

EXAMINING THE FORMATION OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN A NAQSHI COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF ISMAİLAĞA

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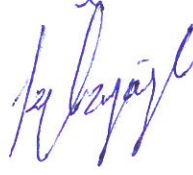
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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE FORMATION OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN A NAQSHI COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF ISMAILAĞA

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MA in Sociology

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This thesis aims to examine the formation of women's identity in Ismailağa community. This particular community is chosen specially for its unique adherence to traditional roles and communal upbringing. I employ three different methods of qualitative research for this study; discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Discursive strategies and modes of subjection revealed that female members of Ismailağa community construct their identity with regards to both Sufi elements and community experiences. Finally, this study aims to contribute to the literature of Sufi communities in Turkey with an emphasis on gender and identity.

Key words: Ismailağa Community, Sufism, gender, identity

ÖZ

İSMAİLAĞA CEMAATİNDE KADIN KİMLİĞİNİN OLUŞUMU

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Bu tez İsmailağa Cemaatin’de kadın kimliği oluşumunu incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bahsi geçen cemaat geleneksel rollere ve cemaati yetiştirmeye dair kendine özgü bağlanma şeklinden ötürü özellikle seçilmiştir. Ben bu çalışma için üç farklı niteliksel araştırma yönteminden faydalandım; söylem analizi, yarı-yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme ve katılımcı gözlem analizi. Söylem stratejileri ve öznellik formları İsmailağa Cemaati’nin kadın üyelerinin kendi kimliklerini hem tarikat özelliklerine hem de cemaat tecrübelerine göre şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Son olarak bu çalışma, tarikatlar hakkında yapılan araştırmalara cinsiyet ve kimlik özelinde katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsmailağa Cemaati, tarikat, cinsiyet, kimlik

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The Sufi is like the earth: every kind of abomination is thrown upon it, but every kind of goodness grows from it. The Sufi is like the earth: both the righteous and the sinners walk upon it. He is like the clouds: they give shade to all things. He is like the raindrop: it waters all things. Junayd al-Baghdadi (Kara, 2017, p.24)¹

1.1. Topic & Rationale of Thesis

This thesis utilizes discourse analysis to examine women's identity formation in Ismailağa community. As a religious subculture in the heart of modern Istanbul, Ismailağa community's adherence to their traditional existence and reserved lifestyle and their Sufi background creates an interesting enigma. Their devotion to traditional gender views, in some respect, differs from two main Turkish gender discourses; conservative and secular gender identity. Their distinctive worldview, mission, orthodox Islamic attitudes, and scepticism towards governmental institutions created a well-preserved community and self-constructed identities for its members.

The Sufi community is a branch of Naqshbandi-Khalidi order situated in Fatih named after Ismailağa mosque, where communities current Sheik served as an Imam for over forty years. The disciples of Mahumut Ustaosmanoğlu lead a minimalistic lifestyle renouncing the modern, as preached by their current sheikh. Although very distinct and

¹ "Sufi toprak gibidir. Kötü olan herşey onun üzerine atılır. Fakat ondan güzelden başka bir şey çıkmaz. Sufi yer gibidir, iyisi de kötüsü de ona basar; bulut gibidir her şeyi gölgelendirir; yağmur gibidir her şeyi sular" (Kara, 2017, p.24)

visible due to their reactionary attitudes, there is still a lack of research regarding the community.

I was first drawn to this particular subject through observation of the community and most specifically their commitment to Sufi teachings and their reactionary attitudes towards modernity. The lack of existing literature on the subject, revealed a reclusive community that have accumulated negative representation over the years. Thus, my aim with this research is to contribute to academic literature on gender and Sufi communities, by examining the formation of women's identity in Ismailağa community. This research will provide a preliminary data regarding women's identity formation in Sufi communities.

1.2. Research Questions

With this research, my aim is to examine, how female members of Ismailağa community define themselves and actively shape their own identity through the teachings of their community?

I utilize discourse analysis to contribute to the gender discourse in Turkey by exploring the construction of habitus and selves through the practices of the community. My aim is to contribute to typology of Sufi women through an in-depth analysis of the Ismailağa community. Thus in addition to the main research question, I will also explore whether the female members of the Ismailağa community are willing to subvert to their prescribed roles and to what extent do they resist the patriarchal hierarchies? Are they mostly influenced by their family or their environment: *medreses*² and *sohbets*? In addition to these questions I will also utilize the modes of subjection to further analyze

² Ottoman *medrese/kurs* (or Madrasa in Arabic), "was an institution responsible first and foremost for acquiring deeper knowledge in the field of religion. However, at least to some extent, it offered a broad education as well. For those who desired a wider understanding, some *medreses* could also provide the comprehensive knowledge required by polymaths" (Shefer-Mossensohn, 2016, p. 61). The Ismailağa *medreses* try to maintain the same structure of Ottoman medreses, purely focusing on religious education, such as Arabic, Quran, Fiqh, etc.

the main characteristics of an ideal Muslim woman, as it is described in the community. And weather it differs compared to other communities? And weather identity is autonomous or communal in the community. And to what extant do these roles provide freedom or role of women in the community?

Through this research, my aim is to identify individual and community-influenced perspectives and trends that shape women’s identity. I will also argue that women’s identity in Ismailağa is influenced largely by their community values as well as their religious views and personal values, which provides a multifaceted formation of personality. Finally, I will attempt to establish a new Sufi typology of women, based on my field research.

1.3. Literature Review

This research falls at the intersection of several important and distinctive literatures, including religious movements, discourse analysis, and gender studies. Thus, it contributes both to these fields individually and to interdisciplinary research with its overlapping content. Therefore, the main literature of this research will extensively borrow from several different areas of study including conservative gender research, Naqshbandi order and the Ismailağa community respectively. The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the research on Naqshi communities and gender studies in Turkey. Second chapter provides in-depth information on the Ismailağa community, branch of Naqshi-Khalidi Sufi order and discourse analysis.

1.3.1. Gender & Turkey

Turkey has a rich and diverse academic research geared towards understanding the inequalities, challenges and hardships faced by women. Women’s studies as research have recently emerged after 1970, with Taşkıran (1973) and Afet İnan (1975), on women’s rights, the first primary source on the field, *Toplumda Kadın*, was written by Abada-Unat in 1979. Other works that were published during this period includes *Çocuğun Değeri* (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1981), *Kadın Sorunu* (Arat, 1980) and *Kadınlar ve Siyasal –*

Toplumsal Hayat (Tekeli, 1981). Most research focused on the “status of women in the family, at work, and in public life” (Arat, 1996).

On the other hand, religious movements and communities have largely been neglected in Turkish studies, rather focusing on these movements as an opposing force to Turkish modernization (Ocak, 2003, p.8). The dominant ideology during the modernization period was to enforce secular ideology in line with new Turkish identity. The aim of this new notion was “to replace the religious identification hitherto prevalent amongst the Turkish population with a national identification” (Waxman, 2000, p. 8).

There are two visibly prominent typology of women in present Istanbul: secular and conservative. However, there is little research done on the different conservative women in Turkey that have been invisible in public domain due to the restrictions placed on religious representations and clothing that was still effective until very recently. Secular women typology has been promoted extensively since the early 20th century, based on new government policies.

Formation of the Republic in 1923 brought forth new policies regarding education and women’s status. The new ‘Kemalist feminism’, as Kandiyoti describes it, saw the integration of feminist movement in to state policy. The idea was to promote modern women in reference to the western ideology; this was first established, in the form of an educated mother and a wife and later as genderless women, working, side by side with men, in the work force (Çaha, 2001). The “state feminism” created the “modern Turkish women” typology, whose main attribute was to raise children, women were still first and far most mothers and now they were the loyal supporters of the Kemalist modernization. The new typology rejected the anti-liberal and Islamist women and attributed backward thinking to them. “The foundational discourse of the Republic had imagined Turkish national identity as a homogenous whole, and this national identity was built around a claim to modernization and progress” (Cindogly& Zencirci, 2008, p.

793). Turkey was much different than Europe as these changes were not brought by the overwhelming increase in gender equality but rather enforced by the government to further encourage westernization and “modernization”. Şirin Tekeli also supports this idea by suggesting that this advancement was to reject the Ottoman ideology and political view and to also prove to the west the Europeanization of Turkey. Tekeli also argues that women represented the oppressed minority by Islamic laws that favoured multiple marriages, covering women and “forcing them to stay at home”. Thus Ataturk’s theological war was to liberate this very ‘visibly oppressed’ women. Tekeli also argues that these equal right laws were to separate the Ataturk’s single party regime from the European dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini (Kandiyoti, 2015, p. 74).

“Thus, the Kemalist national project, in the name of modernization, interfered in all areas of social life, education, culinary practices, customs and family life” (Cindoglu & Zenciri, 2008, p.792). Arat (1989) described these reforms for improving women’s status as a tool to westernize the country, which meant the establishment of a secular, national and a democratic state (p.30). During this project women, “became bearers of Westernization and carriers of secularism, and actresses gave testimony to the dramatic shift of civilization” (Göle, 1996, p. 14). Kandiyoti argued that these changes failed to incorporate the crucial aspects; sexuality and women’s role. Thus women although searched for “liberation beyond emancipation”, the modern Turkish state failed to provide that (Kandiyoti, 2015, p.78).

Durakbaşa (1998) also argues the failure to change the patriarchal values and cultural norms with the radical changes in the society. “Kemalism although a progressive ideology that fostered women’s participation in education and the professions, did not alter the patriarchal norms of morality and in fact maintained the basic cultural conservatism about male/female relations, despite its radicalism in opening a space for women in the public domain” (Durakbaşa, p.140).

Women represented the visual imagery of secularism in modern Turkish state. Religion was viewed to limit women's involvement in public sphere, modern women, on the other hand, had the right to enter and participate in public life freely. By way dissociating the new Republic from Ottoman Empire, secularism became one of its six pillars. Religion was viewed as an illogical outlook towards the world and religion was dismissed in an attempt to rationalize it. In fact Subaşı (2002, p. 17), states that it created new typologies.

Modern Türkiye'nin özgül deneyimi, din ve dindarlık tipolojilerini de dönüştürmüştür. 'Medeniyet'e yeni bir ontolojik ve epistemolojik değişim talebiyle katılma azmi, gündelik hayatın hemen her ögesini güçlü bir değişim talebinin içine çekmiştir. Böylece din de dindar(lık) da siyaset, kültür, ekonomi vs. gibi diğer kompartımanlardan ayrılmayacak bir şekilde yeniden kodlanmıştır.³

The national discourse in Turkey with its disregard and alienation of religion, established tense relationship with Islam. Islam became the other as secularism rose in Turkey. Islam was labeled out of date and regarded as the obsolete. Kemalist elites were and modern ideal citizen was depicted as secular, modernizing and anti-religious. The backward thinking of the past in this context belonged to the past. Since the association of the modern both in institutional and public sphere were a step towards westernized and idealized lifestyle that would rid Turkey of its old chains. Most importantly in national Turkish context the meaning associated with the secularism was not only within the domains of the legal institutional sphere, but more importantly were vital to the introduction of a modern, western, civilized way of life for the new Turkish citizenry. Women's body was the most visual depiction of modern, they were the most evident and visible change in Turkish society.

³ "The particular experience Modern Turkey has transformed the typology of religion and piety. The ambition to join 'the' civilization with submission to change ontologically and epistemologically has demanded a powerful change in every aspect of life. With this, religion and religiosity has been recoded and integrated with other parts of life such as politics, culture, economy etc.

The female body in this context was used as a representation of the secular nation, a break from the past, to assert differences not only from Ottoman Empire, but other nation states as well. The new republican woman was to depict a cross between the old, Anatolian and the new western and modern women. Changing role of women emphasized that, by the confinement of religion to private sphere.

The headscarf was avoided as it was considered inconsistent with the new ideology of modern and civilized Turkish women. Headscarf was mostly associated with backward thinking, in fact, conservative women discourse emerged much later in the late 1980s (Çapçioğlu, 2016). Göle specified that, Turkish reformation period entailed more of a genderless aim for women to incorporate them in to workforce by promoting their actor status rather than their sex (2001: 109). Genderless meant a change in attire: Çaha states that in late 1970s women were encouraged to “relinquish their gender roles, to cut their hair short, dress in jeans, and refrain from wearing makeup to look more like men.” This was to promote, women to work side by side with man in solidarity for their country (Çaha, 2001). Durakbaşa also argued the de-feminized identity of the secularized women under new liberal reforms. She argues that women developed more of a professional identity rather than individuality or sexuality. They were depicted as “a sexually modest and respectable picture that would not threaten the patriarchal morality” (1998, p. 148). Thus, women were encouraged to preserve the traditional patriarchal values and the notion of honor and family.

Conservative women were prevented from contributing to this modern society due their group affiliations. The most affected by these new regulations were the Sufi women. Government banned all religious garments, followed by any conservative religious signs and symbols especially that of Sufi symbols, and finally closed down the tombs and Sufi lodges. Mosques were regarded as the only designated public worships spaces, under the control of ministry of religious affairs. The titles, honours of both sheikhs (Sufi leaders), and disciples were outlawed. The black all body covering scarf

(*çarşaf*)⁴ and the traditional Ottoman headdress for man (*sarık*) along with green robes (*cübbe*) and cane was closely associated with a backward thinking and out-dated Ottoman fashion statement. Thus, women of conservative religious groups had little freedom and were often regarded as invisible in the eyes of the modern state. In fact, Kandiyoti (1991) states that the authoritarian structure of the Single Party regime used women to create monotype citizens, which in return prevented the establishment of any independent women's movement.

The conservative women typology on the other hand, has recently re-emerged after the reversal of headscarf prohibition in government institutions. The recent visibility of conservative women in both government institutions and public domain has created a new conservative women typology. However, the abundance of research for conservative women does not reflect the Sufi communities, since there is still a lack of research on the subject. Nilufer Göle in *Melez Desenler* (1986), suggest that new Islamic identity differs from simply being "born Muslim", that it is redefined with much emphasis placed on the fundamentalist Sunni tradition. This new ideology tries to revive the connection to *Asr-i Sadet* by mostly telling and retelling of the stories of the prophet and his companions and creating a "cultural repertoire" (Göle, 29). Since social movements are more than beliefs, actions and agents, they entail stories as well, and according to Göle, these stories influence identity formation. Contemporary Islamic movements rely on stories to give them a shared sense of "culture, emotion, community and practices" and form a connection between the past and the present. Göle also suggests that, especially women, constantly seek the stories of women companions of the prophet as they construct their own identity, and legitimize their position in the society through these stories. (Göle, 30) Similar results were found on this research. Göle also argues that these communities define themselves in contrast to

⁴ "The term veiling refers to the covering of women according to Islamic principles, yet the actual veil (*çarşaf*) which covers all of the body from head to feet except for the eyes and is sometimes accompanied by a *peçe* (face cover), is quite different from what is understood as an Islamic way of dressing in Turkey now" (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu, 2018, p. 519-520).

“secular” and “western”. Ruşen Çakır in his book *Ayet ve Slogan* (1990) argues that especially Ismailağa community define themselves as a counter power to the society they live in. Persistence on this notion of being the other creates an enclosed society that is tightly bound together. Thus, created a “Muslim ghetto” community in the heart of modern Istanbul. (Çakır, 65).

This polarization dominated much of gender discussion in Turkish academic. The liberalist and Kemalist perspectives argued that women gained liberty with the shedding of their old backwards thinking. Necla Arat was one of the leading authors of the Kemalist women, she argued that liberation of women was an important part of national reforms; she argues that wearing the veil was a sign of “patriarchal oppression”. Most of the argument of the Kemalist ideology lie with the overthrow of the oppressive religious application, the modernization period enabled women to acquire rights and status that would not have been possible under the patriarchy of Ottoman Empire. Kemalist notion from the beginning was as Keyder suggests “if there was a homogenous nation with a common past, their interests and future goals should have been common too. The state would be the narrator and the agent to realize these common goals and interests”. The ideology supported the women’s full participation in Turkish society in terms of education, and occupation. Domestic duties and childbearing practices were no longer a primary concern of the modern women (Taşkıran, 1976:55-56).

Cihan Aktaş argues that the “nationalist” women organizations during the republican era in Turkey, was aimed to segregate the *hijab (türbanlı)*⁵ image of Turkish women in European perception. Furthermore, she argues that *türbanlı* women were viewed as unable to educate themselves due to their devotion to devine laws. These women rejected the modern depiction of national women and opted to preserve the Islamic lifestyle of their ancestors. The republican/laic women, as Aktaş argues had the

⁵ Headscarf that covers the head and the neck.

confidence that christen dogma would enable and liberate women (Aktaş, 2011, p. 251-252).

1.3.2. Religious/Sufi Communities in Turkey

There is an abundance of literature on Sufi orders in Turkey. These sources mostly focus on the foundation of the tariqas, the formation of different orders, characteristics and historical background. Many of these books provide the descriptive information in terms of Sufi tradition and development. Few notable examples of these books include Mustafa Kara's *Tasavvuf Ve Tarikatlar Tarihi* (1985), where he provides the basic Sufi terminology and briefly provides information on prominent Sufi orders. Semih Ceyhan (*Türkiyede Tarikatlar Tarihi ve Kültür*, 2011) and Hulusi Şentürk (*İslamcılık; Türkiyede İslami Olusumlar ve Siyaset*, 2015) on the other hand briefly summarize tariqa in the first part of the book and provide detailed information on fourteen Sufi orders and Sufi communities in Turkey. Şentürk again briefly describes the Sufi communities in Turkey and their experience with the regime change including Ismailağa. Although very limited in scope, there are several researches about the different Sufi communities in Turkey. Ruşen Çakır in *Ayet ve Slogan* (1990) briefly examines the prominent communities of İskenderpaşa, Ismailağa, Nurcular, Süleymancılar and the Kadiri. It is mainly descriptive information of the large Sufi and other religious communities in Turkey.

However, Sufi orders and religious communities are extensively studied in recent years. Main study that is widely relevant to this particular research is the examination of the İskenderpaşa community by Brian Silverstein. In his book *Islam and Modernity in Turkey* (2011), Silverstein focuses on the Gümüşhanevi branch of Naqshi-Khalidi order to examine the enduring roles of sheikhs and Sufi orders in Turkey. The second chapter of his book is dedicated to Sufism, starting from the early Ottoman period to the rejection of Sufi orders in the Republic. Silverstein's work is one of the only studies that examine the Sufi community with a Foucauldian perspective maintaining a discursive method that allows a distinctive outlook on the community. The book draws a

genealogy, which pursues Ottoman Sufism and institutional reforms to the contemporary Sufi devotional practices and traditions in modern day Turkey. Zeynep Yılmaz Hava, have recently studied İskenderpaşa community in her MA research, with an emphasis on Rabita as technology of self and self-care practices. In her research, Hava, emphasized Rabita as a self-care practice and utilized Foucauldian method of self-care practices through discursive formations. She utilized modes of subjection to depict the ethical sheikh and disciples based on her interviews. Although in recent years, literature on Sufi communities increased rapidly with main focus on İskenderpaşa community and Süleymancılar, however, there is still a lack of research in İsmailağa community.

1.4. Outline of the Study

This study is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter outlines the study including an introduction of the thesis, research questions, literature review on gender, and research on Naqshbandi communities, specifically the visible Sufi communities such as İskenderpaşa Community and Süleymancılar, and lastly previous research on İsmailağa Community. First chapter also entails Bourdieu's habitus, field and capital; and Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

Since this study specifically focuses on the identity formation of women in İsmailağa community, second chapter concentrates on the Sufi communities in Turkey, their development and the formation of The İsmailağa community and its structure with emphasis on last two Sheiks and expansion of the community. This chapter examines the principles of the Naqshi Tariqa, its concepts and philosophical background. Second chapter also entails methodology; discourse analysis, field work and participant observation.

