THE BOOK AND THE ROSES

Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul

Catharina Raudvere

SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL

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TRANSACTIONS VOL. 12

Front cover Tile dated to the end of the seventeenth century displaying a view of Mekke and Kabe.

Layout Stilbildarna i Malmö, Frederic Täckström, Sweden
Logotype Bo Berndal

Printed in Sweden by Bjärnums Tryckeri AB, Sweden
Bjärnum 2002
Distribution I. B. Tauris, London, England

ISBN 91-86884-11-5
ISSN 1100-0333

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Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by a three-and-a-half year scholarship from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR). The Crafoord Foundation and the Research Council provided the printing grants necessary for the publication of the present book. At an early stage of my research, the journeys that enabled me to conduct my preliminary fieldwork were generously supported by the Erik Philip-Sörensen Foundation and the Magnus Bergvall Foundation. I am deeply grateful to all these institutions.

I am forever indebted to The Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, which gave me accommodation in its guest-home during most of my visits to Istanbul. The Director at the time of my fieldwork, Associate Professor Bengt Knutsson, and the staff at the Institute, Ms Sidsel Braaten M.A. and Ms Kari Çağtay, became generous and loyal friends who took part in all phases of my work, joyous as well as more despondent ones. I am also most grateful to Professor Elisabeth Özdalga, later Director of the Institute, with whom I have had many a good conversation about Islam in Turkey over the years, in Ankara and in Istanbul – and via e-mail. During my stays in Istanbul, Ms Bente Nikolaisen M.A.was an indefatigable guide to every corner of this alluring city. Professor Özdalga and Ms Nikolaisen also took time to read my manuscript at a final stage. My warmest thanks to all of them for their advice and corrections.

All the friendly and hospitable women in the Fatih district of Istanbul who encouraged me to continue my work, took their time to answer my questions, and opened their activities to me cannot be thanked enough. Without their candour and open-mindedness, the project would have been something quite different. Although the women in the studied group are much engaged in public activities, I have out of respect for their privacy, omitted all names and other indications of identity.

I have had the opportunity to present draft versions of my text to seminars at the University of California in Los Angeles, Harvard University, the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, University of Bergen, University of Edinburgh, University of Gothenburg, University of Uppsala, and at MESA conferences, in the course of which discussions I received many fruitful comments and suggestions for which I am very grateful. The daily work and seminar discussions with my friends and colleagues at the Division of History of Religions at Lund University, have been a constant source of inspiration throughout the project.

In order to stay close to the local terminology, it has been my intention to indi-

cate as far as possible the terms used by my informants and follow the spelling used in the printed materials collected during the fieldwork. Terms and phrases not found in local printed matter adhere to the spelling and transliteration in Orhan Hançerlioğlu's *İslam İnançları Sözlüğü* (1994) and Süleyman Uludağ's *Tasavvuf Termleri Sözlüğü* (1995). I would like to express my great gratitude to my teacher in Turkish Ms Janine Sages M.A. for her patience and help, and for her friendship.

This book is dedicated, with love, to my husband, Gunnar Lindahl.

Lund, September 2002

ENCOUNTERING SUFISM IN CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL

Introduction

My first personal encounter with women practising Sufi rituals was through a video film. Shown during a seminar, it had been shot by members of a Turkish *derviş*[1] order (*tarikat*) themselves. This mode of self-documentation ran counter to the traditional "scholar-in-the-field" image, suggesting new possibilities of performing fieldwork. The film was situated in a historical derviş lodge (*tekke*), in a room filled with memorabilia of the tarikat's more than century-long history. Despite the presence of these historical mementoes, it raised questions about religious practices in modern urban life and about the implementation of secularism in contemporary Turkey.

At the time I was just finishing a project of a completely different character, on Old Norse mythology and Scandinavian folklore. Although greatly preoccupied with that project, I was taken aback by the ceremony and the vivaciousness communicated from Istanbul via the video documentation. I was suddenly very much aware of the constraints of textual studies, having to rely on narratives sometimes 700 years old. Modern times and proper recordings appeared to be the answer to many of my questions about the varieties of religious expression. Little did I realise that fieldworkers adopting such an approach would run into new and very difficult methodological problems, or that the issue of the relationship between text and life would continue to haunt me. There are of course substantial methodological differences between historical sources and collected field material, but neither offers an easy way out when it comes to the analysis of religious expressions.

To See But Not To Be Seen. Encountering Women at a Historic Tekke

As the ritual on the film proceeded, I could see men in a crowded room moving their bodies more and more intensely. The repetitive act of chanting, referred to by the Sufis as "the most beautiful names of God" (*zikir* in Turkish), was

1. In order to mark the context of the term, the Turkish form *derviş* is used throughout the study, to avoid confusion with the loose and more romantic understanding of what a "dervish" is in contemporary English. A derviş is an initiated member of a tarikat, and the term will be used to denote active members of tarikats, sometimes in comparison to other forms of affilation to groups performing Sufi-orientated rituals.

2. The transliterated Arabic form *dhikr* is frequently used in literature on Islam and Sufism.

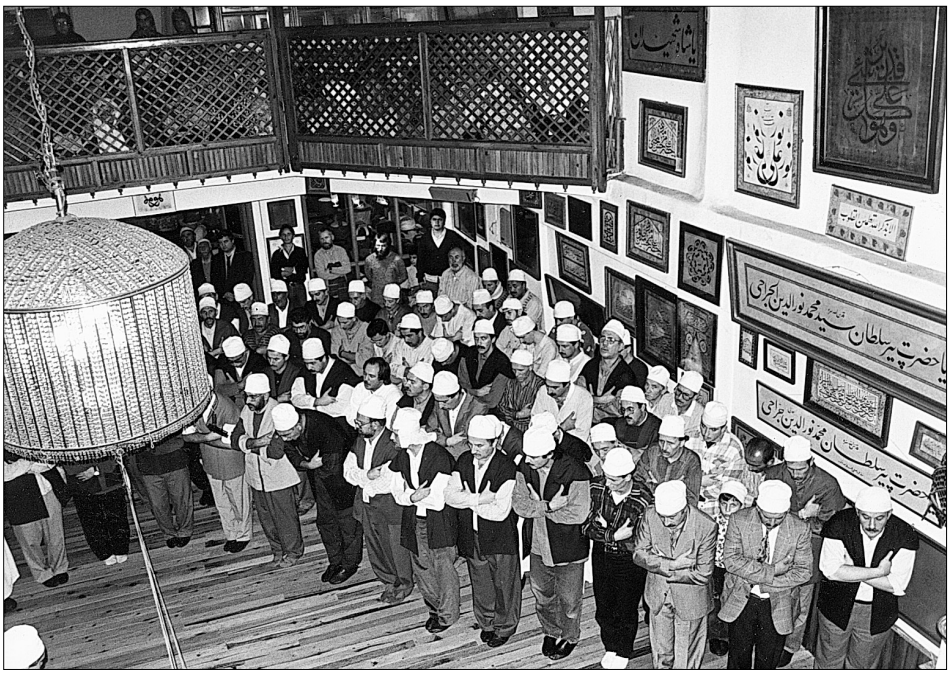
accompanied by the ascending physical movements of the men, who initially formed seated circles. In the middle of the performance, while the rhythm rose continuously, the men stood up and started to turn in circles, acting out more and more intensely. The ritual ended in the choreographic formation of a compact spiral while the participants repeatedly and rhythmically cried: "Hay, Hay, Hay", meaning the Living One. The ceremony was orchestrated by the master (*şeyh*) of the order, who conducted the concentric circles of praying men, the musicians (drums and hymn-singers chanting choruses as well as individual songs) and the Kuran recitation. Despite the many agents involved, it all came out in a well-structured wholeness directed by a simple hand-clap from the şeyh or by a mere nod from him: intense, loud, and ardent, but never undisciplined.

Zikir first appeared to be a mono-gendered prayer-meeting for men of all ages; small boys tried to imitate the proceedings as best they could at the fringe of the circle. However, at the top of the television screen I did eventually catch a glimpse of a gallery with women sitting behind wooden latticework, joining in the ritual with somewhat more restrained movements. No faces could be seen, only the silhouettes. When asked, Professor Geels who led the seminar could only confirm: the women's part of the derviş tekke had not been accessible to him.[3]

Sufism has become a well-known popular concept all over the world in the wake of orientalist travel writers and hippies as well as – more recently – through world music and various manifestations of New Age. Few phenomena from the sphere of religion have a nimbus like Sufism among readers in general. Whenever the sound of the reed-flute (*ney*) is heard, the sophisticated symbols of the miniature paintings are immediately visualised, and the roses and nightingales of Sufi poetry spring to mind. Despite these stirring expressions, the societal influence and political implications of Sufism should not be overlooked. As soon as a distinct group is observed, loyalties and ties of dependence other than religious ones become apparent. It seems that not all dervişes dance. At the time of the film seminar my notions about Sufism and dervişes were based on what I knew from reading, most of all the literary approach of Annemarie Schimmel (1975, 1978, 1992).[4] From her viewpoint Sufism appeared to be a world of poetry, miniature paintings, and music, and it stimulated my interest at the outset of this project. All these aesthetic expressions are of course an indubitable heritage of Sufism; but there is a more down-to-earth ritual life

3. The seminar was led by Professor Antoon Geels at the Department of Religious Studies, Lund University, in the spring of 1990. The results of Geels' psychological analysis of the film and his complementary field studies are published in Geels 1996. His approach is "a multi-dimensional model of analysis in order to study different types of intense religious experience" (1996:54). However, he does not bring up the issue of gender or gendered space in his analysis of the Halveti Cerrahi dervişes. As a male visitor he did not have access to the women's part of the tekke (no male derviş had either, for that part).

4. It should not be forgotten that Schimmel has also published studies more orientated towards Sufi practice and ritual, for example "Sufismus und Volksfrömmigkeit" (1990).



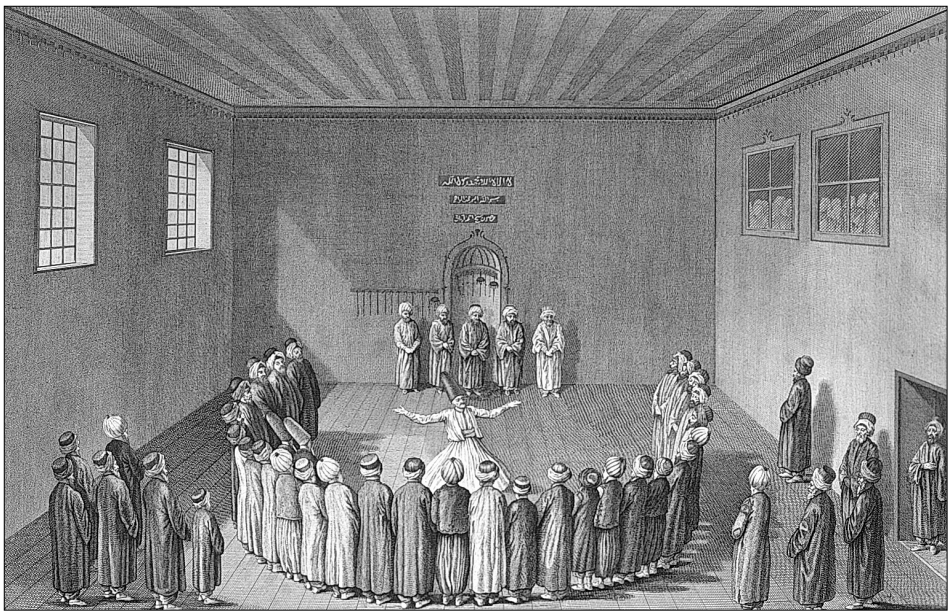
Zikir at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke in October 1995.

THIS SCENE IS VERY similar to what was shown on the video film shot in October 1989 by the dervişes themselves. It shows the women's gallery from the perspective of the *meydan* (literally the square) that is the open (often circular) space in a tekke establishment where the men perform zikir. This part of the zikir is known among the Cerrahis (and other tarikats tooFI) as "turning" (*deverân* or *devrân*). During this phase of the ceremony, the men stand close to one another and move with short steps in a circle. It is not possible for the women on the crescent-shaped gallery to rise and participate in the increasing intensity.

Some women join in the *deverân* in a seated position by moving the upper parts of their bodies. Lacking the men's formalised hierarchies, the women's position during zikir reflects a degree of personal intention. Those who want to participate in a more intense mode place themselves closer to the latticework with a view over the meydan and a possibility to see the signs of instruction indicated by the şeyh. As is the case downstairs among the men when they form their concentric circles, the most honourable positions are close to the şeyh.

PHOTO: CATHARINA RAUDVERE

5. *Deverân* performances are also conducted by the Rufai, Kadiri, Halveti, Bayrami, Gülşeni, Uşşâkî and some other orders as a complement to the verbal zikir. To the Mevlevi devişes, known as the whirling dervişes, the grand turning ceremony constitutes the core ritual and has become the emblematic image of Sufi rituals.



Zikir in the eighteenth century. A detail from the classic illustrations in Mouradgea D'Ohsson's Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman *printed in three folio volumes in Paris 1787–1790, 1821.*

MOURADGEA D'OHSSON (1740–1807) WAS an interpreter (*dragoman*) and later minister at the Swedish legation in Constantinople from 1768 to 1799 and collected information about many aspects of social, political and religious conditions in the Ottoman Empire (Callmer 1985:51; Jarring 1987). His monumental work in three large folios is one of the most important sources in a Western language where Ottoman history is concerned, including such matters as public administration, religion and folklore.

The picture shows a Rufai tekke in Istanbul with a women's gallery of the same construction as the contemporary ones. Unseen, the women could see the male dervişes. In some tarikats it is still today a presumed religious merit (*sevâb*) for women to witness a male event, as much as, if not even more than, practising zikir themselves. Other traditional constructions of the women's quarters (*haremlik*) situated it on the same floor behind the men or in a walled separate room with latticework windows. The important thing is to indicate a border (*had*) between the two spheres of spaces. Within each of them, several functions could be located: rooms for prayer and studies, libraries, kitchens and dining halls as well as areas for more social activities.

Many of the historical tekkes are now closed or were pulled down as a result of the Kemalist laws against Sufi activities. Today, Sufi associations (tarikat-related or not) meet for zikir and other forms of prayer in private homes and in some cases in mosques. In the last decade, a certain interest in tekkes as remarkable examples of Ottoman architecture has been noticeable.

to consider, too, as well as social dimensions of which I knew little at the time.

The present study is divided into three major sections, each focusing on different levels of women's activism. The first considers the political and cultural changes in Turkey at large during the 1990s, on the basis of Alberto Melucci's theories on the impact of small organisations on social movements; the second discusses the group as an organisation as well as its spiritual leader, in order to clarify the historical and theological circumstances in consequence of which women's activism was able to gain legitimacy in a generally conservative environment; and the final part analyses the most significant ritual within the group, the weekly performance of zikir, which gives the group its distinctive character. The intention behind the division is to mark three equally important aspects of Turkish Muslim activism in the 1990s. In all sections the group is the agent, not individual women. To a large extent the three sections can be read separately; read together, however, I would hope that they yield a coherent overview comprising the relevance of conventions in belief and practice, political opportunities in a wide sense, and effectual initiatives as employed by a small group of people in a very large city.

I

ACCESS, VISIBILITY, AND MOBILITY

Islam in Turkey after 1983

Islam as a Lived Practice

Religion is by no means only a cognitive category. To most people, past and present, religion is a lived experience, acted out in physical movements. Faith is expressed in actions and attitudes that cannot exclusively be defined as either sacred or profane. Religion is not limited to any distinguishable realm of holiness. Many religious activities may appear trivial, even vulgar; nevertheless, they are invested with conceptions and symbols of vital importance to the ways in which individuals comprehend their world.

Islam as a Lived Practice. Society, Structure and Identity

Caught between reproduced romantic images of Oriental rituals and fascination with the existence of a historic Sufi establishment in a modern setting, I had initial difficulties finding my way to women's rituals in the literature on Sufism.

Clifford Geertz broke new ground in the social study of contemporary Islam with his concepts "thick description" and "core symbols", though he did not emphasise ritual studies at all in his pioneering *Islam Observed* (1968). Rather, it was Michael Gilsenan's *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*: *An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (1973) that opened the study of Muslim rituals to more sociological and anthropological approaches. This monograph also deals with the performance of *dhikr* in depth (1973:156ff.). In respect of Sufi-related rituals, Joseph W. McPherson's early study of moulids in Egypt should not be forgotten. Although Pherson was no sociologist, but an officer in the British army and a civil servant, he convincingly argued for a devotional as well as a secular aspect of these commemorative ceremonies (1941). Constance E. Padwick's *Muslim Devotion* (1961), published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK, an Anglican mission agency) is an attempt to systematise various forms of Muslim prayer. She collected materials from missionaries in the Muslim world as well as from travel writers, such as Freya Stark. Padwick's is not an academic book; but it offers valuable pieces of information in its attempt to capture Islam both with regard to practice and doctrine. The principal focus is on the five daily prayers, but there is also a section on phenomena "outside the prayer-rite" with descriptions of devotional prayers. It is symptomatic that valuable information on matters that do not belong within the realm of mainstream classic Sunni Islam is to be found in sources from outside Acad-

eme. Missionaries and travellers frequently had a good eye for the daily practices of Islam without measuring them in relation to any assumed orthodoxy.

Among other early studies on Muslim rituals, the works of Edward Westermarck (1926) and G. E. von Grunebaum (1951) must be mentioned. Both were more or less explicitly confident in their application of a dichotomy between "high" and "low" cultural expressions of Islam – a line followed up, although in a more sophisticated way, by Ernest Gellner when he discussed the authority and lines of legitimisation in "tribal society" (1969, 1972). In order to stress variety within a society and emphasise complexity, Gellner points to the ambiguous role of the men of learning (*ulama*): "the verdict of the ulama regarding legitimacy, like the flight of that much overrated bird the Owl of Minerva, takes place only after the event, and hence in effect ratifies the actual power situation, rather than sitting in judgement of it" (1972:308). Gellner further states: "urban Sufi mysticism is an *alternative* to the legalistic, restrained, arid (as it seems to its critics) Islam of the ulama. Rural and tribal 'Sufism' is the *substitute* for it". Later, he continues: "Islam embraces various types of social structure, and while the ulama are its ultimate and most important expression, its constitutional court so to speak, yet many of those social structures, notably tribal ones, cannot accommodate or use these learned scribes, and need other anchorages for religion" (1972:325). Gellner's position here and elsewhere (1969, 1972, 1983) has been severely criticised by Sami Zubaida: "What Gellner does not seem to realize is that you can engage in ecstatic, mystical and ceremonial activity, including music and dancing, and still be 'dignified'" (1995:165). Zubaida insists that Gellner takes up the argument from modern reformist Muslims, who – in their battle against backwardness and fatalism – advocate an original and pure Islam (1995:172f.). Marjo Buitelaar is also critical of Gellner when analysing women's Ramadan celebrations in Morocco, emphasising the lack of individual variation in theories that use too rigid categories such as "formal" and "informal" Islam (Buitelaar 1993:5f.).

In his introductory book on Sufism, Carl Ernst has a chapter on Sufism in the contemporary world which focuses on the conflict between Sufi groups and Islamists (of varying degrees of radicalism) on the one hand and on the other various forms of state intervention in the name of secularism and modernisation (Ernst 1997). In both cases, it is the Sufi practices that constitute the obstacle, more than anything else. In his *Mystical Islam* (1989), Julian Baldick adopts a more clear-cut historical angle, but one that includes awareness of the political implications of Sufi history. In his recent *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (2000) Ian Richard Netton makes a comparison between the ritual practise of the Nicᶜmatullāhī order and the Naqshbandī. He provides a thorough historical background to the groups, many references to their theology and one of the more detailed descriptions of the various phases of Sufi rituals.

As my search for Sufi women's rituals proceeded, a number of valuable studies of contemporary Sufism, based on field observations, were published in the 1990s, and quite a few of them emphasise the ritual aspects of Sufi life. To men-

tion just a few studies from the 1990s which have been of special importance to the present study, as they emphasise zikir and other Sufi-related rituals in the Ottoman Empire and in the Turkish Republic: In Raymond Lifchez's anthology *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (1992), both historical and contemporary aspects are subjected to more ritually orientated studies and various sociological approaches. The essays by Walter Feldman and Nurhan Atasoy, and Raymond Lifchez' introduction, are particularly relevant. Martin van Bruinessen describes the Kurdish parts of eastern Turkey and situates the activities of local şeyhs and tarikats in the midst of regional conflicts, mostly relying on sources from the 1920s and 1930s (1992:203ff.). Robert Olson's studies of the same area also touch on the social and political influence of the many Nakşbandi subbranches (1989:91ff.).

Nancy Tapper studies shrine visits (*ziyaret*), a tradition which includes receptions, recitals, and commemorative prayers, many of which have a connection to Sufi practices. Since these activities take place outside the mosques, women are more visible as active participants. Tapper's aim is to observe "local standards of orthodoxy and heterodoxy as they are defined and sanctioned by the religious and political establishments" (1990:237). The volume edited by Elisabeth Özdalga, *Naqshibendis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity* (1999), mainly focuses on historiography and ideology/theology, though some of the contributions are of importance when discussing ritual practice within this influential tarikat and its many sub-branches./ In *Sufism, Music and Society in Turkey and the Middle East* (2001), also edited by Elisabeth Özdalga, conference papers of relevance for ritual studies are published.

Some recent monographs from other parts of the Muslim world and diaspora could be mentioned, too. Not all of them focus on rituals; but through a variety of approaches these studies connect Sufi practice (ritual or other) with a distinct social environment.‹ Awareness of the impact of the surrounding society is not limited to analyses of contemporary groups. Significant historical Sufi studies have also been published during the last decade: Julian Baldick's (1993) on Central Asia and Julia Clancy-Smith's (1994) on colonial Morocco. Şerif Mardin's study of the founder of the Nurcu movement in Turkey, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (1989), has been a constant companion throughout the project. All these three historical studies highlight local contexts in their historical analyses while also discussing, from different angles, the role of collective memory in legendary history and identity politics. None of them, however, is specifically focused on rit-

1. Especially the essays by Atacan (1999), K. Özal (1999), and Stenberg (1999) should be mentioned here.

2. Behar 2001; Feldman 2001; Schimmel 2001; Tekelioğlu 2001.

3. Frembgen 1993; Schubel 1993; Hoffman 1995; Vikør 1995; Johansen 1996; Ewing 1997; Buehler 1998; Cornell 1998; Werbner 1998; Netton 2000. The critique formulated by Sedgwick (1998) against the dominating sociological approach of the last fifteen years could be noted in this context.

uals. The literature on Sufi rituals will be discussed more extensively in the last section of this book.

The exhausting ritual in the video film struck me; but I was also curious about the activities of the women hidden on the gallery, and my initial question was simply: What did the women do? I remained intrigued by the contents and my recollections of the film and later decided to start a new project dealing with Sufi women. Although my ideas about the issue have undergone considerable changes during the various phases of fieldwork and writing, my focus has been on the zikir ritual throughout. Like many other aspects of Sufism, this intense prayer is surrounded by orientalist conceptions; what has kept my curiosity alive has been the more everyday aspect of zikir performances, in all its complexity. "Ritual action involves an inextricable interaction with its immediate world, often drawing it into the very activity of the rite in multiple ways", as Catherine Bell concludes when closing her study *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997:266). As I turn to the present, the searchlight is directed towards a group of middle-class women handling local conventions (religious and other) as both opportunity and limitation, orientating themselves in the districts of a huge city where the global impact on ways of living has became more and more apparent. Though the literature on both rituals and Muslim women is extensive, it was hard to find studies to compare with the information I had gathered, information which showed women assuming command of their own ritual lives and making moves from secluded private homes to at least semi-public areas. Mary Elaine Hegland's observations in Pakistan, from the same period, agree with mine; she looks at new conditions in which "dawning changes in the attitudes and activities of females in Peshawar were beginning to emerge in ritual participation" (1998:241). Changes in society have had an apparent impact at all levels of ritual life: time, space, organisation, participants, theology, and the formulation of legendary history.

Absence and Presence.
Women and the Study of the Muslim World

The absence of women in analyses of Muslim societies has often been observed. Nancy Tapper writes: "[I]n academic studies of Muslim societies, men's ideals, beliefs, and actions have usually been privileged above those of women; typically, this bias confirms and reinforces the bias against women that is intrinsic to Muslim cultural traditions themselves" (1990:237). However, studies of women in the Muslim world have been a steadily growing field since the 1970s. To begin with, few of these focused on women's religious practices – they were more apt to address other social matters and macro structures behind everyday life. Yet, it was noted that knowledge was lacking – and not only about women, but about Islam as a lived local practice in general. As an academic discipline, the study of religions has become more and more attentive to local variations as

a lived experience the more it has been influenced by sociological and anthropological theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonial studies. In 1972, Elizabeth and Robert Fernea wrote: "[O]ur ignorance of the special religious worlds of the Middle Eastern women is only a subcategory in our general lack of knowledge of popular belief systems" (Fernea and Fernea 1972:391). In recent years, though, several studies have appeared that emphasise Muslim women's ritual life as part of everyday existence, during festivals, and in connection with pilgrimage.[4] Instead of being a modest inner Chinese box in relation to religious and social interaction among men (and mostly a diminutive mirror of these activities), women are seen to lead ritual lives in their own right. Variety within the group of "Muslim women", previously thought of as homogeneous, became strikingly evident. The respective age and social status of women proved to be dividing factors in mono-gendered milieus; set aside from what is conventionally regarded as the influential parts of society, these women's situation illustrated the conceptions of spatial division between the sexes.

Marjo Buitelaar correctly terms the dichotomy between "popular Islam" and "orthodox Islam" a "false assumption" and shows how this intellection additionally constructs a hierarchy between men's and women's rituals: "[A]lthough their [women's] practices may differ at some points from those of men, this does not entail that women operate outside dominant Islam" (1993:6). In her study *Women's Islam: Religious Practice Among Women in Today's Iran* (1998), analysing women's devotional gatherings in contemporary Shiraz, Zahra Kamalkhani comments: "Muslim women are hazily designated as the protectors of religion in the home without researchers even taking into account its Islamic core and organisational pattern" (1998:7).

Two Scandinavian pioneers in the study of Muslim women and their everyday world must be mentioned: Hilma Granquist and Henny Harald Hansen. Though neither of them focuses on Sufism or tarikats, they are relevant in that both brought Muslim women as social actors to life in their writings. Their work also serves as a reminder that material conveying information about Muslim women, their lives and rituals, collected in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, is not found in academic writing only but in reports, letters, diaries, newsletters, and memoirs written by colonial servants, aid workers, missionaries, and others. Eleanor Doumato's study (2000) focuses on the ritual life of Shia groups in Saudi Arabia in the early twentieth century, on the basis of American missionaries' reports. With her close and careful reading in archives and printed texts, she has shown that useful historical material about women's ritual life is still waiting to be found.

The starting-point for the discussion of Muslim women as active religious

4. To mention just a few monographs that in one way or another touch on the issue of Muslim women's religious practices (all of them give further references to many more other studies): Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993; Wikan 1991; 1996; Boddy 1989; Friedl 1989; Delaney 1991; Buitelaar 1993; Kamalkhani 1998; Doumato 2000.

subjects was in many respects Elizabeth W. Fernea's *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (1965). The material for this study was collected in the mid-1950s. Soon after its publication, it became a classic in women's studies owing to its detailed descriptions of everyday religiosity.

In a later survey article Elizabeth and Robert Fernea strongly emphasised local diversity, basing their argument on various empirical materials rather than on theoretical considerations (the latter having predominated since the late 1980s) (Fernea and Fernea 1972). Elizabeth and Robert Fernea made an important observation concerning the consequences of the absence of women:

> The impression one receives from these accounts [studies of Muslim women from the 1940s and 1950s] is certainly that the women are somehow less devout, less regular, less concerned, less knowledgeable, in their religious duties, than are men, partly because of the restrictions surrounding their participation in the regular prayers in the mosques and in the home, partly also because their activities, being mostly in the home, are less accessible to visiting Muslim scholars (Fernea and Fernea 1972:387).

The fourth section in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie's anthology *Women in the Muslim World* (1978) is devoted to the theme "Ideology, Religion and Ritual". Among these articles, Daisy Hilse Dwyer's "Women, Sufism and Decision-Making in Moroccan Islam" (1978a), based on fieldwork from the early 1970s, is of particular interest to the present study in that the author emphasises the issue of legitimacy and authority of female ritual functionaries. Dwyer's monograph *Images and Self Images: Male and Female in Morocco* (1978b), a collection of Moroccan narratives from the 1970s, also supplies perspectives on activities such as prayer, seeking ritual purity, pilgrimage etc.

Interest in women's religious lives cannot be separated from the study of everyday religious practice in general in the last twenty years. In work of this kind "Islam" has not been employed as a monolithic explanation; instead, the focus has been on individuals and groups of a specific social stratum, ethnic background, age, and sex. All these aspects are of relevance when loyalties, conflicts, and networks are formed, maintained, or contested. Two collections of essays, *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East* (1993), edited by Donna Lee Bowen together with Evelyn A. Early, and Edmund Burke's anthology of essays *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (1993), include studies where religious life is regarded as integrated in social contexts, instead of constituting a realm of its own. The latter goes even further in its ambition to avoid stereotypic descriptions and explanations, emphasising individual life stories. "Because social theories", Edmund Burke writes in his introduction, "tend to be partial rather than totalizing (focusing, for example, on political or economic behavior), while real lives sprawl in their sheer exuberance across conventional categories, the patterns of individual lives elude even the best theories" (1993:6).

Focusing on a Turkish context, Richard and Nancy Tapper's several studies of

small-town religious life, operating within a micro as well as a macro perspective, are of considerable importance. Nancy Tapper writes: "[A] study of categories of movement, such as *ziyaret* [local pilgrimage], should be concerned not just with the form of movement *per se*, but with the content of the exchanges and communication which that movement facilitates" (1990:236). The anthology *Islam in Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State* (1991), edited by Richard Tapper, offers several examples of well-localised studies, though none of them actually deals with ritual practice. In Carol Delaney's *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (1991), the classic village study is contested through feminist and more reflexive anthropological theories taking the researcher into account as an active subject in the field. Here, too, religious life is situated in a distinct political setting in the early 1980s (1991:291ff.). Ildikó Bellér-Hann's study of women's attendance at sermons in a Lazi area in north-eastern Turkey could also be mentioned here (1995). As will be seen below, many valuable studies on Muslim women have been published, and more and more of them dwell on rituals as a concrete practice or as a source of local influence.

Restrictions and Borders. The Legal Status of Sufi Groups in Turkey

When I approached contemporary Istanbul as a field of study in search of Sufi women, the absence of women in comparable analyses was not the only determining condition for the formulation of the project: the legal status of certain Sufi-related rituals and the associations behind them possessed similar significance. Among the earliest reforms forced through by the Kemalists in the 1920s in order to put an end to the influence of tarikats on social and political life was the closure of all establishments connected with Sufi groups. In a critical essay, Deniz Kandiyoti has discussed the impact on women of these long-term changes: "[T]he authoritarian nature of the single-party state and its attempt to harness the 'new woman' to the creation and reproduction of uniform citizenry aborted the possibility for autonomous women's movements" (1991:43). Organised religious women were even more unthinkable as contributing in any sense to modern society.

The prohibitions made the women who belonged to Sufi-orientated circles and tarikats more invisible than ever. Aimed primarily at all outward signs of Sufi presence in the social web, the prohibitions concerned places for gatherings, derviş costumes, and honorary tarikat titles. In act no. 677, effective from 13 December 1925, three particular localities were mentioned: the derviş lodges (tekkes), shrines of venerated persons connected to the tarikats (*zaviye*s), and the tombs of saints and sultans (*türbe*s). These establishments were closed irrespective of whether they were managed as endowments or were considered as private property. Only mosques (*cami*s) and small mosques (*mescit*s) remained lawfully open for communal prayer, under the supervision of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, often referred to in the literature

as just Diyanet or by the abbreviation DIB).[FI] The same act forbade the use of a number of Sufi-related titles indicating the status of şeyhs, spiritual guides (*mürşid*s), dervişes, and attendants. The list of titles is very long and does not only mention the various leading functions of a tarikat, but also all kinds of fortune-tellers, healers, and charm-makers who – from an authoritarian secularist perspective – were thought to represent the kind of superstition (*batıl itikat*) that flourished at the meeting-places of the dervişes. The illegal re-opening of a tekke entailed a heavy fine and at least three months in prison. Wearing a derviş costume likewise became illegal and punishable. Not only the garment with its distinct religious connotations was targeted by advocates of rapid modernisation; Ottoman dress for both men and women was generally considered old-fashioned. The Kemalist reformers strove to replace the Ottoman fez with the Western hat or cap, but popular resistance against this endeavour was considerable, if not always pronounced in religious terms. Kemal Atatürk himself was keen to pose for photographs wearing a Western-style suit and bowler hat as a modern, i.e. Western, man. As Martin Stokes rightly comments, this was "the paradigm example of Atatürk's exquisite understanding of the power of the manipulation of symbols" (1992:25). The male-headgear conflict soon became the headscarf debate of its time. It can be noted that women's traditional forms of head covering (the rural variants of headscarves or the Ottoman veil) were never mentioned in any legal texts, though Western clothes and haircuts were strongly promoted by the Kemalists.[FL]

Some of the saints' tombs have been reopened since the 1950s because of their historical or artistic importance (Sumner-Boyd and Freeley 1989:257), but the rest of the prohibitions from 1925 still remain *pro forma*. It appears to have been common knowledge during the whole Kemalistic era that Sufi gatherings took place, and many right-wing and/or nationalist politicians were (and still are) affiliated with the tarikats. All this was tolerated as long as the orders did not act openly as organisations, individuals of the tarikats operating through the legal political parties. However, during the 1990s the limits of the tarikat regu-

5. The Directorate of Religious Affairs was established in 1924 in order to organise the state control of public Muslim services and "functioned to legitimate the reforms that were introduced, one after the other" (Gözaydın 1998:141). See also Tarhanlı 1993; Seufert 1997:191ff. DIB's function today is stipulated in The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey of 1982, Article 136: "The Department of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity." The full translation of The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey can be read on the official website of the Turkish Republic: http://www.turkey.org/start.html. The official website of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı can be found at http://www.diyanet.org. A lengthy presentation of the functions of the Directorate is offered in the *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (published by the DIB's Diyanet Vakfı) (Uzunoğlu 1994; Yücel 1994).

6. In the years after the introduction of the law, however, attempts were made in some municipalities to introduce regulations concerning women's garments. B. Lewis 1968:271; Şeni 1984; cf. Sirman 1989:9ff. See also Özdalga 1998:39ff.

lations were constantly challenged. Today the turbans of the different tarikats and mosque functionaries are common in the streets where the fieldwork for the present study took place, especially the Nakşbendi costume with its characteristic green cloak, sometimes worn with wooden clogs and an emblematic walking stick. Hence, the historical context of the studied locality is twofold. The Ottoman Sufi legacy is visibly present in the cityscape with its mosques, memorial buildings, libraries, and so on; so is Kemalism,‡ with Atatürk omnipresent on photographs in every official room, and buildings belonging to modernisation projects, such as state-run schools and hospitals, serving as icons of the development and progress that were thought to spell the end of religion. In major matters as well as in little things, both legacies had an impact on the studied group.

A Circle of Friends. Establishing a Zikir Community

What began for me as an interest in a Sufi tarikat that had been established for centuries soon shifted towards an informal group (*cemaat* or *meclis*) of women with only peripheral or brief connections to the institutionalised orders. Tarikat is often translated "brotherhood", as if no sisters were involved. Even so, it would be a great mistake to assume that the women are always on the gallery at a "proper" distance from the core of events, though the arenas for women's rituals may be less visible from the outside and also less accessible. Orders or sub-branches have often formed basic structuring categories in the study of Sufism and Sufis, and for good reasons. Such an approach offers some given limits and forms a workable method of structuring the flow of information. On the other hand, the formalised internal hierarchies then tend to dominate the representation, less attention being paid to other modes of social interaction. It is not necessary to study Sufi groups as orders; informal gatherings and temporary constellations have always existed, among women and men alike. Handbooks on Islam describing Muslim prayers tend to focus on congregational worship, with the mosque service as the prototype. The communal purpose of religion, associated with "the five pillars (or demands) of Islam" (*İslam'ın beş şartı*), is often emphasised and connected to the theological concept of unity (*tevhid*). This is one of the most central dogmas in Muslim faith, expressed both in sacred texts and in daily ritual practice as the namaz performers prostrate together as one body. The canonical prayer should not, however, be associated with public prayer to the extent that individual or informal forms of prayer fade away or other spaces for prayer appear less weighty, as is the case in many

7. Kemalism is the conventional English term for the secular state-centralistic nationalism that has dominated Turkey since 1923. In the 1930s *Kemalizm* was know as *Atatürkism*, a period when the focus on President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) peaked.

handbooks. Women's collective prayers are documented and analysed to a much smaller extent. The reason is that, because of tradition, it is less common for them to pray the daily *namaz*° as a joint ceremony; they are more apt to engage in other forms of collective prayer. Another relevant factor in this context is that scholars and Muslim theologians alike have too often considered meetings in private homes as a general social activity rather than a religious one.

From the beginning of the study, I took a specific interest in women's ritual life in Sufi traditions, past and present, but not necessarily in Sufism as a theological system. Very soon, because of experiences during the preliminary fieldwork, the study came to comprise the crossroads of Islamism (*İslamcılık*) and Sufism (*tasavvuf*) in contemporary Turkey. The empirical material for the present study comes from fieldwork in Istanbul, where I studied some young women in a small, independent Muslim group over a period of five years in the mid-1990s. The introduction to the women's group was more or less an accident, as will be seen below; but it was highly significant for the period considering women's ways of networking religious activities, now moving in larger circles outside the extended family and the immediate neighbourhood. Women's recent forthright religious activism has opened up new fora of an at least semi-public character: places where women can meet with women from other backgrounds than their own. Political analyses as well as my own experience from Istanbul indicated that political developments could never be ignored in a study of a contemporary female Sufi milieu, and politics most certainly did colour the fieldwork conditions from the very beginning. Women as actors on the religious scene are far from new, though the conditions of late modern urban life entail a radical change. The phrase "women's religious activism" as used in the present study is intended to be an indication of the aim of the book: to analyse women's collective activities in semi-public fora, not to discuss the individual religious experience of Sufi-related rituals.

Quite some time passed between the actual fieldwork (1993–98) and the completion of the present monograph. When starting to organise the information and prepare the manuscript, I hesitated for a long time about whether to use the present or the past tense when writing about these women. My memories were so fresh, and it seemed natural, I thought at first, to use the present tense. The temptation to construct an "ethnographic present" was obvious. The cure for these essentialist tendencies was contemplation of the political turmoil during and after the fieldwork. The only reasonable method of constructing a sociopolitical background to the activities described was to situate them in a distinct historical/temporal context. In this sense the present case is a historical study. Although it deals with the very near past, it is still time past. The face of religious activism is rapidly and constantly changing, and the terms dictated by the

8. *Namaz* is the Turkish term for the obligatory (*farz*) canonical prayers five times a day, *ṣalāt* in Arabic. The five daily prayers are called *sabah namazı*, *öğle namazı*, *ikindi namazı*, *akşam namazı*, and *yatsı namazı* in Turkish.

state and the military through the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK) have also altered. Therefore the past tense is used throughout when the specific group is referred to.

The women in the studied group organised their activities in the form of a religious endowment (*vakıf*),[9] offering regular prayer meetings and basic religious education and charity work (elementary social welfare such as food provision, clothes, school grants, legal advice etc.) to other women in their neighbourhood. The women's use of the term vakıf comprised both the formal organisation, the congregation that meets and their meeting-place (*vakıf merkezi*; literally the endowment's centre, or from a more practical perspective: office or headquarters). Their ability to stretch given social and religious boundaries made me realise how very direct the impact of the mega-city is on individual lives. Through negotiations within the given Islamic system, freedoms and opportunities hitherto unthinkable were obtained. The weekly performance of the repetitive and intense zikir prayer constituted the core of activities, and the teachings of the leading women and their theology were clearly based on tasavvuf conceptions. The focus of my fieldwork was on their ritual life, and on its significance for the women's profile as a group. The women of the vakıf identified themselves as the keepers of Sufi traditions (*tasavvuf adabı*), but without any formal connection to any established tarikat, and they were not initiated into dervishhood in any form.

As much as teaching and organising prayer meetings, the women were engaged in expansive welfare work – always with close attention to the spiritual and material needs of their local community, a crowded district of central Istanbul that presents most of the characteristics of late modern society. When discussing the tarikats active in the immediate vicinity, the women always stressed their independence: they had no living theological authority and no formal internal hierarchies. Neither in relation to the orders nor in relation to the state authorities did activists of the vakıf want the structure of their programmes to be compared to a tarikat.

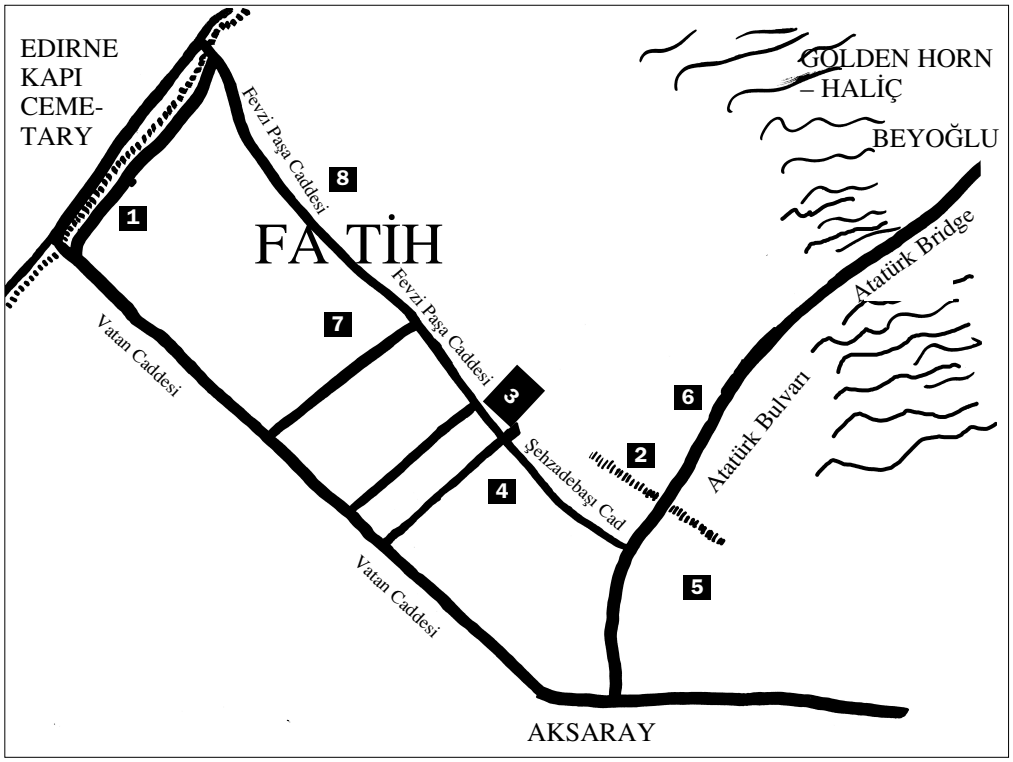
The vakıf group is an example of the many independent religious non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have seen the light of day in Turkey since the early 1980s. In comparison to the situation for women's religious activism in Turkey some ten or fifteen years ago, the projects are not only on a larger scale and considerably more visible in public; they are also undoubtedly part of global events. Here one of many paradoxes in the field material appears. On the one hand, contemporary Turkey provides more options for variety in religious life then there has been since Ottoman times, an apparent individualisation with an emphasis on personal choice. Religious affiliation based on an conscious choice between various options is admired, at least in the Islamic elite. On the other hand, that which the now so visible religious groups teach is often quite

9. Vakıf is sometimes translated as foundation or trust. I follow the terminology used in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and hereafter refer to vakıf as endowment (Peters 2001).

authoritarian, more or less radical Islamist universalism. The women in the present study were empowered, when viewed from the perspective of their local community; but they did not claim power as exercised in traditional political institutions. It is necessary to "extricate 'civil society' from the liberal agenda", that is from the normative platform of the discussions about civil society and its NGOs, Björn Beckman argues in an essay, and he continues: "[W]e need to broaden the concept so as to make it less subservient to the liberal agenda and capable of organizing more complex as well as illiberal social realities" (Beckman 1997:6). NGOs and civil society do not necessarily promote democratisation, neither within the groups nor in the methods they employ to act out their claims. Nevertheless, the very existence of NGOs with some influence is an indication of political change in a country like Turkey.

Adding to the complexity, it must also be taken into account that individuals are simultaneously integrated in several social systems. Many Turkish NGOs (religious or not) define themselves as representatives of values that in one way or another oppose the hegemonic claims. Liberal economic policy, globalisation, and the various NGOs have effectively counteracted such claims. Also, goals and means vary within the Islamist movement. Melucci's use of the term "complex society" is therefore adequate when staging individual agents in a context; micro and macro levels are not always easy to distinguish. Everyday life's activities become the battleground on which structure, secular discourses, and a dominant counter-discourse clash.

The emergence of new Sufi groups is not limited to Turkey. Sufi orientation and references to Sufi rituals are apparently a sufficient mode of communicating a wish "to shape and reshape a sacred landscape; in embodying the sacred as a lived reality they [the new groups and constellations] create and extend new Sufi assemblies", as Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu write (1998:3). What is considered Sufi tradition is developed into new contexts in the twenty-first century, yet with a set of symbols, terminology, and rituals that are conceived as a heritage to be kept in trust. The activists of the vakıf group studied here referred to themselves as sisters, sometimes using the conventional Sufi language that has a variety of terms indicating the initiated dervişes as members and strongly related to one another. There is a miscellany of terms within this semantic field that to most people in Turkey today seem to have connotations to male members of the tarikats, "brothers": *kardeş*, *dost*, *yâr*, *sevgili*, *arkadaş*, *ahbâb*. All these Ottoman terms for brethren, siblings, and "lovers" have obtained a new meaning in the mega-city where old bonds to the extended family are, if not broken, slowly decreased in importance, new loyalties being formed by necessity. Since the Turkish language does not indicate gender in the third person, the classical terms can in principle be used about men and women alike. Nevertheless, the women of the study adopted the old Ottoman word for sisters (*uhtiler*) in the name of one of their enterprises. The term stood out as a conscious Arabisation with a clear indication of the women's Sufi affiliation and was hardly ever used in everyday conversation. The choice was appreciated



Map over the Fatih district.

THE FATIH DISTRICT IS situated in historic Istanbul and is named after Mehmed the Conqueror, Fatih Sultan Mehmet in Turkish. In the centre of the district stands, on the top of Istanbul's fourth hill, the mosque erected in memory of the conquest by Mehmet II who sought to transform Constantinople into an Islamic city, "indeed, a very large urban program for reconstruction on the part of the Conqueror. The sultan tried to create incentives for the settlement of the city. If the *külliye* [mosque complex] of Fatih and other lesser complexes built by his viziers offered services for the welfare of the citizens, the commercial incentive was no less important" (Kuban 1996:229). With these extensive building programmes, the city and its monuments were successively introduced as one of the leading sites in the Muslim world. Today the district can show a blend of Roman monuments, Ottoman architecture, and mass-produced apartment houses from the twentieth century as well as the latest high-tech facilities for those who can afford them.

1. Ancient City Wall; 2. Aqueduct of Valens, ca 375 CE; 3. Fatih Camii;
4. İskender Paşa Camii; 5. Şehzade Camii; 6. Hacı Hasan Camii; 7. Hırka-i Şerif Camii; 8. Halveti Cerrahi Tekke

by purist groups in the neighbourhood and may serve as an example of the women's position at the crossroads of what are conventionally regarded as distinct categories such as "Sufism" and "Islamism".

Islam in Turkey after 1983. Market Economy and Cultural Change

In order to present some facets of contemporary history and the social context in which the fieldwork was conducted, the following is intended as a survey of the changes that have affected the agency of the Turkish Muslim groups in the last few decades. Discussing the impact of governmental and bureaucratic policy on religious activism, Deniz Kandiyoti writes: "Relationships among Islam, the state, and the politics of gender comprise at least three distinct components: links between Islam and cultural nationalism; processes of state consolidation and the modes of control states establish over local kin-based, religious, and ethnic communities; and international pressures that influence priorities and policies" (1997:186). These three components were all visible in the vakıf's district as the weekly programme of the group was conducted.

For more than two decades now, the cultural dominance of the urban secular elite in the major Turkish cities has steadily been challenged by first- and second-generation rural migrants as well as by an increasingly vigorous Muslim middle class. The challenge can be understood in socio-economic as well as in religious-ideological terms. Today the sounds of *arabesk* and *ezan* merge in the air all over Istanbul as indisputable parts of contemporary culture. New cultural syntheses are established in which religious traditions have a more evident role than they had twenty years ago. Michael Meeker has summarised the processes involved, stressing that the new groups and activities did not spring from a vacuum: "The resurgence of Islam in Turkey is better understood as a transformation, rather than a revival, of religiosity" (1995:31). The aggressive attitude against religion expressed by the Kemalistic reformers during the 1930s and 1940s never attained its ultimate goal: making religion superfluous in a modern society. Below the surface Islam continued to be an important factor in personal and cultural life – and it was certainly not only a matter for uneducated rustics as the Kemalists often conceived the matter.

The word "suppressed" frequently occurs in several scholars' vocabulary when discussing the role of religion and the opportunities for individual religious expression throughout the history of the Turkish Republic (Yavuz 1998; M. Erdoğan 1999). The return, or visibility, or transformation of the suppressed in the early 1980s and onwards was not only a question of a forceful "revenge", but also an intentional strategy from conservative/centre (more or less nationalistic) forces aimed against the political left. "Both military and political leaders after 1980 believed Islam could help create a socially disciplined and politically stable society ready to undergo the structural dislocations caused by the transition to popular capitalism and global patterns of life-styles", writes Ümit Cizre Sakallioğlu in her essay "Rethinking the Connections between Turkey's 'Western' Identity versus Islam" (1998:17). Secularism did not mean programmatic atheism, but constitutional reforms that placed the expressions of religion in the private realm with a certain emphasis on personal faith, instead of regard-

ing religion as a dominating force in society as it used to be in Ottoman times.

Throughout republican history there have been "suppressed multiple identities", as Hakan Yavuz states (1998:339). Nowadays, variants considered as additional aspects of national identities are more openly expressed in religious (Süleymaniye, Nakşbendi, Nurcu, Bektaşi) or regional/ethnic (Alevi, Kurdish, Laz) terms. With the exception of Kurdish identity, which is still a sensitive issue, expressions of specific identities within the nation are not necessarily regarded as hostile acts against the state. Turkey's Christians and Jews, however, are often avoided as a topic of discussion and referred to as foreign (*yabancı*) in Muslim and nationalistic discourse, and their cultural legacies are hard to fit into conventional images as to what constitutes the national heritage. Ethnicity and regional identity have turned out to be as provocative as political attitudes.

When writing about this contemporary process, it is hard to avoid the petrified (and petrifying) dichotomy between "secular" and "Muslim" employed by the Kemalist elite. However, these two concepts do not represent invariably distinguishable entities; the former implies an ideology and a view of executive political power, while the latter comes with a wide field of associations that can refer to personal belief as well as to the general cultural background of an individual, region, or era. Hence, "secular Muslim" is not a self-contradictory phrase in Turkey, if the first concept is understood in terms of ideology and the second in terms of culture and religion. Neither is it any contradiction of principle to be a piously practising individual while still fully embracing the secular order of the nation's political rule. Even so, the dichotomy is constantly repeated by the rhetoric of both conservative Kemalists and radical Islamists. In Turkey today a distinct tension and polarisation, political and cultural, is ossifying the respective positions of "the Islamists" and "the secularists". There are clashes, in everyday conversation as well as in political rhetoric, that produce oversimplified images of "the other" as either fanatic uneducated Anatolian peasants or morally depraved and degenerate urbanites.

Labelling religious activities for analytical purposes is a complicated, if not impossible, business. All activities performed in the name of Islam in Turkey are not Islamist, and they are certainly not all aimed against the state. Neither does secularism necessarily imply anti-religious politics implemented by the state; but it does imply a specific definition of religion and its proper spheres in society. There are Muslim religious groups that act consciously against any form of orientation towards a society where the legal system, as expressed in civil or criminal codes, is based on *şeriat*, the revealed sacred law. "Muslim" is likewise a very broad term, applicable to individuals of widely dissimilar orientations. It is usually taken to refer to the cultural and religious background of the majority of Turkey's citizens. "Religion has clearly been central in the developments that have occurred over the last decade. Islam has emerged again as a dynamic element in the culture, and has increasingly been recognized as such" (Robins 1996:76). Religious or not, being a Muslim is conceived of as

being part of a heritage on which conceptions of history, art, and culture are built, and in this sense Kemalistic ideologists have also made use of Ottoman nostalgia. "The republican history shows that it is impossible to undermine the Islamic social base and Islam's overall appeal to the population" (M. Erdoğan 1999:48). Islam, Muslim identity and Ottoman heritage have been tools in political discourse throughout the twentieth century, applied either as elements in a contrasting picture or as features in an apotheosis. They have been instruments for mobilisation as well as discipline, for education as well as protest.

In view of the complexity of the situation, it is improper to speak of a single Muslim or Islamist movement. The various Muslim groups involved in debates and activism are not all radicals. In contemporary Turkey there are a multitude of religious attitudes whose adherents do not only express their views; they also openly justify their existence and attempt to win proselytes: radical political Islamism as well as Muslim welfare-policy-making; increasing interest in Sufi traditions and mysticism, often connected to an identification with Ottoman history and Ottoman aesthetics and style; the rise of Alevi consciousness and interest in the more liberal interpretations of Islam connected to Alevism and the traditional rituals of the Bektaşi order; along with various local and ethnic traditions. However, too often nowadays Muslim activities are identified with the Islamist party organisation (Refah/Fazilet Partisi)[10], and its sometimes decidedly hegemonic claims, including references to itself as "the Muslim voice".

