighborhood know them well. Hosting about 210 students and 25 teachers in total, both madrasas are tucked into a narrow backstreet in seemingly residential run-down apartments, surrounded by other madrasas also masquerading as residential apartments. Though I was informed about where to go my first time visiting, I still had trouble locating the exact madrasa I was looking for. After asking several women in the neighborhood dressed in full-body-length black veils (*siyah çarsaf*), the required attire for females in the cemaat, I first arrived at the beginner's course myself fully covered in Islamic dress. This tenement-style building had six floors, the first three of which were populated by cemaat-friendly families. After climbing the stairs to the fourth floor, I ran into a large metal door blocking

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[150] Author's field notes, September 2012. Due to my access to the female side of the group, my description portrays the organization of the female madrasas more accurately. Although the majority are still illegal, the Diyanet registered a few male madrasas. However, I do not have any data on their numbers or exact organizational set up.

[151] After the change in the Education Law that introduced the 4+4+4 system in 2012, children at age 11 (or at the end of 4th grade) will be able to attend a madrasa.

further passage up the staircase. I realized that this was the "entrance" to the madrasa, and knocked. A few moments later I heard a pair of hurried footsteps descending the stairs, but when the person arrived on the other side, they did not open the door. Instead, I heard a knock on the door from the inside. Not understanding what that meant, I knocked again. She responded not by opening the door, but knocking back. At that moment, I realized that this was a gesture – or some kind of secret sign language – that required the visitor to identify her/his gender. Before deciding to let me in, the host needed to hear the voice of the visitor. Therefore I said: "Selâmün Aleyküm." I heard the heavy bolt turn inside and the metal door slowly open with a young woman behind it with a smile saying "Aleyküm Selâm" (and peace be on you!)

The female voice, according to some interpretations of Islam, is considered forbidden (*haram*)[152] because of its potential to arouse sexual feelings in men. Although there is no direct Qur'anic verse or *Hadis* forbidding the female voice in public and despite contrary evidence from the prophet's time when non-related Companions of the opposite sex held conversations with the prophet or one another, certain Islamist groups insist that the female voice is an elementary aspect of her sexuality that needs to be kept silent as a preemptive measure. The İsmailağa cemaat has an especially rigid approach to women's presence in public—manifested in their requirement to adorn full-body-length black veils, refrain from talking to or making eye contact with unrelated men, and forego school or work due to the gender-mixing that often occurs in those environments. Against the backdrop of these proscriptions, one can understand better the process of secret signaling in which I had to partake upon my arrival. The young girl who did not open the door did not want to incur a sin by speaking to or being seen by a foreign male who

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[152] The more technical term to refer to the aspects of physical seclusion of both men and women is *avret* meaning 'that which causes embarrassment, 'that which needs to be hidden.'

might be at the door. Instead, the fact that she waited until she heard a female voice is a good example of the indoctrination she received at the madrasa.[153]

The beginner's course (*ibtidâ kursu*) occupies the top three floors of the building, where each unit was turned into a section of the seminary including ablution rooms, study rooms, mescits, and a kitchen. There is almost no furniture in the units and the few sofas, stools, and bookcases are all worn out and old. Most of the empty rooms are covered with green carpets and students eat meals, hold classes, and sleep on the floor. This physical environment indicates the cemaat's modest financial resources compared to other wealthier groups like Erenköy or Gülen and its dependence on donors to run its seminaries. While walking through these rooms, I came across Ümmühan the administrative Hoca of the seminary.