In chapter three, for discursive analysis of identity formation, I initially examined the five discursive strategies and techniques that I have developed from in-depth

interviews, content analysis, and participant observation. Chapter four includes, subject construction of Ideal Women, Ideal Man, Ideal Sheikh and Ideal Community, and is further discussed in this chapter with discursive strategies and techniques. Final chapter concludes with review of main arguments/findings; locating women's identity in the Sufi context and more specifically in The Ismailağa community; and finally, suggestions for further research.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *cultural capital* and the Symbolic Interactionist theory as well as existing literature on religious communities. Symbolic Interactionist theory will allow me to address the everyday routines and interactions amongst individuals and their "situated lived experiences" within their religious communities and Bourdieu's *habitus* will provide more structured approach that Symbolic Interactionism theory lacks. These two perspectives will function as the basis for my analysis of discursive strategies through which these women frame their self-representations and their various modes of subjection.

This thesis will emphasise the reciprocal approach to self and society. "The self-influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organization, networks, and institutions". In return, these institutions and society as a whole influences the self with shared language and meaning that enables the individual to understand the other through social interaction and reciprocally view oneself as an object. Self emerges as a result of this process of reflexivity through shared interactions, thus in order to understand the individual self, a close study of society is necessary, keeping in mind that the self is always acting in social environment in reference to other selves (Stryker, 1980).

Social surroundings tremendously influence the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. Ismailağa's adherence to fundamental religiosity constructs a

community identity by its members to preserve Islamic tradition. Within the scope of this research, I will particularly draw on Pierre Bourdieu, Ervin Goffman and Herbert Blumer's works. Both Habitus and Symbolic Interactionist theory provide a combination of the innate and the socially obtained with reference to the social structure; expressing the complex and unique worldview and self-identity of the members of Ismailađa community.

1.5.1. Pierre Bourdieu: Field, Capital and Habitus

This thesis employs the theoretical tools of Bourdieu, in order to recognize the lived experiences of the subjects and to analyse it, in the context of their community and upbringing. Bourdieu's habitus, field and cultural capital terms provide an understanding of the development of women's identity in a religious environment, for they act as a bridge between personal and social domains. In his work, *Sociological Question* (1993), Bourdieu, describes habitus as a "power of adaptation", constantly performing to adapt to the environment. It will aid in identifying the formation of women's identities with the expectations, behaviours, and attitudes of the community of Ismailađa.

1.5.1.1. Habitus

A central concept in Bourdieu's sociological approach and his main contribution to social sciences, habitus in this context is used to explore the differences on how women develop a community habitus with traditional Islamic and Sufi backgrounds.

The philosophical foundation of the concept can be traced back to the works of originally, Aristotle's *hexis* and later Hegel, Weber, Mauss, and Durkheim (1997, 1990). Aristotle, Aquinas, Durkheim and Weber put forth similar habitus term that Bourdieu later employed in his work. Mauss (1979, p. 101), for instance, used habitus to explain the relationship between the individual and the larger social environment. Bourdieu too, utilizes the idea to navigate the "extremes of subjectivism and objectivism" (Urban, 2003, p. 6). Connolly (1997) argues that Bourdieu's works can be understood as

an “analytical tool” to understand why and how humans behave and how those behaviours are affected by discourse. (P.71) Here I will conceptualize habitus as the inherited and the environmentally and educationally acquired dispositions in an orthodox Muslim community to examine, how it influences identity formation in women.

In an attempt to transcend the structure and agency dichotomy, Bourdieu accepts both the influence of the structure that underlies much of culture and places emphasis on human action. Thus, he defines habitus as the “correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world...and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to them” (Bourdieu, 1996b [1989], p. 1). Although it is placed in the individual self, it is produced and maintained by social groups, or as Bourdieu defines it, it is always a “class habitus”. According to Bourdieu (1977), it thus refers to the “interplay between positions and dispositions” in a given social “field”. Power is also legitimized through habitus, which he defines as “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant 2005, p. 316, cited in Navarro 2006, p. 16). Although Foucault argues that power is ‘ubiquitous’ surpassing agency or structure, however Bourdieu, inspired by Marx and Weber argues that all features of society must be examined in terms of power since power is symbolically and culturally created, and constantly preserved or instituted with the interaction of agency and structure. Unlike Giddens’ structuration theory, Bourdieu’s agents are not necessarily conscious of the power embodied in social. Like Marx, Bourdieu is more lenient towards understanding the reproduction of power through structure and ideology.

Habitus is a collection of ingrained disposition, epitome of the body and the being, Bourdieu, refers to as the bodily hexis, where “the body is the site of incorporated history” (Thompson 1991, p.13). Thus habitus is unwarily transmitted, it is the

embodiment of historical relations that “forms of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action” (1992, p.16). Habitus is acquired unconsciously, either through family upbringing, education or other forms of socialization. The collection of internalized behaviour, even the smallest gestures that are unconsciously done is the product of habitus; “a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements...” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 85-7). His dialectic method offers a bridge between the social structure and the mental structure, suggesting that agents are not merely the product of structures but have the ability to transcend and manipulate these rules based on their own personal interest. However, the agent is not completely independent from these structures; they are the embodiment of these structures with an ability to move within the rules and the borders of the provided social structure. It provides a middle ground between phenomenology and structuralism. It is engraved into the self in almost every aspect from gestures, accents, patterns to eating, walking and talking ultimately forming a system of dispositions inscribed in one’s mind and body.

Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1990: 53).

In other words, it is a system of cognitive thought, organizing our thoughts, beliefs and our understanding of the world around us through constant socialization, and enables us to act, think and live in certain way that is deemed proper by the environment we reside in.

Habitus in short is formed by repeated exposure to certain social roles, ideas, conditions and practices. Thus, it has become prominent in studies of religion. In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim defines religious practices “collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that

are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups” (p. 9). Habitus in this religious context can be identified as the knowledge of the embodied principles product of routinized practices that rise to be culturally and socially significant. Religious identity in this context is formed by community and family upbringing from one generation to the next. The religious education these women receive in their community environment through *kurs*, *sohbet* or their family contain attitudes and behaviours specific to this community including its rites, practices, and tradition. Agents in this sense acquire positions and dispositions in their respective social spaces that Bourdieu referred to as the field which “consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital (1992, p. 16).

1.5.1.2 Field

For Bourdieu, the field is a hierarchically structured arena, in which actors compete for money, prestige and power. Struggle is inherent in the definition of it, for the discrepancy in the distribution of power creates a struggle for domination among agents within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2014, p.81). The current state of the limitations, boundaries and arrangements of the field will reveal its history of struggle for different forms of capital within that field. Player such as agents and institutions in particular field struggle to gain and control the capital that specific to the field. Every field is more or less hierarchical since the capital cannot be equally distributed, which is also true for symbolic forms of capital, since it cannot be evenly shared by its members (Swartz 1996: 79). Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) also argue that the field can be viewed as “a temporary state of power relations within what is an ongoing struggle for domination” (p.6). Each field is relatively autonomous and are organized in relation to their form of capital, economic capital being the most prominent.

Religion then can be understood in regards to the field in several ways. It can be understood as a single dominating institution as discussed by Diantielli (2003) for focusing on the French Catholic church. In this sense the competition is not against

other religions but labour distribution in the religion itself. The power in this context lays in the hands of the individuals sanctioned by the religious field who acquire the power to disqualify the layman and provide roles and behaviours to the rest of the community. The second view promotes the shared power between the professional and laity (Dillon, 2001). The third view defines the religious field as a marketplace arguing that there are various religiously oriented fields all in competition with each other for the laity.

1.5.1.3 Capital

For Bourdieu the field entails different forms of power, which he calls “capital”, as well as positions and agents. He defines capital as an “accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated’, embodied form), when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agent, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.46). Capital is mostly bestowed from group to an individual. In this context, he distinguishes four main forms of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic.

Economic capital refers to the possession of economic and established sources, such as money or property rights, respectively. Social capital, on the other hand, is formed through social connections that provide recognition and status in society. These social networks are established to provide welfare in the future. It is in the form of credit that conveys the support of the groups that confers it. Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as “credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group’s belief can grant” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 120). Finally, cultural capital has three distinct forms; embodied state, assimilation of cultural norms and practices within an individual, objectified state; cultural goods and institutionalized state; culturally specific qualities such as titles and degrees (Bourdieu, 1986, p.47).

What counts as capital is always unique to the field and is defined by the individuals within that field. For example, economic capital is the most sought after form, in which

actors struggle over in economic field. While every field has its own stakes, rules and boundaries, will not be the same in different field, “capital is always a resource that can be used to maintain or improve one’s position” in the particular field (Bourdieu, 2002, p.263). Agents compete with each other to obtain capital to be dominant in their own fields.

Hence, I will argue that these women identify themselves with the accepted and most importantly preferred practices, behaviours and titles. Thus, they will predominantly identify themselves with the title perceived as the most influential and prestigious; teacher. Baker and Miles-Watson (2010) suggest that religion refers to “public activities derived from behavioural adherence to structures associated with formal or institutional expressions of faith”. Thus, I will also refer to Bourdieu’s cultural capital when examine the structure of the organization, to identify how legitimacy is acquired within the group. In this instance, religious capital is the one given by the predominant religious members in the organization.

The Ismailağa women’s ways of identity production and maintenance as agents take place not just in terms of (cultural) capital accumulation and habitus formation in the Bourdieusian sense but also in the context of symbolic interaction in their everyday lives, which will constitute the second main dimension of my theoretical framework.

1.5.2. The Theory of Symbolic Interaction

While habitus provides a holistic approach to the discussion of agent vs. structure dichotomy in social order, Symbolic Interactionism offers more of a micro level approach with tools to investigate the actors through their everyday social interactions, as they use symbols to create meaning. It is active in a sense that the participants in social situations constantly negotiate the meanings and definitions of the situations while taking other’s opinions in to account and interpreting and assessing each other’s behaviours to act in accordance with expectations.

Symbolic Interactionist theory assumes that self-concept is created through the interpretation of words, actions and gestures during a social interaction. Herbert Blumer argues that people exhibit actions that are constructed in reference to other people in the process of face-to-face interaction, by depending on their interpretations of their own and the others behaviour (1986). Cooley (1902) argues that individuals think about how others see them, make assumptions about how others are judging them and they reach accordingly by incorporating those ideas into their perception of the self. This process which Cooley calls “looking-glass self” infers from how we imagine ourselves in the minds of others shapes our conception of our-selves. In other words, the other’s view of us functions as a metaphorical “mirror” through which we evaluate and construct our own image. This is a constant process by which we continually reproduce and perform ourselves in accordance with other’s present and potential reaction. For Blumer, this process entails an “inner conversation” with ourselves, and taking ourselves as objects: through this constant inner conversation, we not only construct each other, and hence, the society, writ large, but this process of interaction also shapes ourselves because the “inner voice” speaking to our “selves” (and making the objects) is the society’s voice in us.

Herbert Blumer, suggests three aspects to the theory; humans assign meanings to things and interact with them based on that meaning, the assigned meaning of things come from our interactions with others, and those meanings are interpreted specific circumstances (Blumer, 1969). People can understand others and themselves by both observing and putting themselves in others’ place. Thus people constantly reproduce and perform themselves based on others reactions and interpretations (Blumer, 1986, p. 8-13). The theory posits that society should be studied through the interpretation of objects, events and actions of the members of that society. Members give meaning to social interactions and constantly negotiate the social order. Actions constantly modify the meaning of social behaviour in accordance with the expectation and reaction of the

others. Members also form social bonds through the interpretation of each other's behaviours (Anderson&Taylor, 2002).

In a more detailed explication of the SI theory, George Herbert Mead, too, assumes that people's idea of themselves emerges from their interactions with others, particularly during different phases of socialization starting from early childhood. He argues against biological determinism, with the construction of self through experience and social activity, it is the product of socio-symbolic interaction. Through socialization the self acquires, according to Mead, two distinctive selves: "I" and "Me". The "me" represents the expectations of others, defining the way that is deemed proper, and producing, "a conventional, habitual individual", and "I" as the "novel reply" (Mead, 1934, p. 175). In other words, while the "I" is the opposite of "me" as it refers to the spontaneous, creative, subjective and the uncontrolled aspect of the self. Mead also suggests a dialectical relationship between the "I" and the "Me" as there is a dialectical relationship between society and the individual. Once the individual views him-her-self self from the standpoint of the other, self-consciousness is achieved as self is essentially social and cognitive.

The self is developed through three main activities according to Mead: language, play and game. Language provides the individual with the skills to learn about others by taking the "role of other" and provides others to respond. Play provides individual to take on the role of others, this is key to development of the self, as the individual internalizes the roles in the game. There are always alternative courses of action, and individual continuously makes choices on how to act and behave, within the expectations of the other.

There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience. A multiple personality is in a certain sense normal, as I have just pointed out" (Mead, 1934, p.142).

Since meaning is ever-changing and society is in a constant state of flux, symbolic Interactionist theory proposes studying the actors' subjective meanings and interpretations. Furthermore, the theory provides an explanation as to how different religious meanings and practices arise out of different social situations in which religious behaviours occur. The individuals exist within their social situation and in response to that particular situation.

Mead argues that people take on the roles and imitate others; through "play". Through language and other symbols children learn to convey meaning. Central to this theory is "I" and "me", rather than being two separate parts of self, "I" and "me" are in dynamic relationship which in term forms self. The "me" represents the impression we get of our selves through the actions and attitudes of others. "I" on the other hand responds to, now internalized thoughts of our self from the perspective of others.

I have been presenting the self and the mind in terms of a social process, as the importation of the conversation of gestures into the conduct of the individual organism, so that the individual organism takes these organized attitudes of the others called out by its own attitude, in the form of its gestures, and in reacting to that response calls out other organized attitudes in the others in the community to which the individual belongs. This process can be characterized in a certain sense in terms of the "I" and the "me," the "me" being that group of organized attitudes to which the individual responds as an "I"(Mead, 1934, p. 185-186).

Erving Goffman on the other hand argues that human action depends on the scenarios and performances. Goffman is interested in the maintenance and construction of everyday life interaction as he argues them to be either a ceremonial mandate or a game. The self is the production of the performances that we provide on the social stage. Individual constantly tries to understand the environment and act accordingly to achieve control over it. We act on the basis of the intended image that we want to provide through what he calls "impression management".

Goffman's (1969) dramaturgical approach with all its elaboration, builds on the Shakespearian notion that, "all the world's is a stage" (p.257). The self in this idea becomes a mere "product of an interaction between the performer and the audience" (Ritzer, 2013, p. 234). Individuals constantly perform to maintain a desirable image. The central to this view is the notion of the "front" and the "backstage". The front stage is "where the performance is given" (As cited in Joosse, 2012, p. 178). Actors will try to control or manipulate the environment which includes several elements, or props: dress, speech, staging to cast the most impressive and favourable image to the audience. On these stages, our roles are carefully managed according to others to obtain our goals or to simply fit in to the environment. This suggests that individuals are constantly on guard to maintain the performance. Individuals also constantly engage in "impression management", in social settings, where we present ourselves and behave in the way that will prevent embarrassment of themselves to other actors. Backstage on the other hand provides a relaxed environment from the demanding role playing. "Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1954, p. 112). The preservation of the back and front stages separate is carries outmost importance in impression management.

In addition to front and back, Goffman theorized mask for deception in face-to-face communication (Goffman, 1990, p.57). An individual brings forth different aspects of their personality during their interaction. The individual is not becoming someone else but rather these represent the many forms or facets of the individual. Thus a person can maintain the face that the others expect to see or hear. This "splitting" of self and character can be found in almost all interactions.

Goffman argues that people interpret the world through primary framework or interpretive schemas, formed as a classification based on experiences. It organizes social experiences as guiding reference for actions, individuals, groups and societies. People interpret the world through primary frameworks that consist of social and

natural frameworks. Natural frameworks identify the event as natural and physical occurrence without any social interference. Social frameworks are an extension or built on the natural frameworks, representing the socially driven occurrences. Frame analysis also aids in discourse since relationships are formed through communication, framing analysis how “these relationships are negotiated in interaction” (Litosseliti&Sunderland, 2002, p. 195). Frames communicate members constantly changing attitudes and positions and what is being communicated. It helps understand participant’s definition of a social situation. The main focus here is “frame analysis captures a speaker’s relation to an audience, the audience’s relation to speaker, and a speaker’s relation to nontextual aspects of the self. “Framing can be thought of as the linguistic negotiation of our social and conversational identities” (Litosselitti & Sunderland, 2002, p. 196). Identity in this context can be described as ongoing conversation, composite of projected selves or multiple alignments that one negotiated during an encounter. This specifically important for this research since Goffman (1972) argues that it is not the attributes of social structure that are here considered, such as age and sex, but rather the value placed on these attributes as they are acknowledged in the situation current and at hand. Thus participants negotiate and interpret attributes as the social encounter unfolds.

These frame analysis particularly aid in understanding the changing alignments of self in the presence of others. The shifting of alignments can capture the dynamics of the social and defines the situation and in what way their words and gestures to be understood. Frame analysis through participant interaction thus aids in understanding intersubjectivity.

The “face” on the other hand is used by Goffman to describe the self-image that the speaker or the hearer would like to maintain during the interaction. “Face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p.68). The face has to

be maintained throughout the conversation to create and ideal image or breakdown of communication will ensue.

These terms of face, mask and frames aid in understanding the distinct collective attributes and traditions, education, social solidarity and collective effervescence, and how these change from the culture and other religious communities. In my case, it will help me answer questions on how they depict and maintain the impression that defines and separates them in terms of identity from other groups and how they are affected by the religious upbringing.

It is common for the community to display symbolic indicators that represent both the community and the larger Sufi identity. Their affiliation to Sufism and Ismailağa community can be portrayed by their devotion to dress codes, attitudes, and other public signs. In the case of Ismailağa their distinctive dress code, manner and attitude display codes specific to their own community, which conveys an image of both conformity to moral ideas and religious distinction according to Goffman (1959). Sufi tradition esteems in self for their distinct devotion to *adâb* (ethical code) in their pursuit to achieve the perfect possible self (*al-nafs al-kâmil*). However these qualities of self do not necessarily ensue the social code of civility but rather the inner qualities of the self which is reflected in attitudes and behaviour. That being said a Sheik and his followers must always comply with certain qualities of gesture, expression and emotional state during symbolic interaction processes.

CHAPTER II

NAQSHIBANDIYYA AND THE ISMAILAGA COMMUNITY

2.1 Overview of Sufism

In this chapter, I will try to provide a brief definition of Sufism and Sufi thought. Sufism/Mysticism is one of the oldest concepts, thus it has accumulated an immense literature all over the world. It has varying definitions since every experience is unique.

Mystic orders are clandestine in nature, and experienced and disclosed only through progression of the individual. Sufism in its essence represents the renouncement of all worldly pleasures for the eminent truth of reaching the Supreme Being. It “is a mystical path of love in which God, or Truth, is experienced as the Beloved” (Vaughan-Lee, 2012, p. ii). It is an individual journey to seek the source of all power and divine. The spiritual awakening is the aim of Sufism through *dhikr*, repeating one of the names of God. Sufi ideology is to minimize the effect of the ego, by letting go of all the world pleasures to reach God.

Sufism is practiced under a master (murshid), which traces his saintly lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad. The murshid, in theory, has already completed his path and provides guidance to his disciples (Green, 2012, p.8). All masters in varying degrees based on different tariqas, have reached the knowledge of God’s divine qualities, which is called *ma’rifa*. One of the fundamental aspects of Sufism is, the importance placed on complete obedience to the murshid. Sufi orders formed ‘brotherhoods’ and grouped themselves in ‘*tariqas*’ (paths). Sufism in its essence teaches “the practices of *adâb*, *dhikr*, and *muraqaba* passed down by its masters, with the aim of experiencing the destruction (*fana*) of the lower-self (*nefs*), that leads to survival (*baqa*) of the higher-self (*ruh*)” (Green, p.9).

Nefs is described as one's own instinctual behaviour and its pure focus is on the physical world, rather than spiritual. For people to escape from *Nefs-i Emmare*, to leave the worldly pleasures behind, *tariqa* is viewed as the ideal path. It is seen as a spiritual connection with God, which distracts the person from the physical world, and with through detachment from the physical world, one can become attached to God. Because worldly pleasures are seen as a distraction, minimizing these acts connects the person with the current world is encouraged. Thus, in *tasawwuf*, limiting the consumption of anything excessive and unnecessary, such as limited amount of food, sleep and speaking are encouraged in the Sufi tradition. This is constantly preached in the Ismailağa community. Limiting these activities is believed to have an effect on people's appreciation of God, staying humble and limiting the desires of the *nefs* (Maktubat Imam Rabbani, 6th letter). Islamic tradition argues that the non-material dimension of the human body consists of two parts: the *ruh* (spirit) and the *nefs* (soul). Sufism aims to separate these two parts and even allow the *Ruh* to control the *Nefs*. The *Ruh* learns to control the temptations of the world with their *Mürşid-i Kamil* (Mature murshid) by utilizing *tariqa*.

