

CONVEYING THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM:
MOSQUE SERMONS BY WOMEN PREACHERS

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CONVEYING THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM:
MOSQUE SERMONS BY WOMEN PREACHERS

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Hümeyra Dincer, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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ABSTRACT

Conveying the Message of Islam:

Mosque Sermons by Women Preachers

This thesis is a study of Islamic sermons conveyed in mosques by women preachers hired by the Directorate of Religious Affairs for the congregation of women. This study is an attempt to see how providing positions for women in public spaces as preachers and supporting the women population with religious instructions is actually undertaken by the actors in the context of the state's aim to expand religion.

This thesis focuses on the relation between the space in which the sermons are delivered, the content of the sermons and the narrative structures used to transmit this content. Their narratives, in this sense, constitute the basis of the research through which I attempt to grasp how the notion of "living a Muslim life" is constructed and maintained in today's world and how religious beliefs, rituals and ethics are transmitted by religious specialists to Muslim women.

Despite the fact that scholars have undertaken numerous studies about the relation between the state and religion by focusing on the Directorate, scant attention has been paid to the ways this relation is exercised in the everyday. The actors and the contexts in which religious practices have been conveyed to the population at large, the means available to these actors and the limitations of these processes of transmission have not been the object of analysis. The thesis is made up of three main chapters that constitute the three important dimensions of sermons: the space of narration, the content of the narrative and narrative style.

ÖZET

İslam Mesajını İletmek:

Kadın Vâizelerin Cami Vaazları

Bu tez, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın atadığı kadın vaizeler tarafından, camilerin kadın cemaatlerine verilen vaazların bir analizini içermektedir. Bu çalışmada kadınlara kamusal alanda vaize olarak görev vererek kadın cemaatlere dini eğitim verilmesinin, devletin dini yayma çabası bağlamında hangi noktada durduğu ve devlet aktörlerinin bu süreçteki etkinliği tartışılmaktadır.

Bu tezin odak noktası, vaazların verildiği mekanın vaazların içeriğiyle ve bu içeriği muhataplara anlatmak için kullanılan anlatı yöntemleri arasındaki ilişkidir. Bu anlatılar üzerinden bu araştırmada "Müslümanca bir yaşam sürme" düşüncesinin günümüz dünyasında nasıl inşa edildiği ve sürdürüldüğü, ayrıca dini inançların, ibadet ve ahlakın vaizeler tarafından Müslüman kadınlara nasıl aktarıldığı incelenmektedir.

Literatürde devlet ve din arasındaki ilişkiyi daha iyi analiz edebilmek amacıyla Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığına odaklanan bir çok çalışma mevcuttur. Ancak bu ilişkinin gündelik hayatta nasıl kurgulandığı ve uygulandığına dair oldukça az çalışma bulunmaktadır. Dini pratiklerin topluma aktarılmasındaki aktörler ve yöntemler, bu aktörlerin elinde bulundurdukları imkanlar ve bu iletim sürecinin sınırlamaları hakkında yeterince araştırma yapılmamıştır. Bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlayan bu tezde, vaazların üç temel unsuruna ele alan üç ana bölüm kaleme alınmıştır: anlatının mekanı, anlatının içeriği ve anlatı teknikleri.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of Islamic sermons delivered by women preachers hired by the Directorate of Religious Affairs to the congregations of women in mosques. The focus will be on the relation between the space in which the sermons are delivered, the content of the sermons and the narrative structures used to transmit this content. Their narratives, in this sense, constitute the basis of my research through which I attempt to grasp how the notion of “living a Muslim life” is constructed and maintained in today’s world.

The sermon has a special name in Islamic literature: *vaaz* coming from the Arabic “الوعظ”. The root meaning of the word literally means to admonish, to warn, and to make someone beware of God’s expectations. A person who delivers the sermon is called *vâiz* (a male preacher) or *vâize* (a female preacher). In the sermons, the preacher usually quotes from the Quran or hadith and examines matters of Islamic law and ethics to guide people. To preach is defined as to give advice to a community on religious and moral issues, to say words that will warm the hearts of the audience to goodness and to provide incentives and warnings by giving information about eternal reward and punishment. Considering its long historical trajectory, the sermon, more specifically, refers to the speech of religious scholars, especially in places of worship, in order to ensure the religious and moral development of the audience by enlightening them on religious matters (Cirit, 2012).

This study is concerned with sermons, a key genre of religious discourse, with a special focus on the contemporary practices of women preachers delivering

the sermon. The sermon is certainly not a new phenomenon. The history of the Islamic sermon dates back to the early years of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad himself as the first preacher began to call people to Islam by giving sermons in public from the early years of his prophecy (Arnold, 1935). He recited the Quran to people and preached Islam. So, the Islamic sermon, as an old but never-ending process, is still a living practice that pertains to the Muslim obligation to live according to the rules of Islam. However, what is “new” - and that is what I must stress here- about this longstanding tradition is that preaching becomes institutionally formalized and professionalized by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*).

1. 1 The *Diyanet* as a provider of sermons for women

The *Diyanet*, as an administrative unit of the state, is charged with illuminating society on religious matters and the way Islamic practices are conducted in the Turkish Republic (Gözaydın, 2008). After the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, the role of the *Diyanet* increased and expanded considerably. Especially in the last decades, there is a remarkable increase in the work targeted towards women. The *Diyanet* has increased the number and competencies of its women personnel and expanded its services in this direction to reach as many women as possible and, as Gözaydın (2009) stresses, this increase took place in the mid-2000s, soon after the AKP came to power.

The number of women preachers appointed by the *Diyanet* was 28 in 1992, increased to 57 in 2001, and reached 222 in 2009 (Öcal, 2014). In 2009, Hassan claims that women preachers constituted over one-fourth of the total number of preachers (2011, p. 86).¹ However, after 2010, the *Diyanet* does not provide

¹ Since the *Diyanet* does not share old statistics, I used secondary sources and articles as references. The only exception is the Administration Annual Reports between 2010-2018, accessible on its web site: <https://stratejigelistirme.diyamet.gov.tr/sayfa/22/Faaliyet-Raporlari>

information on the number of preachers for male and female separately. Instead, it gives the total number of all preachers. Accordingly, the number of both male and female preachers was 1242 in 2010 and reached 2624 in 2018; 310 of these were in İstanbul (2018, İdari Faaliyet Raporu, DİB). We also have statistics on the total number of all women personnel (including preachers and other positions) at the *Diyanet*: 5.495 in 2005, increasing to 11.041 in 2010 (Yıldız, 2018).

The increase in the number of women employed in the *Diyanet* is often traced to the presidency of Ali Bardakoğlu (2003-2010). In his period, high-level occupational positions were made available to women personnel through the implementation of a quota system for women in vice-mufti positions (Çakır & Bozan, 2005, p. 35). For example, in 2005, two women were appointed as vice-muftis for the first time in the *Diyanet*. The number of women vice-müftü reached 11 in 2010 (Yıldız, 2018, p. 88) and in April 2019 the *Diyanet* announced that they would appoint other women vice-müftü in 36 provinces of Turkey (“Diyanet 36 ile kadın”, 2019). In addition, Huriye Martı was appointed as one of the five vice-presidents of the *Diyanet* in 2017, becoming the first woman charged with this position.

The *Diyanet* Strategic Plan (2009) also brought up the issue of women’s access to mosques and suggested some regulations in this respect. Furthermore, the *Diyanet* supports women’s participation in public life and speaks about women’s rights and violence against women (Gözaydın, 2009). Women-related issues, such as women’s rights, gender equality and elimination of violence, have been articulated in the sermons and have been subject of 413 Friday sermons between 2007 and 2009 (Yıldız, 2018, p. 88). Additionally, the *Diyanet* opened Family Guidance and Counseling Bureaus in which women talk about their problems and take advice. It is clearly seen that the *Diyanet* developed many initiatives concerning women. Sunier

and Landman summarize the *Diyanet*'s initiatives into three main areas: 1. encouraging public debates on the role of women in society; 2. Running specific activities for women; and 3. turning mosques into less male-dominated places.” (2011, p. 70).

It could be said that all these activities amount to a “gender policy” articulated by the *Diyanet*, a policy in line with the perspectives of the government aiming to increase religiosity among the population.. In the meeting marking “Mosques and Religious Officials Week” at the Presidential Complex on October 2018, President Erdoğan noted that there was a taboo against women in mosques and said:

“There are still mentalities that show these bad traditions as Islam. We need to get rid of these. Did not Ayşe (the wife of the Prophet) give hadith lessons in the mosque? Is there a verse or hadith that bars women from going to mosques? I have never heard of nor have I read such a thing. My tutors have never taught me anything like that. These false beliefs need to be dispelled now, and this needs to be done by the head of the *Diyanet*. We will get through this because we are confronted with very strange situations. If the vice-president of the *Diyanet* is currently a woman², that is a sign that such taboos are being destroyed.” (“Turkish President Erdoğan”, 2018)

The President’s emphasis on “false belief” and his efforts to call the *Diyanet* to duty is important in understanding the function of the *Diyanet* as a state institution. These *Diyanet* regulations targeting women are related to its aim to control and monitor religion as well as to reshape the people’s understanding and interpretation of Islam. However, in addition to its ongoing activities, the *Diyanet*, as Sunier and Landman cleverly stress, concentrated on its public role in recent years (2011, p. 140). Thus, current the emphasis on religious educational services in the mosques is not a coincidence. By employing women preachers in the mosques’ public realm, the *Diyanet* aims to reach more women to transfer “true” knowledge of Islam to.

Very recently, President Erdoğan commented on the function of mosques, which is, again, parallel to the aim of the *Diyanet*. On May 10, 2019 at the opening

² He meant Huri Marti, who has been the vice-president since 2017.

of a mosque, Erdoğan said:

“Mosques where children and the young do not come, and women can not claim as their own are doomed to be abandoned. We need to encourage a mosque-centered life”
 (“Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Cami Merkezli”, 2019, Appendix, 1)

This discourse of mosque-centered life or bringing back mosques to life, find an important place in the *Diyanet*'s agenda. They aim to make mosques available for women, attractive for children and the youth and more preferable than the places run by different religious groups and sects. Gözaydın (2009) interprets this transformation as a change in the societal role of the Diyanet. Mosques used to be very limited to worship; people would pray there and leave it immediately. It is because, she says, the state in the early years of the Republic wanted to limit the effects of religion on people. So, it is hoped that by centering mosques in people's lives will reverse this situation and have the opposite effect of increasing the influence of religion. Namely, it is not only about people's access to mosques, rather the aim is about “making [mosques] more accessible to the *Diyanet*” (Sunier & Landman, 2011, p. 69).

The *Diyanet*'s aim to reach people is related to its role in the production and transmission of religious knowledge. The *Diyanet* has a claim to represent “true” Islam. In that direction, it aims 1) to investigate, examine and take measures against superstition to contribute to the production of authentic religious knowledge; 2) to contribute to what it deems is the correct understanding of Islam as a whole; 3) to provide services for the correct learning of Islam by all segments of society and 4) to contribute to unity, solidarity and peace within the society (2018, İdari Faaliyet Raporu, DİB). As a representative of “official Islam”, the *Diyanet* positions itself in a more intellectual and rationalist role, and is against superstitions and aspects of folk and traditional Islam. The *Diyanet* is also seen by the state as a protection against the spread of the various religious sects that promote an Islam that is different than the

more rational state-based interpretations of Islamic sources. For example, one of the *Diyanet*'s publications in 2006 pointed to 1,380 superstitions and identified them as “having no place in Islam” (Sunier & Landman, 2011, p. 97).

As Kara (2015, p. 107) states, the *Diyanet* believes that the Quran needs to be interpreted through science and reason. Behind this thought, he says, there is fear that otherwise the Quran and Islam will no longer be in use in the present day and age. Thus, the *Diyanet* tries to bring religion in line with the contemporary circumstances of the modern world by using its tools. However, it is not only about the question of how to translate religious knowledge to the modern world. I believe that it is very much related to the role of the *Diyanet* in controlling religion in society. It is believed that religion fills an important gap, and if *Diyanet* does not fill this gap with “proper” and “true” Islam, other informal Islamic groups will. Therefore, it is also about the question of “who will carry the message of Islam to the believers.” In the speech I cited above Erdoğan also says:

“False beliefs about Islam have been used by certain terrorist groups to exploit people’s faith and the *Diyanet* needs to step in to dispel such beliefs... The reason why groups such as FETÖ and Daesh could gain a foothold in society is because there are spiritual gaps, which our institutions fail to fill.” (“Turkish President Erdoğan”, 2018)

The *Diyanet*, as the highest official religious authority in Turkey, has a mission to manage the religious domain. It avoids conflict with other religious groups, but, on the other hand, it takes a distance from them to monopolize “true” and “correct” Islamic knowledge.³ Therefore, I am critical of arguments that suggest a shift in the role of the *Diyanet* from controlling religion to expanding the realm of religion (Yıldız, 2018, p. 19). Rather, I think the *Diyanet* never gave up the role of controlling religion. It is true that it expanded its scope and services in recent years and

³ But of course it cannot succeed to monopolize religion. As Sunier and Landman cleverly stressed: “The initial aim behind the establishment of *Diyanet* may have been to promote a single Islam controlled by the state, but in reality *Diyanet* has never had a monopoly in this sphere and always had to cooperate with *cemaats*” (2011, p. 114).

promoted religion in the public realm, but still, it maintained its control over these. What changed is that the Republican elite's nationalist and secularist perspective to limit religion is transformed into government's conservative and religious perspective to expand religion. However, the controlling mission and authoritative position of the *Diyanet* remained.

This expansion of religion, therefore, includes women, children and the youth, as well as people from different religious and social groups. Mosques, in this picture, come forward as significant places that prevent people from being attracted to other religious movements outside the control of the *Diyanet*. It is possible to think that the explicit encouragement for women's participation is because they are attributed with the role of mothers responsible for educating the future generations. However, an anecdote from the interview with the vice-director of the *Diyanet* in 2009, is very interesting in that it shows how they consider women as a means to reach larger masses in a different way:

“Women have better communication skills than us, men. They narrate what they hear to the neighbors, kids, relatives, they narrate during their tea gatherings and gold days; they narrate to their friends. Therefore, they have a large network, and they are more effective in terms of narrating the tenets of the religion. This was not really noticed until recently. Therefore we found it very important to inform Muslim women, especially with regards to informing the representatives of the future, the children. Thus we started to emphasize guidance (*irşad*) activities addressing women.” (Hassan, 2011, p. 98).

Providing positions for women in public spaces as preachers and supporting the women population with religious instructions occurs in parallel with the state's aim to expand religion. We must ask, how sermons, as a practice central to the religious experience, are functionalized to transmit the religious message within this particular time and place.

Many scholars have studied the *Diyanet* as the object of their researches and the focus of these studies was mainly about the relation between the state and religion. İřtar Tarhanlı Gözaydın's book, entitled “*Diyanet*” (2009) is certainly one

of the comprehensive one among the studies regarding the Diyanet. She provided historical transformation of the *Diyanet*. Following similar direction, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (2016) focused on the Diyanet's transformation in recent years and analyzed its evolving process under the AKP period. However, limited number of studies investigates the Diyanet regarding its services and practices for women. Ece Han Genç Yıldız (2018), for example, explained evolving the role of the Diyanet and its implications for women. The researches of Mona Hassan (2011) and Maritato (2015) especially focus on the role of women preachers in the secular state.

Despite the fact that scholars have undertaken numerous studies about the relation between the state and religion by focusing on the Directorate, scant attention has been paid to the ways this relation is exercised in the everyday. The actors and the contexts in which religious practices have been conveyed to the population at large, the means available to these actors and the limitations of these processes of transmission have not been the object of analysis. This study, hopefully will contribute to the literature by concentrating on the actors (the preachers), products (sermons) and the practices (preaching).

1. 2 Women preachers as carriers of the sermons

Women preachers who make up the object of this study are officials of the *Diyanet*. To be a preacher in the *Diyanet*, they must be graduates of a theological faculty. Master and doctoral degrees in religious studies are highly preferred. In addition to formal religious education, they are also expected to undergo other specific procedures. For example, they have to pass a general civil-servant examination (KPSS, Kamu Personel Seçme Sınavı) as well as the proficiency examination of preaching administered by the *Diyanet*. When they are hired, they also take some professional training (Hassan, 2011). These preachers have a high religious expertise,

but their competency is not limited to formal education; they also gain experience in their profession because they give sermons in mosques and other places, teach lessons on Quranic exegesis, work in the Offices of Family Guidance and Counseling Bureaus (Aile İrşat ve Rehberlik Büroları) and answer questions posed in Alo Fetva Line (Alo Fetva Hattı). Therefore, they are constantly in touch with people, especially with women. The preachers' authority of being an official of the *Diyanet* is supported by the experiences they gain in the field. Under the institutionalized form of religious authority provided by the *Diyanet*, preachers have a double role: they are both religious scholars, experts on matters of Islam and civil servants of the state providing services to society (Hassan, 2011). This, in turn, gives them a “mediator” position between the *Diyanet* and the public, as well as between religious knowledge and people's lives. So, these preachers negotiate between state and civil groups, between the practices of different interpretations of Islam such as more popular or traditional understandings. They also negotiate between different religious groups, sects and authorities.

Women preachers have an authority coming mainly from their special knowledge of Islam. However, being an official of the *Diyanet* supports this authority by giving them a space for publicly speaking, which, in turn supports women active involvement in the articulation of religious knowledge. Women are involved in the process of religious education not only as learners, but also as teachers. This position is in a sense similar to the way the state employed women teachers in the early years of the Republic when they were charged with the task of teaching modernity to society (Kandiyoti, 1991). Thus, having women teach a particular way of life is not a novelty in modern Turkey.

Yet, the question that arises here is that despite their training in religious

knowledge, are these preachers regarded as authority in women's issues or religious matters? Even though they follow similar educational processes as their male colleagues, these preachers experience many problems just because they are women. Their work and efforts are disdained even by their colleagues. And also some people disdain their work because they are officials of the *Diyanet*.

Another question pertains to whether or not women teach Islam differently than their male colleagues, whether or not their sermons empower women or provide women with a more women-centered view of their place in society. The following chapters will address these questions as the ambivalences faced by women as preachers.

1. 3 On fieldwork

In the very beginning of my research, I had a plan to conduct a study on the use of *kıssa* –short story with a parable- in religious speeches. I was wondering how these short stories function in religious discourse; where, when, how and in which context these stories are used and what they do in the transmission of religious message. For this purpose, I began to participate in sermons taking place in various formal and informal assemblies. To decide my fieldwork site, I attended, as much as possible, sermons delivered by different religious groups and sects with the expectation to come across a random use of *kıssa* in these gatherings. However, things did not go as I planned. Above all, the sermons I attended were diverse in many respects and it would be impossible to ignore these different contexts and only take *kıssa* into account. Besides, they did not tell much of a story, as I had hoped. I was like an example of what professors teach at ethnography classes that what you face in the field does not always match your expectation.

So, I began to worry about the fate of my research and look for the other sites that had a potential to use *kıssa* more. In those days, I came across a notice hanging on the entrance door of the mosque at Beylerbeyi, informing about the sermon of a woman preacher for woman congregation after the noon prayer every Monday. Before seeing this notice, I had no idea of these sermons. Despite my prejudice -she was an official from the *Diyanet* so I assumed she followed a formal and structural way of preaching that probably did not use any story in her speech- still I liked the idea of a woman preacher giving a sermon at the mosque and wondered how things would go. The next Monday I went to this mosque at the time of the sermon. After the noon prayer, while the male congregation began to move out of the mosque and some women among the congregation also left the mosque after finishing the congregational prayer, some women were still sitting and waiting for the preacher. Then, a woman among the congregation moved forward and sat down on the *mihrap* –a niche in a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca- and I understood that she was the preacher. When the preacher sat on the *mihrap*, other women came and sat around her in a semi-circle position. I, also, sat down with them. Then the preacher began to give a sermon to the women audience.

I deliberately detailed this first encounter because this was an unusual experience for me. All other meetings I attended for my study –except Karagümrük Tekkesi and Sümbül Efendi Türbesi- took place at houses and only among women. In mosques, I was used to seeing *imams* speak to both women and men, but woman’s preaching at mosques was something that I had not come across and had never heard before. Therefore, this scene of a woman preacher giving a sermon to a woman congregation at the center of the mosque was surprising to me. When I talked to

people about my research, I realized that so many people are not informed of such women preachers.

In my first participation in this gathering, I listened to the sermon while wondering whether she would use *kissa*. As far as I remember, she did not tell any *kissa* during this sermon which lasted almost an hour, but still I decided to come again next week. I participated in this preacher's sermons for a few times, but also was continuing to look for other meetings that I could follow. During this time, I did not tell the preacher anything about my research project because I was just checking whether they used *kissa* or not. Because these sermons are open to everyone, no one asked me anything. And even though I was obviously younger than the majority of women and easily recognized as an "outsider", they did not regard me as a stranger.

After attending several sermons by the same preacher, I see that these sermons were not what I had assumed. I realized that I had some prejudices because the sermons were carried by the *Diyanet* and this made me expect a specific form. But, in time, I began to question my own judgment. Although I was there as a researcher, sometimes I found myself in the position of a listener. The preacher was able to catch my attention by her sayings. I emphasized my own impression and experience because I think it has influenced the way the thesis is shaped. As you will see, the chapters are formed around my own interaction with the field so that space – mosque-, content and the narrative style constitute the pillars of the thesis.

1. 4 Conducting the research

After I decided to study preaching in mosques, first I explained it to the preacher whom I was already following for a while. I mentioned my thoughts and research project and presented my intention to study the practice of women preachers. The first reaction of the preacher was to ask if it was theological or not. She asked me if I

was from the theology department. When I said my department was sociology and my research is not a theological in nature, she seemed more relaxed. I think, she relaxed since I will not evaluating her lessons theologically. Then she directed me to the woman who is responsible for women preachers in Üsküdar district. I met with this woman and again explained my research intention. She gave me the schedule of preachings in Üsküdar in which women sermons in different mosques were listed with dates for the next six months.

The *Diyanet* employs 17 preachers in Üsküdar district; nine of them are women (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Üsküdar Müftülüğü, 2016). While I was conducting fieldwork, there were six women preachers being appointed to give sermons in different mosques. In 24 out of 190 mosques⁴ in Üsküdar district, these six preachers were regularly delivering services. There were other places where they gave sermons, such as cultural centers and women's shelters, but I followed sermons taking place only in mosques. By following the list she gave me, I began to visit different mosques to listen to sermons. During my research, one of these six preachers was on leave, so I was able to participate in five preachers' mosque sermons.

The methodology of this research combines participant observation of women sermons and in-depth unstructured interviews with the women preachers. The fieldwork on which this study is based was conducted between April and June of 2017. Also, I revisited preachers and conducted interviews in May and June 2018.

1. 5 Overview of the chapters

This thesis identifies the space of narration, the content of the narrative and narrative structure as three important dimensions of sermons. It thereby focuses on the

⁴ List of all mosques in different districts accessible on the *Diyanet* web-page through: <https://camiler.diyamet.gov.tr/>

analysis of sermons delivered by women preachers to an audience of women in mosques. I aim to analyze the process by which the Islamic message is interpreted and transferred by the women preachers to the congregation of women.

Chapter 2 brings up the question of space with a particular interest and discusses the preaching activities taking place in mosques. The tension in women's relation with the mosque constitutes the main issue in this chapter. It questions how these women preaching practices deal with the "male-gendered spatiality" of mosques and whether, or how, they challenge or destabilize male authority. Here, the issue of women's access to mosques is explored through the practices of speaking, attending and listening that take place in an otherwise male-dominated space. Moreover, this chapter tries to explore the space-specific atmosphere of the mosque as determining on the effects of the sermon.