Ümmühan was a skinny and fragile woman in her early forties with a reserved attitude. She has been involved in İsmailağa madrasas for twenty-two years. Her husband is an imam at a nearby mosque and she has been a Hoca for seventeen years in madrasas even though she does not earn an income from her service. In talking about her dislike of working for money, she explained to me the purpose of madrasas. Her comments also spoke to the broader purpose and character of the tebliğ movement:

> We do not earn money from our work in a madrasa. In fact, this work (teaching Islam) has no [material] recompense in this world (*madrasade yaptığımız ilmin dünyada karşılığı yok*). However, it does in the hereafter. Our only purpose is to live and disseminate God's directives, and this is only possible by refraining from the prohibited (*haramdan sakınma*). God made it upon us a religious obligation to "invite others to goodness and right conduct and to forbid them from indecency" (*Allah bize insanlara iyiliği emretmeyi ve insanları kötülükten sakındırmayı farz kıldı*). Therefore, just as you do not want to do what is prohibited yourself, you will also prevent others from doing what is prohibited. A human being is responsible for another human being (*insan insandan sorumludur*). What we do in the madrasa is exactly this – teaching God's edicts and prohibitions to others. When I read the life of the Companions, I realized that in reality we do

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[153] It is important to point to the methodological implication of only looking from inside the movement, which can lead to overstating the movement's success in converting its students into strict Muslims. Even though the group is able to convince a group of female members, it is not always successful in recruiting new members into the prescribed life style. Both in the Imam-Hatip and the broader educational settings, I met many women and girls who tried to stay but eventually dropped out of İsmailağa madrasas because of overly rigid rules and expectations.

not do anything, we do not struggle [to spread faith]. Back then, it was forbidden to say Allah, they worshipped idols, there was no modest dress. Today we are too comfortable. Also back then it was an obligation on everyone who could use a sword to engage in jihad. But the prophet did not send those who studied religious sciences. There are two types of martyrs in jihad. The ones who die fighting with their sword and the ones who die while learning and teaching [religious science] with their pen.

Ümmühan's account delineates the principal characteristics of the tebliğ movement that is encapsulated within the madrasa. Turkish Islamists, like their counterparts in the broader Muslim world, have drawn from a Qur'anic concept *emr-i bi'l ma'rûf*, which is found in several verses in the book and serves as a justification for religious mobilization. Ümmühan quotes the full version of this concept in Turkish "invite others to goodness and right conduct and forbid indecency (*emr-i bi'l ma'rûf ve nehy-i anil münker*) to explain the doctrinal reasoning behind the educational mobilization epitomized in the institution of the madrasa. This framework expects every Muslim to take it upon themselves as a personal responsibility to relay the edicts of Islam to broader society, especially to those who are categorically Muslim but not actually faithful. This justification for the tebliğ movement is based on the practive, captured in Ümmühan's later comments, of comparing today's social context and *tebliğ* activities with that of the Prophet's companions. There is a general melancholy among Turkish activists that Islam – as a system of salvation – has been simply handed to them without having to actually fight for it. According to activists, similar to the prophet's time, the contemporary social and cultural context is filled with anti-Islamic trends. However, unlike in the prophet's time, Muslims do not have to take it upon themselves the responsibility to fight, or what Ümmühan called "jihad,"[154] against those trends. In contemporary society, the most desirable form of such jihad has to be conducted not by sword but by pen, in other words by learning and teaching religion to others. Therefore, the tebliğ

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[154] The term jihad, literally to strive, effort, labor, refers to internal or external efforts to be a good believer or to inform others about the faith of Islam. Although it is sometimes translated as "holy war" in the West, with connections to physical war, jihad does not have to be carried out by "sword." The term is also appropriated by radical Islamist groups to justify employing violence against what they consider irreligious regimes or societies. The term has been especially politicized in the West following the September 11 attacks.

movement serves as both a motivation and a manifestation of these sentiments to mobilize against anti-religious trends and thereby follow in the footsteps of the Companions.

If Ümmühan presents the doctrinal and historical roots of the madrasa movement as part of the broader tebliğ movement, Rümeysa explains its sociological and psychological aspects as a context for nurturing a religious subjectivity. Rümeysa was a mid-level administrator in her late twenties and an instructor at the advanced level course (*tekâmül kursu*) across from the beginner's course. She dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen, started madrasa education at age eighteen in a beginner's course in Ankara, and then completed her training in this advanced course before becoming an instructor. A talkative and steadfastly pious young girl, Rümeysa has dedicated her life to the madrasa. During our conversation I asked about the distinct practices inculcated in the madrasa, one of which was the veiling style. Why does the İsmailağa group insist on female members wearing full-body-length black veils (*siyah çarsaf*) rather than the more popular ankle-length outer coats (*pardesü*)? By way of answering this question, she explained to me why it is important to study in a madrasa. Her response revealed the process through which a religious subjectivity is created, thereby explaining the institutional role of the madrasa:

> Those ankle-length outer coats are a French invention. It doesn't belong to our culture anyway. They are extremely tight, sitting on your bosom and hips, revealing your contours clearly. It is, in fact, [not the outer coat but] the full-body-length black veil that is a religious obligation (*farz*) [because they are dark-colored and loose thus hiding your contours] … Wearing the black veil affects every aspect of life. In order to protect it, you have to bring a certain order to your life. Just as prayer protects you from evildoing, so does your veil. With a black veil you cannot enter every environment. It has to be a clean environment; for example you stay away from boyfriends, do not go to gender mixed places. You learn in the madrasa that you should refrain from behaviors that do not befit the black veil (*çarşafa yakışmayan bir şey yapmamak zorundasın*). In fact it's a barrier against prohibitions. It reminds you every minute that you are a Muslim; that you have to do something [to keep your faith strong]. You have to live in line with its orders twenty-four hours a day. And look at the [social] environment around us, it is broken. Is there any female high school student left who is not pregnant? That's what happens if you study in gender mixed places. We are all humans; if we do not stay in the madrasa environment, if we do not stick together, we can slip out into that environment. Once we remain alone in that environment [outside world], we will loosen up. We will take off the black veil, which means we will get rid of

everything that it prevents, such as working [in a regular job], talking to men, being in the same environment with men, watching TV or listening to music. In other words everything you learn in the madrasa will disappear. Before coming here, I used to think "I am careful [about upholding a religious lifestyle]." However, I realized that it didn't go far enough; I didn't do anything compared to what I was supposed to be doing.

Rümeysa's response reiterates three important themes within the tebliğ movement: the critique against weak religious practice, the process of nurturing religiosity, and the role of institutional environments. There has been a prevailing discomfort among Muslims about the adoption of consumerist fashion trends, and İsmailağa has been one of the most vocal critics. The cemaat, due to its slim financial resources and strict interpretation of doctrinal texts, is especially critical of those Muslims who adopt fashionable trends in the name of Islamic practice. As the economic fortunes of Muslims have improved in Turkey in the last two decades, the religious middle classes have also been influenced by consumerist habits, some of which are manifested in a new Islamic fashion industry, expensive Islamic hotel chains, and luxury cars (Wood and Keskin 2013:3). Rümeysa reacts to these Muslims whose motivations depart from gaining God's pleasure through performing obligations correctly, i.e. wearing loose, dark, large clothing, and instead adopt consumerist habits, i.e. donning fashionable tight outer coats. In many other İsmailağa sohbets, for example, I heard Hocas invite the audience to adopt the long black veil instead of an outer coat because it was cheaper and more modest.

Second, Rümeysa's comments speak to one of the core principles of the education movement: teaching obligations not as external religious acts (en route to fulfilling a religious duty) but general statements about one's complete being. A woman dressed in long black veil not only performs a material act but also makes a statement about her ethical disposition and subjectivity. Therefore, wearing the veil is crucial to learning how to be religious. The veil is simultaneously a barrier and an enabler. It bars the individual from committing undesired acts. Such abstinence in return nurtures virtuous habits. It also enables the individual to fulfill her

religious duties by constantly reminding them. A person who allocates systematic attention and time to fulfilling these duties throughout the day eventually develops dispositions that collectively make up a religious subjectivity. Therefore, like prayer, veiling is not simply a religious prescription but pedagogical exercise for building a religious subjectivity.