In order not to compound the confusion, some definitional statements should be made at this point: in the present study, "Islamic" is used interchangeably with "Muslim" as a broad term comprising a wide range of attitudes, actions and aesthetic expressions, while "radical Islamism" is only used in references to political dimensions in the contemporary interpretation of Islam. Further on, "Islamism" (*İslamcılık*) will be used as an umbrella concept covering all attitudes and arguments that stipulate Islam as the solid base for a good and unimpeachable society. Hence the term Islamism is reserved for political interpret ations of Islam, whereas Muslim and Islamic refer to cultural context in a more general sense. Most Islamist activism in Turkey is (and

10. The closure of the openly Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) marked the end of the formal fieldwork, and the name will be used with reference to events before the closure on 2 February 1998. In general discussion about Islamist politics, the slash hybrid Refah/Fazilet will be used in the present study. In May 1997 the constitutional court's prosecutor-in-chief, Vural Savaş, applied for a closure of RP in an 18-point indictment which claimed that RP violated the Act on Political Parties. Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party) was formed on 17 December 1997 under the leadership of Recep Kutan and more or less carried on the parliamentary work for the Islamists from February 1998 onwards. This party was also closed on the initiative of the prosecutor-in-chief in the spring of 2001, and shortly before the closure a distinct conflict between an older and a younger generation within the Islamist Party was apparent even in public. Therefore, in July 2002 two new Islamist parties were founded: Saadet Partisi, SP (Fortune Party), under the continuous leadership of Recai Kutan, and Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Progress Party) or just AK Parti (Purity Party) for short, formed by the younger generation under the leadership of Istanbul's former mayor Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan.

has been since 1983, and long before that) in one way or another related to a party organisation which serves as a base for a great variety of bodies such as alternative trade unions, employers' associations, guilds, Islamic banking societies, educational fora, foreign aid groups (support to Bosnia, Chechnya etc.), students' organisations, welfare committees, and so on. Among the explicitly political positions, a further subdivision can be made: the more or less radical Islamists can be termed *şeriat*-orientated, since their fundamental political arguments are made with reference to the Law of Allah rather than to human needs or societal development. "Islam has been throughout the Republic at once an enemy of the secular state, and yet a tool of social order, excluded from the legislative apparatus of government, yet administered by the civil service", David Shankland comments (1999:44). An additional problem with this absolute distinction is that most activities or expressions refer to Islam in one way or another. The debate is inflamed, and no Muslim sign or symbol is interpreted as merely "traditional" any longer, at least not in urban areas. Once a woman leaves her home and enters the street with a headscarf on, her action is, whether approved or rejected, interpreted within a political context in contemporary Turkey.[11] The headscarf as such, its style, design, and pattern, is interpreted in terms of social status and religious affiliation within and outside the Islamist movement. Islamism in Turkey has become a public drama, and street culture is filled with signs and symbols indicating various religious positions. Wearing a headscarf and participating in the activities of a certain association amounts to *dava*, mission, in this case within one's own society. The style of *tesettür* is also an indication of social background, as fashion always is. Even the all-black *çarşaf* is readable in its details in social and religious terms for those acquainted with its codes.

The contemporary religious awareness can be loosely defined as an embracing of the Muslim heritage with a distinct nationalistic inclination. Islamism in this broad sense of an ideological discourse serves as an organising link and shared idiom between many of the various Muslim groups, with more or less radical programmes, and as a basis for networks. In its more radical form the Islamist discourse formulates resistance, cultural as well as political, to what is vaguely defined as "Westernism" (Salvatore 1997:67ff.). In a global perspective, Islamist activism is in many respects an anti-colonial reaction geared to meeting the problems and challenges of late modern society with religious answers; alternatively, it can simply amount to a mode of being oppositional. Even though Turkey was never a colony, many Muslim activists, along with nationalists and postcolonial theorists at the universities, express an experience of suppression by the cultural hegemony of Europe and North America and a wish to

11. The headscarf debate has dominated the discussions about the position and status of women taking part in religious activism. For introductions from various perspectives, see: Olson 1985; Mandel 1989; Göle 1991, 1996; İlyasoğlu 1994; Sakaranaho 1998:167ff.; Yeğenoğlu 1998:12ff.; Özdalga 1998; Pusch 1999; Saktanber 2002.

take back the initiative for self-definition. The idea of "the West" as the joint enemy of united Muslim forces is an ideological construction formulated for mobilisation. A further distinction can also be made between radical, or *şeriat*-orientated, Islamists and Islamism as a multivocal social movement where everyday issues are of greater importance to the agents than theological interpretation. From an Algerian perspective, Marnia Lazreg comments on this religious critique of what is assumed to be "the West": "as a comparative referent point against which to gauge the failures of the state to foster and sustain a coherent culture and economic system" (1994:215). In Turkey, too, "the West" serves as a focal point for otherwise irreconcilable positions, temporarily united in rejection of what is conceived of as foreign and incompatible with Turkism (*Türklük*) in the religio-nationalistic discourse.

As early as the 1950s, the decade of Demokrat Parti (DP, Democratic Party) rule (1950–60) under Prime Minister Adnan Menderes,[12] a change in relation to the most authoritarian and aggressive phases of Kemalism was apparent. "Islam was no longer frowned upon. Sufi orders remained illegal, but were in fact tolerated and edged their way into the political scene. Said Nursi, leader of the Nurcu order, publicly stated that he would vote for the DP" (Margulies and Yıldızoğlu 1997:147). The Menderes government in fact reopened some tekkes and *türbe*s which were considered to be of national interest. Whirling dervişes, and Sufi poets like Yunus Emre and Rumi, have been part of the country's self-presentation when Turkey has attempted to attract international tourism. In parliamentary politics, there has been an apparent link since the late 1960s between (ultra) nationalism and growing Muslim consciousness in an aggressive counter-discourse aimed against the European ideals of the Kemalists, but not necessarily against secularism as such and certainly not against modernity as a possibility to achieve economic prosperity. In this rhetoric, "the West" became the antithesis of every respectable Turkish and Muslim value.

The recent more public Islamic integration into modernity has led to an increased access to, and a new visibility for, Muslim culture in Turkey. In the

12. When campaigning before the elections in 1950, religion was on the agenda for several politicians, and this is still generally considered to be the fundamental reason for Adnan Menderes' victory. As Prime Minister he never made any substantial changes in the state policy, but took several important decisions that were meant to show his supposed respect for traditional values. Menderes, for example, opened the first İmam Hatip schools (religious colleges), agreed to have new mosques built and legalised Kuran classes. The Menderes era ended with a *coup d'état* in 1960. Non-Turkish political analysts noted the new development, which was commented on in several studies in the 1950s. Other early analyses of the issue can be found in: Karpat 1959; Berkes 1964; Mardin 1971. Among more recent comments on the relation between religion and politics during the first decades of the Turkish Republic, see: Zürcher 1993; Brockett 1998; Davison 1998; Shankland 1999:35ff. A more rural perspective on these issues is to be found in van Bruinessen 1992:252ff. Of all scholars working on the social development of the republic, no one has laid greater stress than Şerif Mardin on religion as an imperative factor for the understanding of the contemporary history of the republic (1989, 1991b, 1994).

wake of this development it is evident that a new history of the post-World War II era has to be written, a history which distinguishes more clearly between official state discourse concerning societal development and life as lived and experienced. Islam cannot be said to be revitalised, as the recent development is often termed in the media, since it was never erased from the cultural map; nor was it ever solely an interest of uneducated rural migrants. "Not only as a religious faith but also as a code of conduct for individual and public concerns, Islam is embedded in Turkish society", writes the political scientist Mustafa Erdoğan (1999:48). This remark points towards a neglected field of study: the impact of Islam and Muslim tradition on values, norms, and behaviour that is not exceedingly pious, but accepted as conscientious conduct by the general public and understood to be contradictory to the secularism of the republic. Another pertinent area of modern history is the question of where spaces of religious practice were possible and how these spaces varied in relation to political changes. Many family histories I came across during the fieldwork would add depth to this spectrum.

Even in the heyday of Kemalism there was a pious urban Muslim middle class, but its visibility was limited. It was a muted group in Edwin Ardener's terminology, and the activities of both rural and urban Muslims were under strict control by the centralist state. Women's religious exercises were, as regards both space and place, very much a private matter. Today the need for a redefinition of the conceptions of both state power and legitimacy is apparent. The modernistic intentions of creating a homogeneous Turkish identity permeated all levels of society as a consequence of the extensive Kemalistic educational programmes. From 1990, however, new forms of everyday life as well as academic studies have contested the secular image of a uniform Turkish national identity. These days, being a conscious Muslim (*şuurlu Müslüman*) has become a common and very publicly expressed identity.

The Great Shift.
New Forms of Activism

Kemalistic modernism was an emancipatory project based on an ideology of progress and optimism. Its hopes for large-scale industrial development and state-governed social reforms had many European parallels in the first half of the twentieth century. But it was built on the axiom of cultural unity, and it did not regard regional and social differences as a strength on the part of the new republic, but as a weakness, even a threat. "The monochrome vision of a Turkish culture in common was laid over the heterogeneity of lived identifications. Local and particular attachments could no longer be admitted. It was not just that these real identifications were suppressed; the point is that their very reality actually came to be disavowed" (Robins 1996a:69). Cemal Kafadar describes this condition as "the schizophrenic quality of modern Turkish cultural life"

(1992:314). A strong state, or at least attempts to make the state strong, was considered to be the necessary fundament for all social progress. The control functions of the state effectively became a drawback in terms of social, economic and cultural development. From the late 1970s onwards, Turkey thus suffered from economic and structural problems similar to those that affected the planned economies in Eastern Europe.

A change came with the aftermath of the military coup in September 1980. A more pronounced market economy, introduced by the reforms effected by the civil government from 1983 onwards, accelerated the development towards a post-industrial society. For Turkey the transformation took a dramatic turn after the political turbulence in the late 1970s. When the military intervened in 1980, after years of political violence between the right and the left, the coup was commonly interpreted in Western media as the military's defence of the secular state and of secularism as an ideology. At some distance from the events, many analyses indicate that Islam on the contrary acquired a distinct position as a cornerstone in what was conceived as the national Turkish culture, "the reintegration of Islamic ethics into public education as a means of consolidating national unity" (Yavuz 1998:29).[13] The military hardly stopped any religious activism, and among those who later founded Anavatan Partisi, ANAP (Motherland Party), many had a background in nationalistic religious circles. Before 1980, many Islamist politicians were active in Millî Nizam Partisi, MNP (National Order Party), and later, after the *coup d'état* in 1971, in Millî Selamet Partisi, MSP (National Salvation Party). Open Islamic political activism became more and more apparent from the 1970s onwards, being more and more openly expressed as Islamism.

During the 1970s the association Aydınlar Ocağı, the Hearths of the Enlightened, advocated what people in these circles termed a "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (*Türk İslam Sentezi*) and was influential among certain well-educated people and businessmen (Zürcher 1993:302ff.; Poulton 1997:179ff.; Davison 1998:11). Its members expressed neo-conservative values and attitudes based on religion, hardly an original position in a period when Thatcher and Reagan dominated world politics. "They shared a deep sense of justice, monotheism and a belief in the immortal soul, and a strong emphasis on family life and morality. The mission of the Turks was a special one, to be the 'soldiers of

13. For research on the role of Islam and Islamism in Turkey after 1983, the following titles may be mentioned: *Islam in Turkey* (1991), edited by Richard Tapper, gives a survey of the status of Islam in republican Turkey from various angles. Historical overviews such as those by Zürcher (1993) and Ahmad (1993) also discuss developments in the last twenty years at length. In the more recent anthology *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (1996), edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, the issue of identity politics also covers Islam and Islamism in contemporary Turkey. Some other studies may be mentioned: Mardin 1991, 1994, 1999; Kafadar 1992; Seufert 1997; Sakallioğlu 1998; Yavuz 1998, 1999; M. Erdoğan 1999; Shankland 1999. Women's activities in the Turkish Islamist movement have generated a large body of literature. To mention a few: Göle 1991, 1996a; Kandiyoti 1991, 1997; Toprak 1994; İlyasoğlu 1994; Tekeli 1995; Sakaranaho 1998; Yeğenoğlu 1998; Özdalga 1998; Pusch 1999.

Islam'," Erik Zürcher characterises the movement (1993:303). The watchword of Turkey as the leader among Muslim nations was to be taken up later, in the 1990s, as a major slogan by the Refah Partisi leader Necmettin Erbakan.

After the withdrawal of the government headed by the coup leader General Kenan Evren in 1983, ANAP and its leader Turgut Özal dominated political life for a decade. With Evren as President, the military kept a close watch on political developments, but did not act against the more open Muslim influences on politics. The establishment of new political parties opened the way for the formation of an openly Islamist party, Refah Partisi (Welfare Party), for the first time in the history of the republic. The changes in Turkish society in the last twenty years are to a great extent centred around one person, the late Turgut Özal (1927–1993),[14] and the economic, social, and cultural aftermath of his liberal politics.[15] The reforms that Özal initiated became the starting-point of an irreversible change of course in Turkish society. After his sudden death in 1993, he acquired an iconic status which no other Turkish politician has had after Atatürk. Özal "had been a successful manager in private industry in the 1970s and was very well connected in big business circles, which liked his liberalization of the economy" (Zürcher 1993:297); but it was also an official secret that he was a devoted member of the Nakşbendi order. Turgut Özal's ideological and theological background in the Nakşbendi order is illuminated by an essay written by his brother Korkut Özal, who is still active in politics and also a Nakşbendi derviş (1999). By and large, the text steers clear of the political aspects of Sufism; but it does touch on the subject towards the end (1999:175f.). Korkut Özal himself could only accept standing for the Millî Nizam Partisi (National Order Party) Millî Selâmet Partisi (National Salvation Party) in the election in 1973 after the approval of his *hocaefendi*, the famous Nakşbendi leader Mehmed Zahid Kotku, with whom the whole Özal family was affiliated. The negotiations are described in Korkut Özal's essay. In their book on Turkish modern politics (1997:163ff.), the journalists Nicole and Hugh Pope draw attention to the early relationships at university and in the early days of professional life between the Özal brothers, Necmettin Erbakan, and Süleyman Demirel. These were relationships that generated both loyalties and competition, but all four of them have been central figures in the new visibility of Islam in Turkish politics. The Özals were Nakşbendi disciples and Demirel is associated with the Nurcus, a breakaway fraction of the Nakşbendi order, and the former Prime Minister Erbakan has close connections to the Iskender Paşa *cemaat* in Istanbul run by a Nakşbendi branch.

Despite the shifting evaluations of the Prime Minister and later President

14. Turgut Özal was Prime Minister under the generals in 1980–82 and in the civil government 1983–89; he was President of the Republic 1989–1993 (Zürcher 1993:363). See also: Pope and Pope 1997; Shankland 1999; Özbundun 2000:118ff.).

15. For discussions about Özal's influence on Turkish politics post-1983, see: Keyder and Öncu 1993:19ff.; Sönmez 1996; Robins 1996a, 1996b; Yavuz 1998; M. Erdoğan 1999; Shankland 1999:40f.

during his lifetime, nobody denies the irrevocable turn that Turkey took after 1983 under his command when civil government was introduced again/FL Among other things, these transformations and openings gave way to new attitudes towards cultural diversity and complexity. State centralism was fundamentally questioned as ideologies and identities other than Kemalistic Turkish were more openly expressed, whether ethnic, religious, social, or political. These upheavals in some cases led to open violent conflicts and in others to more symbolic confrontations. Yet the changes also introduced a tendency to greater acceptance – at least among young people. Although age is hardly a stable analytical category, the younger generations seem more prepared to handle difference without necessarily interpreting variety as a threat to their own preferences or to the security of the state.

Education has been the cornerstone of most Kemalistic reform programmes. More than any other remodelling factor, it has been the bearer of trust in the benefits of rationalism (*akılcılık*) and enlightenment (*aydınlanma*). Nilüfer Göle writes: "A new definition of the Islamic self is rooted in a religiosity repressed by secularism and is sought in the reinvention of traditions destroyed by modernization" (Göle 1997b:89). It should be borne in mind that the ambitions in state-controlled education, more than anything else, promoted a homogenisation of the well-educated. There is a parallel development between Özal's transnational economic liberalism and the appearance of the Muslim movement in all its guises. From very different angles these two processes, encouragement of private enterprise and visible religion, have led to a more fragmented political situation in Turkey compared to the polarisation of left versus right in the 1970s – perhaps not always in terms of party politics, but certainly with regard to a wider understanding of what political life actually amounts to. With more people possessing sufficient knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, the conditions which the secular and the conscious Muslim intellectuals share are not merely a common ground for the options to write in a critical tradition and to explore the advantages of the press and other public fora for debate; those references to contemporary thinkers that form the body of what is considered *Bildung* are their joint intellectual property as well. Consequently, the educated Islamists are forming a counter-elite in two respects. They are formulating an alternative to the dominating secularist discourse while introducing references from contexts far away from conventional theology into the religious debate. Admittedly, the former is a somewhat less daunting project than that of integrating full-blown postmodernism in Muslim discourse.

The radical Islamist intellectuals are nevertheless as rare birds to the grassroots activists as they are to secular intellectuals and academicians who read

16. Today, all activities of political parties are regulated by the provisions of the 1982 Constitution and the Political Parties Act of 22 April 1983. None of the pre-1980 political parties were allowed to continue their political work, and as a consequence they reappeared under new names.

them and comment on them, but hardly integrate anything into their own academic works. From this perspective, the situation of the Islamist intellectuals has a good deal in common with imprisonment in a glass cage. From a Turkish secularist viewpoint, they may be interesting to observe and to analyse as symptoms of social and intellectual processes; but their normative point of departure will remain an obstacle to the mutual exchange of theoretical concepts. Islamists and their ideas are objects of study in many Turkich academic works, but do not occur as theoretic references to challenging scholarly analyses.

Özal, who more than anyone else promoted and pursued a global economy against protectionism and pursued international contacts instead of cultural puritanism, also advocated closer links with Europe in general. In 1987, as President, he signed Turkey's applications for full membership of the European Union (Lundgren 1998). Özal's own book on the subject, *Turkey in Europe* (published in a revised English edition in 1991), which accompanied the request in French, may be regarded as a lucid example of how the old Kemalistic ideals were reinterpreted and transformed in the 1980s. The chronology of the book starts in a good Kemalistic spirit with the first inhabitants of Anatolia, the Hattians, as the founders of civilisation, and ends with Turkey's request for membership. In this way the argument is built around the fact that Europe and Turkey have a shared ancient history which will be confirmed by Turkish membership. The great watershed was the introduction of Islam; but Özal states that in his opinion there is no contradiction between Islam and secularism: "I contend that Muslims need take only one step to rise once and for all from the brotherhood of the Umma [the worldwide Muslim community] to true universal humanism, and that step is secularism" (1991:288); i.e. Islam has prepared the way for the Turks' understanding of democracy. In the same spirit he rejects radical Islamism, "not Islam as religion but attempts to use Islam as a desperate ideology" (1991:283) – that is there is a limit to the extent to which religion should influence politics. The hidden message to readers familiar with Turkish conditions must be that Özal himself, with his Nakşbendi affiliation, is to be regarded as an example of how such matters should be handled. Turgut Özal never exposed his personal religious affiliation or his alliances with conservative tarikat circles in public; he was hence free to use arguments with religious connotations only when they were considered suitable.

Mesut Yılmaz,‡ who succeeded Özal as ANAP chairman in 1989, took upon himself the role of main opponent of the then flourishing Islamist party. Employing aggressive argumentation, he emphasised the role of ANAP as a

17. Erik Zürcher characterises Yılmaz as "leader of the liberal wing within the Motherland Party" (1993:370). "Liberal" in this context denotes a position in terms of economic policy and in relation to the far right. Yılmaz has always been a sworn enemy of the Islamist movement (Pope and Pope 1997:313ff., 334f.). Yılmaz was appointed to play the role of a "Kennedy" in order to break the dominance of elderly men in Turkish politics and bring in the image of youth, change and progress (Pope and Pope 1997:304). Cf. Shankland 1999:126ff.

stronghold against all attempts at Islamisation. In sharp contrast to Turgut Özal, Yılmaz's anti-Islamist attitude became his political signature. Nevertheless, it was commonly known that the party was represented in the parliament by men who also took active part in various more or less Islamist circles, many of them Nakşbendis. In the mid-1990s, the seemingly natural co-operation between ANAP and the other major centre/right party Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP (True Path Party), failed. Owing to severe personal conflicts between Yılmaz and DYP's Tansu Çiller, a stable centre/right coalition was impossible; instead, their enmity prepared the ground for the previously unthinkable co-operation between the Islamist Refah Partisi and the centre/right (Pope and Pope 1997:302ff.). During this period, Çiller was occasionally seen visiting mosques wearing a chic headscarf to manifest an invitation to Islamists attracted to her party. If Turgut Özal was a "secret derviş", Çiller made some feeble attempts to promote a pro-Islamic attitude for as long as the coalition lasted – and her policy was ridiculed in the popular press when she vistited local mosques on her campaigning tours.

Today, religious groups in Turkey are certainly more visible in the political arena. Radical Islamism has come into view, stressing the primacy of religion over politics. Far from all its adherents are demanding *şeriat*, but there is a certain tendency to universalism and hegemonic claims. Consequently, the local groups find themselves somewhere in between, navigating between authoritarian tendencies and newly conquered liberties.

The influence of postmodernism on analyses of the role of Islam in modern Turkey is also apparent (Sayyid 1997; Yeğenoğlu 1998). Intellectuals in general express uneasiness about the demands of Kemalism and other positivistic and universalistic ideologies (Göle 1996b). To what extent postmodernism has had any influence on Islamist theology in Turkey is more of an open question, as is the question of whether postmodernism is a position held in public debates against secularists only (Eickelman 1998:81f.). There is apparently no room in this discourse for those covered by Kevin Robins' expression "the return of the repressed" (1996a:72ff., 75f.). Some intellectual Islamist debaters legitimate their presence with arguments influenced by discussions of relativism, the critique of positivism and the development of civil society as analysed by Saktanber (1994) and Sarıbay (1994). Such a position can constitute an intellectual framework for personal faith in a way that modernism in Turkey never could. In the end, though, there is no escaping the question of whether the focus on difference and diversity in the writings of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler is not always bound to clash with *tevhid*, the basic Muslim concept of unity.

In the present study, a stipulative distinction is made between high modernity – which is used as a label to characterise the official Kemalistic policy from the 1920s onwards – and late modernity (Fornäs 1995). In other words, high modernity in Turkey entails modernism as an ideology promoted by the state through large-scale development programmes, especially in the sphere of education. Although the educational project failed, it has remained the icon of progress in

secular and Muslim circles alike. Modernity is, in Anthony Giddens' terminology, "future-oriented"; Giddens continues: "such that the 'future' has a status of counterfactual modelling" (1991:177). The concept of late modernity is used with reference to the actual conditions that prevailed in people's everyday lives in the 1990s. The use of the latter term basically follows Alberto Melucci in an attempt to grasp a group in constant motion. The vakıf activists redefined their collective identities as conscious Muslims, as Sufi disciples, as women activists, and as welfare workers in relation to other women's groups, to the local religious establishment and to the secular society of the majority. Therefore, the members of the investigated group also acted in ways that might seem contradictory, as they lived in a situation of "disorganized capitalism", to use Bryan S. Turner's expression in order to describe the conditions for their social lives. Their different roles in everyday life set different standards.

Secularism and the Supposed Decline of Religion. Navigating Late Modernity

The conventional post-Enlightenment image of secularism stipulates a decline of religion in terms of less public visibility as societal development proceeds in line with extended education and an additional sense of rationality (Casanova 1994:25ff.). This development was thought to proceed in one direction only. Secularism, or rather laicism, has been a component in the Turkish constitution since 1937. It is one of the six arrows (*altı ok*),[18] the principles on which the republic was founded. Secularism in the early days of Kemalism was combined with "an extreme form of nationalism, with the attendant creation of historical myths, was used as the prime instrument in the building of a new national identity, and as such was intended to take the place of religion in many respects" (Zürcher 1993:189). "But through the simultaneous imposition of an authoritarian and – especially during the 1940s – increasingly unpopular regime and the suppression of popular Islam, they politicized Islam and turned it into a vehicle for opposition", Erik Zürcher writes and continues with the following important remark: "One could say that, in turning against popular religion, the Kemalists cut the ties which bound them to the mass of the population" (Zürcher 1993:200f.). Whatever Muslim group or representative was asked during the fieldwork undertaken for the present study, they considered the state to be if not an enemy or an opponent, then at least a controlling authority with the means – and the legal right – to interfere in local activities. The state was not thought of as a resource in any sense, neither for protection nor for funding or identification.

Islamism has challenged the Kemalistic modernity project and confronted

18. The six arrows incorporated in the Turkish constitution are: republicanism (*cumhuriyetçilik*), secularism (*laiklik*), nationalism (*milliyetçilik*), populism (*halkçılık*), statism or etatism (*devletçilik*), and revolutionism or reformism (*inkılâpçılık*).

secular conceptions of religion as a private matter – the idea that religion belongs "at home", separated from public life, labour and production. Instead a complementary relation between religion and society has been claimed. The fundamental argument is that God is one (the conception of *tevhid*, unity, which nothing – no thought, no word, no deed – must contradict), and therefore the law given by God, *şeriat*, is one and cannot be replaced by any secular law. In Western Europe, after the French Revolution, the ultimate aim of secularisation and modernisation was the separation of religion and politics. Religion, for the modern and enlightened, should be a private matter, and the constitutional freedom of religion therefore became the icon of the liberal ideas of freedom in general. The method employed to achieve the privatisation of religion in most European countries was institutional differentiation and the organisation of religion in specific areas of society (Casanova 1992, 1994). Hence, practised religion became spatially defined. Services and ceremonies became something to be executed in appropriately designed areas and rooms, less and less often performed in the midst of society.[19] This endeavour to give practised religion its distinct space has been one of the characteristics of most modernisation projects in the western hemisphere (in a geographical understanding of the concept) or in parts of the world to which modernisation has been exported (by means of colonialism, mission and capitalism). In other words, the idea has been to show that a modern society is not governed by religious ideas.

The ideology of the Enlightenment was the lodestar for many Turkish intellectuals as early as in the nineteenth century. Educated abroad, they brought back ideas about secularism, personal liberties, freedom of the press, and women's liberation. These early intellectuals and their followers in the twentieth century became the backbone of the higher educational system, built according to the European model. "Enlightened" (*aydın*) has, in all its compounds, been an honorary adjective in these circles. In Turkey public open space was designated to honour the republic; its monuments are modern in message, if not always in artistic expression. Recently established, the republic started to compete with the Muslim and Ottoman heritage as the repository of the nation's memory.

What can be observed in Turkey today may seem quite paradoxical. On the one hand, religion is a private matter more than ever before. As has been pointed out by José Casanova in a discussion of private and public religions, there has been an important turn in the development of politicised religious movements during the last two decades. Because of the effects of modernisation (urbanisation, the spread of education, mass media, communication technology etc.), individuals have a greater variety of options when it comes to choosing a reli-

19. However, a significant difference must be noted between the Protestant parts of northern Europe and the Roman Catholic world, where secularism has never had a comparable dominating influence over state policies or public discourses.

gious mode of life. In her analysis of the development of an Islamist counter-elite, Nilüfer Göle does not even hesitate to claim that this complexity enforces a form of secularisation within the religious communities: "To the extent that rationality, individualism, and critical thinking emerge as autonomous value references for the Islamist elite formed through modern education, a process of secularisation has set in" (1996b:39). Today, it has not only set in; this is a fact, not only at elite level, but also in the steadily growing middle class who nowadays usually have access to codes, spheres, and other forms of symbolic language to express their individually chosen modes of religious expression.

In a comparison between the religious life of people living in a rural area in Turkey and that of migrants from the same village living in Germany, Werner Schiffauer makes some important observations about the processes of change. In urban milieus with all their offers and options, personal expression and self-presentation become more and more important as a demonstration of certain values which also have a profound effect on ritual life. A complementary relation between religion and society can hardly be claimed by migrant Muslims in the West; instead, an "islamisation of one's self" takes place (1988:155). Barbara Metcalf (1996) has more recently taken up Schiffauer's theme when analysing how Muslim space is constructed in diaspora communities for everyday ritual and practice. In the mainland of secularism (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Britain, and the Protestant parts of Germany), the many Muslim groups have started to reconquer the public space for worship. Although Schiffauer and Metcalf analyse migrant groups, it may be noted that at a discursive level, many active Muslims in Turkey define themselves as being in a diaspora in relation to mainstream secular society. A rhetorical twist is often made in the self-image of the Islamist movement between being both a representative of the genuine Muslim Turkish heritage and, owing to political developments, forced into a marginal position. The "islamisation of one's self" seems to be a likely change when traditional Muslim identities meet with late modern forms of urbanisation. No one matrix is available. Today neither identity nor ritual practices are fixed to particular places; new spaces are carved out instead.

In several respects the formerly marginalised religious groups have moved from the periphery to the centre of attention. Mass media play a crucial part in this process, having developed from state-controlled radio and television to a flow from both national and international stations. Groups as different as the various Alevi associations and the disparate constellations of Islamist women share the position of being "other" in relation to mainstream secular society and the traditional Sunni community.

A Late Modern Local Sufi Group

as Part of a Major Social Movement

Sufism as a daily practice in Turkey today is, unfortunately, often imperfectly perceived because people tend to think of it either in terms borrowed from orientalist romanticism or from a viewpoint distorted by a Kemalistic bias. Ambiguous and contradictory images of Sufi groups are produced and reproduced as a result of these conflicting and misleading notions. For a long time, the milieu in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's novel *Nur Baba* (1922) was the prejudiced prototype for the backward and superstitious lives led within the tarikats. Based on oral jocular stories about Bektaşi dervişes, the novel preserved common pejorative clichés according to which tarikat members are newly urbanised Anatolian peasants and the lodge is the site of corruption and decadence. The object of *The Book and the Roses* is to study women's position in religious activities in what they define as a proper space in public life. It is an attempt to write against the populistic image of ecstatic Sufis involved in esoteric speculation. The book aims to present a well-structured enterprise organised by women who constitute an element in the larger Islamist movement by virtue of this engagement.

When Bryan S. Turner (1990:11) writes, "It is possible to be postmodern (without nostalgia for *Gemeinschaft*) without being anti-modern (without rejecting the achievements of bourgeois civil society; that is, the achievements of social relations based on *Gesellschaft*)", it could be added that the religious activism of contemporary Turkey embodies the cultural and organisational opportunities offered in late modern society, although it is discursively anti-modern and employs nostalgia as one of its rhetorical key instruments. In another context, discussing the pluralism and relativism of postmodernity in relation to the universalism of many contemporary religious movements, Turner states: "Fundamentalism is therefore the cultural defence of modernity against postmodernity" (Turner 1994:78). In order to emphasise women's opportunities to speak with the Muslim NGOs as their base, the concept of late modernity is perhaps still a more relevant term when discussing Turkey in the 1990s, though Turner's emphasis on the combined endeavour to master the well-trodden path of history and hopes for a better future is useful when trying to grasp the conditions pertaining to Muslim activists.

Alberto Melucci's arguments in favour of integrating the question of individual needs into analyses of social movements in complex societies are thus very appealing. In his collection of essays called *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (1989), Melucci emphasises that social phenomena such as the emerging NGOs possess dimensions, emotional and symbolic relations, that cannot be interpreted as political in a conventional sense since they function according to a radically different logic. He energetically underscores the fact that these affective relations must be regarded as fundamental whenever social movements of a religious character are analysed. With Melucci's approach, three principal gains stand out when one considers religious women's activist movements both as part of a trend and as activities that demonstrate the impact of the vakıf as an organisation.

Melucci combines micro and macro analyses and does not conceive of global processes and major political changes as national concerns only; rather, he insists on particular local meanings and interpretations. Accordingly, clear-cut rhetorical conflicts are not entrenched – the complexity of variation is emphasised instead. The liberal market economy opened Turkey not only to a more globalised economy but also to substantial cultural and economic changes. The relativisation that follows in the wake of globalisation counteracts the more rigid nation-state identity in many ways. Melucci speaks of "the democratization of everyday life" when approaching attempts to regulate the complexity of rapid contemporary change. The social movements of late modernity offer models for individuals to socialise within as well as rules for transforming liberty and relativism into stable identities. These processes rarely emphasise the authoritarian character of smaller groups. Over the years I have witnessed how networks of women's groups have acquired the capacity for very fast mobilisation. The demonstrations mentioned in the introduction, in favour of religious schools or in defence of Istanbul's Islamist mayor Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan, serve as good examples of this capacity. Young Islamists have not only been able to bring together 50,000 demonstrators in forty-eight hours; they could also organise them into gender-divided ranks in the processions, with well-designed streamers and placards. Melucci also stresses both synchronic and diachronic elements in his analytical framework, which brings up the importance of history in the study of people's interpretations of the present. As discussed above, the historical mirror is of the utmost importance when confirming legitimacy in a local context. Thirdly, variability is a key term for Melucci; the consequences of privatisation of religion has been developed further in Peter Beyer's discussion of the relativisation of religion (Beyer 1994:97ff.). In order not to be misunderstood as inconsistent or paradoxical, the moves of individual agents are aligned with choice and change of "commodity-signs", to borrow Featherstone's term. Within a single day, the religious identity of an individual may face a number of situations whose essential features differ widely and the possible expressions of identity change markedly from one occasion to the next.

Despite his contributions to the study of social movements, Melucci – like other theorists of recent global changes – is highly gender-blind in his search for the meaning of religion in late modern society (C. Scott 1995). When planning and arguing for their programmes, the women in this book are forced into a battle on two fronts: one against the Muslim, male-dominated community and its traditionalistic conventions, and the other against mainstream secular society. They have to deal with local religious authorities, formal representatives of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and more informal imams and hocas, as well as with representatives of the state and the municipality.

In the present context, the main questions that have lingered on since my very first encounter with these women are: how have they gained legitimacy in their local environment for the rituals they conducted; and how did they maintain authority in the continuation of their activities? Changes in society have

obviously had an impact at all levels of ritual life: time, organisation, participants, theology and the articulation of legendary history. The issues examined in the present study deal with the zikir ritual as such, as well as with the women's independent attitude. Controversial matters pertaining to the role of Islam in contemporary Turkey are related to these issues. The relation between state authority and religious groups, as well as the status of secularism, was not only debated within the context of the fieldwork as a political issue; it was also discussed, from a more theoretical angle, within the academic world.

Individual Needs and New Identities

As developments in terms of socio-economic liberalism were already ten years old at the beginning of the fieldwork, three themes appeared to be self-evident objectives when Muslim women's networks in Istanbul were investigated: access, visibility, and mobility.

The study does not focus so much on individual supplicants as on one of the many small Muslim women's groups with a more or less clear relation to the Islamist movement. In terms borrowed from Edmund Burke's definition of the aim of social biographies, the present book explores "the complex ways in which individuals navigate amidst social structures, processes, and cultural interactions [... providing] an alternative vantage point from which to think about the historical processes by which societies have been continually transformed" (1993:6).

The individual persons in this study act primarily as members of a collective, sometimes articulating conflicting interests (Melucci 1996a:171ff.). It is still a biography in the sense that it was my intention to write about the life of a particular group – the biography of a small vakıf. The group was chosen so that I could study the practices of ordinary women in their everyday interaction with the local vicinity and with the broader Muslim community, i.e. Sufism as a lived experience set in a particular national and local context – both tended to be viewed as stable categories by the informants, and yet they were facing the challenges of globalisation.

Having brought the project about Sufi women in Turkey to an end, I am fortunate in having had the opportunity to widen my experience so as to include fieldwork among contemporary women. I would hope that the present study reveals my dual intention: that of exploring the interplay between textual and discursive expression in relation to ritual and social practice. Elizabeth and Robert Fernea wrote in 1972: "Information is scarce about the most public aspects of women's practice of Islam, and material is even more scanty with respect to those religious activities of women which take place out of public view" (Fernea and Fernea 1972:386). To some extent this statement still holds true, though a steadily increasing interest is evident. The following discussions will, I hope, add some examples to the corpus of academic knowledge about Muslim women as religious subjects and about their ritual life.

Out of the Field

The beginning and planning of fieldwork is always a period full of uncertainties and doubts. Finishing fieldwork is even worse. When is the right time to call a halt? And in what terms is the end to be defined? The initial encounter is a distinct event, remembered by both sides and part of a jointly continuous narrative. But stating a formal end to academic work while maintaining friendly relations with former informants and general interest in a specific field is a complicated matter. What date is to be considered the last working day?

The Velvet Coup of February 1997. State Authority and Local Practice

Many anthropological studies start with the first encounter, the important initial meeting between the researcher and the field. However, the discussions in the present volume will begin with my latest – not, I hope, my last – encounter with the women who had established an endowment in honour of their hoca, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı. After I had decided to draw the line and start to write up the manuscript for a book, I realised that I had to go back to Istanbul after all and find out what consequences the shifts on the national political arena had had for local religious life. I came back to Istanbul in April 1998 for a short visit after having been away for almost a year. Deniz Kandiyoti commented at the time: "Studies of women in Muslim societies have not always acknowledged the extent to which aspects of the state practice define and mediate the place of Islam itself" (1997:186). When I left in June 1997, after finishing the formal part of my fieldwork, Turkey was in political turmoil. It was apparent that the Islamist (RP) and right/centre (DYP) government was about to break up within weeks. The fact that Turkey had had an Islamist Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan,[1] for the first time in the history of the Republic had been a provocation for opponents and supporters alike. Many supporters of the Islamist party were disappointed with the few changes that had been achieved, and Erbakan's opponents regarded him as an offence against the Republic and its fundamental values. After one year in office, Necmettin Erbakan had to resign under

1. Necmettin Erbakan was Prime Minister between the summer of 1996 and June 1997. The coalition between RP and DYP finally broke down as Erbakan resigned. As RP was closed in February, 1998 Erbakan was banned from politics for five years.

pressure from the military and in consequence of the coalition's dysfunctional character.

The beginning of the end of the Erbakan-Çiller government became apparent on 28 February 1997, at the monthly meeting of the National Security Council (MGK). The military demanded severe restrictions against the Islamists and their alleged political and social influence, declaring that the Islamist movement was the greatest threat to Turkey's security. The well-known 18-issue agenda drawn up by the military stated the measures to be taken.[2] Especially the fifth and sixth paragraphs are of interest in the present context in that they have a bearing on tasavvuf-orientated circles. They read as follows:

> 5. Religious foundations [vakıfs] under construction in various parts of the country must not be made the subject of political exploitation and kept on the agenda in order to present and reinforce a message to certain groups. If there is a [genuine] need for these foundations, they must be realised by the Directorate of Religious Affairs, who will examine the situation and co-ordinate with the relevant authorities and local administrators.
>
> 6. The *tarikats* prohibited by existing law number 677, and all the activities declared proscribed in that law must be brought to an end. Their threat to democratic society, and the political and social laws governing the social order, must be impeded (Shankland 1999:206).

The two paragraphs pinpoint a basic conflict between the state and local groups. The latter were obviously no longer under the full control of the authorities. The recommendations display a combination of a realistic outlook on the current situation and references to legislation, more than seventy years old, that connects the endowments and orders to social structures which prevailed in Ottoman times. As Alberto Melucci points out, new social movements "coexist with traditional social groupings [...] they remain a stable and irreversible component of contemporary social systems". Melucci continues: "Hence the traditional mechanisms of political socialization, cultural innovation and institutional

2. The stipulations of the MGK as set forth in The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 118: "The Council of Ministers shall give priority consideration to the decisions of the National Security Council concerning the measures that it deems necessary for the preservation of the existence and independence of the State, the integrity and indivisibility of the country, and the peace and security of society. The agenda of the National Security Council shall be drawn up by the President of the Republic taking into account the proposals of the Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff." The MGK has monthly meetings chaired by the President and is composed of the Prime Minister and three other ministers, the Chief of General Staff, and the four military commanders. The function of the MGK is supervisory, and its recommendations are not legally binding. The full translation of The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey can be read on the official website of the Turkish Republic: http://www.turkey.org/start.html.

3. David Shankland has made a full translation of the 18 recommendations (*tavsiyeler*) of 28 February 1997 presented by the National Security Council (MGK) (1999:204ff.).

modernization are redefined" (1989:41). Small independent groups experienced, for good reasons, that they were the targets of the MGK's interest. The alarm lasted for a couple of months, and it was unclear how strong the repression would be. The reference to the act no. 677 was read as an oblique reference to the 1930s, when people were prosecuted for religious opposition.

Even before the announcement of the MGK recommendations, other aspects of the relation between the state (via the local Directorate of Religious Affairs authorities and other forms of administrative control) and active Muslims had been widely discussed. In the district of my fieldwork, the spring of 1997 was dominated by a debate about the status of the religious İmam Hatip schools.[4] At the same time, the MGK submitted a proposal recommending that religious schools should not be allowed until the 8th grade. The purpose was to prevent too early religious influence being exercised on young children. The move was a very effective one, since the issue of education immediately brought the ideological divergences between the ruling parties into focus. For Erbakan's opponents, this was a way to set aside an Islamist Prime Minister without intervention.

The MGK recommendations about the İmam Hatip schools and Kuran classes read as follows:

> 2. As is required by the [original Republican] law for the unification of education [Tevhid-i Tedrisat], private hostels, trusts and schools with links to tarikats must be transferred to the control of the state organs acting under the supervision of the National Education Ministry.
>
> 3. The still-forming minds of younger generations must be made aware of the Republic, of Atatürk, of love for country and nation, and of the aim of the Turkish nation to rise to the level of contemporary civilisation. They must be protected from the [nefarious] influence of various centres of activity. Accordingly, (a) Eight years' continuous education must be instituted throughout the whole country. (b) If a family so decides, children who have completed this education may attend Koran courses. The necessary administrative and legislative changes must be made for these courses' activities so that they [are removed from the responsibility of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and] come under the responsibility and control of the Ministry of Education (Shankland 1999:205f.).

4. The İmam Hatip schools are religious colleges (*lise*s) offering the top forms of upper-secondary schooling. After graduation at the İmam Hatip schools, pupils can go straight on to university. Despite their name, these schools do not only educate future mosque servants (*imam* meaning leader of the Friday prayer and *hatip* preacher), and they are open to both boys and girls. In the last twenty years the number of İmam Hatip schools has constantly increased, a development that has been a thorn in the flesh of the secularist establishment. Along with the *lise*s run by the military (for boys only), these educational institutions are the only substantial chance for young people of less fortunate background to have a proper education. For many students, the opportunity to obtain a certificate from either of these kinds of *lise*s constitutes a springboard to the middle class and a more prosperous future (Akşit 1991; Zürcher 1993:303; Yavuz 1998:31ff.; Gülalp 1999:52; Özdalga 1999, 2000; Shankland 1999:26ff., 59ff.).

The school debate was on everyone's lips and certainly not only an issue for Muslim activists. There were numerous demonstrations, organised jointly by a large number of Islamist groups, in favour of the İmam Hatip schools. Among the most active groups were branches of the Önder (literally "leader") organisation. It is a gender-divided alumni confederation, dating back to 1958, for graduates from the İmam Hatip colleges active on university campuses (İmam Hatip lisesi mezunları mensupları derneği). Its many branches serve as the base of networks for young professional Islamists.[5] The issue of what attitude to adopt toward the religious schools brought out the clash between the two major ideological lines in contemporary Turkey. Mass education has been the base for most nation-building projects; education was always a key issue for Kemalistic modernism, forming a vital part of the secularisation programmes from the outset. The insufficient supply and the shortcomings of state-run school system (especially in poor areas) increased the popularity of İmam Hatip colleges among those who could not afford private schools.

The confrontation over Muslim education for young children had implications at most levels of society. Not even the headscarf debate, a constant topic of conflict since the 1970s, has manifested a division between principles to the same extent. The attempts to curtail the religious schools turned out to be in vain, as the influence of their alumni was so great. The Islamists proved to be well organised in response to what they saw as a provocation, and their protests were vociferous. The conflict peaked dramatically, whereupon the number of students declined and fewer İmam Hatip colleges were allowed to be started.

I left a field with many burning issues and streets dominated by daily demonstrations and counter-demonstrations. From the reading matter available to me back home in Sweden, in Turkish and international press and via the Internet, I derived the impression that religious groups were under much stricter control than before. When I came back in April 1998 for a short visit, I expected a certain restraint in the public activities of the women in my investigation and a reluctance to emphasise their activities in public. What I found was quite the opposite: the women were as ambitious and optimistic as ever, full of new plans and in the midst of further fund-raising, constantly assuring me that what they were doing was certainly not politics. While the group flourished, the organised Islamist attempt to govern by means of executive political power was hindered by the direct interference of the military as well as by the lack of concrete plans to change the system which the Islamists themselves had criticised so severely. In a way, this experience in the spring of 1998 constituted the tailpiece of the fieldwork: small local groups were as active as ever while the superstructure of Islamism was cracking.

5. A presentation is offered on the official website of the Önder organisation: http://www.onder.org.tr

Slipping In and Slipping Out. The Conditions of Fieldwork

My first visit to Istanbul in pursuit of Sufi women took place in October and November 1993, and from then on I made repeated lengthy visits until May 1998, in all about 14 months. The three most intense periods fell between October 1995 and May 1997. As discussed above, this was a period of political and parliamentary turmoil in Turkey, when the role of the Islamist party and its relation to (and dependence on) small local Muslim groups were constantly at the focus of debate.

Owing to my family situation it was impossible for me to stay for one continuous period of work. However, in the end I am grateful that I had the opportunity to go to Istanbul repeatedly, as this has allowed me to follow the pursuits and strategies within the group as well as the general political development in Turkey over a longer period. The changes in attitude towards Muslim groups and their activities – not exclusively orientated towards Islamism – have not only been a consequence of governmental policy, but also of the private opinions of members of the secularist elite who to a large extent dominate the media. My regular visits obviously increased my concentration on the theme of changes over the five-year period, as regards both Turkey at large and the small group studied here. Major political changes in Turkey during the working period affected my fieldwork in decisive ways. The Islamists enjoyed great success in the local elections in the spring of 1994 and even more so in the national elections in December 1995. After lengthy negotiations, the unstable coalition between the centre-conservative Doğru Yol Partisi (DYP) and the Islamist Refah Partisi (RP) was formed in May/June 1996. This co-operation led to the government crisis in the spring and early summer of 1997, which ended with the breakdown of the coalition in June 1997. After the political turmoil that ensued following Erbakan's resignation, President Demirel asked the leader of the Anavatan Partisi (ANAP), Mesut Yılmaz, to form a minority government. It lasted for little more than a year, during which period it tried to balance the demands of the military against the impact of the Islamist movement while coping with economic crises. The fieldwork was finished not only in a climate of political turbulence, but also and more precisely in a vacuum that still persists as these lines are being written in late 2001. Turkey was without an executive government for almost three months (57 days) in the autumn of 1998, until Bülent Ecevit formed a government in January 1999. The economic crisis deepened during the months to follow, a fact more important to most NGOs and their enterprices than any govenmental decree to interfere in the Muslim groups. Many questions remain unanswered and continue to be a source of debate in the media and in homes, among Islamists and secularists alike: How will the state handle the political activism of religious groups in the future? What impact will a possible closer relationship with the European Union bring? How will the state respond to the reluctant attitude to anything conceived as Western (*batı*)

expressed by the Islamists? One may well question whether it is accurate to emphasise a polarisation of the state versus religion as a given parameter. State administrators are also to some extent influenced by the new ideological trends, and they are certainly affected by new living conditions in the wake of economic liberalisation.

Three fieldwork periods can be roughly identified in relation to the general political development in Turkey. The initial period, 1993–94 and the autumn of 1995, was one of tension: the Islamist grassroots attached grand hopes to the changes they foresaw, and the secularists anticipated the same changes with fear and contempt. The political debate was often heated, and people who were interviewed tended to take up rather marked, if not extreme, positions. The middle phase in 1996, when the bulk of the material was collected, was a period of negotiation: the Islamists were the most successful party in the national election on 24 December 1995,[FL] but there was no given form for handling the situation either in the parliament or in the political debate. During the final period of fieldwork in 1997, disintegration and disorder resulted in more open conflicts and even greater polarisation in the general debate. As was suggested above, it all ended in a political vacuum.

In the course of the first few months of fieldwork, in the autumn of 1993, the atmosphere became tense whenever conversations touched on the relation between religion and politics, and the new presence of religion was apparent in street life. The topic was often avoided, and I think it was not only because I was a newcomer to the domain that most of the active Muslims I spoke with (whether related to Sufi circles or not) stressed their strictly apolitical position. Several plausible reasons may be perceived behind their evasiveness. My informants were perhaps suspicious, feeling uncertain as to who I was, under whose command I conducted my work and how I would handle the information I obtained; or they wanted to protect me from what they saw as potentially harmful insights for both them and me; or they considered themselves truly apolitical and regarded the interest shown by the authorities as exaggerated. A combination of all three explanations probably operated. In the second period, the election success of the Islamists was a fact recognised all over the world. However, the Islamist mayors in the major cities and an Islamist Prime Minister for a period did not really affect the everyday work performed by the women of the present study. Finally, the insecurity that prevailed during the last period had more direct effects because of the general doubts as to what was regarded by the authorities as legal activities and what was not. When it comes to access and visibility, the third phase of fieldwork points at the decisive differences between parliamentary politics in Ankara and local practice in a lower-middle-

6. The Islamist Refah Partisi gained 21.3% of the votes in the national elections on 24 December 1995. The centre-right Doğru Yol Partisi and Anavatan Partisi came out with slightly fewer votes. The starting point for the negotiations was that the three largest parties each had about 20% of the seats in the parliament.

class district in Istanbul known as one of the bases for the Islamist movement. Especially women's groups appeared to adapt to the altering conditions for religious activism with skill and tact, always able to withdraw behind what was considered to be private spheres and therefore *haremlik*, that is, the Ottoman term for the space forbidden for unrelated persons entering a house.

In his book *The Uses of Disorder : Personal Identity and City Life*, Richard Sennett writes: "[I]n dense city life some possibility of fraternity, some new kind of warmth, that is now understood in the vague term 'community'" develops (1996:xi). During the fieldwork I was always impressed by the ways in which the women made sense out of disorder, be it the chaotic urban environment or political unrest. In many respects they have fulfilled several of the ideals of Western feminism in the 1970s: they mobilised collective work by women for the benefit of other women (often advocated with a certain stress on essentialistic womanhood). To a great extent this was very agreeable and much-needed community work, yet there was always a disturbing difference between me and the women of the vakıf that could not primarily be defined in terms of religious or ethnic difference. Rather, we diverged in our opinions about authority, diversity, and puritanism when describing all the goals accomplished by the vakıf. There is an apparent risk of idealising the women's hard work and our developing friendship at the cost of ignoring the considerable discrepancy between our opinions. The fact that our world-views were so dissimilar, and our ethical standards and moral persuasions rooted in such widely different milieus, also evoked a mutual curiosity about the other party. It was this condition that added intensity to our first meetings.

Notebooks. Bridges or Barriers?

During the preliminary fieldwork, my concerns were very much of an accumulative character and to a great extent centred on technique: cassette recordings, photographs, and videotapes. I had tried to prepare myself as well as possible at home by reading about fieldwork, studying interview techniques and adjusting to the use of the technical equipment. It would be going too far to state that these ambitions were futile, but the reading knowledge did not come in as handy as expected once I was in the field. All kinds of recording equipment were firmly but politely rejected by the women I wanted to interview with reference to what was assumed within the group to be words from the Kuran: "A woman's voice should not be heard". Hence I have had to rely on my notebooks – a situation I do not regret today, as it forced me to make a virtue of necessity. I had to trust my impressions to an extent I had not expected at the outset. The method of documentation that developed from these conditions was certainly not sophisticated. However, it corresponded well to the informal character of the fieldwork. Though I had read in Lila Abu Lughod's studies how limiting notebooks could be when compared to the richness and complexity of well-

documented living narrative on a recording (1993), I realised that whatever I thought of it, I had to stick to my notes since the women's arguments were incontestable. Writing notes had to become an art of its own. The lack of verbatim recordings made it impossible to work with life stories and narratives or even to feature individuals and their more personal statements, drawing the focus of the study towards the group as such.

The notes start before Istanbul, taken down in Sweden as preliminaries. In the first pages of the first book there are well-prepared questions and neatly written mind-maps, setting out all those themes I thought would be interesting to investigate. When read today, they stand out in sharp contrast to some pages from the middle of the work with scarcely legible scratchings taken down on a joggling bus after a long day together with the women. While on fieldwork, I consistently made notes in three distinct stages. At my desk at home, these three layers of notes – together with the publications of the vakıf, local booklets and poster – have been the very base for the current manuscript when I have tried to put together events from a long period, events that interrelated in ways that were not obvious at first.

The first kind of notes is those made directly on hearing or seeing anything of interest. These "on-the-spot memos" are of course rough in outline; nevertheless, they bear witness to immediate impressions with drawings, maps, and traces of help in ensuring that the Turkish terms were correctly spelt. As the intention of my visits was always openly declared at the vakıf, I took down notes off and on when meeting with the women, although it was not always possible to scribble. Sometimes I found the writing disturbing in the midst of a conversation and closed the pad, while at other times my note-taking proved to be a way of showing that what the women said mattered. Occasionally, I was even requested to write down certain information: "This is important, take it down" or "This you must remember back in Sweden". At sudden moments an ordinary conversation could be transformed into a regular interview with an individual or a group. Unexpectedly, my role as a researching guest was emphasised for a while. The notebook – the icon of the fieldworker – was apparently not only a moat, but also an indication that I was taking the women and their work seriously. In the evenings, I generally tried to summarise and outline the impressions of the day and formulate more context-bound comments, connecting observations from different episodes and relating to previous visits. These daily comprehensive notes constitute the second layer. In some periods, the days together with the vakıf women were very long. Sometimes I left the Swedish Research Institute, where I was staying during almost all periods of fieldwork, as early as 8 a.m. in order to be in time for a meeting and did not return until 11 p.m. On those days the notes could be of a fairly summary character. Nevertheless, it was during these sessions that I had time to reflect on the relations between the women: socially (in terms of hierarchy, influence and limitations), psychologically (tensions and loyalties), as well as in respect of their more direct contacts with persons and groups in the immediate vicinity. The comments con-

cerning the first layer of notes were made with only a few days in between. At this stage I also used more space to sum up in a more reflexive mode, adding descriptions of the milieu and details that I thought would be significant for a full-fledged representation of the field later on. About once a week I tried to find time to re-read the notes written the days before and in the previous week so as to be able to make some more conclusive remarks. In this phase of the ongoing work I constructed preliminary indexes to the notebooks and wrote about the major political events of the week. The latter has been of special importance when observing events at the women's meeting-place in a more long-term perspective in order to relate them to more large-scale processes. This third layer connects the micro and macro perspective in a long-term process.

This technique has had the advantage of easily bringing back memories when I was stranded at home at my desk. As I have been contemplating my notes over and over again when writing the present book – not only the episodes and information I actually wrote down, but also what I initially left out of my scrapbooks – it is interesting to follow certain issues and see how I sometimes hesitated to write down information that I found difficult to handle: failures, misunderstandings, or shortcomings that embarrassed me, but also less personal matters such as anti-Semitic or homophobic statements from my informants which disturbed me very much. When on fieldwork I wrote down observations, reflections, and comments, but I found it impracticable to write longer analytical texts until I came back home. It was impossible to find peace to work out an arrangement that would enable me to grasp the flood of information I was confronted with and shape it into a sensible totality.

