Introduction

The historical roots of the Gülen Movement (GM) go back to the Nur (Light) Movement, which was established by Said Nursî (1877–1960) in the nineteenth century, during the Ottoman Empire, in response to the state’s gradual Western-oriented transformation. After Nursî’s death in 1960, the Nur movement split into factions and the GM was the most prominent one in Turkey. M. Fethullah Gülen (1938–), a follower of Said Nursî and called hocaefendi (esteemed teacher) within the community, is the leading figure of the GM. During his early years, as a religious functionary, he noticed the importance of education in the development of the Islamic faith and in acquiring and cultivating Islamic virtues. Similar to Nursî, Gülen initiated his education project through the first male-only ‘religious summer schools … where hundreds of students received Islamic education’ (Balci 2003, p. 152). In the following years, these summer camps were transformed into ışık evleri (houses of light), dormitories, schools, dershane (private tutoring courses), and universities, as the essential sites and instruments of Gülen’s Islamic activism. In these spaces, the community aimed to institute religious practices and regulate the everyday lives of students by applying them to disciplinary pedagogical forms, and accommodating family life and roles.

The GM has been analyzed as a form of relationship between the state and religion (Turam 2007), or as an actor in civil society (Turam 2007; Yavuz 2003), or in terms of more recent pragmatic accommodation to neoliberal restructuring of the state and market relations (Hendrick 2013; Tugal 2017). A different range of studies is concerned with the Movement’s pedagogical project (Agai 2007; Çobanoğlu 2012; Tee 2016). What is missing is an analysis of women’s role and involvement in the Movement. Based on an eight-month ethnographic work at one of the Movement’s high schools, this chapter examines the community’s gender and pedagogical discourses through two interrelated themes: first, the role of a prominent persuasive pedagogical discourse within the community, known as ‘commending right and forbidding wrong’ (emr-i bi’il ma’rûf neyh-i anîl münker); second, a focus on the sisterhood institution, an informal mobilization network in the GM.

This chapter considers cultural norms within the GM by examining how everyday religious pedagogical practices and gender discourses of the community are grounded in discourses of moral and social order. I show that regular patterns of micro-level practices
create a *gendered cultural habitus* that is learnt via repetition and embodied dispositions within the pedagogical process. Thus communal practices play an active role in creating ‘a set of systems of durable, transposable dispositions’—what Pierre Bourdieu calls habitus, the result of conscious or unconscious practices and thoughts (Bourdieu 1990).

**The rise of the Gülen Movement**

In Turkey, with the establishment of the republican regime in 1923, the public visibility of religion became a controversial issue. Under the umbrella of single-party regime, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (People’s Republican Party, CHP), until 1950, ‘sought to remove religion from the public and social realm’ and reduced it to ‘a matter of individual faith and prayer’ (Gözaydın 2009, p. 1215). In the following years, the CHP regime established the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs) to consolidate religious culture under the state-led policies and institutions. Meanwhile, the religious segments of society sought to overcome the dichotomy between the secular state and religion. In line with this, the emergence of the Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party, DP) in the 1950 elections became part of the solution to the current dichotomy. But the main opposition bloc with a religious character emerged in 1970 with the formation of the Milli Görüş Hareketi (National Outlook Movement, MGH) (Hendrick 2013). In those years, the GM started to flourish under the guidance of M. Fethullah Gülen, an associate imam in İzmir province of Turkey. By the late 1970s, Gülen was delivering public sermons to large crowds and the Movement’s education project was activated through Gülen’s lectures at summer camps, so-called ‘houses of light.’

At the end of 2013, the ruling party in Turkey (AK Party) decided to close down the dershane sector, the main site in recruiting GM students (Ugur 2017). In the wake of a failed coup of July 15, 2016, the conflict escalated into a permanent impasse, the government linking the coup leaders to the GM and defining it as the ‘Fethullah Gülen Terror Organization (FETÖ).’ The failed coup revealed the powerful presence of Gülenists in the military and other state institutions such as legal courts, the police, education, and health. In the aftermath of July 15, 2016, the government declared a state of emergency, which ended in July 2018, during which thousands of employees were dismissed over suspected links with terror groups.

The GM has dedicated its energy to ambiguous political activism through integrating its mobilization strategies and networks into the state institutions—such as by focusing its efforts in military, legal, health, and education units, as part of its ‘self-described non-political mobilization’ (Yavuz & Koç 2016; Hendrick 2013, p. 55). In her ethnographic study, Turam (2004) indicates that the growing influence of the GM is mainly observed in more secular countries in Central Asia and the West, including the USA (Turam 2004), rather than in the Arab-Muslim world and Iran. In this context, the GM aims to ‘reconcile Islamic faith and ways of life with a secular institutional milieu’ (Turam 2004, p. 261). In Turkey, with the election of the AK Party in November 2002, the political atmosphere became charged with ‘conservative democratic’ directions that enabled the GM to develop an apparent relationship with the AK Party (Turam 2004) and play ‘the most influential player in the AKP-led passive revolution’ (Hendrick 2013). This relationship enabled the GM to promote itself in public and private spheres of society.