Lastly, Rümeysa explains superbly the institutional significance of the madrasa not simply as a place of education but also a social context for an alternative, more "clean" system. Like many activists, she establishes the putative "purity" of a religious context by juxtaposing it with the "dirty" elements of a nonreligious context. She uses the term "clean environment" figuratively to refer to relationships uninformed by Islamic principles of gender relations, such as not dating or gender mixing. She believes, for example, that such contexts lead to early pregnancies, which are considered the ultimate embodiment of immodesty and moral decline. Although her narration exaggerates the range of immodesty, especially among women, the underlying idea is shared across groups who form the tebliğ movement: moral decline can be thwarted by returning to an Islamic lifestyle starting with the practice of veiling. However, such practices are difficult to inculcate if they are not supported by an institutional environment, like a madrasa. The outside environment poses a threat to one's willpower to continue living in Islamic tradition because it lacks the institutional support the madrasa can provide. As Rümeysa attests through her own experience, the institutional context of the madrasa not only provides knowledge about undesirable acts, such as "working [in a regular job], talking to men, being in the same environment with men, watching TV or listening to music," but also creates a social support system that will discourage participants from straying from this program.

İsmailağa madrasas are one of the most clandestine institutions of religious education in Turkey. Despite their secrecy, their numbers have been growing under the pro-Islamist AKP government. Madrasas are also one of the most inflexible sites in their interpretation of religion

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with emphasis on complete gender segregation, the black veil, and disciplinary training. As such they are one of the most vocal forces of Islamization in society.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analyzed the semi-formal and informal sites of religious education sites, the cornerstone of the pedagogic movement. I suggested that Islamist mobilization can be understood better if we extend our conception of mobilization from a focus on "visible" institutions, such as Imam-Hatips or legal Qur'an courses and toward the "invisible" institutions that collectively make up the semi-formal and informal segments of pedagogical mobilization. I also suggest that there is a significant logic to operating both at the semi-formal and informal levels. While Islamists use informal education sites to *deepen* individual piety, they are able to use semi-formal ones to *widen* their constituency. In this way, they are able to introduce both religion and the movement to broader segments of Turkish society.

Semi-formal and informal sites, much like the other pedagogic sites discussed previously aim to nurture religious subjectivity in what they perceive as a social and cultural environment that is increasingly committed to nonreligious trends. Although there is great diversity and competition between different cemaats, I suggest that all of these groups agree on the general principle of *tebliğ*, transmitting religion to others, in order to restore the legitimacy and practice of Islam in a secular society. But these sites function more than learning contexts where one gets informed about religion if they don't know much or increases his/her knowledge if they are already familiar. As I try to show, they are comprehensive institutional systems that enable both learning religion and cultivating religious dispositions in the safety of private, decentralized, and supportive domains. The broader aim, however, is to extend this safety to the rest of society through *tebliğ*, which will ultimately render this subterranean world redundant one day.

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# CONCLUSION

The struggle over religious education in Turkey is a struggle for the soul of the individual, and by extension society and politics, that stretches back nearly two centuries. For most of the Ottoman period all education was religious in nature. Children were taught Arabic, the Qur'an, and the teachings, sayings, and deeds of the Prophet beginning at a young age. This system not only aimed to cultivate enlightenment and civility through knowledge of the Qur'an, but also to socialize children into a religious subjectivity. This educational program culminated in the madrasa education where students learned advanced Islamic sciences. Beginning with the *Tanzimat* reforms in 1839, and continuing through the dissolution of the Empire in 1919, however, the religious monopoly over pedagogy was broken and replaced by the supremacy of secular pedagogy.

The étatization of education, the state's seizing authority and resources from a historically powerful and relatively autonomous group of religious actors, played a key role in this process. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 constituted a final and revolutionary break. Not only did the new republic severely restrict formal religious education, but it also undercut the informal sources of religious socialization in society by outlawing Sufi orders, changing the alphabet from Arabic to Latin, and devaluing the symbolic capital of the ulema. The new educational system that emerged from the struggles during the early Republican period, moreover, aimed to create an explicitly secular and nationalist, not religious, subjectivity shared by all members of the nation.

