TRANSFORMATION OF A SUFI TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL: THE CASE OF CEMALNUR SARGUT'S GROUP

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Azize Aslıhan Akman

Boğaziçi University

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Thesis Abstract

Azize Aslıhan Akman, "Transformation of A Sufı Tradition in Contemporary Istanbul: The Case of Cemalnur Sargut's Group"

This thesis analyzes the transformation and the newly-emerging forms of Sufism or *tasavvuf* and dervishness in contemporary urban field of Turkey by focusing on the murids of a Rifai shaykh, Kenan Rifai, and his murid, Samiha Ayverdi. The group's contemporary leader is Cemalnur Sargut. I investigate the way the group imagines and practices Sufism, the way these imaginary and practices are related to the past and present of Turkey as a nation state, which has been subject to modernization and secularization projects, and to the global context. I also analyze the subjectivities and identity construction processes of the group members. I gathered my data through fieldwork, which involved participant observation method and in-depth interviews, and the analysis of the group's publications. In the study, I suggest that the group sets an example for the complex religious identities in the secularized order of Turkey. The group members regard and experience *tasavvuf* as the 'true,' 'proper' and safer form of Islam and define "religiosity" and "secularism" as parts of modernity. They reverse the modernist gaze which has equated Sufism with backwardness and they associate it with enlightenment and profundity. The case undermines the ongoing dichotomies such as religious/secular and my analysis calls for a new conceptual space that transcends these dichotomies. Moreover, the literature on the language of late modernity is operational in grasping the content and the form of the message the group tries to spread and the subjectivities of the group members.

Keywords: Sufism, spirituality, modernization, secularization, subjectivity

Tez Özeti

Azize Aslıhan Akman, "Günümüz İstanbul'unda Bir Sufi Geleneğinin Dönüşümü: Cemalnur Sargut Grubu Örneği"

Bu tez Türkiye'nin çağdaş şehir alanında Sufizm'in ya da tasavvufun dönüşümünü ve yeni ortaya çıkan formlarını İstanbul'da bir Rifai şeyhi olan Kenan Rifai ve müridi Samiha Ayverdi'nin bugün son derece faal olan müritlerine odaklanarak incelemektedir. Grubun bugünkü lideri de bir kadın mürşittir. Grubun Sufizm tahayyülünü ve pratiklerini, bu tahayyül ve pratiklerin modernleşme ve sekülerleşme projeleriden geçmiş bir ulus devlet olarak Türkiye'nin geçmişi ve bugünü ve küresel bağlam ile ilişkisini incelemekteyim. Aynı zamanda grup üyelerinin öznelliklerini ve kimlik inşa süreçlerini de ele almaktayım. Çalışmanın verileri, katılımcı gözlem ve derinlemesine mülakatları içeren bir saha çalışması ve gruba ait yayınların incelenmesi yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bu çalışmada, grubun Türkiye'nin sekülerleştirilmiş düzeninde karmaşık dini kimliklere bir örnek teşkil ettiğini öne sürmekteyim. Grup üyeleri tasavvufu 'doğru', 'gerçek' ve güvenli bir İslami form olarak görmekte ve deneyimlemekte ve modernitenin katılımcıları olarak "dindarlık" ve "seküler" kavramlarını tanımlamaktadırlar. Sufizmi gerilik ile özdeşleştirmiş modernist bakışı tersine çevirerek aydınlanma ve derinlik ile özdeşleştirmektedirler. Bu örnek, dini/seküler gibi süregelen ikiliklerin altını oymakta ve analiz, klişeleri aşan yeni bir alanı gerekli kılmaktadır. Ayrıca, geç modernitenin sağladığı dil ve araçlar üzerine var olan literatür, grubun yaymaya çalıştığı mesajı ve grup üyelerinin öznelliklerini kavramada işlevseldir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Tasavvuf, tinsellik, modernleşme, sekülerleşme, öznellik

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is about a group of people who claim to be on the Sufi path in Istanbul under the guidance of a woman spiritual master or a *mürşit* (murshid), whose name is Cemalnur Sargut. My first encounter with Cemalnur Sargut was through the internet site established under her name.[1] When I first looked at the site in the year 2006, there was the following paragraph just below her photograph:

> This site is prepared by the students of Cemalnur Sargut *Hanımefendi*.[2] Our purpose is to present the speeches, conference and radio speeches and similar efforts which are the fruits of her Sufi works to the benefit of the ones that are interested in. C. Sargut *Hanımefendi* uses the works of Ahmed-er Rifai, Abdülkadir-i Geylani, Muhiddin-i Arabi, Cili, Mevlana, Mısrı-i Niyazi, Yunus Emre, Kenan Rifai, her teacher Samiha Ayverdi and Meşkure Sargut as sources. The mistakes and faults in the presentation of the drops flowing from the Sufi sea are under the responsibility of the ones who prepare.[3]

I did not have any information on Sargut and her group. I was surprised to see so many different names from the Sufi tradition in one paragraph. I knew that each Sufi order or *tarikat* (tariqa) had a shaykh, who is a spiritual guide on the developmental path of Sufism, and had a *silsile* (silsila),[4] which is the chain of initiates reaching back to the Prophet Muhammad via the historical line of shaykhs. I had no knowledge on whether Cemalnur Sargut was a member of a Sufi *tarikat*, or a person giving speeches on Sufism as an independent lecturer. If she had a spiritual guide, a

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[1] www.cemalnur.org
[2] *Hanımefendi* is a term that features women in a polite way. It is composed of the words *hanım* and *efendi*, meaning lady and gentleman respectively.
[3] www.cemalnur.org, 1 April 2006. Translation is mine.
[4] For a more detailed explanation of the term, see Chapter 2.

shaykh, who was that person? What did the names of the Sufis above mean to her? Did she and her followers have anything to do with the phenomenon of the popularization of Sufism? Was her interpretation of Sufism a response to the urbanites' search for meaning and quest for inward journeys, or a safe form of religion in the secularized order of Turkey? Did Cemalnur Sargut have commonalities with the Sufi masters in the Western societies, who repackage Sufism for the needs of the Westerners? The present study is a result of my curiosity with these questions and focuses on the way Cemalnur Sargut and her disciples imagine and practice Sufism in the urban sphere of Turkey and the way their imaginary and practices of Sufism are related to the past and present of Turkey as a nation state and to the context of globalization.

Soon, I participated in one of her conferences which was open to the public on April 2006. This first gathering I participated in was in the Erenköy district, which is on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. I found the place on a silent street of Erenköy around which there were lots of places given the name of Kazım Karabekir:[5] a school, a street, a museum and a cultural center. I remarked the plate of Kazım Karabekir Museum established in the first floor of a high apartment building. The tidiness of the buildings with small gardens ranging on two sides of the quiet street was the clue of a district of middle and upper middle class. *Kazım Karabekir Kültür Merkezi* (Kazım Karabekir Cultural Center)[6] was very close to the museum. I arrived in the center twenty minutes late and found people sitting at the door of the room and even standing due to the shortage of chairs. Demand seemed to be higher in number than I had

[5] Kazım Karabekir was one of the famous military commanders of the Independence War of the Turkish Republic. He was a member of the Union and Progress Party and among the soldiers that supressed the so-called 31 March Revolt, which is represented as an obscurantist rebellion movement in official history.

[6] During the fieldwork I learned that the place belonged to the daughter of Kazım Karabekir. As the *mürit*s indicate, she loves Cemalnur Sargut and allocated the place for Sargut's programs.

supposed. As I approached the door, I began to hear a tremulous, plaintive, rapturous voice, the voice of Cemalnur Sargut. I tried to find a place close to the stage, among the crowds filling out around 200 chairs of the room. I surprisingly found an empty chair at the first row and sat down. The majority of the people in the room consisted of middle aged and old people, but there were also a few young ones. There were both men and women, but women constituted the majority. Except a very few people, the women were not covered. I found Cemalnur Sargut a bit older than her photograph on the internet site. She was smiling and the tone of her voice was increasing and decreasing to give a feeling of the content and sometimes reached the limits of sobbing. She spoke with such enthusiasm that the audience could not blink back the tears from time to time. She was dark skinned and very thin. Her straight hair dropped onto her shoulders. Her blouse, the collar enriched by beads, left her filmy arms naked up to the elbows. The bright orange color of her cardigan did not escape my attention. I found her like an Indian guru or a meditation expert at this first encounter with this energetic outlook and groomed appearance. After I started to see her more often, I understood that she liked clothes with bright colors, which made her look energetic. In this gathering, she mentioned the Prophet Muhammad, his companion Ali, Mevlana, İbn Arabi, Ahmed er Rifai and Kenan Rifai with enthusiasm. The main theme of the speech was the love of God. The first clues about her discourse that I got from this first experience were her effort to articulate the meaning of *şeriat* (*sharia*) by saying "When it is said *şeriat*, everyone is badly frightened, but *şeriat* means to love Allah, what Allah wants from us." At the end of the meeting, most listeners did not leave before kissing her hands and putting their arms around her. She responded with warm hearted words, affection and modesty. I was one of the last persons greeting her in order to get permission for my research in the group and she answered me with a

similar warm hearted, modest manner and the sentence "We are at your disposal." I was glad to get such an encouraging answer.

After this first encounter, we organized a meeting in *Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği* (Turkish Women's Cultural Association- *Türkkad*), which is managed by Cemalnur Sargut. The association was on the last floor of a high apartment building again on the Anatolian side of Istanbul.[7] It was a residential apartment. The apartments in Erenköy are quite expensive, occupied mostly by the middle/upper middle class families in Istanbul. I arrived at the door after getting the elevator and a kind girl opened the door. The flat was an ordinary residence with three rooms, kitchen and bathroom. She invited me to the living-room where she asked me to wait for a while. There were three young girls in the room. Cemalnur Sargut came in her casual clothes and we had our first interview. I soon learned that the young women were from the core group around Cemalnur Sargut. By the term core group, I mean the people from *ihvan*, who yield to the spiritual mastery of Cemalnur Sargut and have attachment to Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi as their spiritual masters. Some of the people in the core group have attachment with the group since their childhood, while some are relatively new. The close group members are different from others who participate in the public *sohbet*s (suhba) of Cemalnur Sargut in that they participate in the closed activities of *ihvan* such as the commemoration rituals in the anniversaries of Kenan Rifai's death, the grand *sohbet*s organized by the elders in one of the *ihvan*'s house or the travels abroad mostly with the aim of spreading the message of Sufism. She aims at disciplining the youngsters around her in accordance

[7] The association moved to another building in the summer of 2007. We had our last interview in September, 2007 in this new flat. It is on the Anatolian side, in an apartment on a reputable avenue with private firms, cafes and houses of the people from the upper middle class on both sides. Cemalnur Sargut finds this flat more suitable as an office for the association than the previous one, which she thinks resembles more a house than an office. She has a smart private room in this new place.

with the tenets of Sufism. Some family members of the youngsters are also from the group and they spend most of their time together. I did not know that the youth gatherings would mostly be organized in one of these young women's house and I would even stay overnight at her house since my house was quite far from hers. I would see them in these programs, *sohbet*s and other organizations. This first meeting became in a way an introduction for me to the group activities.

Cemalnur Sargut is an heir of the tradition of Kenan Rifai, a Rifai shaykh who lived during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the formative periods of the Turkish Republic. He was born in *Selanik* (Salonika), came to Istanbul and established a *dergah*[8] at the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides men, he had a lot of women *mürit*s (murid),[9] to whose spiritual training he gave great importance. Samiha Ayverdi, who is known as a famous literary figure with her thirty five books on various topics ranging from history to spirituality, was one of his most prominent *mürit*s. We get information about the life of Kenan Rifai in detail from the book written by his women *mürit*s.[10] Meşkure Sargut, who is Cemalnur Sargut's mother, is also a *mürit* of Kenan Rifai. After the death of Kenan Rifai, Samiha Ayverdi inherited the tradition and guided *ihvan*.[11] The group was more closed in the era of Ayverdi when compared to the present situation. As Schimmel (cited in Helminski, 2003) suggests Ayverdi tried to convey the principles she learned from Kenan Rifai to *ihvan* who loved her and called her *Samiha Anne* (Mother Samiha). She established *Türk Ev Kadınları Derneği* (Turkish Housewives Association) in 1966 and it was renamed

[8] *Dergah* is another word used for tekke. See footnote 14.
[9] The term *mürit* (*murid*) means disciple. Throughout the text, I use the word as it is written in Turkish.
[10] Ayverdi, S. & Erol S. & Araz N. & Huri S, Ken'an Rifai ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık [Ken'an Rifai and Understanding Islam in the Light of the Twentieth Century]. Istanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyat, 2003.
[11] *Ihvan* is a plural Arabic word which means faithful, sincere and close companions. It is commonly used for the *mürit*s of the same *tarikat* (Devellioğlu, 1993). This usage indicates that they are close companions, brothers and sisters on the same Path.

Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği (Turkish Women's Cultural Association). She also established *Kubbealtı Cemiyeti* (Kubbealtı Society) in 1970 and it gained the status of an endowment in 1978. Cemalnur Sargut and the people in *ihvan* define Ayverdi as their *mürşit*, as an *insan-ı kamil* (insan al-kamil) who sets an example of the perfect human being on the Sufi path. During her lifetime, Ayverdi had charged Cemalnur Sargut with the duty of giving *sohbet*s on Mesnevi[12] of Mevlana[13] to the youngsters when Sargut was twenty-five years old. After the death of Samiha Ayverdi in 1993, old members of *ihvan* such as Meşkure Sargut have perpetuated authorities and given *sohbet*s in the gatherings. However, Cemalnur Sargut leads especially the new generations and conduct a policy of opening to the public.

Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi were among the elites of the Ottoman society and practiced Sufi tradition in the urban field. After the republican reforms that conducted the secularization project in Turkey, Sufi *tekke*s[14] were prohibited by laws. Kenan Rifai closed his *dergah* without any opposition to the state regulations. The group sets an example of the continuation of a Sufi tradition in the secularized context of Turkey among the elite segments. Today, the context in which Cemalnur

[12] "Mesnevi" (Masnavi) is a type of poetry in Persian, which consists of staves that have rhymed with each other and unity of meter. Before Mevlana, this type of poems have been written in Persian since very long ago. However, Mevlana is remembered when it is said Mesnevi today because it is the name of one of his most famous works. It consists of his mystic poems written in Persian in six volumes. A last seventh volume is attributed to Mevlana, but it is argued that this volume is not written by Mevlana (Füruzanfer, 2005, pp. 186- 188). There is controversy on the number of the lines in Mesnevi. Franklin Lewis (2000) shows that late pre-modern manuscripts and nineteenth century printings contain anywhere from 27,700 to as many as 32,000 lines, an accretion of between two and seven thousand lines that do not come from the pen of Rumi (p. 296).

[13] *Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi* is one of the greatest Sufi mystics. He lived in the thirteenth century. As Schimmel (1992) argues, his name Mevlana Rumi, which means "Our Master, the Byzantine," indicates that he lived in Byzantium of the day (p. 11). Afghan and Persian admirers are said to prefer "Balkhi" instead of Rumi, since his famiily lived in the city of Balkh, in today's Afghistan, before migrating westward (Schimmel, p. 11). In the end, his family came to Anatolia via Mecca, Damascus (Syria). His followers established Mevlevi Order, which is famous for its *sema* ritual today. For details see, Schimmel, 1997; Lewis, 2000; Füruzanfer, 2005.

[14] *Tekke*s, or lodges, were the buildings of the Sufi *tarikat*s. Lifchez (1992) argues that in the nineteenth century Ottoman society, most of the *tekke* buildings were ordinary family houses where the *tekke*'s shaykh lived with his family and some spaces were set aside for *tarikat* functions, including the formal and informal reception of those who followed the shaykh's teaching. The *tarikat* buildings are referred to by a variety of names: *tekke, hanekah, asitane, zaviye, dergah*. For more detail, see Lifchez, 1992.

Sargut operates is different from that of Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi. The ongoing characteristics of the group is its appeal to middle and upper middle class urbanites and avoidance any conflict with the secular order of the nation state. What differentiates Sargut from her *mürşit*s is her policy of openness on the basis of the specific characteristics she attributes to the contemporary era and the people living in it. She uses the universalist and inclusivist potential of Sufism in general and of Kenan Rifai tradition in particular to adapt to the conditions of the day.

Studying Religion and Sufism in Turkey

I try to contextualize this study within the larger framework the studies on Islam and Sufism both in the world and in Turkey. The acceleration in the popularity of religious movements in the closing years of the twentieth century increased the scholarly interests in religion. One of the characteristics of the studies on Islam is their emphasis on the so-called resurgence of Islam, which is frequently used with the expression of 'Islamic Threat' (Mohammad, 1993; Esposito, 1992). Especially after the events of September 11 in the United States, the so-called political Islam and Islamism as an ideology of the twentieth century became the subject of so many studies. The global rise in the visibility of Islamic practices such as veiling, gender segregation and the new public spaces that Muslims are said to arrange in conformity with an Islamic life-style in the last twenty years are shown as a demonstration of the Islamic resurgence (Göle, 2006). On the basis of this outlook, Berger, who had previously advocated that modernization would necessarily lead to secularization (Berger, 1969a, 1969b), mentions the process of "desecularization" in the urban fields of countries like Turkey or Egypt today (Berger, 1999). He also gives the

visibilities such as veil and other accoutrements of Islamic modesty as a demonstration of the "desecularization" process. In Turkey, there are people who define themselves Islamists, who are claimed to put Islam to the center of their political practice. These groups become objects of anthropological studies from time to time (Saktanber, 2002; Tuğal, 2006). The covered women, who are represented as prominent symbols of rising Islamism in Turkey, are also studied (Göle, 1996; Ewing 2000a; Saktanber 2002). The hybrid character of 'Islamists' are sometimes emphasized (Göle, 2000) and the outlook of 'secularists' vis-a-vis the perception of an 'Islamic threat' is also studied (Navaro-Yashin, 2002). Another field of study is *Alevi*s in Turkey, although it is a controversy among both the scholars and Alevis themselves whether *Alevilik* is a sect in Islam or a separate faith (Es, 2006). Some of the studies on *Alevi*s represent them as the collaborators of the authoritarian state's secularization policies or as people who are easily adapted to modernity, secularity and democracy (ibid.).

Another field in religious studies is Sufism. There are some anthropological studies on Sufi groups in Turkey and they analyze the transformation of those groups in the modern, secular context of the country (Silverstein, 1997; Raudvere, 2002; Karaatlı, 2006). Sargut's group again faces us as a specific case in that it is the continuation of Kenan Rifai's tradition, which is categorized separately from other *tarikat*s and Islamist movements and named "intellectual Sufism" by Şerif Mardin (2006). This differentiation is made due to the movement's emphasis on subjective experiences rather than state politics for living Islam properly. Another area that needs investigation is the interaction of Sufi movements with the present global trends. As Sinha (2006) puts it, religious communities are necessarily embedded within the boundaries of the modern nation-states, grounded upon the principle of

secularism, and the emergent religious networks across national boundaries today. There is a growing literature on the new hybrid forms of Sufi groups in the Western and non-Western societies and most of them have a transnational character (Atay, 1996; Hermansen, 2000; Howell, 2001; Werbner, 2003; Westerlund, 2004; Howell, 2005; Genn, 2006; Malik and Hinnells, 2006; Howell, 2007). Sargut's group should especially evaluate in relation to the Sufi movements which primarily address educated urbanites in different parts of the globe.

I also analyze the case in relation to the discussions in the literature of anthropology. Contrary to the modernist expectation in the classical literature of the anthropology of religion, this group is a good example of the continuation of the Sufi tradition in the urban context among the educated upper classes. As Atay (1996) argues, until very recent times, the dominant thesis of the studies made on Sufism in the West was that Sufism is an Islamic understanding suitable for tribal life. It is argued that Geertz, Evans Pritchard and Gellner represent this view (Atay, 1996; Howell, 2001). The history of this group undermines this thesis and support theorists like Gilsenan, Eickelman, Fusfeld and Vergin, who are against the above mentioned thesis on Sufism (Atay, 1996). The history of Sufism in the Ottoman society in general and the history of Kenan Rifai tradition in particular also undermine the thesis with their urban character. Moreover, Sargut's group undermines the modernist discourse, which regards Sufi orders as relics of the past.[15] This modernist discourse is not unique to Turkey, but common to other postcolonial contexts such as Pakistan (Ewing, 1997) and Indonesia (Howell, 2007). Far from becoming extinct in the modern urban field, the group uses the tradition in order to spread their message in the modern context of the day.

[15] For a critique of this modernist discourse, see Mardin, 1981; Atay 1996; Ewing, 1997.

This study problematizes the ongoing categories such as Islamist/secularist in analyzing the complex religious field of Turkey. Although I do not think that these categories are totally useful, I argue that they are insufficient and misleading in the case of Cemalnur Sargut's group. The group seems a modernized and secularized version of Islam at first glance, but the picture gets complicated as one becomes more familiar with the group. The case at hand demonstrates that the religious groups in Turkey should be analyzed in their particularities and historicity, without inducing religiosity or secularity to certain visibilities and practices.

Methodology

From the beginning, my encounter with the group was uneasy for me. I found myself in the tension of an insider-outsider relationship. It was sometimes difficult to put a critical distance to the group because I was so familiar with and had sympathy to *tasavvuf* (tasawwuf). Most of the time, I felt a kind of emotional attachment to the leader of the group, Cemalnur Sargut, and had friendship with some of the group members. We shared a common language with the group members due to the similarities in our levels of education and religious sentiments. When I shared the preliminary copies of this study with the group members, I got detailed feedback from them. Their acquaintance with social sciences and high level of consciousness regarding their own identity complicated the relationship between me, as a researcher, and them further. However, there were some other factors putting a distance between the group members and me. First of all, there were some differences in my practice of Islam, such as the fact that I was wearing headscarf. Cemalnur Sargut and the women around her do not cover their heads and are

frequently criticized for not doing so. The significance of the headscarf is due to the controversies around it in Turkey. The clothing style of women has been constructed as an important symbol of the secular republic in the hegemonic discourse and headscarf is represented as a threat to the secularism (Navaro-Yashin, 2002). Although Cemalnur Sargut claimed to give no importance to clothing, headscarf was definitely differentiating them from most other religious groups in Turkey and they also differentiated themselves from other groups with their modern outlook. The second factor was the issue of class and status. I had not witnessed the practice of *tasavvuf* in an upper-middle class urban setting before. Most of the activities took place in upper-middle class districts of Istanbul. Moreover, despite that I was a Muslim and my familiarity with *tasavvuf*, I had no adherence to a *tarikat*. They sometimes treated me as an outsider to their world of meaning, or sometimes I felt to be so. For instance, when I put the book of Mevlana on the ground just beside my bag, one of the youngsters saw it and put it on the table in order to show her respect to Mevlana symbolically.

During my research, I used participant observation and in-depth interviews as my primary method. I participated in Wednesday *sohbet*s of Cemalnur Sargut in a cultural center in Erenköy district, her youth *sohbet*s in Kadıköy on Saturdays and occasionally in the gathering of the youngsters on Wednesday evenings from April 2006 to April 2007. The programs were interrupted in the summer of 2006 since most group members were on holiday. I went to *Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği* (Turkish Women's Cultural Center) three times; I conducted interviews with Cemalnur Sargut and the women from the group and got information and materials about their activities. However, I could not participate in most of the closed activities of *ihvan*. The group members in different ages gather together frequently. Men and

women sometimes come together for various activities ranging from *sohbet*s, visits, and prayings to social activities and projects. For instance, they go to morning prayings on Saturday mornings. They visit other cities for religious reasons like Konya, or they go abroad to countries like Germany, India, and Syria. Cemalnur Sargut and group members never refused to talk to me and welcomed the fieldwork. My limitations in the fieldwork have two grounds: personal limitations and sometimes the group's restrictions upon me. The *sohbet*s that Cemalnur Sargut's mother recites is an example of the latter. I was politely refused to listen her *sohbet*s and Cemalnur Sargut told me that they are people of a different era and do not want outsiders in their *sohbet*s. So, I wrote the thesis based on the interviews and the activities I could participate in. During the *sohbet*s and Wednesday evening gatherings, men and women were together, but I did not conduct interviews with men. So the data mostly come from women, while I could also talk to men in the gatherings. I made five interviews with the women *mürit*s and two with Cemalnur Sargut. The interviews were unstructured but I interspersed three main questions into the conversations. One was on the way they were engaged with *ihvan*, the other on the transformations on their lifestyles after they became a member of *ihvan*, and the last one was on their perceptions of other religious groups in Turkey and the way they situate themselves with regard to them. They were always ready to explicate their feelings and ideas and our conversations were always fluent. Besides participating in the activities and making interviews, the documents I got from Türkkad, which include booklets, books, CDs, DVDs, became very useful in analyzing the language of the group.

Due to the limitations of my fieldwork, the study has some apparent shortcomings. First of all, I could not have enough access to everyday lives of the

group members. Moreover, I only had limited observation of their relationships with their spiritual master, Cemalnur Sargut that also limits my discussion of the power relations between the group members. Other than the interviews, I had a close relationship with some of the young women. I have been in the houses of two women during the youth gatherings on Wednesday. I even stayed overnight in the house they gathered most of the time. This experience gave me an insight to their lives, practices and meaning worlds.

Sequential Order

In order to analyze the group, I start with the historical and contemporary context of Turkey that is needed for the historical contextualization of the group whose root goes back to the twelfth century. So, the second chapter is the brief overview of the history of the Rifai order. I also dwell on the role of religion and Sufi *tarikat*s in the Ottoman society in order both to grasp the continuities and the ruptures of the Sufi tradition in the Turkish context and situate the case in the anthropological literature on Sufism. Then, I turn to the mild response of Kenan Rifai to the secularization project in Turkey. I argue that to a great extent, the adaptation potential of Sargut's group to the conditions of the day lies in this tradition to a great extent. Cemalnur Sargut comes up with further commentaries on religion and secularism, which facilitate the accommodation of a religious lifestyle in the secular context. The group continues its activities outside the *tekke* institution. How do they carry on their tradition today and what kind of activities does the core group do? Since they do not continue traditional *tekke* practices, they give priority to *sohbet*s and reciting hymns. Music was already a common means in the practices of Kenan Rifai and they regard

*ilahi*s (hymns) as a substitute for *zikir*, which they avoid to perform due to the legal restrictions. However, what facilitates their accommodation of the idiom of Sufism in modern life is the understanding of ritual. Since the tenets of Sufism do not restrict ritual to practices such as praying and fasting, they think that they can live *tasavvuf* regardless of where they are: in work life, academy… etc. This perception is epitomized in the saying "You can go anywhere you like as long as you put on the crown of *edeb*." All experiences in subjective life, all the happenings one encounters are interpreted through the eyes of the sacred and are regarded as means of approaching to Allah. At this point, we again face an intersection with the new age tenets: there is no longer any point in dividing our experience into 'this-worldly' or 'other-worldly' categories. The sacred starts to spill over into everyday thinking and the lines between the sacred and the secular are becoming blurred (Davie, 1999, p. 41).

The global context of the day is also a factor in the transformation of the group practices. As Hermansen (2006) puts it, Sufi movements give a wide range of responses and adaptations to the hybrid contexts in which they operate. At first glance, the group displays considerable similarities with the so-called Western Sufism or global Sufism of the recent era (Hammer, 2004). In the third chapter, I analyze Sargut's group with respect to the transformations both in content of their message and the forms they choose for spreading it are influenced by the global context. Cemalnur Sargut does not make a new interpretation, but makes assumptions for the contemporary era and the needs of the individuals and uses the potential of the Sufi tradition to address her audience in the late modern context. I give examples from the means they use for spreading the message of Sufism. They organize open lectures, conferences, public organizations, prepare books, CDs and

participate in television and radio programs... etc. They also operate through civil society, which is a very effective means for social movements. They are organized under *Türk Kadınları Kültür Derneği* (Turkish Women Cultural Association-Türkkad). Türkkad gives the group the opportunity to present themselves as activists in the field of civil society organizations, rather than the ones who work for spreading their religious ideas. Sargut persistently emphasize that they would like to spread the message of Sufism through "academic ways". This anxiety with prioritizing the intellectual character of the group is related to the audience they would like to appeal to: the modernized, secularized segments of the urban sphere.