The aim of cleaning the heart is getting rid of all thoughts and memories from the heart, except Allah. One of the interviewee's, Hatice (age 37) explains the importance of having a Murshid in *Tariqa* in this way; "Reading medical books does not make the person a doctor, to become a doctor you need to attend the class, you have to witness how a doctor treats his patient, reading books on *tariqa* does not teach a Sufi to deal with their *nefs*, the Sufi needs a *Murshid-i Kamil* as a teacher to teach him how to deal with their *nefs*."

Sufi order or *tariqa* in religious literatures translates as the "road to follow" and historically carries both doctrinal and institutional elements (Ceyhan, 2011:27). Sufism indicates a spiritual pathway towards God through love and devotion. There is no definite number of Sufi orders in the world, since *tasawwuf* suggest that there is an

abundance number of ways to reach God, “as many as the stars”. Thus tariqa differs according to place, environment and most importantly the character of the *sheikh*. The different views represent the different characteristics of the *mürids*, and a person is able to choose and be chosen by the most suitable order. Most prominent branches include Halwatiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyyah, Rifaiyya, Shadhiliyye, Sa’diyya, Mevleviyya, Bayramiyya, Bektaşilik, Bedviyye, Desukiyye, Kubreviyye, Suhruverdiyye and Yeseviyye. These main tariqas also have branches of their own that differ according to *adab, erkan, seyrisuluk*. Shadhiliyye maintains a substantial global following with over ninety branches, followed by Halvatiyya with fifty branches (Ceyhan, 30).

Naqshbandiyya is one of the oldest and most widespread Sufi orders. Founded in 1389 by Bahauddin Naqshband, it is the derivative of Hacegan order. Naqshbandiyya was highly influenced by the *madrassa* culture of Horasan thus provided a new synthesis of the order that combined both the spiritual and the institutional aspect. Hacegan order, unlike other orders, argues that their *silsile* starts from Hz. Abubakir, rather than Hz. Ali. Generally the order follows Abubakir, Selman al-Farisi, Kasım b. Muhammad b. Ebu Bekir, Ca’fer Sadık, Bayezid-i Bestami, Ebu’l-Hasan Harakani, Ebu Ali Farmedi, Yusuf el-Hemedani and Abdulhalik-i Gucdvani. The line of successors followed Hacegan tradition until Mevlana Halid-i Bagdadi, who introduced Halidiyya order to Asia, Iraq, Syria, and Southeast Asia. Naqshbandi order spread to Anatolia in the 15th century with the disciples of Ubeydullah Ahrar. Kasniyye, Urmeviyye, Muceddiyye and finally Halidiyyah joined Ahraris in the 19th century. Mysticism or Sufism had very much become part of Ottoman society. Several Sufi orders gained prominence in Ottoman Empire, including Bektasi, Halveti, Mevlevi, Rifai, Qadiri, Naqshbandi and Bayrami. The state often opted to keep a distance from all Sufi orders to maintain the heterogeneity of the government. Istanbul has always been considered a hub for Sufi orders with over 300 *dergah* in the early 20th century. Halvetiyye order was prominent in Anatolia with the most *tekke’s* (lodges) in the region (Ceyhan, 37). *Tekke* showed overwhelming support during the war of independence and Sheikhs took office in the first formation

of the new Turkish parliament (1920-23). In 1924, *Tekkes* were assigned to the Department of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) with its formation. After Sheiks Said riots in 1925, Sufism was banned, and most *tekkes* and tombs were closed.

2.2. The Ismailāga Community

Naqshibandiyya is founded on several principles that date back to the beginning of Sufi order. The founder of the Naqshi branch, Bahauddin Naqshband, lived in Bukhara in the 8th century. It is assumed that he was taught by Hacegan sheik Abdülhalik Gücdevani, through spiritual bond called *üveysiye*. Hacegan order started the quiet dhikr as opposed to loud dhikr as the main method of spiritual training. Naqshband followed this tradition. He mainly lived in Bukhara and the Samarkand region, and following his death Naqshbandiyya became a wide spread order. The tariqa reached Istanbul during the 18th century through Mevlana Halid-i Bagdadi (1491) who formed the Khalidi branch that gain popularity in Turkey. Other Khalidi branches include: Ahrariye, Muceddiye, Mazhariye, Melamiye-i Nuriye (Kara, 2011, p. 233-234). There are four founding principles of Naqshi order. First, to purify the external with Sharia; second, to purify the internal with tariqa; third, to reach God, or to fully know him with truth; and finally, to reach God through “esoteric knowledge (*marifet*)” (Atay, 2012, p. 165, Kara, p. 233)

The Naqshi order entails the sohbet principle and emphasizes dhikr, rabita and hatm-i Hacegan. Mevlana Halid al-Bagdadi sent one of his students Abdullah Mekki to Anatolia. The “golden chain” in Anatolia started with him and passed down to his student Yanyali Mustafa İsmet (d. 1872). Halil Nurullah, again one of his students was appointed. Ali Rıza el-Bazzazi was appointed as the 33rd sheikh followed by Ali Haydar Gürbüzler (d.1960), and finally the current sheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu was appointed in 1960 with Ali Haydar’s departure.

What sets the Ismailağa community apart from most other Sufi communities is its strict adherence to traditional Islamic values combined with unique dress. In fact the Ismailağa community prides themselves in having kept the traditional values of Islam. The Sufi community takes its name from the mosque built by Şeyhülislam Ismail Ağa. Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu, known to his followers as simply Efendi Hazretleri or Mahmut Hoca, the founding father, was appointed by his Sufi sheikh Ali Haydar Efendi in 1960. Ustaosmanoglu retired in 1954 however continued to serve until 1997 in Ismailağa mosque. The reclusive community provides its own schools and affirms the Islamic teachings above anything else. They have been widely known as “reactionary” due their worldviews as well as their appearances. Men abide by beards and long tunics, or caftans and baggy trousers, forgoing the modern clothing (Şentürk, 2015, 548-49). It is situated in Çarsamba, Fatih with every special product readily available in its streets, including prayer rugs, toothpaste, and long dresses for women, and their communal clothing of çarsaf and *cübbe* that men and women wear respectively. Although a very private community, they are accessible through their social media accounts, and TV channel, a call center (for *fatwa* requests) and even mobile application created by the community.

Belonging to a larger order of Naqshbandi-Khalidi Branch, Ismailağa is one of the most distinguished religious orders in Turkey. They provide their own network of Islamic schools, and tended to condemn the public education due to its mixed-gender environment. In recent years, the community has begun to send their kids to *imam hatip* schools, a *de facto* parallel school system for religious families, who want to educate their children in a more conservative environment. They have fought to preserve the pure Islamic education. The Ismailağa community still tries to maintain the traditional morality (Bayat, 111). They are scripture focused; however, unlike “modernist Islamists” they uphold prophetic hadith as one of the primary sources of education. Most of their schools are unofficial, although in recent years they opened their own private schools with their own religious curriculum that differs from *Imam*

Hatips both in the textbooks provided and in their teaching methods. Their adherence to traditional views and pious living is the most prominent feature of any Sufi community.

2.3. Methodological Framework

This qualitative research is conducted in Istanbul, Fatih, via three different mixed methods for data collection: *sohbets*, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. For data analysis, I utilized discourse for this research. I have examined the interviews, gatherings and primary books with discourse analysis. For participant observation, I joined their formal and informal gatherings and closely interacted with its members. Qualitative research analysis offers an explanation of the phenomena in its natural setting by interpreting collected data with emphasis on “meanings, experiences and views of the participant” (Pope & Mays, 1995, p.42). The emphasis here is made through socio-cultural settings and connection to how people define and make sense of their experiences, how they place value on certain situations and place meaning through their interactions with each other. Thus, qualitative research provides, specifically in this example, narratives of the female members of the community through their own analyses as well as belonging to a wider social environment.

2.3.1. The Fieldwork

The research primarily draws on semi-structured interviews with 13 female members of the community, between the ages of 25-45. I have interviewed women who were born into the community as well as those that joined later, but have had a long experience with the community’s practices and are, also, followers of the *tariqa*. I focused mostly on senior members of the community to further understand the effects of *sohbet* on identity.

Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and in-depth information with the narratives of these women to identify the common or reappearing themes that will provide

information on, how these women shape their identity in relation to their Sufi community. To ensure the interactive nature of the interview, I conducted semi-structured interviews that included pre-prepared questions as well as some spontaneous questions in response to given answers. Flexibility of semi-structured interviews, provide specific answers, and non-verbal communication to assess the validity of respondents answer (Baily, 182). Furthermore, it offers control over the structure of the answers and avoids misunderstandings and offers time to correct and re-word the questions for clarity. The interviewer can ensure that all the questions are answered and add or remove questions depending on the clarity of the answer (Baily, 183). Thus, this research mainly relies on semi-structured interviews to capture subject narratives for discourse analysis. Throughout this research I will be using pseudonyms when referring to the interviewees. Since the interviews were all carried out in Turkish, quotations in thesis are translated.

For the sake of the research, the interviews were mostly conducted with the disciples and members who were born and raised in this community, and who have been members of the tariqa for at least five years. The interviews included women who have only received *kurs*⁶ education as well as women who are both university and *kurs* graduates. The interviews were conducted mainly on teachers and administers of *kurs*. I found the informants first through personal contacts and snowballing method. All the interviews were members of different institutions; once again this was to ensure the reliability of the data, and its representation of the whole community.

Throughout this research, I rely on critical discourse analysis to examine the interviews, to find reappearing themes these women particularly used to identify themselves, and

⁶ I will use the term *kurs* or *medrese*, as the community does when referring to Islamic schools that focus solely on Islamic Studies run by the community itself without any government support. Medrese is used to refer to Ottoman style education centers, most famous of those were the Sahn-ı Seman Medrese (Ieri). Ismailaga kurs education entails classes such as Sarf, Nahv, Hadith, Tafseer, Fiqh, Quran recitation and Aqidah.

whether these themes conform to findings from the surveys and my observations. I tried to ask questions that would provide respondents to construct their own narratives, while ensuring the main research question was answered in a wide range of responses. As for document analysis, I examined the *sohbets*⁷ of current supreme sheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu (published in thirteen volumes) as well as other male members of the community including Ihsan Şenocak and Abdülmetin Balkanlıoğlu. *Sohbet* here refers to gatherings where the sheikh or a lesser leaders talks to the disciples, but also includes a dimension of what Silverstein (2004) called “companionship-in-conversation.”

Once again, the aim was to establish an existing and ideal women discourse within the community from a sociological perspective to examine whether there is unanimity or an inconsistency in regards to women’s identity. I examined the reoccurring terms and adjectives attributed when discussing women’s nature, as well as roles in the community.

Another qualitative method used for this research is participant observation. Marshall and Romssman (1989) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.79). It is a primary tool for conducting data on nonverbal behaviour to further study specific actions in a particular environment (Baily, 250). In my research, participant observation provides detailed data to further understand how these women act in certain settings. It provides information on whether family or community is much more influential on identity formation. I observed *kurs*, *sohbets* and simple get-together and other events to identify the patterns on gender roles and the division of labour between the

⁷ “The *sohbets* were structured around the reading and discussion of two or three *hadith*(accounts of exemplary saying and deeds of the Prophet). The *hadith* were first read aloud by the *vekil* in Arabic, translated and then interpreted, giving examples form daily occurrences and historical anecdotes” (Howell & Bruinessen, 2013, p. 42). The current Sheik Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu also follows the same tradition but with a different structure.

genders. I attended several different sohjets and lectures, this collection of visits were spread over a year. I attended lectures at mederses to further observe the environment of the kurs.

2.3.3. Discourse Analysis

A relatively recent method, discourse analysis primarily focuses on the endeavour to understand social issues and inequalities with an interdisciplinary approach. Originally formulated by Foucault (1972), it is essential in understanding how language functions in “constitution and transmitting knowledge.” Discourse influences the social structures, and continuously reproduces and recreates societies. It acknowledges the influence of discursive practices on social constructions. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001, p, 352). Critical discourse analysis has been notably shaped by numerous scholars, most prominent of whom are Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak. Their approach to discourse analysis stemmed from both neo-Marxist and post-structural theories focusing on “language as the primary source of production and reproduction of ideology – of belief systems that come to be accepted as common sense”. Wodak argues that CDA is the study of inequality in society that is evident in language use. According to her, CDA is “fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationship of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p. 2). Thus the fundamentals of CDA lie with the works of Huberman’s claim that ‘language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (As cited in Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p. 3).

There are two main approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis: the one that is derived from the works of Normal Fairclough and the discourse-historical method stated by Ruth Wodak. The first approach to CDA is more lexically oriented as it strictly examines

the key concepts and relates them to overall concept of CDA. This approach also includes discussion of dichotomy. Since CDA also focuses on inequalities, it is impossible to focus on single terms that have lexical complex structures. Another approach to CDA includes examination of the theoretical background and historical development that has shaped CDA. The focus of CDA is to study social injustice and to try to change or take a stance against “social abuse, racism, social prejudice and discrimination against dominated or marginalised people with lesser power.”

Fairclough defines CDA as a:

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices events and text arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationship between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (p. 132-3).

In its core, CDA argues social reality to be constructed based on social interactions (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Discursive acts produce and form certain social conditions, restore and legitimize social status quo. “Through discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them” (Wodak, 8). While Foucault overemphasized the constitutive nature of discourse (i.e. its impacts on social relations), Fairclough and others view language as a form of social practice: “language is both socially constitutive and socially determined” (Wodak et al., 2000, p. 148). Language in this notion is understood as socially constructed and integral to social relations, not something external. In this context, Fairclough applies Halliday’s notion of text: as it covers both written and spoken discourse, and every written or spoken text carries and ‘ideational’ function, carries understanding of the world. However, he defines discourse as broad process of social interaction between participants thus, carries interpersonal function. Thus, text analysis becomes part of discourse analysis. Finally language is constituted by non-linguistic forms of society (Fairclough, 1989, p.

22). Fairclough separates text into three aspects: description, interpretation, and explanation. Although all deal with the analysis, with first stage focusing on the text as an object, Critical discourse analysis second entails the cognitive method of the participants and their interaction. Text and discourses have social influences since 'language use is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and beliefs' (p. 149).

Fairclough also places emphasis on sociolinguistics –the study of language as a part of social context– that entails power relations and social and cultural changes, since language is socially determined. In other words, it provides insight to the struggles in social sphere and is also shaped by them. Discourse, then, is the study of the interaction of language use and the social structures it is embedded in. The relationship between ideologies used in discourse can be traced back to Antonio Gramsci's hegemony and to a lesser extent the notion of "common sense." Discourses play a role in the development and maintenance of hegemony.

Likewise, Teun Van Dijk focuses on the prejudice and racism presented in discourse through the role of conversation in reproduction of ideology. His major premise derives from the idea of "positive self" and "negative other" representation. In his approach CDA is more of interdisciplinary outlook and a branch of discourse analysis. The socio-cognitive model emphasises the importance of cognition in communication and interaction; however, Van Dijk also suggests that CDA should not be confined to the limits of social and cognitive analysis; rather, encompass the historical, socio-economic, logical, and cultural approaches as well. He emphasizes the dependency of text to context and meaning: "discourse is not only analysed as autonomous verbal object but also as situated interaction, as a social practice, or as a type of communication in a social, cultural, historical or political situation" (Wodak, 2008, p.3).

Ruth Wodak and his colleagues at Vienna University adopted the Frankfurt School model, which emphasizes the socio-linguistic and text linguistics. The distinction in this model of CDA is that Wodak aims to use all the background information in deciphering the different layers of written or spoken text. Wodak puts forth some characteristics of the historical approach to CDA with a specific emphasis on “interdisciplinary, the principle of triangulation and the ethnographic approach to sources of data” (book). Following the tradition, she argues that this approach is interdisciplinary, as she argues the dependency of the relationship between society and language. This interdisciplinary nature of the CDA provides both theory and practice, with the combination of argumentation theory and Halliday’s Functional Linguistics. Much like Fairclough, Wodak acknowledges the interdependent relationship of discourse and practice. Critical Discourse Analysis is flexible, can be combined with various other methods and disciplines as it takes inspiration from several different theorists and directions. Given its philosophical and linguistic underpinnings, CDA offers a unique advantage to studying social relations.

Informed by the general assumptions and arguments of CDA, this thesis will nevertheless utilize Michel Foucault’s two main terms in discourse analysis: discursive strategies and modes of subjection. I will also use “discursive techniques” term coined by Nurullah Ardiç (2012, p.35) to further develop a female discourse in the community. Foucault’s theory is studied in his most prominent books; *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *The Order of Things* (1994b), *Birth of a Clinic* (1994a). These books contain the general outline of his view on discourse and discursive strategies. Foucauldian discourse is collective rather than individualistic that combines both structuralist view and praxeological interpretation. Foucault was influenced mostly by the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Foucault describes discourse as:

Group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation... [Discourse] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this

sense is not an ideal, timeless form ... it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history ... posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality (Foucault, 1972: 117).

Foucault also argues that power is everywhere and affects everything, and even creates reality. He states that power “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault 1980,30). Foucault’s work focused extensively on genealogical and archaeological knowledge of systems and practices of power. According to Foucault “individuals are a vehicle of power” furthermore “individuals ...are not the vis-à-vis of power... [but] one of its prime effects” (Foucault, 1980, p.78-9). Discourse constitutes legitimate knowledge, and is the product of power within the society.

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (Foucault 1977, p. 27).

There are many types of discourse and each discourse has its own patterns and themes that are specific to that particular discourse. According to Fairclough and Wodak, discourse is not only spoken or written language but visual images can also be considered discourse. Discourse is utilized through discursive strategies. For the sake of this research to define the community in reference to others, I will utilize the concepts of *in-group* and *out-group* as referred by van Dijk. In this context *in-group* and *out-group* can be viewed as polar opposite and refer to as ‘them’, and defines them in a negative way while the ‘us’ is positively represented (van Dijk, p. 263).

Based on his description in the *Archeology of Knowledge* “discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence” (Foucault 1972:107). Discourse can be initiated by single activity or a person, thus he describes discourse as “a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” (Foucault, 1972, p. 117).

Discursive formations are speeches that relate to one another in some coherent way, and regulated by “rules of formation” (Foucault, 2010, p.38). In other words, discourse analysis focuses on the conditions of its existence, and what made the formation possible. Discursive formation is defined based on set of relations that provides that any object belonging to a particular object. Discursive strategies, on the other hand, are smaller units that make up discursive formations.

In my analysis, I will also draw upon Foucault’s panopticon metaphor, which allows examination of the relationship between social control and agents in disciplinary situations as well as the power-knowledge relation. Panopticon marked the change into an institutionalized power. The source of the power comes from observing others. Foucault argues that panopticon led to acceptance of regulations and docility through normalization of the power.

Another term that will be used in this research by Foucault is modes of subjection. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault examines discursive practices that constitute subjects, in which modern west have to describe as mad. The *History of Sexuality* explains the discursive practices that have formed the subjects “us” as subjects of sexuality. This describes how “within the complex interplay of power formation and bodies of knowledge, certain forms of subjectivity and experience are constituted” (O’leary, 2002, p.112), which will be closely examined in the research. Foucault argues that modes of subject formation historically emerged under three key elements:

knowledge, power and self. Foucault argues that the individual is born out of punishment, supervision and constraint, and is not only an 'effect of power', but it is also 'its vehicle'. In this context, modes of subjection comes in the form of community opinion and expectations, relationship with the disciples and the sheikh in my research.