Since 1923, the struggle over the place of religious education in Turkey has been characterized by shifting periods of state repression and greater openness. In the early years, Islamists aimed to keep alive a religious identity that came under constant assault in a hostile secular and statist country. Beginning in the 1980s, however, Islamists broadened their struggle

from rescuing a marginalized identity to enacting a larger transformation of society along Islamic lines. Following the 1980 military coup, as the Turkish state ideologically and institutionally opened itself to Islam and an Islamized version of Turkish nationalism, religious movements simultaneously converged toward being more statist and nationalist. An unintended consequence of this process was the emergence of non-state actors as contenders for the state's moral authority and pedagogic technology. At the same time, the state's embrace of religion to control Islam's political message inadvertently broadened its mass appeal and inspired religious actors to respond by creating alternative venues of religious socialization and pedagogy. This Islamization project was waged under what I call the tebliğ movement and an associated dual strategy to transform the individual, society, and politics.

The project reached its apex with the tenure of the AKP government (2002-2014). During this time Islamic practices in education, as well as other domains (culture, media, fashion, economy), have slowly but steadily flourished both in and outside of official state sites. The AKP government came to power in the post-1997 coup period when Islamists and their educational activities were still facing considerable repression. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the party whose roots lie in the National Outlook tradition and the various Islamist parties led by Necmettin Erbakan (the last of which was toppled in the coup), had been imprisoned for ten months in 1999 for reciting a poem with Islamist undertones and in 2002 continued to face a ban against running in parliamentary elections.[155] Thus, for the first few years of AKP rule, the party maintained a neutral position toward the religious field. During this time, however, the state began to turn a blind eye toward religious educational activities and thus Islamists no longer faced the full-scale crackdown they had been subject to since 1997. During its second (2007-2011) and third terms (2011-present) in power, AKP's gradual but decisive switch from a neutral

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[155] After the law banning Erdogan was changed, he was elected to parliament in a special by-election in Siirt in 2003 and subsequently took over as Prime Minister

to a favorable to an openly supportive position toward the religious field provided activists with a full range of opportunities and authority to pursue their *tebliğ* activities through the dual strategy I describe and explain in the dissertation.

The Gülen group, for example, has been one of the key practitioners of this dual strategy and a brief look at their trajectory provides insight into the evolution of the tebliğ movement in recent years. The "Hizmet (*Service*) Movement," as Gülenists call themselves, built a massive business empire starting in the early 1980s; first in the educational field, and later in the media, banking and health sectors. The movement is guided by the spiritual leader and eponymous founder of the group Fettullah Gülen, a retired state imam born and trained in the madrasas of the prominent Eastern Turkish city of Erzurum. Gülen retired from the imamate in 1981, but continued to deliver sermons in popular mosques and at private gatherings in 1980s and 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he encouraged his followers to move first to post-Soviet Central Asia and then to South East Asia and Africa to open private schools. At the same time that the group started to amass significant money from its operations outside of Turkey, they also began organizing within Turkey, opening private schools, prep courses, dormitories, student houses (two of which I analyzed in chapter 5), charity associations, media organs, and hospitals. Gülenists maintained good relations with the state (a "pro-state" attitude as some commentators suggest), even though they were never spared secularist suspicions that they planned secretly to conquer state power and undertake a program of full-scale Islamization. Gülenists always denied such accusations, and, on the surface, worked toward regenerating Islam within civil society. Foremost, they used their massive educational network to target, reach, and convert wide audiences to an Islamic lifestyle. This mobilization carried on *outside* the system (not necessarily in the underground, but outside the formal institutions of the state), even outside the country, provided Gülenists with substantial autonomy to transmit their interpretation of Islam. The

opportune moment to carry their project *within* the system, however, came later with the election of AKP in 2002.

Unlike other cemaats' personnel, younger Gülenist cadres were better educated, spoke foreign languages, and some were even trained in the West. Thus, when AKP came to power and began to clean out and re-staff state offices with their own Islamist supporters, Gülenists provided an important source of educated and trained pro-AKP cadres for the new bureaucracy. During AKP's eleven years of tenure (until the Gülen-AKP split in 2013), Gülenists infiltrated critical positions throughout the state bureaucracy, including the judiciary, the police, and the ministry of education.[156] During this time, Gülenists increased their influence within the state while expanding their autonomy and activism outside of it. They successfully carried out the dual strategy I have described to reconstruct the role of Islam in public life (while also enriching themselves).