The second chapter is focused on what is transmitted as the message of Islam through preaching, as practices through which people are informed about how to conduct their daily lives. To achieve this, I discuss how preaching functions as a way to make of a good Muslim and to expand the knowledge of Islam. Here, the content of the sermons is a crucial means to trace what is preferred to transmit to the audience. Since these sermons target specifically women, what is "suggested" to the women audience constitutes the main concern of this chapter. In their claiming a "true" knowledge of Islam, what do these sermons propose for the ideal Muslim women?

The last chapter focuses on the way women preachers narrate. It aims to understand the relation between morality and narrative by asking the question: how are ethical and religious explorations transmitted in the form of preaching? What is

stressed is not only the vocabularies, words and stories used in the narration, but also the stylistic elements that carry the affective capacity of the sermons.

I conclude by asking questions regarding the effects of having women preachers preach in mosques. What happens when women are used by higher authorities to transmit a large public message regarding the nation or the religion? Does this message get transmitted as is, or are the transformations it undergoes when it is transmitted by women provide more space for action to women?

CHAPTER 2

THE MOSQUE AS A SPACE OF NEGOTIATION

Soon after male congregation finished the prayer and began to leave the mosque, the women preacher comes to the main part of the mosque, sits on the prayer niche (*mihrab*) with a lectern in front of her and waits for the gathering of the women congregation. Some women had come in beforehand to perform the prayer with the congregation while some others came on time to hear the sermon in particular. The woman preacher sits in a way that she can see all members of the congregation sitting in a semicircle around her. By the way, she can address the whole congregation from the main prayer part. The older ones in the group prefer to sit on the right side of the circle because where they can lean back on the pulpit (*minber*). While some of them sit in a cross-legged position, others kneel or sit with their legs straight. However, all members of the congregation sit in a way that they all see the preacher directly, and the preacher can see them all, too. The sermon usually takes an hour beginning with the blessing, reciting the Quran that is supplemented by hadiths and narrating some examples about words and acts from the life of Prophet Mohammad and his companions. Some in the congregation only listen while others take notes or follow meaning of the Quran.

Such a scene of women gathering around the preacher to listen to Islamic edict is likely quite familiar to many members of the Muslim community. However, what is strikingly interesting here is to see this group of women in the main prayer area of the mosque that is generally attributed man-reserved area. Even though it has been strongly argued that since the beginning of Islam, women were part of the religious settings and actively engage in religious activities both as learners and

instructors; in practice, things have been gone in men's favor. Traditionally in Turkey, using mosque is regarded as predominantly a male privilege and women have noticeably little access to it. Several mosques stand out by its lack of proper conditions for women to perform ablution and worship.

Mosques are important in this study with two aspects. First, I will deal with the question of how women's preaching in the mosques affects the male-privileged tradition. While doing this, I will focus on the debates over women's presence in the mosque and the problems of women's access as well as how women experienced it and how they negotiate with this problem by using religious discourse. Besides, I will explain preachers' special positions as the religious experts and the officials of the *Diyanet* to face this problem. Whether and how the preachers are challenging and contesting the traditional view of women exclusion. This chapter aims to show how this negotiation is conducting. Secondly, mosques matter in the sense that worship or the sermon is potentially powerful in its original and authentic setting. The mosques as sacred religious spaces are believed having a spiritual atmosphere in which the worship and praying is more affective and valuable. So, I will also trace the space-specific importance of the mosques both for delivering sermons therein and for women's experiences.

Women's participation in the mosques appears to be changing. Challenges regarding the access of women to the mosques take attention and are discussed by different groups, and requests in this direction find an expression on different stages. Religious officials from various positions, writers, journalists reflect on the issue several times. Many women express their unfortunate mosque experience and share their feelings and opinions via the Internet and social media. While some of these efforts remain on the level of reproach, but some have pushed the issue of access and

participation in mosques by turning their demands into the campaign⁵.

Problems about women's access to the mosques reached the *Diyanet* and find a way into its agenda. The *Diyanet* supported women participation in mosques and extended the works for women inclusion in the religious public spaces. To support women's religious engagement, they increased the number of women religious officials and expanded their working areas in recent years. They organized of mosque-centered religious programs for women, made some revisions to improve the sections allocated to women in mosques and increased the number of space for women ablutions. These are some examples of regulation in the *Diyanet's* program. In 2013, they started particular project specifically focusing on this issue and trying to solve it: *Camilerin Kadınlar Bölümünü Güzelleştirme Projesi* (Beautification of Women Sections of Mosques Project)"(Avcı, 2013).⁶ However, because the question of women attendance to mosques is not only limited to the physical and technical obstacles on the space, negative perception and attitudes toward women's participation of mosques on the intellectual level also come forward as more problematic. The *Diyanet* realizes the disapproval of women mosque attendance as a widespread phenomenon and works to revise this belief through different channels on the intellectual field. Articles, sermons, or *khutbas* putting the practices of the Prophet time forefront can be considered as some efforts conducted for this purpose.

2. 1 Women in the mosque

As in the most issues of Islamic postulates, the question of women's positions in mosques is also discussed around the aspect of historical descriptions of women's

⁵ There is a group of women organized around the campaign named "*Kadınlar Camilerde*" (Women in Mosques) in which they work to push the issue of women's access and participation in the mosques.

⁶ The main objective of this project was to improve the spaces reserved for women prayer in more than 3000 mosques in İstanbul. However, although it is possible to reach many news and text informing this project, there is not any report or new that is accessible informing how it ends up.

activities at the time of the Prophet.⁷ Because the Quran does not directly inform us about the position of women in mosques, the *sunna* as a secondary source of Islamic edict is applied to clarify the situation. However, it is essential to note that even though the Quran does not provide clear judgment, there is no restriction on women's participation in the mosque as well (Yılmaz, 2007, p. 115). So, the question "what was the situation at the time of the Prophet?" constitutes a base for the arguments on the Islamic legal status of women's presence in mosques.

Researchers argue that in the early years of Islam, women participated in communal daily prayers, Friday prayers and salah-al-eid. They were also able to listen the khutbas and sermons of the Prophet himself (Yılmaz, 2007; Görmez, 2013). It is said that the mosque of the Prophet was not only a place where women took part in communal prayers; it was also an educational setting in which women got knowledge of religious and social life via sermons (Yılmaz, 2007, p. 115). Women's participation in congregational prayer in Medina during in his lifetime is suggested by the large number of *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) (Lehman, 2012, p. 494).

In Turkey, the *Diyanet* carries out some work to put the record straight and shed light on women's attendance to mosque. For example, in 2013, its official monthly journal of the *Diyanet* has published a special issue entitled "Mosque, Women and Family" focusing specifically on this topic. In this special issue, women participation in the mosque is discussed in detail in relation to the *sunna*.⁸ These articles bring the examples of the Prophet's time to show the acceptance of women within mosques.

Taking into account the importance of past examples and practices in the

⁷ For detailed information on this issue see, "*Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice*" by Marion Holmes Katz which examines the evolution of legal doctrines and argumentation regarding women's participation in mosque-based prayer.

⁸ "Would anyone set *fitnah* as an obstacle to women's attendance to mosque?" and "The place of mosques to create social awareness among women" are some examples of the articles in the issue.

structure of Islamic authority, these experiences from the period of the Prophet Muhammad play a vital role in re-defining women's position and in expanding their participation in public religious spaces at the present time.

The participation of women in the mosque seems explicitly stated in the *hadiths* and reports from the time of the Prophet. The most common *hadith*, a prominent one, is the one reporting that the Prophet has declared, "Do not prevent the maidservants of God from [going to] the mosques of God" (Katz, 2013, p. 191). However, as Katz (2013) incisively stresses, while this *hadith* acknowledges and confirms the rights of women in mosques, it also indicates the early resistance to it even during the lifetime of the Prophet. So, to study the women-mosque relation, one must keep in mind the trajectory of this notion of disapproval and opposition for the right of women to participate in mosques, which likely started very early.

Considering women's engagement with the mosques, it is crucial to note that we cannot mention monolithic and uniform women's mosque attendance throughout the Islamic history. It changes over time. Asma Sayeed states "women mosque attendance and participation is characterized by tremendous diversity across time and place and dependent on numerous factors" (as cited in Katz, 2014, p. 2). One of these factors is no doubt about the changes in the position of the mosque during Islamic history. A complicating situation comes from the problem of historical reconstruction regarding the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad. How the Muslim believers in today's world associate with the practices of the Prophet's time opens up a space for controversy. The position of the mosque in the social life of the Muslim community is one that changed over time. The most frequent idea is that mosques used to play an active role in the organization of social life:

"There (masjid) Muhammad taught the Qur'an as revealed to him, elaborated upon the commandments, led the ritual prayers, received delegations, settled disputes, planned campaigns, assigned tasks, and socialized with his family and community. This place became

the crucible for genetic codes that are at the core of continuity in basic religious practices and institutions, especially the mosque, all across the Muslim world.” (Haider, 2005, p. 6206)

The function of mosques was not only limited to providing a space for worship. They were a place where Muslims came together and settled their affairs (Diyanet Tv, 2018). In the time of the Prophet, religion and politics were intertwined in everyday life and mosques were the center of both Muslim religious and community life. Mosques have long been centers of religion, education, culture and social life (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2018). But in time, new places and institutions were organized for each different domain in which social affairs work. Hence, mosques gave place to new foundations by affecting this transformation and became a space only for worship and prayer (Meriç, 2013, p. 16). The *Diyanet* aims to bring this central position of the mosques back in Muslim lives. Women sermons in mosques, therefore, should be considered from this aspect.

2. 2 The issue of access

Despite the fact that the *sunna* of the Prophet gives women access to the mosques and the *Diyanet* puts forward evidence and promotes it, many mosques in Turkey still practice segregation and exclude women at different levels. While men benefit predominately from the sermons, khutbas and other religious activities in the mosques, women cannot have the same opportunity to receive this education from the mosque (Yılmaz, 2007, p. 107).

Many mosques are not comfortable to host women even for worship. The difficulty women face in accessing mosques is mainly due to the lack of proper physical conditions and the improper behaviour of some male members of the congregation. Kadriye Erdemli, who is the Former Istanbul Mufti Deputy, speaks about the contemporary situation of mosques for women, saying:

“Women were able to perform their prayer in the main area of the mosque in accordance

with the order and could have the feeling and knowledge of being a part of the congregation in the time of the Prophet. However, in Turkey now they have to pray in basement and designated small areas. The places where women perform ablution were not considered at all. These small places are either physically segregated from the mosques or seperated via curtains. This, in turn, is effective for women not to come to the mosque unless they have to.” (“Kadınlar camiden neden”, 2015, Appendix, 2)

Segregated area from the mosque, lack of healthy and clean prayer conditions, physically small spaces, inability to see the congregation and *imam*, inadequate air conditioning facilities and being confronted with a locked door in the prayer room are some examples of the challenges women often experience regarding access to the mosque.

Unfortunately, in many mosques, women pray in storeroom-like places in which cleaning materials and redundant things are left. These all refer to lack of physical and material conditions. However, the particular question of women’s access to mosques is not only related to the problems of physical conditions. Beyond this, there is the difficulty on an intellectual level. And even, the reason behind deeming these places suitable for women based on this intellection. They do not directly prohibit women’s participation in prayers at the mosques, but they do not see it as a necessity. So, they make women feel uncomfortable at mosques. The women preacher-in chief of Üsküdar district, Fatma Bayram, wrote about this feeling among women of “unwanted” in the article titled “*The Women Believers of Mosques*”:

“Did you ever feel “unwanted” when you entered the place, by those who act like the owner of the place? Here in our country, unfortunately most women feel like this, not only in Ramadan but whenever they go to mosque. Not only those who go to the mosque, but even the most irrelevant people around look as if they say “what are they (women) doing here!”. Those who don’t mind talking to any women outside the mosque, treat a woman who came to the mosque as “they were there to tempt them”. Even if you count hundreds, you cannot enter mosques in peace if three or five retired uncles do not approve, because they used to use mosques as their shelter and they repel you someway.” (Bayram, 2015; Appendix, 3)

This anecdote exemplifies that the issue of women’s access is very much related to the issue of power and authority. This sense of feeling “unwanted” and of subordination is a determinant of the degree to which women attend mosques and of the activities in which they engage in when they are there. Some women have

internalized this situation so much that they try not to be seen in there and act very quickly while they enter and go out of the mosque. The assumption of the mosque as man's space is so common and settled that women feel and are made to feel unwanted and hesitant in their relationship with the mosque. Those who are aware of their rights in the mosque as equal to men and do not hesitate to be in the mosque also encounter a strongly male-dominated and male-controlled environment. One of the widespread treatments that almost every Muslim woman in Turkey has experienced in different ways at least once in her lifetime shows itself in the very first stage of entering the mosque: as soon as any woman enters the door of the mosque, someone from the male congregation situated here at that time immediately shows and directs her to the designated space for women and says: "ladies, this way!" ("bayanlar yeri bu taraf"). Men show women where to pray. Fatma Bayram, to illustrate this situation of women in the mosque, draws an analogy through the conceptualization of women as refugees of the mosques. In her web article of "*Women: Refugees of the Mosques*", she writes:

"Mosques are the houses of God on earth. The houses of God belong to all the servants of God. We stay there as long as we want; we pray, read the Quran, worship, do our works, study, listen to sermons and even rest. These are our meeting points, a place of haunt and home as much as our home. It must be this way; that's what we learned from our Prophet. However, in our country, if you are a woman, especially a woman with children, both the way you enter and exit the mosque is, to say the least, fearful. Those who pretend like the owner or the undisputed authority of the mosques try to repel you from the mosque by looking daggers at you, grumbling and finally by coming to you and interfering. If this mindset- which is disturbed by the crowd going in and out of the mosque, by the children's chirps, by the *ilm* communities, in short, disturbed by every member of the community using mosques actively in every moment of the day- is not limited to a few obsessed men or women in the congregation and if this mindset reaches the officials of the mosque then that is the day of our death. Those who act in this way consider only to maintain their power and control over the area. As if the mosque is their country and women and children are refugees who push the borders." (Bayram, 2016, Appendix, 4)

This analogy is very helpful to understand women's religious engagement and women inclusion in the religious public spaces. Mosques are perceived widely as belonging to men so that any act questioning this is regarded as crossing the line, which in turn, disenfranchises women and ends up with their preclusion from

participating in the mosques. The traditional male-dominated religious establishment makes it possible for men to set the limits on women's mosque access.

This anecdote is also important since it mentions that even the officials of the mosques act against women's participation. I will discuss later in this chapter how some of these men make things difficult for women.

One of the most striking examples of men's interference took place in Fatih Mosque this year. An essay began to circulate on the net with the title of "*Exclusion from Fatih Mosque: What are we trying to prove?*"⁹ in which a woman writes about what happened at the mosque. The woman tells us that after performing evening prayer at the designated space for women (*üst mahfil*), she and another woman sit down behind the wooden barriers in the main area which separate men's prayer area from the rest of the mosque, especially in the big historical mosques, to prevent confusion between those who came for a visit and those who came for worship. Then, two other women come and sit next to them. Right after, the security staff comes and warns these four women not to sit there and directs them to go to the women's place at the back of the mosque. The woman replies to him by saying, "we are not praying, we are just sitting and we do not even sit in the men's area". Just then, the *imam* of the mosque comes and says, "you cannot sit here, get up. Men are disturbed". The women insist that they are not sitting in the men's area. The women and the *imam* argue with each other and some men from the congregation gather around them. During the discussion, the *imam* takes the floor and says, "what are you trying to prove?" ("Fatih Camii'nden Kovulmak", 2018). This sentence clearly exemplifies how women are marginalized when they raise a question in the strongly male-controlled environment of the mosque.

⁹ To read the story from the first person's account, see:
<http://kadinlarcamilerde.com/neyi-ispattlamaya-calisiyoruz/>

Whether the mosques are preferable for women or not, how they enter and go out of the mosque, where women are going to pray, how they behave inside the mosque etc. -these are all still a matter of debate regarding women's participation in mosques.

2. 3 Being a woman preacher at the mosque

My fieldwork on different mosques with various preachers is important in that it shows us how women preachers use different interpretations and contrasting activities on women's access to the mosques. Even though they mostly agree on the right of women to be in mosques as equals to men and explicitly complain about the existing situation in many mosques regarding facilities and access for women, in practice, they show different approaches to cope with the issue. First of all, I must say that the preachers are perfectly aware of the undesirable conditions of women's access in mosques and some male congregations' unwelcoming treatment.¹⁰ As a pious Muslim woman performing the daily-required prayers, the preachers already come across the conditions that ordinary Muslim women face in the mosques on a regular basis. However, as they give lessons at the mosque, they experience more than that. As a women preacher authorized by the *Diyanet* to give a speech at mosques, they directly become the object of the question of women's participation in mosques.

The position of the woman preacher is different in some respects to the woman who is in the mosque for worship and prayer. Above all, the preachers are institutionally authorized by the *Diyanet* to inform women of the congregation about Islam. Their competency on religious issues is acknowledged and they are officially qualified. That these preachers take up a space in the mosques to teach other women

¹⁰ Some anecdotes above criticize the limited access of mosques for women are all the statements of reputed women preachers of the *Diyanet*, such as Fatma Bayram, Kadriye Erdemli and Nevin Meriç.

points to their leadership roles as instructors in the religious public space. Thus, we can assume that women preachers at mosque have an authority and leadership position. How this leadership position influences women's access to mosques, involvement and experience therein and what it reveals about the traditionally male-dominated structure of the mosques constitute a matter of discussion in this chapter.

Even though they are authorized by the *Diyanet* and charged with preaching at mosques, they are still exposed to pressure and have to find a way to deal with this. In order to understand the position of the preachers' in the mosque, first we need to take into consideration whom women preachers are in contact with. Because mosques are their places of duty, they are engaged in a relationship with other components of the mosques such as the *imam*, the *muezzin*, attendant men and the male congregation. Preachers have to be in contact with these different groups of people to carry out their job efficiently and have to collaborate with them to be able to perform sermons actively in the mosques.

What women preachers experience in the mosques to deliver sermons shows us that the *Diyanet's* remark on women's mosque access in general or agreement on it by high-level officials is not enough in itself. In our interview, one of my preachers expressed it in the following way:

“At mosques, we are on tenterhooks awaiting whether someone will come and say “That's enough, get out”. We are always on tenterhooks, even though the administration tries to regulate it. From the technician man in charge, to the *imam* and *muezzin*, all components from all stages of this process need to be convinced because authorities are not always there. Although *muftis* gather *imams* and ask them to support and pave the way for women sermons, if the *imam* or the *muezzin* charged with that mosque does not internalize it... I have many experiences in this direction. They can get a hundred women out of the mosque for taking two or three retired men in by saying “get out, prayer time is closing in.” But our time therein was already planned.” (Appendix, 5)

The number of the male congregation is mostly given as a reason for the unequal conditions between men and women in mosques. Also, it is suggested that since the male congregation outnumbers women in general, the mosque space is designated in

favor of men. However, as we see, the plurality of women in number does not make things easier and change the situation on behalf of women. So, the temporary “privilege” of the women preacher during the sermon can be interrupted by the interference of the male congregation.

In some cases, men’s resistance to and disapproval of women at the mosque go beyond the level of interference and result in preclusion. For example, one of my preachers said that she could not continue to preach at one of her mosques because of the difficulties raised by the male attendants:

“There are those (male attendants) who help, but rarely, there are those who hamper. At one of the mosques I was preaching in, I really could not go on after a while. Each time I went, the door was closed. Each time, I was making a phone call to the attendant to come and open the door. Women were waiting during this time. I was going early before the preaching time but it still took time to open the door; sometimes he was not even there. Even if he opened the door, he intentionally opened the distant door to make the women walk more. It can be those who make such difficulties.” (Appendix, 6)

When I first heard this story, I was really surprised about how an authorized official of the *Diyanet* was having such trouble at the official mosque of the *Diyanet*.

However, this reveals how the disapproval of women at mosques is widely common and deeply pervasive. Also, it shows us how local actors such as the *imam*, *muezzin* or someone from the congregation are determinant on the daily functioning of the mosques. The Administration Annual Report, 2018 of the *Diyanet* also stresses the problem of managing the places of worship. It is written in the report that even though the places of mosques, masjids and their extensions are legally under the responsibility of the *Diyanet*, their ownership belongs to other people or institutions, which in turn, raises problems in management and in the works of the officials therein (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2018b).

The woman preacher as a weekly “visitor” of the mosque for one or two hours makes concessions to get on well with the local actors. So they have to find a practical and immediate solution to the current problems that they face at the

mosques. In our interview, one of my women preachers gives an example of such a situation:

“I can inform my chief to deal with the problems and difficulties that the male attendant cause. But, once you get into such a trouble with the man, how long you can keep going. Again, you will face with that man and continue to have trouble. I am trying to take him in hand and not to be in conflict with him because they can also influence the congregation. They know the environment and the congregation better, and when they make an announcement, they can reach more people.” (Appendix, 7)

As she states, women preachers feel obliged to get along well with the attendant man and the *imam* of the mosque in order to be able to disseminate the information of sermons for women. Because this is the only way that the preacher can reach women congregation via the *imams* and the attendant men of the mosque, she has to collaborate with them. *Imams* are those who are responsible and authorized to declare the information of sermons among the congregation. There are two ways used by the *Diyaret* for the announcement of the sermons for women. The first one is to hang an informative notice on the door of the mosque or somewhere close to the entrance of the mosque so that people can see and learn about the time of the sermon for women. This is mainly the duty of the attendant man or *imams*. (This is also how I coincidentally was informed about the sermons for women).

The second way is that imams make an announcement of the sermons for women during the prayer times or the Friday khutbah, where the male congregation is mostly present. This way, the male congregation is expected to inform their wives, daughters or women relatives about the sermons. In either case, as long as the women themselves do not come across the announcement, they are indirectly informed by the announcement of the *imams* and the mosque servants. That's why the position of the *imams* and mosque servants regarding how convinced and eager they are about the sermons for women is determinant on the whole process, from the announcement and dissemination of the sermons to the accessibility and facility of

the sessions at the mosque.

To be an official of the *Diyanet* alone is not enough to open all possibilities for women; on the one hand the gendered structure of the mosque is considered as difficult to change and traditionally viewed as rigid and, on the other hand, in case of resistance and disapproval of the male local actors, things get much worse. However, what is interesting for me is to see that some of the women preachers do not attribute any authority to themselves. They speak as if they were any of the women congregation, not an official of the *Diyanet*. Thus, they don't feel any obligation or they don't think to change or challenge the status quo in favor of women. And even, as seen in the women congregation's daily practice of worship, some women preachers similarly do not feel comfortable participating and leading activities at the mosque as well, which in turn, becomes apparent when they prefer where they deliver sermons.

The time for the sermon is arranged according to the prayer times that the congregation pray together under the leadership of the *imam*. Because mosques are most crowded in the prayer times and they pray all together at that time, women sermons are organized before/after the noon or the afternoon prayer. This way, the overlap of women preaching with the congregational prayer is resolved. As I described in the beginning of this chapter, some preachers use the main area of the mosque to meet with women audience by sitting in the prayer niche (*mihrab*) and they can benefit from the technical tools that the *imam* uses, such as a microphone or loudspeaker. But, some others do not prefer to use the main body of the mosque if space permits. For example, some mosques have small indoor closed areas nearby the court. Also, sometimes there are building for the Quran courses next to the mosques in which proper rooms or *mescit* may present. If such circumstances are

present, preachers may prefer to use these places. If there is not such an option and the mosque should be used, some of them may prefer to use women-segregated areas. As my preacher stated above, they may not want to struggle with some of the male congregation who are really disturbed by the existence of women at mosques. But sometimes, they consider using the main area of the mosques is like an occupying a place for the male congregation. Their position on where they use for delivering sermons depends on how they perceive the question of women's mosque use.