What can we say about Cemalnur Sargut's group in the context of debates on secularization and the project of secularization implemented in Turkey? Are they secular with their compromise with the modern secularized order or religious due to their perception of everything in life through the lenses of the sacred? In the fourth chapter, I analyze the group of Cemalnur Sargut in relation to the debates over the new forms of religiosity and the religion/spirituality dichotomy in the literature (Heelas and Woodhead 2006, Davie, 2006). The debates on religion and spirituality are useful in the case of Sargut's group, because the literature helps me to analyze their search for meaning in the late modern context of the day within a theoretical framework. They have some common features with the Western individuals who quest for meaning in the modern world. However, this does not mean that they are modern individuals. Rather, they have a complicated relationship with modernity. I observe that they undergo a significant transformation after they yield to a *mürşit*. They experience conflicts, ambivalences towards modernity and modern life and Cemalnur Sargut has a crucial place in resolution of these conflicts. I compare the tenets of modern individualism and the doctrine of *insan-ı kamil* in *tasavvuf* and the

reflections of the conflict between the two on the *mürit*s of Cemalnur Sargut. Moreover, they mark their distinction through the construction of the 'middle way' in the conflictual religious field of Turkey. There are two attitudes that they otherize in their identity construction process: '*taassub*' (bigotry) and 'materialism.' They claim to be in the middle way, which they characterize as the way of Kuran and the Prophet, hence 'true Islam.'

Since this study is on a group in Turkey, I use the words as the group members use them in their everyday language. So, I write the religious terms that are common to both Turkish and Arabic in their Turkish versions and in italics. The word shaykh is an exception among them. I prefer the English version of this word, which is written as "şeyh" in Turkish, since the word shaykh is commonly used in the relevant literature in English. In the first time I use these words in the text, I give the Arabic versions of the words in parenthesis with their English spellings, if they are originated from Arabic. I used some of the terms interchangeably, such as Sufism and *tasavvuf*. I generally prefer the term *tasavvuf*, because Sargut and her *mürit*s do not use the term "Sufism" in their discourse. As Ernst (2005b) argues, "'Sufism' is by its nature an outsider's term, belonging to the Enlightenment catalog of ideologies and creeds identified as 'isms'" (p 8). So, "it inevitably stands in tension with the insider vocabulary of spiritual vocations and ethical ideals of the Sufi tradition" (ibid., p. 9). Nonetheless, I sometimes use "Sufism" due to its common usage in social sciences literature. There are some other terms I use interchangeably such as order and *tarikat*, gathering and *sohbet*, disciple and *mürit*, spiritual guide/master and *mürşit*. I qualify the group members as *mürit*s, disciples or students of Cemalnur Sargut. Sargut prefers the term student, but she had a *mürit-mürşit* relationship between the people surrounding her, something that her students also express. When

it comes to the name of the *tarikat*, the term "Rufai" is used more frequently to address the branches of the *tarikat*. So, I predominantly used "Rufai" for the historical accounts. However, I prefer the term "Rifai" for Kenan Rifai tradition, since Sargut's group uses this term while they mention the tradition. Demirci (2006) indicates that the distinction between "Rifai" and "Rufai" appeared after 1970s in Turkey to differentiate the milieu around Kenan Rifai with their urban character from Rufais, who continue traditional popular rituals of the order and is widespread in various regions of Turkey, "Rifai" refers to the milieu around Kenan Rifai.

CHAPTER 2

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A TRADITION IN A SECULARIZED ORDER

In this chapter, I will evaluate the historical background and contemporary context of Sufism in Turkey, without which the hybrid character of the group cannot be understood. I will discuss the role of Sufism in the urban sphere in the history of Turkey. In order to understand Sargut's group in Turkey today, we need to understand the role of Sufism in the cities during the Ottoman era and the history of the Rifai order. In the light of this information, I will focus on the forms of ritual Cemalnur Sargut's group perpetuates in Istanbul, in a context where *tarikat* as an institution is officially prohibited. What were the traditional rituals of the Rifai order, how were they transformed by the Kenan Rifai tradition? How did the group respond to the secularizing reforms of the republican elites? What can be said about the modernist gaze on Sufism, where does the hegemonic modernist discourse situate Sufi *tarikat*s? In what forms does the group practice Sufism? In what ways and why does Cemalnur Sargut's group seem attractive to the upper class residents of Istanbul, most of whom come from modernized families?

Sufism in the Ottoman Era

Islam, with all its diversity, was at the core of Ottoman society and Sufism was an indispensable part of the social life (Lewis, 1968; Mardin, 1971; Trimingham, 1971; Lifchez, 1992; Muslu, 2003; Kara, 2004). The Ottoman Empire had the institution of

the Caliphate since the sixteenth century. The society was organized through the *millet* system. As Behar (2003) argues, the residential patterns of the nineteenth century Istanbul were divided on the basis of ethnicity and religion, not of social class. *Mahalle* (neighbourhood) was the basic unit of the society and the center of social and economic life (Duben and Behar, 1991). Religion was at the center of social life and everyday practices and conducts were regulated according to religious norms.

The administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire also reinforced religion as the core of the society (Mardin, 1971). *Kadı*, or religious judge, was at the lowest rung of the Ottoman administration and there was no authority other than *kadı* at the *mahalle* level.[16] (Mardin, 1971; Duben and Behar, 1991). The authority of the *kadı* was mediated by the religious leader, the *imam*, priest, or rabbi (Duben and Behar, 1991). *Kadı*s were closely involved with the day-to-day problems of individuals (Mardin, 1971). *Kadı*s were part of the larger *ulema* (ulama) class, who had considerable authority in interpreting *şeriat* (shari'a) rules. The *Şeyhülislam* (Shaykh al-Islam) was at the top of the *ulema* class. The *ulema* were educated in *medrese*s to become experts in religion who made legal decisions regarding religious practices and various areas of social life. They were integrated into the state organization and used to work to control social life in the name of the state (Mardin, 1971, p. 40). These examples indicate that religion was at the center of the social organization and the social imaginaries of the Ottoman subjects.[17]

Right along with the *ulema*, as a common feature of the Muslim world, Sufi *tarikat*s were always influential. The Sufi figures were sometimes seen as a threat by

[16] For details, see Özer Ergenç, "Osmanlı Şehrindeki Mahalle'nin İşlev ve Nitelikleri Üzerine," *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, vol. 4, 1984, pp. 69-78, and Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul: Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

[17] As an example of the role of religion in regulating social life in the Ottoman Empire and the way religion shaped the regulations regarding women and non-Muslims in the sixteenth century, see Ahmet Vefik, *On altıncı asırda Istanbul hayatı* (1553-1591), İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1935.

some of the *şeriat*-oriented *ulema* and some of the Sufi *tarikat*s were accused of heresy and of being against the *şeriat*.[18] However, we cannot say that there were clear-cut boundaries between the two groups. On the contrary, there were so many orthodox *ulema* who were affiliated with a mystic order (Mardin, 1989). Sufi orders were widespread and effective both in rural and urban life and in different segments of society (Lewis, 1968; Trimingham, 1971; Mardin; 1989; Kara, 2004). When it came to the eighteenth century, Sufi orders were present in every corner of the Ottoman territory (Lewis, 1968). They had supporters from every segment of the society including the ruling elite.

In addition to his arguments about the influence of Sufism on the ruling elite, Mardin (1971) argues that "dervish religion functioned more as a community-reinforcing and identity-forming process among the lower classes" (p. 206). He proposes that a few dervish orders appealed to intellectually sophisticated officials and notables, but the function of the orders for the middle and lower classes was more fundamental than for the upper classes (1971). Historically, there appeared a kind of differentiation in the followers of the *tarikat*s. While some of the *tarikat*s had a greater number of followers from the elite segments of society, some were more popular among the population at large. Trimingham (1971) gives some information on the mentioned division in Ottoman society. He says:

> Orders came to be associated in various ways with different strata of society. They frequently had a special relationship with social classes, regions, clans, or occupational groups. Some were aristocratic, favored by the court and *ulama*, like the Suhrawardiyya in the Sultanate of Delhi in the thirteenth century and the Mawlawiyya in relation to the authorities of Seljuk and Ottoman states. Others had a popular following,

[18] *Kadızadeli* Movement in the seventeenth century is an example of the polarization and conflict between the *ulema* and Sufis. For a detailed account of the Kadızadeli movement, see Derin Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyazi-i Mısri," *Studia Islamica*, No. 94, 2002.

> as with the contrasting types of Bektashiyya and Khalwatiyya in Turkey. They might be urban (Mawlawiyya) or rural (Bektashiyya), or occupational (according to local circumstances like the association of fishermen in Egypt with the Qadiriyya), linked with trade-guilds or the military class, like the relationship of the Janissary corps and the Bektashiyya (p. 233).

The dervishes were organized around the institution of *tekke*, which can be translated as lodge. The number of *tekke*s in Istanbul gives an insight to the prevalence of institutionalized Sufism in the city. It is estimated that the total number of *tekke*s was 209 in 1834, 259 in 1840, 307 in 1889 and 254 in 1918 in Istanbul (Kara, 2004). There were many different *tarikat*s among them, Mevlevi, Nakşibendi, Kadiri, Halveti and Bektaşi orders being the major ones. When it comes to the number of Rufai *tekke*s, it was 20 in 1834, 18 in 1840, 25 in 1889 and 38 in 1918 (Kara, 2004)[19]. To give an idea about the prevalence of *tekke*s, we need to take the population of Istanbul into account. The total population of Istanbul was approximately 560,000 in 1850 (Duben and Behar). Since the population fluctuated from the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century until the first several of the twentieth (Duben and Behar, 1991, p. 23), the population which was 500,000 in the late 1850s jumped to 874,000 in 1885 and to over a million at the turn of the century. The Muslim population was 385,000 in 1885 and 500,000 in 1914 (Duben and Behar).

Rifai order was a widespread one in the Islamic world and in the Ottoman Empire. Lewis (1968) informs us that Arab leaders of the Rifai order were close to the Ottoman Sultan together with the leaders of other orders. Rifai orders entered Istanbul in two subsequent periods (Muslu, 2003). Some Rifai shaykhs came to Istanbul starting from the end of the sixteenth century. However, the spread of the *tarikat* took

[19] For more detailed information on the Rifai *tekke*s in Istanbul during the Ottoman era, see Ramazan Muslu, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf (18. Yüzyıl)* [*Tasavvuf* in the Ottoman Society (18th Century)], Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2003.

place at the beginning of the eighteenth century after the establishment of a Rifai *tekke* in Üsküdar (ibid.).

Under the guidance of these historical accounts, it is misleading to present the popularity of Sufism in the urban field as a new phenomenon.[20] The presence of Sufism in various segments and spheres in society has a long history in Islamic societies including Turkish society. So, Sufi orders are impossible to classify either as rural or urban institutions. However, the gaze at Sufism transformed dramatically together with the modernization projects in non-Western societies and the modernist hegemonic discourse constructed Sufism as the remains of a "traditional society" that should be left in the past.

The Roots of the Rifai Order

Cemalnur Sargut's group is a variation of the Rifai order today. It is even problematic to call them "Rifai" anymore, because they prioritize a unificatory discourse, which they claim to transcend the limits of just one *tarikat*.[21] Nevertheless, the roots of their tradition go back to the formation of the Rifai order.

Sufis started to be organized around the institution of *tarikat* by the twelfth century. *Tarikat (tariqa)* is an Arabic word and means "way" or "path" and gives reference to the journey the *mürit* or disciple experiences under the guidance of the spiritual guide, who is called "*mürşit*" or "shaykh." *Mürşit* is a person whose lineage goes back to the Prophet Muhammad along the line of a *silsile*. *Silsile* means lineage

[20] For further information on Sufism in the Ottoman Empire, see Raymond Lifchez, *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Otoman Turkey*, California: University of California, 1992; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000; Robert Dankoff, *An Otoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004.

[21] For an account of their unificatory style, see Chapter 3.

or chain. The chain consists of shaykhs of different epochs. There are two lineages reaching Prophet Muhammad: one goes back to Ali[22], the other to Ebubekir (*Abu bakr*)[23]. Some *tarikat*s go back to the Prophet through the first way and are called *Alevi* and some through the second one and called *Sıddıki* due to the title of Ebubekir. His title was *Sıddık*, which means faithful or a man of his word. There are also some *tarikat*s whose *silsile*s go back to both of these persons (Öngören, 2000).

The *tarikat* of Rifai was established by Ahmed er Rifai, who lived in twelfth century. There are different historical accounts about his life. There are two alternative explanations behind the title "Rifai." According to one account, it stems from the name of the clan he belonged to: *Rifaa*. Another explanation is that one of his ancestors' name was *Rıfaa* (Küçük, 1976). The *silsile* of Ahmed er Rifai's skaykhs goes back to Cüneyd of Baghdad (d. 909), who is one of the early Sufis and whose lineage goes back to the Prophet and Ali through Imam Musa Kazım, who is the seventh imam in Shi'a belief.[24] The *silsile* of his shaykhs is as follows from the earliest to the last one: Cüneyd of Baghdad, Ebu Muhammed Rüveym of Baghdad,

[22] See footnote 24.

[23] Ebubekir is one of the companions (*sahabe*) of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliph that led the ummah after the Prophet's death.

[24] Sunnis believe that after the Prophet Muhammad the right to rule the ummah belonged to the caliph that would be elected by consensus. However, according to Shi'a doctrine, the function of guiding men and preserving and explaining the Divine Law continued through the line of Imams (Momen, p. 147). Imamate is believed to start with Ali and continue with his descendants. Although it differs according to the sects of the Shi'a, there are twelve imams. As Momen (1985) elaborates, most of the *silsile*s of Sufi orders traditionally go back through various intermediaries to Ali who is considered by Sufis to have received initiation into mystical truth from Prophet Muhammad. Thus, certain Sufi orders have a tendency to glorify Ali (p. 209). These Sufi orders have great respect for both *ehl-i beyt* and the imams. *Ehl-i beyt* (people of the house) designates the Prophet's more intimate family, which includes Ali. In the Sunni doctrine, it consists of five people: the Prophet, Ali, Fatma (the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of Ali), Hasan and Huseyin (grandsons of the Prophet) (Uludağ, 2001, p. 37). As for the Bektaşi and Mevlevi orders (Uludağ, p. 38), the respect for *ehl-i beyt* and the twelve imams is significant for the Rifai order. The respect for *ehl-i beyt* and twelve imams continued its significance in Kenan Rifai tradition and both Samiha Ayverdi and Cemalnur Sargut inherited the sensitivity. Kenan Rifai wrote poems for expressing his love of *ehl-i beyt.* (See Kenan Rifai, *İlahiyat-ı Ken'an* [The Hymns of Kenan], Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1974). In her *sohbet*s, Cemalnur Sargut says that although they are Sunnis, they are Alevis, which she explains as being from the door of Ali. She tries to eliminate the ongoing struggle between Sunni and Alevi groups on the true conception of Islam and there are Alevi people among her listeners.

Ebu Said Yahya, Neccari el Vasıti, Ebu Mandur et Tayyib, Mansur el Betayihi er Rabbani (İz, 2000). He took his *icazet* (ijaza), which means "permission" and refers to the spiritual permission of the *mürşit* to become a *mürşit* himself, from Vasıti. He is said to have acquired another *icazet* from his uncle, become the head of the *tekke* in his home village and to have made there the center of his *tarikat*, Rifaiyya (Okumuş, 2003)

The Rifaiyya order diffused throughout the Middle East, Anatolia and Balkans. The diffusion of *tarikat*s takes place through the spread of the *mürit*s of the shaykhs to different areas. The *mürit*s, who gain permission to be *mürşit*s from their shaykhs, sometimes establish another branch of the main *tarikat*. In this way, the *tarikat* of Rifaiyya divided into almost fifteen subbranches: Haririyye, Keyyaliyye, Sayyadiyye, Aziziyye, Cendeliyye, Aclaniyye, Fazlıyye, Vasıtıyye, Cebertiyye, Zeyniyye, Nuriye, Mağrufiyye can be counted among these branches (Okumuş, 2003; İz, 2000).

The Modernist Rupture and the Transformation of the Gaze at Sufism

The nation state formation in Turkey started after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the War of Independence (1919-1922) and religion became a central theme on the agenda of the nationalist elites (Lewis, 1986; Esposito, 1991; Kasaba&Bozdoğan, 1997; Davison, 1998; Mardin, 2006). The aim of the nation state elites was to create Turkish "citizens" out of the "subjects" of the empire (Saktanber, 2002) and reforms on religion constituted an inalienable part of this project. As Esposito (1991) argues, the nation state elites frequently equated the beliefs of the people with superstition, which was thought to be an obstacle on the path of modernization. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, one reform followed the other: The

Caliphate was abolished in 1924, the chief religious office of the state, *Şeyhülislam*, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Endowments were terminated. The Sharia court system was abolished in 1924 and substituted by the secular legal system. Sufi orders were proscribed in 1925 (Esposito, 1991). As Esposito (1991) puts it, the *ulema* were seen as medieval obscurantists, and "Sufi leaders as purveyors of superstition and backwardness, the causes of passivity and fatalism" (p. 98). The result of secularism was the disestablishment of the two major wings of the religious establishment: the *ulema* and the Sufi orders (Esposito, 1991). These reforms went hand in hand with the accommodation of the modernist discourse, which aimed to exclude *tasavvuf* and *tarikat*s from the modernizing urban life, although they were part of the urban culture in the Ottoman era. A similar orientation can also be seen in other postcolonial societies with Muslim majorities. This depiction displays similarities with the depiction of Sufi *pir*s[25] in the 1961 census of Pakistan (Ewing, 1997). In a passage of the census report in Pakistan, Sufi *pir*s were depicted as part of the dying "tradition" that still stood between the population and the modern development of the country, setting up the dichotomies of "tradition versus modernization," "rural versus urban". Ewing (1997) describes the message as a manifestation of a modernizing discourse that has pervaded most public policies within the "developing" countries in the postcolonial period. This view displays similarities with the view of Muslim reformists, who see Sufi orders as heterodox forms and accuse them of being 'polluted' by non-Islamic elements. Gellner and Geertz even pointed out that the most serious challenge to Sufism across the Muslim world is Muslim reformism (cited in Howell, 2001, p. 705). Howell (2001) informs us

[25] The Persian word *pir* literally means the old person. In Sufism, it is used as the Persian equivalent of shaykh or *mürşit* (Uludağ 2001, p. 282; Renard, 2005, p. 220). *Pir* also refers to the founder of a *tarikat* (Lifchez 1992, p. 1). The plural of the word (*pir*s) is *piran*. For a detailed explanation on the role of shaykh or *mürşit* in Sufism, see Chapter 4.

that there was a similar expectation in Indonesian society, which is undermined by the recent developments in the urban sphere of the country. In the middle of the twentieth century, there was an expectation coming from both Muslim reformists and modernist scholars that mystical practices would become extinct as the impact of education spread in Indonesian society. Geertz was one of the scholars who foresaw that Sufism would fade from the social landscape, along with traditional rural religious scholars, as Indonesian society modernized (cited in Howell, 2001).

We can see a similar trend in classical anthropology, which foresaw the gradual extinction of Sufism in modernizing societies. Atay (1996) gives examples from the adherents of this trend in anthropology such as Gellner and Evans-Pritchard. What lies behind this theory was the equation of Sufism with rural populations and the theory proposed that Sufism would lose its power of mobilizing people and become less important in social and cultural life as a result of modernization and secularization. Sufism was seen as an Islamic understanding suitable for tribal life (cited in Atay, 1996). Therefore, the people living in the rural segments were claimed to prefer a shaykh, *pir* or *veli*[26] who was ascribed sanctity. (Atay, 1996)

On the other hand, Atay (1996) counts another group of scholars who are against this thesis: Gilsenan, Eickelman, Fusfeld and Vergin. According to them, there is no direct relationship between Sufism and tribal life. They emphasize that Sufi orders and shaykhs have also been as influential in cities, towns and villages as in

[26] *Veli* (wali) literally means "friend of God." As Renard (2005) explains, *veli* is second only to prophets in the hierarchy of spiritually advanced individuals (p. 90). His explanation continues as follows: "The Arabic *wali*, is from a root meaning 'close to, near,' thus suggesting in this usage divine protection or patronage; it is related to the terms often used for 'sainthood' and 'saintly (or religious) authority,' walāya and wilāya.

…

In addition to being regarded as conduits of blessing, Friends of God are often attributed with powers of healing, walking on water, clairvoyance, and other wonders, whereas the extraordinary powers bestowed on prophets are known as evidentiary miracles" (pp. 90- 91).

tribes (Atay, 1996). These arguments transcend the equation of mystical beliefs and practices with "traditional" and "nonmodern" segments of Islamic societies.

This orientation in theory is a reflection of the "great tradition" and "little tradition" distinction in anthropology.[27] Robert Redfield (quoted in Lukens-Bull,1999) came up with this distinction for the first time in 1956. According to Redfield, all world religions and some local religions could be divided into a "great tradition" and "little tradition." The great tradition, the orthodox form of the cultural/religious center, is that of the urban elite. The little tradition is the heterodox form of the cultural/religious periphery. The little tradition is claimed to incorporate many elements of local tradition and practice. The little tradition is the religion as it is practiced in daily life by ordinary people (Lukens-Bull, 1999). Though this distinction has been criticized by scholars like Dale Eickelman (1982; quoted in Luckens-Bull 1999), who suggests that the great and little tradition dichotomy neglects the complex interrelationships between various religious traditions. Hamid El-Zein (1977; quoted in Luckens-Bull 1999) also argues that this dichotomy is fruitless and is part of the Islamic elites' attempt to dominate the discourse about what constitutes real religion.

Modernization and secularization, as political goals, appear to have been hegemonic in the state discourse during the republican era in Turkey. The image of a modern West was vital for the modernization ethos of Turkish state elites. As Talal Asad (2003) puts it, despite the heterogeneity of the West and reasonable critiques claiming that modernity is not a verifiable object, the modernization project appears as a project of certain people in power in non-Western societies and aims at institutionalizing a number of principles, one of which is secularism. According to Asad (2003), "modernity is not primarily a matter of cognizing the real but of living-

[27] For a brief analyses of a related discussion on the notion of hybridity, see Chapter 3.

in-the-world. Since this is true of every epoch, what is distinctive about modernity as a historical epoch includes modernity as a *political-economic project*" (p. 14). He argues that the modern nation as an imagined community is always mediated through constructed images, representations and dichotomies (p. 4). For the dichotomy of the secular and religious, Asad declares that

> What interests me particularly is the attempt to construct categories of the secular and the religious in terms of which modern living is required to take place, and nonmodern peoples are invited to assess their adequacy. For representations of 'the secular' and 'the religious' in modern and modernizing states mediate people's identities, help shape their sensibilities and guarantee their experience (p. 14).

Shaping the sensibilities and constructing the identities of Turkish people was vital for the modernist elites in Turkey. The program of cultural Westernization was an important part of the Westernization program beside secular laws (Mardin, 2006). The modernizing elites tried to shape the sensibilities and experiences of the society at large. In his article called "Culture and Religion towards the year 2000," Mardin (2006) talks about secular Turkish elites whose culture consists of building stones from the West. According to Mardin,

> "This culture consists of an effort oriented to plastic works of art in the Western model, the development of the novel which depicts everyday life, polyphonic music, knowledge of Darwin's evolution and the creation of the museification of Turkish folklore. The unique features of this culture rest in the signposts it brings to the practitioners. The best examples are among academic personnel, jobs that necessitate diploma and bureaucracy. This culture represents the extension of the republican elites' cultural ideals" (pp. 214-215).[28]

Turkish state elites' understanding of "the secular" was very much related to their struggle with the religious imaginary of the old order. So, an important part of the

[28] The translation is mine.

construction of "the secular" appeared to be the struggle against Sufi shaykhs and local religious authorities, which were an important part of the reforms. As Mardin (1981) proposes:

> When one reads the law of 1925 abolishing these orders, it is clear that what Atatürk had in mind was to disallow the influence of local charismatic leaders who were either notables with local political power or appeared as ignorant and cunning figures exploiting the lower classes. Turks would in the future be ruled not by corrupt sheikhs but according to the way set out by science. Their personality would not be determined by the counsel of a religious mentor but by immersion in Western culture (pp. 216-217).

The level of success of the secular elites' politics on religion in Turkish society is an ongoing dispute. Mardin (2006) thinks that while this new elite pushed religion into the realm of personal belief, this was not valid for rural populations and even lower classes of the urban populations of Turkey. Mardin (2006) also proposes that although the new secular elite culture became influential through the use of modern means and technologies and primarily of education, the symbolism of the republic was so superficial that it was impossible for it to take root in Turkish society. Therefore, Mardin (2006) argues that this is one of the reasons behind the intensity of religious beliefs in large segments of Turkish society. Then he (2006) claims that although religion continued to exist in very different forms at imaginary, discursive and practical levels in the everyday life of Turkish society, the secularization project opened a gap between the rural masses and urban elites, or the "periphery" and the "center."

Though this approach can be explanatory for Turkish society to some extent, the group I study forces us to rethink these categories of "religious periphery" and "secularized center". Kenan Rifai and his prominent student Samiha Ayverdi, and the

other people around them were among the urban elites during the demise of the Ottoman Empire. As an heir of the Rifai order and as a *mürşit*, Kenan Rifai did not conflict with the republican elites and continued to practice Sufism in Istanbul. They exemplify how a group of urban elites found a way other than adopting a "Western culture" in a complete contrast to "religious tradition." The "citizens" of the young nation state did not only become passive recipients of the projects, but they participated in the definition of the religious and the secular. Kenan Rifai, Samiha Ayverdi and their heirs transformed their Sufi baggage within the secularized context of the nation state. They themselves call their path a "middle way". I will try to elaborate the meaning of the "middle way" for the group in the fourth chapter.

Responses to the secularization project have been studied in Turkey. However, these studies mostly focused on the groups that define themselves or are seen as "Islamists" and as against Kemalism (Göle, 1996; Ewing, 2000a; Saktanber, 2002; Tuğal, 2006). These exemplify that the secularization project led to negative reactions at the level of society. This may be valid for some groups reacting to the secularization project with their definition of a "true Islamic way of life." However, I claim that the religious field of Turkey is intricate and it is problematic to classify them in lines with the dichotomy of "religious" and "secular." Although Turkish society has experienced a break from its past with the secularization project and it was impossible for religious practices to continue in the same way, as Talal Asad (2003) argues for the Western experience, it was not a total break which excludes the sacred. He takes the secular to be "a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life" (p. 25). Religious actors, who are the participants of modernity and modern politics, come up with different interpretations of religion. Different interpretations lead to different practices and sensibilities which

should be investigated in their own particularities without being labeled simply as "religious" or "secular."

As Davison (1998) argues;

> Like modernity, secularism as an idea and secular institutional relations as practices make no sense apart from the understandings that people have of them, and many who participate in the politics of modernity do hold various secular understandings. As such, secularism is a constantly evolving and reinterpreted tradition in modern politics, as religiously conceived participations are. In the same way that the tradition/modern dichotomy has been too narrow to capture the plurality of traditions and modernities, so too the religious/secular dichotomy is too narrow to understand the religions and secularisms (p. 47).

The orientation of the studies on religion in Turkey creates the danger of equating religiosity with being against Kemalism and secularism. There are religious groups who situate themselves within this dichotomy. Since this is a sensitive issue, religious groups and primarily Sufi groups avoid making comments on Kemalism and secularist policies. Some Sufi groups can make negative comments on the issue out of the Turkish context. For instance, we can see a group that defines itself on the basis of an opposition between Kemalism and Islam in the study of Tayfun Atay (1996) on the Nakşibendi branch of Shaikh Nazım of Cyprus, who is an active Turkish Sufi shaikh in England. Atay elaborates how this religious order claims that Kemalism is against Islam. Shaikh Nazım and his *mürit*s think Atatürk is an enemy of religious orders and Islam. They even avoid mentioning the name of Atatürk and use the word "fetish" for him when they have to mention him (Atay, 1996). Nazım thinks that Atatürk killed the *şeriat* by prohibiting the religious orders, which are supposed to be the protectors of the *şeriat* (p. 250). According to him, Turkish society is seen similar to a tree that is separated from its roots as a result of the secularizing reforms.

It is not possible to determine objective criteria for detecting "secular" or "religious" identities. As the secularization thesis in Western societies is tested not

only through the criteria of a certain kind of religious practice such as church attendance but it is argued that all forms of religiosity and spirituality are taken into consideration in the sociology of religion, the same should be done for the groups in Turkey. One needs to look at the imaginaries and practices of the subjects to see how they construct their identities. Cemalnur Sargut's group, with its roots in the Rifai tradition and its influence on today's urban field in Turkey, is an example of the hybrid forms. She and her group is one of the participants of the intricate religious field of Turkish society and their understanding of religious and secular is worth analyzing. In order to understand Sargut's formulations and articulations, one needs to turn to the era of Kenan Rifai first.