Since the 1980s, this Islamic activism in Turkey was seen as a reflection of a flourishing civil society against a rigidly secular state. The election of AKP only confirmed these observations – that Turkey's secular regime, obstinately unfavorable to political Islam, had to finally confront and open room for it. Against such interpretations, this dissertation puts forth a different explanation: the rise of Islamism cannot simply be seen as a "process of democratization" against a domineering state. Rather, I argue that it must be seen as part of a deeper and longer reconstruction of power and the struggle to realize a sociopolitical project of Islamization. I make this argument based on two critical findings.

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[156] As I mentioned earlier, this strategic partnership came to an end in 2013 due to increasing competition between the party and the group. AKP's desire to end its reliance on the group led to a series of policies to curtail Gülen's power. The most critical was the attempt to close down Gülen's prep courses. The group retaliated by breaking a corruption scandal against the top party officials, reaching all the way to four key ministers, Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan, and eventually to the prime minister himself. Since then, the two parties severed their ties and Erdoğan's government began removing Gülenists from the state bureaucracy, starting with the judiciary.

First, there is a tension between a *nominally hyper-centralized* state and the *substantively autonomous* nonstate actors that facilitated, unintentionally as it is, the construction of an Islamist political movement. Common wisdom holds that since its establishment, Turkey has had a highly secular and centralized state. A historical analysis of the relations between the state and social actors, however, reveals a less clear picture: the state is neither consistently secular nor fully centralized. Rather, it is a site where there has been chronic internal tension over its "secularity," and a chronic ambivalence about its "centrality." As demonstrated in chapter 2, the history of the republic consists of an ongoing story of struggles, negotiations, and realignments related to the principle of secularism and the principle of centrality. I suggest that this tension can be explained partly by the success of nonstate actors in infiltrating and capturing key positions in the state administration and in official religious institutions. These actors in turn have subsequently renegotiated and sometimes subverted these two principles at different times in republican history. It can also be explained by the shifting political will among state actors to monitor and supervise the religious field in which religious actors have strived to regain their lost autonomy. The major implication of the Turkish state's *nominal* but *not substantive* centralization, I argue, has been to open new spaces for Islamist activists to expand the boundaries of the religious field. As the dissertation shows, restoring official and unofficial sites of religious education has been central to that expansion.

Second, the dual strategy pursued by Islamists, working both *within* and *outside* the system, both from *above* and from *below*, has provided them with the requisite legitimacy and autonomy to enact a project of sociopolitical Islamization. I demonstrate that both the *within-system* component and the *outside-the-system* component of this strategy have two dimensions. While the former rests on (1) the capture of key positions in the state bureaucracy and official religious institutions, and (2) struggles over defining the formal contours and status of religious

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pedagogy and socialization, the latter is defined by (1) challenging the state's monopoly over the production and transmission of religious knowledge, and (2) the construction of religious spaces outside the state's regulation, to entrench autonomy further.

The primary actors engaged in these processes, especially since the 1990s, can be characterized as constituting a tebliğ movement, a movement concerned, on the surface, with religious-ethical regeneration and self-enhancement. I contend that examining religious mobilization through the conceptual framework of a tebliğ movement is the most appropriate focal point for the study of Turkish Islamism. This framework provides a unifying ideational scaffolding under which all Islamists operate, while still capturing the diversity of Islamist actors in Turkey and their multiple activities. It also accounts for the fact that Turkish Islamists are paradoxically both non-political and political actors; they reject engaging the conventional institutions of politics, while still embracing a deeply political and transformative agenda.

In fact, even though many of the tebliğ movement's activities are ostensibly non-political, the movement represents the most *unified systemic challenge* and *reconstructive program* in the history of Turkish Islamism. The tebliğ movement poses a systemic challenge because it has been able to unify disparate Islamist agendas since the 1960s into a coherent program to contest one of the most critical domains of state authority. The movement strove to naturalize an alternative conception of subjectivity and morality, a domain of central concern to the modern nation-state, the construction of its power, and the maintenance of its hegemony. Since the legitimate authority of the modern state depends on its ability to constitute subjectivity and morality in a manner that serves to naturalize its right to power in the eyes of citizens, any activism that contests the interests and institutions of the nation-state poses a systemic challenge to it. The tebliğ movement is the quintessential example of such a challenge.