Modes of self-constitution can be divided into four main aspects according to Foucault: the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the practices of self and the mode of being. Mode of subjection "that is, the way to one brings oneself to follow a code-whether one does so, for example, in response to a divine command, or perhaps because one recognises oneself as a member of particular community" (O'Leary, p.12). For the purpose of this essay, with the utilization of modes of subjection, I will examine the main discursive strategies and discursive techniques to establish an ideal man, women, sheikh and community, based on my interviewees' descriptions of themselves, other women and men, and their community and its sheikh in Chapter 4. Before doing this, however, I will analyze the main discursive strategies and techniques which my participants employed in their construction of their own identity in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN THE ISMAILAĞA COMMUNITY

3.1. Discursive Strategies

As mentioned in previous chapters, my research will draw from Michel Foucault's "notion that subjects or identities are produced within and through discourses, and are socially and historically situated". Through my interviews, participant observation and discourse analysis, I have identified recurring themes and statements that female members of the Ismailağa community use to construct their identity. This construction of identity reflects the attribution of value or meaning to pre-existing environmental elements. In order to describe the subject formation in the Ismailağa community we first need to identify the strategies that interviewees used to refer to themselves. Discursive strategies will aid in forming a Sufi women discourse which then enable us to constitute identity.

In this sense, the research reveals the ways in which gender is both constructed within communities and reflective of the communities in which characters live. The complexity of the community is highlighted in this particular research, as characters are embedded in multiple often competing, layers of community including social class groups, friendship circles, and family- that all intersect with the development of gender.

Discursive strategies are small units which structure the discourse, they aid in constructing meaning in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts. Wodak (1999) explains discursive strategies as "plans of actions that may vary in their degree of elaboration, may be located at different levels of mental organization, and may range from automatic to highly conscious (p.188)." Discourse defines its own borderlines and subject in respect to other discourses. Discursive practice on the other defines itself in reference or opposition to other discourses.

Textual analysis of *sohbets*, participant observation, my interaction with the community and semi-structured in-depth interviews yielded five “discursive strategies” (Foucault, 1972) that female members of the community use to construct their own identities. These strategies also have sub-categories of “discursive techniques”, a term introduced by Nurullah Ardiç (2012:35), referring to the subsets of strategies, which support the unique identity formation in the community and further categorize discursive strategies. These discursive strategies and techniques further construct the subject formation of the female members of the community. These strategies include:

1. Formation of identity through “*hocalik*”
2. Tasawwuf as the primary source of education
3. Emphasizing self-sacrifice
4. Construction of identity through stories
 - a. Stories of the Prophet and his companion (Sahaba)
 - b. Stories of the Sheikh
 - c. Stories of the female members of the community
 - d. Exemplary and self-stories
5. Constructing internal hierarchy on the basis of *Taqwa*

These discursive strategies with the exception of the first one, *hocalik*, can be found in other Sufi or even non-Sufi communities. Self-sacrifice for example is seen in most religious communities.

3.1.1. Formation of Identity through “*Hocalik*”

Actors often define themselves in terms of what community or society deems normal or esteemed. Women in the Ismailağa community define themselves based on their profession of *hocalik*⁸ that is largely promoted as the only distinguished occupation for devoted Muslim women. *Hocalik*, as gathered from the interviews and *sohbets*, is

⁸In this context *hoca* refers to a Muslim scholar. Ismailağa community use this term to indicate a member who has completed four years of mandatory education.

devoid of gender and surpasses any other profession even motherhood. Most women choose to identify themselves as a *hoca*, rather than any other term. Thus, identifying with *hocalık* is one of the discursive strategies that I will utilize in order to constitute identity for Ideal Ismailağa women.

To understand the significance of *hocalık* we need to look at the history of the order and what *hocalık* represents in the community and the structure of the *kurs*. Naqshi-Khalidi order has a long *medrese* tradition that was later adopted and expanded by the Ismailağa community.

Bahuaddin Naqshband was born and raised in Bukhara, a city famous for its scholars, culture and religion. The city was for a long time center of Islamic education and *medreses*. Naqshi branch continued this tradition and opened several *medreses* in Fatih, Edirnekapi and Ayyansary under the successor of Abdullah-I Ilahi, Emir Ahmed Buhari (Ceyhan, 78-80). Naqshi-Khalidi branches rapid spread and popularity increased their political influence in Istanbul which raised concerns for the Sultan. In 1828 the branches *medreses* and *tekkes* were closed with the instruction of Mahmud II, and the disciples and sheikh were exiled to Sivas. However during this time, they continued their *medreses* albeit illegally, until the end of these policies with Sultan Abdulmecid. These illegal *medreses* continued throughout the republican period, specifically in east-southeast, under the guidance of Khalidi sheikhs. These *mederses* though hadith, tafseer, fiqh, and aqidah (Senturk, 101-102). Algar refers to Naqshi-Khalidi branch as the most prominent and widespread in Turkey.

Halidi-Nakşibendilerin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti sahnesinden silinmediği açıktır. Tersine, onların ülkeye en yaygın tarikattır. Onlar, dini ilimlerin (özellikle fıkıh, hadis) başta gelen koruyucuları yapmaya yetecek kadar orijinal Halidi etkisi yaşamıştır ve onları niyet itibarıyla olmasa da fiili olarak laikliğe karşı getirmiştir (Şentur, 102).⁹

⁹ "It is obvious that Khalidi-Nakshibendi community was not removed from the Turkish Republic history. On the contrary, it is the most common sect in Turkey. The community was deeply influenced by Khalidi

After the law no.677, which prohibits and abolishes the *tekkes* (dervish lodges), *zaviye* (central dervish lodges) and tombs, most *kurs* and *medreses* were also closed. Most of the Sufi communities were affected by this law, but instead they opted to open *medreses* illegally or under different names. Naqshi-Khalidi was one of the communities opted to open *medreses* first in simple apartments to avoid drawing unwanted attention and later in charity foundations (*vakıf*) and organizations. Naqshi-Khalidi like other tariqas opted to continue under different names and branches.

These *kurs* or *medrese* buildings can range from relatively small apartments to single house units to large buildings that can house over 300 students at a time. Depending on the dimensions of the structure any areas other than kitchen, bathroom, and teacher's lounge are used as a classroom and at night as a makeshift bedroom that turn cots in to beds for students. Teachers sleep in provided beds in a separate room. There are usually 10-15 students in each classroom and there are usually several classes in a single room. There is a single administrator, *idareci*, for each *kurs* that is in charge of both financial and internal mechanisms. Arabic education, which is geared towards teaching Arabic, fiqh, hadith and aqidah lasts between 4 to 5 years. *Medreses* operate more or less like boarding schools. Strict rules apply to *kurs*, for example they are dressed in long sleeved dresses with hijabs at all times, even during sleep. Day wear includes long dresses and second hijab worn over the first one for attending classes as the second hijab represents taqwa, which will be explained later in this chapter. Girls, modestly keep their hijabs pinned at all times, to avoid showing their necks to teachers. Modesty is overly emphasized in the *kurs*. For instance, laughing out loud, or sitting crossed leg, wearing see through socks, high hair bun that alters the shape of the head, too short (above the ankle) and too long (passing the heel), and tight dresses are all frowned upon. Students are encouraged to show respect and modesty in front of the *hocas* at all times. The structure of the classes greatly represents the Ottoman style sitting, with *hoca* at the center and students circle around her. They sit on the cots on

order, enough to make them the leading protector of religious studies (especially of fiqh and hadith) and stand against secularism though not theoretically.”

the floor; in fact the *kurs* usually has no couches or chairs to sit in. All the student share the space as they pray together five times a day, eat together and even sleep in one room all together. *Kurs*' usually operate for twelve days, so students visit home once every two weeks or if the *kurs* is weekly, students go home on Saturday or Friday and come back on Sunday night or Monday morning, depending on the *kurs*. *Kurs* are minimally decorated, with simple settings. They provide cots and low desks to study on. The walls are mostly barren of any pictures; however they usually decorate with verses from the Quran. There usually is a large bookshelf that houses the textbooks for every student, however, other than that, no books are allowed as it may deter from studying. There is wall to wall carpet in almost every *kurs*, which is usually washed once every two weeks. Students are not allowed to use any electronic devices inside the *kurs*. The community is against TV, social media, and even usage of certain electronic devices, thus they encourage the minimalistic lifestyle with almost no communication with the outside, or the wider culture/society.

These girls share the same small space with almost 100 other students and their *hocas*, which ensures that they need to act and dress a certain way at all times. Thus, *kurs* becomes the physical space for reinforcing habitus, since it is the embodiment of everything that the community deems acceptable. We can apply Foucault's panopticon to the structure of the *kurs*. His theory of panopticon as mentioned in Chapter 2 enabled Foucault to study, first, systems of social control and people in a penalizing position and second the power-knowledge concept (Foucault 1977). In *kurs*, students are constantly monitored from what they wear to how they act, they are under constant surveillance. In some cases teachers' lounge acts as the panopticon residence, with its doors constantly open; students are exposed to at least one teacher at all times. As habitus signifies, the teacher's language harbors "dispositions or attitudes and behaviors" in turn becoming self-reinforcing memories, or schemas. They are constantly exposed to certain and proper example reflected by *hocas*, thus are encouraged to follow their example. Very rarely are they left alone by the teachers.

These communal setting schedules students all eat, pray; study and sleep at a certain time thus share the fundamental religious values that comes with sharing the designated space.

As Bourdieu argues, habitus can change and be modified with time and experience, thus we can observe that, their habitus acquired from *kurs* is not static, either. Thus, habitus changes with commemorative acts produced by those who live in that space. This habitus neither requires nor tolerates outside intervention.

They live in close quarters and female environment, while engaging in daily prayers and interact only with other members of the community. They are shaped by the community's moral culture and are developed in to pious agents. This particular setting is completely closed off from the rest of the society; although it is located in the center of the city, they rarely interact or leave Fatih. Being a closed off group, they develop their own hierarchal structure and unique communal attributes, such as dresses and *çarsaf*, which reflect the ideology of the community. This hierarchy has paramount importance in the community, since it is developed on the basis of taqwa and piousness to represent an exemplary Muslim. Teacher-student relationship is extremely valued; however, there is a strict regulation of behavior, based on unspoken set of rules that strictly define the nature of the relationship. This is due to the unique status the *hocas* have in the community. Thus, *medrese/kurs* provides the residents of the community with an institution that legitimize the power structure by (re) producing the hierarchical structure while providing allowing members to cultivate their religion to benefit not only themselves but the whole community.

Due to several factors, women's education is significantly shorter than men's. The main reason is that for *Medreses* geared towards female members of the community there was a shortage of *hoca's* to operate the new *medreses* opened by the community. The curriculum was prepared in a way that allowed women to acquire the essential

education that was needed in order to teach. Thus, for the first year's education was geared towards fast learning and passing on knowledge as efficiently as possible. Furthermore, families were reluctant at first to send their daughters to *medreses* for a long time, thus *medreses* opted for a shorter study period for girls. Finally, girls were encouraged to marry early that interfered with their education period since they did not start until the age of 16. However, this trend has long been replaced since most community members tend to marry later than before. In fact out of 13 women I have interviewed, five over the age of 30 and one 25 was single. And one specifically mentioned that she would rather not marry at all.

Ismailağa community's official website describes their *medrese* (religious school) as:

Hakîkî Âlimler Ancak Medresede Yetişir

Toplum içerisinde belli bir zümrenin vâkıf olması gereken ilimler; Kur'ân-ı Kerîm (tâlim, tecvid ve hâfızlık), Akâid, Fıkıh, Hadîs, Tefsîr, Tasavvuf ve İslâmî ilimlerin yolu olan Arapça ilimleridir. Âlimler, bu ilimleri tahsil etmenin sonucunda âlim kimliğini kazanır ve toplumun yaptığı işlerin Allah Te'âlâ'nın murâdına uygun bir şekilde gerçekleşmesi konusundaki ihtiyaca cevap verirler. Şeyhülislâm Mustafa Sabri Efendi, İmam Zâhid el-Kevserî, Ömer Nasuhi Bilmen gibi büyük âlimler hep medreselerde yetişmişlerdir ve onlar gibi âlimleri yetiştirebilecek yegâne müessesesi; medresedir.

İsmailağa Câmiası olarak, ecdâdımızdan tevârüs etmiş olduğumuz medrese müessesesini etkili bir şekilde yaşatmayı öncelikli gayemiz sayıyoruz. İslâmî ilimlerin öğrenilmesi ve hayata tatbik edilmesi konusunda mürşidimiz Mahmud Efendi Hazretleri 'nin tadrîsât usûlünü ve "Her mahalleye bir erkek ve bir kız medresesi açılsın!" sözünü esas alıyoruz. (Medreseler, retrieved from, <https://www.ismailaga.org.tr/talebe>)¹⁰

¹⁰*Real scholars come from the medreses*

A part of the society must have the knowledge of Quran Kereem (reciting, tajweed and hıfz), Doctrines, Fiqh, Hadith, Tafseer, Sufism and the gateway of Islamic knowledge, Arabic. After studying these teachings they become scholars and help the society to live in accordance with God's will. Important scholars like Şeyhülislâm Mustafa Sabri Efendi, İmam Zâhid el-Kevserî, Ömer Nasuhi Bilmen were all educated in *medreses* and the only institution to provide such education is *medreses*.

As the Ismailağa community, it is our primary goal to keep the *medrese* institution, which we inherited from our ancestors. Our way of teaching Islamic studies is the way of Mahmud Efendi Hazretleri and his

Ismailağa community places great emphasis on learning the required Islamic knowledge that is essential to being a devoted Muslim. Adherence to education, specifically Islamic education in this context, takes precedence over anything else. The female members of the Ismailağa community specifically define themselves in terms of their status within the community. The ideal status they mostly associate with is *hocalık*. The community prides itself in following a strict curriculum that educates its male and female members that most other communities lack. Islamic education for women follow almost the same curriculum as men, including but not limited to Quran recitation, Arabic, Hadith, and Fiqh is highly valued in Ismailağa community. Most pupils start their education at the age of six and depending on whether or not they memorize the Quran continue until the age of 22.

Medrese in this context is a source of cultural ecology. It is not only the place of knowledge but, also a place to build spiritual being.

Talebenin, bir medeniyetin hayatının ve hakikatinin, hassasiyet ve dikkatlerinin, idrak ve varoluş biçimlerinin geliştirdiği ve yaydığı havayı da, bu havanın ürettiği ritimleri de öğrendiği, soluduğu, duyduğu ve başkalarına da duyurma coşkusu ve heyecanıyla dolduğu bir habitus, bir ilim, irfan ve hikmet muhit'idir. Medresede, talebe, ilim öğrenmez sadece. Karakterini, kişiliğini, duyarlıklarını da tahkim eder. Bir geleneği yaşar ve yaşatacak bir ruhla, idealle ve vecdle dolar ve kendini aşar. Ayrıca medresede hem multi-disipliner, hem de inter-disipliner bir eğitim modeli, geçişken ve disiplinlerin birbirini karşılıklı olarak besleyen imajinatif -tastamam çağdaş- bir eğitim programı geliştirilmiştir. (Kaplan, (2010, December, 13) *Medrese ve tekke olmadan asla*, retrieved from, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusufkaplan/medrese-ve-tekke-olmadan-asla-35224>).¹¹

will to open *medrese* in every neighborhood for girls and boys education. (*medreses* retrieved from, <https://www.ismailaga.org.tr/talebe>).

¹¹ It is a place where the students feel the life, its essence, where they improve their understanding of existence, where they are filled with enthusiasm to share the joy they felt with others. In the *medreses*, they do not only learn school knowledge, but they also learn about their character and personality. They live the tradition and with a spirit to keep it alive, with idealism, they surpass themselves. The education system in the madrasa is multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, transitive, allowing other disciplines to

The importance placed on education both learning and most importantly teaching has the highest respect in the community. Women first identify themselves in terms of *hoca*, followed by mother and wife. There are two distinct discursive techniques in this context; first emphasizing the significance of knowledge (*ilim*) and second, the genderless identity of the teacher. Literal translation of *Ilm* refers to knowledge in Arabic, and mostly used by the Community as a reference to Islamic education provided in *medrese*. The Ismailağa community has a unique hierarchy based on education, which will be discussed later in the chapter; the education level affects the significance placed on the individual. *Hocas* who received both four years of mandatory education and have completely memorized Quran are of higher status than pupils who only studied or memorized Quran. The hierarchical structure differs for men and women; although they share the same public space, there is social distance that comes with the rules of Sharia. Both genders go through the same education in identical settings but are completely separated both socially and financially. Ismailağa community's adherences to view that dictate the separation of men and women in every aspect of social life, form two entirely separate social fields, within a very tight physical proximity. This enables women to direct their own lives as they see fit within their own social space. Thus they create their own rules and regulations, but still, in keeping with Ismailağa traditions. This 'social' freedom provides women to dictate their own lives, of course, within the boundaries of both Islamic and communal laws.

There are several reasons why women in Ismailağa associate strongly with being *hoca* than anything else. First is due to the emphasis placed on teaching by the Sheikh. He has constantly encouraged women to learn and teach by opening specific schools (*kurs*) for female members of the community. In most of his *sohbets*, he has constantly encouraged and advocated women's education. "Bir hoca dünya dolusu insan gibidir. Bir hocanın kıymet bilmeyene düşmesi (evlenmesi) kainat dolusu insanın gitmesi

enrich one another and completely contemporary
<https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusufkaplan/medrese-ve-tekke-olmadan-asla-35224>

demektir... Hocayı yaşatmak lazım, kuş sütü ile beslemek lazım. Hoca tuz gibidir millet et gibidir, tuz olmayınca et kokar” (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.5, p.26).¹²

Furthermore *hocalık* is as gender specific profession in the community as it is closely associated with motherhood. Women have repeatedly stressed the issue that this was a biological and divine calling thus deserved utter most respect. Since women’s biological calling is to raise children, female members of the community argue that women are biologically inclined to be teachers and any other profession is misuse of our ability. Emine (47) stated that “kadının önceliği ilimdir, eğitimidir. (Allah) Kadın(ı) anne yani öğretmen karakteri üzerine yaratmıştır. Anneyle çocuk arasında model (ilişkisi) olmalı. Annelik eşittir hocalık demektir”.¹³

Merve (31) also stated that “Kadın bence toplumun asıl esasıdır. Yani toplumu geliştirebilmek için eğitebilmek için büyütebilmek için bilgilendirmek için ilk başta kadın eğitilmelidir. Kadın eğitilmezse zaten evlatlar cahil, evlatlar cahil olunca da toplum cahil kalır”.¹⁴

Hüsniye (39), also argued that mother’s main role is to educate her children and she described the rituals of teaching them about main prayers at night and teaching them basic Islamic knowledge before they begin their *kurs education*. Merve (31) argued that women were wasting their talent by doing anything other than being a *hoca*. “Bana göre hocalık görevini vermeyip de, işe ihtiyacı olmayıp çalışan birisine kendini ziyan

¹²“A scholar is almost equal to billions of people. A scholar getting married to a person who does not understand the value of him is like losing that many persons. We should cherish them, feed them with bird milk. A scholar is like salt and the people meat. Without him the society spoils.”(Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.5, p. 26)

¹³ Women’s priority is education and knowledge. God created women’s character in the form of a mother, thus a teacher. Mother and child should form a model relationship. Motherhood equals hocalik.

¹⁴ Women are the essence of the society. Thus, in order to improve the society, in order to educate and inform, women needs to be educated. When women are not educated, ignorant children and thus ignorant society is inevitable.

ediyor diye bakıyorum”.¹⁵ The description of motherhood overlapped with the characteristics of *hocalik*. Almost all the statements argued that women were biologically dispositioned to be teachers: “Bir annede olan vasıfların hepsinin hocada olması lazım”.¹⁶

The sacred aspect of *hocalik* is also highly emphasized in the community. Ustaosmanoglu states in one his *sohbets* (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.8, p. 26) that “en büyük rütbe ilim rütbesidir...Herseysiz olur ama hocasız olmaz, hoca önderdir rehberdir. Mademki Rasulullah karanlıkta olan insanları aydınlığa Kuran’la çıkardı, o halde Kuran lazım.”¹⁷ Thus women repeatedly argued that *hocalik* is sacred in its nature and one of the reasons that the Ismaili community was disguised from others is the emphasis placed on knowledge and teaching. Ece (37) argues that teaching is the profession of the prophets thus the community should follow in the footsteps of the prophet. “Rasulullah bir eğitmendi ilk önce, bende bir eğitmenim, savaşçıydı bende bir savaşçiyım, eş-arkadaştı”.¹⁸

However, we can also argue that, *hocalik* is a *genderless profession* based on the actions of the *hocas*. *Hocas* all act a certain way that presumes authority. This is unique in a sense that it fails to incorporate any of the characteristics they use to identify themselves. Ideal female, which will be discussed in the following chapter, is first *hoca* but is also described as being feminine, thus ‘fragile’, ‘soft spoken’, ‘naïve’ and graceful. However, they do not describe masculine qualities when talking about *hoca* characteristics since they argue that women are much more active in the community and place more emphasis on education. Thus *hoca* represents a firm and strict

¹⁵ I believe that, those who do not teach and work, although she does not need to are lost.