Kenan Rifai: "*Şeriat* is the Law of the Day"[29]

Kenan Rifai is the *mürşit* of Samiha Ayverdi, of Meşkure Sargut (the mother of Cemalnur Sargut), and of Cemalnur Sargut. Although the group claims access to Ahmed er Rifai through the *silsile* of Kenan Rifai, Kenan Rifai's branch is a unique one whose history is in a way the adventure of religion from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Cemalnur Sargut and the group members frequently refer to him as *Hocam* (my teacher) and *Efendim* (my master).[30] He gained his *icazet* (permission) for being a Rifai shaykh from a Rifai Shaykh, Hamza Rifai, while he was working in Medina as the director of a high school before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Ayverdi, Erol, Araz and Huri, 2003). As I will explain later, this is not the

[29] Interview with Cemalnur Sargut, October 7, 2006. Sargut said that Kenan Rifai uttered this sentence in one of his conversations with her mother, Meşkure Sargut.
[30] The following parts about Kenan Rifai reflect the way his *mürit*s (Samiha Ayverdi, Safiye Erol, Nezihe Araz, Sofi Huri) narrativize his life, choices and reactions. Since there are not many resources on the details of Kenan Rifai's life, I preferred to use his *mürit*s' accounts. So, the text is also about the *mürit*s' representation of Kenan Rifai and their own ideas on the historical period at hand.

only *icazet* of Kenan Rifai. His *mürit*s claim that he had *icazet* from four *tarikat*s. His first *icazet* is claimed to be from a Kadiri shaykh, Ethem Efendi. Ethem Efendi is also said to be the *mürşit* of Kenan Rifai's mother. His *icazet* from the Rifai order is important, because Kenan Rifai opened his *tekke,* or *dergah* as a Rifai shaykh. His *mürit*s explain this process of getting *icazet* only as a formality. According to them, it was specified in the *icazet* given by Hamza Rifai that he had been ordered to give an *icazet* to Kenan Rifai by the Prophet Muhammad (ibid.). After the permission, he opened his own *tekke* in Istanbul in 1908, the *dergah of Ümmü Kenan* (the mother of Kenan). His mürits strongly emphasize that then, being a *mürşit*, an educator, was only possible through opening a *dergah* (ibid.). They anachronistically claim that Kenan Rifai would probably have opened an academy instead of a *dergah*, if he had had the opportunity of spreading his tenets in an academy in that era (ibid.). They emphasize that his *dergah* became a place of scholarship and enlightenment in a short time and the enlightened people of the era, poets, scholars, scientists, and even *şeyhülislam*s, priests came to the center (ibid.).

The response of Kenan Rifai to the secularization project of the nationalist elites and the way his *mürit*s convey it are noteworthy. According to them, Kenan Rifai was aware that the age of orders had ended and institutions of orders were mere form and ritual. They claim that the duty of Kenan Rifai did not end with the closure of religious orders, but an academy formed around him naturally (ibid.). They say that Kenan Rifai used to see the will of Allah in everything, so he saw the commandment of the closure of religious orders as a manifestation of Allah and tolerated it (p. 123). They explain this as follows:

> When all religious training and educational institutions were closed down by the state in 1925, he accepted this without any appeal or

> displeasure. As such, one can almost feel the pleasure of a chief whose order is put into practice, in this exceptional espousal. Did he not say that the voice of society is the voice of God, is it possible to neglect it once he saw it within the very conditions of daily life? (p. 120).[31]

They say that his respect towards the prohibitions of the state was to such an extent that he did not even give theoretical information about the rituals of the *tarikat* such as *sema*[32] or *zikir* (dhikr), let alone their practice (p. 120). There are some anecdotes that exemplify his ease about the events. For instance, when one of the people around him expressed his despair after one of the Rifai *dergah*s had become a dance saloon, he is said to have uttered these sentences:

> Why do you feel sad? There was also dancing formerly, and this is the case now, as well. There is no difference between *devran*[33] and dance... It is just the latter is material, one holds a beautiful woman who will loose her beauty; while the former makes *sema* by spectacle and amusement of *Cemalullah,*[34] who is eternal (p. 123).[35]

In another instance, he encounters a Mevlevi shaykh in the year 1930. The shaykh again voices his worries about the reforms. He is claimed to say that they became pipes, with reference to the *ney* they played. Kenan Rifai is said to answer like this:

> Why do you think we have turned into pipes? We are what we are, *eren*s[36]! Formerly, we were companions in the *tekke* of *zahir*[37], we are

[31] The translation is mine. "1925'te tekmil dini talim ve tedris müesseseleri devlet eliyle kapatıldığı zaman o bunu en küçük bir itiraz ve hoşnutsuzluk göstermeden kabul etmişti. Öyle ki, bu fevkalade hüsnü kabulde adeta bir amirin kendi emrinin tatbik edildiğini gördüğü zamanki hoşnutluğu seziliyordu. Öyle ya, madem ki halkın sesi Hakk'ın sesidir, demişti, bunu günlük hayatın şartları arasında gördüğü zaman biliş çıkmaması kabil miydi?"

[32] *Sema* (Sama) is the *zikir* performed while standing to the accompaniment of music; especially the ceremonies of the Mevlevis (Lifchez, 1992, p. 329).

[33] *Devran* is the *zikir* performed while rotating in a circle, as practiced by Halvetis, Cerrahis and some Kadiris (Lifchez, 1992, p. 324)..

[34] *Cemalullah* (jamal al-Allah) means the beauty of God.

[35] The translation is mine. "Niçin canın sıkılıyor? O zaman da dans ediliyordu; şimdi de öyle. Devranla dansın farkı yok ki... Yalnız biri cismanidir, kaşı gözü solacak bir dilberi aguşuna alıp döner; öteki ise baki olan cemalullahın seyir ve temaşasıyla sema eder."

[36] In the quotation, *eren* is used as a form of addressing the other Sufis. The word *eren* literally means the one who arrives in and reaches. In Sufism, it means *veli* (the friend of God) or *insan-ı kamil*, who achieved the union with God (Uludağ, 2001, pp. 124-125).

[37] For an explanation for the term *zahir*, see Chapter 4.

> the people of the heart in the *tekke* of the heart now. Allah wished the affairs to be like this, and did it. Since it comes from Him, all is nice. There is no reason for being pipes... Today, the body has become the *tekke* and the heart is now the *makam,*[38] the hearts are again filled with the light of God's beauty (p. 124).[39]

This actually was not the only reaction in this direction. The function of Sufi orders was discussed even at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Ottoman Empire and it was accepted that Sufism had ceased to function as it had done in the past. It was already an existing argument that *tekkes* deserved to be closed due to their malfunction (Kara, 2002). However, this does not mean that there were no reactions to the secularist reforms and the closure of *tekke*s. The establishment of the Independence Tribunals (*İstiklal Mahkemeleri*) in March 1925 and the following events demonstrate this. The reaction against secularizing reforms was suppressed by both legal and violent means. As Zürcher asserts, secularizing measures such as the closure of shrines (*türbe*s) and *tekke*s were met with "stubborn resistance" from the population (Zürcher, 2004, p. 173). The Independence Tribunals played an important role in suppressing the resistance. Under the Law on the Maintenance of Order (The Law of *Takrir-i Sükun*), nearly 7500 people were arrested and 660 were executed (Zürcher, 2004). After the Shaykh Sait Revolt in February 1925, he and his twenty nine companions were executed (Kara, 2002). The unrest continued through 1926. Sufi *tarikat*s gave different responses to the developments, ranging from intensive resistance to silent resentment. For instance, the *Nakşibendi* order in Istanbul was among the first *tarikat*s to react to the closure of *tekkes* (Karaatlı, 2006). A lot of shaykhs and dervishes of the Nakşibendi order were executed and their supporters

[38] *Makam* (maqam) refers to stable stations or phases of spiritual development on the "Path" in Sufism (Frager, 2005, p. 32). For a more detailed explanation, see Chapter 4.

[39] The translation is mine. "Niçin düdük olalım? Neysek yine oyuz, erenler! Evvelce, zahir tekkesinde demsaz idik, şimdi kalp tekkesinde dilsazız. Allah böyle istemiş, böyle yapmış. Madem ki ondan geliyor, hepsi hoş. Düdük olmaya bir sebep yok ki... Şimdi ten tekke oldu, gönül de makam, yine kalpler cemal nuruyla doldu."

were imprisoned (ibid.). The shaykh of Halveti Cerrahi order in Istanbul did not react to the state authorities. He tried to reach as many people as possible within the existing laws through the use of Sufi music as an effective means. In a secret fashion, he strove to gather his followers on ritual days and to perpetuate the traditional rituals of the Cerrahi order (Karaatlı, 2006).

In the middle of this unrest, the lack of reaction by Kenan Rifai and his positive attitude towards the new reforms guaranteed the safety of his group. His attitude was even milder than that of the Cerrahi order. While most Sufi orders and their followers were worried about the reforms, Kenan Rifai did not see the reforms as an obstacle to arranging their lives on the basis of the doctrines of *tasavvuf*. His main concern was to demonstrate and indoctrinate that faith in and love for Allah had very little to do with forms, but with the love one feels and experiences. As it will appear in the idiom Cemalnur Sargut uses and the practice of the *mürit*s around her, this kind of an interpretation gives the group considerable flexibility and the capacity of articulating discourse and practice according to changing contexts.

Secularizing reforms were not faced with a similar attitude in all segments of the Turkish society. Although it is not possible to talk about a unified or popular resistance to the secularist reforms, it can be said that the secularist reforms led to tensions within the larger population (Çiğdem, 2004). It can be claimed that although there are not enough resources for documentation, the experiences of the Progressive Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*) and the classification of "accepted" and "unaccepted" reforms give significant clues of the resentment of some Muslim groups, regardless of the strength or form of their response (Ibid.). Çiğdem claims that Islamism in Turkey did not continue its relationship with the republic through a process of marginalization. The symbols, concepts and terminology of Islam were

given consent implicitly or explicitly especially by the conservative right. However, the distinctive line has always been the sanctity of the Republic and any religious attitude or resentment towards it has been brutally suppressed (Ibid.) This tension is exemplified by Tuğal's research (2006) in Sultanbeyli. He argues that various agencies of the state incorporated religious elements as democratization started in the mid-1940s and the military intervention in 1980 institutionalized religion further. He states the introduction of standard religious lessons to public schools' curriculum and the religious references in the definition of the constitution of 1982 as examples. As the state began to incorporate religious elements to maintain legitimacy, Islamists increasingly expected a singular interpretation and protection of Islam by the state. However, they expected the Islamist party to do so and continued to perceive the secularist state as a threat to Islam (Ibid.). They situated their definition of an Islamic way of life in opposition to the secularization project. Some scholars claim that a moral ethos has been attributed to the state in Islamic political thought since the Middle Ages. This perception of the state eliminates possible conflicts with the state (Duran, 2004). Duran (2004) argues that this is why Said Nursi and the *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook) movement Islamist party refrained from clashing with the state.

The response of Kenan Rifai can be summarized with his sentence: "*Şeriat* is the law of the day and our duty is to obey it." The separation between the state regime and the Islamic way of life and the insignificance of the regime for experiencing *tasavvuf* is at the heart of the group discourse, which provided a safer ground for the group and comprised a safer form of religion in such an uneasy milieu.

The Sacralization of the Secularist Elites

Cemalnur Sargut follows the way of her *mürşit*s, Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi. Sargut sees no conflict between an Islamic way of life and the secularizing reforms. She goes further in order to provide the appropriation of *tasavvuf* by her audience: she sacralizes Atatürk and his reforms. In one of her speeches for the youth in the Saturday gatherings, the topic was the Kerbela events[40] and the killing of the Prophet's grandchildren due to the conflicts over succession. She declared that the Kuran definitely prohibits aggressive war, Islam cannot attack for jihad, but for defense. She says "It is very interesting that this is the declaration of Atatürk after *Kocatepe* War. He said 'We do not have right to make war for attack, but we only make war for defense.' This demonstrates that Atatürk used to know Kuran very well."[41] These accounts also serve another purpose. Is this what they claim or your interpretation? They aim to defeat the perspectives that accuse Islam of breeding terror and giving way to aggressive practices.

In another instance in the Wednesday gatherings, she proposed the relevance of "the miracle of 19," which was introduced by a book called *Kuran, İslam, Atatürk*

[40] Ali's second son and the Prophet's grandson, Huseyin, was killed in *Kerbela* city on the 10th day of Muharram according to the Hijri calender (in the year 680) and this is called *Kerbela* events in the history of Islam As Cemalnur Sargut mentions, Samiha Ayverdi used to feel worried on the week of Muharrem 10. She says that though it was not mourning, *ihvan* used to fast and relinguish in the life of Ayverdi. Sargut tries to continue this tradition. In her sohbet for the youth on the week of Muharrem 10, she gave a speech on *Karbala* events in tears. She wrote passages from Kenan Rifai which described the events. She suggested to the listeners to fast and renounce their pleasures, though not to mourn. As I observed in the youngesters, they obeyed Sargut's advises. They tried to eat and entertain less. As I learned from one of the women, they gathered in the house of an *ihvan* in the hour they believe Husayn was killed and drank water in midafternoon to symbolize "his drinking the baverage of *shahada*." (*Shahada* means being a witness to and affirming the belief in God at the time of dying.)

[41] The translation is mine. The quotation is from the youth *sohbet* on January 20, 2007. "Çok enteresandır, Atatürk Kocatepe Muharebesi'nden sonra der ki, bir beyanattır bu biliyorsunuz, biz hücum için savaşma hakkına sahip değiliz. Biz ancak savunma savaşı yaparız. Buradan da anlaşılıyor ki Atatürk Kuran'ı Kerim'i çok iyi biliyordu."

ve 19 Mucizesi (Kuran, Islam, Atatürk and the Miracle of 19).[42] Number 19 refers to the date of Atatürk's landing in Anatolia to start the War of Independence in Samsun on May 19. According to the book, number 19 can be calculated in the Kuran through a calculation called *ebced*.[43]

This kind of an interpretation by a Rifai woman *mürşit* opens significant space for the appropriation of Sufism by secularist segments of society. In order to emphasize the appropriateness of the separation of religious and state authorities, she anachronistically establishes a link between the Prophet's doctrines and secularism. While explaining the reluctance of the Prophet's grandchildren for capturing state authority, she indicates:

> You will see that Ummayyads and Abbasids were always frightened.[44] Because the twelve imams were loved. Be very careful with this point. I will like to give you a secret, a very important secret: Actually our Prophet was secular, if this is secularism. Why? He has a command to the four caliphs that would follow him. He said to them 'You that will succeed me, if you are going to govern the state and gain temporal power, do the spiritual governing secretly. If you are the spiritual leader, please do not attempt to govern the state.[45]

She claims that political authority was offered to Huseyin, the grandchild of the Prophet, against the possibility of Yezid's gaining power, but he refused it.

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[42] The book was written by Cenk Koray, who is not a theologian. It was published in 1999 and had a lot of repercussions in the popular media.

[43] In Arabic, there are several mnemonic formulas designed to help one learn the numerical values assigned to the letters of the alphabet. On the basis of these formula, numerical values of the words are calculated and ebced calculation is made. Sufis extract meanings from some verses and hadith through ebced calculation and believe that these are esoteric information expressed by signs (Uludağ, 2001, p. 114).

[44] She means that Umayyads and Abbasids were afraid of the family of the Prophet, *ehl-i beyt*. For further informationon *ehl-i beyt* and the *imam*s, see footnote 24.

[45] The translation is mine. The quotation is from the youth *sohbet* on January 20, 2007. "Emeviler ve Abbasiler, göreceksiniz, hep korkmuşlar. O kadar çok seviliyor ki on iki imam... Buraya çok dikkat ederseniz çok büyük bir sır vereceğim sizlere, çok mühim bir sır vereceğim. Aslında Peygamber Efendimiz laik bir insandı. Laiklik oysa eğer. Neden? Peygamber'in emri var. Kendinden sonraki dört halifeye diyor ki, benden sonra kim geçecekse, hiç biriniz, maddi idarede olacaksanız devleti idare edecekseniz, manevi idareyi gizli yapın. Manevi başkansanız, yani benim manamın idarecisiyseniz, lütfen devleti idare etmeye kalkmayın. On iki imamın hiç biri devleti idare etmeye kalkmamıştır. Fakat hep korktu Emeviler yani başa geçerler diye."

With this rigid separation between spiritual and temporal authorities, it is claimed that the regime of Turkey is constructed as the ideal regime for living *tasavvuf* in a proper way. As opposed to the hegemonic dichotomy of Islamist versus secularist, Cemalnur Sargut says that they would like to destroy apparent dichotomies. She says they would like to substitute *tevhid*[46] (tawhid, unification) instead of mere form.

Cemalnur Sargut's group is a good example of the continuity of a Sufi tradition without any conflict with the institutional secularization of the republic. Their interpretation of the secularist reforms deconstructs the dichotomy of Kemalism versus Islam as a widespread stereotype for the religious orders in Turkey. This adaptation transforms the practice of *tasavvuf*. What do they practice as ritual and as a religious group without a *tekke*? I will focus on this question below.

Ritual Forms in Traditional *Tarikat*s

There are two kinds of activities that are vital for the Sufi groups in Turkey today: *sohbet* and *zikir*. *Sohbet* is a word that comes from the Arabic word *Suhba*. It can be translated as friendship, friendly chat, companionship or friendly conversation (Uludağ 2001; Cebecioğlu, 2004). It is also defined as "keeping the company of the shaykh and one's fellow disciples to derive spiritual benefit" (Lifchez, 1992, p. 330). *Sohbet* is said to have had prominence even among the early Sufis and was be the basic component of training (Uludağ, 2001). *Sohbet* is particularly among the principle practices of Mevlevi and Nakşibendi orders (ibid.). It is also indicated that all Sufi ecoles are based on two principles: *sohbet* and *hizmet* (service) (Cebecioğlu,

[46] For an explanation of the term, see footnote 71.

2004). The abilities in the spirit of the *mürşit* are claimed to transfer to the *mürit* in *sohbet*s, so the friends of Allah make much of them. Sufis see the justification of their *sohbet* method in the Prophet's training his friends (*sahabe*) through *sohbet*s (ibid.). *Sohbet* is said to consist of keeping the company of the shaykh and of one's fellow disciples in accordance with precise behavioral norms (Silverstein, 1997).

*Sohbet*s constitute a crucial part of the practices of not only Sufis, but of various religious groups in Turkey. While *sohbet*s can be recited by shaykhs, they can also be organized by the caliphs or stand-ins (*vekil*) of Sufi shayks or the prestigious members of religious groups and even by people who would like to read religious sources with their own efforts without a leader. These sources may be the interpretation of the Kuran, hadith, or the books of leading Islamic figures. *Sohbet*s are also an important practice of the followers of Said Nursi in Turkey. The leading members of the groups occasionally organize *sohbet*s in private houses. Women and men generally participate in separate groups. Sometimes they are segregated by a curtain or they listen to *sohbet*s in different rooms. When it comes to Sufi groups, *sohbet*s are important means for Sufi orders in Turkey due to the illegality of the *tekke* institutions.

Zikir, whose meaning is remembering, naming or mentioning, is among the basic elements of all Sufi *tarikat*s. *Zikir* is repeating certain names of Allah (*esma'ül hüsna*- the beautiful names of Allah) and some prayers (*dua*) at certain times and amounts, loudly or silently (Kara, 1990). Schimmel (1975) acknowledges that Sufis would agree that the heart of the faithful must be "perfumed with the recollection of God." Recollection is the spiritual food of the mystic (p. 168). *Zikir* is seen as the first step in the way of love; for when somebody loves someone, he likes to repeat his name and remember him (ibid.). The principle technique for establishing a close

relationship with Allah, through forgetting other beings and existence, is said to be *zikir*. *Zikir* can be performed alone or in a group and depending on the custom of the Sufi order, standing, sitting, or dancing, with or without music. It can be vocal (*cehri,* jahri) or silent (*hafi,* khafi) (Kara, 1990). After the institutionalization of the *tarikat*s, group *zikir*s have become widespread and certain rules appeared according to the *tarikat* customs. For instance, the *zikir* ritual of the Mevlevi order, which is called *sema*, is performed by standing and whirling. *Hatm-i hace* is the *zikir* of the Nakşibendi order and is performed silently by sitting in front of the shaykh. The *zikir* of the traditional Rifai order is called *zikr-i kıyam*, which means standing *zikir* (Kara, 1990).

*Sohbet*s and *zikir* rituals are still an important form of worship of Sufi groups in Turkey, whether in *tekke* buildings, in endowment buildings under which Sufi groups conduct their activities or in private houses. As Kafadar (1992) argues, as *tekke*s were closed down by legal regulations in 1925, "since many Sufi congregations do not depend on a central organization, they have continued to function as independent cells by keeping within certain limits of secrecy and by exploiting selective ties of allegiance with members of the police, the military, and the parliament" (p. 310). Silverstein (1997), who conducted fieldwork among the Gümüşhanevi branch of the Nakşibendi order in Istanbul, says that *sohbet* is a devotional practice of particular prominence. He says that during his fieldwork in the late 1990s, members of the order gathered after *asr* prayers[47] on Sunday afternoons in the main area of the Fatih mosque to attend a *sohbet* recited by a stand-in (*vekil*) for the shaykh (p. 5). He gives the general form of the *sohbet* and says:

[47] *Asr* prayer in the namaz prayer performed in the midafternoon. It is called *ikindi namazı* in Turkish.

> The *sohbet*s were structured around the reading and discussion of two or three *hadith* (accounts of exemplary sayings and deeds of the Prophet). The *hadith* were first read aloud by the *vekil* in Arabic, translated, and then interpreted, giving examples from daily occurrences and historical anecdotes. The exercise generally lasts about an hour and a half, with very little coming and going, no talking on the part of listeners, and almost no note taking. At the end of the *sohbet*, supplicatory prayers (*du`a*) were said, asking God to accept the efforts of the *sohbet* and the prayers of its participants. This became seamlessly an abbreviated version of the *khatm-i Khwajagan*, an invocation of the memory of earlier pious personalities, with special emphasis on figures in the Naqshbandi order's chain of initiation (*silsile*). It was followed by a *zikir* (*dhikr*), invocations and remembrance of the Divine names and attributes (p. 5).

Additionally, he gives a pattern of the *zikir*: "The *dhikr* was commonly 100 *Istighfar*, 100 *Kelime-i Tevhid*, 100 *Lafza-ı Celal* ('Allah'), 100 *Salavat-ı Şerife* and '*Allahumme sally wa Allahumme Barik*' followed by 100 *Sura al-Ikhlas*, and sometimes 100 *Sura al-Inshira*."

Another work is that of Raudvere's on the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi group, which informs us that *zikir* is the dominant ritual of the group (Raudvere, 2002). Contrary to the lessons and *sohbet*s in local mosques and the endowment's center, there were never open invitations to participate in the *zikir* organized by the *vakıf* (ibid.). This ritual is said to be performed exclusively by the inner circle of the group and the front door is said to be locked by the women during the ritual. Raudvere indicates that though extensive and exhaustive, *zikir* was nevertheless a moment of relaxation for the women involved.

Zikir has a prominent place in the Rifai tradition, too. Traditional Rifai groups are known with their standing *zikir* (*kıyami zikir*) or *burhan* in the literature, which was translated as "Howling Dervish ritual" in the European literature (Kafadar, 1992, p. 312). İzzeti (2004) summarizes the Rufai *zikir* with following words:

> The ceremony starts with the sura of Fatiha in the Rifai order. After Fatiha, dervishes, who take their places within the crescent-shaped *zikir* circle, recite *evrad-I şerif*[48] with its special melody. After a short prayer, they stand up and form into ranks facing one another. Shaykh *Efendi* indicates the *esma* (names of Allah) that will be recited and the person called *reis*[49] begins to manage the *zikir* performance. The ones making *zikir* recite hymns and Arabic panegyrics in harmony with the tempo of the *zikir*. The Rifai standing *zikir* is very rapturous and fervent. When the *zikir* gains speed, the performance of *burhan* starts. *Burhan* is unique to the Rifai order and symbolizes the Prophet's elongating his hand from his sarcophagus and the *tarikat*'s founder's[50] kissing the Prophet's hand. The word *burhan* means the evidence eliminating doubt. This circumstance, demonstrating that the knife does not cut but Allah, fire does not burn but Allah, and laws of physics are not in force in some special circumstances, with the performance of movements such as sticking tools like swords, skewers, knobs into different parts of the body like the cheek, belly, throat or eye, licking and touching a hot anchor called 'rose' is the most famous and distinguishing feature of the Rifai *zikir* (p. 212).[51]

Although not frequently, similar *zikir* rituals are performed in the Rufai *tekke* in Istanbul. Karaatlı describes the Rufai *zikir* which she participated in a *tekke* during her fieldwork with the Cerrahi group in Istanbul (Karaatlı, 2006). The shaykh of the group (R. Baba) has close ties with Cemalnur Sargut and he frequently comes to her *sohbet*s in Erenköy. His group is a closed one but on some occasions they perform *zikir* with the participation of the *mürit*s of different orders (ibid., 2006). Like in the Cerrahi *zikir*, women participate in the *zikir* upstairs. They use the distinctive feature of the Rufai order, *burhan*. Karaatlı describes the Rufai *zikir* as follows:

> After a fairly long wait, *R. Baba* (Father R.) and the people that seemed close to him took their places. While the *zikir* which started with *tevhid*[52]

[48] *Evrad* (awrad) means litanies, which consist of some verses of the Kuran, hadith and other rosary (*tesbih*). In Sufi orders, the *zikir* that the *mürit* does is called *virdand* its plural form is *evrad*. There are different *evrad* attributed to the *pir* of each Sufi *tarikat* (Kara, 1990, p. 202). As Raudvere (2002) explains, the term *şerif* (sherif) indicates descendent from the Prophet, and it is used with a double meaning in order to emphasize or honour the position of a person or an event. It supplies a hint that contemporary *zikir* follows a chain of tradition that goes back to the Prophet himself (p. 182).
[49] Reis means head, chief or leader.
[50] The *tarikat*'s founder is Ahmed er-Rifai.
[51] The translation is mine.
[52] *Tevhid* is the zikr of "lailaheillallah" with the meaning "There is no God, but God." (My explanation).

> continued with *esma'ül hüsna*s used by Rufais, e few people whirled *sema* in the middle of the *zikir* circle. However, they did it with their quotidian clothes. The most interesting part of the *zikir* was 'Burhan,' which is a Rufai tradition. It aims to demonstrate the superiority of 'meaning to material' through practices such as stabbing oneself, licking fire... etc. This ritual is a very interesting experience for the ones who see it for the first time. R. Baba's stabbing himself, touching his belly with the hot mace with speedy motions increased his *mürit*s' ecstasy. The *mürit*s of other *tarikat*s were also watching the *zikir* enthusiastically. Actually, it is undeniable that it was a kind of 'performance' for the others (p. 116).[53]

However, the group does not perform *burhan* frequently. Once I participated in the *zikir* in this *tekke*, men and women just sat in the same room in a circle, made the Rifai *zikir* under the leadership of R. Baba's son and did not perform *burhan*.

The Rifai order established a strong *tekke* organization in Anatolia and the Balkans. It is generally in congruous with the stereotypical equation of Sufi *tarikat*s with rural populations with its *burhan* ritual. It is because of the kind of ritual Rufais performed that European travel literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries commonly depicted visits to Rufai ritual as encounters with the wild and irrational religiosity of the Orient (Kafadar, 1992). For the same reason, contemporary researchers also associate Rufai order with lower classes. For instance, Biegman (2007), who conducted fieldwork among a Rifai shaykh and his *mürit*s in Macedonia between years 2002 and 2004, claims in a perky manner that "in the Balkans and Egypt, and no doubt elsewhere, the followers of the Rifaiyya have always been drawn from the lower and lower middle classes and the *tarikat*'s unbridled practices hold little appeal for the Muslim bourgeoisie" (p. 35). Therefore, it can be said that

[53] The translation is mine. "Uzunca bir beklemeden sonra, R. Baba ve ona yakın olduğu anlaşılan kişiler yerlerini aldılar. Tevhid ile başlayan zikir Rufailerin kullandığı 'esma'ül hüsna'larla sürerken, burada da birkaç kişi zikir halkasının ortasında sema döndü. Ancak bunu gündelik kıyafetleriyle yaptılar. Zikrin esas ilgi çeken noktası 'Burhan'dı. Bir Rufai ıstılahı olan Burhan, şiş vurmak, ateş yalamak vb. uygulamalarla 'mananın maddeye üstünlüğünü' kanıtlamayı amaçlıyordu. Bu ritüel ilk kez görenler açısından oldukça ilginç bir deneyimdir. R. Baba'nın zikir halkasının ortasında bir hareket yoğunluğu içerisinde kendini şişlemesi, karnına topuzun ucuyla dokunması özellikle müritleri arasında kendilerinden geçmesini çabuklaştırmaktaydı. Diğer tarikatların müritleri de zikri heyecanla izliyorlardı. Aslında, diğerleri için biraz 'gösteri' havasına büründüğü de reddedilemezdi."