The tebliğ movement is also a reconstructive program because it endeavors to make an alternative "orthodoxy," or vision of morality, political philosophy, and cosmology, central to the organization of society. I argue that the creation of orthodoxy is about the constitution of subjectivities and therefore of power relations. The tebliğ movement constructs this subjectivity mainly through the domain of education, the most critical arena to the forming and reforming of the human material of the movement. The movement aims to create agents endowed with the necessary dispositions to reproduce the principles of Islamic orthodoxy. Thus, rather than posing a simple challenge to the system, the movement also represents a reconstructive program to un-educate and re-educate nominally Muslim members of society to conform to religious standards of conduct.

Based on these arguments, the dissertation makes two main contributions to sociological theorizing on religious movements and on cultural reproduction. First, by studying this putatively non-political movement, the dissertation aims to rethink some of the conventional dichotomies that separate the political and the social, as well as the political consequences of social movements. Moving beyond typological approaches to the study of Islamist movements in particular and social movements in general, the dissertation offers a more sweeping conception of mobilization and struggle. At a broader level, it utilizes the study of micropolitics as a way of studying power, politics, and sociopolitical change. Second, the dissertation uses the tools of political sociology to advance theories of social and cultural reproduction. Despite a continual interest in theories of education, political sociologists have had curiously little to say about religious education as a domain of struggle, domination, and contestation. The dissertation fills an important gap by documenting the struggles over institutions of religious knowledge in undermining dominant orthodoxies and constituting new relations of power in secular societies.

A third, and more area-focused, contribution of the dissertation is to the study of Islamist movements in the Muslim world. The process analyzed in the case of Turkey is hardly unique to the country. Turkish Islamism has been affected by and continues to affect different strands of Islamist trends in the greater Muslim world. Like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sahwa movement in Saudi Arabia, or the Deobandis in Pakistan, the tebliğ movement in Turkey founded its network in the educational system, broadly defined as institutions of socialization and pedagogy (Herrera 2006; Lacroix 2011; Zaman 2007). From this foundation, it spread out its operations and eventually penetrated different domains of social life, including the media, the economy, civic associations, welfare services, and professional organizations. Although the most conspicuous site of this domain is the capture of formal schools, Islamists in Turkey, as elsewhere, also built alternative, informal, and even illegal sites of education in mosques, seminaries, and dormitories.

Another commonality between Turkish Islamists and other Islamist movements in the region pertains to the characteristics of their organization. All these movements created highly flexible, broad-based, and well-organized networks that use face-to-face relations and informal associations to relay their messages outside the purview of state control. An important implication of this organization is that the production and transmission of religious knowledge is often conducted in unlicensed and unregulated fashion. The result has been to provide Islamists in Turkey and elsewhere with the resources to challenge and fragment the state's monopoly over the interpretation of religious knowledge.

Turkish Islamists also continue to affect other Islamist movements in the region. Especially the AKP and its long-time ally the Gülen group, have provided other Islamist groups in the Muslim world with a framework to emulate. Both AKP and the Gülen group have also taken a keen interest in exporting the so-called "Turkish model" to a range of destinations, from

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Tunisia to Egypt, and from the Balkans to Central and Southeast Asia. This "model" claims to weave democracy with religious values (Amin 2013) and denies the use of violence or top-down campaigns to transform society. Instead, it proves the efficiency of a dual strategy, working through the state as well as civil society, and working within the system as well as outside of it. But if the general aspirations of both Turkish and other Islamists are quiet clear, their realization (a full-scale Islamization of the individual, society, and the state) remains indeterminate. This is because though politics is about competition and conflict, it seldom results in a zero-sum outcome. And also because in the midst of societal uprisings, regional wars, and internal conflicts with opposition, Islamists still have challenges to face at home and abroad before they can accomplish a larger project of fully Islamizing their societies.

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