However, it is important to note clearly that while some of them give up fighting for the women's positions and adapt to certain conditions designed in favor of the male congregation, others use their authority and power originating from their official position to open a space on behalf of women. For example, one of my preachers explained how she feels responsible to teach the women congregation about their rights in the mosques. She mentions this issue very often in her sermons to inform women and to change their secondary position in terms of access to mosques. She also expresses how she individually struggles against this mentality in practice, either as a preacher or as an ordinary Muslim woman.

2. 4 Preaching for women at the mosque

Those women being present at the mosque for the sermons are able to hear about the women-mosque relationship as well. Mosque-based issues, such as the position and importance of the mosque in Islam, women's participation in the mosques and in mosque activities, rules of good manners at the mosque (*cami adabi*) etc., constitute a significant part of the sermons' content. Preachers include mosque-specific affairs in their talks and encourage the women congregation to continue attending mosques.

At one of the sermons that I attended during my fieldwork, the preacher had focused on this topic specifically in her weekly sermon. Even though she frequently

highlights the importance of the mosque gathering, she reserved one sermon specifically for this issue and built her topic mainly on the women's right to be in mosques and the need to struggle against the conditions that keep women away from attending mosques:

“I know that you are fired from the mosques, yet seek your right. In this mosque, women have rights as much as men. The Prophet acknowledged this right. During the reign of X Padishah or X Sultan, someone wanted something and you are still following the wish of him. The Qur'an and *sunna* are obvious. No one can exclude you, because s/he has no such right. This place is not a private property. It is a public property. Who is public? The public is you. Public is male congregation; public is female congregation. You will seek your right. They cannot confine you to the place where they put a hoover or cleaning materials. No one has such a right.” (Appendix, 8)

The preacher emphasizes women's right in mosques and reminds them of the practice during the Prophet's period. She implies that the dismissal of women from mosques is a tradition, not the practice of the Prophet, so that they need to abandon it. Later on, she lays it is the responsibility of the women to fight against this wrong tradition:

“I know you will say ‘but male congregation in the mosque said this-and-that to us’. This excuse won't save you in the future. You will be judged. They (male congregation) will be called to account for. They will be certainly judged by God as ‘How can you preclude my maidservants from the mosque? What is this arrogance?’ But you will also be asked ‘where is your struggle?’. What do you think *Jihad* is? That is *Jihad*.” (Appendix, 9)

The preacher refers to *Jihad* to state that there is a religious duty imposed on Muslim believers to struggle in the way of God in general, which, on the basis of her talk, requires the women to seek their rights in mosques. Then she continues her sermon by explaining the order of the mosque at the time of the Prophet:

“This is the way of the Prophet: front spaces are for men and back spaces for women. This is the way. Order is required. I never pray upstairs or downstairs; the back half of the mosque is mine, back spaces of the mosque is mine. I am not going anywhere. I am in the house of God and not going. If you are disturbed, so you go out. I know what I am asking you is not easy, but that is *Jihad*. Take your place and rights in mosques. It is a right given to you by Allah and his Messenger.” (Appendix, 10)

Then she makes a comparison between the mosques and the private property of her audiences. She tries to make women feel the mosques as their own and to protect them. She uses this comparison many times in different sermons when she talks

about women's use of mosques and says "no one can fire you from your own home and so no one can fire you from the home of God as well". She encourages the audience to show resistance when they are treated badly at mosques. She uses the same analogy after her talk and says:

"Just as you protect your own private property, you will protect your right to mosques. That's enough of this trouble, this absence, this lack of mosques and this deprivation of women congregation from the Friday prayer. Our separation and distance from the mosques is enough already. The women *sahabe* (companions of Prophet Muhammed) went to the masjid of the Prophet. The women *sahabe* are present in the masjid of the Prophet during Friday prayer, fajr and isha prayer, funeral prayer and salah-al-aid. This is *fard* (religious duty) on me; this is *fard* on me by the order of the Prophet and the commandment of God." (Appendix, 11)

This preaching is an example of how women preachers motivate and direct the women of congregation when they put the question of women's access to mosques on their own agenda. Besides focusing on this topic on the weekly preaching and giving advice verbally, they may also serve as a model in practice. For example, one of my preachers gives a sermon frequently about the necessity of participating in Friday prayer. She faces two different challenges on this topic. At first, the women object to her because they believe it's a *fard* on Muslim men; and women are not obliged to participate in Friday prayer at mosques. In response to this, the preacher uses her religious knowledge to support her claim with the Qur'an and *hadith* and tries to convince her audiences. Another challenge stands out in the case that, even though the congregation theoretically accept it as a religious duty on them and are convinced to go to Friday prayer, they come up with a reason that many mosques are not suitable for them and that the male congregation or *imam* show unwelcoming and even hostile attitudes toward women's attempts to participate in the Friday prayer. In this situation, the preacher gives advice on how women can deal with these men, how they should argue for their attendance. In addition, she informs them about the women-friendly mosques nearby which are granting access to Muslim women and providing facilities for them for Friday prayer. And also, she encourages the women

to organize and go together insistently to the mosques and expects that, in the end, the *imam* will have to open up a space for them. She gives example of her own experiences in this direction and tells about her struggle at different mosques with these men and how she gains the right for women.

Once, someone from the congregation was again complaining about the men's mistreatment at the mosque in her own neighborhood. The preacher offered to go together to this mosque and also encouraged others in the congregation to join them. They made an appointment for the following Friday to go to that mosque and open up a space for women. In the following weeks, during the preaching she confirmed that they participated in the Friday prayer with 12-13 women in that mosque. Depending on what she tells and exemplifies during the preaching sessions, I can say that she maintains the same struggle in the mosques she preaches. She tries to open up a space for women for Friday prayer in all mosques she visits for preaching, and it seems that she had succeeded.

In still another preaching session, she was talking about the Friday prayer and explaining how it is *fard* on Muslim women as well. She cited from the Quran of Surah al-Jum'ah (The Congregation, Friday) and said that it implies both Muslim women and men. She interpreted the surah as a call for all Muslim believers. That was not the topic of the session, but she addressed it in her talk very shortly. After the preaching session ended, someone from upstairs shouted at the preacher and said "I heard you saying women can join Friday prayer, but you are wrong. Women cannot participate in Friday prayer". That was a man who probably was taking a rest in the upstairs of the mosque and eavesdropped on the sermon at that time. She objected steadfastly and tried to explain to him. But he insisted on his claim by repeatedly saying "there is not such thing in our religion". She said "I am talking to

you from the Quran, hadith and the remark of theologians and the practice of the *Diyanet*. What is your proof? How do you know this? And how can you be so sure about your idea? Have you ever searched for it?”. He got angry and blamed the preacher for reinventing the order of Islam. He was still talking from the upstairs and we were all witnessing this debate between the man and the preacher. And then the preacher said “I am sure what I am saying and if you have any doubt, you can inquire about it, but not through the x or y *Hoca (falan filan hoca)*, but by primary and reliable sources.” and she walked out. The women also left the mosque with the preacher.

So, in this struggle, the preacher both uses the authority of being an official of the *Diyanet* and the authority stemming from her religious expertise.

2. 5 The spiritual atmosphere of the mosque

One of the issues that come forward in both sermons and interviews with the women preachers is about the special spiritual atmosphere of the mosques. The importance of oral tradition and narrative culture in Islam is emphasized and appreciated many times. However, a great value is attributed to the sermons that take place at the mosque. As mosques where Islam is regularly and publicly proclaimed and interpreted, the worship or the sermon is regarded as potentially powerful. The mosque is believed having a different atmosphere in which one can get a different pleasure from prayer and worship. In our interview, the women preacher explained this notion:

“Mosques have a more spiritual atmosphere. How to say, the sermon is absolutely fitting in the specific atmosphere of the mosque. It is much more effective. For example, the sermon at the mosque, you start by reading the Quran and you pray at the end. After all, it is a place of worship. I think that spaces have also their own spirits. Nothing else had been done in that place. Imagine, there was no sin in that place; no adultery, nothing. Not any word of swearing had been made. There, only prayer and worship rose to Allah. So, this space has its own personality and that personality affects you.” (Appendix, 12)

Mosques are places, Richard Antoun (1989) says, where “the Islamic ethos is most

powerful” (p. 116). Mosques, believed as houses of God, reinforce their spiritual importance and meaning through on-going religious rituals, worship or prayers taken place therein. They are special both as a sacred space and a privileged space far away from any harmful or sinful act. God is the only one who is served in the mosques. At one sermon, the women preacher was talking about the importance of mosques and she said:

“Pious people who build the masjid of Allah. Do not get it wrong; it is not only building a structure. Building the masjid of Allah does not mean to build its physical structure. It is built by worship, *ilm*, dhikr, contemplation and glorifying. It is said in the surah of *tevbe*¹¹, only the one who possess taqwa do it. Visit the mosque while you pass by, do not just pass by them. The prayer at the mosque is not any prayer. Certainly, in masjid, we pray (serve) to none but Him.” (Appendix, 13)

The significance of the mosque as a space is also mentioned in the Quran in the verse “all places of worship (*al-masajid*) is due to God alone” (Qur’an, 72:18) and in the hadith “God’s favourite places in cities are masjids” (Muslim, Mesacid: 288).¹²

The direction of mosques needs to be underlined here. The niche of all mosques marks the direction of Mecca. Mecca, as the ritual centre of Islam, is “reproduced in every mosque by means of qibla” (Gaffney, 1994, p. 14). Each Muslim from all around the world faces Mecca while performing the salah or daily prayer, which in turn, is also believed to make mosques carry an aura of holiness. This notion finds its way into the women’s statements when they are deprived of the view of the mosque or of niche: “I want to see the *imam*, I want to see the congregation, I want to see the way that I pursued (*ittiba ettiğim yolu*)”.

The significance of the mosque-specific atmosphere is not limited to the preachers’ accounts; many Muslim women who complain about the present

¹¹ Referred surah of *Tawbah*: (Quran, 9/18) “The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not fear except for Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the (rightly) guided.”

¹² *Diyanet* published friday khutbah on this topic very recently available at: <https://www.diyanehaber.com.tr/hutbeler/03082018-cami-ve-cemaat-adabi-h985.html>

conditions of mosques touch on this point very often. When Muslim women complain about the inaccessibility of the mosque for women, the main point that comes into prominence in their accounts is the deprivation of the specific atmosphere of the mosque. They say that they lack this atmosphere of the mosque and that they cannot feel it enough. All insufficient physical conditions or gender-segregating barriers are considered as an obstacle for benefiting from this specific spiritual atmosphere of the mosque. Namely, to experience the spiritual mosque-specific atmosphere itself becomes a main goal and other details or inadequacies are seen as a barrier from benefiting from this atmosphere.

2. 6 Importance of the mosque as a special space to preach in

In addition to the sermon on the theme of the mosque, “sermons in the mosque” have also special importance in terms of “being present” in the mosque. To preach anyway is not an ultimate goal. Preaching has a space-specific importance. In his message for the “*Cami ve Din Görevlileri Haftası*”, the Head of the Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, introduces mosques as an opportunity to build the consciousness of Muslim believers, to cultivate the hearts and minds, to establish a bond of love and solidarity as well as to improve the social dimensions of faith and Islam (Erbaş, n. d.). In this regard, mosques are considered a longstanding educational setting for cultivating religious belief and establishing a sense of togetherness. Through this function, the mosques gain social significance as well.

Increasing the number of Muslims, both men and women, regularly attending the mosques is one of the aims targeted by the *Diyanet*. In this respect, preaching at mosques gains an importance in terms of refunctioning the mosques and bringing them back to the life again. In our interview, a preacher interpreted it in the following way:

“The regular continuity of the congregation to the mosque is a cause of pleasure for us (preachers). We regard them like our “*eser*” (product). They seem like product in terms of that we bring them into the mosque. Look, these believers are now coming to the mosque. These believers are now participating to the circle of sermon in the masjids of Allah. It is a pleasure if we make someone accustomed to going to masjid of Allah.” (Appendix, 14)

Centering mosques in the everyday life of Muslim believers stands out as an ideal of the *Diyanet*. But additionally, preachers want to promote the formation of “mosque congregation” (*cami cemaati*) gathering at the mosques. This way, the mosque can go beyond its physical setting as a space of worship and become the shared space of the Muslim community. That is why preaching at the mosque gains another meaning apart from any other preaching activities. The sermons become a medium not only to affect the religious understanding and belonging of its audience on the individual level, but also to create a community united around mutual Islamic living. What they propose for “living Islam” will be discussed in the next chapter so I will not go into detail here.

Such an expectation of the Muslim community shows itself in the sermons for women as well. Preachers frequently speak well of the believers who participate in the mosque gathering and remind them how it is valuable for God as well. Being a part of the “mosque congregation” means to be a part of a broader Muslim community praised by God. In one of the sermons, the preacher explained this:

“Dear congregants, it is very important to pray for being with *ebbar*¹³. *Ebbar* means the ones who are the great and good, who are the leaders of goodness. Those who are desirable in the eye of God are called *ebbar*. God, please make us one of them. We are mortal. We may not be able to come here again but this place -*the mosque*- is permanent. Protect and look after it. This mosque is much valuable for both our Friday prayer and the preaching. Keep coming here. Let us die in such a state. Let us die in a group of people who are respected by God.” (Appendix, 15)

Thus, going to mosque and participating in mosque activities is being a part of a larger Muslim community who are praised by God. And continuing to go to the mosque is itself a form of worship that God is pleased with.

Preachers introduce coming to the mosque and attending the sermons as a

¹³ Ebrar, which is Arabic word meaning those who are good, pious and benefactor.

matter of choice. So, they direct the women congregation to use their will intentionally to join mosque gathering and to not to consider it a simple act of going. It is more than that; to be a part of Muslim society on the way of God is intended in a general manner when they talk about going to the mosque. In this respect, the difference is highlighted between those who prefer to go to the mosque and who don't.

In many sermons, they advise to come to the mosque “instead of” doing something else. What might be better (*hayırlı* in Islamic discourse) than going to the mosque? One of my preachers repeats many times in her sermons “the place I call you is to the mosque, not to my own course, my own sermon or *khutba*”. Mosques as the houses of God are regarded as more valuable than any other place and sermons at the mosque in this respect deserve more appreciation than any other activity. In comparison to going to the mosque, preachers bring some examples from the daily activities of women, such as shopping, cleaning, cooking etc. Through this comparison, women are expected to choose the right way, instead of doing something useless. Preachers also make a comparison with some other meeting or gathering activities that women willingly attend, such as home meetings, home sermons etc. The preacher says many times during the sermon that when she invited women to her home to preach, many attend, but when she invites them to a mosque for the same purpose, few are really interested to come. She criticizes this situation and interprets that the decline in favor (*teveccüh*) toward mosques shows deterioration in the Islamic understanding and living. Once, she said, “When you are disconnected from here (mosques), it is uncertain where you tumble down.” “Tumble down” (*yuvarlanmak*) is metaphorically important for implying many things, not limited to, but including the disengagement with those who are good and pious, lack

of being protected against bad and evil, loss of contact with those of “*emr bil maruf nehyi anil münker*” (commanding right, forbidding wrong). So, being part of the mosque congregation is regarded as necessary to protect and maintain a religious connection. And preachers try to build and protect this connection.

Forming a “mosque congregation” means creating a group of religious people who are informed in accordance with the regime of the *Diyanet*, which, in fact, implies “the true knowledge of Islam” instead of “misusing” or “misunderstanding” of the religion. We must bear in mind that the *Diyanet* is in competition with other religious groups, communities, cults and sects. The coup attempt on July 2016 by one the widespread religious groups in Turkey constitutes a turning point in the operation of the *Diyanet*. On the night of coup attempt, mosques and the *Diyanet* played a crucial role. The former President of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, gave an instruction through a TV channel and called the mosque staff to duty. After his instruction, salawats, calls to prayers, prayers and announcements were heard from the mosques, which were used to extend the messages to call people to go out on the streets and hinder the coup attempt. The directorate encouraged people to resist against the coup. However, the work of the *Diyanet* was not limited to the coup night by mobilizing *imams* and calling for resistance. Because “it was not solely a military coup, and perpetrated by a religious order which had a social correspondence” (Aslaner, 2018), this deadly coup attempt by the Gülen movement, as one of the most common and influential Islamic communities at the time, gave rise to a serious questions about the position of religious groups, as well as the relations between the state and the different religious groups.

Gülen is a preacher and the leader of a widespread religious movement known as *Hizmet* (Service) movement or *Cemaat* (Community), which had

successfully infiltrated the judiciary, the police and other key positions in state institutions and was held responsible for this military intervention. In this regard, the authority of religious groups and sects was questioned and the *Diyanet* became prominent and “reliable” as a state-sanctioned religious authority. After the coup attempt, the *Diyanet* gained further importance for both dealing with the “misuse” of religion by different groups or sects and securing the credibility of “true knowledge of Islam”. Within the atmosphere of that religious groups are treated dangerous; it is not surprising, then, that the authority of the *Diyanet* as an Islamic institution is reinforced. Being a member of a “mosque congregation” became important in order to learn Islam through under the discipline of the *Diyanet*. All mosques are allied to the *Diyanet* and different groups or communities are not allowed to carry out any activities therein. Namely, mosques are assumed clean of different groups’ interference. In the sermons or khutbas, learning through the reliable sources is highlighted many times and avoidance of misinterpretation of Islam is recommended. How the Gulen Movement ends up with constitutes a devastating example in this direction. The *Diyanet* and the preachers in particular feel accountable to the public for conveying the right message of Islam and preventing believers to “tumble down” to misdirection from different religious groups or attraction to the secular life in the modern world. Mosques, in this respect, are considered an opportunity to establish and transfer a “credible” religious discourse for our times.

The *Diyanet* aims to promote its “true knowledge of Islam” and wants to create a Muslim community coming together around the mosques. The message they want to transfer through these sermons lead us to question what they say: the content of the preaching. If these sermons are a “call” for the Muslim believers, then, the content of the sermons help us understand what they suggest to the women

population, which in turn, leads us to the question of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS SAID: CONTENT OF THE SERMONS

3. 1 Command right, forbid wrong: The reason for preaching

“Emir bi’l-ma’rûf nehiy ani’l-münker” is a principle of Islam that commands Muslim believers to draw people to the good and warn them against evil. This principle, which provides for the emergence of common consciousness, is in a way considered as the basic dynamic of Islam (Çağrıçı, 1995). Islam, as Berkey (2001) concludes, “with the sharia at its heart, is an intensely ethical religion, and its moral imperatives drive Muslims both to self-improvement within the faith and to encouraging better Islamic behavior among their coreligionists” (p. 5). Thus, Muslim believers are not only expected to dwell upon their own self-oriented religious improvement. The Quranic injunction to “command the good and forbid the evil” imposes an obligation to the Muslim believers to implement the religious moral concerns (Berkey, 2001). By stressing that “Islam has been a missionary religion both in theory and practice”, Arnold points out that the life of Prophet Muhammed exemplifies the same teaching (1935, p.4). Teaching religious rules and doctrines to the followers of the Islam, including moral teaching on what is right and wrong, is required as a religious duty. In the Quran (3:104) it is said that “And let there be (arising) from you a band of people inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.” Thus, the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong is not only bounded with the Prophet himself; it is a moral tenet that puts a responsibility on Muslim believers who are praised by God to attain success and felicity. Preaching is a way for the realization of this principle of

commanding right and forbidding wrong, which constitutes a distinctive element of this Islamic tradition and the practice should be considered within that framework.

First of all, the goal of preaching is to create a transformation on the part of the hearers. Ideally, sermons should cause people to change in a religious and moral sense. Preachers comment on why they preach along with the sermon. They reflect upon the reason and the function of this sermons. One of the main reasons come forward in their account is that preaching purposes change in the action of the listener. During the sermon that I attended for my study, a preacher underlines this issue by saying “morals (*ahlak*) can change, that’s why God gives us a mind so that we can realize and change our behaviors”¹⁴. Thus, through the transmission of religious knowledge, the expectation is that people’s personal religiosity and moral attitudes will change in a favorable direction.

This process requires giving information about what is right and wrong at the first stage, and then stimulating exhortation to do right and avoid wrong. Preaching, at this point, is significant in terms of combining Islamic knowledge with affective drive.

3. 2 The making of a good Muslim

It is very often said in the sermons that worship will change human behavior and social relations. In this respect, worship is not simply considered as a private matter between God and the person. Instead, it is expected that worship will bring about a change, organizing the religious person in all aspects of life. For example, in an interview with a preacher, she said:

“The Prophet declares that *salah* eliminates evil. *Salah* and patience always come together in the Quran, since *salah* requires a person to be patient. Those who are patient and determined can only persevere in prayer.” (Appendix, 16)

¹⁴ “Ahlak deęişebilir. Allah bu yüzden bize akıl vermiş, davranışlarımızı fark etmek ve deęiştirmek için.”

Mahmood made an important contribution to this discussion. In her study on the women's piety movement in Cairo, she argued that worship and ritual actions work in the formation of the pious self. Through ritual actions, she said, the embodied subject is produced. Learning and practicing constitutes the virtuous self. But it is not one-sided process; the inner senses, such as belief, will, desire, thought or affect are embodied through the religious practices, which, in turn, cultivates the inner sense again (2005, p. 162-163).

This mutual relationship between religious practice and pious self is stressed in many sermons by the preachers. For example, while giving a sermon about fasting in Ramadan, another preacher explained the importance of fasting as:

“Fasting is *fardh* (farz, religious binding duty) on you to make you be conscious of your responsibility toward Allah; to make you have religious sensitivity. May *salah* protect you from evil and fasting give you religious sensitivities. Fasting must prevent us from prodigality, stinginess and gossip. Allah does not need your hunger and thirst anyway.” (Appendix A, 17)

The preacher continued her sermon by giving examples of the inconsistency between the reason for fasting and the bad manners of the fasting man. Worship, such as *salah*, fasting, prayer or *zakat* should lead to a change for the better. Preachers believe that there is power in worship that can and should change believers' lives and there is a possibility that a person can change his/her behavior for good manners, which in turn, give sermons a purpose in this direction. One of the preachers explains this as:

“We do sermons in order to change our sad/worried situation (*hal-i pür melâlimiz*). To change our situation, our behaviors. Why does God order fasting or piety if I will not change? If generosity will not eliminate my stinginess, why is it recommended? Bad morality must change and good morals should be undertaken.” (Appendix, 18)

Worship is believed to have a transformative effect on other areas of social relations. Preaching functions as reminder that Muslim believers and listeners are expected to

actualize that knowledge through deeds (*amel*). This knowledge should be transferred into a living practice.

3. 3 True understanding of Islam

After the AKP came to power, the position of the *Diyanet* has improved in the eyes of the Muslim public. While it was once criticized as an ideological apparatus of the secular state and considered an interference of the state on religion, this perception has been radically changed. Under their 16-year rule, the AKP -known as a conservative party- changed the perception about the relationship between state and religion. They are no longer in conflict, which, in turn, eliminates religious peoples suspicions about the presence and activities of the *Diyanet*. In addition to this, the failed coup attempt of June 15, 2016 by the Gülen movement, which is one of the widespread religious groups in Turkey, made people question the authority of religious groups and sects and increased the credibility of the *Diyanet* as a reliable source. The *Diyanet* as a state-sanctioned religious authority gained importance in fighting against the “misuse” of religion by different religious groups. Thus, the *Diyanet* updates its mission of religious education to convey the “true message of Islam” and illuminate society against the abuse of religion from religious groups and sects.