Fieldwork is both an emotional and intellectual challenge. With very few pauses, the constant and intense confrontation with other people is not only exhausting and time-consuming, but also confusing. The discrepancy between absorbing knowledge through reading and observing life as lived was even greater than I had expected in the library. In comparison to published texts, however, notes add a new dimension to the analytical work: the responsible handling of the material and information collected. Lila Abu Lughod's question is therefore a constantly pressing query: "Does using my knowledge of individuals for purposes beyond friendship and shared memories by fixing their words and lives for disclosure to a world beyond the one they live in constitute some sort of betrayal?" (1993:41) The discrepancy between what I see with the help of my analytical tools and the way the women expressed their situation is sometimes striking, but it is also the very essence and aim of analysis.

Although I tried as hard as possible to make the intentions of my visits clear, I know that to many of the women "academic teacher" or "university professor" was a very diffuse identity. To the few women who had been to university, the role of the university faculty was notably ambiguous. On the one hand, they were regarded as learned and had a comparatively high social status; on the other hand, any teacher in the national educational system may be regarded as a representative of the secular state *par excellence* and a tool for control and repression. Espe-

cially after the lengthy headscarf conflicts at the universities, Muslim activists look on the state universities as strongholds of secular ideology and anti-religious sentiment. Rather than my foreign non-Muslim identity, I think it was my role as a scholar that was the most dubious and confusing: why was this far-away university prepared to spend money on an unappeasably curious academic's journeys to Istanbul? The analytical purpose of my presence must have remained obscure to most of the temporary guests who attended the activities, and the fact that I was there was often interpreted, despite my objections, as a sign of a potential conversion. To the inner circle, my Christian identity was emphasised and I was held accountable for Christian conceptions such as the trinity, Christ's incarnation, and the propitiatory. Being brought up in a comparatively High Church part of Sweden, I mostly had at least theoretical answers to the questions raised, though I did not like to be connected with opinions that were not my own. The reasons for the women's many questions were twofold: Among the more educated women, there was an interest in hearing about Christian beliefs in order to make comparisons.‡ The second reason was of course a hope that Islam would stand out as the better choice in comparison. In this respect I had an ambiguous relationship with the group, which was especially apparent when we appeared together outside the vakıf merkezi. When we were going to mosque meetings I was always introduced as a Swedish friend. As a visiting scholar I was welcome, but in the end always an anomaly. Naturally, I was the only one who took off my headscarf when coming out of a mosque, an act that sometimes caused loud comments from surrounding people, but I was always defended by the vakıf women with phrases like "She is a Christian" or "She is an outlandish (*yabancı*) guest". On the other hand, my interest and my proclaimed intention also invested the group with recognition and status. I became a trophy in their achievements, as my presence at the vakıf merkezi and at the mosque meetings was of course well known in the neighbourhood. If the comments about my not having my scarf on became too aggressive, I was always defended by the women I accompanied. It is hard to estimate to what extent my presence at the vakıf merkezi or other activities was observed by any officials in the neighbourhood.

The Gender of Fieldwork. Being a Visitor in a Mono-Gendered Field

Ways of approaching the relationship between gender and social organisation from a general theme in many aspects of this study. First of all, the issue will be discussed in relation to the process of documentation. Whenever I encountered Muslim communities as a fieldworker, the relation between the concep-

7. Later I was invited to speak as a Christian representative at a public one-day conference arranged by the vakıf about religious "universalism", taking its point of departure in the concept of *tevhid*. I rejected this offer for many reasons.

tion of gender and access to data and space was apparent. It would simply be unthinkable for a man to conduct the fieldwork I have done. The rooms of the vakıf merkezi were open exclusively to women. Even when necessary for practical reasons (e.g., to allow male workers to enter the premises to carry out maintenance), male presence caused considerable turbulence, and the rooms in question were quickly cleared out – not only the women disappeared, but all their personal belongings as well. In a few minutes attempts were made to make the room "gender-neutral" and thereby accessible for the man and not contaminating for them. As long as there was a man present, the women did not feel comfortable. The rooms were not theirs any more. These reactions made it clear to me at an early stage of the fieldwork that the space conquered for the women's activities could easily be lost. The women accepted seeing, but not being seen, and they had to defend their rooms as their own. Visibility was indeed a result of their ambitions and efforts, but there was no desire to be exposed to the male gaze as individuals. Improper encounters were always prevented by cautious arrangements. The spatial separation was absolute at the vakıf merkezi in order to keep up respectability (*hürmet*).

However, being a woman was certainly not a sufficient criterion for acceptance when approaching a group like the vakıf. Nor is it meaningful to claim any essentialist view of womanhood and expect "women's experiences" to be shared across cultural boundaries. On the contrary, the issue of differences was at the core of many interesting conversations. To me these moments were some of the most valuable parts of the data-collecting process. In the midst of busy activities at the crowded vakıf merkezi, we had some quiet time for reflections on the varying conditions of female human beings, inside and outside Turkey. At its best, this could be described as a critical dialogue based on a mutual interest in other life-worlds than one's own. References to "faith" and statements like "only a Muslim can fully understand" became progressively rarer as the fieldwork proceeded and as I proved to have sufficient knowledge about Islam and tasavvuf. The activities of the group were never surrounded by any secrecy, and I was always welcome to join the women, on mutually negotiated terms. "Being a female made it difficult for me to assume a non-situated perspective on the society, or rather to mistake a situated perspective for an 'objective' one", Lila Abu-Lughod writes in her essay "Fieldwork of a Dutiful Daughter" (1988:158). With the vakıf women my position was never confused with that of a spiritual seeker, a misunderstanding which existed during my very first contacts with the Halveti Cerrahi order (described in the introduction to this book). A conclusive difference between the groups was of course the fact that at the vakıf merkezi I was the only foreign visitor, whereas at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke there were Westerners floating in and out every day to watch the rituals, many of them with extensive experiences of the smorgasbord of New Age.

Nevertheless, as a Scandinavian woman I still represented "the West" (*Batı*): why did I pay any attention to their rituals when I was not a Muslim? From the beginning, I tried hard to explain the intentions of my study in detail, never pre-

tending to be a potential convert. Instead of trying to become invisible and move about as part of the group, I did not attempt to hide my purpose, and instead tried to be what I in fact was: a temporary guest intending to write a book about the women and their rituals. Despite the friendships that developed it can never be denied that in every formal sense the women of the vakıf were the objects of my study, and I was never a member of the group. In my view, acceptance of this fact was not a hindrance to conducting qualitative interviews. Quite the opposite: this circumstance was conducive to the development of a relaxed relationship, based on an interest in difference from both sides, in a study completely dependent on co-operation with the group. My fieldwork was carried on over long periods of participation during which I shared in everyday life as well as in major events such as religious holidays, public fund-raising meetings outside the vakıf merkezi, and so on. In order to maintain the limits of the fieldwork, I tried to restrict contacts to the concerns of the vakıf and not confuse those concerns with what went on in the private worlds of the members. The fact that the core group spent so much time at their shared apartment made this distinction easier to observe. The individuals who were my informants remain unnamed out of respect for their integrity as well as a consequence of the focus of the study. I met with the women as Islamist activists of a vakıf, not primarily as daughters, wives, students, or professionals. Going to the vakıf was a shared feature. The place was no one's home. It was a special place for special meetings. Many circumstances surrounding the project were in a state of flux (politics, economics, and activism), but the spatial settings for our meetings were always fixed.

A researcher who seeks advice in the anthropological debates of the last decade when experiencing the many dilemmas of fieldwork, will find himself/herself in even deeper waters. With few exceptions, critique of the production of knowledge, rather than inquiries into the art of fieldwork, has dominated the debate (Moore 1994). A lot of postmodern emphasis has been on the issue of text production out of the field "at home", and position, location, and representativeness have been prominent in discussions. One attempt to deal with issues involving gender and anthropological representation is found in Lila Abu-Lughod's introduction to *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993), where she combines her insights into local circumstances with the theoretical understandings of Academe. She writes at length about the "set of theoretical concerns about the politics of representation" (1993:7). Rather than turning it into a question of the anthropologist's self, Abu-Lughod approaches the problem as a matter of ideology.

In attempts to avoid ossified images and simplistic explanations, the dialogic nature of fieldwork has been stressed over and over again, as discussed more than ten years ago by James Clifford in his critical survey of ethnographic writing: "Understood literally, participant observation is a paradoxical, misleading formula, but it may be taken seriously if reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation" (1988:34). Initially this was a much-needed discussion and critique of naive empiricism in ethnographic studies, but

in some cases the explorations ended in a blind alley of reflexivity. The studies tended to deal more with the anthropologist than with the individuals, groups or society studied. However, long-term fieldwork in a more or less limited location is highly dependent on certain significant events: through what person is the researcher introduced, what networks does the introducer belong to, what are his/her own loyalties and controversies? After the initial period of mutual interest, the premises of the study are often shaken, in one way or another, by events that illuminate circumstances that were invisible at the beginning. Although upsetting, the process through which these relations are revealed is often one of the keys to a deeper understanding of the studied field.

Fieldwork is as much a provoked situation as a provocative one. Power and power differences work reciprocally, and two aspects of the matter will be emphasised here. The relationship between the fieldworker and the field itself is an ambiguous business. Kirsten Hastrup has discussed how female anthropologists have not always been identified as "woman" among local women, but have instead been categorised as a third gender, a new fieldwork identity (1992). During the preliminary fieldwork at the institutionalised order, I was immediately invited to the şeyh's quarter – an honour most female Cerrahi dervişes could only dream of. Being an honorary male (that is, a visiting woman who is allowed to enter male space and who to a great extent behaves like a man) was not necessary in the present mono-gendered milieu. Rather, it was my non-Muslim identity that made me into an exotic other in the eyes of the vakıf women. Many studies testify to the pressures on the fieldworker to conform to local gender norms, describing how female researchers are forced to submit to radical changes in dress and behaviour. This has never been the case for me in the present study. I covered my head at the vakıf when the women prayed or when we visited mosques together. Otherwise I was uncovered, and I always used what I regarded as everyday clothes and never felt any pressure that I had to wear anything special to fit in. The women-focused environment entailed a freedom for me in the sense that no matter how unfamiliar my behaviour or questions might seem at times, they were never observed by men (which would have been harmful either for my honour or for the women in charge of me) and therefore did not bother the women. In an urban environment such as Istanbul there is enough social space for an uncovered female academic to dwell among covered women. This freedom for me was part of the same structural changes that have opened new fora for women's religious activism.

More crucial in relation to my work has been the discussion of power relations connected to the authority of ethnographic description, and the awareness of how knowledge is always situated – and thereby gendered (Haraway 1991). In accepting and accommodating that awareness, however, I am mindful of Henrietta Moore's timely warning: "There is a particular danger in discussing situated knowledges: in acknowledging the importance of alterity and diffraction in their constitution and conceptualization, one slips too easily into an unthought dialectic of opposition which is the negativity of difference"

(1994:6). Power and unequal relations in fieldwork are particularly manifest whenever marginalised or poor people are studied, and this has been a major concern in anthropological debate. Solidarity work with a politically sensitive attitude has been an important part in the development of feminism as a political strategy, as well as in the construction of gender theory as an analytical tool. Feminists and gender-orientated researchers have attempted to develop more qualitative fieldwork along with experiments in "empowering methods" of representing their analyses (Wolf 1996:25f.). Voicing has emerged as a key term and is regarded as bridging the gap between political struggle and theorising. "My wish to listen to others is not simply a kind of liberal impulse to listen to everyone. Rather, it is to contribute to a creation of a theory which is not blind to difference", Morwenna Griffiths writes in *Feminisms and the Self* (1995:32). In such emancipatory projects, within the field of feminist anthropology, the loyal attitude would often prevail: "[F]or the [feminist] ethnographer that means being aware of domination in the society being described and in the relationship between the writer (and readers) and the people being written about" (Abu-Lughod 1993:5). To some extent the answer to many questions has been sought in attempts to write from the inside, dangerously close to essentialism. Kirin Narayan, herself an "insider", has forcefully argued that neither inside nor outside can compensate for the "quality of relations" and long-term field studies (1993:671). Furthermore, she sensitively remarks that the very conviction of the existence of insiders and outsiders rests on the conception of "us" and "them".

Postmodern/poststructuralist critique has questioned simplifying political solutions, signifying a shift from changing the world to constructing worlds where either–or is replaced by both–and; but it has also opened the door for an indefinite relativism. In any case, studies incorporating abundant empirical material tend to sharpen the theoretical edges. As an example of research from the field of studies of religions that takes the fieldwork debate into account while keeping the deepening understanding of local expression in focus, Janice Boddy's study of spirit possession and healing, *Wombs and Alien Spirits : Women, Men and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (1989), might be mentioned; another is Caroline Humphrey's (with Urgunge Onon) *Shamans and Elders : Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols* (1996).

The extensive focus on representation has come in for criticism from other scholars. Karla Poewe writes: "Fieldwork assumes a metonymic structure, when it is experienced by the anthropologist as the actualization of the cultural schema or 'the world' of the other in the anthropologist's life and world view through a series of happenings" (1993:193). She distinguishes between two types of ethnographies: experimental (focusing on language and text) and experiential (the anthropologist's self as a source), expressing her fears as to what will result from the blurring of the link between observable reality and the text.

Every instance of fieldwork is a unique situation based on an interplay between closeness and distance. All scholars who have been involved in fieldwork know that there are a number of problems relating to responsibility and

respect. The problem goes in two directions: towards the people from whom the scholars are learning and towards the academic reader, as stressed by Lila Abu-Lughod in her intention to "write against culture" (1993:6ff.). This is a theoretical stand against cultural essentialism as well as against cultural relativism. Presenting individual women's full-length stories, Abu-Lughod avoids generalisations by organising them in conventional analytic categories known to the academic reader: patrilineality, polygyny, reproduction, patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage, and honour and shame. Owing to this mode of narrating, her book is neither a collection of short stories nor a set of stereotypical accounts, but a thorough analysis of how differences between women are articulated in a small Egyptian community. The living conditions are to a great extent shared, but individual interpretations differ and Abu-Lughod approaches the interplay between normative structure and individual expressions in her analysis.

Doing fieldwork on rituals draws us closer to some central questions about representation and positionality. Is it necessary to join the ritual to be able to supply an exhaustive account and analysis of it? Is the only alternative that of being a cold-eyed observer who documents quantitative data through every possible technical medium? As the last section will attempt to indicate, the present study does not adopt either of these stances.

An Encounter and Its Transformations

Towards the end of the fieldwork, while visiting a women's meeting-place for religious education, I found myself in a room one side of which was covered with religious decorations (mainly brought back from pilgrim tours to Mekke (*hac*) or show-off gifts from wealthy emigrated relatives in Germany) whereas the other was lined with bookshelves containing Kurans, selections from the classic *hadis* editions, collections of interpretation (*tefsir*) by famous Sufi şeyhs, Said Qutb and other Islamist classics (in Turkish) along with university textbooks by Foucault, Habermas, and Sontag. A prayer-meeting had just finished in an adjacent room and now the participants were relaxing, drinking tea and chatting. The hot topic of the week was the upcoming trial of Istanbul's mayor Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan (who was charged with Islamist agitation and incitement to rebellion) and the daily demonstrations in his favour. At the same time a teenage girl was zapping with the remote control between the Islamist Kanal 7 and Kral (the Turkish answer to MTV), where Madonna's latest video was being shown. The girl sang along for a while, then pushed the buttons again and the screen gave us a glimpse of a Chechen *şeriat* execution on the news from the national television company.

The blend of political topics, intense prayer, pop music, and social networking together with the ease with which the women moved in between the activities, efficiently planning new Kuran lessons and food distribution to the poor as well as spreading information about new demonstrations, seemed to bother

no one except me, the note-taking outsider. The flow of information, ideas, sounds, and pictures was obviously a manageable part of the women's everyday life.

This particular gathering took place in 1997. It is interesting to speculate on how different the scene would have been only twenty years before. Prayer meetings in secluded places for women only certainly occurred, while other aspects of the ambience are novelties: women who cross the megacity to be able to attend meetings, the presence of political debate, and, perhaps most important, religious women in charge of activism with an immediate impact on their local life. The setting is no longer solely domestic areas or even the city, but the global context. Considering the fact that there are many more of this kind of women's circles, the influence they exercise is not limited to the immediate vicinity.

"Woman" is hardly a distinct analytical category. Every individual woman has her particular family connections, social status, and contacts of her own which, taken altogether, play a role in the construction of her everyday relations. It is not the purpose of this study to present personal life stories, but to show how the group functioned as a minor organisation that must to a large extent be seen as part of a major movement in contemporary Turkey. This book constitutes an attempt to avoid the tendency to view religious communities as exclusively religious. Faith is not the only rationale when it comes to explaining the activities of pious people. Academic studies sometimes lay such stress on religion that other dimensions of human life tend to fade away. My own interest in how religious life is influenced by urbanity emanates from the very character of the fieldwork. It has been as far from the classic anthropological village study as anything could be. The urban setting dictated the conditions for my work, just as it did for the activism of the vakıf. Hours on buses and boats, waiting for latecomers, and planning to avoid traffic jams were all part of the everyday experience of data collection. Doğan Kuban reminds us of the city's expansion: "The complexity and 'entropy' of Istanbul is much greater than that of any medium-sized European country (e.g. Austria)" (1993:10).

During the last decade, Islamist women have gained access to social and political platforms, thereby obtaining a new visibility in society. The young and active in Turkey developed their own rules in the 1990s; they were more independent of paternal authority and possessed greater knowledge of the outside world. The women of the vakıf were locally well known, but in an ambiguous position – not because of the nature of their programmes, but because of the dimensions of what they did. During a few years in the 1990s, the activities among these particular women grew from private house meetings to major events advertised in public. In relation to taxation legislation, the concept of vakıf indicates that the women's group was a non-profit organisation; but in a religious context vakıf is a significant term with a long history in Muslim tradition. A substantial part of the education and charity carried out at the major mosque complexes in the Ottoman period used to be organised with

endowments for various special purposes as the basis for activities. This historical background is also hinted at in the name given to the endowment at the heart of the present study. The last part of the name was *ilim ve hizmet vakfı*, meaning the endowment for knowledge and charity (or service). The name was certainly a proper label for the central activities of the group. This type of contribution is part of the late modern public expression of religion and religious attitudes and considered proper for women. A conscious indication of theological affiliation was also apparent in the choice of name that stands out as a clear self-definition. In a Sufi context, both terms – *ilim* and *hizmet*– are charged with historical and legendary legitimacy. It was difficult to attack women who devoted themselves to the service of their neighbours in the name of Allah.

The importance of the form of the organisation as such should not be underestimated. The endowment gave the women independence and opportunity to accumulate capital to be invested in new projects that were on a larger scale, both culturally and financially. In a district where derviş lodges are part of the historical environment and where Sufi practices have been kept up, albeit under more or less clandestine forms, even during the heyday of Kemalism, the women distinguished themselves as members of a *cemaat* or *meclis* association. They were not organised as an order, tarikat, they stated with emphasis. Both terms *cemaat* and *meclis*, meaning group or society in a very broad sense, are sometimes used to indicate a religious group of a fairly formalised character. In contrast to the tarikat concept, however, neither term says anything about the ambitions of the group.

The initial contact with the small group that forms the core of the current study was more or less incidental and totally dependent on contacts made at the well-established Sufi order. I certainly cannot claim that I picked out the women concerned according to any strict criteria; rather, I was invited as a guest by two young women I had met at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke who were at that time also attending pious meetings of a private character, meetings which would later, after an internal split, be formalised as an endowment. In my memory, this contingent meeting with the group has always been coloured by my observations of the institutionalised tarikat during my first contact with Sufism in contemporary Turkey. The fact that I had been accepted at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke assured the women that I had some point of reference in the local Muslim world and that my interests were something more than a passing fancy. Yet the road to the women's own meetings was not straight; it was dependent on personal sympathies and trust.

Through contacts arranged by Professor Geels, I was welcomed and taken care of by a representative of the Halveti Cerrahi order during my first visit to Istanbul in search of Sufi women in the autumn of 1993. A man in his late sixties, he was apparently appointed to keep up contacts with non-Turks who had shown an interest in the order's activities, and I recognise him in other descriptions of the Halveti Cerrahi order. Despite zealous expressions of interest in my project, I

found it difficult to get in touch with the ordinary women of the order. Like all guests of honour, I was invited to spend most of my time at the tekke in the presence of the şeyh, except during prayer time when the spatial gender division was absolute. There was always something else going on in the şeyh's room that was thought to be better for me to attend than staying with the women, in relation to the prominent male dervişes or among the non-Turkish visitors (mainly from Europe and the US, either converts or temporary guests with a general interest).

Late one Thursday evening at the end of this period of preliminary fieldwork at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke, I started to talk with some young women while waiting for the zikir to start. They differed from the rest of the women at the gallery in wearing full black *çarşaf*, the long very wide coat that completely covers the head and neck (Norton 1997). Some of the women had tied the *çarşaf* under their noses so that their mouths were not visible, and some wore black gloves to hide their hands from the public gaze. They were all friends from the technological university and more or less temporary guests at the Cerrahi tekke in Karagümrük. One of them was a more frequent guest, as she appreciated the practice of zikir very much. In contrast to most other young women at the tekke, these students did not arrive together with family members; they kept together in a group of their own. As Thursday meetings tended to last long, moving around outdoors late at night without a male relative to accompany them – despite the fact that they lived in the vicinity – made them balance on the verge of what was considered proper behaviour. Because of the noise and crowdedness in the women's gallery our conversation was interrupted, and two of the young students suggested that we should meet the next day over a glass of tea. So we did. Coming directly from their classes at the university, they wore not the all-black garment but discreetly patterned headscarves and long coats in pale colours. Both of them spoke good English, and they were apparently accustomed from university to explaining their Muslim faith and discussing it with people from outside the community of conscious Islamists. Nevertheless, all three of us were rather shy, and we carried on a conversation in a very polite mode – and nothing much was really said. After this halting daytime conversation one of them said to me as we were breaking up: "By the way, we sometimes get together with some other young women and practise zikir. Do you want to come along on Sunday?" I realised that this was a kind of meeting that would be more in line with my interests than the male-dominated tarikat life with all its ceremonial courtesies that kept me away from the ordinary Cerrahi women. It was quickly decided that we would meet the coming Sunday outside the Fatih post office and continue to this women's zikir meeting together. That was my first encounter with the women with whom I was to do my future fieldwork.

Opportunities for Public Appearance

The following Sunday afternoon, we duly met and the women took me to a private apartment some few blocks away. I was cordially welcomed and did not feel as an intruder, as the fifteen women present did not seem to be old-time acquaintances but a combination of women from various circles who had come together for zikir. Most participants turned out to be students. The hostess appeared to be the leader of the group and the Sunday meeting had been an established custom for some time. She had arranged the meeting and was also the head of prayers and ceremonies. From the moment I was introduced I was distinctly and continually given to understand that the women were not acting on their own behalf – they were the followers of a spiritual leader. He had been dead for two and a half years, they told me, but they still felt guided by him and paid their respects at his grave. At the time the most frequently used title of honour was *öğütçü*, counsellor or adviser. This choice, as will be discussed later, had a dual direction.

The immediate impression was that these women at the gathering were more autonomous and open than the women in the tekke environment had been, and they impressed me with the easygoing and accessible atmosphere that characterised their meetings. Indeed, their independence was always striking. Perhaps the radical difference from the tarikat in terms of women assuming full social and religious/ritual responsibility for the event is misleading me into constructing a romantic image, though I am aware of the authoritarian aspects of the Muslim resurgence in Turkey. Yet compared to the tarikat milieus I had visited, this informal group appeared remarkable from the beginning. There were no formalised hierarchies in accordance with Sufi conventions. The traditional Turkish respect for age (especially in a mono-gendered environment) was emphasised, rather than spiritual or social rank. Although the prayer meetings had their leaders and most of the active women had their given duties in order to keep the meetings running, most of the women present could speak freely during meetings, to add a cause to pray for or to raise questions during the instructive conversations and sermon-like speeches held by one of the women in order to give participants some basic religious education.

The character of the meeting was at the crossroads between traditional women's meetings, when a woman with a certain prestige and sufficient economic resources arranges a gathering, and the more recent form when women are brought together by a specific religious interest, not necessarily involving initial family or friendship ties. It was university and students associations that had connected many of the younger women. Several of the somewhat older women (in their late forties and fifties) knew one another (more or less well) from various kinds of religious activism in the district. Some of the older ones were well known from charity work, Kuran classes, and in some cases activities with links to the İskender Paşa Camii, the major Nakşbendi centre in the Fatih district. It later turned out that some of them had practised zikir for a long time in a variety of constellations, private and within tarikats. The women

strongly emphasised from the beginning that they did not constitute a tarikat and that they opposed the hierarchical character of the orders. When asked, they answered that their type of group could be called *cemaat* and insisted on the term as an Arabic (*Arapça*) concept. At first I understood this as a linguistic statement and in terms of etymology; but later I realised that it was meant and used as an assurance of the activists' stable grounding in the Sunna (*Sünnet*) of Muhammed as expressed in the Kuran and other normative literature (*hadis*). They identified themselves first and foremost as Sunni Muslims, rather than as Sufis or dervişes. What is more noteworthy is the fact that the women at this stage saw themselves as a group in relation to their surroundings, and it was their collective prayer practices that kept them together as a group.

The central message delivered during the initial meeting dealt with the concept of divine love (*aşk*). This world (*dünya*) lacked love and was therefore comparable to hell, which was defined as absence of love. The middle-aged hostess described herself as a new-born Muslim. She had led the life of the world, but returned. "I have returned" (*Döndüm*), as she expressed herself; that is, she claimed to be a convert (*döndü*) to her native religion Islam, and considered this development to be her destiny, given by Allah. It was written, she said, in the *Kâlû belâ*, a manuscript in Heaven where everything that will take place is recorded from before time. In general, this first assembly had a more intellectual character than the meetings to come – not in the sense that the theological analyses were overly sophisticated, but Sufi terms were bandied about and talked of in an abstract way. The participants were also mostly university students or young professionals. Their way of taking active part in all the phases of the meeting indicated that their presence was a conscious choice. The leader obviously felt no need to reduce the substance of the conversation to everyday imagery.

The specific gathering I attended at our first encounter was not a zikir prayer; nevertheless, the meeting had a distinct Sufi feature. It started with a conversation on spiritual matters (*sohbet*). The character of the sohbet was radically different from what I had experienced during the weeks before at the Halveti Cerrahi order, where the whole event was centred on the şeyh and his statements. The raising of questions as well as the provision of answers from the şeyh were highly ritualised parts of the evening's schedule, strict and in accordance with given tracks. Only those who were directly encouraged to do so could raise questions – often guests of honour, hardly any of the ordinary dervişes.[8] The

8. The conversation room (*sohbet odası*) at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke was, in principle, a mono-gendered room. Though, crowded during meetings, the seating was structured according to status, with the şeyh at the centre. He sat at the centre of the room on the floor on a seat of kelim cushions made comfortable for him and with a small tray table where papers and sweets for distribution were placed. The dervişes sat in concentric circles in front of him. Some had been appointed to the duty of serving tea and sweets to the şeyh and the participants. On a kelim-covered sofa along the wall, a few female guests (mostly foreign visitors and hardly ever any ordinary female Turkish member of the order) sat as honorary males.

room was in any case too small to accommodate all participants at the tekke, and the majority stayed outside in the other rooms. The women on the gallery one floor up had no chance to follow the sohbet.[9] Among the women in the crammed room of the apartment meeting, the conversation was lively; most guests participated actively under the supervision of the hostess, who clapped her hands when the noise was becoming too loud or the debate lost its direction.

The topics of conversation were obviously affected by my unexpected visit, and the women wanted to explain the basics of their spiritual master's teachings. In relation to what was to come later during the fieldwork, it is interesting to see in the notes from the meeting that the key concepts were knowledge (*ilim*) and charity (*hizmet*). The theology that was expounded was of quite a conventional Sufi character. Most of the conversation centred on the cultivation of the soul and on the goal of attaining insight into the difference between the carnal self (*nefs*) and the subtle spirit (*ruh*). According to these women, the egoism that prevails in modern societal life is best combated with Sufi training. Even though my impression was that the meeting amounted to a comparatively intellectual conversation between well-educated individuals – rather than a get-together in a group with a pronounced goal – it also bore witness to a social awareness that would become the hallmark of the later vakıf.

Because my encounter with these young women happended as the preliminary fieldwork in Istanbul was coming to an end, this was the only time I met the group in this particular constellation and at this specific flat. The women showed a profound interest in me, the reasons for my visit to Turkey, and my study of Islam. Several of the women present spoke English, some of them quite well, and there was a keen interest in explaining the activities to me. Especially two of them guided me through the meeting as interpreters, in both a linguistic and a cultural sense. Neither of them had been present at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke, but both gave me their telephone numbers as I told them it was my sincere intention to return in the summer. It later turned out that both the meeting-place and the constellation of women were temporary. When I came back in the summer of 1994, the group had been split into two, and I had to make a decisive choice. My considerations in this situation cannot be said to have been systematic, as I called both women on my return. One was reluctant and on her guard, while the other was overflowing with enthusiasm and wanted to show what she referred to as a *dergah* in honour of the deceased teacher. I was more than welcome to join them for zikir. Finally the road opened up to let me witness women who were themselves in command of tasavvuf rituals. The blend of modernity and frequent references to tradition turned out to be the first analytical obstacle to overcome.

9. Later loudspeakers were connected from the şeyh's conversation room (*sohbet odası*) to the women's gallery.

A Modern Traditional Woman. A Contradiction in Terms or a Social Reality?

The women of the vakıf definitively did not primarily define themselves as "modern women", or as part of any "modern movement"; they were more inclined to represent themselves as keepers of traditional values. *Modern* in their vocabulary was chiefly employed as a pejorative term – unless it was used in praise of new technical appliances. Their proclaimed goal was to restore what has almost been destroyed by the modern world, especially by Kemalism. The "return" they advocated was not only to religion, but correspondingly to what was conceived as a true national heritage (*öz Türk mirası*). In times of cultural fragmentation the women of the vakıf perceived themselves as guards of *tevhid*, and the key concept used when defending this position was *anane*, tradition. As Hakan Yavuz writes, "Islam has been reinterpreted and reincorporated gradually and subtly into official Turkish nationalism. This process can be seen not only as an Islamization of Turkish nationalism, but also as the Turkification of the Islamic tradition" (1998:30). Looking at the decay in the world around them, the women regarded such a tradition as indisputably Muslim, Turkish, and homogeneous. "Modernity" in this context was used as a rhetorical figure, as the name of an alien and opposed ideology that only religion could conquer. The ideological concept "the West" was set up in sharp contrast to Islamic values, the solid base of a future good society.

The women's mission prompted a return to the sources, the Kuran and the *hadis*. In that regard, they must be considered part of the current Islamist movement understood in its broadest terms. Islamism in this sense is a counter-culture movement, stressing Muslim values as the basis for the good society of the future. Various groups in Turkey are united by a strong, and yet diffuse, desire to "return to the sources" and to live like the pioneers of Islam. An image of the *selef*, the first three generations of believers representing "authentic" theology and practice, emerges from the normative literature. These characters were indisputably Arabic; but this seemed to be more of a problem for me than for my informants, who gladly integrate the *selef* in their nationalistic discourse as the pure and righteous beginning. These women did not admire the current *Zeitgeist*; indeed, they defined it as depraved and repulsive. Instead they pointed to institutions and practices which have, seen from their position, stood firm and remained unaffected by influences from Kemalism and modernisation. They built their world-view on a double historical utopia: on the Medine model from the holy scriptures (Raudvere 1998) and on images of Ottoman life. The Ottoman *millet* system (a complicated categorisation of people according to religion, in "nations", *millet*) was "typical of all pre-modern systems of social stratification by social order" (Gülalp 1999:39). It defined a person in terms of relations and duties towards family and community (Meeker 2002). Neo-Ottomanism is an obvious trend among Turkish Islamist intellectuals – as recently discussed by Hakan Yavuz – which has also spread in more general religious circles and

strengthened the nationalistic bias of Turkish Islamism. Yavuz argues: "The processes of democratization and capitalist development carried the dominant, traditional Ottoman-Islamic worldview and culture of Turkish Anatolia from the periphery to the center of the political forum" (Yavuz 1998:20).

The Women of the Vakıf. Sisters in the Metropolis

Studies of Muslim women's religious activism often tend to draw their examples from comparatively well-educated circles, especially from women who publish or otherwise take part in public debates and whose opinions are hence more accessible than those of other, less publicly active women. Islamist women at the grassroots level in Turkey are more seldom the object of academic studies and the diversity within the seemingly homogeneous category is too easily neglected (White 1997, 2000). "These [Muslim women's free associations] are not the exclusive domain of kinship and religion, but can and do mobilise political action among friends and neighbours," Jenny B. White concludes when writing on civic culture and Islam in urban Turkey (1997:152). The vakıf that was the fruit of the originally loosely connected prayer circle is an example of socially mixed associations with few connections to the female elite of the İslamist movement.

The vakıf merkezi was a strictly mono-gendered milieu, but with significant differences among participants as regards social background, level of education, and economic ability. Even so, differences were hardly ever pronounced. Age and respect for an older person were marked in social interaction and by the addition of *abla*, meaning older sister, to a fellow woman's first name. There was no simple theological or ideological model that defined positions within internal hierarchies, as is otherwise customary in Sufi circles where various serving duties are distributed under the leadership of a şeyh. In comparison to the institutionalised tarikats, there was nothing of a guild-like character in this particular women's group. When defining the group, various parameters and different perspectives can be used. The vakıf was run by and reached women of differing ages, backgrounds, and levels of education. However, an important and shared feature was their connection to the Fatih district – often through a family link, and the area as such bestowed some legitimacy on the activities as to be situated in an area known for its Muslim activism.

The women's vakıf could not be defined as an elite group. The core group was mostly recruited from the middle class and the participants in the activities of the vakıf were a very mixed clientele, as was the district where these activities took place. Not even the two women with university degrees could really be recognised as taking part in elite activities as they hardly kept up with their

10. Cf. Robins 1996:73.

11. On educated women's role in the Islamist movement in Turkey, see Sakaranaho 1998; Özdalga 1999.

friends and contacts from the university, with the exception of a few female acquaintances orientated toward Islamism. It was apparently a conscious choice on their part to direct their *hizmet* towards less educated women rather than entering a more academic debate. On the one hand, it must have entailed losing the stimuli from academic debates; on the other, the vakıf offered a unique opportunity to fulfil ambitions and ideas. In general, it seems as if Islamist women who expose themselves as individuals when taking a stand in public place themselves in a vulnerable position. Most of them become "nine-days' wonders" in relation to a specific topic or cause. Few of them stay in the public arena for any length of time, and those who do must be prepared to fight criticism and attacks from many directions. The leading women of the vakıf acted in the name of a group and hence from a more protected position. The vakıf thus functioned as a buffer zone for individual leading activists.

The vakıf was one of several women's groups in the district, in the city and in the Muslim world, and it is naturally difficult to estimate impact of any kind. Turkish Muslim women are far from united in approach or attitudes, but each group manifests women's presence, and they should not be seen as lacking influence in their local culture. More and more groups are making use of traditional media as well as the Internet. The combination of formal and informal ways of communicating and sharing information made it almost impossible to study whether and how the new Muslim women's groups interconnect. Being marginal or acting on the edge does not necessarily imply poverty in any economic or cultural sense: "The 'peripheral' groups also comprise a variety of actors. Some are 'affluent marginals', for instant students or middle-class women who experience the discrepancy between the surplus of possibilities offered by the system and the actual constraints of their social condition" (Melucci 1989:53). As the discussion about political developments showed, the spaces of "the marginals" were less affected by political shifts.

The vakıf and its activities are clearly a product of accumulated knowledge and experience from the Muslim middle class which has, after decades in the shade, been prospering during the last twenty years. The Muslim middle class in Turkey should not simply be regarded as a novelty, caused by rapid urbanisation and the development of the educational system, but as a group that was silenced during the heyday of Kemalism and has only recently become visible in mainstream society. In certain districts of the major cities, well-educated members of religious families have conveyed Muslim scholarship and learning for generations. The contemporary Islamist middle class is certainly not constituted solely of social climbers, as some secularist debaters claim; it also contains transmitters of tradition with a secure foothold in urban environments.

There is of course a risk of stipulating criteria that are either too narrow or too wide when trying to specify who the women active in the vakıf were. They could be defined in relation to their active contributions to the group or in accordance with conventional sociological parameters. The first aspect has been of more specific significance to the study, and it was also as group mem-

bers I met with the women, not as family members or at work or in any educational institution; it was only the inner circle of women who involved other family members to any extent in the services they contributed. The following is a simple sketch with the purpose of indicating the variety with regard to background, intention and effort even within a comparatively small group of a kind that could otherwise easily have been dismissed in homogenising terms. A rough categorisation of the women would suggest that there are three subgroups according to the degree of active participation: the core group, the regular visitors, and the more temporary guests.

What this study loosely defines as the core group, or inner circle, consisted of some ten women who assumed responsibility for the group as a whole and who put in at least twenty hours of work every week. The group was heterogeneous as regards education and social background, but comparatively homogeneous in terms of age (between 25 and 40). In addition to this propelling group of young women, there were four or five more senior women involved in most activities. All but one were mothers of the younger women in the core group. Through the schedule of programmes they ran under the aegis of the vakıf, they reached approximately 150 women per week, many of whom were regulars. The core group thus constituted a distinguishable circle in relation to their local community, and some of the leading women had a family history in the district with a solid base in the Muslim middle class. With that background, they had a certain economic capacity (no extravagance, but a certain wealth in terms of income, real estate, and other stable investments), and – more importantly – access to various forms of education in families where learning and education have high status. It was the values and norms of this social stratum that dominated the endeavours of the group. They took on long-term responsibility and considerable tasks for the group. It was in the core group that I had most of my informants, and it was also a more or less stable group over the years. Women of this group had contacts with other active Islamist women (professionals in publishing, teachers, lawyers, doctors etc.), although the intensity of such contacts varied. The leading women did not constitute any formal board in relation to the other women who came to the vakıf for prayer and social life, but there was a distinct difference between women who came as guests and those who looked on the vakıf merkezi as a place of their own. The activities and responsibilities among the active women were of a formal as well as a more practical nature. Some of the young women were well educated and could take charge of administrative commitments such as forms, money, accounts, and bills. The activities of the week took a lot of time from the women of the core group. At least six or seven of them spent more than 40 hours a week on their vakıf obligations, usually being occupied on all the days of the week. For young unmarried women from conservative circles, the core group spent a lot of time outside their families. However, in several cases the family, not the least mothers, took active part in the vakıf activities. As these activities were constantly increasing, more and more time and effort were put into the organisation,

making it hard to state the exact number of women that constituted the core group. In addition to the six or seven full-time members of the group, at least ten more women were regularly doing work. Many of them were students who more could easily come and work at odder hours than women with jobs and/or families. There were often days when the most active women spent more than twelve hours contributing to the vakıf, and the general feeling was that there was always more work to be done.

There was also administration, forms and the like, advertisements (printing leaflets, contacts with other organisations) to prepare, and someone had to liaise with the local municipality and to some extent the local officials of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. These tasks were of major importance to the vakıf's status. From a legal point of view, there were other institutional contacts. There had be a balance in the budget to keep the place running, to give out grants and charity, and to pay bills and so on. Both the practical and administrative functions had a formal as well as a more everyday aspect. The former was always kept in a very strict order by two of the women who assumed principal responsibility for these duties, while the latter was more practical and involved the contribution of more women who worked with interchangeable tasks. A third form of contribution to the vakıf concerned the theological aspects, didactic as well as ritual. When it came to organisation and to leading gatherings, many things had to fall into place to give the meetings a structure and maintain it, to advise on the arrangements of the different kinds of prayers and to organise the recitations from the Kuran at the vakıf merkezi. A most important task with considerable theological implications was to read from the teachings of the hoca and interpret them at the vakıf merkezi and at the more public mosque meetings.

There were especially four senior women, mothers or mothers-in-law of some of the younger active women, who did a good deal of practical work. These women were known in pious circles of the Fatih district and had participated in tasavvuf-related activities for decades. These profound experiences were of course valuable when it came to providing advice and practical knowledge (what mosques were open to women's activities, how to spread information etc.), and years ago when the now so active younger women were teenagers they were gradually socialised into this particular world of women's religious activism. The presence of the elderly women legitimated the long hours and late evenings that the younger women spent at the vakıf, and with their authority they ensured that the vakıf was a proper and decent place to frequent. This ambitious engagement on the young women's part had some further interesting consequences: sometimes women spent the night at the vakıf. This was a very sensitive topic, involving the delicate and subtle issues of honour (*şeref*) and decency (*edep*). The women were anxious to point out that "enemies" could use this fact against them and their vakıf.

The religious engagement gave the women a legitimate cause to travel in the city late at night, but not too late. Nevertheless, it was a matter of a constant

negotiation in a border zone. More astonishing than the travelling at night was the fact that some women of the core group spent the night at the vakıf merkezi. It was unthinkable for unmarried women (young or not) to stay overnight in other places than their home, with close relatives, or in the company of close relatives when travelling. The family honour would be shaken to its very foundations if it became known that a female family member had spent the night at any place with no immediate connection to the family. Sleeping at the vakıf created a new social realm for unmarried women in their mid or late twenties. Instead of being restricted to their parental home, they could extend their private sphere. At least one of the older women stayed with the younger ones to ensure respectability and took the moral responsibility for the younger ones, extending her role as a mother in this situation to include all young women present. In the bedroom used by three or four of the younger women, some of them kept personal belongings for everyday use such as clothes, books, and bags. It was almost always the same women who stayed at the vakıf merkezi, and they never left the vakıf merkezi unattended at night. They all had mothers who were active in the vakıf group and were also among those who spent the night at the vakıf. In this respect they formed a kind of a women's religious collective where they helped one another with the practical aspects of everyday life, such as meals, laundry etc., and they were connected by mutual interests and goals.

The lives of the active women were redefined, both socially and spatially, in relation to participating in the activities of the vakıf. Because of their leading position, they acquired a certain religious authority, and that authority gave them self-confidence as being reliable and responsible. In terms of commitment, their duties were comparable to a professional position. These mostly unmarried women were thus strongly connected to a place other than their parents' home. On the whole it is still unusual for single women to live on their own in Turkey. The traditional pattern has been marriage; and the few women who, for various reasons, stayed unmarried lived with their parents or their brothers' families, often with an ambiguous status. Female students preferably live at home, at some relatives' place, or in a dormitory with a good reputation. Young women may also share a flat.

For obvious reasons, there was no strict equality in the distribution of assignments within the vakıf. Within the core group, there were comparatively prestigious and intellectual tasks that could only be performed by those with higher education. But it must not be forgotten that the bulk of the duties amounted to practical work to be performed every day: cleaning and tidying the rooms of the vakıf merkezi, buying groceries and cooking, taking care of elderly visitors, making telephone calls – *hizmet* as the women understood it. When a pastry shop and a library were added to the vakıf undertakings, the core group became more dependent on volunteers.

The youth of the core-group members represents a new generation seeking recognition through their attainments. They were educated, not married off

early, and financially supported by their families. Thus they had the time and opportunity to be engaged in the vakıf and to engage others, young and old, in meaningful occupations.

The second group with a relation to the vakıf comprises the regular visitors to the activities. Many of these young women went to some kind of school, some of them to university. Some of the regular visitors were passive participants, while others contributed in various ways. Another difference in relation to the core group concerns the question whether the relevant activity took place at the vakıf merkezi or outside in various mosques. Some women who were frequent participants at the mosque meetings never attended any other of the vakıf's programmes. In some cases it was well known that they were affiliated with other groups which competed with the vakıf for attention; in other cases women seemed to prefer the more neutral ground of a mosque to the more controversial space of the vakıf merkezi. The latter always stood out as something deliberately constructed as the women's own place. Most of these more or less regular visitors came from the Fatih district or other adjacent neighbourhoods. Few outside the core group travelled far to reach the vakıf merkezi.

The results of the present fieldwork underline differing attitudes between the generations. The smallest group was middle-aged women, and they were also the least active in terms of ideological agency. The older women tended to dominate daytime meetings on workdays, and as an afternoon meeting continued until early evening, more and more young women entered on their way from school or work. Younger women also more often just popped by for a short visit on their way to or from another appointment. The pace at which things were arranged and decided, the number of commitments, and the distances travelled across the city were also clearly age-related. At weekends more activities were geared specifically to the young. On Sunday afternoons, there were special programmes for teenagers, or youngsters (*gençlik*); but in general it seems as if the activities of the vakıf mainly attracted young women from the age of twenty and above.

There were also temporary and infrequent guests who constitute the third group of visitors. These women perhaps accompanied a friend out of curiosity, or were interested in a particular programme only. However, the importance of this less regular group should not be underestimated, since it was participants in between the different groups that formed the local narratives of what went on in the district's associations. In this sense such women executed a form of control, and they were sometimes met with a certain degree of suspicion. There was always a slight anxiety in the air about how the word was spread. Some women were talked of as gossip-mongers, whereas others were accepted as "searchers" moving in between groups with varying theological and ritual persuasions.

Keeping Knowledge In Trust. The Purpose of the Vakıf

As noted above, the vakıf's intellectual background in the Muslim middle class was apparent, especially through one of the families involved in the project. This family provided one of the senior women and two of the better-educated young women of the core group. The senior woman was remarkably well educated for a woman active in religious circles from a generation when the choice was either to enter higher education or to live an *edepli* traditional life as a daughter and later a wife. Despite her training, she never led a professional life. Her authority and trustworthiness were based on the respect for age in the traditional value system; along with her refined manners, this made her a suitable person to engage in contacts with different representatives. In her family line there were several generations of Islamic scholars (*ulema*). The members of this particular family testified to the fact that learning and skills from the secular education system, such as the level of spoken and written Turkish as well as fluency in English, were regarded as commendable. Perhaps the circumstance that they were from the higher educated middle class should therefore receive emphasis equal to that put on the specifically Muslim element in the family's education. These more educated women had brought with them a learned tradition (*ilim*) and a great knowledge of Muslim traditions. They were comparatively well orientated in written theological traditions such as *hadis*, *tefsir*, and contemporary pious tracts, and they possessed knowledge about the variety of papers and magazines that published arguments for competing positions within the Islamic movement. This access to the traditional normative literature opened up new modes of constructing arguments.

In the vakıf context, knowledge was a key symbol of authority – especially fluency in Arabic, which entailed independence in relation to male interpreters and status during prayer meetings. Few of the women had received any formal religious education, and those who had were also the most important members of the group as transmitters. They could teach good pronunciation when reciting the Kuran or articulating prayer phrases correctly. These women also had more than reading/recitation ability and were able to comprehend the content of the sures; in addition, they were fluent enough in Arabic to study the *hadis* and classics in theological literature.

The formal way of acquiring confessional learning was through the eight grades of the İmam Hatip colleges or at the university faculties of theology (*ilâhiyat*). In Istanbul, both Istanbul University and Marmara University have institutionalised theological studies. Especially the former was prestigious in the context of the fieldwork. Only two of the younger women had attended an İmam Hatip school for a degree, and none of them had studied theology at university. Although one young woman (with an İmam Hatip degree) had the ambition to take up academic studies in tasavvuf theology at an *ilâhiyat* faculty, her plans were constantly being laid aside because of her heavy responsibilities for the

vakıf. Learned women in the formal sense were still an exception, though lack of formal religious education was no gauge of the actual knowledge an individual woman had acquired. Rather, it served as an indication of what spaces in intellectual life religious women still had difficulties in entering, not because of formal prohibitions but because of general conceptions as to what was considered *edepli* and what the male members of her family deemed necessary.

The informal way of acquiring learning depends on the knowledge that is at hand in local traditions (how to perform the zikir prayer, for instance); consequently, it varies a great deal. Such learning also opens up for a discussion of what is considered superstition (*batıl inanç*) and what is not. This was also the major difference between those in the *cemaat* who had been brought up as members of the Muslim middle class (most of them in Fatih) and the so-called newborns, people who had – using the the local expression – "gone back to their roots" (*köklere döndük*) without really being acquainted with them. It was apparent that those socialised into a more reflexive attitude towards tradition, through Muslim and secular education alike, were also better able to negotiate with people holding other theological positions than their own, and they were stronger and more conscious in their interpretations.

There was mediation within the group with its regular lessons (*ders* and sohbet), informal discussions, and transmission of bodily behaviour. Yet there were other sources of informal religious learning with relevance for women who came into contact with the group. Pious women's magazines were widely spread, at least in urban areas, and one copy could have many readers, as the journals were circulated among friends and relatives (Güneş-Ayata 1991).

The most influential in Fatih were *Mektup* ("Letter") and *Kadın ve Aile* ("Women and Family"), both women's monthly journals closely connected to the Nakşbendi tarikat and their women's organisations. The first one was regarded as "radical" within the vakıf group, and when asked for specification my informants said that the journal – through its influential editor, Emine Şenlikoğlu – advocated the all-black *çarşaf* outfit. No other comment was offered to me, and I took it as an indication that *Mektup* was thought of as too authoritarian. Both journals are very much like the secular weeklies in structure and disposition, focusing on individual persons through interviews, constructing celebrities, answering readers' queries, and so on. In terms of religious education, they could be characterised as agitational rather than learned. None of these magazines was fully embraced by the core group and never openly available at the vakıf merkezi, nor was any printed material – journals, pamphlets, instructions etc. – from any other organisation or publisher. Only what was produced by the vakıf was on offer.

In informal fora, knowledge was mostly transmitted through personal contacts. As will be seen below, the organising of didactic conversation meetings, sohbets, as a vital part of the weekly programme, constituted the first step towards an opportunity for more formalised Muslim education for women who would otherwise not have had access to such training. This is an example of a

skilful way of building up intellectual courage and sovereignty within a small community with missionary ambitions. After a while, the one who learns will be the one who can teach some fundamentals, or at least assist the leader of the sohbet or the Kuran class. There is gendered space in the production of knowledge, and there is a door to be passed for both entrance and exit.

Knowledge, and the question of what was recognised as knowledge rather than mere superstition, was the veritable glass ceiling that marked how far the women of the vakıf could go when attempting to gain influence in their neighbourhood. Being knowledgeable meant: first, having access to what was locally considered to be knowledge; second, being recognised as learned; and third, being accepted as a suitable person to transmit religious knowledge.

No other semantic field played a role comparable to that comprising knowledge, learning, being learned, and teaching. There was a span from teaching in its most fundamental and technical sense to the emblematic centre of all vakıf activities, the hoca himself. Few other things could be said to be a root paradigm within the group for theology and rituals as well as social practice. Viewed from several angles of Turkish society, knowledge is a highly charged concept. Conflicting ideological traditions not only have their own ideas as to what the concept should comprise, but also differing terminologies for referring to the kind of knowledge that is indicated. From a Kemalistic point of view, educational programmes are, and have always been, the basis for the ideal development of a modern nation protected by the secular state. Education is an important factor in this highly ideological definition of modernity and its war against religion as embodying ignorance and a lack of rationality. Implicitly, too, such secular education is targeted against religion, at least traditional forms of religion. In the secularist paradigm, raised levels of education meant a decline of religion.

In most confessional interpretations of Islam, the theological view is that knowledge is one road to salvation. Human beings were given their intellects in order to use them. From this world (*dünya*), which is by definition a wicked place, individuals can still achieve both knowledge and experience that lead to Allah. In many local environments the theological language distinguishes between *ilim*, the trustworthy eternal religious knowledge independent of human experience, and *bilgi*, knowledge that emanates from experience and systematisation. The latter is what is considered to distinguish man and culture from animals and nature; in modern Turkish, the term – significantly enough – stands for "science" as well.

The conflict between the two concepts of knowledge was not emphasised and absolutely not presented as constituting a contradictory element in the political situation where the fieldwork was conducted. Both concepts were seen as based on Muslim values, as opposed to the worldly knowledge taught at schools and universities, understood by my informants in its most positivist and materialist way. The choice of the indication *ilim* in the name of the vakıf was no coincidence. In the context of the vakıf, *ilim* stood for the basic religious education offered. It was considered an invitation (*davet*) or mission (*dava*) to the younger

generation, whose members were deeply affected not only by the Kemalistic school system but also by the increasingly profound influence of Westernism. With their special meetings for youngsters, the women wanted to save them and bring them back to the true religion (*özel din*). The second meaning of *ilim* within the vakıf community was connected to the dissemination of the hoca's spiritual teachings.

As a third point, there was the Sufi concept of knowledge. The following lines are to a great extent a generalisation, but it must be remembered that it was a very generalised tasavvuf theology that was taught, with few if any references to the classical Sufi masters. Sufi tradition has a special vocabulary relating to various degrees of insight and personal spiritual development differentiated into seven stages (*yedi makam*). In tasavvuf theology, knowledge is not merely an epistemological concept; knowledge is also concretely expressed in the relationship between the şeyh and the disciple. To a very large extent it is a male paradigm, supported by the organisation of the tarikats and their hierarchies as well as by the formalised introduction to ritual life (*vird* and zikir). All this is woven into a web under the name of secrecy imbued with legendary history. Discursively the hidden knowledge, the search and sudden revelation, plays a crucial role in many Sufi narratives. There are numerous variations of certain motifs, such as that of the man who finds a key and proceeds to look for the door to which the key fits. The recurrent theme is the untiring struggle, the inquiry into similar (but not identical) variants of the solution.

Marifet is yet another term for knowledge, geared towards individual experience an insight gained through training on the Sufi path (*yol*). With its esoteric and personal aspects, it is often used by the Sufis as a contrast to the "dry" *ilim*.

Encountering the Global – and Sharing In It

Discussing the conditions of globalisation in relation to Muslim women in the early twenty-first century, we may ask, with Alan Scott (1997), whether globalisation should be characterised as a social process or as political rhetoric. Is it an analytical concept or an ambiguous metaphor in praise or condemnation of a worldwide free-market economy?

In order to take a closer look at the framework of globalisation, especially in relation to small local groups, we must be able to approach – not answer – the question where globalisation actually takes place. The posing of this question certainly does not amount to denying that there are processes of change, commonly referred to under the term "globalisation", that *de facto* take place and influence both macro and micro levels of community life in every corner of the world. But what are products of globalisation, and what is productive of globalisation (Roseneil 1997:5)? Questions of that kind bring up issues of a quite paradoxical character.