¹⁶ All the characteristics of a mother should also be present in a hoca.

¹⁷ *Ilm* is the highest degree. Scholars are irreplaceable. They are the guides and leaders. Prophet gave light to those in dark with Quran, thus we need Quran.

¹⁸ Prophet was first and far most a teacher, thus I am a teacher, he was a fighter thus I am a fighter, he was a spouse and a friend.

personality, who adheres to strict teacher code, and carries that outside the *kurs* as well to use in her personal life as a status.

Hoca acts constantly in the 'front stage', aware that she is constantly being watched, thus needs to act in certain manner that is deemed appropriate for a *hoca*. As Goffman argues, the front stage entails internalized norms and expectations that accommodate the setting and the assigned role. In this case front stage role is both habitual and subconscious but also intentional and highly routinized. *Hoca's* performance sets the structure of the community. For she is aware that, she needs to act, dress and behave a certain way, that sets the tone for how others behave towards her. Thus, *hocas* in the community tend to be strict, emotionless, excessively modest, and distant to preserve their image. Yasemin (27) argues that *hocas* should behave a certain way that demands respect. "Daha öğretici olmalı. Kürsünün başına geldiğinde 'ne haber ya nasılsın' diyemez. Bir ağırlığı olmalı. Orda her kafadan insan var, ortaya konuşmak zorundasın. Ama evine gittiğinde 'senin bir işin vardıya noldu?' falan, daha kişisel konu açılabilir, ama bu rahlenin başında olmaz." ¹⁹

Bourdieu on the other hand would suggest that cultural capital, factors in when shaping the front stage behaviour and how others define and interpret meaning. The accumulated knowledge and skills demonstrate *hoca's* capacity to do her job. She is thought to behave like *hoca*, while learning from them.

Thus women use the term *hocalık* to refer to the perfect possible *kul* (servant of God), mother and person, which imply a sacralised form of cultural capital – the command of knowledge on which the status is built is wrapped by a sense of sacred, that is, "something that is set apart [from the ordinary] and protected" (Durkheim, 1917)The sacred essence of the job, combined with the chosen profession by the prophet and

¹⁹She must be educative. She cannot act in her lectures 'hey, what's up? How you doing? ' She must act serious. There are people from very different backgrounds; she has to accordingly address everyone. You can speak of personal matters at home, but not during a lecture.

emphasis placed by the sheikh coins the term as the most prestigious profession/status within the community. *Hocalık* means sacrificing everything in the way of God, by placing everything in secondary importance and dedicating your life to teaching.

3.1.2. Tasawwuf and Tariqa in Identity Formation

The interviews and the *sohbets* revealed several different discursive techniques that describe the function that tasawwuf and tariqa play in constituting identity. The disciples I have interviewed described tasawwuf as the primary source of knowledge. The ultimate goal of tasawwuf specifically in the Ismailağa community is to reach *ihsan* and with that total admonition of the *nefs*²⁰. In the Islamic terminology, *tasawwuf* refers to:

“Bir başka ifade ile tasavvuf, Kur’an ve hadislerde yer alan, insanın mistik yönüne ve gönül terbiyesine işaret eden, maddenin ve dünyanın geçiciliğini işleyen, kalbi davranışları esas alan kaidelerin değişik yorumlarından ibaret bir ahlak ve tefekkür sistemidir” (Kara, 16).²¹

Each define tasawwuf according to his experience and according to the time. Shah Naqshband said “Our path is companionship, and good is in the collective”. Grandshaykh Bayazid al-Bastami said, “It is to bear with opposites. Grandshaykh Abd Allah ad-Daghestani said, “It is the abandonment of anger”. He also said, with regard to the beginning, “It is leaving ‘Why’ with one’s teacher.” Then someone asked Shaykh Nazim for his own definition but, out of modesty and good manners, he would not give one. Instead, he said, “We are servants and followers of these men and hope they will accept us as such!” (Kabbani, 2013, p.483).

Tasawwuf in its core promotes an ascetic life style, such as eating, talking and sleeping as little as possible to discipline the soul. The Ismailağa community promotes a

²⁰ Nefs refers to several different concepts. However in this context, nefis refers to “the cause of all evil in the world. Usually people listen to the voice of their nefis and behave according to its bad intentions. Such as human characteristics as envy, pride, enmity, anger, disrespect, impatience and laziness are all considered to derive from the control of one’s nefis.” (Atay, 2012, p.149).

²¹ Tasawwuf is a morality and meditation system consists of different interpretations of principles from Quran and hadith, regarding the mystic part of human nature and purification of heart, teaching the temporariness of the world and in return focuses on the heart.

minimalistic lifestyle that represents tasawwufi principle. The simple life style without having too many worldly possessions, just enough resource to live off of, is considered to be most distinguished way of living in order to reach God. Minimal possessions represent minimal distractions thereby allowing more time to spend on learning and performing tariqa-related acts. "Sufi mystics renounced the world and withdrew themselves from world affairs. Instead they moved towards spiritual activity and experience, aiming at 'self-abandonment into God' (the Sufi notion of *tevekkul*)" (Atay, 2012, p.16).

In response to a question, most interviewees answered that they would like their daughter to follow tasawwufi thought as they argue that it is essential in order to understand the importance of realizing the transient aspect of the world. Elif (37) said "Tasavvuf, gönül gözünü açar, okuduğunu daha iyi anlarsın, insanın hayati bütün ilimleri öğrenmeye yetmez ama "tasavvuf ile ruhun kalp gözünü açtığı vakitte bütün ilimleri öğrenmiş gibi olursun. Tasavvuf her şeyi hatırlamana daha iyi öğrenmene neden oluyor."²² Subsequently Ustaosmanoglu emphasizes the importance of asceticism in his *sohbets*. " *Rabıta* ateşinde kalbi kızdırıp, yumuşatıp, zikir çekiciyle vurmamakça kalbin pası silinmez. Kalbin pası silinmedikçe Kuran'ı Kerim'in yüksek manalarına ulaşılmaz."²³

Tasawwuf with the purification of the heart by renouncing all worldly pleasures and limiting the outside contact establishes a state of awareness through tariqa to the ultimate end of reaching God himself. Tariqa is described by the Sheikh is as follows:

"İnsanı mutlak vücudun sırrına ulaştıran, ask-ı Resulullah ile Allah'a erdiren en kısa yoldur. Sahebe yemeği sevdikleri için yemediler, ibadete kuvvet bulmak için yediler. Sahabeler elbiseyi sevdikleri için giymediler, avret mahallini

²²Sufism opens the eyes of a heart, helps comprehend knowledge better. A human life is not long enough to learn everything. But when you open your heart and soul with Sufism, only then you can learn all the knowledge. It helps you remember everything better.

²³ You cannot clean the rust from the heart without burning it with the fire of *rabıta*, hammering it with dhikr. And you cannot understand the high meanings of the Quran without cleaning your heart.

örtmek için, sıcaktan, soğuktan muhafaza olsunlar diye giydiler. Dünyayı Allah sevmeyi, niçin? Nefsin işine yarıyor ya ondan Allah dünyayı sevmiyor. Benim hasmıma yarayanıda ben sevmem. Bizde Allah'a tabiyiz. Yemeği ihtiyacımızdan dolayı yiyelim. Şu üç şeyi az yap, kelamı, yemeyi, uykuyu. Çok konuşunmu yedinmi, çok uydunmu kalbin ölür.” (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.10,p.471)²⁴

Secondly, tasawwuf and tariqa is used as a control mechanism in most of the interviews. There are two main references to Tasawwuf, first as source of primary information and second as the root towards ihsan and reaching God. Tariqa, on the other hand, is closely associated with changes in character, for it is often understood as training (*ders*) in purifying the soul and spirit. Tasawwuf and tariqa (*ders*) combined act as channels of identity formation in the Ismailağa community.

An interesting discursive technique my participants employed is to stress that this path allows the mind to comprehend things that were not clear before. “Tarikat insanı islamın hakikatine ulaştırıyor... Bu yüce ilim (ledun ilmi) Allahın yanında bir deryadır... Sana tarikat vasıtasıyla aktarılıyor”.²⁵ Thus Ismailağa women argue that tasawwuf is a means to understand the teachings of Islam and the prophet. Both the sheikh and his disciples argue that without tasawwuf Islamic education would be superficial and there needs to be a balance of both education and tasawwuf to fully comprehend God and to reach *fena fillah* (uniting with God), or the direct connection with God. Since God holds the ultimate truth and knowledge, reaching the final level of awareness means understanding everything in this world as well. Selma (35) argued that tasawwuf opened up mind to different possibilities that were not accessible before, thus allowing

²⁴ It is the shortest way to reach the secret of Vujuudu Mutlak and reunited with God, with the help of the messenger of God. The Companions did not eat food to enjoy it; they ate in order to find the strength to worship. The Companions did not wear dressed because they loved it; they wore it to cover their private parts, to be protected from the cold and the heat. God does not love the world, why? Because it avails *nafs*, that's why God does not love the world. I also do not like what benefits my enemy. We are subject to God. Let's eat when we require. Do less of these following three things; speak, eat and sleep. If you talk, eat and sleep too much, your heart will die.

²⁵ Tariqa leads human to the core of Islam. This supreme knowledge (knowledge of ledun) is a river by God, flowing into you with the help of tariqa.

an easier comprehension of both *zahiri* (overt) and *batini* (covert) knowledge. “Tasavvufi olan bir insanın anlayışı normal bir insanın anlayışına göre çok daha açık. Zahir ve batini noktalarda anlama çok daha ilerliyor.”²⁶

As a further discursive technique, Sufism is often presented as an integral part of Islamic sharia-as in line with the classical Sunni tradition. In other words, these Sufi women present their path as in a relationship of complementarity with the main path of Islam, rather than that of rivalry. Thus, Merve (31) argued that “tasavvufu şeriaten ayrı bir şey olarak düşünemiyorum. Tasavvuf ve şeriat bana göre birbirine kenetlenmiş şeyler, birbirlerini destekliyor. Şeriatı tasavvuf tamamlıyor. Bazı konular var şeriatte, tasavvufi yönü olmadan açıklaması çok zor. Tasavvufi bilgi şeriatteki bilgiyi dengeleyebiliyor.”²⁷ “Tasavvuf: insanın hayatı bütün ilimleri öğrenmeye yetmez ama tasavvuf ile ruhun gözünü açtığı vakitte, bütün ilimlerin başı tasavvuf.”²⁸ (Ayşe, 39)

Tariqa on the other hand closely effects personal growth, as they argue that it adds patience and other characteristics. Rabita and tariqa (*ders*) as a pair is extensively used as a discursive technique to support the effects of Sufi order on the formation of identity. Women argue that, those with *ders* tend to be a lot calmer attitude compared to before. Tariqa as they argue also provides a check and balance system, where there is constant surveillance. Tariqa training is needed in order to be truly conservative. It also acts as a support system with constant moral provision. Tariqa is thus the most effective way of perfecting identity to evolve to an ideal Muslim woman. Thus it is constantly referred to as the source of power, which provides constant strength and

²⁶ Sufi has a better understanding than others who do not have tasawwufi belief. Their understanding of apparent and the hidden knowledge is much less effortless.

²⁷ I cannot think of Sufism as a separate concept from sharia. They are integrated, they support each other. Sufism completes the sharia. There are some issues in sharia that are hard to explain without Sufism. Sufi knowledge balances knowledge of Sharia.

²⁸ Sufism: human life is not enough to learn all worldly knowledge but when you open the eyes of your soul with Sufism. It is the core/essence of all knowledge.

peace due to the fact that a disciple is always protected and governed by the Sheikh, no matter the physical distance, their Sufi bond always connects the Sheikh and disciples.

Moralimiz bozursa gece yatarken bir tarikat dersine oturduğumda sabah kalktığımda bütün sorunlarımın çözüldüğünü hissediyorum. Sorunların içinde hiçbir zaman kaybolmuyorum. Sorunlarımı aşarken çok fazla yardım olduğumu hissediyorum. Şeyh olmadan olmaz. Muhabbet ve feyiz olmaz şeyhsiz, hep bir taraf eksik kalır. Yaşayan bir şeyhiniz olduğu zaman onun varlığı bile huzur veriyor. Anne babanı hiç görme var olduğunu bildiğin zaman sana bir güç kuvvet verir. Senin evde yanındaysa ayrı bir güç kuvvet verir. Şeyhinde eğer yaşıyorsa var olduğunu biliyorsan o sana güç kuvvet veriyor. Yanındaysan devamlı görebilme, sohbet edebilme imkanın varsa. Muazzam bir kale sana.²⁹

Saliha (47) also states that “tarikat olmadan dindarlık yaşanmıyor. Tasvvufun bereketi çok başka, ben buralarda olmazdım. Büyük duası alıp onun himayesi altında bir şeyler yapıyorsak, onun duasının bereketiyle çok daha farklı gidiyor işlerimiz. Tarikat olmazsa olmaz. Tarikat toparlıyor.”³⁰

3.1.3. Emphasizing Self-Sacrifice

Another discursive strategy used by the Ismailiğa women to describe themselves is the notion of self-sacrifice. Since women gain status through *hocalık* and *taqwa*, they are also praised for being active in the community and providing service (*hizmet*). Thus, they mostly argue that women in the community are much more active than men and that in their part only happens through sacrificing from their own time and lives. Meryem (31) for example argues that *hizmet* includes sacrificing your own time, and

²⁹ If I am in a bad mood, when I sit for tariqa at night, the next morning, I wake up feeling that all my problems have been solved. I am never lost in my problems. I feel that I am receiving help while overcoming them. Sheikh is so important. You can't do without him. There wouldn't be the pure love, pure enlightenment without him, you would feel incomplete, that something is missing. Even his presence gives you peace. You don't see your parents much, but knowing that they are alive, it gives you peace, right? When they are near you, you even feel more powerful. It is like that. If your sheikh is alive, then it gives you strength. If you can see him, talk to him, that's amazing.

³⁰ You can not be fully pious without following a tariqa. The baraqah of Sufism is something else. I wouldn't be here without it. If we receive his prayer and do something under his care, then our endeavours are blessed and things go smoothly. Tariqa is a must. It helps you out.

the lack of pay is not a problem in the community. "Ama şu yoktur mesela bizim cemaatte... satmak, para kazanmak. Tek amaç bana göre ilimdir... ve karşılıksız ilim, para almadan."³¹

They emphasize the lack of pay and respect from their male counterparts but for *hizmet* they continue to teach. In fact most emphasized that *hocas* even disregard their own children to provide for the community. Rana (36) argues that every men and women alike have to sacrifice from their own lives to contribute to *hizmet* and community and this was the vision of the sheikh.

İlim noktasında Efendi hazretleri kadın-erkek ayırt etmeksizin herkesin çalışması noktasında elinden gelen gayreti göstermesi noktasında hiç kimseye boş durmamayı devamlı öğütledi ki kadınlarımızın da bunda ben yeteri kadar aktif olduklarını düşünüyorum.³²

Selma (35) argues that this is also one of the things that set them apart from other communities. She argues that they do the bare minimum while in the Ismailağa community they overwhelmingly work.

Diğer kadınlar bizim yaptığımızın çok cüz-i bir miktarını yapıyorlar. Mesela kendim için söylüyorum, annelik yapıyorum, kermes gibi şeyler yapıyorlar, sohbeta gidiyorlar sohbet dinleyip geliyorlar. Genelde hizmet tarzı onların budur. İceride sadece hizmet ediyorlar. Orada muazzam bir hizmet şuuru var. İlme çok fazla teşvik yoktur. Biz bunun yanı sıra ahlak ile uğraşyoruz, hedeflerini koyuyoruz, kaliteli ilim alsın istiyoruz, ihtisas yapınlar istiyoruz. Diğer cemaatlerde bunların hiçbiri yok.³³

³¹We do not sell goods and do things to collect money. Only thing that matter is knowledge, learning. And teaching without asking for money.

³²Our Sheikh advised everyone to do their best in learning without discriminating between boys and girls, and never waste anytime. Women also take this advice very seriously and I think they have been really active in that aspect.

³³Other women (in other communities) do little of what we do. In my case, I am a mother. They organize charity sales, going to lectures and coming back. That's the way they serve. They have a great service consciousness. They don't encourage learning more. But we educate morally, we set goals, we want people to receive good education, expertise on fields. Other communities don't lack these traits.

However some argue that although women are active in the community they neglect their own children and families by doing so, and most marry much later to provide a little more for the community. For example out of thirteen women I have interviewed, six were single and all were over the age of 30 with one exception. Regardless of their age and marital status, however, one common discursive strategy they employed was story-telling.

3.1.4. Constituting Identity through Stories

Stories are a powerful way to constitute and shape both personal and communal identities. Boje (1991) defines the storytelling as “a collective system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense making and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional” (p. 6). The concept here is that, identity can be explored through the stories we tell about ourselves or of others. Giddens (1991) argues that self and reflectivity and interconnected so that identity is a not a sum of character traits but the capability to constitute an instinctive narrative of the self. Since identities is the combination of the relationship between the individual and the institutions; but often represent the routine and habit, accumulated over time. Bourdieu refers to this as “habitus” while Foucault calls it “archive”, a hidden discursive system. In communities people will tend to narrate stories that are likely to represent them as a valued member of the community, which will express the ideal characteristics of the members of the community. These narratives provide valuable information about the community and identity.

The Ismailağa community uses this strategy extensively to promote their own ideological views. Sheikh Ustaosmanoğlu always provides stories based on his experiences with his own Sheikh, Ali Haydar Efendi, or the prophet’s and his companions lives to convey the ‘importance’ of continuing the Islamic Sufi tradition. Interviewees also conveyed personal stories to reflect and legitimize their behaviour and attitudes. These stories represent both personal and communal history. The

Ismailağa community also uses storytelling to constitute their communal identity through stories of Sufi sheiks and the negative stories of the modern world. They mostly rely on several discursive techniques, including narrating the stories of the prophet, companions, Naqshi-Khalidi sheikhs, stories regarding current sheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu, self-stories and negative or exemplary stories.

The stories of the prophet and the companions can be extensively heard in *sohbets* and other gatherings. These stories usually contain the lives and major events of the prophet or the companions that is relevant to the theme of the *sohbet*. Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu used to extensively employ this technique in his *sohbets*, by giving theme relevant examples of either the prophet or his companions, to create a sense of belonging to wider culture of Muslim and Sufi tradition. These stories also provide legitimacy and create sense of relevance for the community to have continued the traditions of the companions. There was sense of envy for the lifestyles of the companions, which prioritized nothing but religious teachings, righteous deeds, and prayer. He constantly relayed stories about the simple living and avoiding luxuries. Saliha (47) describes the tradition as something that needs to be followed as it was intended.

Yaptığım bir şeyde Rasulullah'ın ne kadar izni var. Yüzü Allaha bakan her şeyi kabul edebilirim. Ama tatbikî geleneği bozmanın doğru olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Sofi ve tarikatın bir geleneği var, hem de şeriattın bir geleneği var, ben elimden geldiğince ihtiyatlı davranmayı, bozmamaya çalışıyorum.³⁴

Selma (35) also argued that community specifically follows the traditional lifestyle of the sahabe.

³⁴ Would Prophet give permission to what I am doing? How much would he be content with it? This is what I consider about my actions. I can accept everything that Allah is satisfied with. But I don't think it is right to break with tradition. Sufisim and the *tariqa* have a traditions, sheria has a tradition. I am trying to be careful as much as I can and not break with tradition.