At this point, preaching becomes a crucial means to reach people to convey accurate and authentic knowledge of religion due to its informative value and truth claim. Notably, it is important here to say that preaching is not only a form of prevention against the misuse of religion, but also it is also a struggle against the traditional interpretation of religion¹⁵, independent of basic sources. Thus, another

¹⁵ “Traditional” in this context does not refer to the most agreed upon interpretation of the religion, the sunnah; the Prophet’s tradition. Instead, it refers to that through practice, some actions or customs became religious or Islamic in time.

reason comes forward: preaching is a way to deal with the settled and wrong understanding and interpretations of Islam. One of the preachers explained this: “preaching communities are where true knowledge is transmitted and wrong beliefs (*itikat*) are eliminated.”¹⁶ In this respect, a preacher is responsible for struggling against false understandings of Islam.

3. 4 Subjects that the sermons deal with

Preaching, first of all, serves a call to fellow Muslims to live in accordance with the rules of Islam. So the whole content of the sermons is targeted around how to live an Islamic life, which, in turn, comprises a variety of topics. While preachers provide the congregation with religious education, they guide them towards proper action in many aspects of life. There is a wide range of subjects that preachers expounded on the sermons, such as human relations, everyday interactions, daily problems, justice, rights of others, financial issues, environment, marriage, parenting, childrearing, family life, health, education, generosity, moral cultivation, being Muslim, religious practice, faith, gossip, the Prophet’s life, afterlife, death and salvation, the day of judgment, fasting, almsgiving (*infak*), the Quran and its meaning, worship, mosque, fear of God, good deeds, good treatment, Ramadan, *dua*, repentance, patience, modesty, piety, women’s affairs, self-respect, etc. The sermons discussed a range of topics.

Rather than focusing on the details of what they say about these different topics and themes, I prefer to adopt Ricoeur’s notion of “the said” of the text to analyze the meaning and message transferred via these sermons. A text, according to Ricoeur (1981), cannot be reduced to sentences and semantics, therefore, analyzing a text requires more than the analysis of its semantics. The most important character of

¹⁶ “Vaaz cemiyetleri ilim cemiyetleridir, yanlış itikatları kaldıracamız.”

the text is its “said”. Narrative analysis, for him, requires the analysis of this said of the text, of its meaning and sense. Following Ricoeur, when I consider different sermons from this perspective, the very said of the sermons is “living a Muslim life”. There is a simple, basic question that comes out in these sermons: “how should we live?” Of course, this question is not only fundamental to religion, but here, regarding sermons, the concern behind this question and possible responses around it are shaped through a religious perspective, which, in turn, leads us to ask “how should we live as a Muslim in today’s world?”

First of all, the most salient thing in these sermons is how the ethical dimension dominates the content for both understanding the message of Islam and in dealing with daily issues. Sermons are closely engaged with daily life issues and worldly affairs. What preachers discuss regarding being Muslim or living Islam lies significantly in the areas of social relationship and daily transactions that are compatible with ethical conduct. Of the sermons I heard during my fieldwork research, many were in relation with how to treat others and the strongest emphasis was on governing interpersonal relations. Thus, the sermons abounded with advice on how to avoid gossiping, greed, lying, grudges, selfishness, vanity, judging people, harming any creature, persecution etc. And they encouraged caring and doing favors for others, getting on well with people and living amicably with them, being kind, nice, helpful, compassionate, sensitive to all creatures and the environment, helping for those in need, etc.

While guiding a Muslim audience with respect to religious precepts, the answers the preachers give to the question of “how should we live Islam?” generally pertain to ethical conduct. This overwhelming emphasis on ethical action is worth noting. The possible reason is that Islam is ethical in itself (Antoun, 1989). The

Quran and the Prophet's deeds and words mainly focus on ethics and suggest specific exhortations toward right conduct (p. 10). This ethical orientation of Islam, therefore, became apparent in the content of preaching. Hirschkind also supports this view. One of the targets of the revitalizing movement in Egypt, Hirschkind said, was "to abide by the dictates of what they consider to be a virtuous Muslim conduct in both religious and nonreligious activities" (2006, p. 6) because being Muslim encompasses all aspects of life, even though they are seemingly outside the scope of religion. However, I think that this ethical emphasis is not only because Islam is an ethical-oriented religion, at least it is not limited to it. Considering women's sermons, I can say that it also implies how preachers respond to the problems of living Islam in this specific time and place. Preachers are concerned with and feel responsible for defining how "to articulate the formal religious message of Islam with the needs of community, its problems and its weltanschauung" (Antoun, 1989, pg. xiii). They are interpreters between the text and our world, trying to establish a credible and socially relevant religious discourse for our times. Therefore, what they focus on and how they interpret it are very much related to –and in response to– what they see as problematic in the society. The fact that sermons have intense content on everyday relations and daily life matters is also proof for this. Sermons are not only the exegesis of the word of God. The lived experience of the people and experiential dimensions of Islam constitute an important part of the sermons. I think this ethical emphasis with practical and daily issues is the preacher's response to the present conditions. They prioritize ethical issues because they think there is a need for this. And with this purpose, they are trying to translate belief into ethical behavior.

3. 5 The flow of the sermon

Some sermons are thematic and topic-oriented. For example, during Ramadan, one of the preachers gave a sermon based on the topic of *zekat* (obligatory alms). She narrated verses from the Quran and hadith related to *zekat*, mentioned the traditions of the prophet on the issue, and explained some details about it, as well as underlining its importance and function in today's world. This type of preaching is generated around a specific theme and proceeds in this direction. However, in general, most sermons move in multiple directions and include various subjects, starting with one theme and continuing with different ones. To give an example, I want to briefly discuss the flow of one sermon, considering the themes and subjects it touches.

In the beginning of the sermon, the preacher was talking about faith and stressing that it is like a treasure for believers. Then she criticized how some groups or people, such as the neo-salafis, wahhabis or IŞID, violated faith by naming other people as unbelievers, blaming them for their dress and accusing them of deserving of hell. Then, she suggested doing the opposite by looking for clues for one's belief in God. Instead of focusing and expanding the signs of unbelief (*küfür*), we should concentrate on the sign of belief (*iman*), she said. She told the story of a man who is trying to convince his neighbor to come with him to the Friday prayer. Then she stressed that it was none of our business to send people to heaven or hell. Instead, she advised the congregation to live Islam accordingly and be a good example for people. She also added don't be busy with people's faults and sins, but make sure that God knows everything; He is aware of the least good deed and pious act for all of you. Try to make a difference with your piousness and devotion, she said. Then she turned back to the *meal* (Quran in Turkish) and read a verse, which warns people about

cruelty. She stressed that the Quran warns believers about cruelty and stinginess; it also advises believers to abide by the rules of Islam. But knowledge (*ilim*) is not enough, it should be combined with practice (*amel*), she said. And she reminded the congregation of another verse that gives the example of a donkey who carries volumes of books. Afterwards, she began to talk about how we should read the Quran and urged her listeners to consider it as a whole, not to take it in parts. She turned back again to the Quran and read the story of Adam and Eve, narrating how they were expelled from heaven, and how God forgave them. She stopped to read at that point and highlighted that it is one of the important messages of the Quran, informing us of God's mercy if we show regret and repent for our faults. Then she gave some examples to explain how people might make a big mistake in their lives. She warned the congregation to not fall in to the trap of the devil who wants to make us stuck in our faults and hopeless; instead, we should repent, regret our faults and ask God for help. Later on, she continued to read again from the *meal* about the Day of Judgment and stressed that God warns us against the Day of Judgment. She said that patience and prayer are emphasized in the verse. Then she opened up a parenthesis: the Quran does not show the exact time of the prayer and we learn it only from the practice of the Prophet, which, in turn, shows us the necessity of guidance by the Prophet through his Hadith and *Sunnah*. She reminded the congregation that it is the same for the details of the zakat that we learn from the Prophet's tradition. Then she continued with the verse about prayer and patience, in which she shows how these two come together in many parts of the Quran because prayer supports patience, and the patient one continues to pray as well. Then she came to read the verses of Surah al- Ta Ha (20: 131): "Nor strain thine eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to parties of them, the splendor

of the life of this world, through which We test them: but, the provision of thy Lord is better and more enduring.” She asked the congregation to think about these verses deeply or study its exegesis at home. And then she said: “All these beautiful lives, bodies or luxury that we envy are only mundane and temporal. Don’t stretch your eyes to other people’s wealth, beauty, gaudiness, dignity, status, luxury etc. You may not have any of these. You may not have children, you may not get married, you may not be beautiful like them and you may not be wealthy or healthy. Stop being jealous about what others have.” The preaching culminated in the conclusion that those who are pious will be rewarded and what Muslim women should do is to strive for piety.

This is a brief trajectory of just one sermon that took less than an hour. As you already see, even in a single sermon the preacher has touched on different themes and subjects that we may define as faith, misuse of religion, avoiding judging others, cruelty and stinginess, the relation between knowledge and practice, repentance, patience, salah, modesty and piety. Even though she was using a *meal* (Quran in Turkish) to read while preaching, at many points she gave an explanations and exposition, brought her opinions and examples, added some notes and opened some parenthesis.

3. 6 Broader understanding of religion

I prefer to focus on what is suggested in these narratives as desirable and favorable for living Islam instead of discussing what is transmitted on the obligatory aspects and rules. What kinds of negotiations are running outside the obligatory aspects of religion? What is favorable? What is not? In fact, this is not only my own desire to consider the sermons in this manner; the contents of the sermons are mostly developed in this direction as well. Preachers are not in favor of repeating basic edicts on “do” and “don’t”. For example, when Ramadan began, in the first class on

Ramadan, one preacher said: “don’t expect me to talk about what harms or breaks the fast. Don’t ask questions such as ‘can we take a shower or brush teeth?’” While saying this, she expects Muslim women to know so far the things that invalidate the fast because they are clearly prescribed, defined and unchanging; also, she refuses to reduce the meaning of Ramadan and the fast to such questions and technical details. It is a refusal to limit Islam to symbolic and practical things.

This situation is of course not peculiar to Ramadan. When I started to my fieldwork, I noticed that preachers do not talk much about the details of the prayer or ablution and basic “how to do” rules on an informative level. Prescriptions on how to do certain acts of worship -I mean the technical and formal details- are seen as something that one can acquire in their early years and as information that can be easily accessed when needed. This kind of knowledge is well defined and established that there is no need for interpretation. However, when it comes to guiding Muslims on how to live properly, then it becomes a space of ongoing interpretation. Considering this, preachers deal more with social transactions (*muamalat*) and ethics¹⁷ than with the transmission of details on rituals and worship.

Frisk’s study with Malay women attending mosque classes also verifies this argument. In this study, Frisk observed how these women understand themselves as religious and pious subjects. The reason these women attribute to attending religious classes is very similar to the aim of the preachers in delivering their sermons. As Frisk states, Malay women have received basic Islamic knowledge on “how to” from their families, but they think they need to understand the meaning of Islam (2009, p. 88). The women preachers I followed have the same agenda: they want to deepen the

¹⁷ *Muamalat* refers to the social dimensions of religion. It needs to be highlighted here that such distinction between worship (*ibadet*) and social transactions (*muamalat*) is an analytical one. Faith (*iman*), worship (*ibadet*) and ethics (*ahlak*) do not exclude one another; instead they are interwoven and cultivate one another. For further discussion about the intertwined relations between them, see, for example, the works of Saba Mahmood (2015), Toshihiko Izutsu (2002) and Samira Haj (2009).

knowledge of Islam in a more inclusive and meaningful way among their audience. Thus, the content of the sermons are not only about teaching religious rules and doctrines, but also promoting the understanding of Islam in a broader sense. Preachers want to expand the meaning and understanding of religion in relation to ethical and moral values. They want to expand the understanding of Islam regarding both one's own relationship with God, as well as relations with other people in social life.

3. 7 Inculcation of ethics and a conscious subject

What this religious and ethical discourse attempts to instill merits particular attention. How do they guide their congregation and in which respects? What do they suggest about the proper way of living religiously and ethically in the world? How should Muslim women behave to become a better Muslim?

The sermons pointed to the importance of the ethical and religious cultivation of women themselves. This cultivation process is centered on three main areas: women' relationship with God, their relations with other people and, lastly, their inner selves.

Preachers urge women to improve their belief in God. The ideal Muslim women envisioned in these sermons is one who has deep faith in God, trusts Him, attempts to understand His message, spends time contemplating Him and His creation, follows His order, worships Him and makes *dua*, has respect for the things He blessed, repents for her faults, asks Him for help, prays with her heart and does not give up hope or God's help.

Considering sermons, there are specific messages transmitted about how Muslims should relate to God. Here, I want to give some examples of what is said of in this respect:

A Muslim acknowledges and admires God's power and His control over the world.
A Muslim knows that God is almighty and most wise.
A Muslim admires the wholeness of the Quran and His message.
A Muslim does a favor to gain God's mercy and grace.
A Muslim knows those who do good will get their return by God.
A Muslim trusts God.
A Muslim always remembers God and keeps Him in mind.
A Muslim spends time thinking and learning about what God wants him/her to do.
A Muslim trusts in God and believes in His help and power.
A Muslim is certain that fair judgment will be passed.
A Muslim is patient and sure that God will reward the virtuous.
A Muslim does not forget death and the Day of Judgment.

These are some examples of the messages conveyed through the sermons about how a Muslim woman should think and act in her relationship with God. Of course, there are many other points made, but I want to stress that preachers guide their audience to deepen their relationship with God. The preacher's aim of creating pious women came out quite strongly in several of the sermons.

A sermon is a guide through which women are informed about how to conduct their daily lives. In line with this, preachers stress the women's relationships with other people. If any theme would be central to these women sermons, it is surely that of relationships with others. Preachers seriously highlight that being a religious person with rituals is not sufficient to live an Islamic life and to reach salvation in the afterlife. Right of others (*kul hakki*) is one sensitive issue that preachers strongly warn women about. In the sermons they explain that being religious entails being moral toward other people. To be kind, respectful, helpful, careful or polite is advised while gossip, holding grudges, jealousy, envy or anger is disapproved of. I do not want to repeat myself because in many parts I already gave examples on this issue. However, I must stress that being moral is exemplified in daily relationship with real people and explained in a concrete way, rather than as something abstract and transcendental. They mention people who women are in touch with in their daily life and routine, such as children, husband, family members, relatives, neighbors, salesperson, drivers, teachers, friends, etc. All possible others

are those who any ordinary women are in contact with on a regular basis. Thus, being moral encompasses every aspect of life, from childrearing to shopping.

Lastly, preachers call on women to develop a moral selfhood with consciousness. Preachers invite women to think about themselves: their thoughts, behaviors, intentions, beliefs, emotions, etc. In the sermons, living as a Muslim requires believers to engage in self-reflexive evaluations. To become a better Muslim means to cultivate Islamic virtues in oneself. And this self-cultivation was fostered in the sermons through improving women's knowledge of the religion. Preachers guide Muslim women to learn more about their religion and act knowingly. They expect them to be conscious and aware of their actions. They transmit messages that the Muslim woman should be aware of what she did and take the responsibility for her own actions; Muslim woman should be wise and questioning; Muslim woman should be careful about what is said in the name of Islam; Muslim women should seek true sources of Islam; Muslim woman should prioritize the Quran and its edicts and not be deceived by the comments or judgments of others; Muslim woman should strive for what God expects and show a change for the better; Muslim woman should understand the deeper message of the religious duties, etc. Thus, being a better Muslim and living a more Islamic life is reflected as a learning process that women believers should train themselves to lead. The main feature of female piety engendered through these sermons is to be faithful, moral and conscious subjects. I think the preachers prefer to highlight and give priority to the points that are strongly related to what they see as "problematic" in their community. Thus, considering sermons with a special focus on what they criticize helps us to understand how the "ideal" Muslim subject is constructed.

3. 8 Sermon as a critique

During sermons, preachers voice criticism on various issues. While they are trying to promote what is good and credible, they also criticize what is wrong and unfavorable and what they think the audience should get rid of. There are many issues about which preachers make critical comments, but overall these are generally related to the problem of “misunderstanding” and “misinterpreting” Islam. The most prevalent criticism is about how people understand and interpret the message of Islam. Being more specific, I think it is possible to categorize these criticisms under three main areas. First of all, the problem of how people understand Islam came forward especially in relation to the question of custom and tradition. In the sermons, preachers stress and criticize the predominance of customary views or practices over religious sources of Islam. For them, what is said or done in the name of religion is quite mixed with traditional practices, so that people tend to act according to their traditions and customs and assume it is religiously based. However, it is important to note here that these criticisms are not the same as the total opposition to custom or tradition, as in the case of those who advocates for a Quranic Islam that is supposed to be free of tradition. Instead, what preachers deal with is questioning “some” traditional views that prevent the comprehension of the “real message of Islam” or that is in conflict with Islam. So, they fight against the situations in which tradition becomes religion.¹⁸ Preachers’ criticism on acting more out of custom than out of the requirements of Islam goes hand in hand in most cases with the criticism of people’s ignorance and shallow interaction with the religion. Superficial understandings of Islam and unquestioning settled and traditional practices constitute the basics upon which preachers focus in their sermons in this regard. For example, the following

¹⁸ One of the preacher used this sentence word by word: “our custom became our religion” (örfümüz dinimiz olmuş) to elucidate this problem.

comment made in Ramadan by a preacher which is about *mukabele* (complete reading of the Quran):

“*Mukabele* in these days is not the same as with the Prophet’s tradition. It is only in appearance. The Prophet advises people to *understand* [emphasis added] the Quran. But today, all people from the neighborhood are going for *mukabele*, and none of them came to listen to sermons. They don’t understand any word of it by reading. Quran is not just for reading; it is for understanding and living. In the time of the Prophet, there was not such a reading of Quran -without understanding- as it is now. They read, understand, contemplated and practiced the Quran. What is happening today is vocalizing the Quran; not the actual reading.” (Appendix, 19)

The preacher criticized that people participate in *mukabele* to read or listen to the Quran something that has become a very common practice in Ramadan, but, on the other hand, they do not make a similar effort to understand and practice it. In another preaching session, the preacher was reading from the Quran then explaining and interpreting it consecutively. When she read the verses of Surah al-Baqarah (2: 116): “To him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him”, she stopped and explained:

“Wherever we heard this clause in the Quran -*lillahi ma fis semavati vel arz-* (whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him), that does not mean He is only the creator; He has also a power to work on it. When people miss this point, they begin to look for something else for help. Those who cannot find a job, those who cannot get married or those who cannot have a baby begin to visit frequently different tombs or dervishes. The problem here is that believers do not understand this clause exactly. They think that God is only the creator; this is a partial and deficient understanding. Muslim believers accept God, obey Him and pray for Him, but look for some other powers in different branches of their lives such as work, marriage or trade to make their things better. We must know that God is Knowing, wise and the most powerful.” (Appendix, 20)

Through this exposition, she warned against a partial understanding of Islam, which leads people to look for other sources and alternatives rather than at what the Quran suggests for them. So, gaining knowledge of Islam and true understanding seems to be a way to be saved from wrong customs and traditions.

Another criticism, again closely related with the previous one is about the tendency among people to practice religion on the level of rituals without striving to gain a deeper meaning and message of Islam. Preachers underline the need for comprehension of the Quran as a whole and criticise of formalism (*şekilcilik*). By

formalism, they mean that people are over concerned with the details, rituals and practical aspects of religion, while ignoring the meaning and purpose behind these acts. For example, one of them was about *zikir*. The preacher was talking about the countless blessings God has bestowed on people. Then she said that while it is impossible to name and count them, why do people count their *zikir*? She criticized people who use a *zikir* counter (*zikirmatik*) to keep an account of their thanks to God. Then she suggested that *zikir* is not about how much you say His name or His adjectives in a day. Instead, *zikir* is essentially “remembering” God and this requires being aware of God in everything, which, in turn, pervades every aspect of believers’ lives.

Similarly, preachers make listeners think about the meaning of *dua* (personal praying). Again, they criticized that some people repeat the same things unconsciously. What they persistently stressed is that *dua* is not reciting rapidly some memorized words or sentences. They complain that *dua* has become like unconscious habits that people regularly do after prayers without thinking about what they are saying. Examples can be given about other warnings of being stuck with the details of fasting or almsgiving, as well as the visual aspects of religion. But, I think the following section of a sermon would be helpful to understand the point that preachers highlight:

“Muslim is the one who questions herself and is constantly aware of death. Quran is not only a text with letters and words on papers; it is a law of God and it is a moral (*ahlâk*). If you live in accordance with it, the Quran is alive. If you avoid gossip, then you live the Quran. If you avoid arrogance, then you live the Quran. If you avoid vanity and stinginess and if you are generous, then you live the Quran. Aid (*infak*) is not only about giving money. It is also to show your tolerance, to share your greetings (*selam*), your compassion and your time. This is Islam. Islam is not that of headscarf. The headscarf is one of the orders of the Islam. No order is more or less than the other. They say, “If a woman does not use the headscarf, she will burn in hell”. Veiling (*tesettür*) is farz (obligatory), but it is not as is perceived in our society. “If you use the headscarf, then you are a Muslim. If you do not wear it, then you are not a Muslim.” It is as if those women who use a headscarf are pious, and those without a headscarf are not pious. Get rid of this idea. Get rid of the idea that women cannot pray when men see her while praying. It is not written in the Quran that women without a headscarf will be going to hell, but it is written that the one who gossips (*dedikodu*) will go to the hell. I wish my mom had invested on my morals instead of on my headscarf.” (Appendix, 21)

I cited this long part on purpose because I believe this excerpt constitutes a good example of what I want to stress. By saying “Islam is not about the headscarf”, the preacher, in fact, did not underestimate the Islamic edict on this matter; instead, she criticized people’s judgment of headscarf as a sign or measure of being Muslim or not. As we can see, she brought the issue of morality against the headscarf in order to stress how people are very much interested in the headscarf because it is symbolically crucial and something visual, while, on the other hand, morality and other aspects of religion actually should be more important. Or similarly, as in the example of the *mukabele* that I mentioned above, preachers know that just reading or listening to Quran is *ibadet* (worship), but what she found problematic is people’s neglect of some aspects of living Islam, while overemphasizing others. Thus, in response to this limiting religion with some practices, preachers try to broaden how people perceive Islam. It is possible to summarize the “said” of these criticisms raised by the preachers with the sentence: “Islam is not just that;” it is not as people perceived it. By introducing this phrase, the area that they want to focus on is mostly about ethical cultivation of the self and moral conduct in social relations.

The third focus preachers make critical comments on pertains to women’s affairs. Because sermons are first of all women-to-women talks, they inevitably target the women themselves. One topic is about women’s relationship with religion. Preachers warn the congregation about the “misuse” of religion and want them to be aware and careful about what has been said in the name of Islam, especially on women’s issues. They urge the women not to believe any claims of people who are not authorized to speak about Islam. Preachers also criticize women’s excessive engagement with worldly affairs, such as looks, luxury, clothing, furniture, etc. as well as their being busy with household chores. Spending much time with household

chores is reflected in the sermons as something that prevents women from being interested in religious activities. This criticism came out quite strongly in several of the sermons in different ways, but was expressed clearly in the following excerpt:

“Those who feel God in their hearts would think about the creation of heavens and earth. And they comprehend what God demands with this magnificent system. But, in order to contemplate this world, we need to devote some to it. We need to abandon simple and ordinary things. Dear friends, dear women congregation, please leave to spend time with the clothes or sheets. These fabrics, furniture, showcase or different brands are enough already. Let’s stop with unnecessary things and the waste of time and energy.” (Appendix, 22)

Later in the sermon, she again placed further emphasis on this topic and proceeded by making a comparison between this life and afterlife:

“Let’s suppose you have very important task, a vital one, regarding you or your family. In this condition, does this really occupy your mind that carpets are dirty or curtains need to be washed? If you have a vital problem, most probably you would focus on your issue without any regard to these things. Actually, we have a serious and vital task that is the salvation in the afterlife. So, be careful about how you spend your time and what you are busy with your daily life.” (Appendix, 23)

Thus, preachers think that worldly affairs take too much time in women’s life, preventing them from deepening their religious knowledge and practice. They suggest women take some time to understand and live Islam, as well as to be aware that this world is temporary and what they are doing now is the best opportunity to be prepared for the afterlife. Thus, through these criticisms, they try to strengthen women’s religious commitment.