The emphasis on opportunities and limitations in the heading is not only an

attempt to focus on gender; it also raises issues involving the repercussions of social status and access to education in relation to globalisation. In addition, the ensuing discussion queries the conventional image of women as victims of processes such as urbanisation and globalisation. Instead of using a regretful undertone, this account views religious women activists as an operative part of these changes. They may not always employ the expected mode of communication, preferring new fora that are not so easily detected. Once I was asked at a seminar whether I thought of these women's groups as "really important" to the development of Turkish society. The answer is obviously a question of perspective. The public emergence of religious women in an increasingly complex society has a certain accumulative effect. Little by little, groups that not long ago were quite marginal are now incorporated in the mainstream, and the new media are not as easily controlled – neither by state authorities nor by male family members. In order to approach the issues of access, visibility, and mobility, the following discussion aims – among other things – "to locate postmodern culture in a context of disorganized capitalism, of consumer society and cultural mass production" (Turner 1990:5), adding some Turkish examples.

When globalisation is discussed, key words such as access, volume, and speed are frequently pronounced. In the milieu described in the current study, the world was certainly pouring in by way of the media and visitors' narratives, and there were conspicuous reactions and responses to what is elsewhere referred to as the global flow. In poor areas, too, often viewed – to the biased eye – as homogeneous, there are options for variety in religious life. Different Muslim associations compete for attention and support with various theological and ideological programmes (Manger 1999). On the other hand, not everything that comes after high modernity is pluralism: what the nowadays so visible religious groups teach is often quite authoritarian, more or less radical, Islamist universalism.

To put the paradox into other words: there are parallel processes among the religious groups in contemporary Turkey. There is a striving for homogenisation, at least on a discursive level, although there are widely differing opinions about what the content of "the Muslim alternative" should be. Yet there are also frequent calls for the right to religious diversity. The most striking example is perhaps the increasing Alevi consciousness. Although a highly heterogeneous group, distinctive Alevi debaters and groups present themselves as an alternative to mainstream Sunni orthodoxy and as being in religious and political opposition to the establishment, be it secular or Sunni (Vorhoff 1994). The Alevis pronounce a counter-narrative against the grand narratives of both Turkish nationalism and Islamism. There are also rifts within Sunnism. The traditional tarikats, not least the Nakşbendis, have always belonged to influential political circles. Today various Sufi groups, most notably the Nurcus and groups associated with Fethulla Gülen, have taken political stands against the Islamist Refah/Fazilet Partisi. Along with these comparatively large and public groups, there are numerous associations of a more or less formal character that make

the Muslim map of Turkey quite motley. In the ongoing ideological combat over the direction which the Muslim movement should take, the women of the vakıf were, from the perspective of their local community, empowered. They had opportunities to organise their activities and access to mosques and *mescit*s where they could hold meetings. However, they were not claiming power in any general political sense.

As an additional critique of the often advanced privatisation thesis,[11] it must be remembered that women's religious activism in Turkey is more public than ever – not only in the formal sense, through organisations and meetings, but also through the very presence of women expressing religious values through dress code and behaviour at all levels of society. The variations of the female *tesettür*, decent garb, are relevant in this context: minor details – buttons, pleats, reveres, stripes, and cut, not to mention colour of the coat and whether or not the headscarf is patterned – tell a lot about the wearer and the group(s) she is associated with. Even the most resolute Kemalist must admit that "religious people" cannot be dismissed as a single category, and all of them are certainly not country people (*köylüler*).

In his discussion on how technical, economic, and political modernity run into spheres of various character, Johan Fornäs emphasises social movements as instruments of exchange between individual lifeworlds and systems (1995:49ff.).

Mobility and Visibility

Further examples will show that there is a striking new mobility for religious women, and hence also a new visibility. Not long ago, the home of a woman's own family – or of close relatives and friends – was the given arena for her collective religious activities. The local mosque was scarcely a woman's place. For many women, a visit to a saint's shrine (*zaviye*) on a minor pilgrimage together with a women's group or with the extended family was the only time they entered space exclusively set aside for religious use. Everyday religious life was mainly performed in homes, one's own or others'.

The changes in women's religious arenas have a harsh economic background. Because of rapid urbanisation, women in all strata of society work outside their homes to a much larger extent than before. They are thus of necessity exposed to lifestyles and attitudes that are not represented in their own families. They meet groups whose members have a professional life while being able to follow the rules of *edep* and use the code of *tesettür*. There is no necessary correlation between employment and not leading a religious life. Quite the opposite; the comparatively activistic Muslim groups are well orientated in the urban landscape. Women move extensively to go to work and to participate in reli-

11. For further discussions of secularisation and privatisation, see Robertson 1992:85ff.; Beyer 1994:70ff.; Turner 1994:80ff.; Davison 1998:134ff.

gious activities, and they have become used to moving around in cities by means of public transport. They also have – albeit limited – money of their own to spend on religious activities. This new visibility runs counter to the routine dichotomy public–private, men–women that is prevalent in many secularisation/modernisation theories. Modernisation (in terms of widespread education, urbanisation, professional careers etc.) has made women's religious life more public, and the late modern reaction against the large-scale programmatic secularisation campaigns has created new space for women (Göle 1997a).

II

GÖNENLI'S GROUP
Sufi Women Constructing Rooms of Their Own

From a Circle of Friends to an Established Endowment

What had been a circle of friends meeting in a private home changed between the preliminary fieldwork and the second encounter with the women in the zikir circle in the summer of 1994. The main cause of the change was not to be found in differing theological opinions or personal rivalry, but in dissimilar visions of the dimensions of future activities. Some of the younger women had grand expectations as to what they would be able to contribute to their neighbourhood, and they managed to persuade some of the mothers in this originally loosely defined group to prepare the ground for something more large-scale than informal prayer meetings. The housewives had long experience in the mobilisation of pious women in the district, being used to organising charity work and Kuranic gatherings (recitation and prayers). While some of these constellations for pious welfare work had been both long-lasting and covered vast areas of Istanbul, they were comparatively loosely organised and built on family ties and personal relationships. This had been an advantage when there was a need for swift mobilisation for various causes, but in the long run failure ensued as the groups lacked planning and structure, had no stable economy, and had difficulties in coping with the distances in the large city. The best-known group of this kind, at least among women in Sufi-orientated circles, was The Rainbow Group (Gökkuşağı İstanbul Kadın Platformu).

Male members of one of the leading families helped in setting up contacts with the authorities and served as guarantors when the possibilities of establishing the group were investigated. 1993–1995 was a period of extensive preparations for the women. It was an unstable time before and after the elections, with a particular optimism in Islamic circles since they took over several of the major municipalities – a circumstance that also affected the women's work.

After a formal lawcourt decision on August 3rd 1995, the vakıf merkezi was opened with a charity sales (*kermes*) and a special programme on October 28th. This day was hereafter celebrated as an anniversary day with a one-day programme when the women of the vakıf presented the activities of the past year, young women who had received the vakıf's grants (*burs*) for higher education presented their studies, and representatives from other Islamic groups delivered good wishes. Among the guests of honour was at the time the mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan, together with some other high-ranking officials from the municipality (at the time governed by the Islamist party). The presence of these persons gives a hint of how well-known the vakıf group was and that

their efforts for Muslim education and charity was approved of in the highest circles of Islamists in the city.

The vakıf was founded in order to announce the group as a more formal unit and impart economic stability to the various activities that were planned at the time. It was a given thing that the name of the vakıf should include the name of its theological master, although he was already deceased at the time. His name gave the vakıf legitimacy from the beginning. After a brief period in a second private milieu, an apartment was acquired and arranged as the permanent location for the group. This new space opened up for more regular activities.

In Memory of the Hoca. A Dergah of Their Own

The vakıf in honour of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was not immediately easy to find for a first-time visitor, situated as it was in a small, quite dark, street with apartment-houses not older than twenty or thirty years. There was hardly any commercial life on this narrow and short street; but it was just off a road with shops that could supply most necessities for everyday life, and only two blocks away from the busy boulevard that runs through Fatih towards Edirne kapı. This is a classic route through Istanbul, lined with not only commercial establishments but also mosques, medreses, libraries, and other manifest memories of the Ottoman architectural heritage – some of them dating back to the time of Mehmet the Conqueror, known as Fatih Sultan Mehmet in Turkish. It is a Muslim part of Istanbul which has been urbanised for centuries, its Muslim heartland, one might say. Besides these historical aspects with all their ideological implications, the area is a place of easy access by means of public transport. Few, if any, visited the vakıf merkezi by accident; visitors would be taken there by a relative or friend, and were hence also properly introduced to the women responsible. A new visitor was always defined in terms of family relations, as "the sister-in-law of X" or "a school-mate of Y's sister", rather than with reference to social status or profession. Thanks to these procedures, both parties were assured that they were in proper company. These personal links gave the visitors to the programmes – temporary or regular – an option to explain to parents and family what kind of company they had been in and discuss whether it was appropriate for them to return to the vakıf merkezi.

The vakıf merkezi was located in a historical part of Istanbul marked by the radical demographic shifts in Constantinople/Istanbul over the last hundred years. It was not surprising to find this kind of Muslim women's activities in this particular district, generally known to Istanbulers as a very "pious" part of the city and a stronghold of the Islamist party. Whether or not people have been there, they usually have an opinion about the inhabitants of the district. Secularists frown and call it *çarşaflı mahallesi*, a covered (i.e. with a headscarf) block. Hence the location of the meeting-place was a very important aspect of the identity that formed the group. The women of the vakıf recognised them-

selves as part of the Islamist counter-discourse against the secular establishment. Situated as they were in an environment with long-term continuity of religious activities, the women could hint at century-long customs that had left architectural traces all over the neighbourhood. However, the social and cultural context of the area was new in many respects, and late modernity has added new dimensions to everyday life for men and women alike.

Understood in spatial terms, the vakıf was a meeting-place for women from varying social and educational backgrounds, kept together by their theological fellowship and regular rituals. A conjunct "culture", as it has been stressed in theories on the disruption and ambiguity of late modernity, served as a unifying factor in a swarming world outside the doors of the vakıf's apartment. Alberto Melucci suggests that it is the less visible elements outside the political domain that constitute "the creation of cultural models and symbolic challenges in the 'new movements'" (1989:45). The attraction of the group for its followers was communicated through a set of symbols which were closely related to the organisation as such, and within the domains of the vakıf the memory of the hoca was the key symbol kept in trust by the women. First was the vision, then came the money. Daisy Hilse Dwyer writes of a Moroccan context: "The women of the neighborhood collect the money, prepare the food, invite the guests, and ultimately distribute the baraka [blessing] or supernatural power" (1978a:587). The women of the vakıf started their grand project by the same means.

Vakıf. Stability and Control

The term for endowment, vakıf, was, as was pointed out above, used in everyday language among the women as the standard reference both to the formal association and their meeting-place in the apartment-house and to the congregation that came together, at least the core group who met for zikir. The term as such is not necessarily charged with tasavvuf associations or other religious connotations. In modern Turkish, it can refer to an endowment for any purpose and it is always subject to civil legislation regulating how inheritance and bequests may be organised and protected. There are not always civic interests behind a vakıf. Important endowments are initiated and run by the state or municipalities. Many of these are founded for educational, historic, or cultural causes. Yet it is common knowledge in Turkey that in Ottoman times most derviş lodges were organised as endowments in order to keep their vast obligations such as charity work, educational services, and health care going. The major establishments accumulated substantial capital, land, and real estate for their numerous duties; hence each vakıf with supporting capacity became an influential factor in its community, in the countryside as well as in the cities. Many vakıfs were closely tied to tarikat branches and/or a specific mosque. It was against this kind of economic

power on the part of the vakıfs[1] that the Kemalistic regulations against the Sufi groups in the mid-1920s were aimed.

The vakıf institution has a long history in Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, and theology. The definition of vakıf in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* reads as follows: "in Islamic law, the act of founding a charitable trust, and, hence the trust itself" (Peters 2001:59); in other words: a vakıf possesses means to protect property. R. Peters continues his general description: "The essential elements are that a person with the intention of committing a pious deed, declares part of his or her property to be henceforth unalienable [...] and designates persons or public utilities as beneficiaries of its yields" (2001:59). Islamic law does not recognise the conception of the legal person, a fact that has caused debate about the status of a vakıf as the owner of property. Traditionally, a functional distinction has usually been made between two types of vakıfs. A vakıf can consist of a mosque in all its functions, or of a single utility such as a school, a fountain or a library, or be the administrative source to generate income to maintain and operate such utilities. Modern Turkish legislation distinguishes between charity or support vakıfs for stipulated beneficiaries and family vakıfs for the protection of property and real estate (Bilici 1993:419; Peters 2001:60). Among the charity vakıfs, too, strong family links obtained during the Ottoman period. An endowment could be the possessor of a whole block or a grand mansion, as the şeyh often lived there with his extended family close to the lodge and the other buildings of the tekke establishment. Hence it was not only the authority of the şeyh that was handed down to the eldest son; control over the vakıf in terms of property, money, and investments could in fact be preserved this way for generations.

To be valid, the process of founding a vakıf is prescribed in Muslim jurisprudence (Peters 2001:61). A declaration by the founder is essential, along with a document (*vakfiyya*) in which the cause of the vakıf must be clearly stated and its potential beneficiaries defined. These two requirements are still stipulated in Turkish law and controlled by a special state authority, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü (General Directorate of Endowments).

The development of the vakıf institution is well documented throughout the history of Islam. Many scholars have noted the importance of vakıfs as suppliers of the basic structures in the vast Ottoman Empire because of the vakıf institution's "widespread vertical and horizontal use throughout all socio-economic strata of society; its capacity to adapt to individual, group and state needs within Islamic as well as within Ottoman Christian [...] and Jewish communities" (Deguilhem 2001:88). The networks of vakıfs "were the essential infrastructural link in the transmission of knowledge" (Deguilhem 2001:89), since they were in charge of most educational institutions, libraries etc. and were open to students of humble origins. In his concluding remarks about the historical development of *waqfs* in Ottoman Damascus, Richard van Leeuwen defines the power and

1. Sometimes the Ottoman plural *evakf* is used in the literature.

influence of these institutions in a way that works well in the context of the present case in Fatih: A vakıf was "an economic asset, representing a certain intrinsic value as capital goods"; it was, furthermore, "a container of symbolic meaning, both as monuments and as components of the religious system of symbols", and finally part of "networks located in time and space which could be utilized as a means of control and surveillance" (van Leeuwen 1999:205; see also Gerber 2000). Most of these fundamental features of the classic vakıf are apparently reproduced in our own time, with regard to both form and content.

Women's participation in vakıf matters is certainly not a novelty. Mary Ann Fay writes from a historical perspective of how women "could achieve considerable economic autonomy through their ownership and management of property" (Fay 1997:31). Her findings may also in many respects be related to the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı, which was gaining influence in a period when the state was losing its more direct control over the various Islamist NGOs and power was increasingly located in semi-public spheres. These spheres were to a great extent novelties, established between state control and family authority as a practical necessity in urban areas where late modernity may be said to be located.

Accessibility. The Key to Success and the Source of Vulnerability

The establishment of a formal vakıf was the most considerable milestone in the history of the group, a more significant change than any split, donation, or governmental shift. It was an apparent major step for the women, from the realm of private homes to a more public sphere which made their meetings accessible to hitherto unknown individuals. In contrast to Ottoman terminology, which is chiefly concerned with the bequeathing of establishments and buildings, the modern implications of the term vakıf form a permanent hallmark indicating an approval of the relevant activities from the state authorities. In return, there was a commitment to fulfilling the imposed obligations, and once embarked on they were not so easy to wind up. Once proclaimed as part of the local religious market, the offerings of the vakıf were expected to be available and not shut down because of lack of interest or energy on the active women's part. They had to effect what the *vakfiyya* promised, and better: they were expected to achieve more than that. Ambitions were steadily rising owing to a combination of needs in the neighbourhood, the spur of success, and – at a personal level – the incentives of challenge.

2. Mary Ann Fay, when discussing "Women and Waqf: Property, Power, and the Domain of Gender in Eighteenth-Century Egypt", argues: "Historically, women seem to have had more autonomy and/or power and generally higher status in societies where power was located in households rather than in the more formal mechanisms and structures of the centralized, bureaucratized state" (1997:33).

The importance of the formal (and economic) status of the group as an endowment cannot be overestimated, since it formed the basic structure from which the women reached their neighbourhood. The endowment made certain measures more possible to achieve for the women and created independence for their activities, granting them opportunities to work in line with their ambitions. They gained legitimacy, as their activities were approved by the Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü.[3] This also regulated the group's relationship with the state, not only when it came to account of economic transactions, but also in terms of ideology; the women of the vakıf felt that they could not so easily be accused, by individuals close to the local DIB authorities, of formulating illegitimate innovations (*ictihâd*), in that they had the approval of the central Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü. There was otherwise a certain risk that some civil servant from the local DIB authorities would attempt to incorporate the women's activities into something "more suitable for women". True, the local DIB authorities do not wield any formal power over any pious vakıf as such, nor do they exercise any formal control over any Muslim group. Even so, the DIB body has a certain status and authority when it comes to approval and recognition on an informal basis. There are strong ties in the Fatih district between the personnel employed at the local mosques (who are employees of the DIB) and the Sufi tarikats with their independent organisation and hierarchies of their own. To some extent the orders counterbalance the influence and control of the Directorate. With the vakıf the women were already within a stable organisation, and they did not expose themselves to the risk of being "forced into" any other form of women's activism where they would have lost control over their own business, economic, theological, and ritual. The construction of a vakıf thus implied both control and freedom, and the women acted within both implicitly and explicitly formulated limits.

The endowment cannot be regarded solely as a Sufi congregation with a certain *Osmanlı* flavour, but also as one of many NGOs active in contemporary Turkey, which "often are organised on the basis of mutual trust and interpersonal obligation, rather than on an individual contractual membership basis", as Jenny B. White writes when commenting on women's ways of organising associations and grass-roots groups in urban Turkey (White 1997:143). In many cases these constellations have an opportunity to mobilise in order to achieve influence, and perhaps more importantly create zones of freedom for mind and action. However, Faruk Bilici has discussed the many newly established endowments in a critical essay which can hardly be said to describe their activities in terms of liberal civil society or empowerment: "Le clientélism religieux est une caractéristique fondamentale de la politique turque et particulièrement

3. "Contrôles et supervisés non pas par le ministère de l'Intérieur, mais par la Direction générale des vakıfs, dépendant du Premier ministre et eventuellement du ministère des Finances quand ils donnent lieu à une exonération d'impôt, ils jouissent d'une grande liberté financière, organisationelle, voire politique" (Bilici 1993:414).

des partis conservateurs" (Bilici 1993:433). Family ties are also very strong in the studied group. They were not only manifest in conventional terms of fathers and brothers claiming the right to control decisions; the cultural capital of the family was in evidence, too: how to organise, how to formulate religious arguments etc. The proclaimed charity of many of the vakıfs is also an effective method of forming alliances. As a small group the vakıf became part of larger conflicts in the local society, conflicts where positions were defined by the men in the leading families. The women of the vakıf were able to balance skilfully between the large strong tarikats and Islamism as it was defined in party politics. Spatially, these sources of influence were located in the tekkes, the mosques, and in municipal councils.

In the declaration record and in the name of the vakıf, it was explicitly declared that the areas of activity were to be social welfare and education (implicitly by the choice of terminology of a religious character); but nothing indicated what rituals were to be performed. Working through a vakıf made it possible to accentuate the sides of the activities which the women wanted to see dominate the public image of them, and they were able to play down others that they found private and improper to expose, for example the Sufi rituals.

There is a rich traditional terminology to designate various kinds of Sufi meeting-places: tekke, *zaviye*, *hanekah*, *dergah* (the Persian equivalent of tekke), all of them indicating the location of ritual activities. To my knowledge only the latter has been used by the women with reference to their own place. This was only in the first phase of organised zikir meetings before the split, and the choice of terminology was probably meant to stress the fact that the home milieu could also be ritualised as a proper prayer space. The term was later dropped from everyday language, although *dergah* remained in use in the song tradition of the group as an indication of their place. Most certainly, the shift in terminology was another strategic choice made by the women in order not to provoke the suspicion that they intended to commence anything similar to a formal order, a tarikat. However, an important similarity with the classical terms must be noted: in conventional tasavvuf interpretations, these terms alluded to the social organisation of Sufi activities as well as to the space made holy by the mausoleums, commemorations, and prayers. In the case of the vakıf, it was not sultans or saints deceased since centuries but the memory of the hoca that made the rooms special.

Raymond Lifchez has made thorough distinctions between the classical terms when used in a Turkish historical setting: "the tarikat buildings are referred to by a variety of names: tekke, hanekâh, asitane, zaviye, dergâh. Tekke and hanekâh are generic terms for any dervish facility, with tekke the one more commonly used. Asitane generally indicates a major tarikat facility – a grand lodge – and zaviye a dervish hostel or residence belonging to no particular order. The term dergâh marks a tekke with a tomb attached to it" (1992:76). However, these distinctions cannot be applied to the way in which the women of the vakıf used the relevant terminology, as they all imply far

more extensive organisations than the present case. Even a small zaviye was likely to have had some sort of support from the sub-branch of a tarikat (*kol*, literary "arm"), especially when it came to competition with other groups. For the individual Sufi, a certain amount of flexibility is tolerable. Traditionally, a derviş can be present as an initiated disciple (*mürid*) in two tarikats and take part in prayers and rituals at two different localities (when this is done, it is usually with approval from both tarikats). But the spiritual master, *mürşid*, can only be one.

The Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı has no such mother-organisation or organisational network that would defend or protect it if attacked. Rather, the vakıf was out on a "free market" with its loyal activists to rely on as its supreme capital. In this competition for attention and support, the women picked up traditional terminology that was of necessity given a new meaning in the modern urban setting and provided protection for the activities. These idioms were therefore changeable. Because of local politics it was sometimes better to emphasise purist Islamism than Sufi traditions.

Practising Sufism in the District of the Conqueror

Despite excursions and visits to mosques all over Istanbul, the vakıf and the women's activities were primarily located in the Fatih district. Here several in the core group had their homes and families, and here they had their spiritual and ideological home. Their mode of religious activism was connected to the particular blend of Ottoman heritage and modern city life in the district. Neither the running of a Sufi assembly nor Islamist mobilisation was considered a controversial activity in the neighbourhood, not even when executed by women.

Fatih, on the fourth of Istanbul's seven hills, is somewhat faded, but not really a poor district compared to the settlements on the outskirts of the city, the *gecekondu*s ("built over-night"); nor is it totally dominated by new city-dwellers. A visitor's first impression of the Fatih district today may be that it is quite run down and profoundly affected by rapid urbanisation. It is overcrowded, and traffic problems are severe. Nevertheless, the district is part of the historical city with its monuments and memories of Istanbul as a Muslim city. Outsiders tend to condemn the area as "poor and religious" (*fakir ve dindar*), if they do not use a stronger word and call it reactionary (*irticaî*). Mostly such views are expressed by people with few or no contacts in Fatih. From another angle, the district bears the imprints of the Muslim middle class of the last hundred years. The architecture and structure of the district presents layers of social history that go back to Roman times.

There are families with at least a two-generation history in the district, families who have a distinct impact on various groups today. Members of locally well-known families, among them some of the leading women of the present

vakıf, represent symbolic capital and links to Muslim tradition which legitimise the authority that any Sufi association must rely on.

It has been said that "a city's streets, monuments, and architectural forms often contain grand discourses on history" (Boyer 1994:31), and that is certainly true of Fatih. The district has a cityscape dominated by the historical mosques alongside relatively recent forms of commercial interests: flashing neon signs, grand shopping windows. The Kemalistic ideology has also left traces in architecture and spatial organisation. The traffic is, as everywhere in Istanbul, heavy: exhaust fumes, noise, and jams. Once Fatih was a green district with small houses and gardens. Where the traffic on Vatan Caddesi – the border between the districts of Fatih and Aksaray – now rumbles, there was a river with green surroundings up until the 1960s. Today, the few trees that are left are in the courtyards of the mosques. Doğan Kuban writes in his book on Istanbul's urban history about the technocratic attempts to accomplish what was then conceived as a modern effective structure, pointing out that the Vatan Caddesi "brought the image of a highway into the oldest part of the city [...] and destroyed it" (1996:427). When the women spoke of rescuing old-time values, the manifestations of modernity outside the vakıf merkezi's windows could serve as examples of what they were driving at. Nostalgia for bygone glory led them to forget their otherwise strong appreciation of technological achievements.

"The density of urban life, of communications, education, fashions, and of the social and cultural emulation of the West, as well as the ever-present social mix of Muslim and non-Muslim, created an atmosphere in Istanbul that was quite unique" (Duben & Behar 1991:7). This is not a description of contemporary Istanbul, but of the city in the nineteenth century; it was a "thick" structure that "produced a unique configuration of personal and domestic life which was to persist until the 1940s", according to Duben and Behar (1991:7). That was the case with Fatih, too, though nowadays there are hardly any non-Muslims in the area. Nowadays it is the Muslim history that is emphasised as the grand discourse, not multi-ethnical or multi-religious dimensions. There are several historically important mosques in the Fatih district besides the Conqueror's: Iskender Paşa, Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa, and Hırka-ı Şerif, to mention a few. All of them are prominent in the history of Istanbul's Islamisation. Many old small mosques have been restored in recent years owing to the efforts of the DIB, the local municipality run by the Islamist party and Islamist vakıfs. An increasing number of pilgrims visit the old mosques and mausoleums connected to them. The leadership of the mosques supports these veneration tours as long as the devotion does not transgress the border of what is considered superstition. The pilgrims do not only observe the importance of the holy person; they also pay attention to the site's status as being well integrated in Muslim history. These crowds are therefore a constant reminder of Necmettin Erbakan's slogan "Istanbul – an Islamic City".

The area has been of fundamental importance for the Muslim identity of the

city and still carries the presence of historical narrative.› The district is named after the Fatih mosque,FI and the mosque in turn bears the name of Mehmet the Conqueror, Fatih Sultan Mehmet, who entered the city on 29 May 1453 with his Ottoman troops and, in Muslim historiography, liberated it (Babinger 1978; McCarthy 1997:65ff.). M. Christine Boyer writes in her monograph *The City of Collective Memory*: "In the City of Collective Memory, we find that different layers of historical time superimposed on each other or different architectural strata (touching but not necessarily informing each other) no longer generate a structural form to the city but merely culminate in an experience of diversity" (1994:19). Aya Sofya was proclaimed the Great Mosque immediately after the conquest, though it kept its Greek name. Not long afterwards, however, a new mosque was planned to surpass the former Byzantine church. The mosque in memory of the conquest and the conqueror was built between 1463 and 1471. "When the whole *külliye* [mosque complex] was erected it occupied an area of 100,000 m " (İnalcık 1978:229). Although the original mosque was destroyed by an earthquake in 1776 and a new one was built, the area around the mosque remained the intellectual, social, and economic heart of the district up until World War II. Its size and height dominate the picture of the district. Still today, besides its historic and symbolic value, Fatih Camii hosts several religious activities. It is an important site for Friday prayers; and there are other weekly prayer ceremonies and well-attended Kuran classes arranged by the imams and other teachers connected to the mosque. There are minor pilgrimage tours to the *türbe*s, and west of the outer courtyard there is still a huge open market every Wednesday, Çarşamba Çarşı. Among visitors to the market this kind of shopping was associated with the same nostalgia as the mosque complex itself; it was considered traditional in contrast to the Americanised supermarkets of suburbia. Provisions, kitchen utensils, home technology, and what not can be purchased here at reasonable prices. The commerce fills several crowded streets surrounding the mosque; and in contrast to most other spaces in the area, this is a place where men and women mingle comparatively closely in their search for bargains. The deeper the economic crisis, the more forcefully the Islamists advocated the image of a simple society with clear values and roles, and uncomplicated economic transactions. No global city, but an Islamic one.

4. For surveys of the history of the Fatih district, see: İnalcık 1978:229; Sumner-Boyd & Freely 1989:247ff.; Çelik 1993:23ff.; Mansel 1995:29ff.; Freely 1996:185ff.; Kuban 1996:206ff.

5. "Fatih Camii and the other great külliyes [mosque complexes] became the civic centres of the Muslim city, which was divided into thirteen nahiye, or districts, each of which was subdivided into a number of mahalle, or neighbourhoods. Each of the nahyie, with one exception, was named after the mosque complex that formed its centre and focus" (Freely 1996:185).

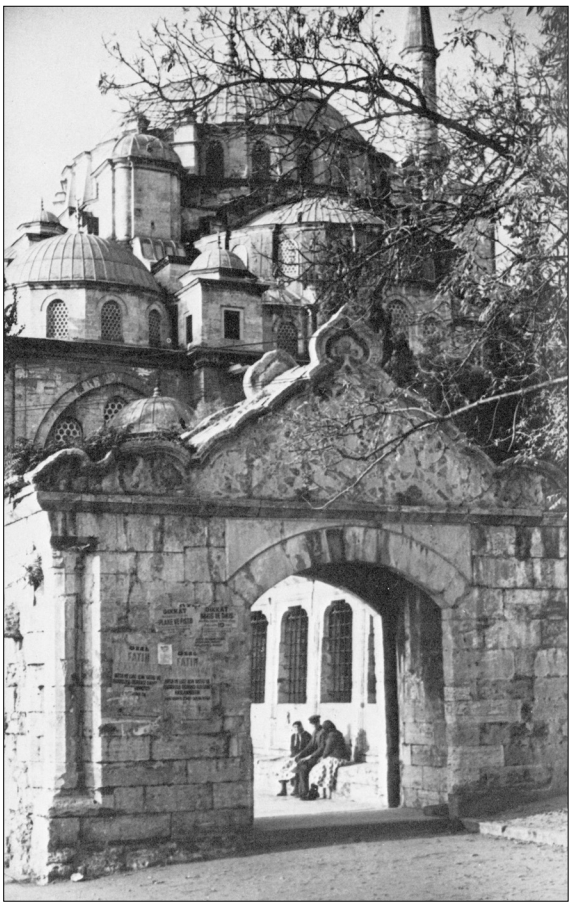
Engraving of the original Fatih Camii by Melchior Lorichs, mid-sixteenth century.

The illustration on previous page

A COPPERPLATE SHOWING THE original Fatih Camii by the Danish artist Melchior Lorichs (Lorck) who visited Constantinople in the late 1550s. His panorama of the city, over 11 metres long and in 21 sections, offers an overview of the buildings and landmarks from the Ottoman classic age (And 1994:17ff.). Better than many later pictures Lorichs' engraving demonstrate what tactic location was chosen for the Conqueror's mosque on the top of the fourth hill.

The mosque was, along with the shrine in Eyüp, the foremost attempt of Mehmet the Conqueror to make Istanbul a holy city and a major site for pilgrimage and establish it as a centre in the Muslim world (Goodwin 1971:131ff.; Mansel 1995:29ff.). The enormous dome of the mosque, at the time the largest in the empire, can be seen along with the hundreds of small domed buildings for educational and welfare enterprises.

In accordance with the *millet* system, the inhabitants lived in areas known as *mahalle* – larger than a modern block, smaller than a district – separated mainly according to religion, ethnicity, or regional background. "The class-based differentiation of the urban fabric was a phenomenon that had to wait for the twentieth century, and especially for the post-Second World War period" (Duben & Behar 1991:31). The term lingers in modern Turkish, not only as a spatial concept but as an indication of cultural and religious affiliation: *mahallörf*, local custom, and *mahallözellik*, local colour. In many Sufi associations, referring to local tradition is the foremost argument in response to more radical and purist Islamists.



Fatih Camii today

A PHOTO OF THE courtyard of Fatih Camii today, a busy place from dawn to dusk, crossed by thousands of people every day. Most of them are on their way to religious meetings outside the mosque complex, to schools, or to the commercial bustle just outside the walls on the boulevard and in the side-streets. The district is still known to be a site of Islamic activism and a stronghold for the Islamists.

In Ottoman society, individuals were categorised as members of *millet*s (literally "nations" or "peoples") – a division basically made according to religion and to some extent ethnic and regional background. The people of the Book, i.e. Christians and Jews, constituted their own millets, most Christian millets being recognised by law and the Jewish ones by tradition.

"Muslim life in the city continued on in its traditional neighbourhoods until the post-Second World War years", write Duben and Behar in their book on Istanbul households (1991:32). In this statement "Muslim" seems to refer to things old-fashioned in a vague way, rather than to any religious dimension in life, and it comes close to the Islamic nostalgia for Ottoman times which is nourished from very disparate sources, historic times being regarded as an alternative to the confrontations of contemporary Turkey.

After the uncontrolled urbanisation of the last forty years, only fragments of the Ottoman household structure are visible in the architectural landscape. Yet the women of the vakıf organised their activities with what they conceived to be Ottoman ideals as models. The grand complexes of religious and social institutions that surrounded the major mosques in pre-republican times functioned as their historical mirror (İnalcık 1978:229). With this *külliye* as a pro-

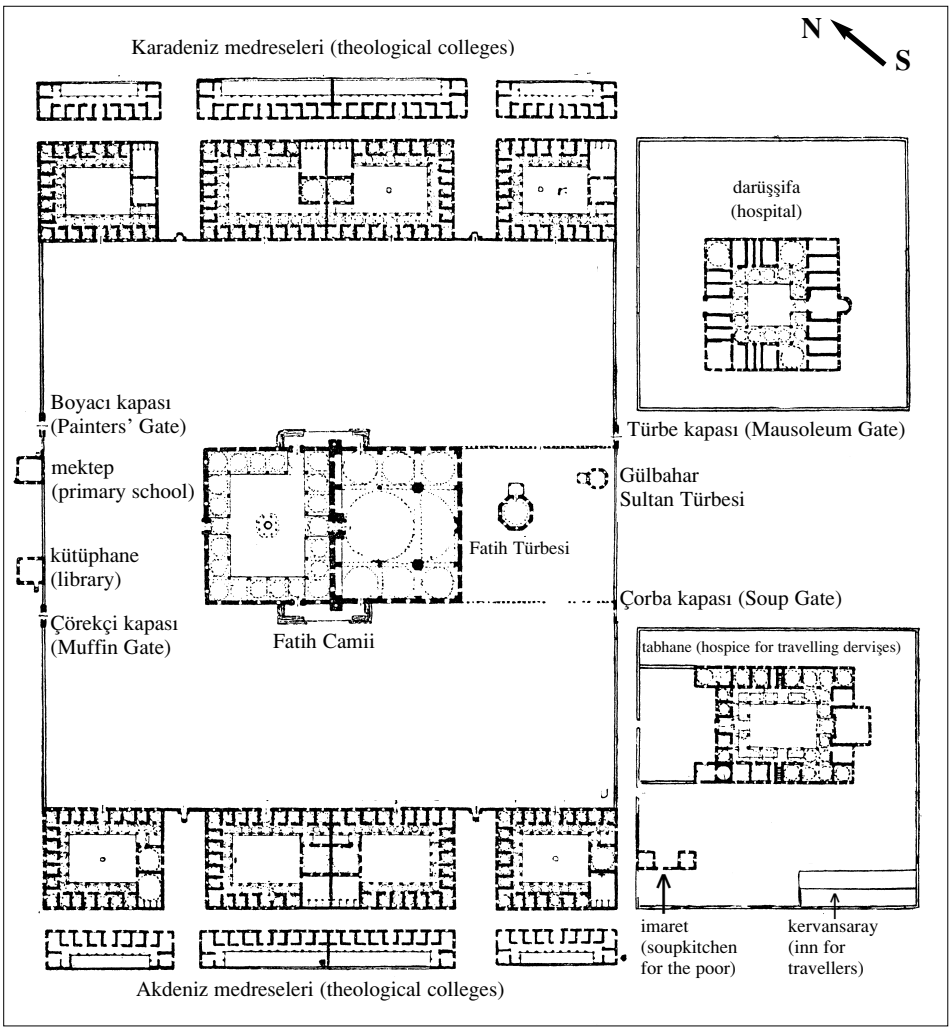
totypefl the women could preach, teach, nurse, and feed – always paying keen attention to the spiritual and material needs of their local community. Their attitude formed an instance of pronounced "anti-modernism" on an emic discursive level; but it is conceived of as a late modern phenomenon in the analytical model used in the present study.

When the women looked for models of their activities in times past in order to seek *Osmanlı* ideals, it was Fatih Camii that they held up: "Fatih Camii had all of the facilities for a civic centre, for in addition to the mosque and its medreses and other religious and philanthropic institutions it also had a large market with 280 shops, 32 workrooms, and four storehouses, the income from which went to support the rest of the külliye" (Freely 1996:185). The goal of the group was ambitious indeed: its members wished to create a miniature of such a centre, able to support all kinds of human needs. When the women wanted to develop the future of the vakıf, all aspects of life were to be taken care of.

All predominant functions of the *külliye* were subsequently added to the vakıf enterprise, either at the vakıf merkezi as such or at other locations in the neighbourhood. One "investment" (in terms of capital, status and – not least – personal efforts) led to another. By being successful, the vakıf evoked expectations of continuation and expansion. After only a few years the dimensions of the undertakings had grown far beyond the original, comparatively modest, visions. Interestingly enough, women who had chosen the other side at the early-stage split of the original group started to turn up when the vakıf had expanded beyond any initial expectation.

The most apparent similarity to an Ottoman establishment was perhaps the construction of a room for Sufi prayers. This was not a permanent place; a room in the apartment was ritualised every Friday afternoon in order to be a proper space for women's zikir practices. This space was comparable to the *meydan* in a tekke establishment, and the gatherings always emphasised commemoration of the hoca as a "friend of God" (*veli*) and his teachings. Relics from the hoca were kept behind glass and were honoured in a mode that suggested both similarities to and divergences from the veneration at the mausoleums (*türbe*s) of saints, şeyhs, sultans and national heroes (*gazi*s) (Meeker 1997). As will be discussed below, the hoca was venerated in the sense that he was remembered as a teacher and as an ideal, and he was also conceived of as being a continuous protector of the vakıf.

6. Kirsten Hastrup writes: "Prototypes reflect clusters of experience, and show how asymmetries prevail within the categories, asymmetries that could neither be predicted nor read from the position of classical linguistic theory, which attributed categories with almost mechanically reflective potential and believed them to be exhaustive" (1995:30). The historical monuments in the Fatih district obviously function as focal points for identification (to be measured against, to integrate in historical narratives and legends, to contrast with the monuments of Kemalism) and communication (symbols, terms, and the like associated with this form of Ottoman life were vital signs when presenting their establishment and their programmes) (Jung and Piccoli 2001; Meeker 2002).



A restored plan of the külliye at Fatih Camii

A RESTORED PLAN OF the *külliye* at Fatih Camii at the height of its grandeur (after Öz 1964). John Freely writes: "the külliye of Fatih Camii consisted of eight medreses (theological schools) and their annexes, with a hospice (tabhane), public kitchen (imaret), hospital (darüşşifa), caravansarai [for travellers to rest at], primary school (mektep), library (kütüphane), public bath (hamam), çarşı (market), and a graveyard with two türbes (tombs), one of which was to be Fatih's last resting place" (1996:185).

Fatih Sultan Mehmet established a vakıf connected to the new mosque which was endowed with the nearby saddle-market in order to bring in funds for the numerous undertakings.

The vakıf merkezi functioned as an educational centre in all sorts of ways. True, it certainly was not a primary school like the *mektep* of Ottoman times, and it did not offer anything comparable to higher Muslim education. Even so, with their *ders* and sohbet meetings the core group of the vakıf did what they could to fill the gap of ignorance that the secular school system had left behind when it came to religious knowledge. In this sense the vakıf merkezi served as a lecture hall (*dershane*). The library (*kütüphane*) with its reading room offered the same facilities to the schoolgirls of our day as the old establishments did to young men a hundred years ago. The emphasis on teaching was less manifest in the programme activities outside the vakıf merkezi, especially since private Kuran classes became illegal. Most educational exercises were moved down to the library, rather than remaining in the room with the relics of the hoca. In the library, the woman who led the lesson appeared as a teacher on general Muslim topics, and the walls covered with bookshelves helped to create a certain atmosphere. More and more, the room with the memorabilia came to stand out as a definite prayer room.

Food distribution was organised as an equivalent to the public kitchen (*imaret*) of the *külliye* in order to feed the poor. Twice a month supplies of dry food such as rice, flour, and sugar, along with oil, were distributed from a storage in the vicinity. Even the traditional market around Fatih Camii could be compared to the *börekçi* where the women of the vakıf were fully engaged in bringing in money to the enterprise. Hospital and medical services were the only point of discrepancy. The vakıf had neither the capacity nor the wish to provide such facilities, but plans were made to buy land outside the city to build a home for old poor women.

Mahalle. A Model for Social Differentiation

If the women of the vakıf strove to fulfil their obligations to their neighbours with the *külliye* as a model from the vicinity, the Islamist movement as a whole looks back to the Ottoman era for normative ideals and models. The fact that social practice and living conditions are quite different today does not seem to darken that vision. Rather, it seemed to strengthen a flexible vision in support of which both religious and national arguments could be adduced, according to the relevant context.

This idealised image of social life in the past also includes the concept of the historical *mahalle*, a miniature community consisting of some blocks. The organisation of social life in unambiguous categories, based on ethnic and religious affiliation, made it easy to define a person as either in-group or out-group. In their study of family patterns in nineteenth-century Istanbul, Duben and Behar note: "The *mahalle*s were the centres of economic and social life. Largely divided along ethnic – not class – lines, they were communities with a certain degree of autonomous control over their day-to-day affairs and a degree of

communal solidarity, with a myriad of informal mechanisms for monitoring and regulating public morality" (Duben & Behar 1991:30f.). All this is not very far from present-day visions of Muslim networking. The Islamists emphasise the image of security by means of control, and violations were mostly dealt with according to each *millet*'s own civil code. This image is used in various arguments in favour of *şeriat*. In sharp contrast to contemporary Istanbul, it amounts to a vision of a translucent society, opposed to globalisation with its constant flow of opportunities. In *mahalle* society, the norms are given and the choices made.

In multicultural Constantinople, a *mahalle* could be defined as follows: "The mahalle was an organic unity, a community with its own identity, settled around a mosque, a church or a synagogue. The individuals of this community were linked not only by a common origin (in many cases), a common religion and a common culture, but also by external factors making for social solidarity. The meeting-place of the community and the symbol of its unity was the place of worship, the repair of which and the maintenance of whose staff were the joint responsibility of the inhabitants, and after which the mahalle was named" (İnalcık 1978:234). Most *mahalle*s had a school, a communal fountain, vakıf endowments, and a night-watchman.‡ In many respects the *mahalle* constituted a miniature society (Faroqhi 2000:146ff.); but, in contrast to contemporary Islamism, it recognised – or at least made space for – other faiths than the Muslim. In secular historiography, a touch of nostalgia is also present, imagining the *mahalle* as the good society that is no more. The bookmarket is flooded with exquisite illustrated volumes about the Istanbul of the past, from academic urban history to glossy coffee-table books.

The *mahalle* ideal can be seen as an analogy to the way in which many NGOs work, with the ambition of establishing control over at least some issues in a constantly changing metropolis. These block units constituted more or less independent universes in their own right, an attractive vision for those who want to pick some of the fruits of modernity without being governed by it. In an historic *mahalle*, especially women had few reasons to cross the borders to the outside very often, and each mahalle was lead by a *muhtar*, headman or elder, who also spoke on behalf of the community. Therefore, to contemporary ideologists the *mahalle* world represents a system where everyone "knew their place", and to a great extent it corresponds to the authoritarian society that many of the Islamist NGOs argue for. In a complementary society, such as the vision of the *mahalle*, there is a proper "place" for everyone – in the local com-

7. Interesting comparisons can be made with the social structure and political processes in the Mamluk empire in Ira Lapidus' Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (1967), especially the discussion on the organisation of the quarters, "closely knit and homogeneous communities" (1967:85ff.). Not only were Jewish and Christian groups set apart; the Muslims lived according to ethnic separation as well. Through their isolation "they were analogues of village communities inside the urban agglomeration" (Lapidus 1967:95). One observes that the urban-rural dichotomy is a fundamental analytical concept in this discussion too.

munity and in family life. There are also obvious outer signs denoting an individual's position – such as clothes and other symbols – in order to avoid illicit or unsuitable encounters. This historical utopia and yearning for uncomplicated solutions may be compared to slogan argumentation: despite severe simplifications, it exercises massive influence over people's concepts and views. A great deal of the Islamist critique of contemporary Turkish society is aimed at its complexity, its indistinctness, and its ambiguity. Thus it is necessary to establish historical counter-images, from the Medina of the Prophet or from an idealised conception of *Osmanlı* life in the nineteenth century, in order to combat the influx of what is considered foreign (*yabancı*).

Small Groups, Large Issues

Muslim religious groups certainly are not alone in having chosen informal modes of co-operation in Turkey over the last ten or fifteen years. There are numerous examples of small secular women's groups, environmentalists' associations, local history societies, and so on, each of them forming its own spirit of community focused on a particular issue, clearly defined and with relevance to the people involved. Hereby a feeling of establishing control over at least a small part of one's own society is gained.

In addition to their tasavvuf agenda, the women of the vakıf took up services and duties usually associated with civil society. In most cases, interest groups established after 1983 function as what may be loosely defined as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The veritable explosion of NGO activism over the last decade has caused some confusion in public discourse as regards the relation between the state and these kinds of new groups. This situation was apparent during the preparations for the UN Habitat II Conference in June 1996, in the midst of the present fieldwork, when groups representing very different interests and strategies had to co-operate, and discovered – as sociologists had pointed out long before – the similar conditions in which they were acting. Ideologically, these new modes of expressing demands for influence and change have been a blow against the massive state domination in policy-making. Binnaz Toprak has outlined (1996) three major similar options for the new modes of mobilisation in Turkey during the 1990s: there are changes in the legal infrastructure (the legislation for endowments with non-commercial cultural or social activities made it easier to establish vakıfs with more or less open religious intents); there are changes in the economy (much more private money was available to support the NGOs); and, finally, there is nowadays an open political challenge against the dominating state ideology, originating from outside the party system. Thousands of groups are registered as active and have had a crucial impact on the formulation of political arguments. The sweeping changes during the Özal regime and onwards engendered spheres of social autonomy and initiatives of a kind that had not been envisaged before in mod-

ern Turkey (Zubaida 1992; Toprak 1996). The three features pointed out by Toprak could be applied to the conditions under which the women of the vakıf operated.

The legal position of the group as a vakıf was clearly defined by Turkish civil law. There was a board with a chair and a well-structured bookkeeping system, and the vakıf was responsible to the central Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü. As a non-profit organisation, the vakıf brought all income (from donations, *kermes* sales, books etc.) back into the enterprise, either to improve facilities at the vakıf merkezi or to distribute its income as charity (goods or grants), or to use it for food served in connection with meetings, accoutrements for *ders*, etc. In a strict sense, the revenue was small. Activities were totally dependent on donations, especially the more large-scale donations from families whose women were closely associated with the vakıf, and without such gifts the considerable investments involved would not have been possible: the apartment for the vakıf merkezi, the library and all the books, the pastry shop with all its tools and equipment, the mini-bus for activities outside the immediate neighbourhood. This fact brings us to Toprak's second issue: the growing wealth during the late 1980s and 1990s in parts of the middle class. In the case of this particular vakıf, the link between the recent change in economic structure and the expansion of vakıf activities was apparent. There was new money deriving from various kinds of more or less family-bound enterprises and from fortunes earned in the last two decades in families who had made considerable social progress in terms of economy and status. The male members of these families marked their new positions with greater ease than those female members who wore *tesettür* and participated in Muslim activism. In return for their financial contributions, honour (*hürmet*) and respect (*saygı*) were accomplished for the male and female members of the families who donated the largest amounts.

Thirdly, the direct relations to the Islamist party were covert, insofar as there were any at all; and these contacts, to the extent that they took place, were individually based. As stressed by Toprak, however, there are new forms of influence and voicing, particularly when made in a local context, which compensate for the lack of formal gateways. The political crisis of the 1990s has reinforced this development in many ways. On several occasions, the state authorities have made attempts to interfere in the small-scale Islamist activities, though with little or no success. The fine-meshed contacts are hard to track down and easily pop up in new incarnations, especially women's meeting-places that always balance between the public and the private. Not even the Islamist party was abolished forever, despite the efforts of the State Prosecutor.

Most religious groups in contemporary Istanbul can be defined as belonging to this variety of NGOs, and many of them are constructed as endowments, vakıfs. A distinct feature in the new situation is the presence and thereby the visibility of women. The increasing number of "covered NGOs" (*çarşaflı NGO*), as one Turkish journalist has named them (Ulusoy 1996), run by Islamist women concentrate their activities on small-scale community work, far away

from the eyes of the general public. They carry out voluntary work at all levels of society; and if they do not exercise direct power, they seek to influence local society. The explicit goals expressed by the representatives of this kind of organisations are seldom overtly political though they are firmly pronounced as apolitical by the spokespersons, a situation which constitutes the source of many conflicts. Rather, group representatives define their aspirations toward a future good society, ruled by just *(âdil*) religious norms. Hence, all Islamist activities are deemed to be political by secular opponents. For covered women, the establishment of some sort of group or association is often the only way of taking part in discussions likely to have any sort of impact. Few of the engaged Islamist women go public, and those who do often attain iconic status as well-known authors, journalists, or television personalities on the religious stations. Visibility can be dangerous in many senses. For instance, Merve Kavakçı was hounded by hordes of national and international journalists to explain her case: wearing a headscarf at her debut in parliament in May 1999. In consequence she came to serve as a temporary icon for the Islamist movement in a "scandal" which hardly touched on the larger issue of female representation at large.[8] Konca Kuriş, a well-known Islamist feminist, was found dead, brutally murdered for reasons that have still not been clarified.

Through the Muslim NGOs, female activists gain not only stability and structure, but also public recognition and opportunities to address wider audiences. This change has entailed a shift from meetings in family houses or apartments, according to very traditional patterns, to conquests of spaces such as university campuses and modern media. Nilüfer Göle has noted the Islamist groups' "attempts to reappropriate control over the orientation of the cultural model problematizing the relations of domination in spheres of lifestyle and knowledge" (1996b:41). For women's forms of assembly, these changes are dramatic, and they have raised questions about access to urban space – not necessarily through verbal debate, but through the mere presence of women. The traditional division of the city in terms of social status, ethnicity, religion – and gender – is hereby challenged. New areas have become prestigious housing areas while districts that used to possess high status are run down or have been demolished; likewise, quarters that used to be known as Greek, Armenian, or Jewish have another character today. And in the remodelled cityscape women emitting all kinds of garment signals are present. Larger and larger parts of the city have become accessible to covered women, and women have started to move across great distances to be able to reach the groups of their choice.

All active religious groups are certainly not Islamist: at functional and symbolic levels, several similarities between, for example, the Alevi groups and the Islamist groups from the fieldwork may be noted. In order not to confine the

8. Attempts were made in 1997 to mobilise women from all parties in the umbrella organisation given the ironic name Kader ("Destiny") in order to raise the percentage of women representatives in parliament. Members of the Islamist Party chose not to participate.

religious resurgence to various shades of Sunni Islam only, some comparisons can be made. Distinct voices have been heard claiming recognition for their Alevi identity, defined in either cultural or religious terms or both, but clearly conceived as directed against the Sunni establishment. According to Alberto Melucci, there are three basic features in the establishment of a group in a social movement. There must be a conception of solidarity, around which a collective identity is constructed and maintained through shared symbols (be it the headscarves of the Islamists or the *cem* ceremonies of the Alevi groups); in the case of the vakıf women, it was the zikir ceremonies that constituted such a core symbol, more than the Muslim education and their welfare work. Secondly, the interest of the group is focused on a social conflict and defines a mutual enemy (be it the secular establishment or the Sunni elite). In this case, the vakıf shared the "enemy" with the Islamist movement at large: the loosely defined depraved contemporary society with its fundamental lack of religious consciousness. The enemies could be presented on a major or a minor scale, sometimes acquiring international proportions: as conspiracies against Islam and Muslims. The third characteristic, according to Melucci, is the struggle for social change (be it an Islamist utopia or social welfare in terms of progressive Alevi politics). The urge to effect changes was never expressed in political terms among the women of the vakıf, although discontent with the contemporary condition of society was constantly ventilated. The discourse on this topic was moral rather than political.

Besides Melucci's three characteristic features of groups in late modern social movements, there are further similarities worth noting. Neither women's groups nor the Alevi communities fall into the official Turkish categories of clearly defined religious groups; for the hitherto "invisible" groups, the NGOs represent new fields of possibilities and new zones of contact with the rest of society. Muslim NGOs generally possess freer and more flexible forms of organisation, and their relations to the state and the DIB are not always very clear. Their unrecognised condition affords them a possibility to adjust to – or to remain unaffected by – any political and social turn that arises. The core activities depend on internal structure more than on outside support. A small organisation can change feet swiftly, and flexibility seems to indicate stability in this context: the core activities are protected by a minimum of formalism. The reactions to the attempts to close down the Islamist party may serve as an example. Neither independent women's groups nor the many small organisations more closely connected to the party were actually affected, and they continued their activism more or less as usual. In the Alevi case, a more complicating factor than the religious activism is the Kurdish activism in some of the groups.

The Alevis have never been officially recognised as a specific community in any formal sense. Until the 1980s they were marginalised and looked upon as rural, by both secularists and representatives of mainstream DIB-Islam. Not surprisingly, Alevi culture has flourished in the diaspora, especially Germany

(Vorhoff 1995; Mandel 1996). Symptomatically, it is the Alevis in urban areas that have become visible over the past decade, and the impact of urbanism on Alevi culture is great. It would be incorrect to view the formation of the new NGOs as a protest against the state only. As pointed out by Sami Zubaida (1992), the new groups show an ambiguous attitude towards the state, mixing protest and dependence. The agency of the state is double-faced as well. Individual choices as to which group and which symbols to turn to are a way of controlling the complexity of modern society. In most groups there is a complex relation between choices and individual freedom on the one hand and conformity on the other, both highly related to the privatisation of religion in late modern society (Beyer 1994). Alevis as well as women active in Islamic NGOs are outsiders in relation to the religious establishment. This fact is certainly not only a disadvantage; it preserves and protects their freer form of organisation. In addition, it invests them with a certain attraction in that they come across as independent, unaffected by the caprices of politics.

Although visible, and sometimes loud, these small groups have limited direct political power; but they exert great influence in their immediate vicinity. The combination of these rings on the water and active networking implies political impact. With their greater efficiency as an alternative to party politics, they are focused on activism and mobilisation with a view to solving concrete problems in local communities. By means of grass-root support, the NGOs claim to be building a civil society in a nation with increasingly weak infrastructures. They replace, or rather fulfil, the obligations of the state and the municipalities. There is a certain risk of liberal romanticism, especially when discussing women's groups, and it must be remembered that many of the religious groups can be quite authoritarian. The very existence of the various groups, Muslim or not, is a consequence of the political and economic liberalisation of the 1990s in Turkey. But the goals of the new groups are not always in line with this liberal course. A large number of women's groups does not necessarily mean that there are many women with substantial influence. The Islamic NGOs have been successful in presenting themselves as focusing simultaneously on practical problems and promises for eternity, and this combination gives them a stable base for recruitment.