Sofi tarzı ile gidiyoruz, sunneti seniyei ihya noktasında ne yapabiliriz yoluyla gidiyoruz. Takva insan yetsitmeye çalışıyoruz. Sahabe gibi olmak için uğraşyoruz. Efendi hazretleri ilme çok önem veriyor. Sanki böyle Efendi hazretlerinin cematının ilme önem verdiği kadar hiç bir cemaat önem vermiyor. Onlar tam anlamıyla islami yaşadılar. Biz de o şekilde yaşamaya çalışıyoruz.³⁵

The stories have two major discursive functions: they represent continuation of the tradition and provide a shared heritage of identity. Humphreys (2002) argue “That a focus on nostalgia permits us to better appreciate and to account for the temporal dimensions of organizational identity” (p. 143) and suggest that nostalgia provides access” to a shared heritage of identity-relevant beliefs and values, functions as an emotional support during periods of change, and plays a role in individual-group identification” (p. 156). These stories provide sense of unity and a role model.

From a symbolic interactionism perspective, through story telling we also establish our own identities and create self-image. We ascribe meaning to our actions and organize our experience. Interviewees told stories to legitimize their actions and to create a sense of belonging through shared identities. These stories allowed access to personal experiences of the members and how they defined themselves in terms of their actions, and how they situated themselves in terms of their community. Women mostly shared stories about the Sheikh as a role model and the prophet and companions. They mostly burrowed stories of male companions as an exemplary representation; however, they did provide examples from female companions as well. Most stories regarding the sheikh was to explain the exceptional connection they shared which provided a sense of self-worth for having found or being born in to the community. Almost all the interviewees had a story about their first time meeting the sheik, which almost all of them described as the ‘turning point’ in their lives, that they felt a sense of belonging to the community.

³⁵ We follow the Sufi path. We try to practice Prophet’s Sunnah as much as we can. We are trying to raise taqwa people. We are trying to be like the companions of Prophet. Our Sheikh gives so much importance to education. I feel that no other community places this much importance on education, as we do. They (sahabe) lived Islam to the fullest. And we are trying to be like them.

The stories of the companions and reflect a continued heritage and a sense of nostalgia. They use personal stories along with companion stories to convey the importance of their actions and the traditions they closely follow. Through this nostalgia, the community connects past intentions with future destiny, and legitimize their position and draw boundaries to maintain their identity. These stories help build an order within the community, and ultimately individual identities are forged alongside the communal ones. Member of the community simultaneously performs positive stories and more critical counter stories. These stories provide a stabilizing effect on the community that maintains their legitimacy through positive and negative stories and forming a connection to the past as they try to keep alive the feeling of belonging to larger Islamic tradition of prophets and sheiks. These are shared frames of references that connect the separated historical community with each other. There is also repeat exposure to negative stories of the “outside” that create a sense of unity in the community and have a boundary-making function. There is a strong in-group and out-group distinction with the stories told in any type of gatherings. Almost all *sohbets*, provide a negative story about the non-members. In-group refers to the community, which one strongly identifies with while out-group is a social group with which you do not identify. The important distinction here is that groups constitute identity by distinctive speech style, dress codes, rituals and so forth, which act as boundary-making mechanisms. The Ismailağa community members strongly identify themselves with unique dress codes and rituals and education style. However, ideological basis of this distinction lies with the religious idea of adopting and adhering to strict religious attitudes that they define as essential for their religiosity. In *sohbets* and other gatherings, the *hoca* will most likely give an example of deviant person or an example of an out-group. Interviewees gave examples of the kids that transferred to *kurs* from schools vis-à-vis to those who only received *kurs* education. Transfer students lacked, according to the interviewees the morals that were instilled in the *kurs* kids. These distinctions are made in *sohbets* and gatherings to emphasize the security of the

community in terms of following religious teachings and internalizing the right religious views that the rest of the society lacks.

O bilimi yazan kimse bir öğreti vermek istiyor karşısında, bir model oluşturuyor karşısında. Bizim kitaplarımızı ateistler yazdığı için, eğer aileden görmemişse bir şey, ateist oluyor. Sürekli bir doktor açığı var mesela, toplumsal bir değer buda, herkesin cenazesinin yıkanması kaldırılması, fikhın açıklanması gerekiyor, devlet bunları yıllarca yapmamış, cemaatler alttan alta beslemiş. Biz çok büyük bir ihtiyacı karşılıyorduk.³⁶

3.1.5. Constructing internal hierarchy on the basis of *Taqwa*

Another discursive strategy the Ismailağa women use to construct their identity is their reliance on *Taqwa* that results in the creation of an internal hierarchy. *Taqwa* is already very significant in Islamic tradition; however, its use in the Ismailağa community differs significantly from its primary definition. *Taqwa*, refers to God-consciousness, or a ‘fear of God’ that allows one to be aware of God (Bukhari, Iman, 13; Muslim, Siyam, 74). It ensures that people follow Islamic principles and are conscious of their actions, and stay away from the dubious behavior. *Taqwa* is frequently mentioned in the Quran, thus is prioritized in the teaching of the community as well. The Quran defines *taqwa* in Surah al-Hujurat as the noblest property of the believers. “Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah, is the most righteous (*muttaqi*) of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.” (Quran, 49:13).

Taqwa entails both an internal and an external compliance to God’s mandates. However, as a discursive technique, the Ismailağa community members usually depict with external qualities due its visibility and measurability. Especially for women, the degree of *taqwa* usually depends on how modesty they dress and behave. Women of

³⁶ The person writing these textbooks wants to impose a doctrine. Our books are written by atheists. So if a person doesn’t have knowledge of the religion learnt from the family, he becomes an atheist. There is always a shortage of doctors, for example, this is a social value, in a funeral everyone needs to be washed and carried, and the fiqh (for that knowledge) needs to be explained. The government failed to provide this (type of knowledge) for years, and the community, in return, provided it. We have been provided most of these needs.

the community identify several modest attires that reflect both the identity of the women and the overall community they belong to. The attention given to modesty and “*tessettür*” measures the degree of *taqwa*, which in turn provides a ground for the hierarchical structure in the community. The attire that is associated with the highest degree of *taqwa* is ‘*çarşaf*’. Majority of the interviewees expressed desire for their daughters to adopt ‘*çarşaf*’ as their regular outfit. Selma (35) stated that, “Kızım kesinlikle takvalı olsun, çarşafını giysin. Bu dünya hayatı bitecek, bitecek hayat içinde nefsiyle uğraşsın istemiyorum.”³⁷ Identifying the *çarşaf* with the highest degree of God-consciousness is indeed a strong discursive technique among the İsmailağa women.

The *çarşaf* has both historical and a religious significance in the community. For the İsmailağa community views the religious traditional and practices of Ottoman Empire to have been the most devout social order in the world. Thus Ottoman social life is an aspiration for community members to follow, a kind of “Ottomanism” that is most visible in education and clothing: they follow the same Ottoman curriculum in *medreses* and clothing for both man and women, although they have had alterations to make it more modest. In this context, the *çarşaf* represents the both modesty and heritage to the community. My interviews revealed that women believe *çarşaf* in its current form as one piece that connects the head piece to the skirt was decided by the Ottomans. This ‘*fetva*’ is still important for İsmailağa community and their loyalty into continuing the customs of the Ottoman Empire. Thus is constantly mentioned as the cloth of their ancestors. There is no standard specific piece of fabric for *çarşaf* that women are expected to wear; however, it is obligatory for women to cover some part of their face with the *çarşaf*.

In understanding the community’s daily practices in terms of clothing and appearance, Symbolic Interactionism can help us again. Goffman utilizes dramaturgical terms like

³⁷ I want my daughter to have *taqwa*. I want her to wear a *carsaf*. This world is temporary. This world will eventually come to an end. I don’t want her to struggle with her *nefs*, for this temporary world.

stage, actor, performance, character, prop, and masks to make sense of micro-level relationships. The front stage can include “clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (p. 24). For the actor is judged by both appearance and manner. In this context from width of their hijab to the modest outfits they wear all provide a certain status. As mentioned above, the second hijab, thick socks and wide dresses are highly associated with modesty and *taqwa*.

Day wear can also represent *taqwa*, for loose clothing with minimal decorations is a representation of modesty as it avoids revealing physical features of the body. Women are expected to wear a dark color instead of a vibrant one, as strong vibrant colors are viewed as tools that connect the person to worldly pleasures. In fact, women mostly argue that it is not proper to wear anything red for it is believed to be associated with the Satan who was created out of fire. Merve (26) for example argues that it is improper for girls to wear colorful dresses: “...kızların rengarenk giyinmesi, aslında dinimizde böyle bir şey yok.”³⁸

Since everything that the ‘non-believers’ wear is seen as a contrary to *taqwa*, the importance of wearing clothes according to *taqwa* is essential so that they do not resemble the non-believers, hence the significant restriction in wearing high heeled shoes, underclothing, jewelry and makeup. The description of *taqwa* in *medrese* is defined as being humble, calm and submissive. *Taqwa* requires for the student to follow the rules and regulations given by the *medrese* and the ‘hoca’. As a discursive technique, the community argues that *medrese* and *kurs* are the only places that provide *taqwa*. Ayse (31) quoted the scholar Ibn Al-Qayyim : “Whoever would like to reside [in] the gardens of Paradise in this world, let him take up residency [in] the gatherings of remembrance, for verily, they are the gardens of Paradise.”

³⁸ Girls wearing colorful (clothing)... there is no such a thing in Islam.

There is also internal aspect of *taqwa*, which is acquired though *rabita* and *tariqa*. *Tariqa* strengthens the internal bond one has with God. Rana stated that:

Hayır tabiki. Neden şart olmadığını düşünüyorsunuz? Cemaat mensubu dediğimiz tasavvuf adı altında söylüyüm, cemaat demiyimde tasavvuf tamamen bir kalbi eğilim olduğu için bu kalbi eğilim kim kendini yatkın ve gerekli görüyorsa hani onunla alakalı olan bi durumdur. Yani kimi insan bunu kendini hazır hissetmeyebilir veya gerekli görmeyebilir, yeterli bilgisi olmayabilir bu konuyla alakalı olarak dolayısıyla kalkıp biz buna hani sen dindar değilsin dememiz mümkün değil ki takvanın tamamen kalpte olan bi eğilimi olduğunu gayet iyi biliyoruz dolayısıyla hani o şekilde sıfatlamamız yada şartlamamız mümkün değil.³⁹

Therefore, *taqwa* is measured by both the connection to God *rabita* and through appearance. However, the Ismailağa women use the term extensively when referring to each other or when correcting others' behavior. It is thus a central term in the community that provides significant information on the structure of the community.

³⁹ Of course not. Why do you think it is not compulsory? The community member, lets say sufism instead, sufism is about heart. So, if one feels close and competent, that's about it. Some may not feel ready yet, or don't see it as a necessary thing or he may not have enough knowledge. So we can not tel that they are not pious enough. We know that consciousness of God comes from heart. So there is no way we can say that.

CHAPTER IV

MODES OF SUBJECTION: FORMATION OF IDEAL SUBJECTS AND COMMUNITY

Identities may be socially and culturally constructed in such a way that actions and attitudes are encouraged to follow certain norms that produce discourses. Foucault argues that, people monitor and conduct themselves according to their interpretation of set cultural norms. This process includes the internalization of identity formed by the community. Identity presents signs and symbols that signify and assign value to certain things that are made visible and comprehensible to others. Formation of identity entails the constant construction of behaviors and attitudes based on power relations. Our ideas and perceptions of self-identity are shaped by power and furthermore our involvement within those power relations. Thus, identities are production of social forces that regulate practices.

Identity is complex in a sense that it is mediated by our interactions with others since it is impossible for a person to separate themselves from their historical background. “(W)hen he (a human being) tries to define himself as a living being, he can uncover his own beginning only against the background of a life which began long before him” (Foucault 2002, 359). My objective here is to investigate the discursive construction of the ideal subjects in the Ismailağa community, based on data collected through interviews, *sohbets* and participant observation. Aforementioned discursive practices and strategies will aid in forming the modes of subjection for the members of the community as well the community itself.

With regards to modes of subjection there are three prominent ideal subjects in the Ismailağa community: the ideal sheikh, ideal women and ideal men. These ideal subjects create an ideal community, which is unique in the sense that it upholds both Islamic tradition and sharia, which the interviewees expressed deliberately and

extensively. In the previous chapter I discussed discursive strategies and techniques in detail; however, in order to understand the structure of the community and evaluate the subject formation in this Naqshi-Khalid based Islamic orthodox community, further analysis is needed.

4.1. Discursive Strategies of Forming Ideal Community and Subjects

Based on the data collected through interviews, *sohbets* and participant observation; I have identified several discursive strategies the Ismailağa's female members utilize in constructing ideal subjects and community, including the ideal *Sufi* subjects and their leader.

4.1.1. The Ideal Sheikh

My observations and the interviews revealed a combination of characteristics and qualities that form several criteria for the ideal sheikh in the Ismailağa community. A crucial discursive strategy in this context involves ascertaining that a sheikh is to follow the golden chain, i.e. he is appointed by the pervious sheikh, and even in some cases through divine intervention. The current sheikh, Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu repeatedly mentions the golden chain (or the "right hand") in his *sohbets*, emphasizing his (and earlier leaders') unbroken connection to the prophet. The following passages are from two different *sohbets* that explain the heritage of the golden chain.

"Efendi Babam: Mahmud'un elinden tutan benim elimden tutmuştur derdi. Demek ki bu fakirin elinden tutan Ali Haydar Ahishavi (Kuddise Sirruhu) nun Hazretlerinin elinden de tutmuş oluyor. Onun elinden tutan Ali Riza Bezzaz (Kuddise Sirruhu) Hazretlerinin elinden de tutmus oluyor. Böylece gide gide Peygamber Efendimize kadar dayanıyor. İşte bu sahih yed'dir. Bir yere bağlı olunacak ki feyiz cari olsun. (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols. 4, p.259)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ My sheikh used to say that who ever holds the hand (supports) of Mahmud, also hold the hand of Ali Haydar Ahiskavi(k.s). And the previous sheikh Ali Riza Bezzaz (k.s). The chain follows until the prophet. Thus, this is *sahih yed*. You should follow someone in order receive *feyiz*.

“Sağlam elli murşidin bağlı bulunduğu silsile birbirine ekli olarak Rasulullaha uzanır. Mesala Peygamber efendimiz (sallallahu Aleyhi ve Sellem) in eli Hazreti Ebu Bekr-I Siddık (Radiyahallahu Anh) a eklidir. Onun eli, Selman-I Farisi’ye ve son olarak da Ali Haydar Efendi Hazretlerine...” (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols. 4, p.294).⁴¹

Sheikhs are appointed based on several criteria. First of these criteria include, *seyr-i sülûk*, to ultimately become *Murşid-i Kamil* (the Mature Guide). In other words, the disciple completes the last *ders* or dhikr, in this case twenty-second, and s/he reaches the level of *fena fillah*, in which s/he loses her/his own existence and becomes one with God. *Naqshi-Khalidi* sources provide detailed information on the attributes of sheiks. For example Muhammed ibn-i Abdullah al-Hani (1279/1862), argues that, *Murşid-i Kamil*, abides by the sharia law and firmly preaches his followers to do the same. When asked about the qualities of an ideal sheikh, almost all the interviewees gave the same answer. *Murşid-i Kamil* is a representative of the prophet thus follows the prophet’s behaviours and attitudes. He should behave, dress and act the same way. Thus, a *Murşid* also closely follows the *sunnah* of the prophet. Sheikh’s priority is to lead the community in a way that would ensure to obey the rules of sharia; that is why he leads by example. Rana (36) who was raised in *kurs* lists the qualities of a sheikh.

Sünnetten asla taviz vermemiş kişi olmalı. İslamla şeriatle tarikatle kuran ve sünnetle bütünleşmiş kişi olmalı. Efendi hazretleri ‘eğer benim bir sünneti terk ettiğimi görürseniz benim söylediğim yoldan ilerlemeyin.’ Bu söz zaten bir şeyhin nasıl olması gerektiğini gösteriyor. Sünnet çizgisi üzerinden ilerlemesi gerekiyor dediğimiz zaman zaten kılık kıyafetide içine girmiş oluyor. Efendi hazretleri derki ‘siz hafız hoca olabilirsiniz, ama bakıldığı zaman bu yürüyen hafız işte islam bu şeriat bu hem islamen hem ilmen hem amelen bakan kimse işte islam dememeli, işte islam bu demeli.’⁴²

⁴¹ The line with the strong hands (spiritually) goes back to our Prophet (peace be upon him). His hand with Ebu Bekr, his hand with Salman Farisi and lastly Ali Haydar.

⁴² He should be a person who hasn’t abandoned any of Prophet’s sunnah. He must be a person who interiorised Islam, sharia, Quran and sunnah. Our Sheikh says ‘If you see me abandon any sunnah, then do not follow me.’ This words show how a Sheikh must be. Sunnah includes how one should dresses as well. He says ‘You may be a hafız and a teacher, but when someone sees you he must say this is Islam, this is a scholar, this is the sharia.

A former Naqshi-Khalidi sheikh, Ahmed Ziyâüddin Gümüşhânevî (d. 1893), describes in *Câmiu'l-usûl* the ideal characteristics of a sheikh, stating that the sheikh is the epitome of true *taqwa*, and a perfect example to follow. He is compassionate, kind and caring and in constant communication with his disciples to aid with unethical behaviors. He is constantly counseling with a calm and optimistic attitude. "Mürşidin bu anlamda en önemli vazifesi kula Allah'ı, Allah'a da kulu sevdirmek diğer bir deyişle kulu rıza-ı ilâhiyyeye ulaştırmak olarak görülür. Bu yolda müridleri incitmeden onları usulüne uygun şekilde gerektiğinde sözlü gerektiğinde de hâli ile uyarmak suretiyle eğitim vazifesini yerine getirir."⁴³ (Erkaya, 2017, p.840)

There is a further emphasis in the Ismailağa community for sheikhs to follow the Ottoman style clothing. He expected to dress the way his predecessors did before him and that includes *şalvar*, *cübbe* and *sarık*. The emphasis on living like the Ottomans is due to two main causes. First, the community has this notion of Ottomans as the perfect, ideal society that abides by the laws of sharia, thus is the prime example to follow (their romantic "Ottomanism"). Second, as a further discursive technique, the community presents the Ottomans as an authentic period prior to modernity, and argue that modernity caused a moral corruption in the Turkish society, especially with mixed-gender education. This idea that moral corruption is the product of modernity is a recurring theme in the community that was also addressed by the previous sheikh, Ali Haydar Efendi. Ustaosmanoğlu mentions in one of his *sohbets* that, "Allah'ın ahlakı ile ahlaklanmalıyız. Televizyonlarda bu ahlak yoktur... Efendi babamın yanına biri gelmişti. Bol bir pantolon giymişti. Lakin oturunca dizleri belli oldu. Bunun üzerine Effendi babam ona: sizin ölümünüzü görse idim de, bu halinizi görmese idim dedi."⁴⁴ (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.3, p. 251). Thus, the Ismailağa community is against many elements of modern

⁴³A Sheikh's responsibility is to help the slave love God, also the otherway around. It is to help the slave gain the love of God. In this path, he fulfills his reponsibility to educate without hurting the followers, warning them in the most appropriate way.

⁴⁴We need to have the morality of God. We don't have that in televisions. Someone visited our Sheik. He was wearing loose clothes but when he sat, his knees were recognized. He said 'I would rather see you dead then see you in this position.'

lifestyle from dresses to electronics, and their ideal sheikh should represent the traditional instead of the modern.