The topics preachers focus on such as household, luxury, vanity and gossip etc. show that, to a certain extent, they share the general assumptions that women’s world consists of these things. However, this does not mean that they stress domestic and maternal role of women and regenerate it through religious concerns. On the contrary, they promote another mission for women. They want to see women as religiously conscious subjects who are concerned with their submission to God. Here, I want to give some examples from different sermons where preachers warn the women congregation not to exaggerate on childrearing things:

“Do not devote yourself to your children. Do not devote yourself to anybody including your parents. Don’t be a servant of anyone. Neither your husband nor your children will appreciate you for this. Be qualified. Even if the children do not tell you, they would rather have a qualified parent than a maid-parent.” (Appendix, 24)

“We always think about this world and ignore the afterlife. Everything we dream of belongs to this world. I think of the Prophet, did he ask for anything worldly? Did he want anything for his children? I did not see this. But we always pray that our children will be like this or that. Pray mostly for your faith and morality and your own salvation. Your children will be the same as you are.” (Appendix, 25)

“The Quran says that goods and children should not keep you busy. But we live a child-centered life. We organized everything around children and put them at the center of our lives. We think we are doing children a favor, but we are raising narcissistic individuals. What is permanent is *salih amel* (good conduct).” (Appendix, 26)

3. 9 Whose words are these?

Even though preaching has always been placed in a central role in Islamic education, Çakmak (2017) stressed, “Neither Prophet Muhammad nor his companions performed preaching as a *profession* [emphasis added] in their lifetime. But after his demise, preaching gained an institutional dimension” (p. 1244). Turkey is one of the countries where preaching gained an institutional character under the central administrative authority of the *Diyamet*. Within this institutionalized form, preachers have a double role, both as religious scholars, experts on the matters of Islam and as civil servants of the state providing services for society (Hassan, 2011).

So, while preachers interpret the religious texts and transmit the message of Islam thanks to their competence on religious knowledge, they are also considered public spokespersons for the *Diyamet* and the state. Transmission of religious knowledge through the channel of these institutions comes with the question of whose words these are and to what extent the institution –the *Diyamet* or the state– intervenes in this process.

One might think that sermon the topics of the sermons are presented by the *Diyamet*, or at least are chosen to conform with the themes being suggested by it. This assumption is linked to the general tendency in the literature to evaluate the

Diyanet as an officially administrative institution which operates as an instrument of the state to control and regulate religion. In this respect, the activities of the *Diyanet* are taken exclusively as the state itself and the *Diyanet* has been portrayed as acting according to the demands of the state. Therefore, any activities serviced by the *Diyanet* are accompanied by the question of how much the state has interfered in it. Delivering the Friday khutba undoubtedly are at the top of this list because attending the Friday prayer is one of the most crucial religious duties for Muslim men.¹⁹ What khutbas convey gains a significant meaning, since they are presented regularly each week in front of a number of Muslims who cannot be united at another time. The Friday khutba, in this sense, is regarded as a crucial instrument to reach the public and is considered an official document of the state and of the state's interference in the religious sphere. The central and official publication of the Friday khutba by the *Diyanet* for a long time -even though it is no longer compulsory- works to support this evaluation. To what extent the *Diyanet* acts as a state instrument or whether Friday khutbas work as a state tool requires, of course, a broader discussion that goes beyond the limits of this study, but since this study specifically concentrates on sermons by women preachers, it would be better to address this schema of state-religion relations by focusing on the formation and practice of these women preachers.

What I want to point out here is that we should avoid the possible assumption that the same process for Friday khutbas operates for all other sermons under the rule of the *Diyanet*. How women's sermons run in the field shows us a considerably different picture. Contrary to the Friday khutba - whether it is official or not- women preachers do not follow a written sermon. The *Diyanet* does not offer a text, example

¹⁹ For more detailed study about the state and religion relations regarding Friday khutba, see: Ceren Kenar (2011) and Habib Saçmalı (2013).

or structured formula for the sermons. There is a list of scheduled topics suggested by the *Diyamet* on a quarterly basis, but, these are not binding for the preachers.²⁰

The committee prepares a list of possible themes, yet women preachers do not have to stick to these themes; they are free to follow their own way both in content and in style.

In addition, the Friday khutba has its own function in the Islamic tradition that gives it a unique position and makes it different from other khutbas. As Richard Antoun (1989) stressed, the content of Friday khutbas has always been more “political and social,” in comparison to other sermons that are more “ritual and theological” (p. 68).

So, I want to highlight that we cannot make a clear connection between the Friday khutba and womens’ sermons on the basis of the fact that they are both forms of sermon. Considering women preaching as a medium of state ideology or as an instrument for state policy would not be, therefore, a good path to take, as it may lead us to jump to a quick conclusion or to misunderstand its unique position and process. Therefore, since the *Diyamet* does not determine the topic or the content of women sermons and what it proposes as topics stay on the level of suggestion. What constitutes the key point in structuring and delivering sermon, in this figured schema, is the nature of preaching and the preachers themselves.

Aside from the absence of the *Diyamet*’s direct interference on these sermons, the authentic form of preaching makes this autonomy and differentiation possible.

²⁰ Modesty, compassion, Prophet Mohammad and his companions, sensitivity to rights, being a trustworthy, lying and its bad consequences, ignorance and its effects on society, intention in worship, Zakah, prayer, laylat a-qadr, praying, living Ramadan with neighbors, protection of religion, Quran that shapes human and society, aid (*infak*) as a key for social peace, and selfishness are some of the topics that the *Diyamet* suggested in 2017. These lists are accessible on the website of the *Diyamet*: <https://istanbul.Diyamet.gov.tr/Sayfalar/ContentsWithoutImage.aspx?MenuCategory=Kurumsal2&ContentCategory=vaaz-ve-irsad-programlari&ContentType=False>

Preaching, in itself, is a discursive and performative act, which does not fit the formal, institutional or structural mold. The preachers I followed during my fieldwork did not use a prepared or written sermon; they were all mainly “oral formulaic” in Antoun’s sense (1989, p. 88). As it is discussed in the section on styles of preaching, preachers follow different ways of narrating while they preach.

However, in all these different styles including the ones where the preacher sometimes reads from the Quran or other sources; its narrative part, which develops extemporaneously, comprises a significant feature of the preaching. So, the flow of the sermon is mostly unplanned and unstructured. When I asked about how they form their speech, a preacher used the word “*spontane*” (spontaneous); it develops concurrently while they speak.

3. 10 No preaching without a preacher

Because preaching is oral-formulaic and very much related to oratory skills, the preacher plays a key role on how the sermon takes shape. Which source the preacher follows, when and where she uses a quotation, which example she gives, which parts she puts forward, how things are related, how she interprets, etc. all blend with the competency of the preacher’s eloquence. The way the preacher formulates her speech considerably depends on her. It is inevitable that there is a variety of preaching styles in parallel with the number of preachers. Even though some patterns might repeat themselves in different sermons, nevertheless, it is a unique process centered on the preacher.

When the preacher is not bound to a specific text or stuck in a script, we cannot talk of any preaching act as independent of the preacher. The reaction of the congregation to the preachers also confirms this. They sometimes express their contentment with the preacher and her way of preaching by giving appreciative

feedback before or after the sermons. Some of them are strict followers of a specific preacher and come from far away to listen and participate in her sessions, even though different alternatives are available nearby their houses.

This autonomy of the preachers allows them to take into account the situation of the congregation, their needs and expectations. Because of the fact that preachers do not have to deliver state or directorate-appointed sermons as a top-down process, they have a chance to organize their sessions in an audience-oriented way. During our interviews, preachers also confirmed that they consider the educational, cultural, social or economic conditions of their congregation. Because sermons take place in the middle of the day,²¹ the congregation consists of non-working women, generally without small children, or retired women having time for themselves. These women are generally around or over their 40s and are mostly low or lower-middle class and they come to the mosque on purpose to listen to the sermon each week at a specific time. Of course, it is possible for any woman to come across these preaching sessions in a mosque unintentionally and to participate in it. However, most women in the congregation are regular followers. It is a kind of appointment that they follow regularly. Through face-to-face and direct relations with the congregation in these mosque gatherings, preachers and the congregation get to be acquainted better with each other in time and their sermons become more local. Thus, it can be said that the less official the sermons, the more local they can become.

Not having a direct intervention of the *Diyanet* on sermons and the specific narrator-driven nature of preaching, no doubt, opens up a space for the preachers. However, this autonomy does not necessarily mean that women preachers act in

²¹ There is one exception in that one preacher was giving a sermon once a week after the evening prayer to make it available for working women. In addition, preachers are sometimes appointed to give a sermon or conferences on the weekend at other places as well, but I limited the scope of this study to mosque sermons.

opposition to the expectations of the *Diyanet* or to state policy. While these women preachers have autonomy to a considerable extent, this does not easily indicate that they speak out against these actors. Women preachers may still prefer to act considering the demands of the *Diyanet* and the government. This situation stems from the possibility that the woman preacher may indeed be in agreement with these institutions or the preachers may exercise self-censorship to avoid possible conflict with the powers that be. In any case, seeing these preachers merely in the service of the state or representatives of the *Diyanet*, is problematic because such a perspective ignores the preachers' role as ethical and religious subjects.

Since women preachers have their authority –even though it may be restricted in some sense-, the question of their ethical position arises. Kalpaklıoğlu Yalçın's ethnographic field with women preachers is helpful to understand how they act as mediators between different actors, while also keeping their own concerns, thoughts or feelings in the process. In her study about the practices of women preachers' delivering *fetva*, Yalçın stresses the “in-between” position of the women preachers as representatives of the *Diyanet* and the demands of the questioners. She concludes that while delivering *fetvas*, preachers feel responsible towards their religion, *fetva*-seekers and the *Diyanet* (2018, p. 90, 110). When it comes to the preacher's practices of delivering a sermon, I can say that their religious concerns come into prominence.

Because the *Diyanet* does not directly interfere with the sermons, two things determine the process: the first is the preacher's religious concerns and responsibilities regarding how to transmit religious messages and the second is the expectations of the women. At this point, how a sermon takes shape imposes on women preachers a responsibility towards God and the congregation, rather than towards the *Diyanet*.

The most salient example of this situation took place regarding women's participation in the Friday prayer. The general tendency among Muslim believers is that the Friday prayer is an obligation only for men, not for women. Most scholars are in agreement that women are allowed to attend the Friday prayer, but it is not compulsory. However, on the contrary, there are some who argue that it is incumbent on women as well. One of my preachers, as a supporter of this perspective, thinks that women should attend the Friday congregational prayer and that is *farz* (a binding religious duty) on them. In her sermons, she attached a particular importance to this issue, talked about it several times and advised women to participate in the Friday prayers. In her sermons, she quoted the following verse of Surah al-Jum'ah from the Quran (62:9), saying "O you who have believed, when (the adhan) is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah (Friday), then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew." And she said this verse addresses all believers, including men and women. She also brought some evidence from the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad to support this view. The point here is not, of course, to decide which side is right or credible, but, instead, the point is to show her insistence in teaching women about this duty and how decided she was to struggle against such a mainstream practice. She challenges and contests the traditional view of women's non-attendance of the Friday prayer through the means of the same tradition: Quran and *sunnah* of the Prophet. In one of her sermons, while she was speaking again about women's responsibility on this regard, she said that some people complained about her and that she had gotten some warnings because she is an advocator of the Friday prayer for women. She explained that it is not her own opinion or wish; instead, it is an order of God and that her job is to convey this edict and inform people. Then she said: "I may be an official of the *Diyanet* and the

state, but, above all, I am a servant of Allah. I will give an account to Allah about these sermons.”²² She may prefer to avoid taking a critical position toward such a controversial issue, but she feels responsible towards God to inform people of this duty. And this responsibility prevails over other concerns, such as getting a warning or risking losing her job, and makes her fight against this long-settled tradition that suggests that women not attend the Friday congregational prayer; it also what enables her deal with many people from different ranks who strongly defend this view. So, her responsibility toward God becomes more important and overcomes her occupational responsibility. As a Muslim believer, she could prefer to attend Friday prayers on her own and do her own religious duty; but as a Muslim preacher she feels responsible to teach people about it. Because she is presenting the message of God to people, she has a responsibility to be faithful to the text, the Quran and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. So, she also feels a responsibility towards the congregation to tell the truth and transfer this religious knowledge.

Her statement “I will give an account to Allah about these sermons” also shows us an important sign about how preachers perceive and give meaning to what they are doing. Of course all believers may think that they will give an account to Allah about their actions, but what she meant is not simply the “do whatever you do best” motto. From a religious perspective, the act of preaching means more in comparison to doing something else. We cannot speak of preaching as any occupation or as only a way of earning money. Their job is irreducible to paid work. Preachers talk about religion and disseminate religious knowledge, which, as I stressed before, is a tradition of the Prophet as well. Thus, what women preachers ascribe to their roles is not only an occupational responsibility, but rather, it is

²² “Ben devletin, Diyanet’in memuruyum ama o bir şey değil, ondan önemlisi ben Allah’ın kuluyum. Benim Allah’a hesabım var bu vaazlarla ilgili.”

meaningful in the religious sphere. Preachers consider sermons as an opportunity to reach people to learn about Islam, and their efforts are not only this-worldly, but also reach the hereafter. While this situation seems like an advantage in terms of motivating preachers, it also brings some religious responsibilities for them. So, when she talked about giving an account for the sermons, she meant not only the responsibility to God about whether she could use this opportunity to deliver the knowledge of Islam correctly, but also a responsibility toward the congregation who follows the sermons so that they can be informed about their religion.

At this point, I must stress that mosque sermons are those where preachers confront the public. The experience and task of delivering sermons is totally different from studying religion on a theoretical basis among books and articles, or writing a khutba, preparing a speech and deciding, what is best for the people on religious manners while sitting at the office of the mufti. It is a real encounter. Women preachers talk face to face with a congregation of women. And the problem of how they transmit and interpret religious knowledge to the audience is a real one. Almost in all preaching sessions, when the sermon finishes, some women from the congregation wait to ask their own question in private to the preacher, or sometimes they mention it during the session. So, interaction is inevitable. The congregation knows about each other and the preacher knows about her fellow-believers. The preacher begins to learn some details about their lives, families, problems, expectations, hopes or disappointments, etc. This acquaintance determines the preaching process, including what they say as, well as how they say it. These sermons, therefore, cannot be considered only as a religious “ideal” or “means” of an institution or the state; they are an interactive process in which the preacher is careful to be understandable and practical.

Therefore, when we talked about the positions of preachers and the preaching events we should be aware that it is a complex process which has many dimensions and different actors. Considering preachers only as officials responsible for transferring directly the words or messages of the directorate will make us mistaken about how this process operates. To handle this issue in a more comprehensive way, we must take different actors into consideration, such as the women preachers, the congregation of women, the *Diyanet* and the state. We should also see the intertwined relationship between religious, ethical and political concerns that these actors possess.

CHAPTER 4

FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE:

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

4.1 Styles of preaching

Preaching transpires in various ways and preachers use different ways of narrating. In one way, a preacher directly reads a couple of verses from the Quran and translates it concurrently into Turkish. During this simultaneous translation, she makes some explanations when she thinks it is necessary. In this style, the written text constitutes a basic path, but it is supported by the preacher's exposition. Another way includes beginning with reading the Quran directly in Arabic, and then with extemporaneous (*serbest*) preaching. By this, I mean they do not use any direct text or written sources to follow, they preach as it is delivered. And also, in this format, it is not necessary to have a relation between where she starts with the Quran and the rest of her talk. For example, she starts with reading a surah from the Quran and then continues the sermon with another theme or topic. In another format, the preacher may follow one source and base her talk on this source. For example, the preacher was using one of the *meâl* –the Turkish meaning of the Quran- as a source of her sermon and suggested her congregation follow this *meâl*, too. While reading from this book, at some points she stops reading and makes explanations or comments. She is using the book as a source, but it is not restricted to the book for her talk. It is a very open-ended process. While reading from the book, she can stop reading very frequently and talk about other anecdotes or issues that the text reminds her of. In another format, the preacher may prefer a free speech form in which she makes the

speech up as she goes along. This format is very much related to the preacher's competency on oratory and religious knowledge. She also recites verses, hadith or surahs but she knows them by heart. One of my preachers called this method extemporaneous speaking (irticali konuşma). Either text-based or theme-focused, in all forms of preaching the narrative part in which the preacher speaks, instead of reading, constitutes a significant feature of the preaching.

Almost in all different formats of preaching, there are similar ceremonial properties appearing frequently in the sermons, such as beginning with the recitation of the Quran, praising God, sending prayers on the Prophet and closing with prayer (dua). In addition, even in the most extemporaneous ones, preaching is closely bound to the classical religious texts, the Quran and hadith. Preaching, Robert says, is “grounded in dependence on God, not just based in rhetorical or technical eloquence” (2013, p. 5). Competence in religious knowledge and cohesion with the basic resources, Quran and Sunnah, in an Islamic form, are primarily required and necessitated, but not enough by itself for an effective preaching session.

4. 2 Preaching: A cluster of discourses

No doubt, content is a crucial component of the sermons to understand religious discourse, but it is not limited to this. There are other dynamics that determine preaching such as its function, genre, discourse, affect and the positions of the preacher.

The aim of what is spoken is of these elements that help us to understand the function of the preaching session. Regarding how these sermons operate, I can say that they provide guidance and prescription on how to behave in many aspects of life, as well as giving religious explanations and providing commitment, inspiration and consolation. In addition, they support faith in God and in the afterlife, personal piety

and salvation, as well as peace negotiations and an end to animosity and envy. Lastly, they promote ethical and religious cultivation, as well as the religiously conscious Muslim subject. It is possible to increase these functions and expand on them, but I underline the prominent and repetitive ones in general.

Another component is pertaining to its genre. By using the Quran as a main source, preachers speak in a format addressing all Muslim believers in general. However, because they speak to women directly, they mostly address women audiences in these sessions. Preachers generally use a direct speech that targets the audience. “You”, “dear congregation”, “ladies”, “dear friends” are some examples used frequently in the sessions to address the audience, which, in turn, work effectively to keep the audience’ attention on the sermons. This direct call to women, repeated several times in the sermons, renews the message, “Listen, I am speaking to you” and makes the women congregation feel they are being addressed.

I want to start with a very rare type of discourse in preaching: recounting. In recounting, the speaker narrates a series of events mostly in chronological order. Recounting is rare because preaching has nothing to do with retelling historical events; instead it is message-oriented and events get mentioned in the preaching as a tool to clarify or exemplify the message. To describe is another way of narrating that we again do not come across very often in the sermons. Preachers use description when there is a need for historical background that the congregation may not have. In this situation, preachers describe the circumstances and conditions of the time of the prophets, for example, to make the audience understand the point. Another way is being instructive which comprises explaining how to do something, what is allowed and what is forbidden. As stated before, this kind of instructive form of religious

knowledge and procedural details are not used very much, unless women ask or preachers see a need to remind them of some point.

The discourse of preaching is also comparative and analogical in some cases. Preachers benefit from comparisons and analogies via associations and similarities to help the women congregation interpret things. I want to mention persuasion and exposition together here. Since the reason of preaching is to promote a change in the listeners, its point of view is based on Islamic sources; therefore, it uses persuasive and expository discourse, as well. The most common type among all is informative. Through using informative discourse, preachers expect to reverse previous beliefs or acts. As I discussed in the section of the critique, preachers believe that people misunderstand religion, so they feel the responsibility to change this. They try to reverse these wrong understandings and beliefs with the right ones. For this purpose, while interpreting religious texts and transferring religious messages, they use an informative way of explanation.

Notably, it is possible to see the combination of these different discourses within the same sermon. One type of form does not necessarily give a character to the whole preaching. For example, preacher thinks that women should attend Friday prayer; she wants to convince people on her point of view and she wants to *reverse* the general assumption on this issue. So, she *described* the time of the Prophet in order to demonstrate that women were also joining the congregation. She *informed* them about the related surah from the Quran and *explained* it. She *instructed* the women on the principles of using mosque, emphasizing that they should stand behind men. She also made some *analogies* between the mosque and the house, saying “if someone gets you out of your home, would you accept that? Mosques are also yours. Why do you accept being fired from the mosques?”. As seen in this small

anecdote, different discourses intersect in many ways and are used together to move the audience.

Another factor that determines the preaching process is its affective tone. I mentioned in the previous chapter how emotions are crucial to the narrative process. But here, what I want to highlight is that religious discourse is carried with affects. Compassion, fear, devotion, closeness, trust, forgiveness, hope, regret, care, courage, intimidation, belonging and admiration are some examples that are prominent in shaping the affective tone of the sermons.

And lastly, the position of the preacher as a speaker also matters in preaching. By saying position, I do not mean their religious education or official positions. Instead, I define their positions according to the function of what they say within the sermon. Preachers are interpreters between the text and the women congregation. In this interpretation, they switch between different roles: they expose, warn, remind, admonish, complain, mediate and advocate. Just like preaching touches upon many themes within a sermon, preachers also speak from different positions within the same sermon. In addition to their function in the speech, they also speak from different subject positions, which again change from time to time. For example, they speak as a religious expert having authority; they speak as a mother, wife, bride or daughter based on their kinship relations; they speak as any servant of God; they speak as a woman who is not welcomed in the mosque or who shares difficulties of living in İstanbul; they speak as a friend giving advice to handle issues, etc. Namely, they benefit from the different identities they possess and use their lived experiences to talk to the women. This opportunity of switching between different positions breaks the one-sided relationship and opens up different possibilities, rather than a hierarchical one from the educated towards the uneducated.

4. 3 Preaching as an art of oratory

First of all, preaching is not a speech. Religious discourse is combined with the art of oratory. Sermons attempt to do much more than simply offering religious instruction and this requires exposition and exhortation, supported by the art of oratory. As one of the preachers said, “Preaching is not a dictate. You cannot give a sermon like making a statement. A sermon should not be considered as an information platform; then it would not have reached its purpose.”²³ Preaching is expected to focus on religious principles and edicts, attract and maintain listeners’ attention and move their heart towards greater piety and closeness to God. Preaching, in its indigenous genre, is not a speech made in formal language; instead it is very much related to the language of the heart; preachers define this with “gönül dili,” which must touch on the heart of the audience and fortify their soul. The utility of the sermon reveals itself by its capacity to inspire an emotional experience.