The Book and the Roses

A logotype for the vakıf was reproduced on all kinds of materials distributed by the group and served as a comparatively large sign on the outside wall of the apartment house where the vakıf merkezi and the library were situated. The circular emblem was composed of a significant combination of text and symbols. As in every contact outside the core group, the choice of modes of expression was made with the utmost deliberation. At the centre, the logotype showed a radiant open book on a stand. In a Muslim context the interpretation is obvious,

even to a child. It can only be the Kuran that is honoured in such a manner and placed in such a position. It is an imperative requirement in Muslim tradition that a copy of the Kuran be kept away from anything that is ritually polluted or otherwise unclean or unworthy. When read from, even in domestic settings, the Kuran often rests on a stand more or less like the one on the emblem. Under the book on the emblem there was a bed of four large roses, and beams radiated upwards from the Kuran. The design made the holy book look like a rising sun. The founding year, 1995, was inscribed at the bottom of the circle.

The logo of the vakıf.

THE PURPOSE OF THE endowment was demonstrated by the carefully chosen name and the iconography of its logo. The open book and the roses could not be misinterpreted in the homedistrict of the vakıf. The combination of symbols was the hallmark of Sufi women who wanted to emphasise the Sunni ground of their activities.

On a band around the emblem, the full name of the vakıf was written. The hoca's name was at the top, and under it was a specification of the two vital purposes of the vakıf: knowledge (*ilim*) and charity (*hizmet*). These two concepts were carefully chosen, being wide-ranging and precise at the same time. However, they were certainly not exclusive to the women's association, as they represented the fundamentals for conventional Sufi training. The religious demands were not so time-consuming as to be impossible to accomplish for a woman with family responsibilities. The combination of the two is commonly stressed as the path (*yol*), and it was also an adequate description of the core activities of the vakıf; the method and the goal were the same. The chosen terms agreed well with the theological discourse and ritual practice that took place and served as good advertisement. With few but well-chosen images and a terminology connecting their activities with the history of the district, the women made a highly readable imprint on their local street life. The door was open to those who wanted to enter.

The imagery of the emblem facing the neighbourhood street could be read by bypassers as a clear directive. By placing the Kuran on its stand in the centre, it signalled the scriptural basis for all the activities arranged by the women. The choice of the Book as their central image placed them in a long tradition of Sufi history, in which finding Kuranic arguments and underlining the Kuranic ground have always been of decisive importance. The combination of the Book with the flowers was unmistakably the hallmark of the group. The five roses were a clear hint of the Sufi background to the theology taught at the vakıf. The rose (*gül*) is one of the core symbols in Turkish and Persian Sufi poetry (Schimmel 1975:287ff., 1978:82ff.), handbooks usually state that it should be interpreted as mystical love. The metaphor stands for absolute perfection, and legendary history tells that it was created from the perspiration of the Prophet. Its dignity and beauty are intended to be understood as mirroring the human soul. Like the flower in nature, the emblematic rose needs cultivation (i.e. personal effort), fertile soil (i.e. guidance and education), and, not least, the beaming sun (i.e. Allah's love). The rose occurs in metaphors and combinations of symbols, not only as a state of perfection (and therefore an ideal worthy to strive for), but as a reminder of the circumstance that this was a time when all destinies of the universe were settled by Allah. Rebellion against one's destiny was considered a major sin among the women of the vakıf, and "Kâlu belâ" was a recurring phrase in preaching and education, with a clear message: "Remember your duties and do not try to run away from them".

This flowering semantic field was obvious on many occasions during the fieldwork. The present study does not aspire to comment on any individual interpretations of such imagery, though it may be noted that some of the con-

MEHMET II IS KNOWN in Turkish as Fatih Sultan Mehmet and is shown here cross-legged, with a royal handkerchief in his hand, smelling of rose. Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 after a siege, 6 April to 29 May. The victory confirmed the Muslim influence over south-east Europe for centuries and Sunni Islam became state religion in the empire. Still today, the grand conquest (*büyük fetih*) is celebrated each year with grand parades and public meetings. Municipalities governed by the Islamist party have developed the tradition further into manifestations of victorious Islam and its weak enemies (Aksoy and Robins 1997). The trend towards Ottomanism is apparent in the Muslim movement at large in Turkey today (Karpat 2001, 2002; Meeker 2002). Many Muslim groups mirror their activities in the past and combine *selef* and *Osmanlı* ideals in their theological discourse.

Miniature portrait of Mehmet II (1432–81) attributed to Sinan Bey, late fifteenth century.

ventional Sufi symbols functioned as very strong signals at the vakıf merkezi in sermons, conversations, and song texts. Like zikir, the rose is connected to memory and the remembrance of the Garden of Paradise. The Everlasting Rose growing in the Garden symbolises the cultivation of the carnal self (*nefs*); its beauty is the goal and ideal of every striving soul. Its perfume is magnetic when in fulfilment and yet, like a scent, it is a brief experience, impossible to grasp in any language, earthly or supra-terrestrial.

An extended image from the same field is the rose and the thorn, the latter being interpreted either as enemies or as protectors of the soul. This symbolic cluster with its clear dichotomy between good and evil was definitely easier for the teacher to attach to themes belonging to the contemporary Islamist agenda than the scent dimension of the picture.

The rose imagery is frequent not only in verbal discourse, but also as a decoration: roses of plastic and paper are often put in informal devotional places. This was also the case at the vakıf merkezi; close to the shelf with Kuran booklets and the bowl with rosaries, visitors had left many variations of the rose decorations as a sign of devotion. During prayer meetings, the rose scent was present in the rose water (*gül suyu*) as well as in rose oil (*gül yağı*) which was generously splashed on the hands of the participants by an older woman who kept the precious drops in a richly decorated carafe. A comparison could be made between these liquids: the blessing (*bereket*) was apparently attached to the scent of the rose and therefore kept in a beautiful vessel and solemnly dispensed, whereas the water in the bottles placed at the centre of the circle of praying women apparently collected the blessing and healing power that came through the joint ceremony and was thereafter distributed to those in need who had not been present.

To return to the emblem of the vakıf, the sun is another extensively used Sufi symbol with both emotional and intellectual connotations (Schimmel 1978:61ff.). Not surprisingly it stands for light and enlightenment or the divine message, as opposed to nighttime and ignorance. The sun image is often constructed in accordance with the concept of Allah's most beautiful names. Absolute closeness to the centre is impossible; it is too much for a human being to bear. But the beams are like the holy names, carrying a resemblance of the source, reaching the earthly humans. The metaphor of the distant source, mysterious and unknown as such, but with an effect that can be experienced, was often used during didactic conversations at the vakıf merkezi or during mosque meetings when Allah was hailed as the source of life.

Muhammed is often, and certainly not only in Sufi legacy, identified with the sun and his companions with the stars. In conventional Sunni theology, any thought of Muhammed as a mediator is strongly rejected. Nevertheless, in local practice Muhammed is an important character in prayers, devotion, and hymns. His radiation is sought in times of need and is thought of as healing and soothing. The addressing of Muhammed is problematic in the same way as the veneration of deceased şeyhs. Formally Muhammed is conceived as the bringer of

light (i.e. the Kuran), though in ceremonial practice he is venerated as the Light, *Nur Muhammadi*.

Though not portrayed on the emblem, the nightingale is another symbol of the human soul and closely connected to the rose imagery. Its song represents the praise of Allah; and song, verbalisation, scent, and beauty fit into one image, as in the well-known and much-loved hymn by Yunus Emre:

> I am a nightingale; I came singing.
> I came holding the royal patent on my tongue.
> I came here to sell my musk;
> I am a deer; my grazing place is There
> (translated by Grace Martin Smith 1993:110).

The leading women found ways of transmitting the metaphors and symbols to make young people acquainted with Sufi language and bring it into contemporary discourse. The blessings of the vakıf are hailed in a particular hymn (*ilahi*). "Girdim Gönenli Meclisine" (I Entered Gönenli's Group) is one of two ilahis reproduced in the prayer book *Evrad ve Tesbihat* (1995). The rich Turkish hymn tradition was consciously kept alive within the vakıf group. A repertoire of classics from the golden era of Turkish and Persian Sufi poetry by poets like Yunus Emre (d. early fourteenth century), Fuzûlî (d. 1556), and others was often drawn on for prayer and sohbet gatherings. These older hymns were transmitted orally, whereas the two relatively recently composed ones were not only printed in the prayer book, but also distributed on photocopies during meetings at the vakıf merkezi. Grace Martin Smith characterises them as "a large body of beautiful religious poetry in flowing Turkish that unites a fully developed poetic style and technique with the fervor and urgency of the proselytizing holy minstrel, producing a religious message couched in, and enhanced by, a lovely, rhythmic poetry, much of which is still recited and sung today in Turkey" (1993:4). Classic hymns like the one quoted above were often performed at the vakıf merkezi during which the guests encountered the Ottoman literary heritage of divan poetry (Walsh 1960).

I Entered Gönenli's Group

At all kinds of meetings at the vakıf merkezi, as well as in mosques and other external locations, hymns were sung between prayers and Kuran recitations. The following is an example of a contemporary hymn whose author has used a well-established form and genre, filling it with a combination of Sufi terminology and modern experiences:

GİRDİM GÖNENLİ MECLİSİNE

Girdim Gönenli Meclisine
Yanlarında yer verdiler
Yüzümü sürdüm ayaklarına
İşte meydana gir dediler

Gördüğünü gözün ile
Söyleme sözün ile
Ondan sonra bizim ile
Sen de kardeş (ihvan) ol dediler

Meyletme dünya malına
Aldanma dünya şanına
Âbu Kevser ırmağına
Dal da kaybol ol dediler

Girdim Gönenli Meclisine
Aldığını ver dediler
Verdiler bizi göreve
Hizmet et de al dediler

Girdim Gönenli Dergâhına
Zikir ile coş dediler
Âbu kevser şarabını
Bizim ile iç dediler (Kana, kana iç dediler)

İmtihana gelmedin mi
Erenleri görmedin mi
Hocan ile yanmadın mı
Sen Resûlü görmedin mi
Sen Rabbin'i bulmadın mı

Gazap etme sabırlı ol
Zahmet çek de Mevlâyı bul
Yanmadan Mevlâ bulunmaz
Hak dostudur sabırlı kul

I ENTERED GÖNENLI'S GROUP

I entered Gönenli's group
They made room for me
My face touched their feet
Come here into *meydan*, they said

What you have seen with your eyes
Don't speak of it with words
After this they said,
You can also be a sister (friend) among us

Don't strive for the goods of this world
Don't be deceived by the glory of this world
Dive into the Âbu Kevser River [river of Paradise],
And disappear, they said

I entered Gönenli's group
Give what you have taken, they said
They appointed us a duty
Serve and you may take, they said

I entered Gönenli's *dergâh*
Get exuberant with *zikir*, they said
The wine of Âbu Kevser
Drink with us they said (Drink eagerly, they said)

Did you not come to the examination
Did you not see the holy ones
Did you not burn with your *Hoca*
Did you not see the Prophet
Did you not find your Lord

Don't be wrathful, be patient
Make an effort to find God
One doesn't find God without burning
The patient servant is a friend of God

The hymn is structured as a dialogue between the first-person narrator, who has entered the *meclis* (group or community), and a more concealed voice that articulates the message of what must be assumed to be the collective of vakıf women, "they". The substance is reproduced by the "I" with reference to what "they said" as a repetitive phrase that replaces the chorus in a traditional ilahi. The seven stanzas are not separated by any formal chorus, and the last one does not reveal the name of the author, as is common in the classical ilahi tradition.

The voice in the first line praises the way in which the protagonist was received by the association (*meclis*). The invitation to *meydan*, the space secluded for zikir, is specified in the first stanza as the most important aspect of "fellowship". Words like *meclis* in connection to *meydan* indicate a Sufi mode from the beginning of the ilahi. The somewhat quaint line about "my face touched their feet" can be understood in a more general Sufi mode as expressing the humble serving ideal, and perhaps the imagery is a reminiscence of narratives about the ways in which novices entered tarikats in historical times. The formalised respectful greeting (*saygı göstermek*, literally "show respect") of older women was practised at the vakıf, a gesture following the manners of conventional age hierarchy. Gratitude for the group and its welcoming attitude is an obvious theme in the first stanza, "They made room for me".

The members of the group assure the newcomer that the experience (the zikir is most likely to be implied here) the group offers cannot be expressed in words: "Don't speak of it with words". The phrase can be understood either as an image of zikir as being too mesmeric an experience to describe, or as an example of the secrecy discourse that surrounds the formal tarikats by tradition. In legendary narratives, a derviş is ideally seen as introduced to one secret after another along the spiritual progress of the path. Consequently, the invitation is repeated. This time it is formulated as an offer to become a sister in the group. The word *kardeş* is used, meaning sibling,[9] but in this mono-gendered context it should in all likelihood be understood as sister. In a break with the poetic style, there is an explanatory parenthesis giving a synonym to *kardeş*: *ihvan*, an Ottoman plural meaning friends. The choice of terminology in the present hymn can be compared to the naming of the pastry shop, where the Ottoman form *uhtiler* was used. It is common for Sufi literature to refer to the community of dervişes as a society of friends; the terms *dost* or *arkadaş* are usually applied in a contemporary context.

In the third stanza the welcomed novice is encouraged to reject the world (*dünya*) by throwing herself into the river of Paradise. *Dal*, disappear! The wealth of *dünya* is simply a chimera. Seclusion in the Christian monastic manner was practised in the early days of Sufism (Baldick 1989:114), but has survived as a metaphoric ideal meaning independence of worldly things. Rather, it

9. The Turkish language is devoid of grammatical gender. To denote a person's sex a word in apposition must be used; in this case *kız kardeş* (female sibling) for sister.

is stressed that a person "on the path" must be able to live "in the world", but not by it. The river Âbu Kevser in this case corresponds to *yol*, the Sufi path as the road to Paradise.

The servant ideal is furthermore stressed in the fourth stanza, and the important notion of service (*hizmet*) is explicitly mentioned. Those who have gained the insights of the path must be humble and be prepared to give something back; "Give what you have taken, they said". Their duty (*görev*) is to carry on the mission of the hoca, and their primary goal is to accomplish *hizmet*.

The following verse mentions more essential Sufi concepts and more controversial topics. The meeting-place is called Gönenli's *dergah*, a charged term with antiquarian associations evoking Ottoman life. The exhortation to get exuberant with zikir is a third invitation to the *uht* to be. The wine (*şarap*) and drinking (*içmek*) are classical metaphors for the spiritual intoxication that can be the effect of zikir or poetry reading. The river Kevser is usually understood as the symbol of spiritual knowledge, and to drink is the fulfilment of the path (*yol*) when entering Paradise. A stanza by Yunus Emre, in Grace Martin Smith's translation, reads: "Paradise will be permitted to you, and you will be permitted to embrace the houris and to drink of the wine of Kevser" (Martin Smith 1993:56). Again a parenthesis is applied at the end of a line, in this case as an emphasis given to the preceding sentence. "Drink with us they said (Drink eagerly, they said)"; zikir cannot be performed half-heartedly. It should be pointed out, though, that the wine symbolism is far from appreciated by everybody in the neighbourhood, this being a milieu characterised by pronounced Islamic puritanism.

The sixth verse is a break in the metric pattern of the stanzas and consists of five lines with direct questions, as if building up to the crescendo in the final stanza. Several of the words are frequently used Sufi terms: *İmtihan* is Allah's ultimate test of a person "in order not to let bad things happen", as it was explained to me, and *erenler* is a designation for saints, with a special connotation of "those who have arrived or attained the goal", i.e. individuals who have reached the seventh *makam* and can be characterised as *İnsân-ı Kâmil*. The latter expression is usually translated as the perfect man, but in this context it must be understood as the perfect human being.

A continuous invocation of the source of the benefits for the soul follows, encouraging an immediate relationship with the hoca, the Prophet, and the Lord himself. Mevlâ is a common name for God, meaning Lord or Master, like Rabbi in the former verse. Hakk (meaning "the Truth") is a synonym for Allah. In a Sufi context, the epithet may also be an equivalent of *efendi*, *şeyh*, *pir*, or *mürşid*, as in Mevlâna ("our Master", the epithet given to Rumi). The key verb in this stanza is *bulmak*, to find. This is the modern Turkish verb used for the progressive religious development, the quest.

Fellowship in Gönenli's *meclis* was not marked by any initiation or formal ceremony. In traditional tarikats, the transition from being a loyal guest to

dervişhood (*dervişlik*) is generally a major event in an individual's life. There are also many legends around this major step on the sevenfold path. Like many things in Sufi history, this is a male story built on a male paradigm, where the idealised model of the father-şeyh and son-disciple is a dominant image. The new derviş receives a diploma (*icâzet*) and often some special garment such as a vest, cloak, or cap to indicate fellowship and belonging; in addition, and most importantly, he swears an oath of allegiance (*bîat*) and takes the hand of his master, gestures which constitute the actual initiation ritual. From that moment, the derviş is bound in loyalty to the şeyh as a mürşid and to the tarikat as an organisation. The initiated is also commonly given a new additional name by the şeyh to indicate the disciple's spiritual emphasis (*meşreb*), as a characterisation of the personality of the derviş, and as a hint of his duties and talents. The act of initiation is often referred to as "to take hand", which seems to be the confirming of derviş obligations by a clasping of hands. Many women choose to be *muhib*s (literally "lovers", that is, sympathisers of a tarikat and loosely affiliated student (*talibe*) to it without any ritually confirmed bonds).

No such ceremonies take place at the vakıf merkezi, and no tarikat terminology is used in relation to the organisation. The women rejected the very thought of tarikat hierarchies and instead emphasised everyone's individual relations to the hoca through prayers and reading his texts. The book with his sohbets was sold at every meeting on the vakıf's premises and in mosques, but the small booklet with prayers was reserved for those who had acquired a personal relation to him. In comparison to the tarikats, prayers may be said to be the women's – very informal – insignia of fellowship and loyalty.

Generally speaking, the space offered by the vakıf may be seen as constructed on a social and a religious basis for women's meetings. Although the majority of activities took place in one single modern apartment building (and later also in the library), not in several detached houses as was the case with the *külliye*s, the vakıf fulfilled the vital functions of a traditional Sufi establishment. The most important thing was a proper room for prayer (both socially and spatially), individual *namaz* as well as collective *tesbihat*, and zikir performances. Knowledge (*ilim*) was highlighted in the very name of the vakıf and was exposed on the walls of the house. Even so, the focus on basic religious education strengthened the vakıf's links to the more Islamist groups of the district. The lending library in the apartment under the vakıf merkezi itself created an opportunity for the more intellectual women to acquire some familiarity with the theological arguments flourishing in the area.

An important aspect of traditional life around a *türbe* or a *zaviye* were the pilgrim tours. To some extent, the vakıf's meeting-place also served as "the mother house" in relation to similar activities. As a modern organisation, though, the women of the vakıf arranged bus-tours to visit famous mosques and *türbe*s.

The Weekly Activites

The establishment of a formal vakıf situated in an apartment with a home-like interior design made it impossible for the women to keep up any absolute distinction between public and domestic space. This absence of a formal demarcation apparently served as part of the strategy applied by the women as they balanced on the threshold to public spaces. The women acted jointly as an institution, although a small one, with the prime goal of protecting the visiting individuals from any criticism or slander.

The activities and programmes organised by the vakıf followed the Muslim calendar, based on the lunar cycle and starting with the month of Muharrem. All major holidays were celebrated with some special event, grand or slight, at the vakıf merkezi. Except for a halt for three weeks after the Kurban Bayramı holiday, there were regular activities at the vakıf merkezi and some nearby mosques all year round. The weekly prayer meetings constituted the substructure, while the educational programmes followed the schedule of the semesters of schools and universities. There were also special summer activities of a more leisurely character that offered opportunities to women of modest means to get out of the city at least once during the summer for a picnic, a cruise on the Bosphorus, or a one-day pilgrimage to famous mosques and *türbe*s within reach from Istanbul. The days of commemoration related to the hoca's life-span were strictly limited to the vakıf group. The birthday of the hoca, 29 November, was indicated in the programme as *Gönenli Mehmed Efendi Hazretlerini Anma Günü*. At this date a full-day seminar was annually arranged in honour of the hoca and in order to celebrate the activities of the vakıf that bears his name. The anniversary of the hoca's death, 9 January, was very discreetly celebrated. A small delegation of women visited his grave at the Edirnekapı graveyard to say some prayers. When talked of it was emphasised as an act of commemoration, honouring his memory, in order not to be fused with "worshipping a saint" which was disapproved of by many Islamists.

In the copied programmes of the vakıf, distributed at meetings and at the *börekçi*, one may note that only a selection of the activities were announced to the public. Only activities at the vakıf merkezi were mentioned in the prints and, notably, not even all of them. Except for the announcement of charity sales, activities *extra murum* were not advertised at all in the leaflets. These gatherings were part of local knowledge, and information about them was spread orally. It is impossible to judge to what extent the local authorities, the police, or the public prosecutor closely followed the moves of all the numerous small *cemaat*s all over Istanbul. The women of the vakıf were sensitive about not advertising anything that could be considered to be against the law. It was apparent that the women felt more safe (*güvenli*) and in command of the situation "at home" at the vakıf merkezi. At their own place there were significant differences in expression, which came out both verbally and by means of gestures and the ways of conducting the activities, depending on whether it was an advertised public meeting or an internal gathering. In terms of time and content, five areas of

activities arranged by the women of the vakıf may be distinguished: the weekly activities, charity activities, *kermes* and other forms of fund-raising, pilgrimage, and finally social activities.

Spatially the meetings could be divided into three categories. Most of the activities took place at the vakıf merkezi, while some events of the weekly programme were situated at mosques – if not in the immediate vicinity, then fairly close. In most cases these mosques were already long known as places for women's prayer meetings of a Sufi character, or related to Gönenli Mehmed Efendi's own preaching activities. Other, more occasional, events were arranged at other places like rented assembly halls run by the municipality or rented out by commercial companies. Among the latter, more distant category of places, the sites of pilgrimage could be included.

A common feature for the weekly meetings was their emphasis on knowledge (*ilim*) and Muslim education. Even if praying constituted the major part during these gatherings, the prayers were always linked to religious instruction delivered by the leading women in accordance with their didactic ambitions. Monday and Tuesday were never scheduled for programmes but reserved for practical matters, while Wednesday through Sunday were almost filled with the various programmes and arrangements. There were three regularly recurring activities, publicly announced, that took place at the vakıf merkezi, all of them organised according to the sex and age of the participants. Every Thursday afternoon sohbet meetings were held for women (*hanımlar*), twice a month there were sohbet meetings for men (*erkekler*) on Saturday evenings, and once a month a lunchtime meeting on Sundays was organised for young women (*genç kızlar*). A youth club (Gençlik Kulübü) was organised with afternoon meetings at weekends to promote learning and reflection (*bilgi ve düşünce*). It also had the social ambition to encourage friendship between youngsters of shared values (*ortak değerler*), a way of mobilising Islamistic youth for further commitments. The meetings for youngsters in their later teens were no doubt popular; but they never constituted a stable group as these young people went on to university studies or professional life, or married and started families. In contrast to the established tarikats there was no real room for young families to join the activities at the vakıf merkezi.

At the Wednesday meetings at the Hacı Hasan Camii, there was a more heterogeneous group of women gathering than usually at the vakıf merkezi. Among the attenders there was a group of supporters of the vakıf, but also women who were loyal to competing groups in the Fatih area and women with no specific affiliation at all. Parts of the mosque had recently been restored at the time of the fieldwork; tools and cement mixers were still around and gave an impression of visions of the future. The area surrounding Hacı Hasan Camii is poor and run down. In comparison with the shabby apartment houses, the courtyard shone with its new stone pavement and the fresh painting of the mosque. The other, smaller buildings of the complex were also renovated. The Wednesday morning activities at the Hacı Hasan Camii were very similar in structure to the public meetings arranged at the vakıf merkezi.

The collective ceremony began around 10 a.m. At the entrance, the visitors were greeted by a woman who distributed sweets to them and sprinkled rosewater on their hands. The sweet taste and smell were to be remembrances of the blessings each visitor brought with her home from the prayer meeting. Before the collective prayer women gathered in the main hall of the mosque for individual prayer and quiet conversation. The gathering started with a communal prayer, an invocation which constituted the sign for the beginning of the meeting and a dua-prayer for urgent causes. No single leader could be pointed out. Women associated with different groups took the lead in various parts and added themes for prayer or took up hymns. Within the frames of a certain pattern, improvisations could be made in accordance with the situation.

The reading from Gönenli's sohbets and the following exegesis were performed by the same woman who took on this duty at the vakıf merkezi, and she added interpretations. İlahis were always sung in between the prayers and were mostly from the commonly known repertoire of classics.

Each ilahi was of considerable length. The stanzas (*beyit*) were often performed by a single woman, whereas the less complex and rhythmical choruses (*koro*) in between were jointly sung by the women present. To know the full text was a sign of being accomplished in local tradition. The choruses were sometimes accompanied by the women's beating the rhythm on their laps, but I have never witnessed any woman playing an instrument in a mosque. At the vakıf merkezi the simple drum (*kudüm*) or the tambourine (*tef*) was sometimes used when singing ilahis, but never during zikir prayer.

Often elderly women who knew the ilahi tradition best took the lead. These women also had the authority to take such an initiative and start singing a hymn during other forms of prayer meetings. The singing could be a way of finishing off one prayer and connecting it with another, and it could always be a method of changing the tempo of prayer into something more intensive and emotional – with the help of the repetitive choruses.

At the Wednesday meetings at the Hacı Hasan Camii one particular woman was known to be skilled in performing the long narrative mevlid poems. She was held in great respect, since the art of performance was mostly conducted by women with some formal education and most often with some kind of family tradition when it comes to religious training. The mevlid singer was not among the frequent visitors at the vakıf, but nevertheless among the supporters in the vicinity.

The meetings on Thursday afternoons at the merkez were the most well-attended of all the vakıf's arrangements; sometimes over 70 women came, and

10. "From the Arabic for 'crowd' or 'mass', cumhur was the closest Ottoman equivalent to 'chorus', a concept otherwise alien to Ottoman musical practice [...] In the mosque cumhur referred to a small group of hafızs (cantors) chanting hymns in unison, while in the tekke it referred to this gathering or to the impromptu chorus of the entire chain (halka) of dervishes in the zikir" (Feldman 1992:193).

there were never fewer than 40 on these occasions. The meeting took three to four hours in all and may be said to be of both a social, a religious, and a mobilising character. The meeting started after the women had completed their midday prayer (*öğle namazı*), individually, and some dropped in after the *tesbih* meeting began.

In preparation large white sheets were laid on the floor, symbolising a circle, even if not perfectly round, and ten small glass bowls with 111 date-stones (from dates brought back from Mekke) were put in the middle. When properly prepared, the women sat down on the floor and formed concentric circles around the white sheets. Each date-stone (*taş*) in the bowls represented one prayer and the women were to complete 4 444 prayers together at one prayer meeting. This form of prayer was referred to as *tesbih*, the name of the Muslim rosary.

The prayer repeated, *Salâti tefriciye*, is, according to Muslim tradition, attributed to the Prophet Muhammed and reads in a rough translation:

> **Salati tefriciye (Salati nariye)**
> bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm
> allāhumma ṣalli ṣalātan kāmilatan wa-sallim salāman tāmman ᶜalā sayyidi-nā Muḥammadin illadhī tankhallu bi-hi l-ᶜuqadu wa-tanfariju bi-hi l-kurabu wa-tuqḍā bi-hi l-ḥawāᵓiju wa-tunālu bi-hi r-raghāᵓibu wa-ḥusnu l-khawātimu wa-yustasqā l-ghamāmu bi-wajhi-hi l-karīm wa-ᶜalā ᵓāli-hi wa-ṣaḥbi-hi fī kulli lamḥatin wa-nafasin bi-ᶜadadi kulli maᶜlūmin la-ka yā rabba l-ᶜālamīna
>
> In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Ever Merciful.
> O Allah, pray a complete prayer and give a greeting [*salâm*] of full value upon our Sayyid Muhammad, the one by whom the knots [were untied] and by whom the sorrows were driven away and by whom the wants were fulfilled and by whom the wishes were given and the beauty of seals and the clouds asked for [rain] through his noble face, and upon his kin and his companions in every glance and every breath by the quantity of everything known to You, O Lord of the worlds.
>
> (transliterated and translated by Dr Philip Halldén)

The following advice from the hoca can be read in the prayer-book *Evrad ve Tesbihat*:

> Hocamız bu salât ü selamı o kadar çok okuttururdu ki "Elimden gelse dağlara, taşlara okuttururdum" buyururdu. Bir niyet üzere okunmak istendiği zaman "Allah rızası için filan niyetine" diyerek 2 rekât namaz kılınır. Ardından 4 444 salâti tefriciye en fazla bir hafta içinde bitirilir. Eğer bir haftada okunacaksa cuma günü başlamak güzel olur. Ama acil durumlarda açılan bir mânevî sofrada 4 444 adet salâti tefriciye bir kerede huşu ve ihlâs içinde çekilirse biiznillah çektirenin niyeti gerçekleşir.
>
> Our hoca used to make us pray this *salât ü selam* and he commanded us: "If I only could, I would make the mountains and the stones pray". When one wants to make somebody read for a specific cause, saying "For Allah", it counts like two *rekat*s [sequences of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting] in a *namaz*. After

> this, the 4444 *salâti tefriciye* should be completed. If it is supposed to be completed within one week. It is better if it [the praying] starts on a Friday. But in emergency, a spiritual dining-table [*mânevî sofra*, i.e. the cloth for the stones, indicating the prayer circle] is opened up if one prays 4444 *salâti tefriciye* at one time with respect and love [*huşu ve ihlâs*], and with Allah's permission the intention is fulfilled.

One of the older women was in charge of the counting of prayers. Either women took some stones from the bowls in their hands and threw them one by one on to the white sheets when one prayer was finished, continuing with the next; or women said the number of prayers they had completed to the responsible woman who picked up the relevant number from the glass-bowls and put them in the middle with the other stones. After the completion of 1 111 prayers the blessing of Muhammed an his house (*Allahümme salli alâ seyyidina Muhammedin' in-Neybiyyi' l-ümmiyyi ve alâ âlihî sahbihî ve sellim*) and an ilahi was sung, as an interlude and to avoid unnecessary talking while the stones were distributed and arranged for a new session. The room was filled with gentle sounds: voices saying the prayers almost silently, the rattling of stones thrown to the centre, the voices of women telling the number of prayers they had accomplished, and from the entrance came sounds of late-comers who made their way into the already crowded room.

On the white sheets in the centre of the circles of praying women, some women had put open bottles with water and small boxes with candy in order to let them be filled with blessing (*bereket*) from the prayers. The water was brought back by the women to sick relatives, and the sweets were also taken back to their families to spread the blessing.

The amount of time for repetition of course depended on the number of women present; it usually lasted just over an hour. In contrast to the zikir ceremonies, the act of repeating the tesbih-prayers was not connected with strong emotions. The *Salâti tefriciyet* was more of an instrumental character as there were causes to pray for. The affective part of this kind of meeting came towards the end of the gathering. Some short invocations and dua prayers followed by *salavât*, the Muhammed blessing, marked the completition of the 4 444 prayers. Special causes of prayer were mentioned, ranging from personal matters to general concerns about how contemporary society was developing. From time to time this part of the prayer meeting could be emotionally very intense, with sighs and tears from the women.

Booklets with Kuran sures and some complete Kurans were distributed and one woman, often young, seated in a chair recited from the holy book while the other women followed in the written text.

Mostly there were readings from the hoca's sohbets, and the reader moved up in the armchair and put the book on a cushion with a white lace-cover. Depending on the theme, strong emotions could arise at this point too. Some traditional ilahis marked the end of the prayer session, or during certain holidays parts of

the narrative mevlid-poem was recited interfoliated with collective choruses. As the women rose and broke the prayer circle, the chorus shifted to the repeated phrase *Allahu Ekber, Allahu Ekber, Allahu Ekber, lâ illâhe illallah* (i.e. a combination of two of the most frequent Muslim phrases of prayer: *tekbir* and *kelime-i tevhid*) As a closure of the ceremony the women faced one of the senior women who had taken out the box with a piece of the black Kabe cover in solemn lines. All women passed her and kissed the cloth while singing the chorus.

Most women stayed for at least half an hour for tea and conversation. During this informal socialising, information about other activities that engaged the vakıf women was spread. The organisers sold copies of the sohbet collection, whereas the prayer-book *Evrad ve tesbihat* was only sold or given away as a sign of close affiliation.

Meetings of a similar character were also arranged in private homes and were then called *toplantı*, gatherings. The reason was often an individual need for intense prayer, joy, or sorrow. The guests then took on the 4 444 *Salâti tefriciyet* as a commitment in order to help. These private meetings had a structure resembling that of the ones at the vakıf merkezi and the same prayers were said, finished with Kuran recitation, ilahis, and sohbet-readings.

Activities Outside the Merkez. Meeting the Neighbourhood

The vakıf merkezi and its adjoining library were a source of pride to the members of the group. It served as a sign of accomplished visions. Most activities arranged by the group took place at their centre, but other locations were also in regular use.

In order to bring in money for the principal enterprise, the women opened a pastry shop (*börekçi*) a few blocks away from the vakıf merkezi. The shop was situated some steps down from the pavement on a lively street that connects the boulevard through Fatih and the highway Vatan Caddesi. The street is lined with bakeries, groceries, a butcher's shop, stores specialising in wedding outfits and *tesettür* fashions, and a locksmith's. The place was given the name Uhtiler Börekçisi, The Sisters' Pastry Shop. The ideological connotations were obvious as the women used a form of the Ottoman word for sisters which is hardly in use any more, not even in pious literature. Signs on the outer wall and stickers with logotype on the windows clearly indicated that the shop was run by the vakıf.

The pastry shop had a homelike atmosphere. The premises were half a flight of stairs down from the street level. The room was explicitly said to be decorated in Ottoman style, with items brought back from a pilgrimage to Urfa that gave it a folkloric character. The shop was open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (at least, sometimes even later). The opening of a shop was a serious commitment that the women had undertaken; as a consequence, even more women were involved

in the running of the business on a daily basis. The duties at the *börekçi* were heavy: preparing items for sale, taking the cash, serving (people constantly enter the shop to sit down or buy something to take away), washing up, and tidying. Full staff was needed for the preparations, baking, serving the customers, washing and cleaning, as well as doing the accounts and other paperwork. All this was done on a voluntary basis as *hizmet*. The choice of pastry as commodity made it possible for any woman who so wished to contribute, no special education was needed and the tasks could be executed at odd hours not to compete with family obligations. Socially it filled the same function as a job, but in this case it was an indisputably honourable and decent undertaking. In comparison to other workplaces, there was no risk of unnecessary contingency with men because of the aegis of the vakıf.

The shop soon became very popular in the neighbourhood. The women served delicious examples of classic Turkish pastry, both sweet and savoury: *gözleme*, *tepsi böreği*, *sigara böreği*, *baklava*, *tulumba* etc. The dishes as such were cherished with nostalgia as being old-fashioned and in line with the vakıf's *Osmanlı* visions. Nevertheless, the place itself was a novelty in the Fatih context. In sharp contrast to the traditional tea house (*çayevi* or *çayhane*) that exists in the smallest Turkish village and in every urban district, the *börekçi* was an astonishingly gender-mixed space. The *çayevi* has a male manager and is, in practice, an exclusively male space where the men of a certain neighbourhood sit and discuss for hours over a glass of tea or cup of coffee (Delaney 1991:176, 217, 251, 292). Conversely, the *börekçi* was very overtly run by pious women in full *tesettür* garments and by a vakıf for the support of women's activities, and many women, covered and uncovered, took the opportunity to sit down in the pastry shop while out doing their errands. Being outdoors on the way to something, in motion and with a goal, is one thing; resting in public is quite another for covered women, careful choices must be made. This completely new construction of space did not merely offer *başörtülü* women an equivalent to the male *çayevi* (like an inversion): it constituted a symptom of the changing times in which the pious women found themselves. The separation of the sexes was the norm in the district and an indisputable fact during rituals, though when it came to city life mixing was inevitable. Men and women had to co-operate, whether pious or not. The *börekçi* was an example of the fact that this could be done in a proper way. What was so striking was that men and women could sit at tables next to one another in a way one would not have imagined possible in a conservative district like Fatih where *çayevi*s or restaurants for a mixed audience were named family places, that is places were women came with male relatives.

The customers at the *börekçi* provide a representative image of the mixed population in the area. It was also an image of the vakıf women's world at large: esteemed traditions remoulded in the late modern metropolis under the increasing influence of global forces.

A few other examples of the new modes of mobility may be mentioned and

their consequences for cultural and religious values in the landscape of the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı's activities.

Travel is of course an obvious example of mobility, and going abroad is a major achievement for most women in Turkey. The number of pilgrimage permits granted in Turkey is limited, and the allocation is by quotas. When a package tour is bought, bureaucratic matters are supervised by the travel agent. The women of the vakıf organised opportunities to join organised hac tours to Mekke/ at least once a year for themselves and women in the vicinity. At least twenty women at a time travelled on a charter basis, with a token man as their leader, and stayed away for two or three weeks. Depending on the schedule for other activities in the group, both the obligatory hac (which may be undertaken only during the month of pilgrimage, Zilhicce) and the minor *umre* (which can be undertaken at any time of the year) were organised. Thanks to these tours, women who would not otherwise have had a chance of going on such a journey were given the opportunity to fulfil the demand (*şart*) of pilgrimage.

The central state authority for the hac tours is the DIB through its local organisations. As in all Muslim countries, the number of pilgrims is restricted, and each would-be pilgrim must acquire individual approval (*izin*). It is apparently the case that an application processed via the vakıf increases the chances of being among the selected, even for women unaccompanied by a close male relative. The hac was much easier to accomplish in the 1990s than it had been just a few decades before. It used to be a sign of considerable economic well-being and social status. Nowadays there are convenient flights and well-planned sojourns. Charter travel is both fast and affordable. Even married women with family responsibilities can make a full hac and be back within a fortnight. Although it is nowadays within the reach of many more people, the hac still has a considerable status within religious circles.

The vakıf took the initiative and thus roused and encouraged the idea (and dream) that the hac was feasible among less affluent women. Members of the group also helped with practical arrangements, for instance advising others on how to obtain economic support, and shared knowledge and experience about the hac as a religious event. The hac as an opportunity for global encounters should not be overestimated, however. There is no absolute correlation between travelling and actually meeting. From discussions after their return, it transpired that the women kept more or less to themselves while in Saudi Arabia; direct, substantial contacts with Muslims from other countries were rare. In her study of the hac, Carol Delaney has brought up the issue of language barriers./ It

11. For further discussions of women's hac tours see Delaney 1990; Tapper & Tapper 1990; Andezian 1997; Kamalkhani 1998:102ff.

12. In this essay Carol Delaney compares the labour migrants' annual journey back to Turkey with the hac tour. The empirical material comes from her fieldwork in central Anatolia 1980–82. The context is obviously very remote from the world of the vakıf women, and Delaney's emphasis on the marginalisation of women is not of course relevant in the present case. Nevertheless, interesting comparisons can be made.

would be untenable to argue that the hac tours as such constitute any arena for actual meetings and interaction with the international Muslim world. The significance of the hac is of another character. Mostly the returning women's sense of "Muslim otherness" was based on visual perception, and they brought back memories of the hac that lingered for a long time. When the television screen showed scenes from Indonesia or Africa, the hacıs often started referring to observations made in Mekke and Medine, and the hac developed into a collective international experience.

The hac tours were certainly not only of significance for those who travelled. The individual traveller shared many aspects of the experience with family, friends, and groups. The homecoming parties were an important part of the pilgrimage. It was almost a rite of passage in van Gennep's sense, the integration being as important as the separation. The liminal phase was the hac experience as such, and the individual was prepared to return to society with a new status: as a hacı (Turner and Turner 1978). The pilgrims were to be received back into the community who had prayed for the travellers during their absence. The women at home followed the daily special hac broadcasts on television during the month of pilgrimage. When the picture showed the hundreds of thousands walking around the Kabe in packed crowds, somebody always shouted with enthusiasm, "Oh, there they are!" Even though it was absolutely impossible to catch any individual faces, the television viewers at the vakıf felt connected to these events thanks to their friends. The introduction of high-tech telecommunication has also facilitated direct reports from Medine. These accounts were of both personal and religious importance, creating an emotional bond of simultaneous experience that momentarily invalidated the differences between "here" and "there".

The memories of the hac were not only transmitted by way of direct verbal discourse; they could also consist in tangible objects, such as souvenirs purchased in Medine. The flow of consumer goods is always mentioned in theories of globalisation, and it was certainly a vital part of the symbolic universe of the community studied here. It is all too easy to dismiss the souvenirs as mere knick-knacks, since they are often mass-produced in China or Malaysia: the Kabe or the Prophet's mosque in a multitude of materials and forms, calligraphic plates, shopping baskets embroidered with the name of Medine, and so on. But the hac presents were of immense importance for establishing and maintaining social relations. The acts of giving and receiving were highly formalised at the homecoming parties, held immediately after the pilgrims were picked up at the airport or within the next few days. The act of gift-giving was a formalised way of showing respect for the recipient and of transferring the blessing (*bereket*) from one location to another, as happens with the *zemzem* water brought back in recycled five-litre cans. For as long as it lasted, the blessed water was distributed at the end of prayer meetings. It would be served in tea glasses from a tray, and the women rose from the tesbih-prayer circle to face Mekke. When everybody had a tea glass a collective formulaic prayer was said and the water was drunk, swallowed in one gulp, all the women facing Mekke.

These seemingly banal souvenirs (framed pictures, keyrings, pencils, purses etc.) were charged with social and religious meaning. Personal gifts functioned as signs of affection, confirming an emotional and social bond between two individuals. The recipient's status was also affected. The gift signalled that the owner was, if not a hacı herself, a comparatively close friend of one. Souvenirs were also kept to be sold further on at the sales and fairs (*kermes*) that were organised twice a year to bring in money for the programmes and charity work of the vakıf. On these occasions, the objects purchased in Medine and Mekke were piled up at the centres of the tables of goods for sale among home-made and hand-made articles and merchandise donated by acquainted manufacturers, often family businesses with one or more women active in the vakıf. The Mekke souvenirs thus spread a certain dignity over the whole event as such.

The women also brought back narratives of memories that were orally spread in the vicinity and supported the status of the group. Both the departure and the return were subjects of conversation: who was going, who gave what to whom, and so on. From the period in Saudi Arabia miracles were told, and there were stories about people who got lost in the immense crowds and were then found again; prayers spoken at Mekke were answered, and recitations from the Kuran were interpreted as answers to current problems. Stories from the hac were told and retold at the different kinds of vakıf meetings and were slowly integrated into the social memory of the group, connecting this little *cemaat* with the universal centre of all Muslims. The hac narratives were frequently brought up as comments on news from the Muslim world on television or in the press, as testimony that there really were Chinese Muslims or Black Muslims in the United States. Late modernity is often related to a multipolar world and set within a discussion about postmodernity. Along such lines, Mekke can be added to the centres competing for global significance in a dual fashion: within Islamist discourse the place challenges the West on ideological and cultural terms, and in a Middle Eastern political context this cultural nexus diminishes the importance of the nation state. Both aspects are apparent in contemporary Turkey where "the new religious consciousness", with all its contradictions, is united – in a vague anti-Westernism – with an even vaguer rhetorical aspiration, far from always practised, for the global *ümmet*. In popular imagination, Carol Delaney writes, Mekke is "a place displaced beyond the horizon, creating a desire to bridge the distance; it is also a presence that is absent, engendering a pervasive mood of longing" (Delaney 1990:516). However, it must be remembered that hac was a mass event (and the nexus of an articulate international mass culture) by definition long before the introduction of such concepts as modernity or postmodernity. What has changed is the number of people (particularly women) who have the opportunity to go and the efficiency with which this fact is handled.

For the majority of the women associated with the vakıf, the hac was the only journey abroad they ever made; and in some cases it was the only kind of travel outside Turkey that was conceivable, owing to family conventions. Even for

educated women (with both economic and social opportunities), a trip abroad – even to a Muslim country – was out of the question. The only legitimate reason for travel was pilgrimage and visiting close relatives. The organising of a hac was a meritorious (*sevap*) act for the vakıf and extended the possibilities for further women to go to Mekke. The hac tours also served as an important icon in fund-raising campaigns and had given the women a high-profile local identity as being full of enterprise. The tours invested them with an ambiguous local authority. Men were ambivalent about whether women should travel like that, and more importantly, whether women should take the lead like that – infringing the norm that a woman should not perform the hac without the company of a close male relative. There had been rather vehement debates between the more educated women, who defended their way of organising pilgrimage, and fathers and brothers who brought up theological arguments. In order to emphasise local diversity, it must be added that other women also opposed this particular form of activity, but often from a social or moralistic point of view rather than a theological one. More than once, calming the storm required the vakıf women to exercise their negotiation skills.

Although the fieldwork for this study was set within one district of the city only, even in this limited area religious groups were competing at both ideological and economic levels. The provision of hac tours and other opportunities for more limited pilgrimage added fuel to a neighbourhood debate from which the women gained, although it also turned people away from them. The concept of negotiation, frequently employed in the social sciences as well as in cultural studies, is useful in this context. From a local perspective, the establishing of space for negotiations has been one of the most considerable social changes: women provoked theological debate and gave powerful answers. This condition could not only be explained by general education, but also by the fact that many more women have graduated from the religious colleges, İmam Hatip schools, and some of them have gone on to conduct academic theological studies at the *ilahiyat* faculties of the major state universities. There are still very few Turkish women who assume public roles as theologians in publishing and other forms of media appearance, whereas in a semi-public space with retained gender divisions such as the vakıf younger women do not hesitate to share their learning, expressing confidence in their scholarly ambitions.

Another aspect of the new mobility that brought the world to the vakıf was the extensive labour migration from Turkey and the subsequent important factor of returning migrants. Generally speaking, the status of these people was highly ambiguous back in their mother country, especially that of young women (Robins and Morley 1996). On the one hand, many people came back with considerable wealth. They could invest their money in local enterprise and live a good life. On the other hand, returning migrants were often looked upon with suspicion in cultural terms. The longer they had been away, the more likely they were to be considered foreigners (*yabancı*). A reunion could be more painful than expected, and on a personal level it might even be a tragedy. In the

present case study, returned and invested money played a crucial role for the vakıf's potential to develop new projects.

In relation to religious activism, those who returned brought back capital in all the four senses defined by Pierre Bourdieu. Economic capital was perhaps the most immediately visible kind: money and prestige goods, as well as management know-how. The economic support from returned families was of fundamental importance to the vakıf group, which would never have been able to keep its ambitious programmes running if it had been obliged to rely on traditional fund-raising, such as *kermes* or subscriptions, alone. Cultural capital came back in the sense that young women who have been to school in Europe often also have some basic knowledge of English, and their general standard of education is higher. These qualifications give them a better position if they want to go in for professional careers or consume global media. In this sense they serve both as introducers and as cultural/linguistic translators. As for social capital, there are connections to Turkish Muslim groups abroad, often in Germany and the Netherlands, albeit less frequently when it comes to women's groups. These groups may have varying aims and orientations, some of a predominantly religious and others of a more nationalistic character, but taken altogether they strengthen the networks available to young Muslims. As mentioned above, young women may be rejected as individuals (especially among their relatives who stayed in Turkey); but in the long run groups with international contacts do gain more and more status, even in their local context. The symbolic capital is manifested in dress code and attributes as much as in the self-confidence with which the programmes are carried out.

The contacts described above were most often family-based. In the long run, the people involved (and here I include both those who actually migrated and those who stayed at home receiving telephone calls and summer visits, watching international news with new eyes as they related to family and friends abroad) acquired a more complex understanding of other ways of life. The Turkish labour migration is a clear example of transnational flows of people, money, consumer goods, knowledge, and information. In consequence, the German and Dutch diaspora is mirrored in local Turkish surroundings. Especially returning women pass on knowledge of how to conquer secular space while retaining their pride and dignity. The very presence of Muslim attitudes that are in line with late modern living conditions could be considered *dava* to the immediate vicinity. Encounters with and access to modernity do not necessarily spell a farewell to religion; but they may give rise to conflicts with the local religious establishment.

Muslim Diversity

As a second aspect of globalisation, it should be observed that the women of the vakıf – as a consequence of social as well as spatial mobility – were constantly confronted with other ways of living. The question of how to deal with

the consequences of the urban conglomerate (Hannerz 1980) highlights the cultural conflicts between rural migrants and the daughters of the megacity within a small group like the one studied here. Both secularism and Islamism constantly challenge what is conceived by newcomers to the city as traditional and sound. It is quite a surprise, or even a shock, to many women to find that they have to defend themselves against other Muslims, realising that their brightly patterned headscarf is less of a problem to the secular lady they are cleaning for than to the women they want to pray with. In almost all Turkish Muslim women's groups, differences in education are noticeable whenever social and spatial mobility is considered. Yet the impact of informal education should not be underestimated, as the women understand their assignment to entail dispensing information and advise about the true path (*doğru yol*), not only in the Sufi sense but also in terms of Muslim lifestyle. In this perspective the informal education undertaken by the religious NGOs is a very direct form of socialisation. Not only of individual importance, the behaviour and attitudes of a collective are constantly judged by the people around them. In a society of "disorganized capitalism", to use Turner's phrase quoted above, charity work is badly needed, not only in an economic sense in order to ease poverty and pain but to reach out to people and make them understand the conditions of modern religion. "Religiously-based social movements therefore constitute distinct possibilities for bridging the gap between privatized religious function and publicly influential religious performance" (Beyer 1994:107). Serving the poor is the prime legitimate reason for religious women to involve themselves in social life beyond the control of family members. It is apparent that these encounters form an inducement to self-reflection, even though the new experiences are seldom articulated in conversations at the vakıf.

A third example of globalisation is of course the new media market in Turkey. The religious television channels have undergone rapid development and are in a state of fierce competition among one another. Programme style has progressed from solemn Kuran recitations, with an almost static picture showing a quietly murmuring brook, to a fairly wide range of television genres: jingles, trailers, television personalities, talk shows, and soap operas. The explosion of television channels, satellites, magazines etc. has brought greater knowledge of the world, not only in a general sense but more importantly – from the angle of my fieldwork – in terms of greater knowledge of how other Muslims live. Despised or embraced, Muslims of other countries have come alive in a way that was not the case some fifteen years ago. Changes in modes of communication play a vital part in this process. Religious messages are expressed in new media which not only affect the sender, but also make new demands on the receiver. One example is mass-produced easy reading aimed at young female readers. These publications often adopt the form of short novels focused on a single individual and with a moralistic twist at the end, where Muslim lifestyle and values prove to be the solution. This consumer culture, with its strong ideological bias, indicates "a consumption of signs and images

in which the emphasis upon the capacity to endlessly reshape the cultural or symbolic aspect of the commodity makes it more appropriate to speak of commodity-signs", Mike Featherstone writes (1995:75).

The women of the vakıf were big consumers of the new communication technology. They were also producers of information. The activities of the vakıf were highly dependent on faxes, mobile telephones, PCs, and quick printing facilities for flyers, posters, and booklets; the women advertised their weekly activities within limited strata and areas, but with the utmost efficiency. The new fora for expression were not solely a reflection of global impact; they also testified to an ardent desire to find new ways of making an impression on the local public sphere. The women participated (more or less consciously) in creating debates by means of their presence/non-presence, still able to observe the rules of *tesettür*, decent dress code.

However, it was only in the political elite among Islamist intellectuals that something was explicitly said about being a global individual in a more technical sense. The women of the vakıf acted out of loyalty to their group and their friends, and they avoided relating themselves to the world at large. Many active Muslims in Turkey define themselves as being in a sort of diaspora in relation to mainstream secular society. A rhetorical twist is often made in the self-image of the Islamist movement, a twist which problematises the situation of being a representative of a genuine Muslim Turkish heritage, while being forced into a marginal position owing to Kemalistic politics over the last seventy years. From this perspective, the conception of a global Muslim community (*ümmet*) serves as both an ideal and a comfort.

When Islamist activism is analysed, there is an apparent risk that people's devotion is reduced to a question of politics, the religious inducements of individuals tending to fade away. Studies of groups with an Islamist orientation seldom emphasise personal belief as a driving force, whereas studies of Sufism tend to avoid the political aspects of derviş activism and instead invoke emic concepts such as spiritual development, guidance etc. in the analytical model. The vakıf that forms the core of the present study is certainly at the crossroads between Islamism and Sufism, religion existing alongside politics: Sufism is political and Islamism is spiritual.

It must be remembered, however, that Melucci, Beyer, and other theorists of globalisation are highly gender-blind in their pursuit of the meaning of religion in late modern society (C. Scott 1995). In many situations when planning and arguing for their programmes, the women of the vakıf were forced to do battle on two fronts: against the Muslim, male-dominated community and its traditionalistic conventions, and against mainstream secular society. They had to deal with local religious authorities, formal representatives of the DIB or more informal *imam*s and *hoca*s, and representatives of state and municipality.

By way of concluding remarks on the discussion about globalisation, some of Fredric Jameson's attempts to distinguish what constitutes the postmodern (or preferably late modern) condition may be applied to the present field material

(Jameson 1983, 1991, 1998).[13] It is primarily Jameson's interest in urban living conditions in megacities that will be focused on here, along with his discussions of the controversial shift from high modernity to whatever comes after.

Jameson speaks of local reactions to the established forms of high modernism. From this perspective the vakıf is a part of a major trend in Turkish society over the last twenty years (if not longer), formulating alternative understandings of modern living. Or, to use a favourite postmodern expression: the Kemalistic master narrative is being challenged by Muslim alternatives. As has been discussed above, the vakıf women's counter-narrative of the past and the present aims at the foundation of a Muslim society as described in the hadis collections. This historical utopia, the Medine model, combines synchronic aspects with diachronic ones that aggressively contradict the progressive evolutionism in the Kemalistic ideology and other forms of high modernism, though the local character and the diversity of this trend have also limited its political influence. As an umbrella organisation the Refah/Fazilet Partisi has hardly had any ideological influence on parliamentary politics. Rather, the party has supported a biased protectionism of a generally conservative character.