Consequently, there is a constant warning in both their publications and interviews against the moral corruptions caused by the school. For them the *medrese* and *kurs* provide a perfect moral environment to raise islamically conscious children. For *kurs* and *medreses* represent pure and untempered Islamic education in Ottoman style environment. Thus, an ideal *mürşid* is an Ottoman subject that exemplifies and encourages the traditional way of life. Rana (36) states that:

Nakşi tarikatı devletin bekasına hep dua etmiştir. Efendi hazretleri derki 'sünneti seniyeden sonra Osmanlı en büyük islam geleneğini yaşatan olmuştur.' Bütün padişahların şeyhle büyütüldüğünü ve her Osmanlı padişahının arkasında bir şeyh olduğunu Efendi hazretlerinden biz çok kez duyduk. Yavuz Selim olsun Fatih Sultan Mehmet olsun bunların arkalarında Aziz Mahmut Hüdayi, Akşemsettin veya Yahya Efendi hani daha eski Osmanlı padişahlarına gittiğimizde bir tarafta Edip Ali tarafından kurulan Ahilik dergahı var. Bu aslında mesleki açıdan yetiştiren bir tarikat gibi ama aynı zamanda ahlaken de insanları yöneten bir tarikattı. Osmanlı da kenarı çekilip tesbih çeken, tekkeye kapanan bir tarikat anlayışı yoktu, yeri geldiğinde odun taşımış, yeri geldiğinde askeriyeye adam yetiştirmişti. ⁴⁵

The last part of this passage also shows another discursive technique used in this context: selective reading of the Ottoman past. For there were many different Sufi orders operating on the Ottoman lands, including most prominently the Shadhilis, Bektaşis and Mevlevis as well as Naqshis, adopting different orientations toward this world. It was the Naqshis, of whom the İsmailağa is a branch, that emphasized this-worldly asceticism the most – others advocated less involvement in this-worldly affairs

⁴⁵ The Nakshi sect always prayed for our nation. Our Sheikh says 'After the sunnah, it is Ottomans who kept Islam tradition alive.' We have heard so many times that every Sultan was raised by a Sheikh and always had the help of a Sheikh. Yavuz Selim, Fatih Sultan Mehmet... They were with Aziz Mahmut Hüdayi, Akşemsettin or Yahya Efendi. Before them there was Ahilik institution founded by Edip Ali. This is more like vocational sect but it also help people to improve their moral values. In Ottomans, sheikhs were not the people who just sat and close himself to a room. They carried wood when necessary, they trained soldier when necessary.

and more in reclusive contemplation. Moreover, there is no evidence that these Sufi orders dominated the Ottoman society – that most people were a member of one of these orders. Therefore, like many other community members, this participant presents an idealized picture of the Ottoman social life in which Naqshi-style asceticism was dominant, by selectively emphasizing a fictional representation of historical memory, which implies the significance of the Ottoman past in terms of their identity construction.

This significance of the Ottomans as the ideal society can also be witnessed in *sohbets* and *kurs* curriculum. There are history classes provided in the community to ensure for members to feel and connect to their heritage, furthermore, *kurs* curriculum includes the history of the Ottoman Empire but not the modern Turkey. This idealized view of the Sultans can be witnessed in sheikh's own *sohbets* as well. "Sultan Hamid veliyyullahdır...İslamı öyle muhafaza ettiler ki...Dinin direkleri idi, padişahlari zem etmekle bir şey çıkmaz siz de onlar gibi olsaydınız dünyayı altüst ederiniz."⁴⁶ (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols. 4, p.98)

Finally, the community members associate their current sheikh with the ideal one: the Ismailağa community's ideal sheikh is Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, for they argue that he was chosen by the previous sheikh, and fulfills all the duties of sheikh, strictly follow the sharia and the Sunnah, and represents the traditional Islamic lifestyle. He also carries the characteristics of a kind and loving leader that encourages compassion within the community.

4.1.2. Ideal Women

Female members of the Ismailağa community emphasize several principles that embody the ideal female Sufi. The women in the community combine both traditional

⁴⁶ Sultan Hamid is among the blessed persons. They protected Islam so greatly. They were the backbones of Islam. You would not benefit anything from humiliating them.

and non-traditional attributes when describing and ideal Sufi women. These attributes provide a distinct identity construction that entails both gender specific attributes that places emphasis on childrearing and more modern attitudes that demand equal education and the opportunity for *hizmet*.

In this context, they primarily stress the importance of education as a main discursive strategy, which was consistent throughout all the interviews with all thirteen female members of the community. Priority of any Muslim, as it should be for the women as well, according to the community, is to receive an Islamic education, which includes Quran recitation, Fiqh, Aqidah and Tafseer as mentioned in the previous chapter. The Ismaili community argues that what sets them apart from other communities both Sufi and non-Sufi is the quality of their education and the emphasis placed on women's education that other communities lack.

For them, receiving the mandatory education ensures the women to pursue *hocalik*, which as mentioned above comes with great esteem in the community. Thus, they argue that their priority should always be to complete the mandatory four-year education and subsequently teach. This is also extensively promoted by the sheikh: he stresses that everyone should receive a basic Islamic education as much as to teach it, and to uphold the ideals of the society to raise conscious and educated members. His *sohbets* for female members constantly affirm that, "Müslümanların hepsi Kur'an-i Kerim ilimlerini gerektiği kadar tahsil ettikten sonra aralarında vazife taksimi yapmalıdırlar (hocalik olarak)."⁴⁷ (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.3, p.145)

Hocalik is a further element that is required of an ideal woman. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is a loaded term, which defines several communally established characteristics of the women and in this sense ensures the only way for women to

⁴⁷ After learning Quranic studies enough, every Muslim should distribute the (teaching) duties among themselves.

obtain respect and recognition with in the community. Selda (35) specifically stated that, “Efendi hazretleri düğününüz olup evinizi görmeden medresenizi görün derdi, bence her daim, hizmet öncelikli olmalı”.⁴⁸

Therefore, being a *hoca* is the primary feature of an ideal İsmailağa woman. Women are constantly encouraged to teach, to be active in the community and to even prioritize *hocalık* above anything else. There are several reasons why *hocalık* is admired in the community. Teaching Islamic studies is seen as the most important job, because it is mentioned by the prophet according to several traditions (*hadiths*). These prophetic traditions were extensively quoted by the interviewees as well to legitimize the importance of teaching above any other profession. There are several quotations that were used, such as: “ya öğretene, ya öğrenene, ya dinleyen veya ilmi seven ol. Fakat beşincisi olma; helak olursun” (Fethü’l-Kebir, 1/204.) and “İlim öğrenmek kadın-erkek her müslümana farzdır.”⁴⁹

This emphasis placed on either being a *hoca* or being close to one is also mentioned by the sheikh. “Ey gençler beytin gereginde hocalardan uzak olmayın. Aksi halde cehennemden kucagina dustunuz demektir”⁵⁰ (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols.4, p. 71). In one of his sohbet, Ustaosmanoğlu again argues the significance of *hocalık* with reference to a Quranic verse: “‘Erkek ve dişi bütün müminler birbirlerinin yardımcılarıdır. İyiliği emederler, fenalıktan alıkoyarlar’ (Quran:9:71). Bir hoca ikamet ettiği yerden dünyanın bir ucuna kadar gitmek dahi olsa emir bil maruf yapmak için gitmelidir.

⁴⁸ Our Sheikh says, one should visit the madrasa even before his house after the wedding. Dawa should come first.

⁴⁹ Be either a teacher or a student or a listener or a person who loves knowledge. Otherwise you would be devastated. It is compulsory to learn for every muslim, woman or man.

⁵⁰ Oh young people! Do not be away from scholars. Otherwise you would fall into hell.

Okunan ayet-i celilede mümin hanımlar da zikr edildiğine göre onlarda öteye beriye gidebilirler” (Ustaosmanoğlu, vols. 4, p. 370).⁵¹

Hocalık also provides an environment of constant surveillance ensuring for her to act a certain way, therefore she is constantly performing as she is continuously in the front stage. This check system ensures her to behave in a certain fashion that entails the requirements of *hocalık*; which is to dress, talk and pray in a way that is instilled and idealized by the community. Ustaosmanoğlu also encourages this notion by stating, “Hoca kızlarımız, sizi dünya ehli kimseler nasıl görmeli biliyor musunuz? Yasi 20, işi 60 yaşında kimse gibi görmeli. Yani ahlakı takvası 60 yaşındaki kimse gibi. Ben sizleri böyle istiyorum.”⁵²

An ideal woman also entails performing their biological duty of having children; in fact most argue that this should be a priority-though this conflicts with their emphasis on “service” (*hizmet*). Based on the interviews, women still argue that their priority is to raise their children with an Islamic consciousness, and they should, at least for few years, omit to educating their own children by quitting *hocalık*. Thus when asked about the characteristics of an ideal women, second most mentioned aspect was motherhood and being a homemaker. Although in almost all the interviews *hocalık* were always the primary characteristic mentioned, motherhood and child rearing followed suit. The participants argue that it is their biological destiny to raise children, and to maintain a household. While women with children suggest that if it is possible to both, do *hizmet* and raise children, than it is the duty of the women to do both. However there is division between mothers and other women among the participants. Those who don’t have any children suggest that women priority should always be educating their own

⁵¹ A scholar should travel to give dawa even to the far end of the world. Women are mentioned in ayats too. So they can do so as well

⁵² Our young woman teacher, do you know how the world should see you? They need to see you as a 60 year-old person. You are 20, but have the morality and taqwa of a 60 year old woman. I want you to be like that

children, mothers on the other hand argue that doing both is the most optimal option for them. Saliha, (47), who doesn't have any children, argues that women who do should stay at home to take care of her children. "Kadın çocuk doğurduğunda o çocuğu yetiştirmektir işi. O çocuk bir kez dünyaya gelecek. Bir zamana kadar kadın için öncelikli olmalıdır. Ama götürebiliyorsa hizmet ve çocuğu beraber götürsün".⁵³ Zehra (47) also argues that, while she is an exception, children should still be the priority.

Kadının kesinlikle görevi çocuk yetiştirmektir. Ama ben bunun tamamen dışındayım. Ben bu hususta şazım kural dışıyım. Ama islamda kadının en önemli görevi çocuk yetiştirmektir. Kadının ev temizlemek, kocasına hizmet etmek, çocuğuna bakmak gibi görevleri yoktur. Tek görevi çocuk doğurmak ve çocuğuna islami terbiye vermektir. Emzirmek bile süt anne tutabilir. Maddi güç ne gerektiriyorsa erkek onu yapması lazımdır...Tek vazifesi çocuğu islama uygun yetiştirmektir. Kadının toplumda ve islamda görevi budur. Bilinçli bireyler yetiştirmek. Terbiye etmektir.⁵⁴

However, women who have children and still teach, encourage doing both. Leyla (35) argues that, in order for her children to view her as a role model, she needs to work. "Sonuçta çocukların seni model olarak alıyorlar. Hocalığı bırakırsam onlar bunun önemli olmadığını düşünecekler. Ben hocalık yapayım ki Allah'da onlara güzel ahlak nasip etsin."⁵⁵ Nevertheless all the mothers, I have interviewed, were active in the community by either teaching or joining *sohbet* groups. However there is unanimity when it comes to homemaking. Almost all argue that it is a women's job to take care of the house and provide for the family by cooking and cleaning. Ayşe (40) argues that, women should be well rounded in all aspects. "Kadın oturmasını kalkmasını bilen, konuşmasını etmesini bilen, sürekli bir tasavvuf halinde, rabita halinde, her hareketi

⁵³ When a woman bears a child, her duty is to raise him/her. *The child comes to the world for one time only*. Child should be the priority for a woman. But if she can handle both dawa and raising a child, then she shall.

⁵⁴ A woman's duty is to raise a child. But I am totally out of this. I am an exception. But in Islam the most important duty of a woman is to raise a child. It is not her duty to

⁵⁵ Your children see you as a role model after all. If I leave teaching, they will think that it is unnecessary. I should keep teaching so that God grants them good morality.

farz, vacip, sünnet, müstehap olan biri olacak. Dikişten yemeğe, bütün dünyaya hükmedebilecek şekilde akli seviyede...Kadın çok donanımlı olacak.”⁵⁶

On the other hand, as a further discursive strategy there is a significant emphasis on active, confident and outspoken women. Almost all of the interviews suggested that women should be self-reliant in all aspects. When asked, what they would want to instil in their daughters, almost all of them answered by stating that they wanted to raise confident and outspoken children. Hatice (38), for example, stated that women “her işi kendi halletmeli, ve yeri geldiğinde bir erkekle ancak islamın izin verdiği şekilde konuşmalı”.⁵⁷ This may be because they view women as much more capable than man. Most argued that, the community administration was limiting, for active women to reach their full potential. All the interviewees also suggest that they are much more active in the community than men.

Zehra (47): Kesinlikle kadınlar daha aktifler. Heyetlerde kadınlar yok. Başarılı olanlar kadınlar ama söz sahibi olan erkekler. Cemaatimizdeki kadın kanadı diğerlerine göre çok daha başarılı . bu direk şeyhimizinde ağzından çıkan sözdür. Espri yaparak ‘erkekler duymasın ama kadınlar bu işi daha iyi becerdiler’ dedi. Bu konuda (hocalık) kadınlarımız daha araştırmacı, kabiliyetli ve daha iyiler. Çok az erkek hoca var iyi diyebileceğim.⁵⁸

Likewise, Ayşe (39) argues that the community limits women by excluding them from executive decisions. “Kadının toplumda büyük ve önemli bir misyonu var. Cemaatin biçtiği rol yeterli değil. Rasulullahın dönemindeki kadınlara baktığım zaman: Savaşçı,

⁵⁶ A woman should know how to behave, how to talk. They need to be in consciousness with the every breath they take and give. Their behaviours should be in the Islamic frame. From knitting to cooking they should know everything and be clever. A woman must possess so many qualities.

⁵⁷ She must take care of everything by herself. If it is necessary to talk to a man, she must talk in a way Islam describes.

⁵⁸ Women are absolutely more active. We don’t have woman in our committees. They are the ones who are successful, but men have the word. Women in our community are more successful. That’s what our Sheikh said: ‘Don’t let the men hear it but women are better at this.

eğitimci, idari konularda devletin kadrolarında yer alabilecek kadar donanımlı. Anne ve aynı zamanda mürebbiye.”⁵⁹

Another interesting discursive technique employed by these women is the emphasis they place on being constantly active. They often devalue homemakers, contradicting the idea that raising children alone should be women’s primary role. Ayse (39), for example, suggest that women who are simply homemakers are ‘lazy’ and would not benefit anyone. “Evde oturan kadının kimseye menfaati olmaz, ne evine, ne de çocuklarına.”⁶⁰ Even the homemakers usually join *sohbet* at least twice a week. Women feel independent and valued by the society when they are constantly active. There is positive connotation placed on independence and autonomy within their respective boundaries.

...hoca oluyorlar. Bildiğiniz iş kadını gibi aktif çalışıyorlar. Bir erkeğin değil belkide bir kaç erkeğin yapabileceği işi tek başlarına yapıyorlar. Benim gördüğüm bu, herhalde Efendi hazretlerinin tasavvuru bu. Kadınlar bir çok iş adamının yapabileceğini yapıyorlar, kendilerini geliştiriyorlar. Dolayısıyla erkeklerle sanki yarışıyorlar. Erkeklerden çok daha da aktifler, daha da muazzam kaliteli hizmet eden hoca arkadaşlar var... Kadın bana göre bu cemaatte çok aktif. Yani tamamen ilim yönünden yani bu cemaatte bana göre kadın ya bir talebedir ya da bir hocadır. Ya sohbetlerde sürekli aktiftir sürekli her sohbe gitmek ister ya da öğretendir bana göre cemaat.⁶¹

There is a symbolic division of space in the community based on gender. Women have autonomy within their own field, which does not allow any form of intervention; however men occupy higher social status as executive decision makers of the

⁵⁹ Woman has a great mission in the society. The role our community gives to the woman is not enough. When we look at the woman in Prophet’s times, we see them they have so many qualities enough to work in a state level in the field of *battle*, education or politics.

⁶⁰ A woman staying at home can not benefit anyone.

⁶¹ ...They become teachers and work as actively as a working woman. They achieve things by themselves a man can not do so. That’s what I see. I guess that’s how our Prophet did as well. Women do so many things, they improve themselves. It is as if they are racing with men. They are more active and some have a great quality in teaching. For me, in this community, women are very active. Here, they are whether a student or a teacher. Whether they attend lectures or give them.

community. The strict rules about gender division in the community allow little room to form a dialogue between men and women, although they share the same physical space, they are not involved in each other's social perimeters. Thus, although men do not encourage the active lifestyle of women they accept it on the basis of *hizmet*. This symbolic boundary is widely agreed upon in the Ismailağa community. Women's perception of appropriate behavior is influenced by both the gender role she embodied and the value placed on it by the community.

4.1.3. Ideal Men

The ideal man described by the women in the Ismailağa community differs extensively from that of the current male character depicted through interviews. My participants argue that men in the community are much less active and less productive than women. Most even suggest that women are responsible for a lot more than man in terms of the division of labor in the community. They particularly stress that they are much more active in participating in *sohbets*. Thus, as a first precondition, an ideal man according to these women is an active disciple. However, they also feel that most of their work is overlooked by the men, and argue that men should be more supportive and appreciative of the work done by women. For instance, Hilal (34) supports this claim saying that: "Cemaatin kadınlarının biraz daha takdir edilmeleri biraz daha yaptıkları işin çok önemli olduğunun farkına varılmaları ve onların desteklenmeleri gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Erkeklerin kadınlara yardımcı olmaları ve destek olmaları gerekiyor."⁶²

Secondly, they argue that ideal man is also a *hoca* who actively promote Islamic thought. According to these women, an ideal man is in the image of the sheikh. Their appearance should follow the common dress style of the community that is promoted by the sheikh. They extensively argue that men are less educated than women in the

⁶² I think the female members of the community should be appreciated more, things they do should be perceived as important and they should be supported. Men must help and support them.

community, thus much more emphasize should be placed on education. Zehra (47) for example argues that, women are far more educated than men.

Bana ne kadar hitap edecek ben ona ne kadar hitap edebileceğim. Benim anlattıklarımı anlayabilecek bir erkek zannetmiyorum. Evli olanlar bunun farklı bir şey olduğunu söylüyorlar ama bana fikir olarak hitap etmeyen doyurmayan biri ile yapamam. Evli olanlar bana bunun arkadaş talebe ilişkisinden farklı bir şey olduğunu söylüyorlar ama 6,7 ay sonra ben bu insanla ne konuşacağım. Bilgi paylaşımını çok seviyorum. Fikir paylaşmazsam arkadaşlık bile yapamam. Yani ne kadar bana hitap edecek. Ben ne kadar hitap edeceğim.⁶³

4.1.4. The Ideal Community

My interviews revealed that the Ismailağa community overwhelmingly assumes that communities, although not crucial, provide the best possible environment for Muslims to easily practice Islam. For instance, Saliha (47) specifically argued that, “cemaat olmak dindarlık için şart mıdır? Kesinlikle birinci şarttır. Tarikatta bana göre şarttır. Şeyhin olması gerekiyor. Akaidde şart olduğu için şarttır. Dinin kuralı bütün ümmetler 72 fırkaya ayrıldı, hep bir topluluk üzerine olmak. Sürüden ayrılanı kurt kapar.” Almost all interviews contained the same argument; however, some also specified the need for a sheikh instead of a community for spiritual support. Although when asked if there was a need for a community to be a Muslim, most said no, but added that it affected religiosity. Their answers were mostly contradictory, since later on during the interview most specified that especially in a modern era, community provides an indispensable support system. For example, Merve (31) specifically suggested that, communities do not contribute to religiosity but people are mostly affected by at least one community when referring to religious teachings.

⁶³ How much we are compatible to each other, how much we can talk on issues together, that is what important. With a man who doesn't understand what I talk about, I don't think I can do that. Married couples tell me that marriage is not a student-teacher kind of relationship. But what could we talk about 6-7 months later? I love sharing informations with people. I can't even be friends with a person whom I can not share these things with. We should be compatible.

Cemaat olmadığı halde çok ihlaslı olan insanlar tanıyorum. Ama ihlaslı olmak için cemaate de ihtiyaç olduğunu düşünüyorum. Konuştuğunuz zaman cemaate mensup olmasa bile cemaatin sohbetlerinden etkilenerek o hale gelmiş. Konuştuğunuz zaman illa cemaatin nefesinden etkilenerek o hale gelmiş yani o cemaatin esintisinden almış kişiler bana göre.⁶⁴

Most interviews also supported this idea with a verse stating that “and hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided.” (Quran: 3:103) When explaining this verse, Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır argues that “ben, kendi başıma, yalnızca dinimi imanımı koruyabilirim’ demek tehlikelidir. Kendi başına kalmak isteyen fertlerin, iman ve İslam üzere ahirete gidebilmesi şüphelidir. Fert, zorlama ve baskı altında her şeyini kaybedebilir. Toplum asit gibidir. Ferdi, kimliğinden sıyrıp kendine benzetir. Bundan kurtulmanın yolu, cemaat içinde kalmaktır” (Elmalılı, Hak Dini Kur’an Dili, II/405).