Kenan Rifai's branch within the Rifai tradition is a unique one with its educated, middle and upper class *mürit* profile. Their differentiation from other branches of the *tarikat* is also manifested in Rufai-Rifai distinction, which appeared after the 1970s in Turkey (Demirci, 2006). Demirci says that while the term "Rufai" refers to the branch of the order which continues the traditional popular rituals of the order and is widespread in various regions of Turkey, "Rifai" refers to the milieu around Kenan Rifai. In other words, the Rifai group is said to be adapted to urban life and modernized, while Rufais commonly appeal to rural segments.

Tarikat without *Tekke*: Persistence of *Sohbet* and *Zikir* through Hymns

Cemalnur Sargut's group has two gatherings that are open to public: the gatherings in Erenköy and the gatherings for youth in Sahrayıcedid.[54] However, there is a "core group" comprising men and women, some of whom have been in the group for a long time and some who are new. I could get information about the history of this core group in my interviews and during the Wednesday evening gatherings of youngsters. Before Yağmur, who is one of the young mürits of Sargut and my interviewees, nobody gave me a detailed description of the group's history. This is due to the fact that Yağmur, who is 30 years old and one of the young members of the group, is "*ihvan* by birth." This means that one's parents already had connections with the group. In Yağmur's case, only her mother was from the group. She told me that her mother used to take her to the activities when Samiha Ayverdi was alive.[55] Yağmur was living in Ankara in her childhood and she told me that she used to come to Istanbul with her mother for the commemoration of Kenan Rifai's death on the

[54] For a description of an Erenköy gathering, see Chapter 1.
[55] Samiha Ayverdi died in 1993.

seventh of July each year. She said that her uncle (mother's brother) lived in the flat just below Samiha Ayverdi's flat in Fatih and narrated the memories of her personal history with a feeling of nostalgia, as I asked questions about her earliest encounters. As pieces of blurred memories about their visits from Ankara to Istanbul, she remembered trips on the ship on the Bosphorus accompanied by *mehter*[56] marches and tears of the young people. She said the group was small enough to fit into a ship in those days. They used to recite *mevlit*[57] after midafternoon prayers (*ikindi namazı*) and meet in *Kubbealtı* in the evening. The Kubbealtı Association (*Kubbealtı Cemiyeti*) was established in 1970 by the leading group members and primarily by Samiha Ayverdi and turned into the Endowment of Kubbealtı (*Kubbealtı Vakfı*) in 1978. It still continues its activities in *Çemberlitaş* in its original building. All the books of Samiha Ayverdi were published by Kubbealtı Publishing (*Kubbealtı Neşriyat*) and the endowment still continues its activities.

The death of Samiha Ayverdi marks a significant event for the group. This is a story most of the group members are reluctant to voice. Other than Yağmur, Anna, who is a young anthropologist conducting fieldwork with the same group, was the second person giving a hint about the matter to me. The opening policy of Sargut is a controversial issue among the heirs of the Samiha Ayverdi group. Indeed some of them do not support this tendency. As a result of this division, Yağmur told me that there are two branches now: one that is against Cemalnur Sargut's policy of openness and the other is that Cemalnur Sargut's group. The first group's members mostly live and conduct their activities on the European side of Istanbul, while the other group resides on the Anatolian side. Yağmur looked worried about the division and

[56] The word *mehter* is a word in Ottoman Turkish referring to the musicians playing marches in Ottoman military bands. The plural word is *mehteran*. *Mehter* groups perform for the commemoration of Ottoman events, such as the celebration of Istanbul's conquest. Here, *mehter* marches appear as the indicator of the group's appropriation of the Ottoman heritage.
[57] *Mevlit* (mawlud) is the poem describing the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

indicated that she could not mention this without a pain in her heart. Although there is no apparent conflict or rivalry, this is the untold story. However, she told me that they still come together during the commemorations of Kenan Rifai. Cemalnur Sargut does not even mention this story and she does not mention conflicts as a principle since she claims to eliminate differences and accommodate unity instead of conflicts. Most of the students of Cemalnur live on the Anatolian side. They told me that since most of them lived on the Anatolian side; they carried *Türkkad's* building from Fatih to its present building in Sahrayıcedid in the year 2005.

How do they come together, with what kind of groups and activities do they continue today? Except the activities that are organized for "everyone," I could only participate in the Wednesday gatherings that young group members organized. Some of the *mürit*s participate in the group as a whole family. To give an example, Ceren,[58] one of the young persons that I spent a lot of time with during Wednesday gatherings and interviewed, participated in group activities with her mother and grandmother, while her father did not even have information about their involvement. Her parents are divorced. She started to listen to Cemalnur Sargut while she was in high school. After school, she used to go to *sohbet*s. İpek, one of the women who are very active around Cemalnur Sargut, is her uncle's wife. She told me that her first encounter was thanks to İpek. She also used to come to the Saturday *sohbet*s of Meşkure Sargut, the mother of Cemalnur Sargut. All of them call her *Meşkure Anne* (Mother Meşkure). After entering university, Ceren started to be more active in the group and to "shape her lifestyle" in harmony with the tenets of the order. One of the young *mürit*s, whom Ceren mentions as a "dervish girl," was her close friend and in a way she became an intermediary for making Ceren closer to the group. Cemalnur Sargut sent

[58] Other than the names of the *mürşit*s, all the mentioned names of the group members are pseudonyms for the purposes of protecting anonimity.

some messages that she could not tell Ceren directly through this friend and Ceren asked some questions with the intermediacy of this friend since she could not ask Cemalnur Sargut due to her "edeb."

Due to the existence of different age groups, there are different types of *sohbet*s. Ceren gave me some accounts about these different groups in an interview we made in her home. I went to her home for two occasions after this interview for Wednesday gatherings. One of the *sohbet* groups belong to the old people, who mostly became *mürit*s of Kenan Rifai. Ceren indicated that they call this group "Team A" informally among themselves in order not to be impolite by featuring them as "the elderly." However, there is no clear cut distinction between the groups. Ceren gave me an example: A *sohbet* of Mother Meşkure had taken place in the house of Ahsen, a middle-aged *mürit*, the text was recited by Cemalnur Sargut, everyone could participate, she herself went there, but could also take her grandmother there. She informed me that the age group determines the subject of the *sohbet*s and does not indicate strict age segregation. For instance, the topic of the *sohbet* given to the young people is not the same with the *sohbet*s with group A. Ceren said that Cemalnur Sargut recites some basic books such as the *Mesnevi* of Mevlana, but the old *mürit*s do not need to hear same things because they already read and know *Mesnevi* in their youth. Cemalnur Sargut gives speeches according to the level of the audience. Ceren told me that Sargut sometimes mentions the complicated issues in her *sohbet*s and sometimes makes an introduction to the audience which is not familiar with Sufism. Ceren informed me that this *sohbet* with the participation of the old people in one of the *mürit*s' house takes place almost once a month and the next one was approaching. They call these monthly crowded *sohbet*s as the "grand *sohbet*." I asked her whether I could participate in it and she suggested

that I ask Cemalnur Sargut. The *sohbet* would again take place in the home of a prestigious family within the group and they called the host *abi* (brother). After her suggestion, I called Cemalnur Sargut and asked her whether it was possible for me to come to the brother's house. She politely told me that the owner of the house did not want the house to be "crowded." I understood that they did not want me to come to the grand *sohbet*s and I had to draw my boundaries during the fieldwork. I was invited to the morning prayers on Saturday in our first interview in *Türkkad* by Cemalnur Sargut, but grand *sohbet*s were not such a field for me. I was upset when I learned that the boundaries were less strict for Anna. She had the advantage of writing her project in a European country, not in Turkey. I faced this fact when I wrote a paper for a presentation in a symposium. I used the word *mürşit* for Cemalnur Sargut and *mürit* for the people who are under her guidance within the lines of the Rifai tradition. I sent the article to Cemalnur Sargut and Ceren. They read it together and Cemalnur Sargut told me that I should not have mentioned her spiritual role in the group, but their "legitimate" activities in *Türkkad* in line with the laws in Turkey. I insisted that it would not be meaningful to ignore her group's identity as a Sufi order and her role as a spiritual guide. As a result of my insistence, she allowed me to use the phrase "teacher" for "*mürşit*" and "student" for "*mürit*." I felt worried about this restriction and was afraid that the paper would discredit my position as a researcher. We had a telephone conversation with Ceren on the issue. She said that Sufi orders are closed in Turkish legislation and although their activities are "open" and "known" by everyone, I could make them suspects with *mürit-mürşit* relationship. They did not want to be associated with the terms or the rituals of traditional *tarikat*s. However, Anna told me that she could use the words "*mürşit*" and even "shaykha" for Cemalnur Sargut and they had not restricted her use of this

terminology. I relate this restriction to the sensibility of the Turkish context with regard to religion, peculiarly to *tarikat*s. As Silverstein puts it, after the legislation punishing Sufi orders, it has technically been a punishable offence to be involved in a Sufi order as a shaykh or devotee, and the orders continue to function in a somewhat "public secret" fashion (Silverstein, 1997, p. 1). Cemalnur Sargut has another *sohbet* group on Mondays, in which the core group reads the Kuran and interprets it. This *sohbet* takes place in Dilek's house, who is a young woman I know personally from Wednesday evenings. Dilek is also *ihvan* by birth, although she participated in the group during her university years. Ceren told me that Dilek's mother hosts the Kuran *sohbet*s on Monday.

The only core group activity I could participate in was the program organized by the young generation of *ihvan*. However, middle aged *ihvan* occasionally came to the events and I had the chance of having conversations with them and of following the group activities. The sincere encounter I experienced on Wednesday evenings with the young members of *ihvan* helped me so much in understanding their conception of Islam and *tasavvuf*. Some of the youngsters were relatively recent members, while others were *ihvan* by birth. Regardless of when they joined the group, all were active in the group. They spent most of their time left from school or work with Cemalnur Sargut.

The first feature of the group that attracted my attention was their level of education. This was something I had realized even in the Erenköy *sohbet*s. Cemalnur Sargut presupposes a knowledgeable audience. She reads and explains difficult texts from prominent Sufis and sometimes gives examples from science, particularly from chemistry since she is a retired chemistry teacher. They gather in the house of one of them every Wednesday evening, unless they have to cancel the program because of

the last minute changes in their programs. Most of the time we gathered in the house of Irmak in Kadıköy near the former building of *Türkkad*. She lives in Erenköy, close to *Türkkad*, whereas her family lives in a remote district on the European side of the city. It was a simply-decorated, cute house with three rooms. We had the meetings in the relatively larger living room with a divan, an armchair, a small dining table, a vitrine with open and closed shelves and a television cabinet. There were musical instruments which are frequently used in Sufi music such as *ud* and *bendir*[59] in the room. It is easily grasped that she has some acquaintance with classical Turkish and Sufi music. In the gatherings, she plays the *ud* and *bendir* and also recites hymns with her nice voice. There were photographs of Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi on the walls. I even saw the photograph of Cemalnur Sargut on the desktop of her laptop computer. She is a theology teacher working in a private college. I was a bit anxious when I was invited to her house. Only three young girls that I had met in *Türkkad*, Irmak, Dilek and Öznur had information about my fieldwork and I did not know who I would meet in this first close gathering. Irmak met me at the door on my first visit. She called me "*sevgilim*" (my darling) like she did on the phone before. Cemalnur Sargut uses the same phrase while calling people around her. As I guessed, there were two people I had never met before in the room: Ceren and Eren. They were having the soup, flan and salad Irmak had prepared. Irmak introduced me as someone "investigating" them, while bringing food for me from the kitchen. She added that they were very glad of being "investigated." I did not know whether the others would be irritated by being "investigated" by a woman with a headscarf. I saw the only source of my credibility as being from a reputable university. However, a middle-aged man who participated in the gathering a few weeks later explained to me their

[59] *Ud* and *bendir* are widely used instruments in Sufi music. *Ud* is a kind of lute which is commonly used in Turkish and Arabic music. *Bendir* is a frame drum which is also commonly used in the North Africa.

outlook on my work and made me feel comfortable. He said that I could not write anything without the permission of their master (*Efendi*), meaning Kenan Rifai. According to him, I had no opportunity and will of writing something without the permission of Allah and their master. This comment reflects their belief that there is no good or bad, but the will of Allah in this world. This is the way they interpret events even if they do not like them at first sight.

After a while, Öznur joined the dinner. It was comforting for me to see another person I had met before. She is *ihvan* by birth and her family, living in Konya, already had contact with the group before she was born. After studying industrial engineering in Konya, she found a job in Istanbul in the private sector and now spends most of her time with *ihvan*. Ceren is an undergraduate student at the department of psychology at a private university. She is well cared in her external appearance and looks self confident like the other group members. She is living in an upper class district of Istanbul. Her mother is also a psychologist, who worked as a clinical psychologist for years and is now working in the business sector. During the conversations we had after dinner, she told me that she did not want to stay in the academy, but to work in the private sector. She said that theories are Eurocentric and are mostly invalid for Turkey. She thought she could be more influential in the private sector than in the academy. She said "I would like to be someone working in a private company like Coca Cola, setting an example for the people actively and also having time for my family. This looks more meaningful to me."[60] However, she criticizes consumer culture at the same time. She says that one cannot be satisfied even if s/he is the richest in the world and the message of the advertisements that pretend to ensure peace and happiness terrify her. From her speech, I got the point

[60] Conversation with Ceren during the Wednesday gathering, November 1, 2006. "Ben, örneğin Coca Cola gibi bir şirkette çalışan, aktif bir şekilde insanlara örnek olan ama aynı zamanda ailesine, çevresine de zaman ayıran biri olmak isterim. Bu bana daha anlamlı geliyor."

that she has been to different countries like the USA and Italy. She worked in New York and went to Italy as an exchange student. We also had a conversation with Eren, who is a professor at the technical university. I thought he was a musician, because they began to solfege with the *ud* after dinner while we were talking with Ceren. Soon I understood that Eren was the indispensable member of *sohbet* groups with his beautiful voice and ability to play the *ney*, *ud* and *bendir*, which are important instruments of Sufi music. As I learned from Anna, Eren was reciting prayers and hymns on many occasions, ranging from their collective morning prayers to travels to other cities and abroad. This means that women do not lead prayers loudly, but they prefer a man to do so. Another boy, Burak, participated in the evening. He is in his second year at the department of management at a private university. He is *ihvan* by birth and as far as I learned from their conversations, his mother is also an active member of *ihvan*. I later learned that he went to Austria to study management, but found it difficult and returned to study in Istanbul.

In this first evening gathering of these four young people from the group, they decided where to meet on Wednesday evenings and what to do. The tradition of the evening gatherings was reading books and reciting hymns. They read Samiha Ayverdi's book called *Türk Tarihinde Osmanlı Asırları* (Ottoman Centuries in Turkish History), which analyzes Turkish history from the Seljuks to the Ottomans in line with its relationships with Islam. They recited various hymns, some of which were written by Kenan Rifai. They said that when they did the reading after the hymns, some people might leave early, so decided to read Samiha Ayverdi's book first and then recite the hymns. When it came to selecting the house in which they would come together, they decided to gather in the house of Irmak. Ceren wanted to

host them, but they all found it difficult to return to their houses from Ceren's house on the European side. Burak, Eren and Ceren have cars, but Irmak does not have one.

This first evening gathering of the year was an introductory one for me. I had brought them pastry since I was going there for the first time. After dinner, Irmak told her friends that I had brought pastry for them, she served me a piece, but they did not eat. They explained to me that they tried not to eat artificial sugar. They made an effort of eating natural foods as much as possible and I brought fruit or fruit juice on the following occasions.

The number of the youngsters with whom I gathered was around six. It increased when other, sometimes elder members of the group participated. Other people occasionally coming to the evenings were Yağmur and Zeynep. Yağmur, about whom I introduced before, is a designer and also a professor at a technical university. Zeynep graduated from the school of law and is studying Islamic law in her graduate studies.

The general pattern of the gatherings did not change over the weeks. They firstly have dinner prepared by Irmak. They all see each other as close friends, as members of *ihvan*, which indicates that they are brothers and sisters. They make heart-to-heart conversations, nestling all the joy and energy of their age. One joke follows another side by side with the frequent theme of their love for their *mürşit*s, Cemalnur Sargut, Samiha Ayverdi, and Kenan Rifai. They frequently review their everyday life choices according to the normative criteria of their *mürşit* during these conversations. They discuss every detail of life, ranging from intimate matters, interpersonal relations to important choices such as the selection of a school, a job. For instance, Ceren asked Cemalnur Sargut about going to a journey before finishing a group work in a course at university. She needed Sargut's advice before leaving the

task of completing the work to her friends. In another instance, she mentioned that she had again asked Cemalnur Sargut before having an operation that would remove the deficiency in her eyes.

The reading of Samiha Ayverdi's book, *Türk Tarihinde Osmanlı Asırları*, and the recital of hymns follow the dinner. Hymns have always been an important component of Sufi *tarikat*s. Yağmur is one of the *mürit*s who loves music and reciting hymns. She indicates that she strongly feels direct access to Allah through music. Hymns have a special prominence for Kenan Rifai and the group, because Kenan Rifai has a lot of lyrics and compositions. His poems and hymns are published in the book called *İlahiyat-ı Kenan* (Hymns of Kenan). They adopt the tradition of Turkish Classical Music and Turkish Classical Music chorus studies and instrument courses still continue in *Kubbealtı Cemiyeti*. Some of the people around Cemalnur Sargut participate in the chorus there. They sometimes recite songs and hymns after the Erenköy gatherings of Cemalnur Sargut. The recitals on Wednesday evenings were preparations for programs such as *Kutlu Doğum Haftası* (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Week). After reading some parts from Ayverdi's books, they recite hymns. This is not a formal ceremony, but youngsters do this in whatever fashion they like. Sometimes with only one instrument, sometimes with *ud* and *bendir*, sometimes accompanied by *ney*. They occasionally gave out papers on which lyrics were written, so everyone could follow the sentences and sing. When the gathering took place in Ceren's house and Irmak and Eren were both absent, they could not sing hymns but only read Ayverdi's books.

Young dervishes have prominence for Cemalnur Sargut. She has been organizing *sohbet*s for young people since she was twenty-five years old. Samiha Ayverdi is said to have given her the duty to address youth since she is supposed to

speak the language of youth. The youngsters, together with their activities abroad, appear to be part of their plans for the future. They seem to advocate the claim that the world is on the eve of a spiritual revolution. They interpret the world's orientation towards spirituality as a sign to increase their activities worldwide and addressing the youth, who are important for this project, is an important step.

When I participated in the Wednesday evening gatherings for the first time, they had not organized where to do Cemalnur Sargut's youth *sohbet*s for the year 2007 yet. They were a bit upset about it, because they had started to these *sohbet*s earlier in the previous years. The *sohbet* used to take place in one of their friends house with the participation of almost a hundred young people. They needed a larger place and Eren gave the information that they could find a place near *Türkkad's* building again. Due to the delays, they started the youth *sohbet*s of Cemalnur Sargut in December. I went to this first *sohbet* comfortably since I thought I was somewhat close to them by now. However, I encountered the crowd of strangers in the one room flat on the apartment's first floor. The room was so crowded and there were even people standing at the back of the door that I entered the room with difficulty. I took my place among six people standing just in front of the door with a bulk of shoes just behind me. There was a range of sofas leading to the walls of the room and a few people were sitting there. The others were either sitting on the chairs lined side by side or sitting cross-legged on the ground in front of the chairs. Although the majority of the listeners were youngsters, there were also middle-aged and old people. There were a lot of men, though women seemed to be the majority at first sight. Cemalnur Sargut was sitting on the table in front of the crowd. Her enthusiastic, emotional voice and manners had influenced the audience. As usual, the main theme of the *sohbet* was love for Allah. She was quoting epics from the

Prophet, Mevlana, Ahmet er- Rifai and talking about Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi. After a while, I noticed the people from the Wednesday gatherings in the middle lines: Irmak had bowed her head and tears were flowing down her cheeks. Ceren and Burak were sitting side by side. There were some other people crying.

According to Cemalnur Sargut, these *sohbet*s have significance for addressing a large segment of the audience and spreading the doctrines of *tasavvuf*. She also perpetuates her influence on *ihvan* through these *sohbet*s, as a religious actor who does not carry on institutionalized rituals of the *tarikat*.

In her *sohbet*s, Cemalnur Sargut tries to explain the basic concepts of *tasavvuf* and to propagate its basic tenets, such as love of Allah and perceiving one's weakness in front of Allah. She indicates that all *tarikat*s and Sufis give the same message. However, she also discusses the doctrines of the Rifai order. For instance, she often emphasizes the three principles of the Rifai order: Not to accumulate property, not to reject when someone offers something and not to expect anything from anyone.

After the *sohbet*, most of the people left the room and the core group remained. Eren and another woman I had familiarity with from the Erenköy *sohbet*s began to play *bendir*, while Eylül accompanied them with her singing. In the meantime, Cemalnur Sargut was signing her newly published book, *Kenan Rifai ile Aşka Yolculuk* (Journey to Love with Kenan Rifai), that they had just delivered. The singing group simultaneously formed a circle with the others and began to recite hymns. This pattern of reciting hymns after *sohbet*s was repeated in all the programs I participated in.

As we can see in the descriptions above, the traditional *tekke* practices including Rufai rituals such as *burhan* are very different from Kenan Rifai's

tradition, which perpetuated *tasavvuf* in harmony with the institutional secularization in Turkey. In line with Kenan Rifai's way, *ihvan*, the close group around Cemalnur Sargut, continues its solidarity and claims to experience dervishness in the form of gatherings, *sohbet*s, with the activities they perform together, the hymns they recite. These activities do not enclose them in the society of *ihvan* and do not disrupt their active participation in other spheres of the modern life. Some forms like the open gatherings even disclose previously closed activities to the public.

Blurring the Boundaries Between World Rejection and World Accommodation

The group's survival and success in modern life is mainly related to the group's perception of religion, *tasavvuf* and dervishness. They think that religiosity is embedded in one's perceptions towards all life experiences. In order to grasp this, I would like to their understanding and experiences of ritual.

Cemalnur Sargut strongly emphasizes the importance of ritual prayer (*namaz*) as the foundation on the path of *tasavvuf*. Ritual prayer is regarded as one of the fundamental rituals of Islam in the path of *tasavvuf* by most Sufi groups. It is performed five times a day at prescribed hours. Schimmel (1975) informs us that early Muslim ascetics and mystics regarded ritual prayer as a kind of ascension to heaven, as a *miraç* (ascension)[61] that brought them into the immediate presence of God. Thus, prayer became the time of connection, the moment of proximity to God. Ritual prayers have great importance in the daily lives of Sargut's *mürit*s. They

[61] *Miraç* literally means "ladder" and it refers to the Prophet Muhammad's night journey to the Heavens, which is mentioned in Sura 17 of the Kuran. It is controversial whether it was a physical journey or was experienced in a dream. Schimmel argues that *miraç*, which she qualifies as the experience of the Prophet Muammad as a repitition of the joy of ascension, has a connection with daily prayer, namaz. This connection is said to make such an ascension into the divine presence possible for every sincere Muslim. The mystics are said to apply the ascension terminology to their own experiences in the rapture of ecstasy (Schimmel, 1975, pp. 218-219).

perform ritual prayers in Saturday mornings every week. When it comes to their daily lives, they say that Cemalnur Sargut tries to make ritual prayer an ordinary and easy part of their lives. They do not wear some special clothes; they just cover their heads loosely over their daily clothes. For some groups in Turkey, it is important and even indispensable to wear abounding clothes during *namaz*. Cemalnur Sargut appreciates wearing clean and smart clothes while meeting with Allah during the ritual prayer. She mentioned a woman applying make up in order to meet "her darling," Allah, looking beautiful. Despite the significance they attribute to the ritual prayer, it is not easy to perform it on time due to the working conditions. There are no places for worship in most of the private firms or universities. Moreover, they may or may not expose their religious identities in their work lives, or sometimes even to their close friends. For instance, Yağmur told me that she cannot mention that she is in a Sufi group and performs prayers in the academy even to her closest friend, who has no familiarity with *tasavvuf*. She told me that she compensates her ritual prayers at home later. Yağmur also compares the behaviors of the young people from *ihvan* and the young students around her at university. She says that she becomes aware of the students' selfishness and the primacy of their *nefis* (nafs) in their dominant norms of behaviour.

Apart from the women who left work and are involved in other activities such as the ones in *Türkkad*, the people I met in *sohbet*s mostly study or work with people who have no acquaintance with *tasavvuf* and experience difficulties in practices such as ritual prayer. However, Cemalnur Sargut does not advise them to break off their ties with their existing milieu. On the contrary, she appreciates the works they undertake in professional or academic life. This flexible attitude of Sargut facilitates the orientation of youngsters from diverse formations and circles to her *sohbet*s. The

youngsters sometimes express that they find some *mürit*s like Ahsen and İpek, who spend most of their time with Cemalnur Sargut. In one of the *sohbet*s, Ceren, who wants to become active in work life, asked Sargut what the ideal position was. Sargut said that it was very enjoyable to be together all the day but also difficult. If they could bear this difficulty, they could leave work and become like Ahsen or İpek. According to them, the *mürit* should be in a place best fitted to her/his *meshrep*, meaning the inborn characteristics.

Then, in line with Kenan Rifai's tenets, they say that "You can go anywhere you like as long as you put on the crown of *edep* (adab)."[62] One component of this is to see oneself in relation to Allah and in a test for one's demonstration of love for Him all the time. All experiences in subjective life, all the happenings one encounters, are interpreted through the eyes of the sacred and are regarded as means of approaching Allah thanks to the tenets of *tasavvuf*.

Therefore, the group members think that they can walk on the path of *tasavvuf* regardless of where they are: work life, academy or *Türkkad*. Their activities are highly appreciated by their *mürşit*. Öznur expressed their outlook in the following way:

> We try to make everything Cemalnur Abla told us a state of living, and realize them in our whole life, during daily life, business life, private life, in buses, ships, everywhere. It is not that we read a book and close it and then return to our affairs, this is not the case. It is about refraining from displeasing others as a state of living. Say, I tell you lies for twenty four hours of the day, and then come and advise you not to tell lies, is it convincing? Everyone tries to form a state of living according to his/her capacity and destiny. *Sohbet* never bores you. Because you check out what is going to affect your life, what your destiny is. You wait for your destiny, indeed. We try to apply it to our business life, or while walking on the street, whoever you come across, be it a beggar, or somebody who

[62] "Edeb tacını giy, nereye gidersen git."

> is angry with you, who shouts at you and insults you, you always feel in a test. We shouldn't be careless, we are trying to be careful about it.[63]

What is important is the way you interpret everything around you then, not where you are. This is again related to the definition of *ehl-i batın* (ahl al-batın) or *ehl-i tasavvuf* (ahl al-tasawwuf), who see Allah everywhere. Cemalnur Sargut (2006) proposes that their *mürşit*, Kenan Rifai, taught them to reach Allah even through the smallest events, even through the ones which look undesirable at first sight. Sargut relates the happenings in the world to the *tecelli* (manifestation) of Allah with his *cemal* (jamal, beauty) and *celal* (jalal, supremacy)[64] at the same time. So, one should bear the difficulties of life. Sargut (2006) gives reference the famous story of *Leyla* and *Mecnun* in Sufism and says "By seeing or feeling His revelation in the difficulties He gave us, or in our quarrels with other people, if we can say 'How nice that He acts distinctively towards me,' 'How nice that He believes that I am strong enough to endure, so that He acts distinctively towards me,' we gain salvation. Thenceforth, we acquire personality"(p. 24).[65] She makes an allegory between the affairs in the world and *gölge oyunu* (shadow play) and says we get angry with the

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[63] Interview with Öznur, October 7, 2006. "Cemalnur Abla birşey söylüyorsa bunu bütün hayatımızda, iş hayatımızda, özel hayatımızda, otobüste, vapurda, her yerde bunu bir şekilde yaşamaya, hal etmeye çalışıyoruz. Kitap okuyalım, sonra kapatalım gidelim işimizi yapalım, bu değil. Birbirini kırmamayı hal etmek. Yirmi dört saat yalan söyleyip sonra sana gelip yalan söyleme diyorum, ne kadar inandırıcı sana? Herkes kendi kapasitesi, nasibi neyse onu hal etmeye çalışıyor. Sohbet seni hiçbir şekilde sıkmıyor. Çünkü orda senin nasibine ne düşecek, sen neyi hal edeceksin ona bakıyorsun. O nasibini bekliyorsun aslında bir yerde. Bunu iş hayatımızda uygulamaya çalışıyoruz, yolda yürürken uygulamaya çalışıyoruz, bir dilenciyle olabilir, sana kızan, hakaret eden, karşı çıkan birisine karşı olabilir, kendini her an, her alanda, her yerde imtihanda olarak görüyorsun. Gaflette bulunmamamız gerekiyor. Bunlara dikkat etmeye çalışıyoruz."