Secondly, Jameson and others speak of the blurred or contested boundaries of high and low culture. This feature has a certain gendered aspect and could be exemplified with the new modes and genres of both spoken and written text. In the local context of the present fieldwork, authoritative speech and authoritative interpretation have traditionally had their specific and highly respected time, place, agents, and symbols. Bruce Lincoln writes: "[D]iscursive authority is not so much an entity as it is (1) an effect; (2) the capacity for producing that effect; and (3) the commonly shared opinion that a given actor has the capacity for producing that effect" (Lincoln 1994:10f.). The public prayer ceremonies, Friday sermons, formal didactic speeches, sohbet, and other statements of a normative character (fatvas, moral advice etc.) are carried out by male bearers of tradition. Within the tarikats discursive authority is institutionalised and embodied in the şeyh. He is regarded as a living link in a historical chain of divine guidance (*silsile*). Tradition in these conservative milieus is to a great extent understood as faithful reproduction, while novel interpretation (*ictihâd*) is considered a major sin. The lay women's appearance on the semi-public scene (along with other Muslim/ Islamist NGOs) has certainly blurred those distinctions. Not only have they transgressed the gender borders as public speakers, they have also brought into public modes of speech that not long ago were limited to the private sphere.

Furthermore, Jameson also uses postmodern as a periodising concept. Although criticised by sceptical commentators, this aspect is interesting, as Jameson emphasises that the "break" is as much a continuation. Applied to Turkey, the introduction of the Özal liberal economy could serve as an example of such a radical shift (Özal 1991). It definitely globalised the economy of Turkey

13. The quotations in the following discussion are taken from *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983–1998* (1998).

and had a major impact on social and cultural life; it put a decisive stop to large-scale state-dominated projects, and late modernity has certainly caused cultural processes to take another turn. In its wake, numerous NGOs were established in all fields of interests, manufacturing local, transnational, and other identities. Choice and diversity are hailed by Turkish intellectuals as the road to more thoroughgoing democratisation. From the perspective of a less than prosperous district, the importance of education is more than ever the key to gaining access to the benefits of a changing society. If globalisation is supposed to be more than just another term for internationalism, colonialism, or hegemonic aspirations, it must comprise chronological aspects. The present study works on the assumption that there is a temporal aspect of globalisation which indicates a new phase of modernity as a force in social and cultural processes as well as an ideology.

Fourthly, Jameson's adoption of the term pastiche (without any mocking or satirical connotations) might be noted when considering the code systems of the Turkish Muslim NGOs and discussing the use of history or the fad for nostalgia and "retro" in secular as well as religious circles. Both Neo-Ottomanism and the salaf ideals are representations of past ideals or of cultural stereotypes about the past, although it is the secularist interpretation of nationalism that has been the dominant ideology for the better part of the twentieth century. A new mode of nationalism has emerged with an apparent orientation towards the Muslim world as regards both cultural identity and foreign policy (Yavus 1998).

Finally, a condition under the pretext of postmodernity that is more complicated to apply to the ideology of the women of the vakıf is "the death of the subject". It might to some extent go well with the Sufi theology of taming the self and conceptions of "die before you die", whereas normative, more Islamist discourse demands a stable, responsible, humble self. It leaves us with the discussion of the relation between a globalised world with an ever-growing number options and the trend towards particularisation and emphasis on local life worlds; "the interplay of the particular and the universal in the process of globalisation" (Beyer 1994:14 et passim).

Late Modernity as a Living Condition

Islam has always been understood by its followers as a universal religion. The salvation that is preached is a concern for all of humankind; consequently, the concept of tevhid has always been a cornerstone in all forms of theological discourse. In this chapter globalisation has been discussed as an effect rather than as a cause. Above all, the discussion has focused on women as agents responding to a global impact on their religious lives in a male-dominated context.

As indicated in the scenario outlined in the introduction, the conditions for women's religious activism have changed rapidly over the last fifteen years. The attempts to establish proper female space for prayer meetings and social events of similar kinds are hard to obtain recognition for within a system built on a strict

private/public dichotomy. While still adhering to the rules of spatial gender division, tesettür dress and edipli behaviour, the women have nevertheless amazed (if not shocked) their local environment with their intense activism and their ability to conquer new arenas. This activism is to a large extent dependent on individual women's skills and proficiency. The potential for women's groups to act in a more visible mode has been realised thanks to women with both secular and religious education which enabled them to deal with authorities (establishing a vakıf) and to formulate valid theological arguments (defending the hac tours).

However, the ability to cope with the flow of information, propaganda, and leisure-orientated phenomena issuing from competing, not to say combating, media conglomerates (religious or not) is not a question of education alone. There is a substantial difference between the generations, as the younger women not only use the new media technology as an instrument but also show that their apprehension of the world is deeply affected by cultural globalisation. The technical competence of the younger ones is the means by which the senior women partake in the global flow.

By way of closing this section, it must be stressed that no contemporary Turkish issue or event can be discussed without considering the impact of nationalism. As the election in April 1999 testified, it is perhaps the most forceful ideology today. Contemplating the conditions for religious activities, it must not be forgotten that nationalism is a strong bond between laicists and Islamists. Kemal Atatürk is still omnipresent; his portrait hangs in every public room, watching over his republic. But current identity politics are radically different from the heyday of Kemalistic modernism. Everyday life has become the battleground between structure, discourse, and a vibrant counter-discourse. Most Turkish NGOs (religious or not) define themselves as representatives of values that in one way or another oppose the hegemonic claims made by the state for decades. Liberal economic policy, globalisation, and the various NGOs have effectively counteracted such claims. In the present context, where the focus is on a grass-roots organisation, no clear-cut centre of conflicts can be identified. Even within the Islamist movement, goals and means differ dramatically. Melucci's use of the concept "complex society" is therefore adequate when staging individual actors in a local context; micro and macro levels of society are not easily distinguished when one tries to perceive groups in constant motion. The group studied here is constantly testing its collective identity in relation to other women's groups, to the local religious establishment, and to the secular society of the majority – and therefore it sometimes acts in ways that may seem contradictory. Adding to the complexity, it must also be taken into account that individuals belong to several simultaneous social systems. An individual is certainly more than a religious activist; she has roles and commitments of many kinds in her family, in her neighbourhood, and at work.

Whether the present development of multivocal Muslim NGOs lends greater depth to democracy or constitutes a step towards a more authoritarian society is a topic of inflamed debate in contemporary Turkey.

Modern ve Dindar. The Life and Legends of the Hoca

The vakıf as such was nothing remarkable for the area, neither as a religious endowment nor as a women's organisation. Rather, it was the combination of those two elements as well as their choice of authority that caused occasional discord between the group and people in their vicinity. In this context, it should be borne in mind that Sufism is embedded in the history of the district from its beginning.

A Web of Sufi Circles

The women's hoca was a characteristic preacher in his time, far from unique in his local milieu. For centuries there have been Sufi masters (şeyhs or other teachers) whose students kept venerating them long after they departed. Some of them were buried in mausoleums; others only gradually began to be venerated and locally talked of as saints. Most of them only live in stories and legends. In the Fatih district, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi had several contemporary fellow teachers whose theology and instructions for ritual practice belonged within Sufi traditions. The memories of them also linger.

The vakıf merkezi was situated close to one of the better-known Sufi centres in Istanbul, İskender Paşa Camii. At this complex, the famous Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897–1980)[1] was the leader of various Nakşbendi activities for decades. He is one of the most prominent examples from modern times and an urban setting of honoured persons who were never formally accepted as saints, but gained influential status (both during their lifetime and after death) owing to their charismatic leadership. Kotku's reputation and authority linger on in the neighbourhood and are maintained by his successors and followers. His career is an illustration of how local religious leaders are venerated as long as their memory live on, in a way that was common throughout the Ottoman Empire for centuries. In this case, however, modernity and urban living conditions must be added to the picture of how Kotku made a sustained impact; and today he is well known beyond his local base. From the late 1950s

1. For introductions to the theology of Mehmed Zahid Kotku see Mardin 1991:133f.; Zarcone 1996:376ff.; K. Özal 1999. See also Atacan 1999; Yavuz 1999b for more political analyses. His disciples present their teacher and their activities on the following websites: www.iskenderpasa.com; www.kotku.org.au; www.kotku.net; www.aitco.com/guldeste; www.hacegan.com.

until his death in 1980, he maintained a substantial Nakşbendi influence over certain sectors of political life in Turkey. Among the persons who participated in his circle was the former Refah Partisi leader Necmettin Erbakan (Baldick 1989:159f.; Mardin 1991:134). Today the İskender Paşa group is led by Mehmed Zahid Kotku's son-in-law, Es'ad Coşan (1938–2001), whose many books have reached a wide audience – not only in Turkey, but also abroad in translation.

In many ways the Nakşbendis fulfil the standard image of a tarikat: it exercises discreet, but firm, political influence; it has a guild-like substructure that forms alliances of vital economic importance; and its leading members interpret tradition in fairly orthodox Sunni terms. In Fatih, the various Nakşbendi subbranches have formulated a specific discourse over the last twenty years, a discourse that combines and integrates radical *şeriat*-oriented Islamism with tarikat-oriented Nakşbendi theology. This combination of strategic features constitutes the breeding-ground of many formal and informal Muslim activist groups in the district.

Generally speaking, the İskender Paşa group has many international contacts through converts and successful missions in Western Europe and North America. The order also links traditional Nakşbendi dervişes in the Muslim world (since the collapse of the Soviet Union there have been extensive contacts with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia) (Zarcone 1996:379) with Turks in the diaspora (Gaborieau & Popovic & Zarcone (eds.) 1990; Özdalga (ed.) 1999). Their activities today are far from clandestine or underground. On the contrary, this particular Nakşbendi group is more or less the secularist-prejudiced prototype of Sufi groups: many members walk around in the district with their tarikat turbans and mantles on, using their emblematic walking-sticks and clogs. Their appearance is unambiguously a demonstration against the secularist aim to privatise religion. During the politically hot spring of 1997 discussed at the beginning of this book, some ten men were taken into custody each Friday after the midday prayers for not wearing "contemporary clothes", although they were released after some hours and no legal action was taken. In the last ten years the Nakşbendis, as well as other Muslim groups, have acquired new public visibility, especially through the media and in particular television. The Nakşbendis run the AKRA radio station and the

2. Es'at Coşan has written books with such titles as: *İslam, Sevgi ve Tasavvuf* (Islam, Love and Sufism) 1994; *Haccın Faziletleri ve İncelikleri* (The Virtues and Finenesses of the Haci); *Yeni Dönemde Yeni Görevler* (New Eras New Duties) and *Zaferin Yolu ve Şartları* (The Path and the Conditions of Victory), all published by Seha Neşriyat, a Nakşbendi company which also runs a major bookstore in Fatih. Along with the Directorate of Religious Affairs' bookstore ("Diyanet"), the Seha bookstore is the largest and best-stocked in the district. The publications of the vakıf were not for sale in either of these bookstores. Although the women's activities and booklets were known, it is my interpretation that this was an arrangement with which both parties were content. Selling vakıf materials would have amounted to taking up a position on both sides.

AK-TV[3] channel, and they publish journals and magazines. By such means they have gained the position of one of the dominating Islamist voices in contemporary Turkey.

The Nakşbendis, not only the group at the İskender Paşa Camii, have enjoyed influence in political circles on the centre-right wing since the end of World War II. Besides the well-known Turgut Özal (who never declared in public that he was a devoted member, though he was always known to be one), the late president's brother Korkut Özal[4] is still active both in politics and in the religious debate. He is generally regarded as a reliable spokesman of the tarikat. With his moderate attitude, Korkut Özal is a person often brought forward whenever a representative of contemporary tarikat life is needed. He is a combination of the modern derviş (no fierce rural rituals, but silent zikir as preferred by many of the Nakşbendis) and the honourable citizen (at the time of the fieldwork he was still a member of parliament for DYP, not his brother's ANAP).

Seen in this perspective it was not controversial in this particular neighbourhood for the women of the vakıf to have a strong relation to a religious teacher and adviser. The vakıf as an organisation was founded to honour the deceased hoca as a pious person and as a spiritual leader (*mürşid*). Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was mentioned and praised at every gathering as the one who had not only brought the women on to the righteous path, but also inspired them to spread the message of Islam. The endowment bore Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's name, and the symbols on the emblem indicated the places where his teachings were continued today. The bold advertisement and the emblem underlined that the women were organised and independent, with a *mürşid* of their own choice.

The urban environment is nothing new to the Sufi orders (Zubaida 1994; Cornell 1998). As stressed above, Istanbul has a long history as a cosmopolitan city. However, the rapid urbanisation from the 1970s onwards has not only had demographic but also profound cultural consequences for how lives are lived and how religion is expressed. Urbanisation, with the coming of rural people to the major cities, greatly affected the attempts of the authorities to keep up the Kemalist ideals. Not only country people entering the city (as opposed to those families who had been city-dwellers for more than two generations) changed the urban mode, but also the amalgam that followed in their wake, made up of people from various regions in Turkey, non-Turkish citizens (Turks or not), and the presence of secular and international lifestyles. What became apparent as structural problems in the last decades of the twentieth century was a process that began more than a hundred years earlier. It was in such a soil that the hoca grew as a religious teacher. He was *modern ve dindar* ("modern and pious"), as

3. *Ak* has a double meaning of both "white" and "honest" or "pure". The choice of name is symptomatic of the Turkish Islamist discourse during the last decade. The self-definition is fashioned around an image of the Islamists as untouched or uncontaminated by the scandals of official life.

4. Mardin 1991:134; K. Özal 1999.

one young woman who had never met him exclaimed. Apparently she felt that the message of the hoca – and her sisters' contemporary interpretation of it – was in tune with her own time.

A Life and Achievements in Parallel with the Republic

The religious reactions to the new constellations and lifestyle options in the wake of modernity could not simply be countered with rejections and condemnations. A more successful strategy consisted in attempting to meet the urban challenge with pious answers. The span of the Gönenli's public activities from the early 1920s onwards is parallel to the rapid modernisation process after the establishment of the secular republic.

The traditional Sufi orders during the Ottoman period were well established among their specific clienteles (often with a clear social stratification or professional division as the hallmark of each branch or sub-branch), and in many cases the orders were an integral part of politics and involved in court intrigues. To fulfil the secularist ambitions of the Kemalist regime's modernist ideology, many of the early Kemalist prohibitions and regulations were aimed at circumscribing the further influence of organised dervişes who were believed to act as a blind body at the will of their şeyh.

Act 677 of 1925, discussed above, imparted a new legal status to Sufi activities. It explicitly closed the meeting-places and banned any symbols or honorary titles indicating tarikat rank. In relation to the current context, it may be noted that neither hoca nor efendi is mentioned in the text of the law; the reason for these omissions is that those titles are in general and common use for teachers, at universities and schools as well as in religious training, or for the purpose of honouring a learned person in general. The law ends with a long harangue about rituals connected to healing and fortune-telling which are claimed to be superstition. This closure of the text indirectly defines all tekke-related activities as irrational, backward, and reactionary, not even religion proper but superstition. From the beginning, a purist attempt was made to maintain that true religion could exist alongside the grand modernisation project, unlike to popular religion and superstition.

Hence, in the new era of the post-Ottoman period there were no official tekkes and no formal Sufi organisations. Nevertheless, Sufis continued their practices underground; and it must be observed that the law never explicitly prohibited zikir or any Sufi-related ritual, only the social side of tarikat networks with its potential political impact. The law has never been abolished or changed, but on the other hand it has not been referred to in court in recent times either. When the State Prosecutor and other bodies have taken legal proceedings against what they conceive of as illegitimate Islamist activities, especially the party formations, it is the formulation in the constitution about "religious and ethnic hatred" that is invoked.

As has been pointed out, the different orders' relations with the state have

varied immensely. Sufi groups like the Nurcus, the Bektaşi, or the Rufais remained – and still to a large extent remain – socially and culturally marginal, whereas members of the Nakşbendi circles and Halvetis kept their political influence even after the establishment of the Republic, albeit expressing themselves in new modes of Sufi discourse. The tarikat members have manoeuvred between internal and external activities with great skill and tact. Despite the endeavours of the more authoritarian secularists, they have not only had their share of party politics but remained a part of public administration, legal and educational systems, and even the military.

According to what the women said about him, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was never a derviş of any tarikat; instead, he defined himself as a disciple of some other locally well-known preachers active in Istanbul at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was repeatedly pointed out to me by the women that neither their hoca nor they themselves had any tarikat affiliations. Gönenli carried out his mission as an autonomous teacher seemingly without formal relations to any group of any kind. To a large extent the women's narratives of the life of the hoca were confirmed by persons related to the Halveti Cerrahi order.FI Members of the order never spontaneously mentioned Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's name, nor did I ever hear the şeyh do so in his teachings,FL but both younger and older ones knew of him when asked; and like the vakıf women they strongly stressed Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's independence (*bağımsızlık*). Among the Cerrahis, too, he was remembered for his generosity (*ahî*) and for the way in which he was always engaged in charitable work. Especially his assistance to young students who lived in the Fatih area was mentioned several times. This aid was apparently principally aimed at male students who had come to Istanbul on their own to pursue higher education and had to be protected from the vicious influence of the metropolis. Judging from the Cerrahis' stories, they seemed to refer to actual achievements rather than utter stereotypic eulogies.

Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was known to direct his words particularly to women in his sermons, and as he followed a distinct schedule for his wanderings, they knew where to find him on any particular day. Preaching to women was a long-term commitment of his, not a temporary inclination. Thus the activities performed in his name today have a comparatively long history. They include women's meetings at the Hacı Hasan Camii on Wednesday mornings for over forty years without interruption, first under the direction of the hoca himself and after his death under that of his disciples. The number of relevant locations is very much smaller nowadays, though.

5. It may also be noted that Mustafa Özdamar's hagiography of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi (1995) was sold at the nearby Halveti Cerrahi tekke in 1996 and 1997, and that the book was often seen on sale during that period in religious bookstores of various kinds.

6. Unsurprisingly, each group kept to the legendary corpus relating to their own associates in teaching, preaching, and veneration.

After his retirement in 1982, I was told, the hoca even intensified his ambitions to reach women all over the city, as the spatial indications in the sohbet collection imply. However, there is a certain concentration in the historical parts of Istanbul and in the vicinity of Fatih. Most legends of his life originate from the years after 1982, when some of the women who were able to attended his meetings more or less regularly. During these last years of his life as a "wandering hoca", Gönenli Mehmet Efendi consolidated his image as an independent preacher.

As such an independent preacher, the hoca's spiritual status as a *mürşid* could, according to opponents of the vakıf, be called into question. In a highly attentive area like Fatih it is one thing to claim that he was a good Muslim teacher, quite another to claim him as a source of esoteric knowledge. The better-educated women in the group were well aware of this when they presented their activities in the vicinity. But they were always all prepared to defend him as *hocamız*, our hoca. The status of the hoca highlights the ambivalence in the relations between the vakıf and various formations of radical Islamists, as well as between the vakıf and the established tarikats, especially the Nakşbendis. In several cases these positions were united in the same person. The polarisation suggested here is mainly intended to distinguish the two poles from which arguments were formulated. In the Fatih district these two clusters of groups dominated local life, and it is true of both of them that issues of authority and legitimacy were crucial to their judgement of small, informal groups like the vakıf. Both theological and social considerations could be used as arguments against the women's activism. However, the options for criticism should not be overemphasised since the objections were rarely pronounced in public as part of a theological debate. In general it appeared as if women's groups could take advantage of the fact that they were acting within (or on the border of) what was locally assumed to be domestic or at least semi-public space. Such groups are not easy to target, especially if they strictly adhere to every rule of decent (*edepli*) behaviour. Actually, differences between groups brought out the vital interplay between larger and smaller groups within a district that is usually frowned upon by secularists as "religious" (*dindar*) and "backward" or "reactionary" (*irticaî*) without any further justification.

In Trust of the Memory of the Hoca

It is time to consider the accounts of the life of the hoca transmitted within the vakıf, on the basis of the narration and understanding of the women.‡ In other words, this chapter views the life-span of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi from the perspective of the activities that took place in the contemporary vakıf that bears his name, without any claim to establishing *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. On

7. Nereid (1997:14ff.) similarly has to reconcile contradictory accounts and hagiographies when trying to write a survey of Said Nursi's life.

the one hand, the emphasis on the emic representation is a way of making a virtue out of necessity. It would be a long-term project in its own right to dig out more substantial facts about the life of the hoca from Turkish official files, insofar as the relevant archives could be opened at all.[8] The Directorate of Religious Affairs' notations on Gönenli will in all likelihood always remain sealed to a foreigner. On the other hand, it is the opinions and lives of the contemporary women related to the vakıf that form the core interest of the present study. From this perspective, the memories of the hoca, and the ways in which his life-story is made part of religious projects that were hardly imaginable during his lifetime, are as important as the factual span of his life.

The sources of the following outline exclusively consist of the hagiographic material I have come across during the fieldwork, primarily oral information: legends (*menkıbeler*) told and ilahis sung in the hoca's honour, some of which are reproduced in the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı's printed books and booklets. In addition to these expositions, Mustafa Özdamar's printed hagiography from 1995 should be mentioned. It is a popular account of over 200 pages, defined by the publisher as a documentary biography (*belgesel biyografi*).[9] It consists of short chapters formed around retold legends with a dramatic dialogue. The content is basically the same kind of legends that were told among the women. However, when the topic of Özdamar's book was brought up, some women strongly emphasised the difference between these retold stories and the vakıf's printed edition of the sohbets. Apparently they considered their own volume to be of greater authenticity and prepared with greater accuracy. Yet another source available to me (and read in the vakıf's own library) was the biographical article on Gönenli Mehmet Efendi by Recep Akakuş (1996) in the *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, published by the Directorate of Religious Affairs' own Diyanet Vakfı.[10] This short biography confirms the oral information. For a while a pen portrait of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi could be read on the website of the Directorate of Religious Affairs as part of a[11]

8. According to Akakuş (1996:150), the archives of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Ankara keep dossiers about Gönenli Mehmet Efendi at the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Mushafları İnceleme Kurulu Esâmî-i Kurrâ Defteri. The notations are probably kept for dual and somewhat contradictory reasons. On the one hand, it is the assignment of the Directorate to control Muslim activism; on the other hand, the dossiers serve as documentation about a well-known, and in wide religious circles respected, pious man.

9. Mustafa Özdamar has written several popular *belgesel biyografiler* about other pious characters of the twentieth century. The list of the publishing house Kırk kandil yayıları has a general Sufi profile.

10. Akakuş' article supplies some further references to Turkish Muslim journals and daily papers.

11. The text, "Hatıralarda Gönenli Mehmet Efendi" (Memories of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi), was part of a series of portraits published on the website and written by Professor Nesimi Yazıcı of the Faculty of Theology at Ankara University (www.diyanet.gov.tr/diyanet/nisan1999/portre.htm). In contrast to Akakuş' concise overview, this essay bears the stylistic marks of legends, and no further information about Gönenli's life and achievements is added.

series introducing famous Muslim teachers via the Internet.// These two texts indicate that Gönenli is neither forgotten nor rejected by the religious establishment. On the contrary he is held up as an example worth following. The vakıf in his name initiated by the women is not mentioned, nor is any other organisation created in his memory, and no reference is made to the vakıf's publication of his sermons.//

The question is whether these male writers ignore the vakıf group and its enterprises because the activists are women or whether their invisibility is caused by competition between various groups. However, it is hard to believe that biographers would be so involved in local conflicts; they are more likely to take an interest in larger arenas such as the Internet than in booklets from Fatih. Maybe their ignorance amounts to tacit criticism of the space the women have occupied in the name of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi and the success they have gained.

At least during the last decade of the hoca's lifetime, some of the now rather elderly women who followed him and came to his sohbets at various mosques, made systematic notes of his sermons. It is stated in the preface of the printed collection that the bulk of the memos was compiled between 1980 and 1988. There is a discussion of the editing process as such, expressing a certain awareness of the risks of transferring oral matter into print. Moreover, influence from the source criticism taught at the universities can be traced in the preface. Matters of orthography, deficiencies in vocabulary, and difficulties in deciphering the hand-written notations are brought up for discussion. The women involved in collecting, arranging, and correcting the sermons are carefully mentioned. The preface gives the impression that the publication was to some extent a joint effort among young and old in the vakıf. Even so, it was commonly known that it was the editor of the volume who took on the time- consuming preparations and guided the project into a printed book.

The notes and cassette recordings were mostly made by women of whom only a few are still active in, or even associated with, the group. Many of the women who followed the hoca were of the same age as he and were consequently old, and sometimes infirm, at the time of the publication; they were therefore unable to keep up their attendance at the vakıf meetings. Among the women who assumed responsibility for recording the sayings of the hoca in the 1980s, two are especially singled out in the preface to the sohbet collection, both of them highly active in all kinds of programmes. Their names function both as given sources and as confirmation of indisputable decency.

Some of the notebooks were kept at the vakıf under reverential forms and unpublished parts were sometimes read during the zikir meetings, but never

12. The same is true of the website www.geocities.com/gonenlihoca, signed by Cengiz Numanoğlu, which presents information and links without any distinct organisation behind them.

during the more public gatherings when the women read from the printed volume only. There were two reasons for this measure of caution: the notes were highly treasured by the women who did not want to see them handled unnecessarily; and the reverential attitude toward relics from the hoca constituted a risk. The hoca also appears in a short sequence on a videotape that was shown repeatedly during celebrations of the vakıf's anniversaries. I was told that the film was shot in 1989 at the Fatih Camii and that it shows the hoca appointing some young men as *hafız*es. A still photo from the film is reprinted in colour in the edition of the sohbets, showing the hoca in a black cloak[13] (*cübbe*) and a turban (*sarık*), red at the top and with white trimmings.

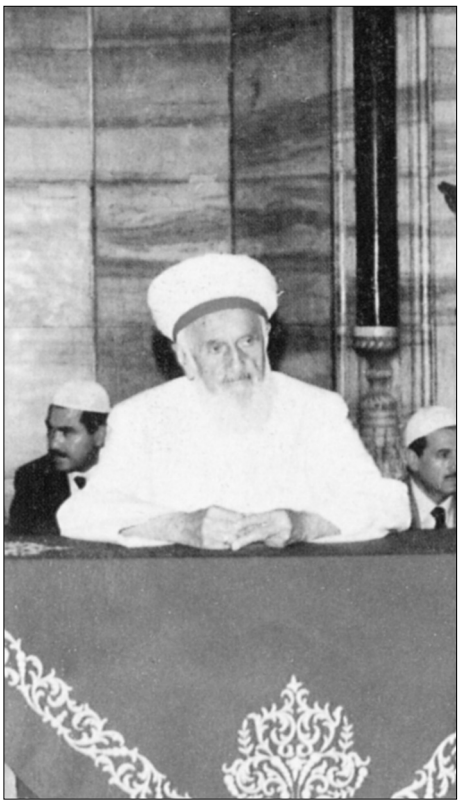
Several women had personal memories of the hoca as a wandering teacher, and some of the younger ones remembered seeing him in mosques when they were teenagers. Four or five of the most active senior women were more consistent followers who had kept notebooks and tapes during his lifetime. It was from these sources that a younger woman was able to prepare the material for publication (with the assistance of her mother, who was among those with extensive memories of the hoca). A second volume was under preparation during the fieldwork. The oral traditions about the hoca were formulated in regular legends when the women told stories from the hoca's life and activities. The oral corpus was also an integral part of the interpretations based on the readings from the printed collection of the sohbets that took place at almost every kind of meeting with the group.

The Life of a Modern Hoca

Few details are known about the hoca's personal life. Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was born in 1901 in Gönen, between Bursa and Çanakkale, in the Aegean hinterland, to parents of Crimean origin. It is still a small market town, best known for its historic hot springs, and it is not on record as having been a centre of Sufi devotion or Islamic learning. The hoca-to-be was from a comparatively modest background, not born into any tarikat aristocracy or *ulema* dynasty. After completing basic school education in his home town, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi came to Istanbul to receive formal religious education at some of the well-known *medrese*s. In legendary stories about the hoca, it was stressed that lessons of particular importance were given to him in the 1920s by Serezli Ahmed Şükrü Efendi.

In 1925 Gönenli Mehmet Efendi received his authorisation (*icazet*) as an *imam*, which gave him the official right to deliver Friday sermons. After being appointed *hafız* (which indicated the proven ability to recite the Kuran by heart) and *tashih-i huruf* (the right to proof-read and correct Kuranic texts), he was recognised as a *kurra*, a master *hafız* (*üstat hafız*). These titles show that

13. This is not to be confused with the traditional cloak of a tarikat şeyh.



Portrait of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi

Mehmet Öğütçü (1903–1991), known to his followers as Gönenli Mehmet Efendi, was a well-known imam and preacher in Istanbul. He held several prestigious positions, among them as imam in Sultan Ahmed Camii ("the Blue Mosque") from 1954 until his retirement in 1982. During his whole career, Mehmet Öğütçü was profoundly engaged in social welfare work (he was especially concerned with students who were newcomers to the large city, as he himself had once been). Another long-standing commitment of his consisted in his addressing women, to whom he directed himself in his later years as he wandered between mosques all over Istanbul every day to preach according to a stable weekly schedule. After his retirement, the lessons (*ders*) and didactic conversations (sohbets) he gave to the female congregations flourished even more.

Today several groups and religious teachers refer to Gönenli. Some of them compete and some cooperate.

Gönenli was given recognition from the Directorate of Religious Affairs and lived his whole life as a full-time religious teacher. He was, the women of the vakıf assured me, a real hoca (*hakikî hoca*).

At the beginning of his career, owing to the prohibitions against religious garments, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was not able to use the traditional emblems of his religious status (i.e. the cloak and the turban of an *imam*) in public. The hoca instead wandered around in Istanbul, in order to fulfil his call to preach, in a Western-style suit and carrying a modern walking-stick. The younger women recounted this with great amusement; most of them had only seen their hoca on photos from the 1980s, at which point he had been a dignified man among the learned (*ilmîye*) and as such a reminder of Ottoman times, not a symptom of modernity. An imam in a suit was probably not possible to visualise for the youngsters. To them the 1920s and 1930s were of course a remote period in history, and those less well read in history are likely to have found it difficult to imagine the living conditions for religious individuals and groups during the most authoritarian phases of the Kemalist reform programme. However, in other families with a religious background there were those who could relate family recollections about relatives in the grandparents' generation who were taken to court and in some cases jailed for periods of varying length. From a person related to the Halveti Cerrahi order I received the information that Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was taken to court for keeping Nurcu literature in his home, thereby attracting the attention of the authorities. He was held in custody more than once during the 1930s, and according to the oral legends, the hoca was taken to court during the "Independence tribunals" (*İstiklal mahkemeleri*).[14] This was a topic which the women of the vakıf chose not to talk about. Martyrdom in the 1930s and 1940s apparently was not a theme thought to confer honour on the group, whereas stories of suppression are important to self-defining legends in Nurcu circles.

Nurcu legends also relate that Gönenli met with Nurcu students in the infamous Denizli prison (in the Aegean hinterland) in the early 1940s. As in the Halveti Cerrahi narratives, Gönenli is portrayed with the utmost admiration. He is said to have taken on missionary work among hardened criminals in order to instruct them in how to perform the daily *namaz* prayers and how to recite the Kuran.

The abolition of the sultanate in 1923 and the caliphate in the following year entailed a complete restructuring of power. The shift from empire to republic was also a shift from a form of society where religious institutions had legislative as well as normative power over decision-making to the beginning of representative parliamentarism, when Muslim organisations and public activities were put under strict state control. Hence Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was among

14. As an estimate of the dimensions of these tribunals Erik Zürcher writes: "under the Law of the Maintenance of Order nearly 7500 were arrested and 660 executed" (1993:181).

the first to receive his authorisation from the newly established (1924) Directorate of Religious Affairs (DİB). There were certain risks at the time in openly inviting people to prayer meetings.

In Muslim middle-class families, too, there are transmitted memories of relatives (Muslim scholars, *ulema*, şeyhs and hocas) who were taken to court. The stories of the past seemed to come to life again when Refah Partisi was closed and when the mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan, was charged with making Islamist propaganda. These incidents fomented many Islamists' image of the state and the establishment as enemies of innocent religious people.

The avoidance of discussions about Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's contacts with the police and the authorities was not due to reluctance to speak about martyrdom, but to the fact that going to jail or falling foul of the law was considered shameful. The modern understanding of such an event could be totally misinterpreted, and blame might be cast over the hoca and the women who kept his memory in trust.

The hoca's independence, as it appeared in legendary history, and the fact that he never formed any alliances with religious organisations is a telling example of how secularism was implemented as practical politics in Turkey 1923–1950.

From the mid-1920s there were, in terms of organisation, two major kinds of formalised Muslim activities. *Pro forma* there was the Directorate of Religious Affairs, acting not as a ministry but under the direct control of the Prime Minister, for state-controlled religious activities. It established control through its local offices and by appointing imams. During this period there was no official confessional education at university level (one theological faculty was reopened in the 1950s). Men in search of Muslim learning therefore also went abroad, a situation that in the long run meant not only a certain Arabisation of Turkey's active Muslims, but also a certain influence of Islamism in responses to modernism as interpreted by the Kemalists, such as *selef* and *vahhâbî* groups. These circumstances do not only form the intellectual setting of the life of the hoca; they also define the milieu of the educated Muslim families whose daughters were active in the vakıf.

As a parallel structure, the Sufi orders maintained underground activities and – not least – networks based on religious affiliation and professional connections. The prohibitions and regulations probably made tarikats like Nakşbendi, Halveti, and Kaderi even stronger. In some cases, they constituted an anti-structure in opposition to the public and official Diyanet activities at a time when *ezan* was called out in Turkish and state authorities tried to replace the Arabic text of the Kuran with Turkish translations. These orders were large enough, with their many sub-branches in both urban and rural areas, to provide forms for resistance and for the continuation of Sufi teaching. Dervişes and sympathisers were visibly organised. Smaller groups succumbed more easily in times of harder repression; they had fewer connections among bureaucrats, dependent as they were on one or a few leaders. There were of course decisive differences

between the orders, and from this viewpoint the hoca's operations were a mild but recalcitrant protest. He had advocated a return to the Turkish heritage for generations.

Outside these two main forums for religious activism, the DIB controlled mosques and the influential larger tarikats, there was also the Nurcu movement – despised by the state authorities as well as by the tarikats. Nevertheless, the group and its leader have had a profound impact on popular Islam since the end of the nineteenth century, and it is still one of the more successful movements when it comes to attracting followers. The name of the Nurcu movement goes back to its founder Said Nursi (1873–1960),[15] around whom a religious group gradually grew from the late 1920s (Mardin 1989; Karpat 1993a, 1993b; Neireid 1997). Said Nursi himself originated from a Nakşbendi-dominated part of eastern Turkey, but like Gönenli Mehmet Efendi he found his way to Istanbul. Both Nursi himself and his students were repeatedly imprisoned during the Istiklal tribunals and afterwards too.

In contrast to the main branches of the Nakşbendi order, whose dervişes were found at all levels of society, the Nurcus remained outcasts. The Nakşbendi order managed to retain a sophisticated image, whereas the Nurcus were more apt to praise their rural and popular background. Nevertheless, today both of them hail Gönenli as a praiseworthy man.

"How was it that some religious groups were proclaimed enemies of the state while others were considered as allies?" Camilla Nereid asks in her study on the relationship between Turkish nationalism and the Nurcu movement as a religious alternative (1997:2). The Nurcus were in the focus of constant public debate during the 1950s and 1960s, constituting the target of harassment and suppression as a prime icon of religious backwardness. The Nakşbendi and the Nurcus, responded quite differently to the demands of the new Turkish republic in the 1920s and 1930s, and Gönenli Mehmet Efendi represents a third way between the two poles. As a man of learning he remained in contact with the former, but the groups of followers that grew around him had more in common with the latter. The Gönenli groups appear to have cherished their freedom without a formal şeyh and derived social benefits from their independence. Judging from his later followers, he won disciples from both sides.

Despite the repression from the elite – or perhaps because of it – the Nurcu movement grew in both rural and urban areas, and lately it has gained ground in the Turkish work-migration diaspora. In contemporary politics, a spin-off movement from the Nurcus, centred around the charismatic leader Muhammed Fetullah Gülen, plays the role of religious opponent to the Islamist party (Yavuz

15. Said Nursi's name can be connected to the theological Sufi term for the divine light (*nur*) as well as to the name of his native village, unfailing sources of folk etymologies (Nereid 1997:21). His major instructions to his followers are collected in *Risale-i Nur* ("Treatise on Light"). New Turkish editions are constantly printed, and his book has been translated into English as part of the successful contemporary Nurcu mission abroad.

1999b; Özdalga 2000).

My interest in and questions about the fact that the life and career of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi had run parallel with the development of the Turkish Republic encountered either reluctance or displeasure among the vakıf women. This response on their part probably reflects a desire not to have their hoca placed in any socio-political context. The women's unwillingness to discuss ideological questions or state policy is in line with their ambition to present themselves as helpers (*yardımcılar*), always stressing the hoca and themselves as non-political (*politikasız*). Nevertheless, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi came to Istanbul in 1918, during the chaotic period in the wake of World War I, to devise and organise the teaching he felt called to perform in terms of mode, locations, and preferred terminology in order to be open for students in the new republic. If the women of the vakıf are the granddaughters of Kemalism, the hoca was the son of modernism.

In 1927 Gönenli Mehmet Efendi graduated from an İmam Hatip school, and in 1930 he started to serve at the Merkez Camii in Istanbul. After an interlude of three years when Gönenli Mehmet Efendi did his compulsory military service, he resumed his duties in Istanbul and served over the years in several mosques all over the city: at Hacı Bayram-ı Kaftânî Camii, Dülgerzâde Camii, Üçbaç Camii, and Hacı Hasan Camii, spending the longest period, 1954–1982, at the Sultan Ahmet Camii.

In contrast to the Nurcus, the local Diyanet office accepted Gönenli Mehmet Efendi, who was appointed to positions in important mosques in the city. His long service at Sultan Ahmed (commonly known to tourists as the "Blue Mosque") must be regarded as particular evidence that Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was not principally looked upon as an outsider, but rather as a reliable servant of the state. It was his intense missionary zeal that made him stand out when compared to the regulated activities arranged by the DİB. In an age of programmatic secularisation, his message was to urge his contemporaries to return to religion. The hoca literally wandered around the mosques of Istanbul, grand complexes as well as local *mescit*s (small mosques), to preach sermons. To him, according to the women of the vakıf, the concept of tarikat was the spiritual method, not an organisation. The terminology used by the women to illustrate their relation to the hoca and his sermons bears witness to the Sufi elements in Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's teachings.

According to the texts preserved, as quoted in the sohbets and prayer books, he addressed the women as students (*öğrenciler*). The traditional tasavvuf term for disciple or student (*talip*) was also used when referring to the active associates of the vakıf, particularly in printed texts. *Talip*, from the Arabic word for student, is only used in a religious context. It has an old-fashioned flavour in itself, and recent developments in Afghanistan have of course added another set of associations. But it is a common designation in Sufi circles. The Turkish term *öğrenciler* can be used about students of any kind. To women of no or little education, the appellation was very honourable, indicating how serious-

ly the hoca regarded each woman's striving along "the path". Instructor-student is the basic metaphor for the spiritual training in Sufism (*yol*) and no one can claim to be a Sufi without a teacher.

As repeatedly stressed elsewhere, the women did not portray themselves as learned ladies, but as women catering to the spiritual and physical needs of people in their vicinity. In other Sufi-orientated groups, learning and knowledge were much more emphasised as status indicators. In the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi group the servant ideal was much more prominent. Nevertheless, the charitable efforts were also conceived as something to learn from a master in order to be able to contemplate the meaning of the good work. The ultimate goal of the hoca, as defined in the preface to the sohbet collection, was the attitude of serving mankind (*insanlığa hizmet anlayışı*).

When spoken of, his message and activities were characterised in terms like *hizmet*, which connotes a wide semantic field: blessed help, philanthropy or service, charity; furthermore good deeds (*hayırlı işler*); and consultancy or guidance (*irşad*). The first term, *hizmet*, underlined the social aspects of his life's work, the second the moral, and the third the theological. All these terms are significant tasavvuf concepts, especially the last. *İrşad* is not a genre as such; it is conventionally considered to be a more or less formalised treatise expressed in many genres throughout Sufi history, some of which have been disseminated in print. *İrşad* could equally well be formulated as a didactic doctrine or as a poem or a legend. The term used for Nursi spiritual testimony, *risale* meaning letter or message, was never used at the vakıf. Although it is a traditional Sufi term for treatise too, it is associated with the Nurcu groups. Because of the personal contacts between associates of the vakıf group and Nurcu students, the avoidance of the term must have been a deliberate choice. Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's *irşad* was considered to be the collections of his oral sermons, conversations, and instructions for prayers. The content and the forms for his *irşad* follow the conventions of religious expression. The remarkable factor in the present case is the female disciples' efforts to collect, edit, and print it.

The key term in this connection is to receive knowledge (*ilim karşılamak*), which indicates that the position of the student was to embrace. According to Sufi tradition, the great insights could not be achieved without guidance, and they were supposed to amount to a progressive development. The word for "veil" (*hicâb*), as used for the opaque or semi-transparent piece of cloth worn to cover the face in Ottoman female costume, is traditionally used in Sufi language as a description of the film that prevents humans from confronting the Ultimate Reality – a veil which only the consulting of a true *mürşid* can lift. When asked, the leading women more than once stressed that Sufi knowledge (*tasavvuf ilmi*) was more a question of insights and feelings than knowledge from books. "Sufism is living knowledge, talking is no knowledge" (*Tasavvuf hal ilmidir, kal ilmi değildir*), one proverb attributed to Gönenli says.

The hoca's mode of activism must be assumed to have altered during the

general political and cultural developments in Turkey after 1983. For almost a decade, 1982–1991, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi confirmed his position as a wandering hoca. This period at the end of his lifetime was, as discussed in the first section of the book, characterised by the new visibility of various Muslim groups. Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was now freer to deliver his message, and as a retired imam he devoted all his time to his educational project. Several informal groups of women formed around him already during his lifetime.

Gönenli Mehmet Efendi passed away on 2 January 1991, and after a well-attended funeral service at the Fathi Camii he was buried at the Edirnekapı cemetery, just outside the ancient city wall. The grave (*kabir*) is situated within walking distance of the vakıf. It was frequently emphasised that his grave was not treated as a mausoleum (*türbe*) in the conventional sense.[16] Instead it was a grave among others. Nevertheless, the grave was given the honorary epithet "the Noble Grave" (*kabr-i şerif*) in vakıf prints. Even though the women visited his grave regularly (and especially some of the older ones), it was not regarded as a holy site as such, and the visits could not be defined as organised veneration. Instead it was the meeting-place of the vakıf that served as the place of ritual commemoration of the hoca.

There was also a practical aspect to the matter. In a major city, tombs are mostly far away and difficult to visit; these modern resting-places can never play the same role as the *türbe*s of local saints and hocas of a district or a small town and in the countryside, or the şeyhs of the tarikats who rest close to their tekke or within a mosque complex. "[H]onoring those who were 'close to God' created hierarchies of sacred space with economic and political implications as well as spiritual, moral, and emotional content", Julia Clancy-Smith writes about colonial Morocco, and she continues: "The saints were an expression of territorial and, by extension, historical authenticity; at the same time, many paradoxically were believed to have come from elsewhere" (1994:33). Visits to the hoca's grave were emphasised at the beginning of the formation of the group, but gradually the visits became less frequent and were mostly undertaken by some of the senior women. When asked why, the women voiced the argument that it is superstitious to venerate the dead at their graves, and the reason why some women went was that the grave had to be kept tidy in order to honour the hoca. The fact that he was never called a saint (*veli*) in public is probably due to the same kind of restraint. It would have been a too far reaching claim of his status as a Sufi teacher and, not the least, it would have raised questions about who was making such a claim. Calling a deceased hoca a *veli* in a

16. "Other holy persons are remembered only by a pile of stones, decorated with tall irregular sticks from which flutter bits of rags, multicolored mementos left by generations of village women who have come to vow and to pray. For in all parts of the Middle East, women visit shrines and make vows from time to time, seeking supernatural assistance in matters over which they have little or no control: conception, childbirth, the loss of childhood friends, the choice of husbands, and the health of families" (Fernea & Fernea 1972:396).

casual manner was probably no offence, but if a pious women's group pronounced their spiritual master a saint in public discourse or printed matter, it would bring the issue to another level.[17]

Discussing the status of the grave brought the women of the vakıf close to a definition of what disagreeable folklore (*halkbilimi*) and despicable superstition (*hurafe* or *batıl itikat*) are. With consternation, they said that there were still people (especially women) who tied ribbons to the trees at graveyards like Telli Baba at Sarıyer when making a vow (*adak*). Many pictures from the early days of photography show the trees at various holy places decked with ribbons or cloth. Even today, this motif and other similar ones are sold as postcards. Such sales are riding on the wave of nostalgia for "Old Constantinople". Today these rituals are rare and mostly occur in narratives and on postcards. The decline is not solely a consequence of the secularist battle against superstition, but also of purist *selef* influence according to which rituals have nothing to do with the original Muslim life that the true believers should strive for. Traditionally, women are usually the ones who make vows, and the ribbon is the sign of the promise made. Tradition states that the topics of the prayers and rituals are family-related problems: illness, childlessness, conflicts, possible marriage matches. It is perhaps not too bold to assume that the interests attributed to the women reflect a prejudiced view of what women are supposed to be concerned about. Even a simple ritual can have a rich variety of significant existential dimensions. It may be noted that the stereotypes are transmitted by Islamists and academics equally.

Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was a married man with three sons, two of whom are still alive. None of them has taken up their father's role as a preacher. This situation has been quite unproblematic for the groups formed around Gönenli Mehmet Efendi. The blessing or grace (*bereket*) came and went with the hoca. There is no claim to any chain of authority (*silsile*)[18] in a traditional sense either before or after Gönenli Mehmet Efendi. The hoca's widow was still alive during the time of the fieldwork and lived in the district where the vakıf was situ-

17. The mausoleum of Kemal Atatürk in Ankara, Anıtkabir, follows the tradition of honouring the memory of sultans and gazis at their graves; but it takes place under a new name, and his resting-place is unconnected with Ottoman practices. Recently Turgut Özal's grave at the Edirnekapı graveyard, not far from Gönenli's resting-place, has received expressions of public interest as no other leader's after Atatürk. Large crowds come to commemorate him every year on the day of his death, April 17th. He is honoured in the gazi and Atatürk tradition as a political leader. Nevertheless, his Sufi affiliation lingers his memory and paying respect (*saygı göstermek*) at special graves is by no means at the point of extinction.

18. Julian Baldick writes regarding the importance of establishing *silsile*s in the tarikats: "The Sufis needed to have these guarantees of authority, partly because in Islam knowledge has to be transmitted from sound teachers, and partly because the Traditions [*hadis*], the sayings attributed to Muhammad with pedigrees of transmitters, constitute the foundations of Muslim doctrine and practice. Consequently the appearance of Sufi 'chains' mirrors the development of lists of Tradition collectors" (1989:75). This would appear to indicate another similarity to the vakıf group.

ated. The women of the vakıf kept in regular contact with the widow and spoke of her with great respect. They called her an Ottoman lady (*Osmanlı hanım*), thereby indicating her proper and modest way of living. Although not an active visitor, the widow followed the activities and achievements of the vakıf, the hac tours etc. with approving interest. She did not have any position in the vakıf group, the way a şeyh's wife can have in a tarikat. Small parties of women from the vakıf paid her respect with more or less regular visits in her home close to the Fatih Camii. The visits were spoken of as ziaret, the term used for pilgrimage to saint's graves or *türbe*s.

The preface to the prayer book *Evrad ve tesbihat* states that the hoca's achievements were not of the kind that could be constrained by death (*emel defteri ölümünden sonra kapanmaz*). The women defined themselves in the text as continuers of his beneficial work (*o'nun çok hayırlı işini devam etmek*). They are students (*talebler*) of his teachings as well as legitimate keepers of the traditions inherited from the hoca, though they do not deny that there are many other followers of the hoca besides themselves. Indeed, there are "thousands of children and students" (*binler evat ve taleb*), not using the modern Turkish form *talebe*.

A Teacher, a Guide and a Friend of Friends

In the absence of *silsile* claims, the constructions of the hoca's names used by authorities and by the vakıf are of significance when discussing the status and authority of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi as a religious teacher. Although Kemalist reforms required family names by law (*Soyadı Kanunu*) in 1934, it is still common in Sufi circles to refer to honourable persons in Ottoman style: with an indication of the place of birth or family origin. Hence the hagiographic texts do not give Gönenli Mehmet Efendi a family name in the Western fashion. First comes the name of his ancestral town with a *-li* ending, indicating the association with a particular place, then his personal name, Mehmet, and finally the courtesy title, *efendi*. The title is one of many "old-fashioned" ones given to (male) persons with a certain authority, not necessarily religious. Gönenli Mehmet Efendi is also the name by which he is referred to by the Directorate of Religious Affairs, in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* as well as on its website.

More epithets for the hoca are supplied in the introduction to the printed sohbets. There he is called adviser (*öğütçü*), *Hâtemül Evliya*, holy saint, and *Reîsül Kurra* (master *hafız*). Sufi tradition offers a great variety of designations given to spiritual leaders and high-ranking dervişes, titles indicating honour and respect. These names also have a (narrative) function within Sufi historiography, though. By giving a character a certain epithet in a legend, the storyteller has said a lot about his (more seldom her) status, duties, and prospects within the order. However, the use of honorary names within the vakıf was restrained in order not to provoke any objections from the outside.

In everyday speech among the women, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was often

referred to as "our hoca" (*hocamız*), and "hoca" was the most frequently used word from the outset. It is a comparatively neutral title; pupils and students use it when addressing a teacher, to indicate respect and reverence. In the official name of the vakıf Gönenli was given the epithet *efendi*, and sometimes he was emphasised as the adviser (*öğütçü*), with a hint to his added family name. According to Akakuş (1996), Gönenli took Öğütçü as his family name in 1934 – an indication of how he wanted to present himself as a young imam ten years after the prohibition of Sufi titles. The very first time I heard any reference to Gönenli Mehmet Efendi, in a situation where the women were taking a stand against traditional tekke life, the term *öğütçü* was used. This word means adviser in a very general sense, but in religious discourse it has more qualified connotations of preacher, and in a Sufi context it implies a spiritual guide, as an equivalent of *mürşid*. The latter is only used in a religious context, though. However, after a while this particular courtesy title was very rarely used in everyday speech, and the same applies to the title *eğitici*, educator.

Yet Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was never called a saint (*veli*), but a friend of *veli*s. This is not to be interpreted as lack of affection on the women's part; rather, it should be seen as a way of protecting the group's interests. He never called himself a şeyh, a concept that implies a formal appointment in a tarikat, nor did he claim to build his authority on succession (*silsile*). Nevertheless, the deceased teacher was considered to be the protector (*koruyucu*) of the vakıf.

In Praise of the Hoca

The virtues and blessings of the hoca are extolled in a particular ilahi which is often sung at the vakıf. The hymn "Kıymetli Hocam" (My Precious Hoca) is one of two recently written ilahis reproduced in the prayer book *Evrad ve Tesbihat* (1995). Together with the hymn quoted above, "I entered Gönenli's Group", these new songs constitute a kind of signature tune of the vakıf. In melody, metre, and general style they allude to notions common in Ottoman poetry.

A certain Hayrünnisa Açıkgözoğlu signs the hymn in the printed version. The last stanza also includes her name, as is customary in the Turkish hymn tradition of Yunus Emre and other masters: "Açıkgöz says". The historical background to this custom is that when an ilahi was orally spread, it was obvious who was its originator. The poet thus sets his/her hallmark on the text as a signature. When I first saw the name attached to this particular hymn in print, it seemed like an obvious pseudonym to me. The first name has a distinct Ottoman flavour, but holds no obvious meaning to the average Turkish speaker today. When read aloud with an Arabic pronunciation (*khayrun-n-nisāʾ*), however, the name means "women's benevolence". The last name Açıkgözoğlu is

19. The ending *-oğlu* is frequent in the construction of family names, meaning "son of". Açıkgöz literary means "open eyes".

more patently understood as "clever" or "smart", also by a modern Turk. I interpreted this signature as one of many allusions to Ottoman tradition that were made within the group. When I asked about it, however, it became clear that Hayrünnisa Açıkgözoğlu was neither a fictitious person nor a play with words. She was a real person existing under that very name, and she belonged to the respected group of women who had actually met the hoca and heard him preach. Her ilahi was written in enthusiasm over her experiences. My misconception must serve as a reminder of how easy it is to overinterpret phenomena with Sufi connections and give them layers of meaning that do not exist in everyday discourse.

The hymn consists of seven four-line stanzas that tell of the virtues of the hoca in a rather compact catalogue form. Each stanza (*beyit*) ends with an epithet attributed to the teacher, and the same adjective is then repeated in the following chorus of two lines that ends with a new epithet which is then taken up in the first line of the following stanza, in the classic *corona* fashion. When performed, the verses were usually sung by one or a few lead singers and the assembly filled in the choruses, which underlined the epithets in a powerful way. As will be discussed below, the repetitive character of ilahi singing is comparable to the mode in which zikir was performed. The short choruses were sung with a distinct pulse, which gave the singing events an emotionally fervent character.

The nine adjectives that are used to characterise the teacher all have very significant associations in Sufi discourse; they also – like the whole genre – possess a definite *Osmanlı* flavour. The hoca is said to be strong (*gayretli*), benevolent (*himmetli*), precious (*kıymetli*), serving (*hizmetli*), ornamented (*ziynetli*), affectionate (*şefkatli*), grand (*heybetli*), and successful (*devletli*), and finally he is the deceased (*rahmetli*) hoca. Obviously, with these qualities the hoca could indirectly be recognised as a *veli*, a friend of Allah, in the sense of "a mystic in general" (Radtke 2001:109) who had willingly shared his experiences and learning. Carefully, though, the ilahi only says that he is a friend of *veli*s.

KIYMETLİ HOCAM

Hocam bize sevgi ile bakardı
Derdimizle yüreğini yakardı
Müjde verir cennetlere sokardı
Cennet yollarında gayretli Hocam

Gayretli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

Hocam bizim için durmaz koşardı
Kuranın aşkıyla coşup taşardı
Burda değil Beytullah'ta yaşardı
Kabe yollarında hizmetli Hocam.