Meanwhile, the Movement concentrated on connecting to the market economy for the sake of expansion—in mass media, private education, trade, finance, and charity networks (Hendrick 2013). First, the GM created its own education institutions and media outlets to cultivate its loyal adherents, becoming ‘the leading private producer of “Turkish Islam”’
In a second phase, the GM contributed to the global market economy by producing goods and services and playing an active role in creating the conditions of their own reproduction (Hendrick 2013). At the same time, the GM paid close attention to mobilization techniques at the micro level and started to institutionalize various local communication networks. The main organizational strategies active in local networks were schools, student dormitories, apartments, and the sohbet meetings (conversation/reading circles) (Hendrick 2013). During a conversation with one of the community teachers, she explained to me the reasons behind the emergence of the GM:

The Hizmet movement was the result of imposed restraints on religious practices and difficulties of maintaining religious integrity in the public sphere . . . There was a demand for the movement . . . The conflict between my religion, Islam, and modernization [was also a crucial reason for establishing the Hizmet] . . . [Through the Hizmet], faith transformed from imitation to recognition.

Thus, the GM succeeded in playing a role in society by reframing the cultural program of modernity, gradually establishing a social change without contestation from the secular state structures, and through forming and consolidating its cultural hegemony in public and private spheres. During our conversations, one of the community teachers said that ‘this community was the result of the weakness of the faith in society’ and that Islam ‘was politicized as the ideology of cultural self-preservation and opposition to colonial rule,’ in opposition to the modernity project (Karpat 2001, p. v). This counter-hegemonic cultural program was activated through political and civilian mobilization—mobilization in ‘parliament, the presidency, the state apparatus and education, business, media, and public relations’ (Hendrick 2013, p. 25). In other words, the GM consolidated its power in the state and civil society gradually. It came into conflict with the state, its institutions (e.g. military) as well as with the AK party only in recent years, and very much because of its success in consolidating its power.

### An institutionalized pedagogical model

This section is an in-depth discussion of (1) emr-i bi’l ma’ruf neyh-i ani’l münker as a hegemonic pedagogical discourse and (2) of the institution of sisterhood as a pedagogical medium in the GM.

Foucault (1995) argues that the art of government involves the art of self-government, connected with morality; the art of properly governing a family, which belongs to the economy; and the science of ruling the state, which concerns politics (p. 91). In the GM, preserving a continuity between these categories is ensured by emr-i bi’l ma’ruf neyh-i ani’l münker, which is ‘concerned with the maintenance of public morality’ (Mahmood 2005, p. 59). The community’s pedagogical institutions become active sites for this by establishing a normative-disciplinary network that deploys teaching methods for the cultivation of a desirable human character with certain habits and attitudes. In this context, the principle of emr-i bi’l ma’ruf builds new networks of governmentality within the community.

The word ma’ruf means ‘what is known, recognized, and accepted’ whereas münker means ‘what is not recognized and approved’ (Çağrıcı, nd). This is mentioned in a number of places in the Quran, for instance the surah Āl ‘Imrān (The Family of Imran) and surah At-Taubah (The Immunity). It addresses ‘a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right, and forbidding and trying to prevent evil’ (in appropriate ways). For
the GM, the most efficient way of fulfilling this approach is to know one’s interlocutors, avoid debates, develop negotiations, and show tolerance. This offers a moral structure that regulates everyday social life and its institutions. The principle goes beyond forbidding wrong and commending right. It helps maintain public and communal morality and construct moral behavior. It is associated with a ‘duty of rescue’ (Cook 2001), of which one of my interviewees speaks in the following way:

The primary role we play in this school as teachers is to help students in saving their spiritual values and life. In doing so, we prefer not to appear in the foreground, and taking into consideration Hocaefendi’s recommendations, we prefer not to highlight the perfection of the Hizmet movement.

The principle *emr-i bi’l ma’rûf neyh-i anîl münker* plays a crucial role in mediating the relation between students and community teachers and it activates a well-ordered solidarity network which, in turn, makes possible particular ways of relationality and supports a strong patronage system.