[64] *Cemal* means beauty. In Sufism, it refers to the attributes of God which results in grace, mercy and blessing. It is believed that when God manifests Himself with *cemal*, it leads to the acceptance, protection and favour of God (Uludağ, 2001, p. 87). *Celal* means supremacy and greatness. Sufis believe that God, who is the Loved One, manifests His greatness to show that He is never in need of His subject, who is the lover, the seeker. With His attributes of celal, He is believed to demonstrate the lover his desperation by destroying his pride. The attributes of *celal* are believed to result in revenge, torment and pain, which disciplines the *nefis* (*nafs*) of the subject (Uludağ, p. 86).

[65] The translation is mine. "Allah'ın verdiği sıkıntılarda ya da bize kızan insanlarda O'nun tecellisini görerek ya da hissederek... 'Ne güzel farklı davranıyor, ne güzel benim tahammül edip dayanacağıma inanıyor, onun için bana farklı davranıyor' diyebilirsek kurtuluruz. O zaman da şahsiyet sahibi oluruz."

figures since we cannot see the person articulating them behind the scene, but the one who knows the truth laughs at us (ibid., 2006) Therefore, she thinks that the truth is that the ropes of all of us are in the hand of a "supreme stage manager," which is God. "That stage manager has given us various duties but it is he who plays out and talks in all" (ibid., 2006, p. 25).

The Sufi path has displayed different interpretations and practices vis-a-vis "worldly" activities since its earliest days. The formative centuries of Islam witnessed the appearance of ascetic modes of life. Some of them are said to express their faith in Allah by refusing to make a living, expecting Allah to nourish them and detaching themselves from the productive circles of society (Hurvitz, 1997, p. 50). Milder forms of asceticism also appeared in various degrees. Regardless of the degree of asceticism, *tasavvuf* had an integrative cosmology relating human beings to the universe and to Allah. Terzioğlu (2002), in her work on the diary of Niyazi Mısri in seventeenth century Ottoman Empire, observes the shift that took place in the modes of self-representation in Sufi narratives in that period and the entrance of the temporal and the mundane to Sufi personal narratives as the Sufis became progressively more integrated into the social, political and economic structures of "this world." The aspect relevant to the argument is that there are many accounts in the diary of Mısri giving heavenly explanations of mundane events and finding divine meanings even in political events. The blurred boundaries between the earth and the heavens is claimed to make everyday life of mystics more enchanted than ever (ibid., 2002). The infiltration of meaning to the micro processes of life and the reenchantment of the world overlap with the language of the new age teachings of our times. The increase in the interest in Sufi cosmology and teachings is also related to the trend of holistic outlook on existence. Davie (1999) advocates that in the last

decade of the twentieth century the sacred has become more integral to the well-being of the individual and it is thought that no healing can take place while mind, body and soul remain fragmented. With reference to Robertson (1991), she indicates that there is no longer any point in dividing our experience into "this-worldly" or "other-worldly" categories. The sacred has started to "spill over into everyday thinking" and the lines between the sacred and the secular are "becoming increasingly blurred" (p. 41). The idiom of Sufism accommodates the contemporary holistic milieu and addresses a wider audience.

Kenan Rifai came up with an interpretation and practice of *tasavvuf* which did not conflict with the secularization project. As the heirs of this tradition, Cemalnur Sargut and her disciples reconcile the existing order with the life style of Muslims. As participants of modernity, they try to articulate the meanings of "religious" and "secular" and they also try to practice *tasavvuf* within the secularized order.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A UNIVERSALIST DISCOURSE

In this chapter, I will try to explicate Sargut's group in the historicity of the present era, for which the global trends are determining to a considerable degree. The global context leads to various forms of hybridization, which influence both the form and the content of the social and religious movements.

Sufis have always been mobile in order to spread Islam to the remote parts of the globe. Their high level of mobility has increased the encounter of Sufism with different cultures, which triggered cross-fertilization. As Werbner (2003) examplifies, Sufis have followed the trade routes and paths of imperial quest into the remotest corners of the globe, from the Near East to North Africa, Iran, Central and South Asia, Indonesia, and Africa (p. 4). After the *tarikat*s emerged as institutional forms of Sufism at the end of the twelfth century, the spread of Islam to Anatolia, Central Asia, India, Southeast Asia and Africa was accomplished (Atay, 1996, p. 44). Although there have been also more closed *tarikat*s, there are historical examples which demonstrate the high level of mobility and cross-fertilization. One example is the study of Ernst (2005b) on the interaction of Sufis and yogis[66]. He shows us how different Indian Sufi groups, particularly the Chisti and Shattari orders, incorporated certain practices of yogis into their techniques from the fourteenth century on and argues that Sufi groups did not fundamentally alter the character of existing Sufi practices (p. 30). He tells the story of a book called *The Pool of Nectar*, which consists

[66] Yogi is a term that refers to the practitioner of yoga.

of Islamized versions of materials giving information about certain practices associated with Nath yogis and the teachings known as hatha yoga.

The high level of cross-fertilization resulted in debates among both Muslims and the scholars that make studies on Islam. The controversy of Muslims has mostly had a normative character, which discussed the "true forms of Islam" around orthodoxy/heterodoxy dichotomy.[67] This has been a continuing debate in the religious field and some forms have been accused of 'heresy' and labeled as "non-Islamic." Sufi *tarikat*s have frequently been subject to these debates and have been criticized for being polluted by "non-Islamic" elements from the periods in which they were institutionalized up to the modern era. We can find examples in the execution of Hallac in the tenth century, in the rejectionist position of Wahhabis in the eighteenth century in accordance with the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and in the opposition of Salafis from the nineteenth century to present (Sirriyeh, 1999). In the face of the opposition of Muslim groups, Sufis have insisted on the Islamic roots of their beliefs and practices. Both Muslim scholars and the scholars who study Sufism have endeavored to demonstrate that Sufis remain inside the fold of Islam. For instance, Trimingham (1971) thinks that Sufism owes little to non-Muslim resources and was a natural development within Islam, although it received radiations from the ascetical-mystical life and thought of Christianity, neo-Plotanism, gnosticism and other systems (p. 2). The works of scholars from different traditions also stress the Islamic roots of Sufism. The works of Burckhardt (1973), Schimmel (1975), Chittick (2000) are written on this direction.

The aim of this study is not to discuss the "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" roots of Sufism. I think that cross-fertilization is at work most of the time in any cultural

[67] I discussed the relevance of this dichotomy for the anthropological literature in Chapter 2.

milieu, though the speed and extent may differ. My reference to the issues of hybridization and cross-fertilization here does not assume that there are non-hybrid, pure forms of Islamic practice anywhere in the world. I also see the history of Sufism as a history of cross-fertilization. Nevertheless, I argue that the form and level of globalization today facilitate the process of hybridization, since the interactions between different cultures reached an unprecedented level. So, contemporary (religious) movements cannot be analyzed independently from today's global context. While elaborating the spread of Said Nursi's influence in Turkey, Şerif Mardin (1989) analyses this phenomenon within the context of the "communication revolution" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A more tremendous change occurred at the demise of the twentieth century with the new phase of globalization. There is a general agreement on the fact that the extent and the form of globalization today is a distinguishing trend of the present (Cvetkovich, Kellner, 1997). Giddens (1990) defines present globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (p. 64). Globalization brings about the intensification of worldwide political, economic and sociocultural relations. This process has serious implications for the issues of culture and identity. On the one hand, emphasis on national and individual identity has emerged as a form of resistance to homogenizing global forces, while globalization produces new configurations of identity at national, local and personal scales (Cvetkovich, Kellner, 1997, pp. 9-10). The responses of religious movements and of Sufis in particular can be evalutated in this direction. Contemporary religious movements can not remain indifferent to the forces of globalization and even when their responses are negative and foster isolation. Beyer (1994) gives the example of the Rushdie affair to show that

even where religion appears as a negative reaction to globalization, this does not mean that religion is simply a regressive force (p. 3). He claims that "events like the Rushdie affair, and indeed the Iranian Revolution as a whole, indicate that religion can be a proactive force in the sense that it is instrumental in the elaboration and development of globalization: the central thrust is to make Islam and Muslims more determinative in the world system, not to reverse globalization. The intent is to shape the global reality, not to negate it" (p. 3). While mentioning Muslim societies which are exposed to processes of globalization and regard hybridities as sinful and dangerous, Werbner (2001) says:

> New religious fundamentalist movements of purification, whether Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim are, somewhat paradoxically, themselves hybrids of modernity. They are regimented and bureaucratized, scripturalist and procedural. They take to a new *modernist* extreme the inherent tendency of all religions to classify right and wrong, good and evil, the acceptable and the unacceptable, the normal and the transgressive. They allow for no exceptions, no anomalies, no betwixt-and-betweens (p. 142).

When it comes to the Sufi groups, they can be differentiated on the basis of their responses to globalization and the global trends. It is argued that globalization engenders two main kinds of ideological responses: a retrenchment to local and traditional identities or an embrace of universal tendencies already found in the tradition (Ernst, 2005a). Ernst adds that there are many examples of the latter kind of universalistic response in modern Sufi movements (p. 12). In order to situate hybridity which both influences the form and the content of the message of the Sufi groups and of Cemalnur Sargut in particular, I would like to turn to the global trends I have mentioned above. What is the conjuncture that drives Sufi groups to spread their message to a larger audience and to use the universalist potential of the Sufi tradition? Is there an audience ready to hear their message?

There is a global phenomenon of a rising scholarly and popular interest in spirituality in general and in Sufism in particular. Nasr (2000) mentions an expanding field of scholarship in Sufism both in the Islamic and Western societies. He gives examples from works on Sufism in relationship with different branches of art such as poetry and music. Besides, there is a growth in the number and visibility of Sufi *tarikat*s in the West. Though this is a global trend, it can be said that it is more widespread in the West and in the metropolitan centers of the non-Western societies. In the preface of his introductory book on Sufism, Chittick (2000) epitomizes the situation in contemporary West as follows:

> Nowadays, everyone seems to have heard of Sufism, and the name is mentioned in daily newspapers, best-selling novels, and popular movies. Back then Rumi was hardly known outside university courses on Middle Eastern Studies, but today his poetry is found in any bookstore and recited on television by celebrities. The "whirling dervishes" were a piece of exotica left over from nineteenth-century travellers' accounts, but today people learn "Sufi dancing" in health clubs and New Age centers.

As Ernst (2005a) elaborates, this trend can be observed in the bestseller English translations of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi and the interest of celebrities in the US in his poems[68], the widespread production and distribution of sound recordings of Sufi music, the effective use of the internet by Sufis, the use of Sufi shrines and rituals as sources of tourist revenue by the governments and so on. Ernst (2005a) calls the process "the publication of the secret" and "commodification of Sufism" (p. 5). He asserts that the introduction of print and lithography technology made possible the distribution of Sufi teachings on a scale far beyond what manuscript production could

[68] Mevlana became the best-selling poet in the United States of America in 1997. Lewis (2000) asserts that devotees of Sufism, adepts of new age spirituality and those with a mystical orientation toward religion all revere Mevlana as one of the worlds great spiritual teachers. Some people in New York even do yoga and spiritual aerobics with a mixture of rock music and readings of Mevlana at the background (p. 1). He even calls this orientation as "Rumi-mania" (p. 1)

attain and Sufi material in America and Europe has joined the shelf of new age teachings in a veritable market of spirituality (p. 6). Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) handle the issue in the larger framework of religious and spiritual movements and define the process as the commodification of the occult-related activities and objects in relation to the millennial capitalism. They argue that there is an explosion of occult-related activities in many parts of the world, ranging from Africa to the United States and they come up with the concept of "occult economies" (p. 310).

When we consider current developments in Turkey, a similar process of commodification can be traced in various examples such as the commodification of the dervishes who perform *sema*, which has become the symbol of the *tarikat* of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the Mevlevi order, in popular culture. They are even invited to the openings of shopping centers in big cities. Besides, there is a tremendous rise in the number of publications on Sufism, including books and periodicals. Various publishing houses such as *İz, İnsan, Kaknüs, Gelenek, Sufi Kitap, Keşkül* publish books and periodicals on topics related to Sufism and these books reach a considerable number of readers. The interest in Sufi music and the merging of Sufi music and the *ney* sound with new age sounds in the works of musicians like Mercan Dede[69] is another area manifesting the interest in Sufism.

These phenomena go hand in hand with the appeal of Sufism to a growing number of middle class urbanites and "repackaging Sufism" (Howell, 2007) in new forms, which transform the tradition. There is a growing literature on these newly emerging universalist articulations of Sufism in the modern urban contexts of the

[69] *Mercan Dede* is a *ney* player who combines Sufi music with electronica and is famous for his works that consist of different styles ranging from fusion-jazz and etno-trans to world music. He performes both in the *sema* rituals and in underground parties as a DJ. He has an underground style, he wears earings, dyes his hair blond, or sometimes appears with a pinch of hair on his head. His style is sometimes subject to criticism, but he attributes his style that merges various cultural backgrounds to his commitment to Sufi tenets. He is qualified as a "dervish of modern times" in the popular media in Turkey.

Western and non-Western societies, being more visible in the former (Hermansen, 2000; Howell, 2001; Westerlund, 2004; Ernst, 2005a; Malik and Hinnells, 2006; Genn, 2006; Howell, 2007). The common characteristic of these movements is their adaptation to the modern contexts in a hybrid way and appealing mostly to the educated, upper and middle class urbanites. These movements come up with innovatory discourses and methods by using the potential of their traditional roots. The so-called neo-Sufism or Western Sufism (Hammer, 2004) prioritizes the universalist tendencies of the tradition. Hammer (2004) argues for the Sufi movements in the United States that the most appealing part of Sufism for the Western audience is the element of spirituality, not social ties with other Muslims (p. 139). He establishes a dichotomy between "traditional Sufi movements," which mostly attract Muslims in the diaspora, and "Western Sufism," which is said to predominantly attract Westerners. He characterizes the latter more individualistic, egalitarian and as prioritizing spirituality to religion.[70] Western Sufi movements are also said to be more egalitarian in gender relations. Ernst (2005a) claims that the increasing role of women in Sufism is an aspect of the adaptation to globalization (p. 14). He says that women have positions of leadership with the title of *shaykha* in many Sufi groups in Europe and America. Prioritizing spirituality to religious bounds is a common feature of the popularizing Sufi movements in the Western world (Ernst, 2005a; Malik and Hinnells, 2006; Genn, 2006). Hazrat Inayat Khan, who is an Indian master associated with Chisti order, is an example of presenting Sufism to Europeans and Americans as a spiritual path not necessarily tied to Islam (Ernst, 2005a; Genn, 2006). Mehmet Sherif Catalkaya, who is a Rifai shaykh in the United States, is another case of presentation of Sufism beyond religions (Ernst, 2005a). He declares

[70] For a discussion of the dichotomy of religion versus spirituality in the literature, see Chapter 4.

that "What brings people together, what allows the love of God to enter the hearts of people is morality.... All religions are the same" (Ernst, 2005a, p. 12). He even says that Sufism is not a religion, but love of humanity. Nevertheless, this group is said to combine universalism with recognition of the primacy of Islamic themes. Hermansen (2000) calls these movements as "perennial," meaning that they emphasize the unity of religions. Hermansen (2000) also makes a distinction between the perennial movements in the West on the basis of their stance towards *şeriat*. She says:

> Some of the other perennial groups who call themselves "Sufi" in the West have taken another position, which is that spiritual practices from various religious traditions may be combined since they all emerge from the same true source, which is, in fact, primarily esoteric and Gnostic rather than exoterically religious. Thus it is necessary to differentiate the strain of perennialism that maintains adherence to the Sharia from other "perennial" Sufi-inspired movements in the West, which take a more "universal wisdom" approach to spirituality (p. 160).

Western Sufi movements also come up with unconventional methods for spreading their message. Hermansen (2004) argues that Sufi activities in America are characterized by fondness for public performance, extensive use of the media such as computer networks, exploitation of radio and newspaper coverage, Sufi dancing, and the use of vehicles such as lectures, seminars and conferences (p. 45).

These examples do not only come from the West, but also from the non-Western contexts. The account of Nasr (2000) is meaningful in grasping the context of the non-Western societies:

> In comparison with the older generation there is a notable rise in the number of youths attracted to Sufi orders and to a study of Sufism in countries as diverse as Egypt, Syria and Persia. In the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent interest continues to be strong, never having diminished in a noticeable manner as was the case in the Arab world and Turkey. In Turkey interest in Sufi writings among university students has increased immensely since the years following the Turkish revolution (p. 3).

Although there are not many case studies of the new forms in which Sufi *tarikat*s appear in non-Western societies, we can find an example from the work of Howell (2005, 2007) on Indonesia. She says that some of the Sufi movements are said to repackage Sufism for Muslim cosmopolitans in the urban field. Howell (2007) elaborates the open lecture in a newly upgraded Islamic studies center in Jakarta, Indonesia. The center was formally constituted as a charitable foundation. She argues that the elimination of the shaykh-*müirit* hierarchy, the use of modern methods such as discussion and practice are well-suited to the interests and preferred learning styles of well-educated, globally "connected" urbanites (p. 22). It can be said that this style addresses the spiritual growth demands of modernized segments in the urban field. Howell (2001) shows that traditional Sufi orders, namely *tarikat*s, have image problems with the secularly educated middle classes in Indonesia. According to her, *tarikat*s have authoritarian images that recall traditional hierarchies. In response to the unmet need of the middle and upper classes, Sufism has been adapted to a variety of new institutional forms in urban settings. Most of the Sufi orders modify themselves substantially and utilize international forms such as foundation, institute, seminar series and even spiritual workshops (p. 718). The movements in Indonesia have also perennial aspects. Howell (2005) gives examples of Salamullah, Kumaris and Anand Ashram, saying that all three organizations have contributed to the popularization of a new understanding of religious "universalism" (p. 475). She says that Salamullah and Ashram have even championed the concept of "perennialism," which means that they think there is a common core experience of the divine, accessible through the esoteric traditions of the great religions (p. 476).

I would like to evaluate some aspects of Cemalnur Sargut's group in the light of the above-mentioned processes. Is the Western Sufism/traditional Sufism dichotomy useful in understanding their methods and language? Does the group have similarities with the popularizing Sufi group in the West? If they are part of the "publication of the secret," how do they contribute into the process and use their traditional roots to legitimate it?

Publicizing the Secret in the "Age of *Irfan*"

"Our age is the age of irfan, in which meaning is revealed to everyone."

Cemalnur Sargut

One of my observations about Sargut's group is that, they have some similarities with the Sufi movements popularizing in the urban fields of different contexts. First of all, they take what Ernst (2005a) calls "publication of the secret" as an axiomatic phenomenon of this era and interpret it with reference to the tenets of Sufism and the Kenan Rifai tradition. Relating the process to the new technologies, Ernst (2005a) defines publication of the secret as "the use of new technologies to publicize the previously esoteric teachings of Sufism" (p. 5). Sargut and her *müreit*s are highly conscious of the era in which they live in. They attribute specific features to contemporary era and the people of the age. They characterize the era as the "age of *irfan*." According to them, the main characteristic of the age of *irfan* is the manifestation of the previously hidden "meaning." In the Sufi doctrine, *irfan*, or *marifet*, is the inward, experiential or mystical knowledge, which the dervish seeks for on the Path. The dervish needs a shaykh, or the spiritual master, to walk on the Path so

s/he is initiated to a *tarikat* by the shaykh. As Schimmel (1975) elaborates, this is a difficult process, in which the spiritual master tests the seeker's willing and ability to undergo the hardships before accepting him/her as a *murit*. She asserts that usually three years of service were required before the adept could be formally accepted in a master's group (p. 101). The seeker is required to display an absolute trust and obedient to the master. As Schimmel summarizes, after three-year service to the master, the seeker might be considered to receive the *hırka*, which is the patched frock (ibid.). The relation of the disciple to the master is threefold: by the *hırka*, by being instructed in the formula of the *zikir*, and by *sohbet*, service and education (ibid.). The most difficult part starts with the initiation and the disciple walks on the Path under the guidance of the master and passes through certain spiritual states.[71] In a way, this is the way to acquire *irfan* in Sufism and the disciple has to enter the closed sphere of the *tarikat* for that. Cemalnur Sargut has also a master-disciple relationship with the *ihvan*, although the disciples do not receive a *hırka* anymore. The significant point is that Sargut does not restrict her activities in the group and reveals the previously hidden meaning to the public. She indicates that they work for contributing to the manifestation of the previously hidden meaning with their activities. Thus, they situate themselves within the framework of a larger project of spreading the divine message. What does she do in order to achieve this and how does this perspective influence her language and methods?

The group has a universalistic and perennial character in harmony with the language of the day to address a larger audience. They use the potential of the Sufi literature and the Kenan Rifai tradition in formulating a unificatory language. First of all, they emphasize the sameness of all Sufi paths. Rather than prioritizing their Rifai

[71] For an account of these states, see Chapter 4.

roots, they emphasize the unity of all *tarikat*s. They frequently express that the tenets of one *tarikat* are not enough for the individuals of contemporary era. So, both Sargut and her *müirit*s reminded me that they read the writings of all Sufi *pir*s. Cemalnur Sargut mentions and refers to the sayings and anecdotes of Sufis like Mevlana, İbn Arabi, Abdulkadir Geylani, Yunus Emre, besides Ahmed er Rifai and Kenan Rifai. She claims that one of her biggest desires is to eliminate differences and collates the sayings of different Sufis, which they regard as the same. This emphasis on the unity of the message of all Sufi *tarikat*s and already exists in the Sufi tradition. What is new is the way Cemalnur Sargut uses the potential of the tradition today: they attribute specific features to contemporary era and to the people living in it, whose needs they represent differently from the people of the previous eras.

Right along with their emphasis on the unity of all *tarikat*s, they emphasize the unity of the messages of all religions and remind the perennials of the Western world and Indonesia. Cemalnur Sargut frequently emphasizes the sameness of the underlying meaning of all religions. She thinks that *ehl-i tevhid* (ahl al-tawhid)[72] see Allah everywhere regardless of the religion they have adherence. She gives an anecdote from Ali[73] to reveal the sameness of the meaning in all religions. In her speeches, she says that when Ali heard the sound of church bells, he said "Look, how beautifully they say 'Allah, Allah!'"[74]

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[72] *Tevhid* literally means unity. The religious concern of every Muslim is the affirmation of the divine transcendent unity, *tevhid* (Renard, 2005, p. 96). It is to seclude the essence and essential character of God from everything that one's mind can imagine. In Sufi cosmology, *tevhid* is seeing the unity in all existence. This means to see God everywhere and in everything. It is said that the Sufi sees just the One and knows the One and forgets everything other than the One, which is God (Uludağ, 2001, p. 353). In Sufi cosmology, this state of the Sufi is expressed in the Arabic expression *vahdet-i vücud*, which means existential monism. Renard (2005) explains the term as follows: "… The individuality of the mystic is ultimately annihilated in the being of God. Developing the concept elaborated most prominently by Ibn al-'Arabi, some Sufis adopted the metaphor of drop losing itself compeletely in the ocean of the divine unity" (p. 245).

[73] Ali is the forth caliph. For his significance in *tasavvuf*, see Chapter 2.

[74] The group's stance towards other religions is actually a complicated one, which needs elaboration. Alhough Sargut emphasizes the unity of religion in the name of *tevhid*, she also indicates that other religions become invalid when Islam is revealed. She says that she sees the people who have a strong

The basis of their claim of uniting the "eternal and unchanging" message of Sufism and all *tarikat*s is the personality and commentaries of Kenan Rifai. They continuously emphasize that Kenan Rifai addresses everyone, every religion and every way and everyone finds something from himself/herself in Kenan Rifai (Sargut, 2006.). As we learn from Kenan Rifai's *mürit*s, he has permission (*icazet*) from Rifai, Mevlevi, Kadiri and Şazeli *tarikat*s. Sargut (2006) formulates his personality with reference to this background in the following words: "Kenan Rifai unites the humility of the Rifai order, the wisdom of the Kadiri order, the proper way between this and the other world and the pleasure of living with enthusiasm of the Şazeli order and the love of the Mevlevi order in his personality" (p. 148). She suggests similar qualities for the school of Sufi branch she comes from:

> I think it is the age of the mystics (*mutasavvıf*s) that my teacher (Kenan Rifai) brought up. I believe Semiha Cemal[75] is also going to be manifested. Therefore, the selling of the books of my Mother Samiha in D&R shops today and the appearance of not only her historical and literary aspects but of her mystic side demonstrates the magnitude of the need for Mother Samiha today. I believe that this age is the age of Samiha Ayverdi. It may be the age of enlightenment with the light of Kenan Rifai. It is not necessary for him to be alive. We need his understanding of *tevhid* (p. 227).[76]

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faith in God and whose personalities she likes as Muslims. During our interviews, while mentioning some Christian friends whose personalities she admires, she said that they were actually Muslims, but they did not know themselves. Therefore, this aspect of the group can be evaluated better in the context of the interfaith dialogue. Nevertheless, they have common characteristics with the perennials in the West.

[75] Semiha Cemal is the cousin of Samiha Ayverdi and a *mürit* of Kenan Rifai. She lived between 1905 and 1936. They were known to be close friends with Samiha Ayverdi since their childhood. She was a teacher and also one of the first philosophers of Turkey.

[76] The translation is mine. "Zannederim ki bu devir hocamın yetiştirdiği mutasavvıfların tanınma devri. Ben Semiha Cemal Hanım'ın da artık yavaş yavaş aşikar olacağına inanıyorum. Dolayısıyla Samiha Annemin kitaplarının şimdi D&R'larda satılmaya başlaması, sadece tarih ve edebi yönüyle değil de mutasavvıf yönüyle de bilinmeye, tanınmaya başlanması, Samiha Anneye ne kadar ihtiyaç olduğunu da gösteriyor. Bu devrin Samiha Ayverdi devri olduğuna inanıyorum. Belki de Ken'an-er Rifai'nin ışığıyla aydınlanma devridir. İlla yaşadığı devir olması gerekmiyor. Onun tevhid anlayışına ihtiyaç var…"

Thanks to these characteristics, Sargut thinks that the tradition which she inherited addresses the individuals' search for meaning in the modern world and she comes up with projects for addressing the people in Turkey and in different parts of the world. Through spreading the message, they want to be part of the movements that become a bridge between East and the West. Their imaginary of the "West" is important in their project of revealing the meaning. They again look like the Sufi movements of the West with their desire of being a bridge between the two worlds. Cemalnur Sargut and her students frequently emphasize the lack of spirituality and morality in Western countries. They see the "East" as the home of spirituality and meaning, while seeing the majority of the "West" as "cold" and like a "nightmare". This perception constructs the West as a lack and reverses the relationship between the East and the West. Thus, they think that they have a lot to give the West and a mission to struggle with "materialism" of the West. On the other hand, the East appears as the sphere of peace. In one of the youth *sohbet*s, Cemalnur Sargut mentioned the visit to India they recently came back from. She told the story of their visit enthusiastically and qualified India as a place of *tevhid*. Making a comparison between East and West, she said "Everywhere was very cold in Europe except three churches. There is *tevhid* everywhere in India, young people smile. However, young people are very unhappy in Europe. Let Allah give them salvation. Let Him grant the peace of the East to the West."[77] Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by globalization, Cemalnur Sargut and her students frequently go abroad for various programs and organizations. Ernst (2005a) mentions one of her journeys to the United States with her women disciples from Turkey. They also travel to countries in the East like Syria, Egypt, India, Pakistan and more frequently to Mecca and Medina. They prepare their

[77] Youth *sohbet* on December 16, 2006. "Avrupa'da üç kilise hariç her yer soğuk. Hindistan'da her yerde tevhid var, gençlerin yüzü gülüyor. Allah hidayet versin. Allah Batı'ya da Doğu'nun huzurunu nasip etsin."

materials for the global audience; the CD called *Dinle* (Listen) is a good example with its English translation. These are part of their investment in the spiritual market of the day. One of her students gave me the clues of their awareness about the global orientation towards spirituality. While we were talking about Cemalnur Sargut's students' travels abroad to countries ranging from Europe to the Far East, she told me that Cemalnur Sargut was shooting the right points and the results of her shoots would be tremendous. She was very hopeful for seeing the returning result, which they all hope will meet their efforts exceedingly. Nevertheless, one cannot qualify them as a global Sufi movement, because they are very different from the movements labeled as global. Shaykh Zindapir from Pakistan (Werbner, 2003) and Shaykh Nazım of Cyprus (Atay, 1996) are such movements with their considerable number of adherents in multiple sites. For the case of Shaykh Zindapir, his Sufi cult is truly a transnational movement with its extension to Europe, the Middle East and South Africa in his lifetime and his disciples and his order has a mosque in Britain, lodges and disciples in different countries (Werbner, 2003). Shaykh Nazım is a Turkish shaykh, who is active in London and has *mürit*s from migrants from various countries (Atay, 1996). What I am arguing about Sargut's group is that, the specific qualities of this movement cannot be understood devoid of any effects of globalization on Sufi movements.