Some think that the effect of the sermon comes from the power of divine word and preachers are relatively less influential. The power of the Quran is considered in the foreground in Islam. While discussing the persuasiveness of the sermon, Hirschkind mentions this issue:

“The fact that Muslim scholars have been relatively uninterested in elaborating an art of persuasive speaking owes in part to how revelation affected their conceptions of the efficacy of speech. As the miraculous word of God, the divine message convinces not through an artifice of persuasion, the rhetorical labors of skillful human speakers, but by its own perfect unification of beauty and truth. The message itself has been articulated in the most perfect of possible forms, the Quran.” (2006, p. 34)

The power of the divine word might be strongly influential on persuasion, but I believe the efficacy of speech on being able to make the audience listen is also very much related to the speaker’s eloquence. Preachers, who advanced on the art of oratory, such as being skillful in extemporaneous speaking, fluent in speech,

²³ “Vaaz bir dikte değildir. Demeç verir gibi vazedemezsiniz. Bilgilendirme platformu gibi düşünülmemeli, o zaman amacına ulaşmış olmaz vaaz.”

proficient at using religious references and anecdotes properly, are able to hold their audience. In the long run, these preachers reach more people. Moreover, even though preachers use some texts as a source for their talks, they pay attention to support these textual forms through a verbal exposition on it. For example, if she is reading a *meal* (Quran in Turkish) during the session, she stops reading very often and makes explanations or comments on it, then continues to read. This direct reading part of the preaching is frequently interrupted by the preacher's non-textual random intervention. Thus, this concern that textual-based knowledge formation needs to be balanced with the art of oratory constitutes a specific character of preaching.

During the sermon, the congregation is sitting in a semi-circle to see directly the preacher and the preacher sits at the center in the same level with the congregation where she faces them. In this type of sitting arrangement, the preacher can see the congregation and the congregation can see her as well. The preacher is the center of attention, both with her speech and body. Preaching as an audiovisual process benefits from both verbal aspects and nonverbal bodily forms of communication. Because the voice of the preacher is the main focus of in the sessions, how she utilizes it is determinant on the impact of preaching. The sonic qualities of speech, flow of language, loudness, intonation patterns, syntactic forms, vocabulary and rhythmic structure are important constituents of verbal expression that shape efficient and affective preaching. They also use frequent digressions. In addition to this, preachers also benefit from the bodily forms of expression with their posture, facial expressions, head and hand movements, gaze and gestures, etc. Thus, the sermon, in addition to its religious based content, highly depends on its visual and auditory effects. Therefore, *how* they preach constitutes an important concern for the preachers in addition to *what* they say.

During our interview session, one of my preachers explain what they take into account in the act of preaching as:

“You must look at each person, you must have at least one eye-contact with every person. You need to ask questions on the spot to get their attention, but these usually should be rhetorical questions that have no answer. I think asking questions is very important.”
(Appendix, 27)

These strategies may seem to be the basic practices recommended by classical communication skills. And these communicative tricks or strategies can easily be considered general communicative skills, determining the efficacy of any speech. But, what is striking here is to think about their use for the preaching practice and what is unique to the preaching context. As the preacher stated above, what makes preaching different from “an information platform”?

For Hirschkind, these linguistic expressions, such as voice quality, intonation, rhythmic pattern etc., “do not stem from their instrumentality in relation to the act of persuasion, but their ability to sway an audience in favor of the khatip’s argument.” (2006, p. 12). Such techniques and stylistic elements of preaching are a vehicle by which the preacher makes the congregation listen and moves them to action through stimulating their senses. Here it is important to note that, of course, I do not trivialize the necessities and contribution of such linguistic techniques, which stand to comprise a basis for the art of oratory. On the contrary, I think it is important to highlight that they have a role in enlivening the audiences’ senses. Sermons should enact “ethical attitudes and sensibilities” (Hirschkind, 2006, p.12). In this sense, preaching, as a form of narration, incorporates both linguistic techniques suggested by communication skills and religious discourse to evoke senses.

4. 4 Preaching and emotions

What we discussed so far implies that, either one way or another, preaching is inevitably linked to emotions and sensibilities. Preaching, beyond its intellectual side

of providing true knowledge of the religion, is expected to touch on the sensitive heart of the listener. So, successful preaching is considered one that is able to stir and inspire the audience, and the successful preacher is the one who is able to manipulate the listeners' emotions. It seems that this emotional aspect gives the sermon its power. At this point, the question that arises is how and why this emotional capacity of preaching matters so much. Affective modulation created by preaching is necessary so that the ethical improvement and moral development of the audience who is listening prevails. That is why, Hirschkind notes, "within the Islamic homiletic tradition, listening is privileged as the sensory activity most essential to moral conduct" (2006, p. 39). He underlines the importance of listening on the cultivation of the heart for the development of moral subjects:

"From early in the development of Islam, sermon audition has been identified as essential to the cultivation of the sensitive heart that allows one to hear and embody in practice the ethical sensibilities undergirding moral action. Beyond the cognitive task of learning rules and procedures, listeners hone those effective-volitional dispositions, ways of the heart, that both attune the heart to God's word and incline the body toward moral conduct." (2006, p. 9).

Thus, Hirschkind defines sermons as a "vehicle of ethical improvement" (2006, p. 37). Moving the audience to pursue good and giving rise to ethical performances are the main aims of the preaching that works through cultivation of the sensitive heart and operation on the soul. But this is not a simple method of injecting some emotions, such as fear, humor or hope etc. into the preacher's speech. Instead, it creates affective conditions to yield some special insights that stimulate and move the listening subjects. With emotional style of preaching steeped in moral commentary, audiences are able to incline toward moral actions.

In addition, there is an idea that emotional arousal supports piety. Römer (2013), for example, argues that medieval sermons aimed to arouse emotional reactions, rather than a direct analysis of the text. Christianity in pious practice, therefore, was the main concern. Since piety is considered possible mainly on the

emotional level, religious knowledge and understanding that they remain relatively secondary. However, my study shows that women preachers found both factors equally crucial for the development of religious subjects.

Before elaborating on preachers' accounts and practices in this respect, I must note that such a distinction between reason and emotion has been already criticized by scholars. Barbalet, for example, thinks that the reason behind this distinction stems from a misunderstanding of the relationship between emotion and rationality (2004, p. 13). He defines three different approaches to the relationship between emotion and reason. The first one is a conventional approach in which rationality and emotion are considered opposite to each other. The second is a critical approach that sees emotions as a support for reason. They are not opposed each other, but have different faculties. And lastly, in the radical approach, emotions and rationality are considered to be continuous (p. 29). The general attempt is to reveal the role of emotions in irrationality, but Barbalet suggests to look at the role of emotions in rationality and he argues that emotions have an important purpose in rational thought and action (p. 32). In reference to William James's work, "Sentiment of Rationality", Barbalet says "intellect, will, taste, and passion, in fact, necessarily support each other. Reason and emotion are not opposed phenomena but distinct names for aspects of a continuous process" (p. 45).

During my fieldwork, the sermons I listened to and the preachers I interviewed individually emphasized on both the emotional experience and the intellectual understanding. They intentionally promote "knowingly doing". For the preachers, preaching devoid of emotion does not work efficiently; but, on the other hand, preaching filled with only emotions is not acceptable as well. Sermons should be a blend of emotions and intellect. One of the preacher explain this situation as:

“I think we should pay attention to the sermon that if a sermon is devoid of emotions and filled only with information, such as conferences, then the audience of it learned something, but does not have a will to do it. On the other hand, if a sermon is injected with lots of emotions, but lacks information, such as exciting and thrilling sermon that make people shout “Allah Allah”, those people go out with full motivation, but don’t know what to do. It has too much emotional agitation, but does not provide a target or information on what to do. Therefore, the sermon needs to include both information and emotional motivation to reach its transformative power. So, they need to be together in balance.” (Appendix, 28)

Preachers disapprove of agitative preachings and they regard them as an old-form and wrong method of talking about religion. At this point, it is interesting to note that ancient texts indiscriminately use the terms wa’z and khawf to point out the same phenomenon. Wa’z means admonitions and khawf means fright and they were used together (Kilito, 2014, p. 38). But now, according to my preachers, frightening people, using fear, horror tales and stories in preaching are considered to be unsuitable for modern subjects and present conditions. In this respect, preachers distinguish their sermon from this “traditional” method of preaching that uses a language of fear, threat and rejection. Thus, what we discussed so far as an emotional preaching is not the same thing as used in these old methods. Preaching should strike a balance between text and oral language, knowledge and emotional drive.

Another contribution of this modulation of affect performed by the preacher comes forward with the therapeutic side of the sermons. While discussing the therapeutic capacities of listening, Hirschkind argues that within Islamic societies, “sermons have historically served as an instrument of ethical therapy” (2006, p. 37). He supports the idea that sermons have an ethical function on the listener. Similarly, preachers also mention the “rehabilitative” effect of the listening sermon. Based on their own observations, experience and feedbacks from the congregation, preachers think that women who came to listen to the sermon are going to feel better due to its healing effect.

The significance of the sermons on shaping contemporary moral and religious subjects lies not simply in their capacity to spread and re-cultivate religious

knowledge, but in their effect on the sensibilities and affective capacity of the audience -on affects and senses-.

4. 5 The moment of preaching as “mood”

Because formation is mainly oral in preaching, it opens up a shared interactive space between the narrator and listener. This “sharedness” cannot be simply valued in the area of language, beyond that it takes an advantage of moment of narration. This notion of sharedness came out quite strongly in several of the interviews, but was expressed most clearly by a preacher who defined preaching as a kind of “mood”:

“Preaching is a kind of mood. Preaching is the name of the communication that the preacher establishes with the congregation. It is the name of the collective mood they experience.”²⁴

Furthermore, the preacher underlines that preaching is not a one-sided process in which preachers are informants who transfer religious knowledge and listeners are the learners who get to know about their religion. She defines a mutual relationship that is totally different from the understanding of two separate groups. Instead of distinguishing the experience of transferring knowledge by preachers and reception of this knowledge by listeners, she describes it as a moment of shared experience. This affects how and why she preaches and how she perceives “being a preacher”.

She explained this interaction as an affective process:

“It is not just telling the truth, but being able to convince and invite them to the truth. And this call/ invitation is possible through love, not through language. Not verbally, but through feelings. Actually, this is the main duty of preachers. Being a preacher is not delivering information. It is a transfer of emotions and the mood in a way that affects both the preacher and listener.” (Appendix, 29)

Thus, to preach means not only telling the truth, but mostly operates in the way it narrates to create an emotional desire by which listeners incline to act towards ethical improvement.

²⁴ “Vaaz bir haldir. Vaaz vaizin camiye gelen cemaatle kurduđu bir iletiřimin adidir. Yařadıkları ortak halin adidir.”

The moment of preaching is an intersubjective experience in which listeners give affective responses to what the preacher speaks about. Even though the listeners do not speak during the sermon, they produce emotional expressions, such as facial, gestural or postural signs and some vocal exclamations like “ah, oo, cık cık, Allah Allah, Allahuekber, etc..” and the preacher is aware of all these expressions. At once, one of the preachers told me that she can see all the members of the congregation and can catch the clues about who is bored, who lost attention, who disagrees with what was said. The preacher can see and feel the mood of the congregation. Some gestural signs and verbal interjections of the congregation allow the preacher to make sense of the affective atmosphere.

At this point, I want to mention the study of Julian Millie (2011) on Islamic preaching and women’s spectatorship in West Java in order to stress how the audience is active in the process of preaching. Millie conducted research with a mixed audience group, but focused on the women audience because he argues that women’s spectatorship patterns affects and determine the conduct and format of the preaching through their bodily and gestural responses. Far from being passive and submissive women in the position of listeners, Millie argues that women’s spectatorship is influential on the way the performance is made and the women audiences are pleasure-taking subjects in these sermons (p. 153). Women’s participation, says Millie, enlivens the atmosphere of the sermon, such that preacher is in a position to accommodate their female audience and is responsive to them (p. 156).

Additionally, the moment of preaching is important because the preacher and the audience share the same setting, time and space, which, in turn, helps us to understand the significance of a face-to-face form of preaching, even in the age of

technology. Knowledge of Islam and explanations of the Quran in various forms exist almost everywhere and are easily available. Radio, TV and Internet provide religious information in various ways. New audio technologies make sermons accessible in different forms. But, preaching is more than that. The preacher and listeners share the same affective domain in the same setting. They get to know each other in time, they begin to call each other by name, the preacher asks them questions and makes joke, listeners also interfere in the sermon, making comments, and asking questions. They develop a mutual relationship and experience a common mood.

Thus, for preachers, telling the truth is not a complex matter, as it is already well defined to a large extent by Islamic discourse; instead, they are concerned with how to narrate and explain things. How do they make their speech understandable and effective so that it will bring a change in the audience's behavior, leading them to stop doing wrong and intend to do right? So, the way they narrate matters significantly.

4. 6 On the relation between morality and narrative

In questioning the moral development of the subject, one cannot disregard the narrative tradition. The inseparable relation between morals and narrative has been discussed by many scholars from different perspectives. For example, Salmon (2010) in reference to Barthes, argues that narrative is one of the great categories of knowledge through which we understand and organize the world. MacIntyre (1984) also uses the narrative approach to understand virtue and ethics. Kathleen Stewart (1996) considers narrative as a vital ethical practice for moral subjectivity and argues that "narratives not only express local epistemology but also help create a positioned subject." Ricoeur (1992) goes beyond and argues that identity itself is produced

through narrativizing. For him, narratives not only articulate the moral world of a person but also help constitute identity as a moral subject. Besides, Cherly Mattingly and Linda Garro (as cited in Zigon, 2012) take narrative as a fundamental human way of giving meaning to experience. Narrative helps us to understand how people give meaning to their experiences in a structural and linguistic form, as well as how they transmit these experiences. Mattingly also goes beyond the understanding of narrative as articulations and actions by broadening the concept to include the key role of morality. In her conceptualization of narrative reasoning, narrative helps us to realize moral ways of being in the world because it implies “the good.”

Among all these contributions to the field of moral anthropology, Zigon opens up a great discussion by including people’s moral lives. He appreciates the ongoing debates about the capacity of narration to evaluate events, but what is morally most significant for him about narratives is the “act of speaking with an other” (2012, p. 207). Narrative matters in the way we live with other. Zigon criticizes the analysis of narratives as only meaning-making articulations and he moves beyond it by suggesting we read narratives as “articulations of the embodied struggle to morally be with oneself and others in the social world” (2012, p. 205). Then, narrative becomes important for studying morality because it reveals the ethical process of embodied agreement on how to live together. Narratives gain an importance in intersubjective relations. In this regard, preaching provides the best focus for an investigation on the relationship between morality and narrative literature because the preaching that is aroused in oral tradition is always interested in the way we live (with others) and interferes in how we should live. Preaching, above all, touches on how to morally be-in-the-world in an intersubjective manner. For example, if we consider any sermon, it reminds the audience of the imperative to

do “good (al-amr bi-l-ma’r’ûf)” and to avoid that which is “bad (wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar)” as a duty on the Muslim (in reference to verse 31/17 from the Qur’an, “enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong”). It aims to change or organize the way we live with one another.

4. 7 Storytelling and *kissa* in pursuit of morality

“Why do narrators use stories when talking to people?” seems, no doubt, a big question with different possible answers to be able to comprehend within the limits of this study. But, when I think about the characteristics of the sermons, using stories is seen as an inseparable part of their speech and is highly relevant to moral injunctions and teaching. Preachers want to transfer a message, lesson or admonition to the audience; and sermon ultimately emphasizes morals. And one of the best possible ways to accomplish this is narrating through stories. This relationship between narration, stories and morality introduced in preaching is important to discuss.

Telling stories has always played a significant role in the Islamic tradition (Berkey, p. 5). But, considering storytelling a longstanding tradition rooted in the religious discourse does not prevent me from asking the question of “how”: how does storytelling operate? What is the function of telling stories in the form of a sermon? How does it work to move religious subjects toward moral entailments? To understand the relation between storytelling and morality, it is important to remember the questions raised by White (1981): “Was there ever a time when people did not tell stories?” and “Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?” These are questions that will constitute the starting point of our awareness of the relationship between morality and narration. Telling stories is certainly a process continuing through human history and people articulate their moral world through narratives.

One of the main functions of the narrative is undoubtedly to tell fascinating stories in which one can get inspired and learn something (Fulford, 2014). But, what makes the stories so attractive lies in their existence in the actions of people and their roots in social, cultural and religious life.

Short stories with a parable have a special name in literature: *Kıssa* (*Kısas* in plural) coming from the Arabic “قصة”. The lesson drawn in the story is stated as “*Kıssadan hisse.*” The prominent feature of *Kıssa* is its narrative style, its story-like form. *Kıssa* refers 1) to trace, follow and go after, 2) to convey, transmit, narrate and quote, 3) to cut, 4) the chest, the core and important part of the subject (Demir, 2003). Thereby, the basic element of telling *Kıssa* is to follow a trace and go after it to get to the core point (Öztürk, 2012). As is seen, the etymology of the word implies that *Kıssa* provides an example to follow. *Mesel* (*emsal*, *mesela* coming from the same root) to show what is good and what is bad, what needs to be done and what are the possible consequences of that action. It is a way of real teaching when its message is fully received. To narrate something or to transfer a message, *Kıssa* or storytelling²⁵ works through making listeners follow and go after events by analogies with their specific situation. The characters, plot, time or scene might be totally different from your case, but, in some way, you can make an analogy and draw a conclusion that pertains to the situation you are in. For example, the story of Prophet Jonah gives a lesson about trust in the decree of Allah, the power of *dua*, patience and repentance, even though the term, conditions or context is completely different from any of us today.

Kıssa and short stories with parables not only have a literal, superficial meaning, but also convey the deeper message; the moral lesson. Stories work as a

²⁵ I used *kıssa* and short stories or storytelling interchangeably in this context.

vehicle to make us participate in a moral universe. Each story, explicitly or implicitly, has a moral judgment in the end. It directs toward the good and prevents people from doing wrong. By telling what has already happened in its unique form, stories not only help people to conceive the metaphorical meaning and decipher its message, but also lay a burden on the listener about what needs to be done. Hidden or indirect message of the stories prompt listeners to do something; to change the way they live, to be fair, to be compassionate, to be patient or more religious, etc. It aims to reorganize human relations. It has a pedagogical function to lead the listener to act in a morally and religiously better way. Stories call people to believe in themselves to fulfill their potentiality for being better. During the preaching, one of my preachers was talking to the congregation about how Muslims should believe in themselves so that they can move on and not get stuck in troubling situations. Then she interprets the reason of *kissa* in this respect to take a lesson from them and keeps going:

“Why are there lots of *kissa*? We cannot change our situation by focusing on our deficiencies, by constantly pitying on ourselves. There is repentance for this; to keep going. *Kissa* are not in vain; they are not just a story. The prophet Moses had committed a murder in his youth. What does this example say to us? You can never give up hope. He then became a prophet. Let’s think about the prophet Adam, who saw God and the angels, he knew everything but still ate the forbidden fruit. But then, he repented and God forgave him.” (Appendix, 30)

Thus, while *kissa* promotes the good and right and prevents bad and evil, it also implies the “possibility” of doing good and of being moral. *Kissa* gives us “hope” to change. As is stated in the example above, the story of these two Prophets make the listener believe primarily that there is still an opportunity to correct his/her mistakes. You may commit a crime or fall into sin, but no matter how bad it is, some examples or stories suggest that there is still hope for change. And this hope makes a difference for someone to stop doing wrong and to act differently.

Additionally, these religious stories make the audience a part of something bigger, of a great narrative beyond time and space. Stories of the Prophet Jonah,

Moses, Adam, Mohammad or his companions and tales of unknown dervishes or saints came from many years ago and different places. Through these stories, listeners participate in a tradition that links them with earlier generations of religious leaders and figures. As Mirzeler (2013) puts forward “perception of the contemporary world has at its base the memory of the moral authority of the ancestors.” In reference to Bloch, Mirzeler reminds us that a performance of historical tradition does not simply narrate certain past events, but reflects on those past events influence the present. In his ethnographic study with the Jie people, Mirzeler (2013) confirms that the discourse of historical tradition constitutes the basic means by which people rationalize the social and political realities of their contemporary world. By reformulating his concept of “historical tradition” in a way to include religious tradition as well, I can say that the circulation of stories of different religious and historical figures not only connects past and present, but also helps to reorganize the present and enables us to make projections for the future. Preaching does not pull the listener only into the narrated moment. Narrative time is extended with these stories to include the past, present and future. When a Muslim individual takes the Prophet Muhammad as an example, he/she intends to act in a certain way and will have an expectation of God’s mercy and grace.

Stories benefit from the power of the past, since this method of using *kissa* and storytelling, thereby, blurs the position of the narrator. Through *kissa*, the narrator situates herself behind the “authorities of the past,” in the words of Kilito (2014, p. 38). The narrator is placed behind the ancients, predecessors, and authorities of the past. As Kilito wrote: “It is indeed he who talks –narrator-, but he makes sure that his speech is but an echo of what illustrious predecessors have already said.” It is always a story of someone other that has been transmitted through. The role of the narrator is

one of mediator and transmitter. The subject of the narration is mostly fuzzy. *Kissa* suggests an admonition and gives a lesson “as if” it is independent of the one who is speaking. So, *kissa* refers to the act of one who is historically and religiously important and who is expected to be more pious, more religious or more spiritual than the narrator.

Furthermore, using stories creates an indirect speech between listeners and the narrator. The preacher moves within a safe zone; by using a third person narrative, she seems to be positioned out of the story. Thus, what needs to be said is under the protection of indirection of storytelling, which is supported by the authority of the religious story itself. The narrator includes neither herself nor the listener directly, which, in turn, features and intensifies the message itself. The preacher resorts indirectly to the parable because to tell something in the form of a story makes the message stronger, rather than advising it directly.

Such indirectness through stories also gives space for the listener. When the preacher narrates a simple story, through which, a new space of coming to mutual meaningful understanding is opened up. The indirect discourse provides a space for the interlocutor to be included. As Frank Kermode (1981) cleverly stressed “A story is always subject to interpretation. Stories as we know them begin as interpretations” (p. 181). By giving a space for listeners’ interpretations, narrator would pave the way for listeners to uncover the meaning by themselves, which, in turn, may help them to draw a lesson that is best for them, for their situations. For example, in one of the sermons I attended, the preacher was talking about the need for gratitude for the things God gave us. Then she reminded us of the story of the Prophet Ayub. Ayub was a prosperous man with wealth, property, large family and health. Then all of these were taken away from him. He lost everything he had before and his body got

weak with a serious disease, but still he remained firm in his belief without complaints and thankful to his God. His wife, on the other hand, got tired of their situation and asked him to call upon Allah to remove this suffering. But Ayub replied her that he could not call on God to remove the hardship because he had not suffered longer than the years of good health and plenty that he had enjoyed. After retelling this story, the preacher continued saying that we should not complain about all the troubles that we face and that we should remain patient and strong in faith under the stresses of all circumstances. Allah tests us in many ways and we should be thankful to him even under the stressful circumstances.

This story of Ayub is just an example of many other stories that I came across during my fieldwork. It is obviously a story about patience. The virtue of patience, being hopeful of God's mercy, being insistent and strong on faith are some lessons for the listeners to ponder over to assess their relationship with God. The story is most likely interpreted by the listeners, depending on the dire situations that they are getting through in their own life. For example, those having an elder to care think about being patient regarding this caring activity that bothers them. Or, those having health problems believe that they should be patient about it. Some others having trouble with children may decide not to complain about it. Those who are healthy and wealthy may recognize that they can lose everything as in the case of Ayub, etc. Different interpretations are possible and this makes the audience able to find a relation between what is being told and what he/she is living through. Thanks to such indirectness, the listener can find a meaningful way to engage with the story. In his remarkable work on the art of storytelling of Arabs, Kilito (2014) stresses that assertion alone is not enough to make an interlocutor listen; "it can function with a maximum of efficiency only if it is accompanied and supported by an indirect

discourse, a narrative.” (p. 19). Storytelling benefits from the advantage of this indirect discourse, which differs from other ways of interaction.