The GM school I observed was a boarding school, where students lived in dormitories and female teachers played special attention to their needs and concerns. In their relations with students, they employed images of motherhood or sisterhood to exert their authority, while simultaneously enabling the community to transfer familial virtues of loyalty, harmony, chastity, trust, intimacy, care, and respect. The use of these quasi-familial forms and relations bothered some of these students at some point, as they felt that ‘their private lives and areas are violated.’ Thereby, they were uncomfortable with the communal model of family relations and friendship. The duty of rescue infiltrates into the lives of community members and inserts itself through multiple practices, such as a specific manner of caring, restless motivation, and individualization. This reminds us of the profile of a shepherd in reference to a pastoral type of power (Foucault 2009). Thus, an inquiry into the role of *emr-i bi’l ma’rûf neyh-i anîl münker* directs us to the practices accumulated and retained through the principle and the emotional patterns and dispositions embedded in it.

### Sisterhood: creating female habitus

In the school, quasi-familial forms and ties are key resources that secure communal relations. Organized around family-based bonds and relations, the school institutes ties of devotion and inspires community members to pursue a life in accordance with the virtues of communal life. It welcomes nuclear family-based micro interactions, authority patterns, intimate relations, and patronage networks. Each unit or microstructure harbours a variety of emotions that are ‘tied to an economy of action that follows from the experience of that particular emotion’ (Mahmood 2005, p. 140) and ‘aligns individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments’ (Ahmed 2004, p. 119). In the GM, these attachments are designed to ensure communal coherence and solidarity. For instance, one of the female teachers indicated that if her husband were not a member of the GM, it might be challenging or impossible to stay and be active within the community. In his writings, M. Fethullah Gülen (2013) emphasizes the importance of arranging marriage as follows:

Marriage cannot be random people of a certain level obliged to get married. While for women getting married is *vacip* (obligatory), for others marriage can be *mekruh* (revolting...
and inappropriate in the sight of the God). Without taking into account all these things, if a person establishes a conjugal bond only considering the physical needs they cannot contribute to the future of society.

(pp. 42–48)

Therefore, selecting a partner and establishing conjugal bonds become necessary conditions for the vitality of community. This also ties the movement to the market. As Hendrick (2013) remarks:

[although its goals are anchored on a conservative, faith-based social identity, and although its methods are often non-transparent, GM actors are reliant on the market for their continued expansion and are thus best presented as products of, rather than as a fundamentalist reaction to, the processes of neoliberal globalization.]

(p. 9)

In this equation, family, as a mobilization unit and as a neoliberal formulation, plays a central role due to its potential to shape the socially conservative and progressive character of the community and promoting ‘Turkish ethnic pride as equally constituent of twenty-first-century Turkish national identity’ (Hendrick 2013, p. 21).

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus involves a coordination between ‘outward behaviors (e.g. bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g. emotional states, thoughts, intentions)’ (Mahmood 2005, p. 136). Bourdieu also places a strong emphasis on the transfer of habits. Thus, the formulation of communal habitus depends on acquiring the communal habits that take root through the assiduous cultivation of emotional and rational practices. In this context, the principle of emr-i bi’l ma’rûf neyh-i ani’il münker is noteworthy since it is regulated by a variety of recurrent performances in a school setting, which serve to fix specific communal habits in one’s character.

According to Gülen (2013), an ideal societal model institutionalizes motherhood as the primary role of women in the communal order, and constitutes female virtues and practices in accordance with this model. In one conversation, a female teacher notes:

In terms of disciplinary methods, I prefer to use emotional alternatives rather than aggressive ones. As ladies, we are responsible for mobilizing male students’ emotional intelligence.

Another informant admits that ‘since I am married, I can act comfortably in my relationships with my students ... When you are married students cannot fancy you. That is why unmarried women teachers should be more careful.’ In terms of participating in the school’s decision-making process, one female teacher shares that:

[d]ue to the participation of both male and female teachers in these meetings, I do not feel comfortable. I would be more comfortable if it is organized only among women teachers. Certainly, being an unmarried woman constrains me from participating. I am more cautious during those meetings to protect my chastity and honor.

Female teachers’ practices are guided by the emr-i bi’l ma’rûf norms and diffuse into the others’ lives to construct and transmit a communal habitus. Patterns of familial life and relations are central to this.
The transfer of familial bonds, emotions, and associated protocols into a pedagogical medium blends familial roles and pedagogical ones. During the fieldwork, it was difficult to separate an image of family-oriented life and school life within a pedagogical medium. For instance, one aspect of this alliance includes recognition of familial roles that are essential in crafting the web of dependent bonds (Donzelot 1979), ties of affection which mask forms of communal hierarchies through tying them up with intimate relations. In the community, this is characterized through certain familial roles, such as sister (abla) and brother (abi) roles. The resultant structure transfers familial virtues in ways that are capable of securing communal order and solidarity.