Spreading Sufism through "Academic" Ways

Cemalnur Sargut claims to spread the tenets of Sufism through academic ways and relate this method to her *mürşit*s, Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi. Since *tekke*s are legally prohibited, the *mürit*s of Kenan Rifai anachronistically claim that he would

have opened an academy instead of a *dergah* if the conditions of his era were different (Ayverdi, Erol, Araz and Huri, 2003). Cemalnur Sargut (2006) indicates that "What I learned from Mother Samiha and my mother is that the rituals (*zikir* and *sema*) are formal (*şekli*) worships and the distance that traversed in a hundred years with *zikir* can be passed in one second with *sohbet*"[78] (p. 160). According to Sargut (2006), Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi established the "*tarikat* of heart" and taught them how to educate people within it. She qualifies this as an innovation. She sees this as spreading *tasavvuf* through academic ways and teaching the Prophet's morality through one's attitudes or *hal* and *sohbet*s. The academic ways appear as a safer form of spreading the message in the context of Turkish society.

The rapid changes that Turkey experiences give religious movements various new channels for spreading their messages. Sufi movements, which were restricted by the state in the formative years of the republic, find new areas for maneuvering especially with the neoliberal state politics of the 1980s. Kuru (2005) asserts that the result of neoliberal policies of the Özal period led to the gradual elimination of state monopoly over the media, education and economy in Turkey. Economic liberalization and the transfer of communication technologies went hand in hand. In the early 1990s, the state monopoly on television and radio stations ended, the use of computers and the internet dramatically increased (Kuru, 2005). Yavuz and Esposito (2003) argue that the historically excluded groups benefited from the new political opening and activated their indigenous networks in the 1980s. They indicate that between 1983 and 1990, religious networks were mobilized to offer welfare services, communal solidarity and mobility to the newly educated classes and businesses in Turkey. Özal's expansion of the freedom of association, speech and assembly

[78] The translation is mine.

removed the state monopoly over the broadcasting system and further facilitated the communication and dissemination of local and global idioms. As a result of these factors, Islamic movements started to benefit from these opportunities to shape the sociopolitical landscape of Turkey (Yavuz and Esposito, 2003). Sufi movements, as well, take the advantage of this emerging context. Istanbul is particularly a fruitful ground with the opportunities it presents to Sufi movements, since it has become a global city where global flows of money, capital, people, ideas, signs and information have intensified (Keyder, 1999). Sargut's group uses similar methods to those of Western Sufi movements in this context. The majority of their audience is from educated middle class urbanites and Sargut's method is successful in addressing them. Below, I will give examples of what they mean by the term "academic."

The opening of her *sohbet*s to the outsiders who are not from *ihvan* is a good indicator of the group's policy of opening. Sargut conducts *sohbet*s like lectures. She did not organize lectures for 'outsiders' until year 2005. In a two-year period, the group organized a lecture in Erenköy and a lecture for young people. By the term outsider, I mean the people who are not from the close circle of the group. As I learned from the interviews I conducted with the people from her close circle, the policy of opening is quite new in the history of the group. They told me that they had to get permission before bringing an outsider to the gatherings two years ago. However, there are two gatherings open to the public now. Though there is not a clear-cut distinction, the Erenköy *sohbet*s are primarily open to middle aged people and there is another group for the youngsters (*Gençler Sohbeti*). One characteristic of these groups is that while they were previously organized in one of the group members' or sympathizers' house previously and were not known widely, they had to find bigger places as the number of participants escalated day by day. Her students

indicate that Cemalnur Sargut sees this gradual increase in the demand for her speeches as a sign from Allah, affirming that they should expand the scale of their activities and declare them to the public. They said that the Erenköy *sohbet*s were in an apartment building, but they had to leave since the residents were disturbed by the crowd. Before I started my fieldwork, the *sohbet*s for the youth used to take place in one of their friend's (the word "friend" is used by Cemalnur Sargut) home. However, as the group became crowded, they moved to a bigger flat that belonged to an association near the building of *Türkkad*.

One of the means her group uses effectively is the media. First of all, they have an internet site whose design was updated in 2007. This is a trend among the popularizing Sufi movements of the West. Ernst (2005a) observes that there are dozens of websites representing the Sufi traditions from all over the world today. Cemalnur Sargut's website does not merely addresses the audience in Turkey, but the global audience with its English version. General information about Cemalnur Sargut, the "elders" of the tradition such as Kenan Rifai, Samiha Ayverdi from whom Sargut claims to continue the tradition, and information on the key terms of Sufism can be found on the website. Some articles, publications, parts of her lectures and conferences and future programs are accessible. Moreover, there is an interactive "questions and answers" forum on which one can find questions from different cities of Turkey. Cemalnur Sargut answers these questions with short sentences in basic and clear language.

During her accounts about their activities in our first interview, Cemalnur Sargut gave priority to the television and radio programs in which she had participated. She told me about the lessons on the *Mesnevi* of Mevlana in Expo

Channel in 2006. Her lectures are broadcasted in another website about Sufism.[79] She participated in the programs of two different radio channels, one belonging to the Alevi community, the other to a group of Said Nursi's followers, in 2006. She appeared on other TV channels, including the state television channels of TRT. She continued to take part in television programs during 2007. In the Ramadan, which is the fasting month for Muslims, she continued to participate in programs organized for Ramadan.

They organize most of the activities that they call "academic" through *Türkkad*. Sargut wants to prioritize what she calls "academic" for their public image and *Türkkad* has an important function for this purpose. Although it is an association established by Samiha Ayverdi in 1966, it increased its activities significantly under the leadership of Cemalnur Sargut since 2000. This is also related to the opportunities created by the neoliberal government policies. Today, civil society organizations are promoted since they are regarded as indispensable elements of contemporary modern societies. As İpek (2006) argues, we are in the midst of a global "associational revolution" that may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation state was to the latter nineteenth. The last decade witnessed a rise in the number of civil society organizations in Turkey. Religious groups tend to organize activities under the umbrella of civil society organizations. Türkmen (2006) argues that Islamic actors in Turkey conceive foundations (*vakıf*s) and associations (*dernek*s) as shelters where they construct themselves as subjects and re-emerge in the public space. They are seen as instruments for the Islamist social project to integrate into the system in a legitimate manner. It needs further discussion whether Sufi movements can be seen as Islamic projects or not. However, Cemalnur Sargut strongly

[79] This website is www.semazen.net.

emphasizes the "academic" nature of their activities in *Türkkad* in order to remain within the limits of the laws that prohibit the institutional practice of Sufism in Turkey. They effectively use the new space opened for civil society organizations.

An important part of the activities of *Türkkad* are large-scale international conferences they organize in collaboration with other civil society organizations and even with government institutions. The one I participated in and observed was an international conference with the title "Mevlana and Women" in May, 2007, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and two civil associations called *Uluslararası Mevlana Vakfı* (International Mevlana Endowment) and *Ailem Derneği* (My Family Association). The theme of the program was Mevlana since the year 2007 was declared "Mevlana Year" by UNICEF. The program took place in *Atatürk Kültür Merkezi* (Atatürk Cultural Center-*AKM*) in the Taksim district of Istanbul. Professors were invited from universities in Turkey and abroad. Cemalnur Sargut and her students were active at every phase of the organization. They welcomed the audience at the tables set in the entrance and presented the materials prepared for the program. The design of the card on which the program details were published was made by one of the students of Sargut, whom I knew personally. Sargut mentioned this detail and expressed her pleasure with the skill of her student during her speech. The figure designed by the student, which depicted *semanzen*s in an innovative way, was also on the poster hanging at the back of the scene. I saw the same figures in a film they made during my last visit to *Türkkad*. They distributed a ceramic rosette with an illustration of Mevlana. Cemalnur Sargut was one of the speakers who talked on the issue. In the middle of the program, a whirling dervish, who was said to be invited from the United States, appeared on the scene and displayed some parts of the *sema* ritual of Mevlevi dervishes.

Another international program was organized in 2005 before I started my fieldwork under the name "Last Prophet's Birthday" and they repeated a similar program in 2006. Although I have not been there myself, I could get a good idea by watching a DVD of the evening Cemalnur Sargut gave me after our first interview. Accompanying the DVD was a booklet with the transcriptions of the main speeches of the evening and some pictures. It was published on couchette paper. With this booklet, they gave me two other books prepared by *Türkkad*. One was prepared in the name of the Prophet again and consisted of passages from various Sufis' interpretation of the verses of the Kuran. Mevlana, Shaykh Galib, Ahmed er Rifai, Kenan Rifai, Abdulkadir Geylani, İbn-i Arabi are among these Sufis. There are also passages from the Bible which are believed to declare the coming of the last Prophet with the words of Jesus. The other book was written about the life of Mevlana and came with a CD called *Dinle* (Listen) that comprises passages from Mevlana with Sufi music. It has subtitles in English for the international audience.

Cemalnur Sargut also works with another civil society organization established by the grandchild of Kenan Rifai. He established an endowment called *Cenan Vakfı*, which is named after Kenan Rifai's mother, Hatice Cenan. Sargut indicates that it is an endowment that aims at "improving Sufism." She says that the endowment serves the purpose of spreading Sufism in academic ways, which they think is the way Kenan Rifai preferred. When I first interviewed Cemalnur Sargut on 7 October 2006, she and the grandchild of Kenan Rifai had recently started the restoration of Kenan Rifai's *tekke* in Fatih, out of which they wanted to make a museum for Kenan Rifai, and had raised the dome of the building. The restoration of the *semahane*[80] was finished a short time before my interview and is claimed to be one of the most famous

[80] *Semahane* is the room or structure where *sema* ritual takes place.

*semahane*s of its era. The museum is also established to spread Sufism in "academic" ways. Cemalnur Sargut told me that she wanted the museum to be an open place also used for *sohbet*s, but the decision was not made by the head of the *Cenan Vakfı* yet.

Sargut informed me that publications were significant in terms of their purposes. In our first interview, she told me that they wanted to open a publishing house in order to publish the writings of many Sufis, regardless of their orders. In my last interview with her in September 2007, I learned that they had recently opened the publishing house, which is called *Nefes Yayınları*. A book called *Kenan Rifai ile Aşka Yolculuk* (Journey to Love with Kenan Rifai) was published by another publishing house called *Sufi Kitap* in 2006. It consists of the interviews made with Cemalnur Sargut about Sufism and her *mürşit*, Kenan Rifai.

In her *sohbet*s, Sargut emphasizes that one should obey a master for being on the Path. However, she defines *tasavvuf* as an inward journey and reveals what a person should do on this Path with the above-mentioned activities. She works for spreading the tenets of *tasavvuf* to the public audience. She writes books, appears on television channels, and answers the questions via her website. Thus, in a way accepts everyone as her disciple, although not in the conventional way.

CHAPTER 4

BETWEEN MODERN SUBJECTIVITY AND NORMATIVITY OF *TASAVVUF*

The previous chapters focused on Cemalnur Sargut's group's public appearance, image and efforts to survive and address as many people as possible within the secularized order of Turkey without conflicting with the nation state discourse. This chapter will elaborate the way the *müreit*s experience *tasavvuf* in the late modern context of the day. Firstly, I will discuss the *müreit*s' subject positions in the context of the debates around the secularization thesis. Then, I will elaborate on the *müreit*s' construction of self as a unified religious identity, as well as their subject positions within the religious field in Turkey. I will give examples from the *müreit*s' transition from late modern subjectivity to their submission to the normativity and the truth regime[81] of *tasavvuf*.

The Disputes on "Secularization or Sacralization" Question

The secularization thesis can simply be defined as the claim that modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion both in society and in the minds of individuals (Berger, 1999, p. 2). Though the thesis was proposed for the experience of the West, it has relevance for both Western and non-Western societies because the secularization thesis has always been descriptive and normative (Asad, 2003) It is descriptive for Western history, and normative for the rest of the world that is

[81] I use the term "truth regime" as Foucault uses it. According to Foucault (1980), each society has a "regime of truth," which is defined as "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (p. 131)

supposed and encouraged to desire modernization and westernization. Modernization and secularization projects make the discussions over the thesis relevant for the discussions in Turkey. Moreover, thanks to the questioning of the thesis, which constructs the dichotomy of religious and secular as mutually exclusive categories, different forms in which the sacred is experienced today began to be questioned.

The roots of this thesis go back to the theories of classical sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber. Durkheim's conception of religion is related to his distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. What Morris quotes from Durkheim's work, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, is meaningful to understand his conception of the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. He says:

> But if there is one truth that history teaches us beyond doubt, it is that religion tends to embrace a smaller and smaller portion of social life. Originally it pervades everything; everything social is religious; the two worlds are synonymous. Then, little by little, political economic, scientific functions free themselves from the religious function, constitute themselves apart and take on a more and more acknowledged temporal character. God, who was at first present in all human relations, progressively withdraws from them; he abandons the world to men and their disputes (1964; cited in Morris 1988, p. 108).

A similar tendency appears in Weber's work with the concepts of "rationalization" and "disenchantment of the world." According to Weber, "The faith of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment' of the world. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life" (cited in Morris, 1988, pp. 68- 69). As Morris (1988) elaborates, an increasing systematization of religious ideas and concepts, the growth of ethical rationalism and the progressive decline of ritual and magical elements in religion accompany rationalization process in the thought of Weber.

This idea about the retreat of religion in the face of secularization and modernization gained popularity in the 1960s. Bryan Wilson (1966, 1989) and Steve Bruce (2002) are among the advocates of the secularization thesis. According to Bryan Wilson (1989), new religious movements are the last ruins of religion and in reaction to secularization. However, he thinks that these movements serve the process of secularization since they rationalize understanding and commitment (ibid.).

Another advocate of the secularization thesis has been Peter L. Berger in the 1960s with his books called *A Rumor of Angels* (1969a) and *The Sacred Canopy* (1969b). However, he criticized the thesis in his recent works. Berger (1999) argues that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. He now thinks that despite the secularizing effects of modernization, more in some places than in others, secularization at the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization at the level of individual consciousness. He supplements that certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms (ibid.). What seems to be the most significant in his argument is that he asserts that the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated (ibid.). In the 1990 edition of *A Rumor of Angels*, which had favored the secularization thesis in 1969, Peter L. Berger tells us the line of change in his ideas:

> I was preoccupied with the problem of secularity, and A Rumor of Angels was an attempt to overcome secularity from within. The third world taught me how ethnocentric that reoccupation was: Secularization is today a worldwide phenomenon, that is true, but it is far more entrenched in North America and in Europe than anywhere else. A more global perspective inevitably provides a more balanced view of the phenomenon (p. 134).

Thus, he thinks that the secularization thesis, which seemed meaningful to him earlier, is not sufficient to understand today's societies. Though he does not see it simply as a mistake, he acknowledges that both the extent and the inexorability of secularization have been exaggerated, even in Europe and North America, much more so in other parts of the world. He thinks that modernization is not a unilinear process, but a process in ongoing interaction with countervailing forces and we should look at secularization in the same way- as standing in an ongoing interaction with counter-secularizing forces (ibid., p. 137). He sees the necessity of exploring the details of this interaction.

One of the developments undermining the relevance of the secularization thesis is the global rise of religious movements. Various kinds of religious and spiritual movements are analyzed and the secularization claim is reviewed with reference to these movements. The proposition that the secularization process leads to the extinction of religion in all segments of societies is questioned. Daniel Bell, in the article he wrote in 1977, anticipates a return of the sacred and the rise of new religious modes. He supports his argument with reference to Bellah: "To concentrate on the church in a discussion of the modern religious situation is already misleading for it is precisely the characteristic of the new situation that the great problem of religion... the symbolization of man's relation to the ultimate conditions of his existence, is no longer the monopoly of any groups labeled religious" (p. 443).

The project of secularization, which has been constructed as a *sine qua non* of modernization for non-Western societies by the hegemonic modernist discourse, has led to hybrid imaginaries and practices in these societies. Despite the fact that the perceptions and practices of different groups in different societies are not

independent from the grand narratives of hegemonic modernist discourse and macro processes, these imaginaries and perceptions should be investigated within their particularities. The critiques of the secularization thesis point out that religion and belief are experienced in diverse forms today. The common theme of these critiques is that the observed decrease in institutionalized forms of religion should not be interpreted as a decrease in belief. The studies on religion and faith in Western societies indicate that while Christianity survives outside the institution of the church, new religious movements and diverse spiritual orientations have commonly surfaced in today's societies (Davie, 1999; Luckman, 1974; Heelas and Woodhead, 2006). There are studies arguing that religion has begun to be experienced individually and in subjective lives outside religious institutions. Though it is problematic to make a clear-cut distinction between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized religion, the studies on the so-called new forms of religiosity and spirituality are noteworthy for seeing the variety of forms in which the sacred is experienced today. For instance, Grace Davie (1999) comes up with the term "believing without belonging" for the way English people experience religion in uninstitutionalized forms. She suggests that despite the fact that the rate of church attendance decreases among English people, they continue to believe in God. According to her, the fact that they do not feel attachment to the church does not mean a decrease in belief.

Luckman is among the sociologists who criticize the identification of church and religion and expresses his dissatisfaction with the limitations of various empirical studies in the sociology of religion. Luckman (1974) draws attention to individual religiosity and argues that "once the sociology of religion uncritically takes it for granted that church and religion are identical it blinds itself to its most

relevant problem" (pp. 26-27). He thinks that religion is increasingly becoming a "subjective" and "private" reality as a result of the institutional specialization of modern society (ibid.). According to him, individuals do not abandon their search for meaning, but look for it outside the church (ibid.).

Together with his critique of the secularization thesis, Peter L. Berger (1999) comes up with a "desecularization thesis." While looking at the global scene today, he also gives examples from Turkey and says that Islamic revival is not restricted to less modernized segments of society, but it is very strong in cities with a high degree of modernization (ibid.). He gives the example of many daughters of secularized professionals in Turkey and Egypt and says that they are wearing "the veil and other accoutrements of Islamic modesty" (p. 8). I think visible symbols such as the veil should not be seen as evidence of desecularization. The subjectivities of the group members should be investigated with their own particularities and the evaluation of secularization and desecularization should be done for particular cases. Should we categorize the *mürit*s of Cemalnur Sargut as "secularized" or desecularized" subjects? At first sight, Cemalnur Sargut's group seems to be a modernized Sufi group having no conflicts with modern secular society. However, further analysis suggests the intricacy in their relationship to modernity, harboring conflicts and tensions. In a way, they deconstruct the religious and secular dichotomy. In the following part, I will analyze their religious identities within the late modern context of the day. Where can we situate Cemalnur Sargut's *mürit*s, a society of *ihvan*, in the secularized order of Turkish society?

There is a tremendous interest in spirituality, including Islamic mysticism, in today's world. However, this kind of an orientation was actually presupposed by sociologists of religion for decades. For instance, Peter Berger (cited in Şentürk, 2004) had supposed a return to Christianity and Judaism in the 70s, but not to the esoteric doctrines of the Eastern world, despite the new religious movements that arose in the US in the 1960s. Daniel Bell, in *The Return of the Sacred* which he wrote in 1977, mentions the "multiplicity of exotic consciousness-raising movements" such as "Zen, yoga, tantra, I Ching" and regards them as an illustration of the search in this multiple, discordant world for the authentic "I" (p. 443). Besides, with reference to a historian, he believes that America, in the mid-seventies, has launched on the "biggest introspective binge in any society in history has undergone" (p. 443). I will relate this "introspective binge" to modernity and specifically to the conditions of late modernity.

Turkey is not exempt from the above mentioned current. One of the most apparent clues of this trend of the society is the circulation rate of the books which are recently classified as "spiritual books." The books classified as "spiritual" are estimated to constitute half of Turkey's publishing sector of five hundred million YTL (Özkartal, 2007). For instance, the book called "The Secret," which had global popularity in 2007, sold 125 thousand in four weeks, while a book of Orhan Pamuk, a writer with the Nobel prize, is said to have sold 250 thousand since 1994. These books are mostly about the power of one's thoughts and encourage the individual to "turn inwards". A similar trend is observed in books about Sufism. Publishing houses such as *İz, İnsan, Kaknüs, Gelenek, Sufi Kitap, Keşkül* have published a lot of books

of local or foreign authors on Sufism in recent years. These books can be regarded as indicators of the rising interest in towards spirituality in general and Sufism in particular.

How can we explain the interest of modern subjects in inward journeys in the midst of a social milieu that is expected to be more "rational" and "disenchanted"? Recent works on spirituality offer an insight to the matter. A recent work conducted in the town of *Kendal* in Britain analyzes the tremendous interest in spirituality and the decrease in the followers of institutionalized religion (Heelas and Woodhead, 2006). The findings of their research indicate that the sacred is experienced in a subjective fashion in that Western town. In line with the common distinction of recent years, the authors distinguish between "religion" and "spirituality" and come up with the "spiritual revolution thesis." Religion is used for more institutionalized versions of religion and spirituality is used for the totality of universal values regarding belief and mostly more individualized forms. Similarly, Heelas and Woodhead make a distinction between "life-as," or the "congregational" domain and "subjective life" or "holistic milieu." The key value of the former is claimed to be "conformity to an external authority," while the latter's value is said to be "the authentic connection with the inner depths of one's unique life-in-relation" (p. 4). They sum up their idea that "the great historical bond between Western cultures and a Christianity whose characteristic mode is to appeal to transcendent authority is rapidly dissolving," and in its place they are "seeing the growth of a less regulated situation in which the sacred is experienced in intimate relationship with subjective-lives" (p. 10). This distinction seems problematic for the case of my fieldwork, since congregational bonds and subjective spiritual experiences go side by side in this case. Heelas and Woodhead are also aware of their case's particularity and shortcomings

in claiming the incompatibility between religion and spirituality and they express its insufficiency for explaining spirituality experienced by mystic Christian circles having bonds with the church and they call it "life-as spirituality" (pp. 5-6). Nevertheless, their arguments about the "massive subjective turn of the modern culture" and the "subjectivization thesis" seem operative in analyzing the rising interest in spiritual tenets, new age religion and also Sufism in the Western world and among the urban middle and upper class subjects of modernizing societies.

The argument is that the massive subjective turn experienced by contemporary modern Western societies, which is becoming increasingly influential, leads to the prioritization of subjective well-being to material necessities and securities of life. This culture is claimed to be influential in all fields of life, ranging from family to business lives. For instance, "the disciplined family of traditional values has increasingly been replaced by the expressive family of emotional bonds," "the hierarchical command structure of the old-style business" has to compete with "more fluid and individual worker-centered systems" and "educational provisions have shifted in emphasis from authoritative teaching of the facts of the matter to 'bringing out' the abilities of the child" (pp. 79-80). "The ethic of subjectivity" is at work everywhere with the value attached to self expression and fulfillment, to doing "what feels right", "following your heart", "being true to yourself", cultivating "emotional intelligence" (p. 80). They suggest that "the success of holistic spiritual teachings is linked to their ability to cater for the subjective turn" and that "the growth of subjective-life spiritualities owes a great deal to the fact that they attract people who are already involved with the culture of subjective well-being" (p. 83). Though it is not sufficient to understand all the processes about the sacred in contemporary Western societies, the subjectivization thesis and the culture of well-

being explain the attraction of an increasing number of people to spirituality and also to Sufism. Hermansen (2004) relates the popularity of Sufi movements in America to Americans' interest in experiential modes of spirituality and claims that "the American religious style is increasingly embracing the spiritual" (p. 38). Many shaykhs in America are said to add psychology and psychotherapy to their spiritual training. This process is called the "psychologization of religion" or the "sacralization of psychology."

The subjectivization thesis should not be taken to explain all religious and spiritual experiences in all societies today in a general fashion. This kind of an approach generalizes the experience of Western subjects to other parts of the world and is misleading. If we talk about Sufism and Sufi orders in Turkey, religion and belief are experienced in many different forms. Hierarchies and traditional rituals pervade some of the Sufi orders both in rural and urban spheres. However, the subjectivization thesis seems operational for the case of Cemalnur Sargut's group, in which the majority of the members are from upper middle class segments of the urban sphere of a country that has experienced modernization and secularization. Istanbul, like the other metropols of the world, is increasingly witnessing an inclination towards new religions and subjective spiritual experiences, especially among the middle and upper middle classes. However, the position of the people around Cemalnur Sargut should be analyzed together with the spiritual revolution claim and the conditions of late modernity.

The primary motivation of the people around Cemalnur Sargut appears to be the search for a meaning in an increasingly disenchanted social field. There may or may not be a period of depression or deep pain. This is the case for both the people who are "*ihvan* by birth" or who encountered Cemalnur Sargut's group in different

periods of their life courses. For instance, Dilek and Yağmur stressed their negative psychological states in narrating their involvement with the group, although they are *ihvan* by birth. However, Öznur did not mention a negative psychological state in her personal narrative. Psychological problems, mostly depression, are factors driving the subjects towards the *mürşit*, especially in the in case of subjects that did not feel attachment to the group even if their families were from *ihvan.*

I encountered Dilek during my first meeting with Cemalnur Sargut in *Türkkad* and I learned her story in my first interview with her and Öznur there. Irmak, who is one of the people with whom I became close but whom I could never interview, refused to talk even in the first instance. Both Dilek's and Öznur's families had close relationships with the group in different cities. Öznur's parents lived in Isparta and Konya in her childhood and they had a connection with Samiha Ayverdi and Kenan Rifai through a woman they call *N. Teyze* (Aunt N.) in the city of Isparta. They also participated in the *sohbet*s of another man they mention as "grandfather" (*dede*) who was a *mürit* of Kenan Rifai in Konya. Öznur told me that like Samiha Ayverdi who continued the *sohbet*s of Kenan Rifai as his *mürit* in Istanbul, *M. Dede* (Grandfather M.), who died in 2005, did so in Konya. Like her parents, Öznur was under the guidance of N. Teyze until she was twelve years old. When they went to Konya, she was under the guidance of M. Dede until she came to Istanbul from Konya after university. She did not mention a period when she was not under the control of a *mürşit*. Her story is a story of being the member of *ihvan* by birth. However, Dilek's story is different. She told me that during a depression when she was twenty years old and wanted to leave university, her mother, who had already known Mother Meşkure and Cemalnur Sargut since her childhood, took Dilek from Ankara to Istanbul in search of a remedy for her depression. *Sohbet*s were

not open to the public that time, in the year 1997, and she participated in the monthly *sohbet*s of Meşkure Sargut and the youth *sohbet*s of Cemalnur Sargut in the houses of *ihvan*. After this event, she says that she encountered some "miracles" which prevented her from giving up her university education. She indicated that depression and school were just causes on the surface for her way to the *mürşit*. She said that she was not an atheist before this encounter, but she did not "have a good relationship with Allah" and a deep faith. She said that she started to pray five times a day, stopped consuming alcohol and gradually quit "undesirable manners" like gossiping, arrogance, criticizing others. She told me that she experienced the feeling of giving up everything with the "love of Allah". Her primary emphasis was on this love that they claim Cemalnur Sargut introduces to the youth.

Yağmur also narrates her story as a story of escape from depression and search for a meaning in life. While she was living as a child in Ankara, she had problems with her father, who was also a religious man but from a more strict, *şeriat*-oriented group according to the description of Yağmur. She was sometimes in depression during the elementary school years and her mother, who already had a relationship with Samiha Ayverdi's group, read the *Mesnevi* of Mevlana, and Samiha Ayverdi's book *Dost* (Friend), which is about Kenan Rifai's life and consists of parts of his *sohbet*s. She told me that she did not experience a radical rapture and already had relationships with the group since her childhood, but she became more active for the last four years after coming to Istanbul for her academic career. She was also taken to a psychologist, but she characterizes her encounter with the group and reading the basic texts of *tasavvuf* as a turning point in her life.

What attracted my attention in the interviews was the stress of the people on their search for meaning and their inward journeys while narrating their life stories.