In addition to that, one of the main features of *kissa*, or stories with parables, is that they are short to keep in mind and easy to remember. When someone leaves the sermon, what remains primarily for her is the story conveyed during the sermon. Stories are something “movable.” Thus, it is easy to re-tell and re-circulate them again and again. In one of the sermons I attended during my fieldwork, someone from the congregation mentioned how she shares the story of previous sermons with her child and husband at home, and how they talked about it. After that, her husband had also told a story, and she brought the husband’s story to the sermon and shared it with the congregation. She could easily transfer something meaningful and impressive from the story she told her family and from the family to the congregation. Obviously, she was affected by the message or lesson drawn in the story and wanted to convey a similar effect to her own family. Telling a story or *kissa* gave her an opportunity to convey the moral message with its affective power.

Because stories are generally religiously edifying ones, they function in an exhortatory way and mobilize emotions. And notably, this act of re-telling a story does not require oratory skills or preaching experience because the story itself talks and is believed to have a specific effect. Thus, stories can be remembered easily and can move to different contexts in different times. By telling stories, this woman reproduces the effect of the sermon and gives a moral lesson. In addition, this also proves the role of women at transmitting religious knowledge to their families, including both their children and husbands (Frisk, 2009).

What is interesting here is how stories have become favored tools to convey moral duties. The advantage of stories is empowered by narration, which, in turn,

gives a best way for moral values to be transmitted.

4. 8 To exemplify as a way of addressing the congregation

Preachers very often use ordinary and simple examples that are familiar to the women audiences. For example, once the preacher was talking about the situation of the one who is mistaken by forgetting the day of death and resurrection. She gave an example of a little child to make an analogy to this forgetful person:

“When a child is a guest in any place, he feels free to romp. He doesn’t think of the moment when he returns home and the fact that his mother is going to be very angry with him. But, eventually they go back home. You all know this scene, don’t you? The situation of any man who forgets the Day of Judgment looks like this child. They think that they can romp as much as they want because God doesn’t respond in that moment. But they do not know or may forget that their life has an end and they will come back to God.” (Appendix, 31)

While giving this example, the preacher is aware that the majority of the congregation consists of mothers who have their own children. So, this example of “a romp child” is meaningful and understandable to all. Preachers use these kinds of examples on purpose to clarify the situation and make them plausible. One of my focuses in the interview questions was about the tactics and strategies they use to improve their speech. What are the elements that make preaching better? While preparing or giving a sermon, what do they pay particular attention to? These are some examples of questions I posed in the interviews with the preachers. And their responses indicate that giving relevant examples is an essential part of the preaching process. One of the preachers explains:

“Giving examples has vital importance, in my opinion. And these examples are certainly not the ones collected from the books; you should have examples that you find with your own creativity. So if you talk to housewives, examples should be related to shopping, kitchen and cooking, hospitality or relations with their children and husbands. These examples can be imaginary, but surely they must fit the life of the audience. If you find examples of people’s lives, you can even talk about the most academic subject. I think, the most vital issue to enable us to talk about difficult subjects is to find examples from their lives that will fit well with their minds.” (Appendix, 32)

Therefore, giving examples connected with the experiences of the audiences’ everyday life is a tool to clarify difficult subjects and also a strategy to attract the

listeners' attention to the sermon. As Malmström stresses, "homiletic literature advocates the use of everyday language in preaching" as well. Sermons should have a "familiar conversational quality" by including the lives of the listeners (2015, p. 355).

However, I think this exemplifying method and preachers' recognition of it imply more than a communicative strategy and mean something about the interactive nature of preaching. Even though preaching seems like a monologic discourse in which the preacher speaks to the audience and is not interrupted very often by the listeners' interference, in fact, even at the first stage, how they preach is shaped significantly by the audience. Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the dialogical principle helps us to understand this relationship. In his formulation, words are always in dialogue with the one who we are speaking with. Speech is in relation to and is shaped by the potential or existing listeners. So, in the act of preaching, a religious text is not only a component that the preacher dialogues with, the audience is also important in terms of how the speech is constructed.

Preachers are well aware of whom they speak to and they take seriously into account the status of the listeners. They mention the act of preaching as an interactive process between the preacher and listeners. Preaching does not come out as one-sided transfer in their explanations. It is a reciprocal process in which both preachers and listeners take part. So, knowing the congregation (*cemaati tanımak*) - they described it this way- highly matters in the whole process from preparation for the sermon to how it will evolve during the session.

Interviews with the preachers show that there are two different levels for this knowledge about the congregation.

First, they mean general information about the common profile of Muslim women in Turkey. Regarding this overall perception, they already became familiar with it throughout their lives in their relationship with relatives, friends or neighbors. One of the preachers explained this situation, saying “I lived in this public with these people (she meant Muslim women congregation). My mother or my family members are like these people. So, this is not strange to me.” (Appendix, 33)

Because, they lived in and grew up together with these people in similar conditions, they are well acquainted with them. Preachers already have a perception of women’s expectations, problems, habits, ways of life and with their understanding of Islam. Even though preachers have a degree in theology, they are familiar with the public practices of Islam, what is revealed as “traditional Islam” or “folk Islam”.

The second level of knowledge refers to more specific features about each congregation member, such as their educational level, socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds, and understanding of Islam, etc. This kind of knowledge requires spending more time with the congregation. Preachers say that they come to know the congregation better with the passage of time and figure out their needs and expectations. This knowledge helps them to construct *what* to tell and *how* to say it. During our interview, a preacher said, “Continuity is necessary to get to know the congregation. When it is achieved, you begin to know the congregation members. And when you know them, the preaching (what you tell) is based on this knowledge and becomes congregation-oriented.” (Appendix, 35)

Another preacher explained the effect of the congregation on their preaching:

“The congregation gives shape to the sermon. In my opinion, preaching is not just a practice which the preacher effects on the congregation. It is a mutual relationship. The speaker affects the listener and, I believe, the listener affects the speaker as well. And I am affected. The blessing of the sermon is affected. The congregation influences the presentation and style of the sermon. And even it affects the topics.” (Appendix, 36)

The preacher's awareness of and knowledge about the audience is determinant of the way they give a speech, which, in turn, gives the sermon a dialogic form. When the listener hears something touching her own life during the sermon, she thinks that the sermon speaks to her. This shows that the sermon has reached its goal through making listeners to think about their own behavior. Preachers note that many times they hear from some in the congregation saying that "it (sermon) was said directly to me". One of my preacher's accounts exemplify how they got feedback in this direction when they know about the congregation:

"If you do not observe the congregation, your sermon will be insufficient. I experience very often someone from the congregation saying '*Hocam*, you have an eye of the heart that guess our situations. We tested many times that we came here with a question in our minds, but you answer it during the sermon even before we ask.' I said it is not because of 'the eye of the heart', but because we observe society and speak regarding the needs of the society. For example, in modest neighborhoods there are apartments that consist of extended family members. And women have serious problems because of living in these family apartments in which everybody lives together in very close relations and nobody has their own private life. So, when I give an example from these family apartments while speaking about privacy, this example fits well with at least 15-20 people in the congregation. And they say 'Wow! How could she know? Just like my situation' and they think 'as it was said to me'. To achieve this, you must know about the problems of the society you live in." (Appendix, 37)

While we were talking about how they prepared for the sermon, how it evolved, what were the possible effects of the congregation are and how knowing about the audience is important, another preacher said similar things on the feedback that they get from the congregation:

"They (congregation) may say, '*Hocam*, this sermon is telling exactly what happened very recently.' For example, someone from the congregation said '*Hocam*, yesterday something happened and this sermon gave a lesson for it, as if you know the case'. At once, when I finished the sermon, I remember there was a woman who just recently began to come to my sermons who said: '*Hocam*, I told my husband that it was as if the preacher was at our home last week and listened to the debate between us and preached about it during the sermon. I told him how I am astonished.'" (Appendix, 38)

Notably, this feedback from the congregation like "as it was said to me" or "as if the preacher was at our home" is not coincidental and limited to these two examples. It is very common for the preachers to hear such responses in various ways. This can be simply considered as a return or outcome of their profession as a preacher, which keeps them continually in very close contact with the people. And also it is because

the preachers are not only expected to give a sermon to women, but they are also charged with various areas that the *Diyanet* brings service to, such as Alo-Fetva line, Family Guidance and Counseling Bureaus (*Aile İrşad Bürosu*), prisons and social service organizations, etc. Therefore, in line with their job, preachers are actively in relation with Muslim believers and well acquainted with their questions and problems. However, I believe that this case tells us more. First, it points to how religion is strongly embedded in daily life and in people's everyday relations and second, how preachers strongly embed religious issues in daily life matters through their sermons. Sermons that work on the religious sphere, directly and automatically become the subject of worldly affairs and daily relations. The predominantly moral content of the sermons and how the preachers perceive the problems of their society shows that there is no separation between religious and worldly affairs.

When I understood the importance of preacher's perceptions on the problems of society for the configuration of each sermon, I asked them about the problems coming forward as far as they were concerned. Family relations constitute an important part. One of my preachers explained:

“The most common problems are seen in the relationship between husband and wife, such as the problems of cheating and marital conflict. Another one is about raising a child. But the relationship problems are the most common. Especially regarding the relations with family, both their own families and their husband's family. They mostly ask questions on these issues.” (Appendix, 39)

Regarding what they say and how they say it, the preachers promote issues that are important to them and this “importance” is already shaped by what they learned in their relationship with women.

4. 9 Repetition as transforming knowledge into practice

Repetition comes forward as an outstanding element of preaching. It is common to see that some topics or points are referred to again and again in the same sermon, or sometimes you can realize that similar themes are repeated at different times. It is

possible to simply argue that repetition works to mark key moments and significant points, as well as to reinforce what someone has learned. And also, someone may think that repetition itself lies in the nature of oral tradition, which makes it easy to follow and remember. But, what is interesting here is that nothing is entirely new in the sermon. Preaching generally functions to remind and repeat what the audience already knows. Of course, it is partly informative and explanatory in each time of telling, but the main point is to remind them of what God wants them to do. Preaching orally re-cultivates them again and again.

For example, each Muslim knows that Islam requires them to avoid gossip, but still this theme continues to appear in many of the sermons. Examples can be counted for many other religious principles, such as prayer, zakat, repentance, etc. In this respect, repetition is required to support the transformative effect of listening to the sermon. For example, you may already know gossip is forbidden by Islamic religious edicts on an informative level. But that doesn't always prevent you from doing it. When you listen to a sermon on this topic again and again at different times, it may help you keep it alive in your mind and be cautious of not doing it. Repetition refreshes you in this respect; you listen and you refrain from doing it, then you listen and refrain from it until this practice becomes situated and internalized. This form of periodic repetition of auditory admonition works as a reminder for the listener to monitor him/herself in line with the dictates of Islam. According to Hirschkind, this regular act of listening helps one to maintain self-scrutiny, *muraqaba*²⁶ (2006, p. 71). One of the preachers explained the function of the repetition in the sermons:

“The repetition has a vital importance because we do not write an academic article or book. It's not a conference either. Most of the audience is not taking notes and they are just listening to you. So, repetition and what you repeat is very important here. Repetition at regular intervals enables them to settle down, and if the sermons are going to transform us in

²⁶ Known as a Sufi term, means “self-control” and “watch-over” and refers to inner feelings and tendency of controlling behaviors.

a spiritual way, then repeating contributes to this transformation. And also, this is the method of the Qur'an as well. There are many repetitions in the Qur'an. It also shows what you care about." (Appendix, 40)

By stressing repetition as a method of the Qur'an, she underlines that it is part of an Islamic religious discourse. The contribution of repetition appears on the transformative effect of the sermon. This transformation means that the change in the behavior of the listener is in line with the aim of preaching. Thus, there is a link between repetition and practice. Through repetition, knowledge on the religious or moral rule is expected to transform into an ongoing practice by the listening subjects. Repetition is not only a cognitive process that is linked to understanding and comprehension. Beyond that, it is necessary for one to gain a habit of action (the relation between *ilm* and *amel*).

In addition, repetition stems from the characteristics of religious themes that are interrelated to each other; and when you touch on the one you immediately call the other. Thus, within this interrelatedness, it becomes inevitable to use repetition. Drawing on a metaphor of "salt," the preacher tries to explain this interrelatedness and it is also important in terms of it directs changing position of the listening subject at different times:

"Every time you hear something you already know, one of the reasons for your renewal is to place this in a new combination. You are not the same person now with what you were yesterday. For example, salt enters all meals but in a different combination. Or, fat is included in all meals, but they are all a different combination. Some topics resemble turmeric which cannot fit with every meal. But, some others are like salt that goes well with everything. Prayer, for instance, is related to all topics such as patience, fear of God, afterlife, surrendering to God etc. Prayer touch on many issues that you can give it as example." (Appendix, 41)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis is a study of the *Diyanet*'s women preachers who deliver sermons for women in mosques. As one of its aims to illuminate the public regarding religious issues, the *Diyanet* employs women preachers in mosques in order to reach women population with the purpose of transferring religious knowledge and guidance. These preachers are responsible for interpreting religious matters and reinterpreting them in accordance with the needs of the contemporary social life of believers. This study traces what the sermon, as a key religious discourse, suggest and recommend for women Muslim believers. More specifically, it deals with what they expect women believers to do and what is drawn as an ideal of Muslim women. The issue the study deals with is not only what the sermons say about being a Muslim woman today, but also addresses the question of how sermons say this and how this saying operates.

For this purpose, I listened to more than forty sermons of women preachers taking place in different mosques as well as interviewing women preachers who deliver these sermons. Since these sermons are services of the *Diyanet* and the women preachers are officials of it, in the first chapter I discussed the role of the *Diyanet* as a enabling the existence of sermons for women and the women preachers as the carriers of the sermons. Here, I stressed that the *Diyanet* increased and expanded its services targeting women. Especially in the last decades, the *Diyanet* developed many initiatives concerning women. However, the sermons for women are important because they allow the *Diyanet* to put into effect three important policies all at once. Through these sermons, the *Diyanet* is able to reach more women to transfer its message to, to make the mosques more accessible for women and to

increase the number of its female personnel. In this sense, sermons delivered by the woman preacher occupy a central place in the effort to make the mosque and thereby state Islam a normal part of the believer's everyday life.

In the second chapter, I focus on the mosque as a space in which sermons take place and I discuss women's relation with the mosques, problematizing women's access to mosques. It is known that the mosques in Turkey are mostly male dominated and women have limited access to them. However, it was interesting to see that in spite of the preachers' special positions as the religious experts and the officials of the *Diyanet* charged with giving sermons in the mosques, they also face the problems of male-gendered spatiality of the mosques. At this point, I discussed whether and how the preachers are challenging and contesting the exclusion of women both through their sayings in the sermons and their practices within the mosque. Notably, they negotiate with this problem of women's access by using their religious knowledge by referring to the practice of the Prophet's period. Their reference to primary sources of Islam such as the Quran or the Prophet's sunnah, works to strengthen their position and tackle opposing arguments.

In addition, the mosques matter in the sense that they are sacred religious spaces believed to have a spiritual atmosphere. Worship and praying in mosques are regarded as more valuable and affective. I questioned how this space specific atmosphere is effective on women's claim for their access to the mosques and on their experience of the preaching practices therein.

The importance of these mosque sermons is not limited to providing services for women. Mosques have a critical position for the *Diyanet*'s agenda and government interests. The *Diyanet* aims to turn mosques into central places in the lives of the Muslim believers. It is because the *Diyanet* wants to transfer "true"

knowledge of Islam, and mosques are regarded as crucial means to reach people to transfer this knowledge. Mosque-centered religious education is considered to prevent people from joining different religious groups and communities. This notion gained very much importance especially after the coup attempt by the Gülen movement. The Gülen movement and its attempt to overtake the running of the state worked as an example of what happens when a religious group is allowed to operate without control. It strengthened the *Diyanet*'s position in its argument to represent "true" knowledge of Islam in comparison to the "misuse" of religion by different groups. The formation of the mosque community, therefore, refers to groups of people who are informed by the *Diyanet* on religious issues. Thus, what they want to transfer with these sermons lead us to the third chapter in which I discuss the content of the sermons.

The focus in this chapter is on what is transmitted as the message of Islam and what women preachers suggest as the life pious Muslim women today should lead. As I stated, sermons are not only about obligations or rules, and are not a simple "do" or "don't" list. Instead, they suggest, give advice and guide people. They try to provide women with a general idea about religiosity so that they can tell what to do and what not to do and why. Keeping this in mind, I followed the question that, in a claim of true knowledge of Islam, what do these sermons advise and suggest to women? First of all, regarding content, there is a wide range of topics they mention in the sermons but ethical issues such as respect for others or having a social conscience, are considerably prominent. The ethical emphasis dominates the content both for understanding Islam and dealing with daily issues. Secondly, what these preachers draw for being a better Muslim is how to be a more knowledgeable and conscious subject. They try to promote moral selfhood and consciousness. They

suggest ethical and religious cultivation of women on their inner selves and in their relation with God and other people. To become a better Muslim means to cultivate one's self in Islamic virtues. This can be achieved, according to sermons, through improving one's knowledge of religion. So, preachers expect women to know more about Islam and to be conscious on what they do. I need to stress here that this emphasis on "conscious" act does not mean that they understand or promote a cognitive notion of religion and exclude practices of worship such as the prayer or fasting. Preachers are aware that it is practice that makes a religion. So, what they try to do is supporting practice with consciousness. They are trying to combine practice and cognition.

This peculiar emphasis on "a conscious and knowledgeable subject" might have the effect of laying an additional burden on women in the sense that they are now expected to seek for the "true" Islam, to be suspicious about what they are told in the name of religion, to be careful to live according to what they are told to be the "true" Islam, to be truly responsible when carrying out pious acts, to be an example for others, and so on. This is quite an enormous list. Thus, these sermons put responsibility on the women audiences to live an Islamic life and to spread this true teaching among their families and friends.

Another point I stress about the content is the critics of the preachers. While they give suggestions and advice, they also draw criticism from various circles. They criticize what they define as "misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islam," issues that are very much related to the question of tradition. The *Diyanet* considers some traditions as obstacles to understanding true Islam. Preachers often stress the idea that people act more out custom than out of religion. They are also critical of

women being overwhelmed by running the home and organizing daily life. They oppose excess and suggest moderation, thus placing more burdens on women.

The last chapter examines how these preachers narrate. I explain their unique genre of preaching and stress its feature as an oral performance and extemporaneous speech. I explain the dynamics of preaching as genre, discourse, affect and preacher's position and describe how preachers use combination of different styles and strategies to transfer the message effectively. Here also I stressed that preaching is not about knowledge transmission, it also aims to inspire emotions and enact sensibilities on the past of the hearer. I suggested that this emotional aspect gives the sermon its power because it moves people to improve their ethics and moral comportment. I explain the importance of listening in the cultivation of the heart for the development of the moral subject. I mention the affective conditions of preaching that yields special insights, which, in turn stimulate and move the listening subject. I focus on and detail the relation between morality and narrative and stress that these sermons touch on how to be a moral being in the world in an intersubjective manner. In addition, I discuss the role of storytelling and *kissa* as an important character of preaching for the injection of morals and for religious teaching. I mention how exemplification functions to address the audience. Preachers use examples through which women can find a connection with their own life. Repetition, as another element of the sermon, works to transform religious knowledge into practice.

I argue that how they preach is as important as what they say. In the discourse of preaching the content and the narrative style intersect in many respects and support each other.

Beyond the various possible alternatives to study sermons and practice of preaching, we should keep in mind that the sermons studied here are first and

foremost a woman-to-woman conversation, which necessarily constitutes the main characteristics of the sermons in this study and affects all components of the sermon such as content, narrative style and space. Through these sermons, women are not only involved in the physical space of mosques, they also enter the area of the articulation of religious knowledge, which is also historically male-dominated. So, these women preachers open up a space for women-led religious knowledge articulation. Yet that these sermons are part of a larger social project and that therefore see women as agents of this project is a point that should be kept in mind when assessing the sermons.

The importance of this study lies in its inclusion of the religious specialists into the discussion, that is, the woman preacher who is responsible for the interpretation and transformation of the religious message to its believers. While it is possible to find numerous studies on theology, religion or ethics; the relationship between religion and its specialist is limited. Thus, questioning the role of the preacher as the religious specialist on the transmission of religious message hopefully makes us to understand better the process of how religious knowledge is interpreted in this specific time and place.

Women preachers as officials of the *Diyanet*, intersect and diverge from the expectations and demands of the *Diyanet* in many ways. These women are neither simply mouthpieces of the *Diyanet*, nor are they totally independent from it. The relation between the preachers and the *Diyanet* cannot be assessed in terms of whether the sermons comply with the directives of the *Diyanet* or whether they object to it. Instead, it is necessary to see these women preachers as officials of the *Diyanet* who try to reconcile the tension between bureaucratic structures, their own religious concern and the expectations of the congregation (Yalçın, 2018).

These sermons certainly matter in the sense of having significance in the lives of the listeners. As the target of this process, the listeners' perspective is also important, but missing in this thesis. The focus here is on the preachers and their way of narrating and I give limited data about the audience responses. These are in fact various and include practices of socializing and making new friends, the retelling of religious anecdotes to family and friends as well as leading to confusions and arguments about religious practice. However, I believe in that including the women audience into the picture would make this study broader by asking questions such as how listeners are affected by the sermons, whether and how they confer agency to the listeners, the motivations that makes them go to listen to these sermons, and the extent to which these sermons affect their religious engagement and everyday relation by allowing women to have a voice in religious discussions and interpretations that might allow a more woman-friendly approach.

These questions can be increased but they are all questions that cannot be asked without a critical study of the delivery of the sermons themselves.