In the movement, the model of sisterhood strongly shapes gender discourses and behaviors. Involvement, for one, is in service to communal values, which enables female teachers to develop intimate, familial-like relationships with female students. The other way is a form developed among female teachers which reveals gerontocratic authority and practices of communal patriarchy. Both forms of sisterhood are governed by the discourse of gender segregation, which is predicated upon the principles of fitrat as the most central reference in building gendered acts within the community circles. The community teachers provided a common definition for fitrat: God-given characteristics. The concept of fitrat stands for an intrinsic natural tendency or disposition which can be considered as a discursive space where gendered practices are deepened and emotions are enhanced. One of the female teachers, who is in her mid-twenties and lived in the movement’s houses in her undergraduate years, noted that:

My religious sensibilities are part of my fitrat. I believe that the innate characteristic of fitrat is Islamic, and then it can be converted into the other religious orientations. Since one’s fitrat is one’s God-given characteristics, I think that men are not emotional; we are more emotional than men are. This difference is related to fitrat.

A male teacher, who was involved in the community in his high school years, asserted the following:

Fitrat of men and fitrat of women are different but complementary to each other, fitrat of women is different, but it found itself with the help of fitrat of men.

(Gokturk 2017, p. 9)

When I directed the question of fitrat to ‘the most experienced sister’ in school, she explained that:

Fitrat is a proper persona that fits to the ideal of creation ... There is a difference between fitrat of women and men. Women face some difficulties in life because of their emotional character. In daily life, men’s agenda is busy with the issues of power, social status, and pride.

(Gokturk 2014, p. 120)

The institutionalization of fitrat functions as a regulatory apparatus that affects bodily practices and forms socially and communally contingent norms, thereby producing and consolidating communal forms of power structures (Gokturk 2017). As one male teacher states, ‘by nature the community is masculine, and the masculine attributes of the community make it powerful, or [if] the community [is] powerful, then its nature is masculine’ (Gokturk 2014, p. 105). Nevertheless, Fethullah Gülen was opposed to the interruption of women’s university education due to the headscarf ban, which was issued following the 1980 coup d’état. According to Gülen, ‘wearing a headscarf is fitrurat, a secondary issue in comparison to the
primary aspects of Islamic faith’ and the public presence of women, as part of the Movement’s mobilization strategies, is essential (Akbulut 2015). This pragmatism was also evident in the comment of a biology teacher, who said that:

I am trying to be neutral when teaching the subject of evolution. I warn students about this: you should learn evolutionary theory in order to answer the questions asked during the national entrance exam, but you do not have to believe in that.

In summary, a frictionless integration of a series of characteristics of family life and power relations into the movement’s habitus has a pivotal role in consolidating and mobilizing its norms, reshaping the discourses of solidarity, organizing a pastoral type of pedagogical model, and accumulating recognition in the forms of gendered and religious power within changing modern contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how discourses on womanhood within the GM are institutionalized within communal circles through integrating quasi-familial chains of authority and a set of practices into a pedagogical domain. These practices bring together the private and public spheres and help the GM to achieve a non-confrontational interaction between them. In a school setting, this alliance is activated through an overlap between the teacher and the sister (abla) roles. For instance, as teachers GM women loyally observe the Ministry of National Education (MNE) curriculum. But in the role of sister they are active in the reproduction and maintenance of community habitus. The sisterhood model exemplifies techniques of self-governing and self-disciplining by ‘pursuing a set of values linked to personal work discipline, family relations, and communal solidarity’ (Gokturk 2014, p. 175).

Thus a hegemonic form of conservative sisterhood supports female power and authority and cooperates with male counterparts to consolidate gender complementarity. Female teachers are able to develop intimate, familial-like relations with students and govern their souls and lives. By employing images of sisterhood and brotherhood (or motherhood and fatherhood), the communal life creates personae that are ‘powerful but not punishing, moral guardian[s] but never distant or unengaged, threatening but always loving, tough-minded but emotionally vulnerable, self-sufficient but forever in need of human companionship’ (Cucchiari 1990, p. 692). Both sisterhood and brotherhood are governed by the discourse of gender complementarity that is predicated upon the principles of fitrat. We have seen how the discourse of emr-i bi’l ma’rif neym-i ani’l münker (commending right and forbidding wrong) plays an important role in governing historically sedimented pious practices.

As a final remark, this research opens a space for a discussion of the difficulties of participant observation in ethnographic research. Drawing on my field experience with the GM, I admit that one of the methodological difficulties concerned my position as a researcher in the community and to the views that community members developed about it. Although I was aware of the controversial position of the Movement in Turkey before doing fieldwork, I soon realized that there are more complex local relations and negotiations that I had not known about. Some felt that a proper representation of the community could not be achieved without being a community member or a sympathizer of the Movement. I observed reluctance on the part of some of the female teachers to cooperate with me, and those who did generally kept a respectful distance between us. Thus the role of the researcher is mediated through the norms of a tight-knit movement with clear gender norms.
References