The way they narrate their stories overlaps with the language of late modernity. They assert that they found the meaning of life thanks to the tenets of Sufism, sometimes during a depression and a life crisis. This is a pattern I witnessed both in youngsters' and middle-aged people's accounts. Giddens (1991) claims that "What to do? How to act? Who to be? are focal questions for everyone living in the circumstances of late modernity" (p. 70). He acknowledges that the search for self-identity is a modern problem having its origins in Western individualism. He claims that although attributes relevant to identity already existed in medieval Europe, the various stages of life were "governed by institutionalized processes and the individuals' role in them was relatively passive" (pp. 74-75). He quotes that therapy and significantly self therapy are crucial parts of the so-called self-realization, and self-therapy is grounded in the individual's own reflexivity and continuous self-observation, which includes the individual's asking "What do I want for myself?" in each moment of life. This continuous self-observation necessitates one's listening to his/her inner wishes constantly. Therefore, the individual self is constructed as a "reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (p. 75). These accounts overlap with the concept of the massive subjective turn and the "culture of wellbeing" Heelas and Woodhead (2006) came up with. The significant value of the culture of wellbeing is to be "treated as a uniquely valuable person, finding out about oneself, expressing oneself, discovering one's own way of becoming all that one can (reasonably) be" (p. 81). This is also in harmony with the merging of religion and psychology, or the psychologization of religion. These questions of the self facilitate the orientation of late modern subjects towards various forms of religion and spirituality. Self questioning, questioning of the *nefis*, and self-reflexivity have always been a part of Islamic and Sufi tradition.

However, it can be said that the idiom of Sufism and its tradition successfully address the imaginaries of late modern subjects, who are already a part of the culture of wellbeing and a cultural field naturalizing self-reflexivity. The religious understanding of the people around Cemalnur Sargut is entangled with their search for psychological wellbeing and inner peace in the initial period of their relationships with the group.

The search for meaning and constant self observation are the primary themes of the middle-aged women I talked to. The other important emphasis is the lack of morality in today's society and their search for people of good moral character. I encountered with three middle aged women who do not work anymore and spend most of their time with Cemalnur Sargut in *Türkkad* or for other activities they organize or participate in. I interviewed two of these women and conversed with the other one at the end of the *sohbet* for the youngsters. I conducted interviews with Ahsen and İpek, the aunt of Ceren, during my second visit to *Türkkad*. They were in the middle of a crowded meeting with Cemalnur Sargut as part of *Türkkad's* activities, so we had the interviews in a small room of the flat. They notably dwelled on their existential searches before becoming *müri*ts. Before Samiha Ayverdi and Cemalnur Sargut, they seemed to display the features of late modern subjectivity in urban life. When I asked them their stories with the group, they divided their life courses into two periods: before finding their spiritual guide, their *mürşit*, and afterwards.

Like most of the group members, İpek was a very polite, elegant, smart and well-groomed woman with smooth motions and a velvet voice. Her appearance reminded me of the advice of Cemalnur Sargut Ceren had mentioned to me. The women were supposed to be well-cared for and nice. My following observations

showed me that most of the women around Cemalnur Sargut were following the polite Istanbulite woman style, which was common among the old urbanite women of Istanbul, and this was the upper class style of Samiha Ayverdi. İpek is forty four years old and married with two children. İpek's story is not one of deep sorrows or conversion from atheism. Her father was a religious man of *tarikat*, a *mürit* of the *Nakşibendi* order. İpek said that she used to have a good moral character, was not a naughty person, but she did not have the concept of a spiritual guide, a *mürşit*, and was "looking for something". She told me a story of education in finance in the United States and a distinguished career in the stock exchange in Istanbul during its initial periods of institutionalization. However, that sector seemed wrong to her:

> It did not look appropriate for my moral outlook. For things that are not much related to money, there may be approaches that are not so honest. I was working as a manager and I was signing many documents. My time was up there and my heart may have felt like that. Also there is love for *ilim*. After giving a break, I took an Executive MBA degree. I was not the type of person that sits alone at home. One could have become a [high rank] manager. But that was not it either; I did not have such desires. So many business offers from various friends. When you get into the finance sector early, you are promoted very fast. Many people became firm owners. When I wanted to leave that time, many said, come and manage our firms, they wanted to hand their firms over. I realized that I had nothing to do with money. My feet went backwards.[82]

She was not working and her child was not very young anymore. She seems to have felt a satisfaction with material wealth and had an orientation towards her inward world. She had a neighbour from *ihvan*. She had told her neighbour about her search for something that she herself did not know and was invited to Mother Meşkure's

[82] Interview with İpek on December 29, 2006. "Ahlak anlayışıma çok uygun delmedi. Parayla iç içe olmayan şeylerde çok dürüst olmayan yaklaşımlar olabiliyor. Yönetici olarak çalışıyordum, çok da imza atıyordum. Benim orda miadım dolmuş ve gönlüm öyle hissetmiş de olabilir. İlim aşkı da var. Biraz ara verdikten sonra executive MBA yaptım biraz kendimi dinledikten sonra. Evde oturacak insan değildim. Yönetici olur insan dedim. O da değil, öyle bir isteğim de yoktu. Bir sürü iş teklifleri arkadaşlardan. Finans sektörüne erken girince çok hızlı yükseliyorsunuz. Bir sürü insan şirket sahibi oldu. O dönemde ayrılmak istediğimde gel bizim şirketimizi yönet dediler, şirketlerini teslim etmek istediler. Para falan hiç işim olmadığını fark ettim. Ayaklarım geri gitti."

sohbet. She was impressed with Meşkure Sargut's advices to her friend who had psychological problems those days, chiefly due to the sentence "You will turn pain into honey." She said that she was influenced by the similarities between the psychologist's and Meşkure Sargut's methods. She was also motivated by her friend's saying "You do not seem so ignorant". She used this phrase about her knowledge on religion. She said:

> I was curious about what she was filled with. But instead of saying 'So what?' everybody needs some ambition. I wanted to go to her *sohbet*. There was a difference in Ahsen's behaviors. I went there not because I needed to, but because I wanted to learn what was there. I did not know what kind of people I was about to meet. There was the *sohbet* of sister Cemalnur in the house and you could enter only by her own permission. After listening to her *sohbet* for the first time, I said I cannot be at any other place.[83]

She said that after the encounter she began to compare the capitalist world and the new world she was facing:

> In the financial sector, relationships are based on interest and they are so artificial. They approached me since I had knowledge. I felt as if I wanted to cry out "Hey you, crowds of human beings out there, what are you doing, the real life is here, come and see!" I changed my ways, I said welcome to anybody who wanted to continue with me. We still meet with people that I used to see with my husband but it's not a pleasure for me, I do it as a task. I feel as if I don't have any relationship with the people I used to meet and go to cafes with. If I ever have any spare time, I sit at home and read or write something. I said to myself that the real life is here, to be alive and fresh.[84]

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[83] Interview with İpek on December 29, 2006. "Onun dolusunun içinde ne var merak ettim. Aman bana ne yerine, herkese bir miktar hırs lazım. Onun sohbetine gitmek istedim. Ahsen'in halinde tavrında da bir farklılık vardı. İhtiyacım var diye değil, ne var burada diye gittim. Nasıl insanlarla karşılaşacağım bilmiyorum. Cemalnur Abla'nın sohbeti var, evde ve ancak müsaade ile gidebiliyorsunuz. İlk kez sohbetini dinledikten sonra dedim ki ben başka bir yerde olamam."

[84] Interview with İpek on December 29, 2006. "Finans sektöründe ilişkiler çok sahtedir, çok çıkar üzerinedir. Bilgim olduğu için bana yaklaşıyorlardı. Haykırmak geliyordu dışarıdaki insan kalabalıklarına: 'Ne yapıyorsunuz, bakın hakiki hayat burada, siz de gelin!' gibi bir haleti ruhiye içerisine girdim. Yolumu değiştirdim, benimle devam etmek isteyene buyurun gelin diyordum. Eşimle birlikte görüştüğüm insanları görmeye devam ediyoruz ama bayılmıyorum, görev icabı gidiyoruz.

She told me that everyone was very surprised by her decision to leave work. She said "How could they understand my reasons for leaving with their material criteria?"

She was a stereotypical upper middle class, well-educated urban woman from the service sector. With the acceleration of economic liberalization in the 1990's, she was saturated with material earnings. Her social field, like most of the people in *ihvan*, is the field of late capitalist society. Ahsen is another middle-aged woman displaying similar characteristics with İpek. She told me about her search for a meaning in life in her early twenties, while she was a university student in Ankara. She is forty-two years old and married with one child. She categorizes people into three groups: The ones that do not question why they come to life and why they live, the ones that ask such questions but cannot get an answer and the ones who ask these questions and insist on finding an answer. She situates herself in the last group. The people in the third group are claimed to find a *mürşit* if Allah grants and to discover themselves thanks to the *mürşit*. She told me that she had a questioning mind. She said that she was surrounded by people who claimed to fulfill the requirements of Islam. She said:

> In our house, we used to fast and pray but there was no answer for why you were doing this. Did our Prophet fight for a prayer or for fasting or was there any other thing behind this? It is the need to go deeper and that's when you submit to Sufism. I was a university student of 22 and did not know what I was searching for. I read all the books of all Islamic scholars but I said 'No, this is not what I am looking for'. If Islam was this, it was impossible for me to do what it demanded. I wanted someone in the twenty first century to explain why did the Prophet come, why was he sent, what should I do, what I should not do?[85]

Gezdiğim kafelere gittiğim arkadaşlarımla ilişkim yok gibi. Boş vaktim varsa da evde birşeyler okuyor, yazıyor oluyorum. Hakiki hayat, canlı ve diri olmak buraymış dedim."

[85] Interview with Ahsen, December 29, 2006. "Oruç tutuluyordu namaz kılınıyordu bizim evde ama niye yapıyorsun sorusunun cevabı yok. Peygamber efendimiz bir namaz iki oruç diye mi mücadele verdi, yoksa içinde başka bir şey mi var? Derine girme ihtiyacı, o zaman da tasavvufa giriyorsun. Ne

While she was in search of books in a library, she faced the book of Kenan Rifai, *Kenan Rifai ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*. She said she was ignorant then although she was praying five times a day and did not know anything about Sufi *pir*s. She thought that Kenan Rifai was the person to teach Islam to her in this century and she "entered the city of the Prophet through the door of their master". She was twenty-five years old in 1990 and was married with one child that time. When her child grew up a little bit, she began to participate in the *sohbet*s of Meşkure Sargut and the *Mesnevi sohbet*s of Cemalnur Sargut.

These examples demonstrate the persistence of existential questions and the lack of "fillers" for the feeling of lack that the upper classes in the urban field of Turkish society feel. This situation resembles the arguments of sociologists on the return to religion in Western societies. One argument is that science and ideologies cannot answer the existential needs of the individuals in the modern world, thus religion returns as an alternative. Peter L. Berger and Daniel Bell are among the prominent sociologists advocating this outlook (cited in Şentürk, 2004). According to Berger, the reason behind the return to the sacred is that secular world views cannot answer deep questions about human existence, "from where, "to where" and "why" questions because of their intrinsic weakness (p. 99). He sees this return as a manifestation of the limitations of secularity. Similarly, Bell (1977) also advocates these limitations and relates his estimates for the rise of new religious modes to his idea that religion is a constitutive aspect of the human experience since it is a response to the existential questions. Luckman is among the scholars problematizing

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aradığımı bilmiyordum, 22 yaşında üniversite talebesiydim. Bütün İslam alimlerinin kitabını okudum, 'Yok bunda yok' dedim. İslamiyet buysa bunları yapmama imkan yok, bunları bana 21 yüzyılda anlatan insan istiyorum niye geldi peygamber niye yolladı, ben ne yapmalıyım, ne yapmamalıyım?"

the relationship of individuals in modern society to the social order. His arguments about modern society are parallel with those of Weber. According to Luckman (1974), as the prevalent norms in the various institutional areas, especially economics and politics, were increasingly legitimated by functional rationality, and the more autonomous and rational the specialized institutional areas became, the less intimate was their relation to the transcendent sacred cosmos (p. 101xx). So, the autonomous institutional "ideologies" are claimed to replace the transcendent universe of norms. However, Luckman also dwells on the influences of this process on subjective lives. He further proposes that "This, precisely, constitutes the key problem for the relation of the 'modern' individual to the social order. In the long run, isolated institutional 'ideologies' were incapable of providing a socially prefabricated *and* subjectively meaningful system of 'ultimate' significance" (p. 101). Luckman relates his arguments to the faith of totalitarianism in modern societies and sees them as attempts of transforming "institutional" ideologies into encompassing world views.

Another argument for the interest in new religious movements is that these movements fulfill the desires of the people that remain unfulfilled due to the process of secularization. Since traditional religions are claimed to fail this function, new orientations appear (Şentürk, 2004). This seems to be valid also for new forms of *tasavvuf*, which aim at attracting a wide audience.

Cemalnur Sargut's group should not be categorized among the new religious movements, but it has similarities and intersections with the idiom of new religious movements. It particularly has similarities with the Sufi movements in the West.[86] They also differ from more traditional, *şeriat*-oriented Sufi groups in Turkey, even from the ones in the urban field of Istanbul. Cemalnur Sargut makes some crucial

[86] For an account of these intersections, see Chapter 3.

articulations with the root paradigms[87] of *tasavvuf* in order to address the desires of the late modern subjects around herself. One of the desires appears to be finding a meaning in life. They do not claim that they are just performing the necessities of religion. They constantly refer to the deep meanings they are looking for and Cemalnur Sargut comes up with *batını* (esoteric) interpretations of all events and the data they have in the vast Sufi literature. The second motivation behind their search seems to be the desire of finding people of good moral character. They overemphasize the lack of morality in capitalist society. Yeşim, who is the third middle aged-woman I conversed with in the group, also had left her hectic work life behind. After the *sohbet* and with the hymns in the background, she told me that she had worked in the department of foreign trade for a long time in an extremely tiring pace, but now she was following her spiritual needs. She looked for peace in going from one *sohbet* to the other. She was also in the chorus of *Kubbealtı Cemiyeti* and accompanied the hymns with her well-trained voice. Her main emphasis was the wearing and consuming nature of modern life. She set her eyes on the wall and recited a poem on the consuming life and artificial relationships among the people in Istanbul. It is not only the middle aged members of *ihvan* who stress the artificial nature of modern urban life. Ceren also stressed the same theme. While mentioning her short work experience in New York, she said "I also worked in New York. The conditions of work are worse there, because you know that they can scheme behind

[87] I use the term "root paradigm" as Mardin (1989) uses it for understanding the effect of Said Nursi. He employs the term "root paradigm," which is used in order to "characterize clusters of meaning which serve as cultural 'maps' for individuals; they enable persons to find a path in their own culture" (p. 3).

you even when you go to the lavatory. This is inhuman and against the basic needs of the human beings."[88]

The critique of consumer society and of the meaning it pretends to give to the individual are a part of their common discourse. The institution of the family is also one of the indispensables of the group. The dissolution of the family institution is part of their critique of modern society. They also think that *tasavvuf* leads to the strengthening of the family institution. They are against extra-marital relations and see the family as the guarantee of teaching moral values to the new generations. For instance, Ahsen criticizes the United States for the prevalence of adultery and the dissolution of families. These accounts show that the group, whose members are engaged in late modern conditions and the modern capitalist system, are motivated to join the group by the conditions of their social strata which display similarities with the conditions of the modern West. Therefore, the reasons purported for the "return of the sacred" have validity for the case of Cemalnur Sargut's group. Another explanation behind the spread of new religious movements is that traditional religions create the feeling of belonging and close relationships by furnishing congregational relations and a sincere social milieu. These bonds are claimed to be broken off because of modern social policies and economic regulations. Therefore, the need for close and sincere relations are in a way filled by the relational network of religious groups (Şentürk, 2004).

Another feature of the *mürit*s showing the characteristics of modern individuality is their emphasis on "choice." The factor of choice preserves its significance for the issues of existential questions and the search for meaning. Luckman (1974) explains this perception with the following sentences:

[88] Interview with Ceren, November 28, 2006. "Ben New York'ta da çalıştım. Orada iş koşulları daha da kötü, çünkü sen tuvalete gittiğinde dahi arkandan bir şey çevirebileceklerini biliyorsun. İnsanlık dışı bir şey. İnsanın en temel ihtiyaçlarına aykırı."

> Yet, with the pervasiveness of the consumer orientation and the sense of autonomy, the individual is more likely to confront the culture and the sacred cosmos as a "buyer." Once religion is defined as a "private affair" the individual may choose from the assortment of "ultimate" meanings as he sees fit-guided only by the preferences that are determined by his social biography (p. 99).

Grace Davie (1999) comes up with similar arguments indicating the domination of the capitalist market logic over the lives of modern individuals in all spheres of life. According to her, "not only do we purchase our material requirements, we then shop around for our spiritual needs" (p. 39). Besides being the mentality of the capitalist society, maybe more significantly, it reminds us of the desire which an indispensable ingredient of modernity triggers: the "freedom of choice" and autonomy in the private life. This finds expression in formulation of Hervieu Legér (2002):

> ...the awareness has grown that the concept of modernity takes in more than the advance of scientific thought and of the technical mastery of the world. It encompasses affirmation of the autonomy of the individual. And by degrees in the development of Western democratic societies this has come to incorporate the demand for individual freedom in private life (p. 112).

Including Cemalnur Sargut, all of the group members mentioned their initial desire to "choose" what to believe by themselves. As a young girl, Cemalnur Sargut had told her mother, Meşkure Sargut, who was a *mürit* of Kenan Rifai, not to force her for anything. In the end, she yielded to the path of her parents, but it was crucial for her to decide by herself. The factor of choice seems to be a prerequisite for a "conscious" decision. The component of "choice" in the identity construction and a critical distance towards one's identity and a conscious identification process are modern phenomena. This emphasis on "consciousness" in the construction of religious identities also appears in the narratives of some other Muslim groups on which there

are ethnographic studies in Turkey. For instance, Saktanber based her fieldwork on the residents of a middle class site established by people with the desire of living as "conscious" Muslims in their own space. The emphasis of these people on "consciousness" is strong (Saktanber, 2002). We can see a similar emphasis in the fieldwork of Ewing (2000a) among covered university students in Istanbul. Based on her fieldwork in Istanbul during the summers of 1993 and 1997, she proposes that the concept of "consciousness" is central to the articulation of identity among the covered women she met. The "choice" factor is what they think distinguishes them from the "unconscious" Muslims. Ewing argues that the "not-self" or the other of these women is the "traditional." The covered women, who characterize themselves as "conscious" Muslims that decide to cover as an act of personal choice, draw a contrast with women who wear a headscarf out of "habit" and so "unconsciously." As conscious Muslims, they claim self-awareness. The comparison of these women with the students of Cemalnur Sargut seems meaningful, because both claim to have access to, though not claiming to practice perfectly, 'true' Islam in the contested and controversial religious field of Turkey. All of them claim self-awareness and are educated individuals. However, their constructed "others" differ.

Ehl-i Tasavvuf: The "Middle Way"

The middle way has broad meanings in Islam. It is said that it is the way of the Prophet, but the interpretation of the middle way differs for different groups. When I asked Cemalnur Sargut their understanding of middle way, she said that it is such a beautiful way since it is the way of the Prophet. However, rather than the broad

meaning, I will sociologically analyze what the middle way refers to in their identity construction in the context of Turkey.

The students of Cemalnur Sargut are members of an urban, educated social milieu of reflexive subjectivity that triggers a search for meaning and identity. They criticize the common religious perception of Turkish society at large. They start criticizing from their families. One aspect of their criticism is the lack of questioning and self awareness in practicing Islam. In the cases of Ahsen and İpek, we can see that they are from religious and practicing families and their fathers are from other Sufi orders and motivated their daughters to adhere to Islamic practices such as praying five times a day and fasting. However, they do not find their level of consciousness enough. İpek mentioned her father's insistence on her praying five times a day and covering her head. However, she said that she found the meaning she was looking for when she first listened to the *sohbet*s of Meşkure Sargut.

Then, what is their definition of consciousness? They claim to be in the "middle way," which is defined as being in the middle of "materialism" and *ehl-i taassub* (ahl al-taassub). Materialists constitute one of the others of their identity. Cemalnur Sargut frequently criticizes what she calls materialism and lack of meaning in Western society. They address the source of materialism as "wrong Atatürkism" (*Atatürkçülük*). Ahsen told me that these people are enemies of religion in the name of *Atatürkçülük*. For instance, she thinks that the Kuran should be taught to children before the age of twelve, but it is not allowed in Turkey today. She accuses them of ignorance (*cehalet*). According to her, Atatürk had the understanding of "true Islam" but the people who misunderstand Atatürk associate materialism with *Atatürkçülük* and cling to material in the name of Westernization. She thinks that Westernization is not actually materialism and the West has nothing worth imitating today:

> In Europe, there are Bibles at the bedsides in hotels. You don't inform your own children about your religion. Their minds are filled up with pebbles and sand. Atatürk would dispatch these people who take themselves as Atatürkists with gun. To be Western is not leaning on material. There's nothing to be fond of. People commit suicide. People use churches only for weddings. Europe has become atheist. Leftists say that they have fallen behind because of Islam. Today the West commits suicide, it is homosexual, and what are you imitating? It does everything that is cursed in the Kuran. The West uses cocaine.[89]

Besides the masses that do not question the deep meanings in Islam and *tasavvuf* and materialists who are against belief and religious practices, maybe the chief other of their identity is *ehl-i taassub*. This is the extension of an old distinction between *ehl-i taassub* and *ehl-i tasavvuf*. It is also expressed with the terms *ehl-i zahir* versus *ehl-i batın*. *Zahir* means the outer, external appearance of something or the outlook at the surface. In Sufism, *zahir* is used with the meaning of *şeriat* and its rules (Uludağ, 2001). *Batın* means to see the truth, the reality and reasons behind the things and events at the surface via the eyes of the heart. *Ehl-i batın* are associated with Sufis, who are the friends of Allah (*evliya*) and sees the truth behind the appearance. This is among the stages of *nefis* in *tasavvuf* and is called *fenafillah*, meaning that a man can see nothing but Allah. It is the stage in which a person finishes himself, he kills himself in Allah by the heart. In contrast to *ehl-i batın*, *ehl-i zahir* do not experience what the former do, so they accuse the others of heresy, as we can see examples in history. The hostility even towards early mystics such as Hallac-ı Mansur, who recited the words "I am God" and gave voice to existential monism (*vahdet-i vücud*) is only one of these cases. This is known as the controversy between *ulema* and Sufis

[89] Interview with Ahsen, December 29, 2006. "Avrupa'da otellerde başucunda İnciller olur. Sen kendi dinini tanıtmıyorsun bu çocuklara. İçi çakılla kumla doluyor. Atatürkçü geçinen insanları Atatürk olsa silahla kovalardı. Batılı olmak maddeye yapışmak değil. Hayran olacak bir tarafı yok. İnsanlar intihar ediyor. İnsanlar kiliseleri ancak düğün törenleri için kullanıyor. Avrupa artık ateist olmuş. Solcular, İslamiyet'ten dolayı geri kaldık diyorlar. Batı bugün intihar ediyor, eşcinsel, neyine özeneceksin? Kuranda lanetlenen her şeyi yaşıyor, kokain alıyor Batı."

in history, the traces of which can also be encountered in the Ottoman era. The *Kadızadeli* movement is an example of the hostility of some powerful figures towards *ehl-i tasavvuf* in the seventeenth century Ottoman Empire.[90]

Cemalnur Sargut and her students think that the understanding of Islam for the majority of Turkish society is based on a facile perception. The counterpart of *ehl-i taassub* in today's Turkish society is important for the group's articulation of identity. In comparison with "materialists", Ahsen criticized *ehl-i -taassub*:

> And also there's an unbelievably fanatic group, and this group has no difference from the Atatürkist group. They make five year old kids wear headscarves in the name of religious hegemony. They make them wear mini skirts under that and when the child slides from the slide, her underwear is seen. I am not talking about your headscarf, one wears it or not according to her wish. The kid's religious education is not limited to a headscarf. On one hand she wears a headscarf, on the other hand she is in disgraceful manners. This is not religion. Leftists are afraid of these fanatics of *taassub* (bigotry). As *Efendimiz* (our master) says, we are neither from them nor from any other. I am neither a leftist, nor a bigot rightist. You will take everything necessary from the West, television, automobile… You will make use of every material possibility. You will be clean. The sitting of our Prophet on the floor doesn't mean dirtiness. You will use a fork and knife. You are making an Islamic synthesis. You cannot impose on those people that I'm thinking like this, you will think like this, too.[91]

As I observed in the close *sohbet* groups and sometimes heard from the young women during our conversations, the groups who are in conflict with the secularist state for *zahiri* reasons such as the headscarf controversy are regarded as *ehl-i*

[90] For berief information about the controversy between ulama and Sufis and the *Kadızadeli* Movement, see Chapter 3.

[91] Interview with Ahsen, December 29, 2006. "Bir de inanılmaz bir yobaz kesim var, bunun Atatürkçü geçinen kesimden aslında hiçbir farkı yok. O da din hegemonyası altında çocuklarına beş yaşında başörtüsü takıyor. O çocuğun altına mini etek giydiriyor kaydıraktan kaydırıyor iç çamaşırı gözüküyor çocuğun. Sizin başörtünüze laf etmiyorum insan istiyorsa kapatır istiyorsa açar. Çocuğu küçücük yaştan yani din sadece başörtüsünde değil. Bu taraftan kafasını kapatıyor öteki tarafta yapmadığı rezilliği bırakmıyor. Bu din değil. Dolayısıyla ne taassub tarafı bağnazların yaptığı gibi, solcular bunlardan korkuyor. Efendimin dediği gibi biz ne ondan bundanız, biz hem şundan bundanız. Ne solcuyum, ne taassub ehli sağcıyım. Batı'dan alınması gereken televizyon, araba. Her türlü maddi imkandan faydalanacaksın. Temiz olacaksın. Yerde oturuyordu diye peygamberimiz. Çatal bıçak kullanacaksın. Kendin İslami bir sentez yapıyorsun. O insanlara da ben böyle düşünüyorum sen de benim gibi düşün diyemezsin."

taassub by the group members. Although Cemalnur Sargut occasionally indicates that the clothing style has no significance for them due to the conception of unity (*tevhid*) they learned from Kenan Rifai, she does not want the women in her close circle to cover their heads. As I learned in the first interview, Irmak was wearing a headscarf when she first came to the *sohbet*s. They also criticized the people with headscarves during the interviews, saying that they excluded me from these critiques. Though I tried not to be influenced by the issue, I felt that the political tensions over the issue of the headscarf was influencing my relationship with the group members. Despite, or may be sometimes due to, Cemalnur Sargut's explanations that they do not give importance to whether one covers her head or not, I knew that she asked her *mürit*s not to cover their heads and it was unsettling to know this from time to time.

The headscarf has been a controversial issue since the 1980s, and the tension has never settled. The discussions around secularism have perpetuated throughout the republican era and the contest over the definitions of Islam and secularism continues around certain symbols. The continuing threat of Islamism has been the constitutive other of Turkish secularism in the state discourse. This discourse increased its effect in the 1990s with the rise of the Islamist Welfare Party. The "tales of nightmare", as Navaro-Yashin (2002) identifies, about the resurgence of Islam in Turkey which occupied the minds of many people before the 1994 municipal elections won by the Welfare Party, persisted during the parliamentary elections in which the Justice and Development Party won in 2001. The Justice and Development Party was regarded as an Islamist Party initially, since it was established by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the mayor of Istanbul from the Welfare Party, and his young colleagues who were also members of the same party. The fear of some segments of society was to such an extent that after his party won the parliamentary elections of 2001, Erdogan

had to make a speech which indicated that his party was the guarantee of democracy and secularism. Although his party's mostly liberal politics blurred its image as an Islamist party, the discussions about secularism and the criticisms against the party members have continued up until today. Discussions pervaded when party members suggested that secularism should be redefined in today's conjuncture or when President Ahmet Necdet Sezer invited only the wives of the parliament members who did not wear headscarves. This was a long-lasting crisis. This is part of the wider discussion over Turkishness and Turkish culture, which became more controversial with the discussions about the EU membership of Turkey. Navaro Yashin (2002), with reference to Raymond Williams, argues that there are certain historical periods when the contestation of the concept of culture becomes public. According to her, at certain points in the history of Turkey, culture was transformed from tacit knowledge into an abstract concept to be discussed, analyzed, and theorized. The mid-1990s, when the Islamist party won the municipal elections, and the initial nation-state formation of the Turkish Republic were such periods. In the mid-1990s, the Islamist Party reproblematized the issue of Turkey's local culture. Although the tension, which led to the so-called February 28 military intervention, is not to that extent today, the discussions on Islam and secularism continue. The meeting organized in April 2007 against the possibility of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's becoming the president is an expression of this tension over secularism. The way of clothing has a significant place in Turkish modernization. As Nilüfer Göle (1996) puts it, "the official ideology of the republic did not differentiate its utopia of civilization from lifestyles and clothing habits" (p. 61). Atatürk attributed such significance to clothing style that he declared the hat law. Göle (1996) argues that abandoning the practice of veiling further extended the boundaries of *mahrem*,

predetermined by the religious authorities and norms. It is still publicly discussed whether the headscarf symbolizes backwardness, means the submission of women or a revolt to the values of the secularist republic.