An ideal community, based on the data gathered, entails the following characteristics. First, it follows the rules of sharia and abides by *Sunnah* to ensure the optimal Islamic obedience. Second, such a community should also entail qualities that were present in the Ottoman society, and refrain from any modern teaching. In this context, *medrese* and *kurs*, which follow the Ottoman style curriculum, are of crucial importance in an ideal community. Furthermore, Ideal community is Sunni and follows a legitimate sheikh. However the most important aspect of an ideal community is their devotion to Islamic_education and emr-i bi'l ma'ruf ve nehy-i anil münker. The ideal community is also inclusive and accepting of everyone. Lastly, in terms of its organization, a tariqa structure with a sheikh as its leader is the cornerstone for any community.

The notion that, education is the core of an ideal community was a recurring theme in almost all the interviews. It was agreed that community has to provide the necessary

⁶⁴ I know so many people who have *ihlas* without joining any religious community. But at the same time I believe that there is a need for a community to be *ihlasli* (someone who has ihlas). When you talk to them, you see that they are like that because of the influences of the *sohbets*. When you talk to them, you also see that they are influenced by the breath of the cemaat, so they have a feel of the cemaat.

education to all its members in order for them to live their lives according to Islamic rules. This is crucial for the community to provide an environment for proper and accurate education that entails learning about sharia. For instance, Selma (35) argued that the community's main aim should be to educate people to obtain taqwa and to abide by Sunnah. "Sünnet-i seniye'yi ihya noktasında olmalı... Biz mesela, takva insan yetiştirmeye çalışıyoruz. Sahabe gibi olmak için uğraşılıyor. Efendi hazretleri ilme çok önem veriliyor. Sanki böyle efendi hazretleri cemaatinin ilmine önem verdiği kadar hiçbir cemaat vermiyor."⁶⁵ There is also an emphasis on living the way prophet and his companions did. When compared to other communities, the Interviewees suggested that, education was lacking in most Sufi and non-Sufi communities but it was necessary for a person to maintain an Islamic identity. Rana (36), too, argues education should be a priority in an ideal community.

A'dan Z'ye 7'den 70'e çocuk büyük küçük kim olursa olsun Resullullah (s.a.s) hayatı gibi bir nebze bile olmuş olsa en azından öğrenmek işte yaşamak ve ondan sonra sadece kendini değil etrafındaki insanları da ışık olmak, kurtarmaya çalışmak hani kimin neye gücü yetiyorsa bunu yapmaya çalışmak... tanımıcak olursak ilimle ameli birleştirip ihlas yolunda son noktayı koymayı hedefleyen bi cemaat.⁶⁶

Hilal (34) argues both the importance of education and to pass on that education to others as a crucial aspect of an ideal community.

Cemaatin ilime önem vermesi, bu birinci sırada. Bence ikinci sırada her ne kadar aksi düşünülse, kadınların yetiştirilmesine önem vermesi. Özellikle arapça temelli kökenli metinlere ve bu hususta yazılmış arapça üzerine yazılan fıkıh kitaplarını yani arap diliyle yazılan fıkıh kitaplarına ve tefsir kitaplarına

⁶⁵ It must be about practicing *Sunnah*. We are trying to educate people with the consciousness of God, to be like the companions. Our Sheikh gives great importance to education. It feels like other communities don't give that much importance.

⁶⁶ From A to Z, age ranging from 7- 70, child or an old person, just as Prophet did in his life, should try to learn even just a little, live that knowledge and also spread it, share it with others. One should do his best to do these. To clarify, this is a community aiming to unite knowledge and practicing, and do the best in the path of *Ikhlas*.

vukufiyette yani gerçekten cemaatimizin daha önde olduğunu düşünüyorum tabi bu bi tutmak değil, bu bi hakikatin hakkaten yansıması olarak görüyorum bunu. İkinci olarakta yine bence aldığı ilimi vermek ve sohbet etmek, yani irşat, tebliğ de diyebiliriz, bu şekilde en önemli bence iki özelliği bu.⁶⁷

Furthermore, another aspect of an ideal community is there adherence to *emr-i bi'l ma'ruf ve nehy-i anil münker*, which emphasized urging others to do good deeds and deterring them from sins. This is crucial in a community, since their nature is to provide the needed Islamic education to others. This practice is mentioned in several verses, and due to its obligatory nature discussed by the prophet, it is understood as a core of the community. "And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and these it is that shall be successful." (Surah Ali- 'Imran 3: 104). *Amr Bil Ma'ruf and Nahy Anil Munkar* are obligatory duties, and those who neglect it, are as guilty as those who commit sins. "Those who believed from among the children of Israel were cursed by the tongue of Dawud and Isa, son of Mariam, this was because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limit. They used not to forbid each other the hateful things (which) they did; certainly evil was that which they did." (Quran: 5: 78-79).

Thus the community argues that in order for a Muslim to succeed, she/he needs to abide by sharia, since it ensures that Muslims can lead their lives with God's guidance.

Sharia or Islamic law is mostly concerned with personal religious observance such as prayer and fasting. Therefore an ideal community not only teaches the sharia but ensures that disciples practice sharia, by providing a suitable environment. However, there is a strong association of sharia and *tasawwuf*, too. Most interviews suggest that sharia is best experienced, understood and applied through Sufism, as they complement each other. The latter enables people to comply with sharia rules much

⁶⁷ The community gives importance to education. This is the first one. The second is –despite the contrary thoughts- giving importance to the women's education. Especially studying arabic- originated textes, arabic *fiqh and tafseer* books and expertise on them is one of the things that make our community special. It is not taking sides. I see it as the reflection of what is being done. The other feature is giving lectures, teaching what they learnt, giving dawa etc. These are the most important features.

easier. It acts as a spiritual discipline by limiting the faulty qualities of the ego, such as arrogance, greed, anger and envy and aims at purifying the soul of any other world pleasures to seek and please only God. Therefore, tasawwuf and sharia cannot be separated, since they both act as a tool to reach God, according to the community members.

And lastly, the ideal community is not based on a modern lifestyle, in the sense that it should not follow clothing, education, and technological advancements in the world. Modernity according to the Ismaili community comes with derogatory conations about Islamic religion. Saliha (47), for example argues that modern education corrupts the moral sense, since the curriculum follows a western pattern that is mostly secular. As discussed in the previous chapter, kurs and medrese provide the best environment for moral development.

Korkunc bir degismi uğruyorsunuz o bilimi alirken. Haram olmadan olsa niye olmasin. Kayip veriyor cunku. Bilim benim için çok önemli. Kuran zaten bastan aşağı bilim. Hem zaman hem ahlaki kayıp. Suanki bilim bile batı eksenli, islami bir psikolog bile yok. Kendi kültürünü veriyor, islam kültürünü vermiyor. O bilimi yazan kimse bir öğreti vermek istiyor karsısına, bir model oluşturuyor karsısına. Bizim kitaplarını ateistler yazdığı için, eğer aileden gormemisse birsey, ateist oluyor. O yazan onu bir fikirle yaptı, onu aksettiriyorsun. O kendi fikir yapısını oluşturuyor. En azından belirli bir dönem asla gitmemeli.⁶⁸

This chapter has discussed the main discursive strategies and techniques that participants of my research employed in their definitions of ideal women, men, sheikh and community. These strategies and techniques, which function as the main elements of their different modes of subjection in the Foucauldian sense, include the following;

⁶⁸ While leaning that science, you change greatly in bad way. Without haram things, it is ok. But you are losing in the process. Science is important for me. The Quran itself is a science. Otherwise it is losing time and losing your good morality. The science today is still western-oriented. There is not an *islamic* psychologist. They teach you their culture, not yours. Those who create these sciences want to impose a certain doctrine, create a certain model. Our books are written by atheists. If a person doesn't have fundamental Islamic knowledge, if the family didn't teach anything, he becomes an atheist after reading these books. They impose their way of thinking. At least for a time, we should stay away.

- a) Ideal Sheik
 - i. Dedication to following the sharia and the sunnah
 - ii. Anti-modern
 - iii. Zuht and Taqwa

- b) Ideal Women
 - i. Educated/Hoca
 - ii. Modesty and Taqwa
 - iii. Hizmet through self-sacrifice
 - iv. Complies with traditional gender roles

- c) Ideal Man
 - i. emr-i bi'l ma'ruf ve nehy-i anil münker
 - ii. Hocalik

- d) Ideal community
 - i. Fulfills the requirements of sharia, and follow sunnah
 - ii. Education
 - iii. emr-i bi'l ma'ruf ve nehy-i anil münker
 - iv. Follows the example of Sahaba and Ottoman community

Some of these strategies and techniques overlap with those employed by my participants in constructing their own identity, as discussed in the previous chapter. For example, an ideal woman defines her value by *taqwa*, modesty and her job as a teacher. Furthermore, she also describes herself against the male members of the community and measures her worth once again with the *hizmet* she provides. Ideal man, in this notion, is formed in comparison to ideal women, thus entails characteristics that women attribute to themselves as the ideal women, with a slight change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The research focused on the distinct identity formation of women in the Ismailağa community, through discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews of the female disciples and *sohbets* of the sheikh, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, and the prominent female and male members of the community. Women in the community actively shape their own identity that convey communal influences; with particular adherence to Sharia law and Sunnah practices combined with Sufi tradition. My main motivation in selecting this topic was to understand the differences of identity formation in religious/Sufi communities, more specifically the Ismailağa community and to further understand the structure and the gender roles in this particular community. The self-constructed and multifaceted identities of the Ismailağa women attract much attention due to their traditional and distinctive lifestyle that follows traditional orthodox Islamic practices, Sufi heritage and anti-modern values. I interviewed thirteen female members of the community between the ages of 25 to 45. To further understand the effects of community on identity formation, I interviewed women who joined the community after the age of 20 and those that were born and raised in the community.

The Ismailağa community follows the Naqshi-Khalidi branch of the Sufi order that emphasis *sohbet* and quiet dhikr as opposed to loud dhikr. They adhere to traditional Islamic views, strictly following the lifestyle of the prophet and *sahabe* while trying to resist the influence of the dominant culture since it carries modern elements. They are mostly known as reactionaries due to their isolated lifestyle from the larger society. The region with its current ambiance gives an Ottoman feeling, with men dressed in şalvar and cübbe, while women are dressed in all black covering çarsaf. Most shops are clear reflection of values, with long dresses, required kurs textbooks, praying beads, and everything that the community deems proper to preserve a modest and Sunnah lifestyle. Although they reside in one of the most populated areas in Istanbul, their

exclusiveness and unwillingness to send their children to public schools have protected much of their traditional attitudes. Thus, my aim was to explore this distinct identity formation in women, since it overwhelmingly carried much of the characteristics of the community as it was discovered in my research.

For this research, I have utilized the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Herbert Blumer and George Herbert Mead. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital provided a structured approach to the research while Symbolic Interactionism Theory, addressed the common, everyday acts of the community; both these perspectives provided a foundation for my analysis of discursive strategies and modes of subjection in the community. These theories exposed the innate and the socially obtained within the social structure of the community.

I employed the concept of habitus and symbolic capital, which provides the basic structure on explaining the formation of women's identity in the community. Habitus assisted in understanding the expectations, behaviors, and attitudes in the community; acting as a bridge between larger environment and the individual. This was particularly significant in understanding the effect of the community on the individual while also emphasizing human action. Symbolic capital on the other hand provided understanding of the prominent values in the community, since it represents accumulated labor and is usually bestowed from group to individual (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 46). The members identified themselves with the most valued profession in the community; *hocalik*, since it brought prestige, value and higher social status in the community. *Hocas* were also ranked based on their level of education. For example, those who were both *Arabic hocas* and *hafiz hocas* were placed on a higher social status than those who only thought one.

Second theory I applied to this research was Symbolic Interactionism, since it offers a micro approach to understand the everyday social interactions. It focuses on the usage

of language and symbols to convey meaning to understand the social world. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis was mostly used in understanding the concept of *hocalik* and what it represented in the community. Goffman argued that people's social interactions resembled that of a 'script', with cultural references. Terms that were prominently used in this research were dramaturgical concepts of Goffman, such as; front stage, props, and face. *Hocas*, for example, were constantly visible in the community, as they attracted much attention due to the nature of their profession. With the emphasis placed on the perfect moral behavior and wisdom of *hocas*, both through *sohbets*, *kurs* and sheikhs constant reminders, they were viewed as a role model; a perfect example of an ideal Muslim. Thus, hocas are constantly required to maintain this perfect behavior when they are on 'front stage' through their actions and attitudes.

I applied Foucauldian approach to further analyze the identity construction of the women in the community. Discourse is constructed upon discursive strategies to form discursive unity. Foucault describes discourse as a "group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment". "Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall, 1997, p. 44). These discursive practices are formations of particular episteme, thus with discursive formations, meanings are discovered. Furthermore, through my research of semi-structured interviews, *sohbets* and written sources, I discovered five discursive strategies that form the Ismailağa women typology. I also utilized discursive techniques that support and further clarify discursive strategies. These discursive strategies are:

1. Formation of identity through "*hocalik*"
2. Tasawwuf as the primary source of education

3. Emphasizing self-sacrifice
4. Construction of identity through stories
5. Constructing internal hierarchy on the basis of *Taqwa*

The most distinct difference in this community was the emphasis placed on being a *hoca*. The notion of *hocalik* was the single most used attribute to describe women in the Ismailağa community. Women largely defined themselves with their profession of *hocalik*. However, the idea of *hocalik* was very distinct since it was defined as a genderless profession with several different distinctions. *Hocalik* did not carry distinct male or female characteristics, since the women defined themselves as; fragile, soft-spoken and naïve, and these attributes were largely left out when defining the characteristics of a *hoca*, which was also the case for male characteristics. However, interviewees argued that women were naturally inclined to be teachers, since mothers are children's first educators. Furthermore, *hocalik* meant a devote life, thus a divine profession.

Second discursive strategy revealed that community viewed *tasawwuf* as the primary source of education as it is in most Sufi communities. Community follows a *tasawwuf* based education since it is seen as the source of development of moral sensibility as well as (*taqwa*). *Taqwa* according to the community is the source of cognitive and spiritual development and all accumulated knowledge. Thus, most interviewees strongly emphasized that *tasawwuf*, alone, is the major tool for acquiring all knowledge. Furthermore, *tasawwuf* acts as a control mechanism, since the disciples are constantly watched by the sheikh, they are always mindful of their actions. Second discursive technique here was the psychological support received by *tasawwuf*. Most disciples argued that they felt helped and supported by their sheikh whenever they faced any obstacles.

Third discursive strategy was the emphasis placed on self-sacrifice. Most argue that children come in second to the service they provide to their community. The notion of self-sacrifice was highly influential in the community. Women gained status through *hocalik* and *taqwa*; they were also highly praised for being excessively active in the community. Furthermore, most women also postpone marriage since it may intervene with their duties. Story-telling was another key aspect of conveying their identity. Interviewees told stories about the prophet, sheikh and other distinct members of the community to convey the values and ideal characteristics. These stories revealed important information in regards to identity and the values of the community. Final discursive strategy that the female members of the Ismailağa community use to construct their identity is the formation of hierarchy on the basis of *taqwa*. The Ismailağa community focuses on the visible aspects of *taqwa* to form an internal hierarchy. The visible and measurable part of *taqwa* is reflected in clothing and attitude, specifically for women. Thus, the degree of modesty and *taqwa* is closely associated with *çarsaf* and long dresses.

These five main discursive strategies aided in discovering the ideal subjects in the community. The structure, world view and the characteristics of the community were reflected in these strategies with discursive techniques to further understand these strategies. The first part of analysis focused on the identity formation of the female disciples in the community, second part of the analysis examines the construction of ideal subjects and ideal community. I have utilized the modes of subjection to further examine the gender roles and the structure of the community. The interviews and *sohbets* revealed the following 'ideal' characteristics for sheikh, men and women. I have further explored the image of 'ideal community' represented by the members.

Ideal sheikh revealed common characteristics that can be found in most religious/ Sufi communities, but also characteristics that are distinct to this particular community. Ideal sheikh is chosen by the previous sheikh, sometimes through divine intervention.

The process is different in the Ismailağa community, since almost all the sheiks were appointed through divine intervention, rather than passing on from father to son. This also ascertains an unbroken connection to Prophet Muhammad. In addition to this, Sheikhs represent prophet Muhammad thus needs to adhere to sharia law and Sunnah, and preach his followers to do the same. One aspect that was particular to this community was sheikh's anti-modern attitude; that sheik should dress the way Ottomans did, in şalvar and cübbe, limit technology use and only be educated in kurs. The interviews revealed that there is an Ottoman romanticism in the community, since modern values corrupted morals, and Ottoman Empire represented the ideally moral society.

Ideal women on the other hand carried gender specific values as well as progressive attitudes that reveal a different gender identity from most other communities. The women in the community do preserve their traditional gender roles, and argue that women are indeed first mothers, housewives and are main caretakers of the house. However, they also argue that women have the duty to teach, and everything else is of secondary importance. The interviews revealed that women are mostly displeased with inactivity of men and other female members; in fact homemakers are highly disregarded in the community. An ideal woman is always active and pursues the application of God, through teaching if not always educating herself through sohbet. This progressive attitude towards learning and having a 'job' outside the house is distinct in this community. An ideal man on the other hand is active in the community. Since men are able to represent the community outside without any restriction that women have due to their clothing and other religious aspects, they are expected to promote Islamic values. Men and women had very distinct roles in the community. Women due to physical limitations of the çarsaf were only able to serve in the community, while men are able to promote both outside and inside of the community. However most women complained that men are not as active as the women in the community, in fact they unanimously argued that the community was supported

mostly by women. Thus an ideal man is both active in and out of the community. Like the ideal women, an ideal man also is hoca, or at least received the mandatory Islamic education. An ideal man also dresses in şalvar and cübbe. Finally ideal community strictly follows sharia law and Sunnah and emphasizes Islamic education with *kurs* and *medreses*. Ideal community follows a legitimate sheikh and tariqa.

The research also revealed that *kurs* and *medrese* are responsible for most of their identity formation. *Kurs* educated children to follow certain behaviours of both the community and the Sufi attitude. Constant surveillance drives students to develop habitual behaviour that is later produced and reproduced in the community through *sohbets*. Thus, *kurs* and the *sohbets* are responsible for much of the identity formation in women. This can also be seen with the dress code and how they describe themselves. In summary, women in the community identify themselves, (i) by their education or profession, (ii) motherhood, (iii) active lifestyle/hizmet and (iv) Sufi heritage. Thus they provide distinct identity formation that entails both progressive gender roles, by insisting to be educated and to work outside the home, but still in compliance with traditional gender roles, that demand women to comply with their historical roles such as housekeeping and childrearing. Thus the predicted outcome of the study has been proven with data provided by semi-structured interviews, *sohbets* and participant observation.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This research can be further expanded to include male identity formation in the community and how it differs from that of female identity formation. Furthermore, this research can be expanded by increasing the number of interviews and *sohbets*, which could provide a better understanding of the dynamics of the community. Further research can also be conducted by interviewing male members of the community to further understand if there are any discrepancies between how male members view women versus how female members view themselves.

This research can also be extended to include comparative analysis of different Sufi and non-Sufi communities. Although there is an abundance of research in İskenderpaşa, Süleymanlılar, Nur cemaati, there is still a lack of specific gender research in these communities. Further research can be developed on sohbet's and its effects on identity formation.

There were several limitations to this research. First, lack of primary sources on both female identity in Sufi communities and a lack of research specifically in İsmailağa community restricted the study. Male disciples also rejected any interviews, due to frowned upon male and female communication in the community, thus limiting the research further.

I would like to build on and expand this research further in for my PhD dissertation by combining several different Sufi and non-Sufi communities to broaden my research to compare and analyze how conservative Turkish women shape their identity in reference to their community. The focus of the research will include İsmailağa community, İskenderpaşa Community, *Süleymanlılar* and *Nurcular* with an emphasis on its two main branches of *Okuyucular* and *Yazıcılar*.

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