Hizmetli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

Ravzanın bülbül-i nalanı idi
Ulema, evliya yaranı idi
Veys-el Karani'nin hayranı idi
Ravza gülleriyle ziynetli Hocam

Ziynetli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

Allah deyip Hakkı haykırıyordu
Garibi, acizi kayırıyordu
Öksüzü, fakiri doyuruyordu
Bütün insanlara şefkatlı Hocam

Şefkatlı Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

Yorulmak bilmedi hep irşad etti
Kubbeleri, kürsüleri şad etti
Bizi böyle garip bıraktı gitti
Minberde mihrabda heybetli Hocam

Heybetli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

MY PRECIOUS HOCA

My Hoca looked upon us with love
He set his heart on fire with our pain
He gave us good news and brought us into the gardens of Paradise
Along the roads to Paradise, my strong Hoca

My strong Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
Nobody will ever fill your place, my precious Hoca

My Hoca ran for us without stopping
He overflowed with the love of the Kuran
He lived, not here, but at Beytullah [Kabe]
On the roads to Kabe, my serving Hoca

My serving Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca

He was like a lamenting nightingale at Ravza [the tomb of the Prophet]
He was the friend of learned men and saints
He was an admirer of Veys-el Karani [a saint]
With the roses of Ravza, my ornamented Hoca

My ornamented Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca

By saying Allah he proclaimed the Truth
He cared for the poor and the incapable
He gave food to the motherless and the poor
To all people he was my affectionate Hoca

My affectionate Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca

He did not know fatigue, always giving guidance
He filled the cupolas and the pulpits with joy
He left us without him and went
In the *minber* and the *mihrab*, my grand Hoca

My grand Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca

Fatih'te muhteşem bir gün yaşandı
Gönüller fatihi tahtına kondu
Herkes anlamıştı o ne sultandı
Kuran tacı giymiş devletli Hocam

Devletli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam

Açıkgöz der gelin ibret alalım
Halk içinde Hakk'a vasıl olalım
Dünyada, ukbada huzur bulalım
Himmet etsin bize rahmetli Hocam

Rahmetli Hocam, himmetli Hocam
Yerin doldurulmaz kıymetli Hocam
Hocalar sultanı Gönenli Hocam

The hymn is structured in a restrained but austere way. There is an individual voice, "I" , who speaks from the very first line, with immediate reference to a less specific group, "we". The latter could be interpreted either as the vakıf group, as Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's followers in general, or as mankind at large. When hearing the verses performed at a vakıf gathering, a new participant was likely to feel personally addressed by the singing women, those already integrated in the prayer circle. The intermittent phrase "my hoca" underlines the intimate tone of the relationship with the deceased teacher. The closing of the hymn may well be regarded as an invitation to the *Gemeinschaft* created as an oasis in the more or less individualistic *Gesellschaft* outside.

The content of the hymn closely follows the virtues lauded in the narratives of the hoca, and the roses and nightingales of the classical Sufi poetry are certainly present. The chorus between the verses expresses a humble attitude in relation to the hoca. The conclusion is that he cannot be replaced, but his work must be continued.

The opening stanza tells of the caring hoca with his burning heart open to people's problems. It is Gönenli the almoner that stands out in the presentation. His strength and his love are emphasised. It is the message and, implicitly, the instructions of the hoca that put the disciples on the road (*yol*) to heaven.

It is notable that before more explicit references to Sufi concepts and Sufi practice are made, the Kuranic base is stated in the second stanza, important in an environment with many potential backbiters. It was Gönenli's love of the Kuran that made him spend his days on the roads to Kabe, the symbolic heart of Islam, indicated by the name Beytullah, the house of Allah. This term was used in sermons and conversations at the vakıf to indicate both Mekke as a holy place and the kernel of Islam in a more metaphoric sense – and a polarisation

The conqueror of hearts was put on his throne,
Everybody understood what a sultan he was
He was wearing the crown of the Kuran, my great Hoca

My great Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca

Açıkgöz says: Come, let us follow an example
Among people let us reach God
Let us find peace in this world and in the next
May he give us benevolence, my deceased Hoca

My deceased Hoca, my benevolent Hoca
It is not possible to fill your place, my precious Hoca
He is the sultan of hocas, my Hoca Gönenli

between "here" and "there" develops through the hymn. The choice of symbolism may be regarded as an example of how Arabisation and Ottomanism are amalgamated in text and music. This was the true abode of the hoca, not the singers' corrupted present, the text states.

In the third stanza, a more distinct Sufi symbolism is apparent. The nightingale and the roses are two of the most frequently used images in Sufi art, , not to say the two most conventional ones. The bird is usually interpreted as a metaphor of the human soul, while the rose stands for Allah's love since its fragrance is highly perceptible, but still invisible. Both symbols are connected in this poem with the tomb of the Prophet. The balanced approach of the hoca is emphasised, as he is claimed to be a friend of both learned men (*ulema*) and saints (*evliya*); he has both the formal learning and the spiritual insights. His teachings are not innovations, but founded on the stable ground of tradition as if they grew out of the Prophet's tomb.

Merely by uttering the name of God, the ultimate Truth is revealed, the fourth stanza testifies. It may be noted that both Allah and Hakk (mentioned in the Turkish text) were among the most frequently used "beautiful names of God" during zikir ceremonies in the group. Veys-el Karani /(or Ûveys-i Karenî, as it is more commonly spelt in Turkish) refers to a saint from the time of the Prophet who never met Muhammed, yet is said in legendary history to have been spiritually guided by him by means of telepathy and to have grasped the message fully and correctly (Baldick 1999a). The mention of this saint says a

20. See the discussion of the symbolism in the emblem of the vakıf.
21. Baldick 1993:21ff., 1999a, 1999b; Sedgwick1998:26f.
22. In Arabic Uways al-Ḳaranī.

Gönenli Mehmet Efendi in Fatih Camii

A STILL PHOTO OF the hoca from a videotape recorded at the Fatih Camii a few years before his death. On this occasion he was performing his official duties, distributing diplomas to young men after completing Kuran classes. Gönenli Mehmet Efendi can be seen here in his turban (*sarık*), indicating his status as a *hafız*, an honorary title given to those who can recite the Kuran by heart. He also earned the title *Reîsül Kurra*, master *hafız*.

His headgear should not to be confused with a şeyh's turban (*tac*, literally crown), indicating spiritual guiding authority over a branch of a tarikat. Neither Gönenli Mehmet Efendi nor his followers ever claimed that he was a şeyh. Instead the ordinary title for teachers, hoca, was used most of the time, indicating both his humility and that of his disciples.

According to his disciples, Gönenli was acknowledged to have the ability to put all the verses of the Kuran together to one unit (*cevamı ül kelim*) and thus he formed the core of his message. From his grave he was said to have the ability of letting this message be emotionally transmitted to people with an open mind when hearing the sohbets being read, rather than to those who studied texts in a conventional manner.

In the printed materials distributed by the vakıf the hoca's efforts for charity and his personality (*kişilik*) were given a prominent position in the group's self-presentation. His theological stands were referred to as sohbet or lessons (*ders*). The conventional term for sermon (*vaaz*) was hardly ever used in relation to his women's programmes.

great deal about central theological positions in the group. The line where it occurs is short, and its meaning is not further developed in the stanza or poem. Its significance is not likely to have been clear to all participants at the vakıf meetings. This fragment of a legend served as an image of how the communications with the hoca were sustained after his death. This kind of relation to a *mürşid* is known as *üveysî* or *uwaysiyya*, originating from "a class of mystics who look for instruction from the spirit of a dead or physically absent person" (Baldick 1999b:958). ‹ The spirit (*ruh*) of the hoca was, according to this theological tradition, still to guide his followers, and the media for this kind of intercommunication were reading or listening to the sohbets, zikir prayer, and, more vaguely, dream interpretations; the spiritual being of the hoca (*ruhaniyet*) remained as the protector of the group and his *müride*s. He was just seemingly resting in his grave, in a state the women called *yakaza*, literally wakefulness, and was therefore able to communicate with his faithfull disciples. The possibilities of insight beyond worldly perception derived from the hoca, though the esoteric aspects of Sufism were never an emphasised theme during the vakıf's lessons. It is a symptomatic way of expressing central Sufi messages: it is all there, for those who have the key, in a simple song intended for a fairly uneducated audience.

When the hoca's teachings are praised in the fifth stanza, a more commonly known Sufi expression is used, *irşad*. The word means theological instruction or guidance in general and refers to the central act between master and disciple: the giving and the receiving. But basically, like *üveysî*, the term *irşad* hints at a central problem for the vakıf: how to be trustworthy keepers of the venerated hoca's teachings and to be able to make proper references to his own words. The rest of the stanza praises the wholesome influence which the hoca exerted. If *üveysî* and *irşad* emphasised the Sufi orientation, the claim that he made the cupolas and pulpits happy may be read as a confirmation of the fact that his guidance belonged to the area of proper mosque activity; there was nothing clandestine or underground about it. After all, Gönenli Mehmet Efendi was the *imam* of one of the important mosques of Istanbul for almost thirty years and an approved Islamic teacher in the Republic.

When the hoca passed away, we are assured, it was in the direction of Mekke, which is marked in the verse by the terms *minber* and *mihrab*, the destination of the honourable dead. The last line is a reference back to the Kabe theme in the second stanza.

A notion of spatial location is voiced in the sixth verse. The indications in the previous verse of the hoca's activities in the mosques may suggest that the

23. In his overview of the *Uwaysiyya* Julian Baldick mentions an Iranian Uwaysı movement in the twentieth century that could be compared to the activities at the vakıf, and is "a conscious reaction to the brotherhoods and their elders /- - -/ characterised by attempts to improve Sufism by integrating with it modern Western findings in the natural sciences" (1999b:958).

place is not only Fatih as a district, but more specifically the Fatih Camii (cf. the photos of the hoca from the videotape that are used as portraits in the sohbet collection and the prayer book). The hymn says that the hoca was put on a throne (*taht*). This could be compared to the sheepskin (*post*) on which the şeyh sits during zikir prayers in some tarikats and which is known as the throne of the şeyh. Correspondingly, the crown could be associated with the turban. The turban of a şeyh is called *tac*, meaning crown; it is the insignium of his office and position. This kind of headgear was never the hoca's. As the *hafız* he was, he wore a *sarık*, symbolically wearing the crown of the Kuran. *Fatih* is used in the stanza as an ordinary noun, meaning conqueror. The word serves as a reminder of the collective memory and identity of the district, linking the lauded hoca to Sultan Mehmet, the man who made Istanbul a Muslim city. In the subtext lies the fact that the hoca's first name was Mehmet and that his ultimate goal was to win his contemporaries back to Islam.

The final stanza praises the continuation of the hoca's efforts, and the verse reveals an indication, as is traditional, of who the poet is. In this case it is Açıkgöz who speaks. As a witness she can claim with authority that it is possible to find peace in this world and among people, if the message of the hoca is adhered to. No specifically otherworldly sentiments are expressed, but rather an urge to spread the *irşad* and sohbets of the hoca. The mention of this world in parallel to the world of the dead is a reference to a central concept in popular Sufism on which many rituals are founded. Not only the living (in this world) but also the dead are the beneficiaries of the prayers of the pious. Religious merit (*sevab*) is considered to be conferred on both. It was energetically emphasised during prayer meetings that the sick, the unhappy, the "fallen", and the deceased should be the concerns of the praying women. Correspondingly, the *bereket* of the deceased hoca can flow over the praying women.

In the very last line, we are assured that there are no other teachers; Gönenli is the Sultan.

The Protectors of the Teachings of the Hoca

When the women described the status of the hoca, it became more apparent than ever that there was no formal theological authority for them to lean on when they "went public" – a fact which to some extent made them vulnerable. Their judgements preparatory to making plans and their evaluation of the hoca as a *mürşid* were based on the personal experience of what they found to be right. They felt helped and guided by the hoca through prayers and dreams, and strengthened by listening to the preserved sohbets. The principle of *üveysîlik* hinted at in the fourth stanza is fundamental to an understanding of how the women comprehended and defined their relation to their master.

Potential criticisms regarding the women's reliance on the deceased hoca were primarily formulated within the domestic domain, not in the public theo-

logical debate. Male members of some of the women's families raised the strongest objections. In some cases attempts were made to prevent young women from participating. From what was related to me, these family discussions principally centred around two issues.

The first was a conflict over family authority: fathers, brothers, and husbands felt obliged to watch over the moral conduct of the females of the family.

The elaborate problem was who was responsible for the women when they dwelt at the vakıf merkezi, and under whose control the prayers and ceremonies were conducted. Secondly, more intellectual arguments based on theology were sometimes formulated by men with religious education, to whom it was crucial to question the legitimacy of a deceased spiritual guide and the modes by which the women sought contact with him.

Outside the domestic realm, two main opponents of the vakıf could be identified. First there were the various representatives of radical Islamists, both male and female. During some sohbet meetings young women were present who clearly represented an alternative attitude. It seemed as if the reason for their visits was mere curiosity, perhaps to accompany a friend to a group with some local reputation. The opposition of such a temporary visitor could be marked in various ways, for example through body language. They did not make gestures of rejection, but they avoided hugging and kissing cheeks, which was the accustomed mode of greeting at the vakıf. In this way they clearly marked that the women of the vakıf were not their sisters. Another signal that they did not belong consisted in their keeping their coats on. The symbolic meaning of this behaviour was perfectly clear: the opponents regarded the vakıf merkezi as outdoors and thus not as protected or *helal* space. This kind of protest occurred from time to time, but was merely to be regarded as individual demonstrations made by young "hotheads".

Hence the Sufi criticism was to be taken more seriously since it was aimed not at what was observable in public welfare work, the Kuran lessons, or even the hac tours, but at the heart of the matter: the authority of the zikir rituals as practised by the core group.

Within the formal Sufi orders, authority is supposed to be transmitted along a saintly lineage (*silsile*); often – at least from a historical perspective – the succession has been related to family genealogy. Throughout Muslim history, the leadership of tarikats has frequently been transmitted from father to son; [24] at times, too, it has been a source of conflict in limited local contexts. "The problem with the shaykh is not so much that he is human (in the sense of fallible) as that he is mortal", as Mark Sedgwick puts it (1998:21). The key terms in this context are transmission and succession. In spiritual terms, a transmission of *bereket* – literally "blessing", but also understood as good and healing power or

24. Although Julia Clancy-Smith tells of a most interesting case in North Africa at the turn of the last century, the issue of lineage has almost exclusively been a male business (1994:214ff.).

grace in general – is the essential factor when the legitimacy of a new şeyh is to be confirmed. If it is not passed on within a family structure, it must be handed over by an ageing şeyh to his future successor. Socially, the succession within a tarikat must confirm the established patterns in order not to jeopardise the existence and position of the branch or be the cause of yet another sub-branch. The death of a şeyh is always a time of crisis, breeding conflicts if the matter is not settled in advance. Bruce Lincoln defines authority as "the result of the conjuncture of the right speaker, the right speech and delivery, the right staging and props, the right time and place, and an audience whose historically and culturally conditioned expectations establish the parameters of what is judged 'right' in all these instances" (1994:11).

Gönenli Mehmet Efendi, however, never claimed to be a şeyh, a position of both theological and administrative dignity. Holding such an office requires being appointed according to the lineage. Different categories of holy persons, making up a wide range of characters, are venerated during their lifetime and after their deaths: *veli*, hoca, *yatır*, *evliya*, *aziz*, *eren*, *ermiş*. Veneration is not always the same as worship. Prayers could be directed to a holy person as a source of help, or be formulated as petitions asking for amending intercessions. To Muslim orthodoxy, this is a decisive theological and juridical difference; in local ritual practice, though, is it hardly an important matter. The Muslim world does not know of anything like the Christian process of canonisation, and no central organisation proclaims saints, as the Papacy does in the Roman Catholic world. Sainthood is to a large extent a regional, even a local, definition. The question of who should be venerated or not has also been a source of numerous conflicts. As in the present case, the holy person serves an emblematic role when defining a group identity. In one way or another, a holy person is connected to the qualities of *keramet* and *bereket* by his or her disciples.

Keramet, the ability to perform miracles (Gramlich 1987; Nereid 1997:25ff), was not spoken of at the vakıf in anything like a spectacular fashion; rather, this dimension was implicit in references to wonderful coincidences in connection with the hoca, or terrible accidents that had been avoided, or the ability to predict events to come – not necessarily in any great detail. Such a concept can easily come into conflict with attempts to act in line with modernity with its claim for rationality. *Keramet*, it was stressed, is a tool, an expression of grace from Allah, to help and cure, not a means of amazing people or frightening them. No suggestion was ever made that miracle stories were only for the less knowledgeable. In the contemporary context of the vakıf, the interpretation of miracles had an aspect of communication: the "wonders" were spoken about as a kind of visualisation of Allah's boundless abilities. This was in marked contrast to the traditional legends that were told parallel to the modern stories, legends where miracles play a major role as factors promoting edification. In colonial North African material Julia Clancy-Smith has observed about the traditional legends dealing with important Sufi characters: "the karamat [*keramet*] were cited in hagiographical accounts with a didactic intent – to teach and to

edify – since it was rather heroic virtues and exalted piety of the holy persons which made them close to God" (1994:35).

Bereket is a vaguer term which described the group's attitude to the hoca during his lifetime as well as the consequences of the work performed in his name after his death. The women did not claim to be successors to the hoca in any sense; they acted as his disciples and indicated the path at his request, but they did not transmit any *bereket* themselves. The important question whether *bereket* still originates from the hoca was answered from two angles. From a theological point of view, Allah is the source of all blessing and grace, and holy persons are only tools in Allah's plan for salvation; when Islam is followed, *bereket* comes directly to the *mürid*. These expressions, vaguely formulated so as not to provoke more purist Islamists, were in sharp contrast to the ritual practice which emphasised individual women's intense relation to the hoca and other aspects of his teachings that were not expressed as theological statements, but evinced through the relics, the Kabe cloth, and the prayers said together.

The principal arguments for Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's capacity and status in the local Muslim community are based on two conceptions (held to be equivalent by the women when acknowledging him as a legitimate teacher). The two key concepts that are fundamental to the argumentation are knowledge (*ilim*) and moral conduct (*edep*). Gönenli Mehmet Efendi's authority as a teacher is based on the fact that he had formal religious training and a diploma. This officially recognised knowledge still gives his sermons legitimacy. Secondly, his moral conduct is manifested in his unselfish love for his disciples and people in need – a core theme in the legends that were repeatedly told of the hoca in the vakıf.

Since the grave of the hoca was not emphasised in vakıf discourse or in venerating practice, the relics from him served as equivalents of the *türbe* in a traditional tekke or *zaviye*. They represented not only the memory of the teacher and guide, but also his permanent presence in the lives of the women and his blessings on the group. The objects were placed in the sitting-rooms used for zikir prayers in a cupboard with a glass door on the same wall as the *kıble* indication, the poster of Mekke. The eye-catcher of this arrangement was his *sarık*, signifying his religious status as a formal teacher, and there was also a glass box with hairs from his beard. These items were venerated at least once a week along with a piece of black cloth, part of the Kabe covering purchased on a hac tour to Mekke and brought back to the vakıf merkezi by one of the senior women. By way of conclusion to the *tesbihat*-prayer on the Thursday meetings, the women rose after hours of praying and filed one by one past the Kabe covering and the *sarık* as a last blessing. Through this weekly ceremony, the relics of the hoca evoked the memory of him as a teacher, and emphasising his relation to the absolute spiritual centre of the Muslim world.

As we will see in the following section of the study, one of the major challenges for the vakıf group was the balancing of Sunni theology and Sufi ritual practice.

III

"GET EXUBERANT WITH ZIKIR"
Women in Command of Commemorative Prayers

Performing Zikir at the Vakıf Merkezi

THE REPETITIVE ZIKIR/ PRAYER is the core activity that – despite differences in the structure of the order, the social or political context, or the theological position – unites almost all Sufi groups, past and present. The prayer can be acted out in a number of ways: collectively or in private, aloud or in silence, with or without accompanying song or instrumental music. The bodily expressions of the prayer may be very restrained, or they may be acted out in a public event of an almost carnival-like character. Sufism and zikir practices are represented all over the Muslim world. In some areas, tarikats and dervişes are in a marginal position, acting in more or less underground cells; elsewhere they are very much integrated in local religion and social life. Although Sufism is sometimes emphasised as a "popular religion", which handbooks often place in an urban-rural dichotomy, it seems evident that tarikats have been involved in politics at a high level of society over the centuries, and that Sufism has been a prominent source of inspiration in more intellectual circles.‹ As has been noted by many scholars, it was to a large extent the orientalist travel literature that constructed the image of the exceptional derviş. Along with the veiled women of the harem, the derviş became the site of orientalist and colonial fantasies.› Performances by dervişes as artistic events for travellers were among the first

1. In Arabic *dhikr*. When this type of prayer is defined in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as "the act of reminding, then oral mentioning of the memory, especially the tireless repetition of an ejaculatory litany, finally the very technique of this mention" (Gardet 1965:223), the distinction between the act of commemoration and the technique is underlined. The various social contexts of the ritual are in fact hardly mentioned in Gardet's survey. In the vast literature on Sufism, there are some studies that emphasise the analysis of zikir practice: McPherson 1941:60ff et passim; Trimingham, who primarily discusses the historical development of the orders, also analyses Sufi rituals 1971:194ff.; Crapanzano 1973:185ff.; Gilsenan 1973:156ff.; Schimmel 1975:167ff.; Feldman 1992:196ff.; Hoffman 1995:163ff.; Geels 1996; Werbner 1996, 1998:95ff.; Johansen 1996:180ff., 267f.; Norris 1990:63f., 80ff.; Knysh 2000:317ff.; Netton 2000:35ff., 79ff.

2. The construction of such a dichotomy and the academic critique against it as an analytical concept were discussed in the first chapter of the present study.

3. For overviews of the development of the various tarikats with further references, see: Arberry 1969; Trimingham 1971; Andrae 1987; Baldick 1989; Popovic and Veinstein 1996; Knysh 2000. A major survey of the influential Nakşbendi order is to be found in Gaboreau, Popovic and Zarcone 1990.

4. Meyda Yeğenoğlu writes: "In exploring the articulation of sexual and cultural difference in the discourse of Orientalism, I have pointed to the inextricable link between the masculinist and colonialist position of the Western subject occupies in relation to its Oriental others" (1998:66f.). See also Mabro 1991; R. Lewis 1996.

tourist attractions organised in the Orient. Though the photos should not be dismissed as curiosities only, in some respects they can serve as historical sources. "The images of dervishes created by artists and photographers of nineteenth-century Istanbul provide an additional, critically important, source of information", Nancy Micklewright writes (1992:269).

Remembrance. The Method and the Goal of a Zikir Ceremony

The reason for beginning a section on prayer performances with renewed comments on the local context is the desirability of reminding the reader of the social diversity of Sufism as a lived practice, in history and today.[5] Not only does the urban-rural dichotomy distort the social perspective, it also constructs a hierarchy between *doxa* and *praxis*. Zubaida writes that Gellner "is wrong in drawing the boundaries between the two in terms of ceremonies, ritual and magic; these elements are common to both, as we have seen, it is the style of performing which differs" (Zubaida 1995:169). Similar reservations were pronounced by Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper in their article on the celebrations of the birth of the Prophet in a Turkish small town, as it took place in the early 1980s: "The study of the practice and meaning of ordinary, day-to-day practised Islam, which inevitably combines both 'orthodox' and 'popular' elements, has been neglected as straightforward and lacking in theoretical interest. Neither, of course, could be further from the truth" (1987:70). In their introduction to the volume *Embodying Charisma*: *Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu discuss what they correctly designate as "false dichotomies" between belief and practice, religion and magic, syncretic practice and orthodoxy (1998:3f.). Even so, Cemal Kafadar defends the polarisation between high and low with the following argument when writing of a seventeenth century derviş diary: "I believe the distinction between courtly and popular traditions in Ottoman civilization is useful (after sifting through some of the attached values) in providing the two poles, of cultural activity in certain respects such as linguistic usage or literary genre conventions" (1989:122). Rather than two distinct poles, several sources of influence on the historic orders could be noted: theological, aesthetic, regional, economic etc. factors have forced the tarikats towards constant change over time.

This final part of the study adopts a more social approach, adding some questions from ritual studies as well as gender aspects to the analysis of women in command of zikir meetings of their own. Information about women's participation in Sufi-related activities throughout history is scarce, most of it coming

5. Cf. also Gellner 1969, 1972, 1981; Zubaida 1995; Raudvere 1998.

Dervişes in Guillaume Berggren's studio ca 1880.

A FLAVOUR OF ORIENTALISM lingers in the illustrations of dervişes as they are reproduced in travel literature, souvenir albums, and postcards. Nevertheless, such materials provide useful information about costumes, instruments, tekkes, and other architectural constructions: "the results cannot be dismissed wholesale as illusions", Nancy Micklewright states (1992:282). The nineteenth century photographs of dervişes are both snapshots from street life and from lodges and arranged scenes in studios. Compared to the numerous pictures of men in various social positions, very little about women's lives is documented by these photographs. Women most often appear in portraits. Women active in tarikats wore no outward signs that could identify them as "dervişes" outside the tekke, and inside the visiting photographer or artist had no access to the women's part of the establishment. The derviş remained male per definition.

As dervişhood served as an icon for the Orient, the derviş identity could be borrowed for a while and portrayed on a souvenir to bring back home. "Photographers kept a variety of props in their studios to create their own photographs or allow customers to dress up in costume" (Micklewright 1992:283 n. 9). One of the most popular photographers was originally from Sweden: Guillaume Berggren (1835–1920), a well-known *paysagist* (landscape photographer) in the city for over fifty years, who specialised in views and exotic oriental motifs. The arranged photograph above (Berggren 1984:64) from Berggren's studio shows five Mevlevi dervişes: a neyflute-player, two dervişes in "whirling position", a leader of the *aîyn* ceremony, and a Kuran reciter, all in their traditional costumes. The picture gives correct ethnographic information about garments, instruments, and bodily expressions among the "whirling dervişes". Nevertheless, its commercial foundation was the potential selling of memorabilia to Western tourists and to the armchair travellers of Europe and North America by means of illustrated journals and books. Textual equivalents to photographs like this were widely spread and read, for example the vivid accounts of Egyptian dervişes by Edward Lane.

from legendary history.FL A lucid example of an approach toward women's participation in tasavvuf groups and rituals, where historical women and the concept of the feminine are mixed in a fairly essentialistic compound, is the appendix entitled "The Feminine Element in Sufism" in Schimmel (1985:426ff.). Annemarie Schimmel writes: "The attitude of Sufism toward the fair sex was ambivalent, and it can even be said that Sufism was more favorable to the development of feminine activities than were other branches of Islam" (1985:426). Especially the saint Rabia has become an icon in the strategies of presenting a "woman-friendly" form of Islam. An opposite attitude is found in Baldick's critical rereading of the story of Rabia (1989:29f.). He shows how two persons, Rabia of Basra and Rabia of Syria, are made into one character in legendary historiography. "The pair of the penitent courtesan and the sexually abstinent wife form a pattern which continues in Sufi biographies" (1989:30). Margaret Smith's academic but still patently hagiographic monograph, *Rabiᶜa the Mystic and her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (1928/1984), has been reprinted many times. Nowadays various Islamist organisations distribute it as *dava* among converts-to-be in Western Europe, and it is also widely spread in Turkish translation. Annemarie Schimmel has written the introduction to the latest English editions of Smith's book. Praising Rabia's self-denial, poverty, and austerities, Schimmel states: "[O]ne may be able to apply to one's own life the quintessence of her life, that is, the deep love of God without fear of Hell and without hope of Paradise" (1984:xxxiv).‡ Portraits like this offers a picture of a character that stands out as liberated from time and context; this is, unfortunately, not a source one can rely on when searching for women's rituals.

Stories like the one about Rabia, or about other pious mothers and sisters of famous male saints, are repeatedly told in popular printed overviews of Sufism as well as in oral legendary story-telling in Turkey. The ideals that are worthy of imitation stand out, but there are hardly any accounts of individual lives. Little is known of what women of flesh and blood did, and even less of what they thought. Although many scholars state that women were present at derviş gatherings, there are very few sources pertaining to the conditions whereby legitimacy could be claimed for women's participation in rituals. The examples supplied in present study have shown that the position and the status of the observed group were of a highly complex character. Likewise, the legitimacy of commemorative rituals was not a question of either/or, but a question of the leading women's ability to navigate between local dominant discourses. Zikir ceremonies in Turkey today are performed at a crossroads of contemporary

6. The reader *Women in Islam and in the Middle East* (1999), edited by Ruth Roded, offers a survey of hagiographies over Sufi women (1999:128ff.). Historical information can be derived from Roded's *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections* (1994:91ff.). Cf. Elias 1988; Metcalf 1990; Seng 1998; Faroqhi 2000:101ff.

7. Schimmel further states: "Rabiᶜa's prayers can still serve as paradigms for the prayer life of anyone hoping for spiritual progress" (1984:xxxv).

ideological debate, and the judgement on these ceremonies is either in favour of the women and their activities or it amounts to the conclusion that there is just cause for rejecting groups like the vakıf and their theological position. Both Islamist and secularist groups hail Sufism as part of a national heritage, simultaneously judging its representatives according to their respective models of proper behaviour.

In some literature on Sufism, academic as well as non-academic, zikir is described in a way that makes the ritual stand out as something exotic and exclusive. Terms like trance, ecstacy, and altered state of consciousness occur with some frequency. From these accounts is it hard to visualise Sufi traditions and rituals as anything but marginal and odd. The imagery of the nineteenth century postcards lingers on. But zikir also has an everyday context of local understanding of Sufism, as well as being constitutive of specific social networks. To a large extent it was the anthropologist Michael Gilsenan who initiated a more sociological approach to the study of Sufi groups, their rituals, and the social implications of their activities in his *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt* (1973). All ritual activities are seen within a distinct social framework (173ff.), and his conclusion is that "the severe restriction [in the mid-1960s] by the regime of the political and social channels through which individuals might seek status and to play an active role in voluntary association with their like-minded fellows does open a new field of the Order [Hamidiya Shadhiliya]" (206f.). His focus on power alliances and local authority in a milieu where hierarchies based on genealogical and religious narratives play a prominent role in the social structure, is further developed in his more recent *Lords of the Lebanese Marches* (1996).[8] In order to grasp the rapid changes in society, the study "is concerned with the social practices of narrative-in-use in the everyday life and history of a Lebanese region" (1996:57). Sufism and its institutions, hierarchies, and loyalties are and have always been parts of social webs far beyond what is conventionally defined as the realm of religion.

The academic search for everyday worlds in the study of religion runs parallel to the increased interest in women's religious practices. The development during the last two decades of sociological/anthropological approaches to the study of religions takes account of wider fields of agency than conventional religious studies used to do. These new approaches focus on space, observing new fora where the religious life of individuals actually takes place. A second consequence is a new understanding of the concept of religion, entailing a decision not to accept the rules imposed by local establishments as to what religion is and recognising that the pursuits of women, youngsters, and elderly people often fall outside what has been stated as the norm. By necessity, these recent orientations also challenge the strong secularist agenda that has dominated Turkish academia. This agenda has not always made a clear distinction between

8. Gilsenan's *Recognizing Islam* (1982) must be mentioned again when discussing these matters; chapters 4, 5, and 6 especially deal with the social context of Sufism and its orders.

the ideological conceptions of the place of religion in the political system and religions as an analytical object. Secularism has promoted the non-confessional study of religion, the very base of the discipline today, and made it comparable to other fields of humanities and social sciences. Even so, the role of the educational system in a modernist utopian ideology must be put under debate (Göle 1996a, 1996c).

If religion is to be defined as something more than statements articulated in normative literature or activities practised by "religious specialists" for various purposes in specially designated places, new empirical materials must be collected, from historical sources as well as contemporary inquiries.

The Ethnography of Muslim Women's Commemorative Rituals

The social aspects of religious life are the basis of most gender-related studies that focus on how power and influence are gained, maintained, and executed. This is also to a large extent the case when we approach the zikir rituals of the vakıf.

Two aspects of zikir connect this particular form of prayer with other modes of devotion in the Muslim world: it bears similarities to commemorative prayers (Connerton 1989:41ff.), recitation for the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed (*mevlid*), and narrative incantations and hymn singing (Fuchs and de Jong 1989). Zikir also resembles other modes of intense, sometimes repetitive, prayers such as the African *zar* ceremonies and other healing rituals, and musical performances like the North African *gnawa*. The practice of zikir is constituted around a conception of the virtue of remembrance, the act of repetition serving as a goal in itself. Commemoration ceremonies in the present sense are only partly to be classified in the conventional mode as calendrical rites (Bell 1997:104ff.) of the Muslim year; they are as much daily and weekly performances carried out on both an individual and a communal basis. As calendrical rituals, the commemoration ceremonies with their repetitive prayers are – especially in Turkey – connected with some of the major Muslim holidays: the martyrdom of Hüseyn during Muharrem (*Âşure Günü*), the celebration of the birth of the Prophet (*Mevlid Kandili*), and the Night of Power (*Kadir Gecesi*) at the end of Ramazan. All these three events are connected with long narratives, in a more or less mythical or legendary form, whereas the regular zikir (whether individual-daily or collective-weekly) is based on the Kuranic command to "remember Allah" frequently and is focused on the names (i.e. the various aspects indicating that Allah is greater) of God, who cannot be grasped with one sole human concept: "Allah is greater" (i.e. than human intellect and emotions can imagine). Nevertheless, there are similarities of a theological, technical, and social nature in these three holiday celebrations of ritual commemoration and

zikir. In short, three features can be brought forward all of which, each in its individual respect, ensure that these kinds of gatherings become highly emotional events. Theologically, they recall and visualise holy history through popular genres like story-telling and hymn-singing, making the message of the holiday apprehensible. Technically, the remembrance is spun around commonly known folk narratives and songs that balance individual contributions against collective choruses of repetition; the individual singer or story-teller has a certain amount of freedom to improvise and can extend, emphasise, and introduce twists in direct contact with his or her audience, who in their turn respond and underline the message with the instruments of oral performance. Socially, these kinds of commemoration rituals bring together larger crowds in mosques as well as in private homes. The latter factor traditionally constituted an opportunity for women to socialise in wider circles. These shared features from the Turkish context open up possibilities for broader comparisons.

When approaching the ritual life of the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi vakfı women, some previous studies focusing on women's commemorative rituals have been of special importance to and served as sources of inspiration for me. The focal point for most of these studies is found in some of the fundamental conditions shared by most Muslim women in their religious practice: the spatial separation between the sexes; regulations for ritual purity and women's regular state of impurity which intermittently places them outside ritual life; and the issue of visibility: women's rituals should always be located away from the public gaze. The latter aspect is significant to the performers' own definitions of place and space, while also determining the possibilities of locating women's rituals in a particular context. Despite my ambition not to construct another essentialistic image of the stereotype "Muslim woman" and her limited spheres of action, these conditions must be taken into consideration, since they constitute the borders and norms that most women in the Muslim world negotiate in their everyday life.

Far from attempting a full coverage of a rapidly growing field of academic interest in the religious lives of Muslim women past and present, the following discussion will concentrate on some examples of descriptions of female participants in various forms of commemorative prayers. Most of these studies turned out to be from Shia communities, where emotional prayers – close in expression to the way zikir is commonly practised among women in Turkey – are frequent.

Elizabeth W. Fernea's book *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (1965) became a classic in women's studies at an early stage. It was one of the first studies to offer thorough descriptions of Muslim women's ritual life on the basis of long-term field observations: what did the women actually do during Ramadan and Muharram celebrations and recitals, at weddings and funerals, and in different phases of the individual life cycle; and how did women act as religious subjects? This lively and sympathetic description found readers far beyond the limited circle of anthropologists and other academics. Fernea's empirical material was collected during two years in an Iraqi Shia

community not far from Kerbela during the mid-1950s. She provides the following description of a women's recital gathering one evening in the month of Ramadan, a description with striking resemblances to the zikir performances I witnessed in Turkey:

> The [female] mullah sat down and the two young girls [disciples of the mullah] stood to lead the congregation in a long, involved song with many responses. Gradually the women began to beat their breasts rhythmically, nodding their heads and beating in time to the pulse of the song, and occasionally joining in the choruses, or supplying spontaneous responses such as "A-hoo-ha" or a long-drawn-out "Oooooh!" /. . ./ When the mullah reached the most tragic parts of the story, she would stop and lead the congregation in a group chant, which started low and increased in volume until it reached the pitch of a full-fledged wail. (1965/1989:110)

Fernea's study contains examples of other modes of communicating the religious message among women, but this particular event is termed *kraya* (or *ḳirāʾa*, "reading", in Arabic·). It was a kind of recital gathering held separately for men and women, with marked intensity during Ramadan and Muharram. These long ceremonies could last several hours into the night. A *kraya* was a social as well as a religious event; it was popular and surrounded by excitement and expectations built up over a long time.[9]

The meetings were initiated by individuals, who sent out invitations through the family network and welcomed kinsfolk and friends to their private homes for early evening meetings. For women with few other possibilities to socialise, this was a welcome opportunity to contact women outside the immediate family. The main character of the gathering was the female mullah, an honoured, more or less professional reciter who did the reading. The account casts her as a female tradition-bearer, in the folkloristic sense of the term, who transmitted her knowledge and skills to younger generations. In this rural context, recital performers were apparently trained within a family network and considered to be keepers of a specific spiritual gift. More recent anthropological research from Shia milieus confirms that these emotionally eruptive readings continue in contemporary urban settings (Kamalkhani 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Torab 1996).

As she entered the house of the hostess, the mullah's equipment appeared to be simple: "worn copies of the Koran and her own Book of Krayas" (1965/1989:109); the hymn tradition was apparently not only orally transmitted, but also written

9. Paret 1986. In general, the term refers to the formalised act of Kuran reading. The Turkish form kırâat refers to the knowledge of Kuran reading as a distinct theological discipline, as taught in medreses and other religious educational institutions. Cf. Hançerlioğlu 1994:248. According to Rudi Paret: "The recitation of texts proclaimed by Muhammad as revelation played from the very beginning a prominent part in the Muslim community. This is already evident from the fact that the collection of these revelations was designated as Ḳurʾān 'recitation'" (1986:127).

10. Similar gatherings are described and discussed by Torab 1996; Hegland 1998; Jamzadeh and Mills 1986; Betteridge 1989.

down in a specific corpus. The narrative hymns were performed with the women in the crowded room as a very active audience. Each of the hymns was "a long involved song with many responses". The joint singing was followed by a sermon which told the tragic story of the martyr Hussein and his family at Kerbela, "which is told every night during Ramadan and is the beginning of the important part of the kraya" (1965/1989:110). Fernea indicates a progressive escalation and calls the phases of the ceremony the three "stages", a scheme which includes a final part when the emotional expression reached its climax as the mullah rose, singing and rocking, "until the crowds of women formed concentric circles around her, and they too rocked in unison, singing and beating their breasts" (1965/1989:111). The scene in the description seems to be choreographically very much the same as a traditional standing zikir (*kiyami zikri*) in Turkey, common among men in some tarikats but very rare among women.

Marjo Buitelaar's *Fasting and Feasting: Women's Participation in Ramadan* (1993), taking its material from contemporary Morocco, applies a more distinct social angle to the analysis where key terms such as social attitudes, distribution of responsibilities, and roles are frequent. Nevertheless, its focus on Ramadan celebrations brings up the traditions of the night of the 27th, "The Night of Power", or "The Night of Measure" as Buitelaar prefers to call it in accordance with the local terminology (1993:64). The pattern discovered in many other ethnographies is also repeated here: men pray in mosques, in highly public events (the king's prayer is even broadcast on television), while women's participation in these celebrations is much less visible. Women choose other locations for their devotion and go to the tombs of the saints (the ideal is to perform a tour to the Seven Patrons and recite Sura 112 at each shrine) or bring couscous dishes to be distributed to the assemblies of praying men in the mosques. Such actions are thought to engender much religious merit, but they hardly promote societal influence to the women engaged.

Mary Elaine Hegland's essay on Muharram gatherings among Shia women in Pakistan is also of interest (1998) when comparing commemorative celebrations. Hegland's empirical material was collected during almost the same period as the present study, and she faced the same problems when searching for background literature: there were studies on the rituals in question, but few of them mentioned women's participation at any length. The energetic commemorative character of the Muharram gatherings is also a shared feature that makes more formal and structural comparisons with the material presented here possible.

The interconnections between Sufi and Shia traditions through history is a highly complicated matter. Generally speaking, however, commemoration ceremonies seem to hold a special position in Sufi and Shia communities. They share not only the intense prayer meetings with their extensive bodily expressions, but also the narrative chants telling lengthy legendary stories which are intimately connected with the ritual mode of expression.

Hegland's study emphasises how the Shia women of Peshawar found "rituals a means for self-expression, self-definition, and personal empowerment, and for

implicitly questioning gender ideology" (1998:241f.), using these rituals as a form of resistance in a hierarchical society where position is mainly determined by sex and age. Despite the obvious social and political differences between Pakistan and Turkey today, interesting similarities crop up when we look at the ways in which the young women of the vakıf conquer space for their activities, ritual and other. In both cases women act as organisers as well as participants and have to balance power and responsibility. The pattern of ambiguity is confirmed in Vernon James Schubel's *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (1993), though this study only briefly mentions women's participation. It offers ample documentation of devotional prayers from a Pakistani context. The status of women's rituals remains controversial, as they are defined within the domestic realm (and seem to be destined to stay there).

Zikir as the Dominant Ritual of a Small Women's Meclis

Evidently, there have been women of great influence throughout Sufi history; but hardly anything is known of how women in general practised what normative literature distinguishes as spiritual training. How regular was their attendance at the tekkes? How frequent were their zikir meetings in private homes? How significant were the differences between rural and urban communities? How were the hierarchies constructed among women compared to men? These historical questions seem hard to answer, even though legendary narratives of past times play a constitutive role in the oral traditions of the tarikats.[11] Today's Turkish female dervişes within the established orders cannot be said to conduct parallel activities; indeed, the image of a Chinese box seems to be more relevant. The male dervişes organised in tarikats act on the fringe of a public arena in contemporary Turkey, while the women's activities and rituals are even more hidden and hardly ever open to an outsider's gaze without considerable effort. Women in an independent group or association (*meclis*) such as the vakıf seem to have more freedom to arrange their rituals in accordance with what they define as their own needs and wishes, although their performance of zikir appears to be regarded, by themselves and others, as a private matter. Hereby they dissociate themselves from the formal prohibitions against tasavvuf activities, as well as against the contemporary secularist argumentation to the effect that such activities form the basic network for the Islamist resurgence. In the studied group, the zikir performances were even carefully separated from any association with the social welfare work which the group conducted. Being apolitical (*politikasız*) was one of the prime criteria in the self-definition of their activities among the vakıf women.

11. Renewed investigations in the public and private collections of documents and in libraries, drawing on more gender-focused questions, would probably uncover new sources for the discussion of women's participation in historical tekke life.

Zikir must be considered the dominant ritual (Bell 1997:173) of the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi group. It was a significant event for the concord of the group, in addition to investing the vakıf with a specific local identity. From the perspective of the women's interpretation of Sufi theology, zikir held its position as a core ritual for several reasons. It was considered to have been given to them by their hoca along with other forms of additional prayers he proclaimed necessary for bringing the soul (*nefs*) to maturity. Zikir had its given place performed within a supervised structure of recurrent prayers, as indicated in the booklet *Evrad ve tesbihat*. Catherine Bell uses the term "ritual density" (1997:173ff.) to show how ceremonies relate to one another within a ritual systems, "a necessary means for reconnecting the individual rites [. . .] with the full human context in which they actually take place and have a meaning" (1997:209). "Traditional" (*ananevi*) was the key term in response to the Islamist radicals of *selef* orientation and other backbiters when the women of the vakıf characterised the relevance and legitimacy of the repetition. Performed on Fridays at the vakıf merkezi, zikir had a symbolic place in the women's weekly calendar and could in this respect be compared to men's meetings at the mosques on the same day, almost at the same time. The women who frequented the vakıf hardly ever went to the mosque for any of the grander ceremonies, neither at the Muslim festivals nor during the ordinary week. They only attended the meetings arranged exclusively for women, which sometimes took place in mosques, from time to time staying for the subsequent namaz and withdrawing to the women's section of the mosque. No woman I spoke with went to the Friday noon service (*cuma namazı*), either because they wanted to prepare themselves for zikir in peace and quiet or because they did not have the opportunity owing to school work or jobs (and therefore did not have to make an active choice), or because they did not regard it as an appropriate occasion for them (more an activity for men).

The zikir prayer is additional and voluntary, in contrast to the daily namaz, which is indisputably obligatory (*farz*) – although there is no lack of Kuranic defence of commemorative prayers.[12] Sure 73 "Enwrapped" states in verse 8:

12. Both the Kuran and the hadis literature are customarily used in defence of zikir. Two major groups of arguments can be distinguished, as discussed in Gardet's article on zikir in Encyclopaedia of Islam , "Dhikr" (1965). First there are those that pinpoint the occurrence of the Arabic world dhikr in the Kuran (e.g.: 18:24 "mention thy Lord, when thou forgettest", or 33:41 "remember God oft", or in Gardet's translation: "Remember Allah with much remembrance") and thereby underline zikir as an imposed communicative ceremony. Second there are arguments referring to passages in the Kuran that speak of the closeness between Allah and the individual (50:15 "We indeed created man; and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein") and of individual commitment and spiritual training (2:147 "So remember Me, and I will remember you; and be thankful to Me; and be you not ungrateful towards Me"). For surveys of theological debates about the Kuranic legitimacy for zikir practice, see Schimmel 1975:23ff. (NB note 2 p. 24); Gril 1996; Massignon 1997; and for criticism in more general terms from the opponents of Sufism, see discussions analysed in Sirriyeh 1998 as well as the historic perspective in de Jong and Radtke 1999.

"And remember the Name of thy Lord, and devote thyself unto Him very devoutly" (Arberry's translation). The phrase "the remembrance of God" (in Arabic *dhikr Allāh*) occurs, according to William Chittick (1989), twenty-six times in various forms and compounds in the Kuran, though the local and individual favourite quotations in defence of zikir vary. In contrast to the use of musical performances as part of a Sufi gathering (*sema*, often spoken of as a "spiritual concert"), defenders of zikir have throughout history turned to the Kuran in their search for arguments in favour of the practice, as well as for confirmation that the individual "names" of Allah are to be found in a Kuranic context. In teaching and preaching at the vakıf merkezi, explicit or formalised Kuran exegesis was rare. Rather, Kuranic defence of the zikir was formulated in general terms: "The Kuran says" or "The Kuran assures us". I never witnessed any direct conflict about the theological or scriptural basis for zikir. It was my questions that provoked argumentation in detail among the leading women on a few occasions.

Despite the obligatory character of namaz, not everybody is convinced that women's prayers belong to the mosque, regarding the presence of females as a disturbance (*fitne*). Meetings for women only arranged by the vakıf members, or by other women and other associations, at local mosques faced the same kind of problems when attempts were made to defend their presence. The women complained about the comments they heard when they occasionally prayed namaz at a mosque: "Why don't you pray at home?" or "There is not enough space for women here". The women's morning meetings in mosques often came to an abrupt end when the noon namaz was about to take place and men started to enter the mosque. Even though it was rare for the central room of the mosques to be filled (except for noon prayer on Fridays, when women nevertheless were not allowed to organise meetings in mosques even in the morning), comments were often thrown at women who lingered for private prayer in the secluded section or gallery.

Zikir was also a dominant ritual in that it was empowering for the women themselves at a personal level. It was performed exclusively by the inner circle of the group. The front door was locked; latecomers were not allowed in; telephone calls were not answered. During this meeting, the participants did not have to serve and guide visitors and guests; they could perform zikir for their own personal emotional needs. Extensive and exhaustive, zikir was nevertheless still a moment of relaxation for the women involved. The practice of zikir was legitimated in the teachings of the hoca, as read in the published records and overheard in transmitted oral traditions. The printed booklet of prayers gives zikir a prominent position among prayers, calling it *zikri şerif*, the noble zikir. The term *şerif* generally indicates descendent from the Prophet, and it is used with a double meaning in order to emphasise or honour the position of a person or an event. Its genealogical aspect bestows legitimacy on the noun. In the present case, the use of *şerif* supplies a hint that contemporary zikir follows a chain of tradition that goes back to the Prophet himself. No *silsile* was ever

claimed, as discussed above; indications of Kuranic legitimacy and claimed links to the Prophet were apparent enough. The practice as such hardly diverged from what was customary in the district, only the intensity and some women's pronounced leadership. *Şerif* is also used more vaguely as an honorary adjective in order to reinforce the importance of the keyword. As is commonly known, green is a favoured colour in the Muslim world since it is regarded as the colour of Islam and the Prophet, and it is considered by many Muslims to be the particular colour of *şerif*, the descendants of the Prophet. As zikir came with such an honorary epithet in the local discourse, the semantic field involved connected this mode of prayer with concepts such as tradition and legitimacy. Considered traditional, zikir was far from exceptional in the context of the Fatih district, although questioned by some radical Islamists who viewed it as an improper folk tradition. Arguments in favour of zikir frequently referred to Sufism as a cornerstone in the Turkish cultural heritage. This viewpoint was often repeated by more secular nationalists, too, who acknowledged religion as a conservative discourse but did not necessarily lead pious or active religious lives as individuals. Zikir had a flavour of the past, of the *Osmanlı* world, and the air of tekke life, where both persons and institutions were adjusted according to a proper order; being and behaving in line with what was conceived as prescriptive conferred high status.

Sources and Experiences

The empirical material that forms the basis of the following discussion of zikir comes from several sources. First, there are the general assumptions about tasavvuf and its rituals as expressed in local discourse. This was a highly tense field comprising social as well as political aspects alongside the obvious religious ones. Zikir was a much-talked-of topic in the Fatih district, and arguments were raised in favour of zikir in a symptomatic way. Secondly, there are the norms and values as expressed in the public education (*ders* and sohbet) of the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi group when teaching in local mosques and at the vakıf merkezi. There were never any general or open invitations to participate in zikir organised by the vakıf, but the very presence of tasavvuf terminology in the public *ders* embodied a hint of what prayers were performed in privacy. Many tarikats have printed manuals for zikir and virdpractices. Handing over this printed instruction is often a vital part of the initiation ceremony (*bîat*) when dervişes receive the insignia of membership (such as a garment or a rosary). Such printed materials are fairly widely circulated and have offered a way of comparing the practice in one group with that of other. Finally, the most important source of information is obviously the ritual practice as observed during fieldwork, initially at the established Halveti Cerrahi order's tekke and later, and at length, at what was to become the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi vakfı merkezi.

Before turning to the description and analysis of the zikir as performed

among the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi followers, is it necessary to clarify the analytical position in relation to the concept of experience in local tasavvuf discourse. The use of the term "experience" is a complicated matter, as it is a favoured term in the milieu where the ritual takes place while also being an analytical concept which is sometimes used in more reflexive anthropological studies. In her monograph *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (1995), Kirsten Hastrup offers a survey of the debate about experience as a source of anthropological knowledge, as well as critical remarks. She comments: "Approaching society or culture through 'experience' immediately takes off in an ego-centred view of the world. There is no experience beyond the experiencing subject – the recentred self". Hastrup continues: "At the same time, however, there are limits to creativity and choice, and there are learned dispositions that cannot easily be unlearned. But social actions are not rule-governed in any simple way" (1995:80). In the following discussions, a sharp distinction is made between the contexts where articulated experience is the matter of analysis and those where experience is a rhetorical tool. The present study focuses on the first aspect: experience as expressed. It is not a psychologically orientated analysis either. In his critical survey of the use and misuse of the concept of experience, Robert H. Sharf states: "[T]he term is often used rhetorically to thwart the authority of the 'objective' or the 'empirical', and to valorize instead the subjective, the personal, the private" (1998:94). Timothy Fitzgerald adds, as a comment on the historical background of the concept of experience: "The term itself is radically open-ended, sliding in scholarly usage from relatively specific situations within the Judeo-Christian traditions to all-encompassing cross-historical and cross- cultural claims" (2000:125). Fitzgerald particularly emphasises the discrepancy between the Judeo-Christian tradition of narratives relating a unique personal encounter with God and the stories of individuals' "on-going, continuous, comprehensive experience of the world through the framework of their particular tradition" (2000:134). The former has its distinct genre of narration (the Saul/Paul paradigm), whereas the latter is often concealed in its everyday context.

I make no claims to be drawing on my own experience of the ritual – I have been an observer and a guest – nor do I claim to have had access to the women's inner experiences. My interest lies in what is expressed in words and bodily movements, and how symbols are communicated during and after the ceremony. Anyone who has been present at a zikir ceremony can testify that it is a very suggestive ritual, with its characteristic repetition and increasing intensity. I have often been asked the question, both back home and by secular Turks, what a zikir ritual "feels like", and it has always bothered me and made me eager to clarify my objectives. The present study asks how these women expressed themselves. It is impossible not to be affected by the rhythm, the sighs, and the repetitive songs. But my chiefly aesthetic experience cannot become the main instrument for reading meanings into other women's life-worlds, or be used as a tool for the understanding of the local meaning of a ritual. "It is a mistake to

approach literary, artistic, or ritual representations as if they referred back to something other than themselves, to some numinous inner realm. [...] a particular experience – that is, its ineffability – cannot in and of itself constitute a delimiting characteristic, much less a phenomenal property," Sharf continues the discussion (1998:113f.). Following this argumentation, it is not only a methodological problem to claim personal experience as a source, but also questionable to refer to what I experience in emotional and aesthetic terms, not sharing the fundamental theological conceptions. To me, critical observation consists in interpreting and translating what is seen and heard. This mode of analysis is reflexive so far as the translation necessarily relates to my personal corpus of knowledge accumulated during the fieldwork. The slow pace of the documentation was valuable, as it entailed my spending hours and days close to the participants while consciously or unconsciously reflecting over the action that had taken place on the ritual scene.

I was always welcome to attend the prayer meetings, from my seat on the sofa one metre from the women sitting on the floor; and I always felt like a comfortable and respected guest. I was as close as possible without being part of the circle of praying women; spatially I was in the same position as the menstruating members who attend but do not participate. With my hair covered by a white scarf, I tried as far as possible to comply with the dress code of the zikir ceremony and use as light colours as possible. Nevertheless, the analysis of the zikir is not about me, but about how the women of the vakıf tell about their experiences in order to make sense of the ritual. My position should not be interpreted as a denial of the possibilities of human communication, but be understood in an academic sense, as my ambition is to focus on modes of communication (i.e. verbal, bodily, spatial, and aesthetic expressions) used in this particular context rather than on any references to inner worlds.

The Framework for Friday Zikir at the Vakıf Merkezi

The general social framework of the vakıf group's activities is discussed at length in the first section of this book. Here, only the aspects of status and legitimacy will be stressed in order to focus on the fact that the performance of zikir has more than religious significance to the participants.

Throughout the fieldwork, the trend toward ever-increasing formalisation was most apparent in the women's ambitions to go public. Their activities could not, after functioning for some time as a semi-public organisation, be dismissed by anyone in their vicinity as "just women's meetings". The way young women developed the forms and structure of traditional women's meetings emphasised the need and opportunities for new forms of gatherings. As indicated, the zikir ceremonies played a crucial part when such legitimacy was gained, and the process worked in both directions: goodwill came from the women's charity work, and people were prepared to support them since they were thought to

embody traditional values in their ways of performing good deeds. The regular zikir ceremonies, along with the way in which ilahis and mevlid singing was conducted at the Wednesday and Thursday meetings, gave clear indications to any woman interested in taking part in the meetings that these gatherings were founded on solid tradition. The very focus on zikir, mevlid, and other commemoration ceremonies, such as the mourning hymns and recitations during the first ten days of Muharram, indicated a specific theological abode when performed in public.