I began and continued my fieldwork with the burden of this tension as a woman wearing a headscarf and was included in the category of the Islamists on the basis of the hegemonic categorization of the day. My unease was very much related to the tension around secularism in Turkey. I had found myself at the center of controversies frequently in my daily life. I was also a bit scared in my first face-to-face encounter with Cemalnur Sargut for the first interview. I had always been the only young woman with a headscarf in the Wednesday gatherings and did not know their attitude to this kind of clothing. Neither Cemalnur Sargut nor the young women had headscarves and I realized that my obsession was not groundless since Cemalnur Sargut referred to the issue of clothing in my presence in this interview and on other occasions. Both speech and silence about this issue had a meaning both for me, as the researcher, and for them. At the beginning of the interview, like in our first conversation in the Wednesday gathering when I got permission for my research, she emphasized that clothing is not important for them. She said there is no significance whether one wears a headscarf or not, walks around naked or covers from head to foot. While talking about the people coming to Erenköy for the Wednesday gathering, she said "We see everyone coming there as human beings. There are people from every milieu there". This emphasis at the first encounter put a distance between me and the group, while motivating me simultaneously. Another emphasis she made about clothing was about another group she suggested for me. It was another Rifai group in the *Fatih* district, whom she described as "having more *edep* when compared to us." In this first meeting, it was meaningful for us to talk about

"*edep*." She said "We are of poor *edep*" with laughter, and addressed one of the girls in the room. She said "Irmak was also very '*edepli*' when she first came, but now she is of poor *edep*." Laughters followed these sentences. As I became more familiar with the group, I understood that her usage of the word was ironic. I understood that she actually does not define *edep* with covering, but with other tenets and manners.

I do not think that *ehl-i taassub* is equated with the headscarf by the group. It has a wider meaning of having a superficial understanding of religion. However, this side of the coin acquired more importance for me as a covered researcher. They are also against strict rules for gender segregation. They perform *sohbet*s, travel, organize programs together, though they pray separately, such as the morning prayings in large groups. While some Muslim groups are strict about gender segregation and practices such as women's shaking hands with men, Cemalnur Sargut and her *mürit*s do not have such regulations. Women and men can hug one another. Men can kiss and hug Cemalnur Sargut especially after her *sohbet*s. Youngsters are also quite comfortable with one another. For instance, Ceren had her boyfriend with us in *sohbet*s performed in her house. Ahsen gave me clues about their outlook on relations between men and women. She criticized one of her young woman relatives who graduated from a reputable university, learned two languages but changed her lifestyle by wearing a black chador (*çarşaf*), which is occasionally represented as the symbol of backwardness and threat to the secular republic by the media in Turkey. She criticized this woman for pursuing strict gender segregation and not swimming in beaches, but going to remote places with a boat. She said that they are against complicating one's life. She says "Now, have you made life harder for you, or haven't you? Allah says, have pleasure. You will not behave immorally but you will derive pleasure from the blessings of Allah. The *mürşit* rasps your

bigotry if you are inclined towards it." As they are against the exorbitance of *ehl-i taassub* in practices such as covering or gender segregation, they also claim to be against the other extreme. In one of the crowded *sohbet*s in the house of Irmak, they talked about the "proper" clothing style for women. They said that they are against attractive clothes such as a blouse leaving one's belly open, and applying strange models to one's hair.

In this emphasis on hostility towards strict gender segregation, they represent their interpretation of religion and Sufism as an enlightened one. Ekal (2006) argues for Alevis in Turkey that woman appears a symbol of group identity, a point of differentiation of Alevis from Sunnis, where Alevi women are depicted to be side by side with men and Sunni women as segregated from men, at times associating this difference with a dichotomy of 'enlightened (*aydın*) and forward-looking (*ilerici*)' versus backward looking (*gerici*) and bigot (*yobaz*)'. The people around Cemalnur Sargut free themselves from accusations of bigotry with the position of women in their group. They differentiate themselves from other groups that practice strict gender segregation. They adopt the republican approach which has seen women as signs of modernity of the nation.

With these articulations, Cemalnur Sargut's group reverses the modernist gaze at and the hegemonic discourse about *tasavvuf*, which has been seen as a symbol of backwardness, irrationality and superstition by the ideology of the enlightenment. Until recently, *tarikat*s had been represented as the enemies of the secular republic by the media. By otherizeing the groups with this kind of an image, they reverse the gaze. They narrate the history of the republic vis-a-vis Islam as a positive one and juxtapose *tasavvuf* and modern life. They associate *tasavvuf* with education, profundity and a deep understanding of religion, which is "true Islam."

On the Path Towards *İnsan-ı Kamil*

In the previous parts, I gave priority to how Cemalnur Sargut's *mürit*s display the characteristics of modern subjectivity and are part of late modernity. As I mentioned in the first chapter, some of the Sufi groups in urban settings address modernized, secularized urbanites in big cities like the ones in the United States or Indonesia. Their tenets approach the new age teachings with their holistic approach to life. Cemalnur Sargut's group looks like the so called "*tasavvuf* without *tarikat*" with their stance before the public. It is argued that new forms of Sufism like *tasavvuf* without *tarikat* and their modern-style education suit the modern sensibilities of educated Muslim urbanites (Howell, 2007, p. 22). With the analysis of ongoing neo-Sufi movements and practices in the Western world and the urban sites of non-Western countries such as Indonesia, dichotomies such as "Islamic Sufism" versus "neo-Sufism" or "global Sufism" are constructed (Hammer, 2004). Substantially, neo-Sufism is characterized as an individual quest pursued primarily through books. As I tried to explain above, we witness a similar individual quest in the case of the educated *mürit*s of Sargut. As I elaborated in the first chapter, the public appearance of the group displays considerable similarities with the so-called neo-Sufi groups. They give importance to personal choices, subjective experiences and methods such as discussions and constant dialogue in their activities. One component of neo-Sufi groups is claimed to be the decrease of the traditional hierarchy of the *mürşit*s, or shaykhs. For instance, Howell (2007) gives the example of an Islamic studies center in Indonesia delivering *tasavvuf* programs by "teachers and facilitators" instead of a shaykh or *mürşit*, which are more resonant of the authority and hierarchy in the old

time *tarikat*. Western Sufism, or "neo-Sufism" is represented as a non-hierarchical form with its non institutional institutionalization. It is situated vis-a-vis the traditional forms, which are claimed to persist among non-Western societies or Muslim migrants in Western societies. Can we situate Cemalnur Sargut's group in this categorization?

Cemalnur Sargut's group seems to be a non-institutional *tarikat* at first sight in line with its public image. Sargut does not prefer to use the terms *mürit-mürşit* due to their traditional connotations of the *tekke* institution banned in Turkey and she insisted that they do not perform the rituals of the *tekke* from our first encounter on. However, far from being a *tasavvuf* in the form of lectures, I observed both in the accounts of Sargut and her *mürit*s that they perpetuate the *mürit-mürşit* relationship they inherited from Kenan Rifai and Samiha Ayverdi. Needless to say, they do not perpetuate traditional forms such as getting permission (*icazet*) from the shaykh and opening a *tekke*. What they continue is the spiritual guidance of the *mürşit* and the respectful manners one has towards his/her *mürşit*. Cemalnur frequently mentions that she was respectful and obedient to her *mürşit*s. Her *mürit*s also esteem her with their manners, verbal or non-verbal. This respect for the *mürşit* is expressed in the well rounded term, one of the root paradigms of *tasavvuf*: *edep*. It is related to the role of the *mürşit* in the spiritual path. The definition of the term can be found in one of the main sources of the group, *Sohbetler*, in which there are anecdotes from the life of Kenan Rifai. The book consists of the notes of his *mürit*s about his *sohbet*s and the times they spent with him. According to the explanations of Kenan Rifai, the meaning of *edep* is "to attribute everything to the will of Allah, to see the actions, the actors, the existing as nothing, but Allah himself" (Rifai, 2000, p. 6). This means to accept the unity of Allah and all creatures and not to fall into *shirk*, which means

accepting other powers besides Allah. Part of *edep* is loyalty to Allah and to the shaikh. This broader and deeper esoteric definition appears in every articulation Cemalnur Sargut makes in her path, which she constructs in the light of Kenan Rifai's and Samiha Ayverdi's tenets. In the book the group prepared for Samiha Ayverdi, which is called *Hatıralarla Samiha Ayverdi* (Samiha Ayverdi in Memories), Cemalnur Sargut's mother (Meşkure Sargut) mentions Ayverdi's understanding of *edep*. (Sargut, 2005). She says that the lessons of *irfan* (insight) that she made with Kenan Rifai had taught two types of *edep* to Ayverdi: *zahir edep* (outer *edep*) and *batın edep* (inner *edep*). She explains outer *edep* as obeying the ethical norms of the society and inner *edep* as the belief that both benefaction and evil come from God.

They do not only continue the *mürit-mürşit* relationship, but also see it as the *sine qua non* of *tasavvuf*. One of the cases Cemalnur Sargut mentions for demonstrating the necessity of a *mürşit* is Ebu Hanife, who is the founder of one of the four sects in Sunni Islam. She says that even a person like Ebu Hanife obeyed to a *mürşit* and accepted that he would perish unless he became affiliated with the *mürşit*. Then, what is the role of the *mürşit* on the spiritual path in *tasavvuf*? The main theme of *tasavvuf* is "love of Allah," which is reached through the "love of the shaykh." These are actually the same thing. The *mürit* wants to reach Allah and as Werbner (2003) expresses, it is not just a matter of learning from books. The *pir* has the secret knowledge and the *mürit* should learn with his guidance. *Tarikat* is known as the path on which the mystics walk (Schimmel, 1975). Schimmel elaborates further and says that There are three levels, depicted by circles one inside the other: The outer circle is the *şeriat*, the second one is the *tarikat* and the last is *marifet*. In most Sufi groups, it is believed that the path, meaning *tarikat*, comes out of *şeriat*

and mystical experience cannot be realized if the binding injunctions of the *şeriat* are not fulfilled faithfully. The path is said to be narrower and more difficult to walk and leads the adept -called *salik*, "wayfarer"- in his *süluk* "wandering," through different stations (*makam*) until he reaches his goal, the existential confession that God is One. The spiritual path is seen as a dangerous way. As Frager (2005) explains, Sufis feel that they cannot mature on their own and need the discipline of a *mürşit*. The path is full of egoism, fake visions, misinterpretation of mystic stages... etc. So, the master watches every moment of the disciple's spiritual growth, interprets his dreams and visions, reads his thoughts, and follows every moment of his conscious and subconscious life (Schimmel, 1975). Under the guidance of his *mürşit*, the *mürit* is expected to proceed in the stations of the path (p. 104), to become a perfect mirror of Allah. This relationship may seem irrational when one looks through the lenses of Western individualism. The dependence of the "self" on a *mürşit* that *tasavvuf* wants to construct has been interpreted as the disappearance of the subject and her/his personality as an instrument of eternal faith or as an absolute subjectivism because the human personality is inflated to such an extent that it is considered the microcosm, the perfect mirror of Allah (Schimmel, 1975). As Ewing (2000b) connotes, orientalist discourse, privileging the Western individual, labeled the dependency as a pathology, loss of personality and lack of awareness. In contrast to this perspective, Ewing suggests handling Sufi discourse without giving any privilege to the autonomous self of the West. Similarly, Werbner (2003) argues that what is privileged in Sufism is not common sense "rationality," but a higher, divinely inspired rationality, associated with divinely endowed powers (p. 147). Once they become affiliated with the *mürşit* and take steps on the spiritual path, they say that the *mürşit* brings them face to face with the evils of their *nefis* and the struggle with

the *nefis* begins. They become subject to a transformation in their desires and gradually adopt the desires that the discourse of *tasavvuf* constructs. The term *nefis* is used to mean the selfish ego, the lower self, the base instincts (Schimmel, 1975; Frager, 2005). *Nefis* is the cause of blameworthy actions, sins and base qualities and the struggle with it has been called "the greater Holy War" by the Sufis (Schimmel, 1975). It is incumbent upon every *mürit* on the Path to purge the *nefis* of its evil attributes in order to replace these by the opposite qualities (p. 112). There are different stages of *nefis*. The first is *nefs-i emmare*, which charges evil, while the last stage is *nefs-i mutmainne*, which is peace. Obedience to the *mürşit*, fasting, praying are means for taming one's *nefs-i emmare*. Praying and fasting are among the most important advises of Cemalnur Sargut's *mürit*s. Ahsen narrates her relationship with her *mürşit*s as follows:

> The *mürşit* corrects your nature as well as your spirituality. The *mürşit* discovers some parts of you in your [secret] spirituality that not even you are aware of. She does not inject something from the outside; she makes you find the treasure inside you. Not the same system is applied to everyone. Cemalnur sister and Meşkure sister are controlling us. We are all in front of Cemalnur sister and we are all conducted by her. The place all of these take us to is our Prophet. She is a guide in your voyage towards the Prophet and Allah. A great inner struggle [with *nefis*] starts. She holds a mirror to you and makes you see all the hypocrisies, arrogance, anger, wrath, sloth. You discover yourself and start your inner struggle. You have to transform anger to softness, arrogance to humility. It is not killing something, killing your *nefis*. She takes you from the raw state and turns you into someone who is at peace with herself, who loves and knows yourself, an individual who is beneficial to society.[92]

[92] Interview with Ahsen, December 29, 2006. "Mürşit tabiatını da batınını da düzeltiyor. Mürşit senin bilmediğin batınında olan taraflarını bulup keşfediyor. Dışardan mürşit enjekte etmiyo senin içindeki hazineyi bulup keşfettiriyor. Kişisel irşat var. Herkese aynı sistem uygulanmıyor. Cemalnur ablayla meşkure anne kontrol ediyor bizi. Cemalnur ablanın gözü önündeyiz onun tarafından çep çevriliyoruz. Hepsinin götürdüğü yer peygamber efendimiz. Peygambere ve Allaha yaptığın seyrü sefere yardımcı. Muazzam bir nefis mücadelesi başlıyor. Sana ayna tutuyor riyaları kibirleri öfke gazap tembelliği hissettiriyor. Sen kendini keşfedip kendinle mücadele etmeye başlıyosun. Öfkeyi hilme, kibri tevazuya dönüştürmen lazım. Bir şeyi öldürmek nefsi öldürmek değil burada. Seni çiğ halden olmamış koruk halinde alıp kendisiyle barışan kendisini seven tanıyan topluma faydalı birey haline getiriyor."

With reference to Foucault, Ewing (2000b) claims that after its institutionalization, "Sufism constructed a historical subject by creating a discipline and an official discourse which situates itself between the subject and the human body"(p. 174).[93] This discipline and discourse opens a space where the truth regimes of modernity and *tasavvuf* intersect and conflict in the *müri*t's' lives and minds and Cemalnur Sargut resolves these conflicts and crises with her interpretations. She struggles to turn the subjects of late modern society who are in search of meaning to subjects searching for divine love on the path under her and the *pir*s' guidance. The characteristics of Western individualism such as "autonomy, agency, uniqueness, equality" (Werbner, 2003, p. 147) are tried to be replaced by the concepts of *tasavvuf*. This sometimes necessitates facing the difficulties of life and abiding by them in contrast to the seek for pleasure interpellated in modern individualist culture. The difficulties are declared to be seen as the examination (*imtihan*) of Allah and misfortune (*bela*) is seen as the means of eliminating the believers of Allah. In her book, Cemalnur Sargut (2006) asserts that every kind of misfortune reveals the beauty the human being carries inside her/him and the disaster reveals whether the person's heart is copper or gold (p. 112). Once the *mürşit* wishes the *mürit* to bear the situation, they do so. There are such examples from Cemalnur Sargut's life. Once the person becomes a *mürit*, s/he submits to the *mürşit* with all his/her will. They say that is the reason (*akl*) is under the control of *nefs-i emmare*, it frustrates you. They say that they get rid of the burden when they get the advice of Cemalnur Sargut. If a *mürşit* wants them to show patience about something, they believe that they should bear with it. The group members give examples from Cemalnur Sargut's life for examples of her patience towards difficulties. Patience (*sabır*) and even becoming thankful

[93] The translation is mine.

(*şükür*) in the face of difficulties, not running from tough conditions are very important for the *mürit*'s progress on the Path. Ahsen told me how she bore a tough period of her life. She wanted to get a graduate degree, but her husband did not allow her to do so. She was married and pregnant and thought about divorcing her husband. However, she said that she endured the difficulties and "When I look back, if I was a university professor, I would be a arrogant woman. I would not have children. I would be a professor in America, but I would be an unhappy woman."

Contrary to the modern individual pursuing his/her own choices, the group members qualify their affiliation as a grant of Allah: *nasib*. They think that the *mürit* does not "choose" the *mürşit*, but s/he should be chosen by the *mürşit*. To become a *mürit* is said to be a matter of the primordial grant (*nasip*) of Allah. They think that if the person feels a deep commitment to the *mürşit* even at first sight, s/he is the right *mürşit*. If the person has no grant determined by Allah, s/he feels nothing for the *mürşit* of the *tarikat*. İpek's experience set a good example for the matter. İpek is not "*ihvan* by birth," and was taken to the *sohbet* of Cemalnur Sargut by her friend, Ahsen. She says:

> There was a *sohbet* of Cemalnur Abla, it was at home and you could only participate by permission. After I listened to her *sohbet* for the first time, I told myself I could not be anywhere else. At the end of the day, I telephoned my father. I told him that *namaz* (ritual prayer) or fasting were not mentioned at all, but I got extreme pleasure. My father said 'If you had peace and extension in your heart when you left, it is the right place for you, go there.'[94]

[94] Interview with İpek, December 29, 2006. "Cemalnur ablanın sohbeti var, evde ve ancak müsaade ile gidebiliyorsunuz. İlk kez sohbetini dinledikten sonra dedim ki ben başka bir yerde olamam. Gün sonunda babamı aradım, o gün de namazdan oruçtan bahsedilmedi, kimse örtülü değildi ama ben çok büyük zevk aldım dedi. Babam dedi ki 'çıktıktan sonra gönlünde bir huzur ve genişleme olduysa orası doğru yerdir oraya git'"

The love one immediately feels for the *mürşit* is counted among the ways of becoming a dervish. Frager (2005) mentions this style as "falling in love with the shaykh," besides other ways like dreams or demand. Whatever the means is, the *mürit* must feel a deep attachment to the *mürşit*.

Divine love is experienced when the subject feels her/his nothingness in front of Allah. Paradoxically, the dervish becomes "nothing" and "everything" at the same time. Frager (2005) asserts that the path of Sufism does not mean anything to the ego for this reason. He contrasts the Sufi ethos and the desire of the ego in the following way: The ego is said to demand fame and assets, while the dervish seeks to eliminate worldly passions despite s/he is extremely active in fulfilling his/her worldly duties. According to Frager (2005), ego calls for freedom, while dervish wishes to subordinate herself/himself to a *mürşit* and a path.

As it can be seen in the examples above, the normative order of *tasavvuf* calls the subjects to a different world of desires than the desires that modernity constructs. Instead of the feelings of uniqueness and autonomy, Cemalnur Sargut claims to teach her *mürit*s their "nothingness" in front of Allah and the *mürit*s of Cemalnur Sargut undergo a significant transformation after their subordination to the path.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study focused on a woman *mürşit*, Cemalnur Sargut, and her disciples in Istanbul, in an attempt to analyze this group in relation to the growing transnational interest in Sufism and to the religious identities in the complex religious field of Turkey. The growing interest in Sufism is manifested in the rise of scholarly works on Sufism and of the activities of Sufi groups in urban spheres of different countries, the works on Sufism in relationship with different branches of art... etc. Some of the Sufi *tarikat*s in the Western and non-Western societies repackage the message of Sufism in innovatory forms for appealing to the educated middle class urbanites. To this end, they prioritize universalist and perennial tendencies of the Sufi tradition. These groups and their followers can be labeled as moderns at first sight due to their active presence in most spheres of the modern life.

The phenomenon of the popularization of Sufism remains as a tenuous concept unless it is analyzed through particular cases. I trailed the phenomenon in the urban field of Turkey and tried to explicate it in the case of Cemalnur Sargut's group. There are some studies on Sufi groups in Turkey, but they do not contextualize these movements within the framework of the newly developing forms of Sufism that address peculiarly the modernized, educated urbanites. I argue that these new forms worth analyzing since they undermine certain dichotomies that pervade in the religious field of Turkey such as Islamist/secularist dichotomy. Especially in contemporary Turkey, identities are easily categorized as secular or religious on the basis of certain visibilities which are regarded as symbols. It is not easy to categorize

the middle class urbanites that are hailed to the subjectivities that *tasavvuf*'s regime of truth constructs.

In the main stream, popular imagination, the term *tarikat* connotes a traditional shaykh with a beard and a gown, and men that recite *zikir*, due to the modernist imaginary that constructs *tarikat*s and dervishes as relics of the past and media representations consolidate this image. A parallel representation has recently represented Sufism and *tarikat*s as a safer form of religion as opposed to fundamentalist movements that are supposed to threaten the secular order of the society. In this context, Sufi groups should be studied within their historicity and the local and global contexts of the day.

Sufism has been a widespread phenomenon in both urban and rural fields in Turkish society. So, I started my analysis with the role of religion and Sufism in the urban context in the Ottoman society and the traditional roots of the group that go back to the formation of the Rifai order in the twelfth century by Ahmet er-Rifai. I aimed to demonstrate that Sufism is not a new phenomenon in the urban field of Turkish society. Contrary to the modernist trend within the anthropological literature which equates Sufism with the rural parts or with the traditional society, Sufi *tarikat*s have always been important in urban life and even among the elites of the Ottoman society. However, modernization and secularization processes settled a hegemonic modernist discourse, which associated Sufi groups with backwardness and superstition. While Sufi groups that opposed the secularizing reforms were disqualified sometimes with violent means in the early republican era, Kenan Rifai and his *müri*ts were among the Sufis who appropriated an obedient stance towards the state. Kenan Rifai and her prominent *müri*t, Samiha Ayverdi, imagined Sufism as a lifestyle that could be sustained in subjective experiences and in the society of

ihvan, so did not oppose institutional secularization. In order to emphasize the possibility of practicing Sufism outside the *tekke* institution, they argued that the hearts of the dervishes were *tekke*s. This interpretation of religion was a secure one in the secularized context and provided a secure position for the members of *ihvan*.

The adaptation capacity of *ihvan* to new conditions of the day comes from Kenan Rifai. Some Sufi groups in Istanbul continue their activities in *tekke* institution around a shaykh, though their practices are also transformed. Although *ihvan* still take *tasavvuf* as the primary reference point in their lives, they do not continue the istitutionalized Sufi practices such as doing *zikir* which are illegal in Turkey and continue the practices which pose no risks for the group. They continue *sohbet*s, some of which are open to the public, organize close gatherings and recite hymns that have replaced *zikir* performance of the traditional *tekke*.

The group has been going through a significant process of transformation in recent years. Cemalnur Sargut and people in *ihvan* try to spread the message of Sufism to domestic and international audience. They qualify their method as "academic" and situate it against the old methods of the *tarikat*s which they think became extinct. Academic activities include an effective use of the radio and television channels, internet, publications and the programs and projects they conduct through the hand of Türkkad, which is a civil society organization established by Samiha Ayverdi in 1966. They aim to address the educated urbanites and use the means and the language they think are suitable for this purpose. These means and this language appeal both to the educated upper classes in Turkey and abroad, although they have a very limited audience in the latter. They form their language and method on the basis of their assumptions about the contemporary era.

They claim that it is the age of *irfan* and the meaning of Sufism should be revealed to the public.

One of the main themes of this study is that Sargut and her *müri*t*s* aim at reversing the constructions of the modernist gaze. They try to deconstruct the gaze that associates *tasavvuf* and *tarikat*s with backwardness and they try to associate it with education, profundity and a deep understanding of religion. Moreover, they reverse the hierarchical relationship between the East and the West and regard the West in need of belief and spirituality, which the wisdom of Sufism in the East can provide. They base their mission on this kind of an interpretation.

Another point that should be emphasized is their in-between position between a unificatory language through which they claim to work for *tevhid* and the mechanisms of differentiation and the politics of difference they perpetuate. They claim to work for the elimination of differences at the level of belief and society. One part of this elimination is their emphasis on the unity of all *tarikat*s and the other is the unity of religions, which is the perennial side of the movement. Sargut even wants her disciples to stay away from government politics, which she thinks prompts conflicts and differences in society. Nevertheless, differentiation and otherization towards the groups in the religious field of Turkey is at work in the identity construction of *ihvan* and their definition of 'true Islam.' Deriving from the traditional dichotomies in Sufism, they define themselves as *ehl-i tasavvuf*, who are enlightened and who penetrate into the deep world of Sufism, and situate themselves against *ehl-i taassub*, who they think has a superficial understanding of Islam. Moreover, they define their way as the "middle way," which is between materialists and *ehl-i taassub*. Thus, they participate in the definition of 'true Islam' and

secularism in Turkey and claim the right understanding of *tasavvuf*, *Atatürkçülük*, Westernization and secularization.

I analyzed the group with respect to the secularization thesis, around which a lot of discussions have evolved in the sociology of religion. In line with the modernist outlook, secularization thesis expected the demise of religion both in society and in the minds of individuals (Berger, 1999). Nowadays, this thesis is criticized by most of the sociologists of religion, including the early adherents of it (Luckman, 1974; Bell, 1977; Berger, 1999; Davie, 1999). It is argued that the only indicator of the level of belief should not be regarded as visible symbols such as church attendance (Luckman, 1974; Davie, 1999). Moreover, it is claimed that the rate of belief is increasing in the sphere of the individuals' subjective experiences in Western societies. When it comes to non-Western societies, the increase in the visible practices such as veiling are interpreted as a contrary trend to secularization (Berger, 1999). These arguments led me to discuss Sargut's group with regard to religion/spirituality dichotomy and I dwelled on their subjectivities and the way they narrate their initiation to *ihvan*. I suggest that they are late modern individuals in a search of meaning and they narrated their stories with a late modern language which frequently gives reference to psychological states, feelings and emotions. In this sense, they are modernized individuals that experienced the "subjective turn" of the contemporary era (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, they do not carry Islamic visibilities as defined by some scholars (Berger, 1999; Göle, 2006). At first glance, they have considerable similarities with the Western Sufi movements that give priority to spirituality and individuality rather than religion and spiritual bonds (Hammer, 2004). However, I encountered a different picture when I looked at the subjectivities of the group members more closely. Although they operate in a late modern field, the

people of *ihvan* challenge what they see as the values of the contemporary modern society in harmony with the truth regime of *tasavvuf* both in their language and practices. Although in a different form, they continue the congregational bonds and the *murit-mürşit* hierarchy. The desires of the *mürit*s are transformed by the discipline of the *mürşit*, Cemalnur Sargut. The community of *ihvan* created a space in the modern secular order, where they think they practice the Sufi way of life. The group can be categorized neither as a traditional Sufi group, nor a Western one, but harmonizes the characteristics of these two categories. The case of Sargut's group opens a new space for the studies on religion in Turkey, transcending the religious/secularist and religious/spiritualist dichotomies. I do not suggest that all dichotomies belonging to the religious field in Turkey are invalid or false representations. There may be the groups of people who define themselves in line with the existing dichotomies. What I argue is that these dichotomies make us overlook the particular cases that incorporate these dichotomies in a different way and Sargut's group is one of these cases. In many senses, the group is an in-between. This study does not claim that all dichotomies belonging to the religious field in turkey are invalid or false representations, but asserts that they make us overlook the particular cases that incorporate these dichotomies in a different way. Sargut's group attempts to undermine certain hegemonic categories, while substituting new ones, which are operative in the identity construction of *ihvan*. Moreover, this study is an attempt to relate particular subjectivities to the global processes.

This study has been a preliminary attempt to analyze the transformation of a specific tradition in the late modern context within the conjuncture of the local, global and historical context. However, there are some other vital aspects excluded from the scope of the thesis but can be handled in further research. First of all, the

influence of Samiha Ayverdi was not analyzed enough. Right along with the similarities of Samiha Ayverdi era with Cemalnur Sargut's, there are differences at the same time. The nationalist discourse of Samiha Ayverdi, which establishes a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, underwent a transformation in the discourse of Cemalnur Sargut. Moreover, the group is more disclosed when compared to the time of Ayverdi. The changes in their discourses can be studied within the changing contexts of their eras.

Another topic I did not handle in the thesis is the issue of gender. The guidance of a woman *mürşit* in the spiritual path of Sufism can be analyzed in many respects. Their construction of gender identities needs elaboration. The group dynamics, the *müreit*s' relationships with Cemalnur Sargut needs further research further together with a comparison of the experiences of different genders.

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