APPENDIX

LONG QUOTATIONS IN TURKISH

1. Çocukların gelmediği, gençlerin uğramadığı, hanımların sahip çıkmadığı camiler boynu bükük kalmaya mahkumdur. Cami merkezli hayatı özendirmemiz gerekiyor.
2. Hz. Peygamber zamanında caminin ana mekânında saf düzenine uygun olarak namazlarını kılan, camide cemaat olma duygu ve bilgisine erebilen kadınlara bugün Türkiye’de, bodrum katı ya da küçük yerler tahsis edilmiştir. Abdest alma mekânları da hiç düşünülmemiştir. Bu küçük yerler camiden kopuk odalar veya cami estetiğine uymayan perde ile ayrılmış mekânlar olup bu durum, namazlarının geçmesi gibi bir zaruret olmadıkça, kadınların camiye gelmemesinde de etkilidir.
3. Bir yere girdiğinizde oranın sahibi gibi davrananlar tarafından istenmeyen kişi olarak hissettirildiğiniz oldu mu? İşte ülkemizde ne yazık ki kadınların çoğu, sadece Ramazan’da değil, her ne zaman bir camiye girseler öyle hissettirilirlir. Sadece cami ile ilgisi olanlar değil, çevredeki en ilgisiz kişiler dahi "ne işleri var burada" bakışıyla bakar. Cami dışında hiçbir kadınla konuşmakta sakınca görmeyenler camiye gelen bir kadına "kendilerini günaha sokmak üzere oradaymış" muamelesi yaparlar. Üç-beş emekli amcanın sığınma evi gibi kullandıkları camilere ise sayınız yüzlerce bile olsa onlar onaylamadığı takdirde huzur içinde giremezsiniz; ne yapar eder püskürtürler sizi.
4. Mescitler yeryüzünde Allah'ın evleridir. Allah'ın evleri Allah'ın bütün kullarına aittir. Oralarda istediğimiz kadar kalır, namaz kılar, Kur’ân okur, ibadet eder, ders çalışır, sohbet dinler, hatta istirahat ederiz. Buluşma yerimiz, uğrak yerimiz, evimiz kadar evimizdir. Öyle olması gerekir. Efendimiz’den öğrendiğimiz budur. Ama gelin görün ki eğer kadınsanız, hele de çocuklu kadınsanız ülkemizde çoğu camiye girişiniz de çıkışınız da en hafif ifadeyle ürkekçedir. Camilerin sahipleri ve tartışılmaz otoriteleri gibi davranan bazıları kötü kötü bakarak, söylenerek, olmadı gelip müdahale ederek sizi camiden püskürtmeye çalışır. Camilere giren çıkan bir kalabalıktan, çocuk cıvıltularından, ilim meclislerinden, kısaca camilerin günün her anında, toplumun tüm üyeleri tarafından aktif bir şekilde kullanılmasından rahatsız olan bu zihniyet cemaatteki birkaç takıntılı amca ve teyzeyi aşip oranın görevlilerine kadar uzanmışsa işte o zaman "ört ki ölem" diyeceğimiz gündür.... Bunu yapan sadece erkini korumayı, alanını kaptırmamayı düşünmektedir. Cami sanki onların ülkesi, kadın ve çocuklar da sınırları zorlayan mültecilerdir.
5. Camide biz hep diken üstündeyiz şimdi biri gelip de bize “tamam, çıkın” dicesek mi? Hep diken üstündeyiz. Yönetim ne kadar bunu düzeltmek için uğraşsa da en alt kademeye kadar camideki görevli teknisyenden tutun da

imama müezzine varıncaya kadar herkes tarafından bilinmesi lazım çünkü yetkililer sürekli her an orda değil. Müftüler imamları toplayıp kadınların vaazlarına destek olun, zemin hazırlayın dese de, o camide görev yapan müezzin imam bunu gerçekten içselleştirmemişse... Çok tecrübelerim var benim bu yönde, iki üç tane emekli amcanın camiye girmesi için, yüz tane kadını camiden çıkarabiliyorlar yani. Çıkın artık namaz vakti yaklaştı diye halbuki bizim ordaki süremiz zaten belli.

6. Yardımcı olanlar oluyor, ama nadiren de olsa köstek olanlar da oluyor. Bir camiye gidiyordum, gerçekten bir süre sonra devam edemedim. Her gittiğimde kapı kapalı oluyordu, her gittiğimde kapı kapalı oluyordu. Her gittiğimde görevliyi arıyordum. Kadınlar kapıda bekliyordu. Öncesinde gidiyorum ama yine de kapıyı açtırana kadar vakit geçiyor, bazen olmuyor. Açıyor ama ters kapıyı açıyor, insanları dolandırıyor başka bir sokaktan filan. Böyle zorluk çıkaranlar olabiliyor.
7. Amirine söyleceksin, o ilgilensin de bir şeyler yapsın diye. O zaman da araya böyle bir sorun girince kavgalı olduğun bir yere ne kadar gidebilirsin. Yine sen muhatap olacaksın o kişiyle ve sorun yaşamaya devam edeceksin. Ben daha ziyade sahip çıkmaya, zıtlaşmamaya çalışıyorum, çünkü onların da etkileri olabiliyor. Etrafı ve cemaati daha iyi tanıyorlar. Onlar duyuru yaptığında daha çok insana ulaşıyorlar.
8. Ben biliyorum kovulduğunuzu ama hakkınızı arayacaksınız. Bu mescitte erkeğin ne kadar hakkı varsa kadının da o kadar hakkı vardır. Peygamber bu hakkı kabul etti. Falan padişah döneminde falan sultan döneminde birilerinin canı bir şey istemiş hala onu sürdürüyorsun. Kuran duruyor ortada, sünnet duruyor ortada. Sizi burdan hiç kimse kovamaz, çünkü hakkı yok. Özel mülkü değil. Kamunun mülküdür. Kamu kim? Kamu sizsiniz. Kamu erkek cemaat, kamu kadın cemaat. Hakkınızı arayacaksınız. Süpürgeyi temizlik malzemelerini sıkıştırdıkları yere sizi hapsedemezler. Böyle bir hakkı yok kimsenin.
9. Biliyorum ‘Ama camilerde erkek cemaat bize şunu bunu dedi’ diyeceksiniz. Yarın bir gün bu bahane seni kurtarmayacak. Sen hesaba çekileceksin. Onların hesabı sorulacak ayrı. ‘Sen benim kadın kulumu camiden nasıl men edersin, bu küstahlık nedir?’ diye onların hesabı kesinlikle sorulacak. Ama sana da sorulacak mücadelen nerde? Siz cihadı ne zannediyorsunuz? Cihad işte bu.
10. Peygamberin usulü böyle ön saf erkek cemaatindir, arka saf kadın cemaatindir. Usulü budur. Nizam gerekir. Ben hiçbir zaman üst katlarda alt katlarda namaz kılmam. Ortadan arkası benimdir. Arka saflar benimdir. Gitmiyorum kardeşim, allahın mabedindeyim ve gitmiyorum. Rahatsız mı oluyorsun, buyur sen git. Size söylediğim şeyin kolay olmadığını farkındayım ama cihat budur. Camilerdeki yerinizi ve hakkınızı alın. Orası size Allah’ın ve Resul’ünün vermiş olduğu bir haktır.
11. Nasıl ki özel mülkünüze sahip çıkıyorsunuz, mescitteki hakkınıza sahip çıkacaksınız. Bu sıkıntı, bu noksanlık, bu eksiklik, bu kadın cemaatin Cuma

namazından bu mahrumiyeti yeter olsun artık. Bizim bu camilerden kopuşumuz, ayrılığımız, ıraklığımız yetsin artık. Peygamberin hanım sahabeleri peygamberin mescidine gitti; cumada, vakit namazında, sabahta, yatsıda, bayramda, cenazede peygamberin hanım sahabeleri peygamberin mescidinde. İşte benim farzım bu kardeşim, benim farzım peygamberin buyruğu ve Allah'ın emri ile bu.

12. Daha manevi bir atmosferi var camilerin. Nasıl deyim, camide vaaz cuk oturuyor! Çok daha etkili oluyor. Mesela camideki vaaza Kur'an okuyarak başlıyorsunuz, dua ediyorsunuz sonunda. Sonuçta orası bir ibadethane. Ben mekanların da ruhu olduğunu düşünüyorum. Başka hiçbir şey yapılmadı o mekanda. Düşünün o mekanda hiç günah işlenmedi, yani zina bir şey yapılmadı. Hiç isyan olacak küfür sözler söylenmedi. Orada sadece dua ve ibadet yükseldi Allah'a. Dolayısıyla oranın bir kişiliği var ve o kişilik sizi etkiliyor.
13. Allahın mescitlerini takva sahipleri mamur eder. Binasını mamur etmek değil sadece, yanlış anlamayın. Allahın mescitlerini mamur etmek fiziksel yapıyı mamur etmek değil, burayı mamur edeceksin ibadetle ilimle zikirle tefekkürler tesbihatla. Diyor ki tevbe suresinde ancak takva sahipleri yapar bunu. Yoldan geçerken camilere uğrayın, camileri trans geçmeyin. Buralarda yapılan dua herhangi bir dua değil. Muhakkak ki mescitte allah'tan başkasına dua edilmez.
14. Cemaatin müdavim olması bizim göz aydınlığımız. Eseri olur ya insanın eser diye bakarız biz onlara. Camiye kazandırdığımız müminler olarak bakıyoruz, o anlamda eser. Bakın, bu müminler artık camiye geliyorlar. Bu müminler Allahın mescitlerindeki ders halkalarına katılıyor. Bir müminin ayağını Allahın mescidine alıştırabilirsek bu çok güzel.
15. Arkadaşlar çok önemli bir duadır, ebrarla beraber olmak. Ebrar ileri gelenler, iyilikteki önderler. Allahın nezdinde makbul zümreye ebrar denir. Rabbim bizi onlardan kılsın. Bizler faniyiz. Buraya gelmemek var gelip de görmemek var ama burası baki. Buraya sahip çıkın. Bu camii hem Cuma namazlarımız hem bu sohbetlerimiz için çok kıymetlidir. Buraya devam edin. Biz böyle bir halde ölelim. Rabbim katında muteber bir cemiyette ölelim.
16. Namazın kötülükleri gidereceğini belirtiyor peygamberimiz. Namaz ve sabır hep beraber zikredilir Kuran'da. Çünkü namaz sabır gerektirir. Sabırlı, kararlı ve azimli insanlar ancak namazda sebat edebilir.
17. Oruç size Allaha karşı sorumluluk bilincine erişesiniz diye farz kılındı. Dini hassasiyete eresiniz diye farz kılındı. Namaz seni kötülükten alı koysun, oruç sana dini hassasiyet versin. Oruç bizi israftan, cimrilikten, gıybetten alıkoymalı. Allah'ın sizin açlığımıza susuzluğunuza ihtiyacı yok.
18. Biz bu vaazları hali pür melalimiz değişsin diye yapıyoruz. Halimiz değişsin diye. Niye oruç, takva emredildi eğer değişmeyeceksem. Cömertlik benim cimriliğimi kırmayacaksa, neden emredilsin? Kötü ahlak değişmeli, güzel ahlak deruhte edilmelidir.

19. Bugünkü mukabele Resulallah zamanından gelen bir mukabele değil, şeklen öyle. Resulallah Kuranı anlamayı öğütler. Bütün mahalle mukabelede, sohbe kimse gelmiyor. Hiçbir kelimesini anlamıyorlar. Kuran sadece okumak için değil, anlayıp hayata geçirmek için. Peygamber döneminde şimdiki gibi bir Kuran okumak yok, okuyim, anlamiyim yok. Okuyup, anlayıp, düşünüyor ve hayata geçiriyorlar. Şu an yapılan kurani seslendirmektir. Okumak değil.
20. Kurani kerimin neresinde lillahi ma fis semavati vel arz duyarsak, Göklerde ve yerlerde ne varsa Allah'ındır demek sadece mülkiyeti Allah'ın demek değil. Mülkiyeti Allah'ın olduğu kadar Allah o mülkiyetinde güce sahip. Allah evirip çeviriyor onu. Kul Allah'la irtibatını burada zayıflattığı zaman şirke düşüyor. Bizim kız evlenemedi yaş 30 a geldi şu türbe, bu baba, iş için şu türbe, eş için çocuk için şu baba... Buradaki sıkıntı, lillahi ma fis semavati vel arz ayetinin hakkıyla anlaşılması. Mümin bu ayeti kerimeyi sadece sahiplik olarak anlıyor. Yarım bilgi. Mümin Allah'ı kabul ediyor, ona ibadet ediyor, namaz kılıyor ama işlerinde, ticaretinde, duasında hayatının farklı farklı şubelerinde, farklı kudretler arıyor. Her kuvvet ve iyilik hakkın sahibi olan Allah'a aittir.
21. Müslüman kimdir nefisini hesaba çeken, ölümü çokça hatırlayandır. Kuran kağıtlarda yazılı olan değildir, ahlaktır, Allah'ın kanunudur Kuran. Yaşıyorsan, Kuran yaşıyordur. Dedikodudan kaçırıyorsan sen, kurani yaşıyorsundur. Kibirden kaçırıyorsan, sen kurani yaşıyorsundur. Gösterişten, cimrilikten kaçırıyorsan, hakkıyla cömertlik yapıyorsan sen kurani yaşıyorsun. İnfak sadece para değil. Hoşgörüden infak et yahu, selamdan infak et. Merhamet göster, zamandan infak et. Müslümanlık budur. Müslümanlık başörtüsü değildir. Başörtüsü İslam'ın emirlerinden bir emirdir. Hiç bir hüküm diğerinden daha az veya daha fazla değildir. "Bir kadın başı açık gezerse cehennem dibinde cayır cayır yanacak ooooo" diyorlar. Tesettür farzdır. Ama benim cemiyetimde algılandığı gibi değil. Başörtülüysen Müslümansın, değilsen Müslüman değilsin. Başörtülüler takvalıdır, başörtüsüzler takvasızdır gibi. Bundan kurtulun. Bir kadını erkek görecekt diye namaz kılmıyor. Bundan kurtulun. Başörtüsü takmayana Kuran'da cehennem görmüyoruz. Ama gıybet edeni cehenneme atıyor. Keşke annem de başörtüme yaptığı yatırımı benim ahlakıma yapsaydı.
22. Allah'ın hatırını kalplerinden çıkarmayanlar, semavat ve arzın yaratılışı üzerine düşünürler. Allah'ın muazzam bir sistemle yarattığı bu dünyaya dair neler beklediğini düşünenler kavrar. Düşünmek için vakit ayırmamız lazım. Basit şeylerden vazgeçmemiz lazım. Arkadaşlar, hanım cemaat, ne olur bu evde bu örtülerin bu çarşafın yakasını bırakın. Efendim mefruşattı, alışverişdi vitrindi, markaydı ne olur yetsin artık. Artık bu lüzumsuz şeyleri, israfları, gereksiz zaman ve enerji israfını bırakalım.
23. Çok önemli bir işiniz var diyelim, hayati. Sizinle, ailenizle alakalı çok hayati bir badirenin arafesinde olduğunuz zaman, şu sizi meşgul eder mi: hay Allah camlar da epey kirlendi, hay Allah perdeleri epeydir yıkamadım. Yahut halıların yıkanması lazım, bunu düşünür müsünüz? Siz hayati bir şeyi

düşünüyorsunuz, bunlara ehemmiyet vermezsiniz. Bizim işimiz çok ciddi ve mühim bir iş. Nedir o ahireti kazanmak. Günlük hayatınız nelerle geçiyor ona dikkat edin.

24. Kendinizi çocuklarınıza adamayın. Kimseye kendinizi adamayın. Ana babanıza adamayın. Kendinizi hizmetçi yapmayın. Çocuklarınız da eşiniz de sizi takdir etmez. Vasıflı olun. Çocuklarınız söylemese de vasıflı bir anne babası olmasını hizmetçi bir anne babasına tercih ederler.
25. Biz hep dünyayı düşünüyoruz. Öldükten sonrayı hesaba katmıyoruz. İstedığımız her şey dünyaya ait. Peygamberimizi düşünüyorum, dünyaya ait bir şey istedi mi? Çocukları için bi şey istedi mi? Ben denk gelmedim. Bizse sürekli çocuklarımızın şöyle böyle olması için dua ediyoruz. En çok duayı kendi imanınız ve ahlakınız ve kendi kurtuluşunuz için yapın. Siz nasıl olursanız çocuklarınız da öyle olacak.
26. Mal ve evlat sizi oyalamasın diyor Kur'an. Ama biz çocuk merkezli yaşıyoruz. Her şeyimizi çocuğa göre düzenliyor, onu hayatımızın merkezine koyuyoruz. Çocuklara iyilik yaptığımızı düşünüyoruz ama narsist bireyler yetiştiriyoruz. Asıl kalıcı olan salih ameldir.
27. Herkese mutlaka bakmanız gerekiyor, herkesle mutlaka en az bir kere göz kontağı kurmanız gerekiyor. Yerinde soru sormanız gerekiyor dikkatlerini toplayabilecek ama bunlar çoğunlukla retorik sorular yani cevabı olan sorular değil. Soru sormanın çok önemli olduğunu düşünüyorum.
28. Vaazda çok önemli bir ölçüye dikkat etmemiz gerektiğini düşünüyorum, o da şu: bir vaaz hiç duygu içermiyorsa sadece bilgi içeriyorsa mesela konferanslar gibi o zaman onu dinleyen insan bir şeyler öğrenmiştir ama yapma isteği duymaz. Bir vaaz çok duygu içeriyorsa ama bilgi içermiyorsa, böyle coşturan vaazlar, insanların allah diye bağırdığı vaazlar gibi, o insanlar müthiş bir şey yapmak isteği ile dışarı çıkar ama ne öğrendik ne yapacak bilmezler. Aşırı duygusal tahrik, ama bir hedef ve bilgi yok ne yapacaklarını sunmuyor. O yüzden bir vaazın hem bilgi içermesi gerekiyor, hem de duygusal açıdan motive etmesi gerekiyor. O dönüştürücü gücüne ulaşabilmesi için. O yüzden ölçülü bir biçimde ikisinin bir arada olması gerekiyor.
29. Tek başına doğruyu söylemek değil, doğruya inandırmak, doğruya davet edebilmek mesele. Davet sevgiyle olur davet dille olmaz gönülle olur. Mesela sözle olmaz hisle olur. Aslında vaizin esas görevi bu. Vaizlik bilgi aktarımı değildir. Vaizlik biraz his aktarımıdır, hal aktarımıdır. Bunu hem vaiz, hem cemaat hisseder.
30. Kıssalar niçin var? Kendimize acıyarak, sürekli pişmanlık duyarak, eksikliklerimize odaklanarak halimizi düzeltemeyiz. Onun için tövbe vardır, yola devam etmek için. Kıssalar boşuna değil, hikaye değil. Hazreti Musa gençliğinde cinayet işlemiştir. Bize ne demiş oluyor bu örnek; asla ümit kesemezsin, hiç kimseden. O insan peygamber olmuş sonrasında. Hz Adem'e

bakın, Allah'ı ve melekleri görmüş, her şeyin farkında ama yine de yasak meyveye gidiyor. Ama sonra tövbe ediyor ve Allah onu affediyor.

31. Bir çocuk misafirliğe gittiğinde kendini yaramazlık yapmak konusunda özgür hisseder. Eve döneceği anı ve annesinin ona kızacağını düşünmez. Ama eve dönerler. Hepiniz biliyorsunuz o anı değil mi? Ahiret gününü unutan bir kimsenin hali bu çocuğa benzer. İstediklerini yapabileceklerini düşünürler çünkü Allah onları o an cezalandırmaz. Herkesin ömrünün sonlu olduğunu düşünmezler ve Allaha döneceklerini bilmezler.
32. Örnek vermenin hayati önemi olduğunu düşünüyorum. Ve bu örneklerin kesinlikle kitaplardan toplanmış örnekler değil sizin kendi yaratıcılığınızla bulduğunuz örnekler olması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Yani ev hanımlarına sohbet veriyorsanız mutfaktan misafir ağırlamadan alışverişten çocuklarıyla eşleriyle ilişkilerinden bir örnek. Bu farazi bir örnek olabilir. Ama muhakkak onların hayatına oturan bir örnek olmalı. İnsanların hayatlarına oturan örnekler bulabilerseniz en akademik konuyu bile anlatabilirsiniz. O zor konuları anlatmamızı sağlayan o faktörün de onların hayatlarında kafalarına tam oturacak örnekler bulmak, en hayati konunun bu olduğunu düşünüyorum.
33. Ben de bu halkın içinde yaşamışım. Annem de ailem de genelde böyle insanlar. O yüzden yabancı değilim bu duruma.
34. Cemaat şekillendirici oluyor. Vaaz mesela şu değildir, kanımca vaaz sadece vaizin cemaati etkilediği bir saha değil. İki taraflı. Hatip dinleyenleri etkiliyor, ben aynı şekilde dinleyenlerin de hatibi etkilediğine inanıyorum ve etkileniyorum. Vaazın bereketi etkileniyor. Sunumu, üslubu etkiliyor, hatta konuları etkiliyor.
35. Cemaati tanımak için devamlılık gerekiyor. O devamlılık sağlanınca, bu süreçte cemaati tanıyorsun. Taniyınca da, anlatılan genelde bunun üzerinden, cemaate yönelik oluyor.
36. Cemaat şekillendirici oluyor. Vaaz mesela şu değildir, kanımca vaaz sadece vaizin cemaati etkilediği bir saha değil. İki taraflı. Hatip dinleyenleri etkiliyor, ben aynı şekilde dinleyenlerin de hatibi etkilediğine inanıyorum ve etkileniyorum. Vaazın bereketi etkileniyor. Sunumu, üslubu etkiliyor, hatta konuları etkiliyor.
37. Cemaati gözlemlemezseniz havada kalır vaazınız. Çok karşılaştığım bir şey, diyor ki hocam sizin kalp gözünüz mü açık? Biz defalarca denedik, buraya gelirken şu soruyu soralım diye biz daha sormadan siz vaazın içinde yer veriyorsunuz. O dedim kalp açıklığından değil, o toplumu gözlemleyip toplumun ihtiyaçlarına göre konuştuğumuzdan. Mesela bugün daha mütevazı semtlerde aile apartmanı diye bir olgu var ve kadınların ciddi sorunları var aile apartmanlarıyla ilgili. Yani herkesin bir arada yaşadığı ve kimsenin özel hayatı olmadığı. Dolayısıyla şimdi ben mesela aile apartmanından bir tane örnek vermişsem diyelim mahremiyeti anlatırken orda vaaz dinleyenlerin içerisinde en az 15-20 tanesine bu çok uyuyor ve o diyor ki “vay, nasıl bildi

ya! Aynı bizim durum” diyor “sanki bana konuştu” oluyor. Yaşadığımız toplumdaki sıkıntıları bilmeniz gerekiyor bunun için.

38. Hocam geçen bir şey olmuştu bu vaaz tam olarak onu anlatıyor dedikleri oluyor. Biri dedi ki mesela hocam evde dün benim şöyle bir vukuat oldu, sanki bu vaaz ona bir ders verdi, sanki siz onu bildiniz. Mesela bir hanımı hatırlıyorum, yeni gelmeye başlamıştı camiye. Vaaz bitti dedi ki ya hocam geçen haftaki vaazda eşime gittim dedim ki sanki hoca geçen hafta bizim evdeydi de aramızdaki münakaşayı sanki hoca dinledi onun üzerine camide vaaz yaptı diye anlattım ve hayretimi eşimle paylaştım dedi.
39. En çok karı koca ilişkilerindeki sorunlar, yani aldatma ve geçimsizlik problemleri gibi. Çocuk yetiştirmekle ilgili sorunlar. Ama ilişki sorunları en çok. Aileyle ilişki, karı kocanın ailesiyle ilişki, kendi ailesiyle ilişki. En çok soru olarak gelen de bu alanlardan.
40. Tekrarın çok hayati bir önemi var. Çünkü akademik bir makale veya kitap yazmıyoruz. Konferans da değil. Not almıyor çoğu ve sadece sizi dinliyorlar. Dolayısıyla burada tekrar ve neyi tekrar ettiğiniz çok önemli. Belli aralıklarla tekrar etmeniz hem onun yerleşmesini sağlıyor hem de hani eğer vaazlar bizi manevi açıdan dönüştürecekse o dönüşüme katkısı var. Ve Kuran’ın da metodu böyle. Kuran’da da çok tekrarlar var. Bir de neye önem verdiğinizi gösterir. Ama tekrarın da bir hassas çizgisi var o çizgiyi çok aşarsanız hoca bugün çok iyi hazırlanmamış olur.
41. Bildiğiniz bir şeyi her duyduğunuzda yenilenmenizin sebeplerinden biri de onu yeni bir kombinasyonun içerisine yerleştirmeniz. Bir hafta önceki senle, bir hafta sonraki sen bir değil. Mesela tuz bütün yemeklere girer ama hepsinde ayrı bir kombinasyondur. Ya da yağ bütün yemeklerde vardır ama hepsinde ayrı bir kombinasyondur. Bazı şeyler zerdeçal gibidir her şeye atılmaz. Ama bazı şeyler tuz gibidir yani. Namaz mesela her konuyla ilgisi var. Sabırla ilgisi var, disiplinle, Allah korkusuyla, ahiretle ilgisi var, Allah’a teslim olmakla ilgisi var. Hangi konuyla ilgili değil ki namaz her konuda namazı örnek verebilirsin.

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