Zikir was performed regularly at the vakıf merkezi, as it was in many other groups in the Fatih area and in the whole of Istanbul. Even though the tarikats underwent a long period of decline during the first decades of the republic, this kind of prayer meeting was kept up under more or less clandestine circumstances, among men and women alike. Some history handbooks strongly emphasise the closing of the tekkes in 1925[13] as a definitive turn in the sociopolitical development of the new republic. However, the loss of political power and social influence for the tarikat networks[14] must be distinguished from the ways in which people actually choose to express their religion. "Since many Sufi congregations do not depend on a central organisation, they have continued to function as independent cells by keeping within certain limits of secrecy and by exploiting selective ties of allegiance with members of the police, the military, and the parliament," Cemal Kafadar writes (1992:310). An ideological turn was also obvious within the Muslim discourses as a consequence of governmental decisions that "took additional measures to heighten Turkey's 'Turkish' national consciousness at the expense of a wider identification with the Muslim *umma*" (Kandiyoti 1997:186). After the closure of the tekkes, zikir was in many cases performed in private milieus, and the transformation of the relevant premises and spatial conditions had a profound impact on the status of derviş-hood. Here an inverted process from the 1930s onwards can be noted in comparison to today's religious mobilisation among women – male dervişes' religious practice went from the public arena to private spheres, from visibility to seclusion (Lifchez 1992).

Many of the historical derviş lodges were deliberately destroyed or left to fall into disrepair, and in the 1920s new locations were to be found out of the immediate sight of the state authorities. (The secrecy aspect should not be exaggerated, though; both parties were seemingly well aware of the moves of the other). The secular educational programmes, forcefully aimed against any form of religious training that was conceived as "backward" and "reac-

13. The Kemalist reforms were certainly not the first anti-Sufi wave. In Ottoman history there are several examples of how attempts were made to diminish the influence of the orders. The antagonism was directed both against the tarikats as powerful organisations and against their theology based on hierarchical loyalties.

14. The post-Ottoman situation for the tarikats is discussed by Lewis 1968:401ff.; Shaw and Shaw 1977:384ff.; Stokes 1992; Ahmad 1993:52ff.; Zürcher 1993:180f.; Shankland 1999:64ff.; Schiffauer 2000:41ff.

tionary", had been undertaken at the various tekke complexes in the cities or by the local şeyh in rural areas. The secular intellectual elite emphasised an image of şeyhs and religious people as backward and superstitious, and of the lodge as a site of corruption and decadence. Nevertheless, ritual practices in line with the tasavvuf tradition were kept alive, as many family histories testify. To a great extent it was in private milieus that the Muslim middle class passed on their cultural capital to the younger generations for decades. It is apparent from the fieldwork that those women with some religious education who are now in their sixties were in their younger days introduced to Arabic and pious literature through family members, but also through the more or less secret Sufi networks. Derviş life declined to its lowest point during the late 1950s and 1960s, but it certainly did not languish. Rather, some circles (especially the Nakşbendis) became involved in politics again after the introduction of the multi-party system after World War II. Hakan Yavuz observes: "What the reformist Turkish state perceived as out-of-date institutions became a 'womb' for fostering flexible and adaptive informal institutions and discourses" (1999:129). Nowadays the understanding and appreciation of Sufism as an "underground culture" has been reversed, and the derviş heritage attracts many young Turks (Kafadar 1992). In this respect it is not only the ritual life of Sufism that has drawn attention; its cultural and aesthetic forms of expression have also been embraced by students and well-educated young people who did not necessarily read Sufism as conventional theology. The junction between Sufism and New Age is a fairly new field of scholarly study. This vivid contemporary interest cannot solely be defined in religious terms; it also implies a search for cultural roots and therefore has an obvious nationalistic angle (Yavuz 1998). However, as Yavuz comments: "These networks have been the main intellectual and philosophical sources of the contemporary Islamic movements in Turkey" (1999:129). Many of the small associations cannot be clearly distinguished as either Islamist or nationalistic; they possess characteristics associated with both.

Like anything that could be defined as Turkish, as opposed to Arabic or Persian, parts of the Sufi heritage have always been recognised as praiseworthy in republican circles, although derviş life held a highly ambiguous position for a long time. "Insofar as tasavvuf involved the advocacy of tolerance and love against ritualistic rigidity and orthodox exclusivity, it was reinterpreted as an early Turkish humanism that obscurantists and exploiters had corrupted," as Cemal Kafadar comments (1992:317). The republic has never hesitated to bring forward the aesthetics of Sufism as a national hallmark, emphasising Ottoman music and architecture, using miniature paintings for posters and emblems, or sending Mevlevi groups on world-wide tours. It may be noted how republican historiography in its very self-definition uses the ossifying dichotomy in the supposed contradiction between "Sufism" and "orthodoxy". The republican self-image amounts to a modern version of the rational and scholarly parts of Sunni theology in the battle against ignorance and backwardness. This is the

nationalistic version of the same type of arguments that were discussed above when applied in an academic context.

Throughout Sufi history, a variety of zikir techniques have always been practised; many of them are represented within the immediate neighbourhood of the vakıf. There are several Nakşbendi groups that perform silent zikir (literally "zikir of the heart", *zikr-i kalbî*) in mosques and in private homes. Their dignified attitude toward ritual practice and the emphasis on their role as defenders of Sunni theology have made the Nakşbendis a conservative voice in the neighbourhood. Not many blocks away from the vakıf merkezi, the Halveti Cerrahi order resides with its historic tekke. At this location, weekly *sema* ceremonies (musical sessions with instruments and elaborate hymn performances when some of the Cerrahi dervişes also train and execute the whirling ceremonies, *devran dönmek*, of the Mevlevis[15] in full Mevlevi costume) take place on Monday nights. On Thursday nights, grand zikir ceremonies go on for hours with Kuran recitals, ilahi singing, and vigorous standing zikir. The members of the Rufai order, who also frequent the Cerrahi tekke, are known and talked of as "wild". Their rituals are very loud and vivid in bodily expression. Some participants pierce kebab sticks (*şaşlık*) through their cheeks or needles through their tongues during the climax of the zikir ritual. Not surprisingly, they are commonly known as the "howling" dervişes. A considerable corpus of narratives is transmitted, forming the local knowledge of how the various zikir groups perform their prayers, and in this context the Rufais stand out as wild and savage. They have a position of being something out of the ordinary in such folk narratives and are in this respect comparable to the Orientalist image of derviş rituals in an murky Ottoman tekke. The ideal for the Nakşbendi zikir, the silent zikir of the heart, stands in sharp contrast to the narratives about the Rufais. When it comes to practice, however, most Turkish Nakşbendi groups do perform zikir with loudly pronounced names (*lisân zikri*), and the Rufais are not so wild that they cannot be welcomed and integrated in the Halveti Cerrahi ceremonies. The oppression from state authorities has most probably brought the tarikats and their branches closer to each other, both in terms of organisation and ritual practise.

Voices of Remembrance

Zikir prayer was a highly integrated part of the vakıf's programme schedule, although zikir meetings were never advertised in the printed calendars. The reasons why the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi vakfı did not advertise were both theological and political. From a Sufi perspective, an individual must have reached

15. A derviş can obtain permission from the şeyh to train according to the traditions of another tarikat and to participate in their zikir performances and other kinds of prayer meetings. But a derviş can only start to wander (*süluk*) one tarikat's path and only have one şeyh at the time.

a certain spiritual maturity, assessed by the zikir leader, to be allowed to participate. As zikir meetings are still forbidden by law, the women risked the whole vakıf if they were announced too boldly. When people prayed together as a circle of friends in homelike circumstances, their pursuit was less easy to attack. Nevertheless, the zikir among the women was well known in the vicinity, as were many other Sufi-affiliated associations. The groups that organise zikir meetings certainly do not always need to be a formalised order (*tarikat ehil*). They may call themselves Sufi society (*sufi cemaati*) or zikir group (*zikir meclisi*) or, even more informally, a circle of friends (*arkadaşların halkası*). Officially, however, no such organisations exist.

Zikir can be characterised in relation to other forms of prayer (especially namaz) in key terms such as additional, voluntary, and repetitive. Zikir can be collective, expressed in communal performance, or individual, performed in solitude. The women of the vakıf performed both, although the latter was of a highly private character (with a minimum of bodily expression and most often in absolute solitude at home) and was hard to distinguish from other forms of daily prayers. The core term was *teveccüh*, meaning concentration and implying various methods of sitting and standing when performing music or poetry.

If thus prescribed by a şeyh, *mürşid*, or hoca, zikir can be performed every day as individual, often secluded, zikir (*münferiden zikir*). The idealised picture of zikir depicts a spiritual leader and an all-attentive apprentice, not busy professional people in a large city. The situation was somewhat different at the vakıf in other respects as well. The spiritual advice transmitted from the hoca was somewhat hard to pinpoint in conversations with the women of the vakıf. Rather, it lingered in the vocabulary used for different forms of prayer, and in what the group conceived of as customary behaviour. The sequences of the ritual appeared to differ according to the situation in terms of individual needs; particularly urgent issues to be addressed in prayer, or prayers formulated for specific holidays, could be varied by the zikir leader, as could the form of the prayer as such.

As was customary in the context of confessional learning, the ways of acquiring a proper zikir technique were also semi-formalised at the vakıf. Within the tarikats, there is an elaborate theological literature as well as oral traditions on matters concerning the use of breath control and rosaries, suitable and unsuitable bodily movements and the like.

The musical aspects of a zikir event should not be underestimated (Feldman 1996). Hymns have customarily been sung during zikir and other forms of prayer meetings. In the historical tekke tradition, the lead singer (*zakir*) was the second most important person after the şeyh during zikir ceremonies, functioning as an emphasis of the latter's voice and following the instructions. Hymns and odes (*şarkı*) of various religious and performative genres – such as ilahi, *kaside*, *durak*, *mevlud*, and *mersiye* – are, when performed, functionally and ritually close to zikir as a repetitive form of veneration and prayer. What can be distinguished as literary genres (ilahi, vird, zikir) were blended as ritual prac-

tice at the vakıf merkezi, and the difference was rather a question of degree and modus than of kind, united as these forms of expression are by the element of repetition and by the beat.

In an article on musical genres and zikir, Walter Feldman makes a distinction between two musical categories of ilahis sung in connection with zikir ceremonies, *zikri-ilahi* and the literary ilahi. The former is complex in rhythm while the motions of the zikir are performed with "a simple binary rhythmic pattern" (1992:192). The simplicity of the form makes it possible for all the participants to join in. This musical expression occupies a vital part of the zikir ceremony. The more literary sophisticated hymns are too complex to integrate into the intense zikir ceremony, but they can nevertheless play an important role during a zikir meeting (Feldman 1992). The two ilahis in praise of the hoca are of this kind, the content being of greater importance than the rhythm and the tune. İbrahim Hakkı's ilahi "Mevlâ görelim neyler", in which powerful choruses occur, may serve as an example of the opposite kind. In this case the repetition is constructed around a play on words with the idiomatic expression "Neylerse güzel eyler" and the word for reed-flute (*ney*), one of the most powerful Sufi poetic symbols indicating humans aspirations toward Allah.

Mevlâ görelim neyler	Let us, my ney flutes, see the Lord
Neylerse güzel eyler	What He does, He does for the best

Strictly speaking, mevlid is a hymn genre of a distinct narrative character. Though commemorative songs are known from all over the Muslim world, the form discussed below mainly originates in the Ottoman world. The Turkish spelling alternates between *mevlid*, *mevlit* and *mevlut*,[FL] and the term refers both to collections of poetry in praise of the Prophet and to the specific celebration of the Prophet's birth. The songs are widely spread in all strata of society in various printed editions of the classical texts, from critical editions with learned commentaries to simple photocopied booklets. The corpus is considered to be part of the national literary heritage, yet it is also generally known to be part of tasavvuf training.

The term mevlid has dual connotations in modern Turkish. It often refers to a particular collection of poems by Süleyman Çelebi (1351–1422), published in countless editions (popular as well as scholarly) in Turkey under the title

16. In contemporary Turkish the form mevlit refers to the celebration of the Prophet's birthday on the twelfth night (*Mevlit kandili*) of Rebiülevvel, the third month in the Muslim calendar. In modern everyday Turkish, the term refers more to the festival than to the genre of poetry. In this study, the more Osmanlı form mevlid is used in consistency with the printed material produced by the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi vakfı. Tapper and Tapper use the form *mevlûd* in their study "The Birth of the Prophet: Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam" (1987), while Martin Stokes uses mevlut. *Mawlid* or *mawlūd* (pl. *mawālid*) is the corresponding word in Arabic (Fuchs and de Jong 1989).

Mevlid-i Şerif,[17] and to a less distinctive orally transmitted corpus of texts frequently used in expressions of popular piety. The term can also refer to two particular forms of meetings: either gatherings in honour of a recently deceased person, or to women's recital meetings in private homes or elsewhere (Gilsenan 1973:48ff.; Rabinow 1975:89ff.; Eickelman 1976:171ff.). Always very popular within Turkish-speaking areas, *Mevlid-i Şerif* has never been fully embraced in all Muslim circles. A certain orthodox opposition against what is considered to be wrongful innovation (challenging the Kuran and other normative texts) is still pronounced in Turkey today. The criticism has aimed at both the content of the poem (not verified in the Kuran or the *hadis* collections) and at the mode of performance and the emotions stirred by it. Nevertheless, this long narrative poem is still today admired by poetry lovers for its beautiful language as well as by less literary people for its emotional strength and the mighty rituals it is part of.

The more formalised public singing follows the religious year of the Muslim calendar, and there are more or less professional singers (*mevlidhan*) who can take on the duty of reciting from the mevlid poem (Stokes 1992:211ff.). In Turkey, the mevlid stanzas that are part of Süleyman Çelebi's corpus are likely to be sung at mosque meetings during Muslim festivals such as Ramazan, Muharrem and the birthday of the Prophet (Özdemir and Frank 2000:53ff.). During Ramazan religious activities are intensified in general, with more and longer meetings when the whole or parts of the *Mevlid-i Şerif* may be sung more or less spontaneously. During the ten first days of Muharrem, particular parts of Çelebi's mevlid corpus are recited along with ilahis connected with the mourning theme of the period. Large-scale events are usually dominated by men, and it is common for women and their activities to be obliged to step back during the holidays and become the audience for male performances. At the Sümbül Efendi Camii, there are grand meetings on the evening of the 10th of Muharrem. Both men and women gather in compact crowds, the men sitting closest to the mevlid singer who stands in the pulpit and women forming the outer circles. The choruses, when the audience join the singer, are close to a zikir ceremony in emotional expression and rhythmical mode. The mevlids are not formally prayer events, though most of the choruses have the character of an invocation.

The singers, properly paid for their services, are invited to private homes for celebration or mourning, circumcisions, weddings, homecoming hacıs or death. The recitation of mevlid poems is an essential part of the festival in celebration of the birth of the Prophet, the night between the 11th and the 12th in the month of Rebiülevvel in the Muslim calendar. The poems recited on this occasion tell legends from the life of the Prophet and have become popular at many kinds of meetings, especially those of a semi-private character. In the mid-1980s, in a Turkish small town, Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper observed that: "recitals have become the central part of a religious service that may be held at any time

17. The quotations in Turkish are from a popular edition published by Yusuf Tavaslı that also includes didactic instructions. This folk edition and others are widely spread.

of the year and in many different social contexts". They continue: "mevlûd recitals are among the most prominent of all religious services in contemporary Turkey" (1989:73). The ability to sing mevlid well is prestigious, as it reveals both skill and learning. At the meetings arranged by the vakıf at the Hacı Hasan Camii, mevlid recitals were performed all year around, depending on whether there was a skilled mevlid singer around or not. The length of the singing depended on the time of the Muslim calendar, or on whether there were causes for prayer that required this kind of emotional expression.

As with other commemorative forms of prayer, there have been theological objections when the chanting practice has been debated throughout history.[18] It is especially the musical and artistic aspect of the performance that has raised objections throughout history.[19] The performance is always at risk of being understood as an aesthetic manifestation rather than a form for prayer. In contrast to zikir, mevlid singing does not have a base in the Kuran or the *hadis*. The legitimacy of the artistic style of performing a prayer lies in its being deeply rooted in Ottoman piety. "The style of recitation in the Mevlid is not markedly different from kıraat [Kuranic cantillation]. What is problematic is the element of 'musicality' acknowledged in the Mevlid but denied in the kıraat," Martin Stokes writes (1992:211). Nevertheless it was apparent that the lead singer's contribution was judged according to the beauty of her voice and her phrasing.

Süleyman Çelebi's *Mevlid-i Şerif* was translated into English by F. Lyman MacCallum in 1943. In the words of Nancy and Richard Tapper, "MacCallum's translation does capture important elements of contemporary recitals, namely the archaic vocabulary and the sophisticated and sometimes esoteric character of the poem" (Tapper & Tapper 1987:74). , To convey an idea of the emotional aura that surrounds mevlid events, some quotations will be supplied here. At the end of every more or less thematic section or canto (*bahri*) of the poem, the following invocation appears:

Ger dilersiz bulasız oddan necât	If from Hell's flame you hope to find salvation,
Işk ile derd ile aydun es-salât	With grief and love repeat the Salutation

The introductory *bahri* in praise of the names of God, "Allâh-Âdın Bahri", is thematically close to what is considered to be the essence of zikir, to pronounce the name of Allah as a form for prayer (*zikremek*). The first seven stanzas of the

18. "The Muslim debate has much in common with the debate over the legitimacy of music in the Christian church during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation" (Stokes 1992:208).

19. "Two issues in particular are involved: whether the reading of the Kuran (kiraat or tilavet) should be 'musical', and the permissibility of non-canonical poetry, music, and dance in the context of worship (sema and zikr)" (Stokes 1992:209f.).

20. However, they also state: "It is convenient to follow MacCallum's translation of the poem though it is less literal than we might wish" (Tapper and Tapper 1987:74).

invocation, much performed, in joy and in sorrow, read as follows in MacCallum's translation:

Allâh âdın zikredelim evvelâ	Allah! This name invoke we in the beginning,
Vâcib oldur cümle işde her kulâ	For this is ever due from us, his servants.
Allâh âdın her kim ol evvel anâ	Allah! The name which brings to all who call it,
Her işi âsân ider Allâh anâ	God's present aid, the weight of labour light'ning.
Allâh âdı olsa her işin önü	Did Allah's name begin each fresh endeavour,
Hergiz ebter olmaya ânın sonu	The end would ne'er fall short of full attainment.
Her nefesde Allâh âdın de müdâm	With every breath repeat that name, unceasing;
Allâh âdıyle olur her iş temâm	In Allah's name see every task completed.
Bir gez Allâh âdın de müdâm	Who says: Allah! in language truly loving
Dökülür cümle günâh misl-i hazân	Shall see his sins, like autumn leaves, removing.
İsm-i pâkin pâk olur zikr eyleyen	That man is pure who on the pure name calleth;
Her murâda erişür Allâh diyen	Who cries: Allah! attains his every purpose.
Aşk ile gel imdi Allâh diyelim	Come then in love, that holy name repeating;
Derd ile göz yaş ile âh îdelim	Your woeful tears and heartfelt fears commingle.
(*Mevlid'i Şerif* ed. Tavaslı n.d: 4)	(*The Mevildi Sherif* transl. MacCallum 1943:17)

A mevlid gathering during the holidays can take several hours, and the congregation that listens to the text as it is being performed is filled with strong emotions, happiness or grief. Tears flow and loud sighs are heard. The longer the gathering takes, the more likely is it for participants to start to move their bodies in a mode very close to zikir exhilaration. The ritual choreography is very much the same during zikir and mevlid. The recitation of all the stanzas of the poem takes a good hour, and the act is surrounded by a varying number of recitations from the Kuran, prayers, and ilahis.

Even more hard to distinguish from zikir and mevlid – considered in literary terms rather than ritual – is the vird petition or invocation (Netton 2002:47ff., 86ff.). Vird and its Ottoman plural *evrâd* are used as wide-ranging concepts denoting repetitive daily prayers that are to be read in a distinct order at certain hours of the day, according to the instructions of a *mürşid*. Mostly the vird is made up of a set of Kuranic verses (*âyet*) or whole short sures and "the most beautiful names of God" from the Kuran to be said repeatedly. Commonly known prayer phrases can also be included. The vird conventionally serves as an introductory prayer at the zikir ceremony, thus marking the shift from other forms of prayer to zikir.

In contrast to the institutionalised Sufi orders, which in many cases have printed manuals for the vird reading and where the rules of zikir have been transmitted orally for generations, the booklets from the vakıf contain few precise instructions regarding the actual performance. Basically, what is considered obligatory (*farz*) before prayer is not only relevant for the performance of namaz, but also for that of zikir. As with all kinds of formalised prayer, the proper intention (*niyet*) and ablution (*abdest*) are required. There are also preparatory prayers and the Kuran recitation before the zikir itself, and the vird can be supplemented by additional prayers of various kinds.

Each tarikat, and most often each tarikat sub-branch, has its own particular vird. Almost without exception, it is attributed to the founder (*pir*) of the order who has also, according to legendary history, issued instructions on when and how the vird is to be read. As is the case with the various traditions within the tarikats of how to perform zikir, vird can be said loudly or silently, individually or in a group. In traditional tasavvuf teaching, an emphatic distinction has been made between situations where vird functions as part of an elaborated teaching scheme and situations where it is a matter of inspiration (*vârid*). In the former case, the words of the petition are chosen by a *mürşid* (departed or alive) as being appropriate for the spiritual training of the *mürid*. The selection of holy words that constitutes the vird is cautiously kept within the tarikat or *cemaat*, not necessarily as a secret in the ordinary sense of the word, but as something to be transmitted formally as a precious gift at the time of the initiation. *Vârid*, on the other hand, are conceived as words placed directly by Allah in the heart of an individual without effort or intent (*kasıt*) from the receiver's part, where they function as an individual person's vird in connection to zikir performances, canonical prayers, or individual petitions.

As the hoca did not leave any particular zikir instructions to his followers in his *irşad* as it was presented within the group, the abla of the Gönenli Mehmed Efendi vakfı taught that an individual vird would be revealed to those who listened carefully to readings from the edited sohbets. The technique for discovering the vird was close to the concept of *vârid*. This was of course a controversial theological position; consequently, it was in no way indicated in the booklet *Evrad ve tesbihat* among the instructions for prayer.

Gönenli Mehmed Efendi did not bequeath any such vird to his followers for use in their spiritual training. A Sufi saint (*veli*) is traditionally supposed to act from his tomb and share the lives of his followers and devotees, being claimed to be able to help with instructions and other forms of spiritual comfort. The hoca was not considered to be a *veli* in this sense, but he was still believed to have an impact on the circumstances of the women. When asked, the women said that each zikir performer had her individual relation to the hoca and that a personal vird was to be discovered by each woman when listening to readings from the sohbets. In this sense the vird was individual and based on a conception of hidden (*batın*) meanings in words, to be revealed under certain circumstances. In order to confirm the choice, interpretation of dreams was occasion-

ally also to be used among the vakıf women. This attitude is an aspect of the general beliefs among the women regarding their possibilities of communicating with their deceased hoca (*üveysîlik*). The Kuranic defence for such an attitude toward the reception of a personal vird has traditionally been taken from sure 2:15: "Those to whom We have given the Book and who recite it with true recitation, they believe in it; and whoso disbelieves in it, they shall be losers" and from 18:26: "Recite what has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord; no man can change His word". The controversial difference in relation to the tarikats was that no vird was left to be transmitted intact, kept by successors blessed with *bereket*. By not attributing a specific vird to the hoca and the group that transmitted his teachings, the vakıf ensured that their zikir ceremonies were spared criticism. With no claim to sainthood and no stipulated vird, the women's Friday activities remained a private matter inspired by a deceased teacher whose lectures they had kept record of, lectures in which nothing more spectacular could be read than that zikir is a valuable kind of spiritual education.

In the printed edition of Gönenli Mehmed Efendi's sohbets the following instructions for zikir were attributed to him (1994:329):

> Allah (c.c [celle celaluhu]) Hazretleri cümlemizi tecelliyat-ı ilâhiyyeyi öğrenen, Allah'ını anan kullarından eylesin. Allah (c.c) imandan, Kur'an'dan ayırmasın. İki rekat gece namazı Senin cennetlik olarak kurtulmana sebep olabilir. Allah için sıcak soğuk demeden camilere, ilim ve zikir meclislerine koştun mu imtihanını vermişsin demektir. Elhamdülillah elimiz ayağımızla Mevlâmıza teslimiz. O'nunla her an için meşgulüz. Rabbim bize bu sıcağı kendisini hatırlatmak için yolluyor.
>
> May Allah (great and Glorious) let us all be among those who learn the strength of spiritual revelation [*tecelliyat-ı ilâhiyye*] and learn the utterance of the name of God. May Allah not separate us from the true faith [*iman*] or the Kuran. Your salvation – in that you will become heavenly [*cennetlik olmak*] – can be the making of two rekats [prostration sequences] during the night prayer. If you, despite the weather, have eagerly been [literally been running] to mosques and pious associations [*meclis*] for knowledge [*ilim*] and zikir, it means that you have passed the examination [*imtihan*]. *Elhamdülillah*, with our hands and feet [that is, all of ourselves] we surrender unto God. In every moment we are occupied with Him. My Lord sends us this warmth [spiritual nourishment] to remind us of Him.

The last sentence is most probably an addition in form of an invocation directed to Allah expressing an desire never to forget Gönenli's teachings. All key concepts that encompassed the zikir performances are present in the text. Zikir was thought of as a form of spiritual training, as was the practice of charity; both were thought of to be ways of approaching Allah. However, as spiritual training zikir can be separated from other forms of additional Muslim prayers that are of a more instrumental character.

A Friday Afternoon at the Vakıf Merkezi

Before turning to the weekly gatherings at the vakıf merkezi, it must be noted that each *mürid* of a Sufi group can also perform daily zikir in privacy for sessions of varying length. The rules depend on the commandments and instructions given by the *mürşid*, and solitary zikir is mostly integrated with individual namaz prayer or personal dua. Like Ave Maria in the Roman Catholic tradition, the zikir sequences can be silently or quietly said, as a particular formula for a chosen time, and the same phrases constitute a vital part of well-organised collective rituals. More expressive performances of zikir as an individual commitment are not known among Turkish women. It was spoken of in the vakıf group as a technique providing comfort in times of concern and as a memory of the collective Friday sessions. In both cases zikir was conceived of as a gateway to a deeper understanding of the hoca's teachings.

After having witnessed a number of Friday sessions, it became apparent how, to the participants at the vakıf merkezi, zikir redefined time and space and vice versa. When and where the ritual took place were not only issues of convenience, but also of authority and legitimacy. A suitable choice of time and place/space confirmed the zikir leaders as knowledgeable and responsible persons who would not lead the disciples in any wrongful direction. To hold a meeting or perform a ceremony of prayers and songs required close attention to the expectations present in the surroundings. The extremely careful choices made in relation to time and space coloured the group's public appearance and the ways in which the women of the vakıf sought recognition in the neighbourhood.

During my initial, more or less accidental, meeting with women from the group in the course of preliminary fieldwork in the autumn of 1993, the zikir ceremonies were held on Sunday afternoons and had a much more distinctly private character. The women met in a private apartment, and the gatherings were surrounded by as little formality as possible. There were few additional prayers, songs, recitations, and gestures. Apart from the leader of the zikir prayer (who was not the same person as the hostess at the time), no fixed roles (in any formal or informal sense) seemed as yet to have emerged within the group. The congregation, fairly recently established at this time, attracted members from various circles (connecting through family and fellow students), and a certain tension between the women who wanted to take the lead in future events was apparent. The fluid authority caused some insecurity, and hesitant guests tended not to come back. Two main clusters were already observable at

this stage, attached to two informal subgroup leaders. When this first zikir assembly split, it was more due to personal than theological disagreements. My contact with the group at this phase of its history was brief, and the comments offered here are not meant to serve as a basis for any regular comparison; rather, these observations constitute a background from which the subsequent elaborate activities of the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi group grew. To some of the older women, participation in zikir rituals was customary in their families. Many of them had been regular visitors to the nearby Halveti Cerrahi tekke or to the Nakşbendi activities at the Iskender Paşa Camii under the auspices of Mehmed Zahid Kotku and later Es'ad Coşan. Nurcu followers were also among the visitors. To many of the young women who did not follow a family tradition of Sufi activities, the intense repetition was a novelty when they encountered zikir in this women's group. Among those who were gradually trained into this particular form of prayer, some nevertheless became cornerstones in the vakıf-to-be and skilfully introduced zikir to others.

Even when the plans for a proper vakıf were still only a dream, the women soon established Friday as the day for zikir. Though many tasavvuf handbooks claim that the beginning of the Friday (i.e. Thursday night) is the preferred time, this particular constellation of women has always met in the afternoons. There were both social and moral reasons for keeping the meeting at that time of day. More women were likely to be free from social obligations, but primarily it was, as discussed above, a question of moral conduct. In most tarikats zikir is performed after the last of the daily prayers, the night prayer (*yatsı namazı*). Although both men and women attend the nightly zikir meetings of the tarikats, the social setting is quite different./ Most women who visit a tekke do so together with other female family members and, most importantly, almost always accompanied by male relatives. Very few women go to such late meetings on their own. Those who do are generally well educated and used to relatively free social interaction, and those who "return" (*dönmek*) to religion are accustomed to move around in the city at night as well. They may not do so frequently, but at least they have sufficient experience to handle the situation. Especially in summer when the night prayer starts very late, the zikir ceremony in all its phases and digressions tends to take the better part of the night. During Ramazan, zikir is customarily prolonged owing to the festive character of the period and also because the first meal when the previous day's fast is broken (*iftar*) is served at sunset and it tends to be a get-together of some length. The *iftar* is served at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke as a communal meal, whereas it

1. My knowledge of women and zikir in the tarikats is mainly drawn from observations made at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke during my two first visits to Istanbul in 1993 and 1994, and from information conveyed to me by the women active in the vakıf and more temporary visitors to the vakıf merkezi who had personal experience of the tekke. After beginning the fieldwork proper in 1995, I found it impossible to visit both places regularly, not only because the fieldwork was time-consuming but mainly because of loyalty to the women of the vakıf.

is otherwise a gathering for the extended family in private homes. If Ramazan is in the summer, the zikir performance may well end at 2 o'clock in the morning and the following conversations and social activities at 4.

For a women's association, it would not be defensible to arrange protracted nightly meetings along such lines, not even for Ramazan celebrations. A zikir ceremony in the afternoon can be attended in accordance with the norms of *edepli* behaviour. Quite apart from the aspect of moral conduct, women were also more likely to be able to fulfil their social obligations in their families if they could get back home for the early evening. Generally speaking, collective meetings on specific weekdays are the rule among most Sufi groups, as was the case with the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi group. The choice of Friday was symptomatic, forming a significant stance against the secularist organisation of the working week and instead emphasising the Muslim holy day of the week. It was also a choice in favour of moral conduct and in consideration of the women's social obligations as mothers, wives, and daughters. The women performed a zikir ceremony every Friday afternoon, between the second namaz prayer (*öğle namazı*) at midday and the third in the late afternoon (*ikindi namazı*). It was a limited group of women who met. All of them were closely associated with the vakıf and belonged to those who devoted a substantial amount of time to vakıf activities. The ceremony took about 60 to 90 minutes in all (the very repetition of "the most beautiful names of God" about 30 minutes).

As described in a previous chapter, on the Friday mornings some of the women led programmes in the Sultan Ahmed area from which they returned around noon. After a short lunch-break the preparations for zikir started. Up to twenty women gathered for the event, and in a way the zikir meeting served as an equivalent to men's gathering at Friday prayer. To my knowledge, none of the women active at the vakıf participated in any Friday prayer at any mosque. From what I have seen of the mosques in the area, they were so overcrowded on Fridays that men filled up the women's sections too, and men also prayed in the courtyards outside and even in the surrounding streets. The general understanding is that the public *cuma namazı* is not women's business.

"Come Here Into the *Meydan*, They Said". A Suitable Place for Zikir

The spatial dimensions of zikir were perhaps even more important than the temporal ones, since space for ritual use defines people in it as well as the other way around (Ardener 1993) and space in the Muslim world is conventionally defined in terms of pure/impure and proper/improper.

The anthology *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (1992), edited by Raymond Lifchez, provides a substantial overview of

Istanbul's tekke establishments past and present. It has served as a background for the construction of a general picture of what is conceived – also from a historical perspective – as traditional and customary in this particular context. There is a specific established theological terminology within Sufi-orientated circles to indicate what is appropriate as zikir space. In Ottoman times almost every branch of the major tarikats had its own lodge, tekke. It could be a building within a major complex of facilities (*külliye*) or, in more modest circumstances, just consist of a room in a family house reserved for this particular purpose. Yet, in both cases the mental map of the ritual room took into account actual place as well as space. As will be shown further on, the zikir room can serve multiple uses, albeit ritualised through items, symbols, and signals.

Two kinds of rooms in Ottoman Sunni tekke architecture are particularly connected to the zikir ritual along with other forms of commemorative prayers. *Tevhidhane* is literally a "house of unification", but more freely translated a place for devotion (Feldman 1992:196), and *semahane* is a special room designated for musical performances, but not exclusively a room for *sema* ceremonies with whirling (or turning) modes of prayer. However, the latter term was, and still is, often used as a general name for the derviş prayer-hall (Lifchez 89ff.). The "turning" ceremony is a form of zikir, and as such comparable with the variants of verbal zikir (silent or loud) where reflection over one or several names of Allah is the central component. The Mevlevi zikir puts greater emphasis on sophisticated bodily movements, though, and music plays a more substantial part in the ceremony than in most other forms of Turkish zikir. The traditional *tevhidhane* was often a circular space in the men's quarters of the tekke, and the women's section on the upper-floor gallery formed a crescent. The women could look down on the male dervişes' activities, but there was little chance of seeing anything that the women were doing on the gallery from the floor. Raymond Lifchez uses the term "canonical spaces [...] that reinforced the traditions of Turkish family life – an intergenerational structure, separation of sexes, division of labor, child rearing, family gatherings, and relations with outsiders" (1992:90).

Tevhidhane was a term never used in everyday language among the women of the vakıf, but it is the conventional term for naming the room where the zikir ceremony takes place. In the present study is it a technical term indicating the period when the living room of the apartment (the place) was made into proper space for zikir prayer. However, it is used with some hesitation since its histor-

2. An even more detailed catalogue (with numerous pious remarks) can be found in Mustafa Özdamar's *Dersaâdet Dergâhları* (1994). The title means "Istanbul Dergahs", and both terms in the original are heavily flavoured with *Osmanlı* nostalgia. Dersaâdet, "Gate of Happiness", is an old name for Istanbul, and *dergah* is the Persian equivalent of the Turkish term for derviş lodge, tekke, and an even more old-fashioned term than the latter. The author is the man who wrote the hagiography of Gönenli Mehmet Efendi (1995), and he has an extensive publication list of popular books about legendary Sufi history in Istanbul.

ical flavour underlines the women's rhetoric and self-image as keepers of tradition in a way that withholds the fact that their activities have inceptions in modern society.

Some aspects of the actual place in relation to the performance of zikir may be emphasised before turning to a more lengthy description of the ritual. The ceremony was always performed at the vakıf's own meeting-place, in a room of their own, not in a mosque and not in a tekke or a tarikat. This gave the organisers freedom in practical as well as theological matters, creating a more relaxed atmosphere for all participants compared to the very first phase of the gatherings. As soon as the vakıf merkezi was established, the zikir gatherings were no longer in a home and therefore not so immediately connected with one single family. The formalisation was of significance for the identity of the group, and the choice of place helped to define the women in relation to mainstream Sunni practice, the established tarikats, and finally also in relation to the less well-structured tradition of private women's meetings. The spatial indications began with the sign on the facade of the apartment house, as discussed in a previous section. The Book and the roses sent signals to the passers-by in the street that this was a house where the Kuran was studied and tasavvuf theology taught; in addition, as was pointed out above, the name of the vakıf emphasised learning and social concern. Any young woman taken to the vakıf merkezi for the first time by a relative or a friend would fairly soon recognise the location as a place of Sufi devotion. However, the central ritual would neither be forced upon a newcomer nor be accessible to her until she was thoroughly familiar with the theology behind the zikir. Collective zikir was mostly performed in a particular room that situated the ritual and bore witness to the attitudes of the participants and their eagerness to maintain moral standards.

It was significant how the room was organised in order to host all kinds of prayers, not only zikir. The L-shaped living-room was actually employed for administrative and educational purposes on a daily basis. Used for individual namaz, it also served as the office of the vakıf and as dining-room when many women were present.

Zikir was always a closed ritual in the sense that, with the exception of my presence, there were no "observers" of the ritual. The reason for the secrecy was dual. Tarikats are still formally forbidden, and seclusion increased the chance of evading the eyes of the authorities. Besides the theological factor, this was also a reason why the ceremony was not introduced to anyone who was unprepared. Maybe it was my position as an interested foreigner, who had proved her knowledge in earlier conversations, that made my presence unproblematic. There was no risk that I would be distressed or confused by what I witnessed. Secondly, the women remained undisturbed and were able to concentrate fully when no outsiders were around. The room was regarded as, in the most fundamental sense of the term, a house of unity, *tevhidhane*.

The front door was closed, no telephone calls were answered, and – perhaps most importantly – the participants constituted a selected group who were all

well-known to one another. No one was accidentally passing by, as can be the case when zikir is performed among men in mosques or other places. In such an environment a newcomer had to have a personal invitation (*davet*) to the Friday meeting or permission (*izin*) from a tasavvuf authority, based on an estimation of the individual's spiritual maturity. It was often repeated by the women that participation was not only a question of age and certainly not of social status. Young women in their late teens also attended the zikir meetings. Ideally it is only after an ultimate test or examination (*imtihan*, as mentioned in the ilahi "I entered Gönenli's group" and in the sohbet quoted above) that a person is allowed to participate in zikir. Traditionally, however, the issue of permission does not seem to have played any major role among the women. At a meeting in a private home any visitors are guests under the aegis of the hostess, and the honour of the house protects the participants as the house is protected by its male family members. It rather seems as if the more formalised and recent semi-public character of the zikir ceremonies at the vakıf merkezi have drawn more open attention to the issue and become a potential juridical and theological problem. So far, no one has provoked the women into taking up a public position on the question of whether it is sufficient to possess the preserved sayings of the hoca to be allowed to participate, or whether communication with him through prayer and dreams is required.

The living room was sparsely furnished. There was no other furniture than some sofas with their backs to the walls, an arrangement that left a large open space in the middle of the room. When entering, one had a strong impression of an open and airy room, almost always ready for prayer. The *kıble* was indicated with a poster bearing a colour photo of Kabe. When women performed their individual namaz, they brought prayer rugs from other rooms in order to construct temporary ritual space. No such arrangements were necessary for zikir. Traditional ritual objects of the Ottoman *tevhidhane* such as rosewater sprinklers (*tombak gülabdan*) and incense burners (*tombak buhurdan*) were never used at the vakıf merkezi. Few objects were for ritual use only; many more reflected the multipurpose character of the room. This maintained the familiar atmosphere and, from a practical point of view, the flexibility to adjust to up-coming situations during the week's activities. The water bottles, boxes for sugar cubes, and sweets that played such a prominent role in the context of *bereket* collection during the Thursday meetings were not displayed during zikir. A large decorative bowl was always standing on a small coffee-table, filled with rosaries (*tesbih*) of many designs and colours and used at the collective gatherings described above for individual devotion and collective dua. The exact number of prayers was of importance for the fulfilment of the intercession commitment, though rosaries were never used during zikir and the number or length of the repetitions of "the most beautiful names" was never registered.

All the women at the vakıf merkezi sat directly on the wall-to-wall carpet, a practice that is in line with the anti-hierarchical structure of the group – a fac-

tor which invites comparison with the significance of the special carpet or sheepskin (*post*) of the şeyh in formal tarikats, referred to as his throne (*taht*) or high seat (*post nişîn*). High-ranking dervişes also sit on *post*s, ideally forming an inner circle together with the şeyh, although in a crowded *tevhidhane* the scenography of the seating is not always clear. Keeping one single circle on equal conditions was a vital part of the way in which the women spoke about the zikir. The ilahi "I Entered Gönenli's Group" expresses an invitation to the *meydan*: *İşte meydan gir dediler*, "Come here into the *meydan*, they said." Meydan is yet another spatial concept with both an everyday meaning, "square", and specific Sufi connotations, meaning the area in the centre of the *tevhidhane* where the Sufi circle is formed during the zikir ceremony. At the women's place there was no *meydan* in an architectural sense, but a temporarily constructed metaphorical *meydan*. No reserved place; but certainly space.

There have never been any precise provisions in normative literature for how to design a tekke, and there were major differences between the various Ottoman constructions over time and in different regions of the empire. Most tekkes were directly associated with the tombs of deceased *veli*s and şeyhs. In most cases, the founder (*pir*) remained the centre of the order: spatially in that he was venerated as a saint (*veli*) at his tomb (*türbe*) where the window of devotion (*niyaz penceresi*) constituted the entrance to the establishment, and intellectually through the vird that most initiated dervişes repeated every day. The importance of claiming origins connected with the pir for prayer, narratives, customs etc. is also seen within contemporary tarikats. In the vakıf merkezi the relics from Gönenli served the same purpose, forming a visual reminder of the theological background to the activities.

In the traditional tekkes the şeyh used to live in some additional rooms designated for him and his family, as some of the young women did off and on at the vakıf merkezi. This more or less constant presence of persons in charge of the activities added to the status of the vakıf merkezi as a well-kept place.

Preparations for Proper Zikir

The ritual preparations for the lengthy collective commemoration prayers started slowly and individually as the participants arrived. The call to prayer (*ezan*) was heard from the nearby mosques and floated into the apartment along with other sounds from the vicinity: traffic, commercial jingles from sales vans, pop music from cars passing by, and shouts from salesmen. There was no immediate haste to begin the midday prayer (*öğle namazı*). Whatever the women had at hand was first finished at an individual pace, and then one by one they started to prepare themselves for the obligatory canonical prayer. Vernon James Schubel writes from a Pakistani context how his informants explained the relation between canonical prayer and the voluntary repetition of Allah's names: "for in repeating the words of the living God as they were heard by the Prophet,

worshippers are in some sense able to recreate the experience of the Prophet as he himself first heard the words." He continues his characterisation: "The ritual of prayer is an attempt both to emulate the historical actions of the Prophet and to taste something of the transcendental experience of Muhammad" (Schubel 1993:35). For the women there was a significant difference between congregational petition (*cemaatle dua*) and the canonical collective prayer (*cemaatle namaz*). The latter requires a prayer leader (*imam*), a role that was not to be thought of for any of the women.

Preparation had a dual aspect, comprising a practical and a spiritual dimension. It included having the proper intention (*niyet*) to perform namaz correctly and performing the lesser ritual ablution (*abdest*) – or the more extensive one (*gusül*) – depending on the state of impurity (*cünüb*) the woman was in, to remove what hindered lawful and proper communication with Allah.[3] The ablution ceremony was well provided for at the vakıf merkezi and was conducted in the bathroom or at a handbasin in a corridor. There were piles of clean towels at both places for individual use and plastic slippers to wear when standing on the wet floor (in order to avoid direct contact with the water from other women's ablution acts, as one woman explained to me). It was important for the practical parts of the preparations to move smoothly and quickly at the times when many women were present for vakıf activities. As almost all the programmes were run in the afternoon there was always at least one, if not two or three, occasions for namaz to be performed by visitors and arrangers alike.

The purification implied a specific ritual quality without which prayer was unthinkable. Purity was also a temporary and fragile state that had to be renewed if any other acts than praying had taken place. All the preparatory acts were performed individually and followed by the midday prayer (*öğle namazı*). The namaz was either performed in one of the additional rooms or already completed before coming to the vakıf. After the ablution they found themselves a quiet corner, often in the living room. Picking up one of the many prayer rugs (*seccade*) that were neatly rolled up, they established space for their worship (*namazgâh*). The completion of *öğle namazı* was a prerequisite for participating in the zikir; intention and purity were carried forward from the midday prayer, which was also a fulfilment of an indisputable obligation (*farz*).

The informal and individually executed beginning marked a difference compared to the nightly tarikat gatherings where namaz, vird, and zikir follow one another closely in one ritual event. At the tekke, namaz was performed as a collective ritual with a prayer leader (*imam*), men gathering in the *tevhidhane* on rows facing the *kıble*. Conversely, at the vakıf merkezi activities went from individual obligation to collective commemoration.

3. Two scholars particularly, Carolyn Delaney (1991) and Julie Marcus (1992), have emphasised the social and religious importance of concepts such as purity and impurity. Both authors regard the Islamic purity laws as the prime source of Turkish women's subordination.

Connecting the Zikir Performance to Mekke

A significant dress code considered suitable for the zikir event developed within the group over the years. All women who participated in the ritual wore long, wide white dresses reaching down to their feet. It has been customary for Turkish women in many communities to change their everyday headscarf (patterned or not) to an all-white one – not always when performing namaz, but for collective prayer meetings and most certainly for zikir. The women of the vakıf added the white dresses on their own initiative.

In the tarikats, authority and hierarchy are expressed in various pieces of garments worn by male dervişes. There is the official turban (*taç*) and the mantle (*cübbe*) which the şeyh wears, and numerous variants of the cloak or vest (*hırka*) and cap (*kubbe*) used by the initiated male dervişes. The latter often wear (or at least did in historical times) signs that indicate the individual's position in the internal hierarchy . For the women of the tarikats, there have always been fewer emblems and iconic garments (if any) to wear as indications of accomplished initiation, and even less to mark status within the group.

There was never any such formalised system of hierarchical signs among the women in the vakıf, since they despised the very thought of internal hierarchies. Instead they developed spatial arrangements and a collective dress code to emphasise unity during the zikir prayer. When the activities in general became more public, there was an obvious need to organise a structured framework for this central ritual event of the week. The white dresses were in line with the development in the course of which the present, more or less public, activities were set at a marked distance from the initial private meetings. At the same time, zikir was performed by a select group of women, and a specific dress code was a visible sign of the repeatedly stressed unity.

The women connected the white dresses with Mekke and an "Arabian" way of dressing. Most robes were brought back from pilgrimages to Mekke, to be used by both hacıs and other women. The costume may be viewed in conjunction with the male hac garment (*ihram*), a white robe of pilgrimage (Delaney 1990:521; Roff 1985). The Arabic word *iḥrām* covers both the ritual state of a person properly prepared to go on hac (or *umre*) and the dress required by male pilgrims, basically two pieces of cloth wrapped around the body. Unlike men, women do not wear any special garment or symbol of the occasion during the hac. Wearing the white Mekke robes during zikir spread the *bereket* from the hac to everyone in the zikir circle.

The dresses were very wide and made of a thin, nearly transparent fabric, some of cotton and some of more shiny synthetic materials. Other layers of clothes were used beneath and the white robe easily slipped over, and perhaps "cover" is a better term than "dress". In a sense these dresses were the opposite of the tarikat garment, which to a large extent signals hierarchy; instead the white dresses functioned as equalisers that were supposed to erase individual differences and increase the sense of a collective event. The unity of the circle formed during zikir was even more emphasised after the introduction of the

white dresses. Nevertheless, there was also an element of status involved even with this single form of garment. Some dresses were personally brought back from Mekke by some of the women present, who exclaimed "These dresses are only available in Arabia" and hinted that this was the actual street wear of Saudi women, while other women wore dresses that were gifts from hacıs or home-made. Despite the attitude of coherence, the latter apparel was second-rate compared to wearing a garment deriving from one's own hac.

When the white dresses were put on, a thin golden ribbon was placed around the head, over the forehead and around the white headscarf. These ribbons were also brought back from hac tours and were talked of as Arabic. After some time a "veil" was added to the white dresses. A square thin transparent piece of white cloth, trimmed with blanket stitching with coloured yarn and the size of an old-fashioned handkerchief, was put in front of the face. Actually there were now three layers of head covering: the inner scarf that keeps the hair pressed tight to the skull, the outer scarf (which was always white during the zikir ceremonies), and on top of this the thin white piece, held in place by the golden ribbon. A tip of the top layer fell down over the wearer's nose, thus covering her eyes. In the intense Turkish debate about headscarves and covering, many scholars have emphasised the difference between Ottoman dress and the contemporary Islamic dress code, especially the fact that the veil, in the proper sense of the word, was part of fashionable women's costumes in the wealthier strata of society.[4] The white face-cover was the closest thing to the *Osmanlı* veil that I ever witnessed, and it was used for the particular ritual event only. The reason for the addition of this veil was said to be an attempt to create a certain sense of intimacy; it was also seen as offering protection against "the gaze of other people". The veil was hence supposed to increase the ability to concentrate.

As for the clothes under the white dresses, individual variations in dress and style were as great as on other occasions at the vakıf merkezi. No one dressed up especially for the event. In the early phases of the fieldwork, when the zikir was less structured and still held in a private apartment, two young students who came to attend the zikir for the first time were offered long skirts to cover their jeans. It was not that the trousers were indecent as such, but the baggy skirts (home-sewn with elastic waist-bands) were supposedly more traditional and therefore more appropriate at ceremonial events. As was pointed out above, the white dresses were not meant to establish any hierarchy – ideally they would accomplish the opposite – but to mark a boundary between common everyday life and *zikri şerif* – and they were never used after or outside the ritual event. Putting them on was a sign that everyone was getting ready for the main ritual of the afternoon and that the preparations were to be finished promptly.

4. Lindisfarne-Tapper 1997; Norton 1997.

To Wander Along the Path

In traditional Sufi teaching, the judgement of the şeyhs determines whether a disciple is considered to have reached the proper spiritual level (*makam*) to conduct certain spiritual forms of training, among them zikir. Ideally, permission or an invitation should be obtained as a condition for participation. Tasavvuf terminology speaks of "the one who treads the path (*yol*)" as the wanderer (*salik* or *sâir*), from the root *seyyâr* meaning to wander. The wanderer concept does not apply to spiritual training only; in Ottoman language it is also related to the verb meaning to tie or attach (*sülûk*) oneself to a tarikat and become a derviş, taking an oath of allegiance (*biat*). This term also indicated the actual initiation ritual, a ceremony that entailed the right to wear the garment of the tarikat. Metaphorically speaking, it was the path toward the ultimate goal: a consecutive taming of the self (*nefs*) and an experience of unity with Allah, the women of the vakıf explained.

The associations of collective agency that surround the tekke terminology do not necessarily mean that the zikir is jointly performed at all occasions; it is more a matter of the *mürşid*'s, in his guidance, relating the individual *mürid* to a larger group of followers. Among the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi followers it was the invisible bond of the circle that played the major role rather than any formal initiation. Being a participant in the zikir circle was not a singular event. It was a long-term commitment and a sign of trust and expected loyalty, not only in relation to the other participating women but also in relation to Allah, the women of the vakıf explained.

Nor did the printed materials from of vakıf offer much in the way of instructions (*telkin*) for the actual performance of zikir. According to the prayers contained in the *Evrad ve Tesbihat* booklet, the participants are supposed to sit in a circle (*halka*) with their eyes closed and to be decent in appearance (*edepli bulunmak*). Another key concept here is "presence" or more literally "state of concentration" (*huzur*). The prayer book emphasises that the zikir is performed in the presence of the *mürşid* (i.e. in the present case the hoca) and of the Prophet. These two authorities are thought to keep their eyes on the prayer session. In traditional tasavvuf theology, the state of *huzur* can be developed in seven spiritual stages (*yedi makam*): from a more formal sense of paying respect to religious authorities to a level where God is constantly present in the heart of the *mürid*. But no discussions about the indications and characteristics of the stages of spiritual progression were to be found in the publications of the vakıf.

Since the Turkish language does not distinguish between different genders, there is no indication in the *Evrad ve Tesbihat* as to whether a man or a woman should supervise the zikir ceremonies, and the general tone of the booklet is gender-neutral. Neither is the gender of the potential reader specified, and the women of the vakıf distribute their materials to both women and men. The phrasing is simply "the person who is in charge of the zikir" (*zikri idare eden kişi*). The short instructions in the collection of prayers are only a very brief out-

line of the zikir actually practised among the women. Short *tesbih*s are given in Arabic along with the Throne Verse of the Kuran (2:555), plus a standard repertoire of Kuran sures.

"Get Exuberant with Zikir"

Zikir is performed with great variety in Muslim communities all over the world. Whether performed by women or men, in history or today, inside or outside the Arab world, the indissoluble simultaneity of individual and collective expressions constitutes a significant characteristic of zikir performance. If there is one single common feature in these zikir rituals, it is the utterance of "the most beautiful names of God" (in modern Turkish *Allah'ın en güzel isimleri/adları* or, as often referred to in religious literature, in its Ottoman form, *esmâ-ül hüznâ*). In Sufi tradition the repeated sequences are not considered just a petition to Allah; the repetition constitutes spiritual training in its own right. Thus the term zikir is often translated in academic literature as "litany" because of its repetitive character, as is vird. This translation is highly questionable, though, as the traditional Christian understanding and connotations of litany as a prayer genre can be quite misleading. The Christian litany is a liturgical form of prayer, consisting of a series of invocations with identical responses after each part of the prayer, and it is basically a petition connected to a specific period of the ecclesiastical year, Lent. Zikir differs in two distinctive ways. First, the zikir prayer is not of such an immediately instrumental character; second, it is not related to the religious calendar, and in a contemporary Turkish perspective it is not part of any public celebration as is a Lent litany in a Christian Sunday service or mass. Finally, the zikir technique is considered a blessing as such for the participants.

Zikir is a form of prayer, a genre both in a strict theological sense and in the way it is performed. Mostly it is practised as an integral part of elaborate rituals conducted by Sufi groups. The formal aspects do not only pertain to the literary aspects of the prayer. The specific form in which zikir is performed is often the hallmark of a particular group, signifying its theological position. Technical aspects of the zikir liturgy are also of a distinguishing character: breath control, rhythm, respiration along with bodily posture and gestures. "'Belief' in this context can only be extrapolated from ritual action itself, or deciphered from fragmentary exegetic commentaries. By contrast, for students of Islam the written religious corpus and hermeneutical traditions of a world religion seem overwhelming" (Werbner & Basu 1998:5).

In the context of the present book, deciding whether to limit the discussion to one specific ritual event or to present a more general picture of how zikir was performed at the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı amounted to making a crucial choice. Since the studied group was in a state of constant development during the time of the fieldwork, it would have caused severe analytical problems to

pick out one particular event.[5] What follows is basically an account that seeks to take into consideration a development over four years, with comments on how manners and practices changed during the fieldwork period. This was a time of transformation at local and national levels as well as of increasing obligations within the group, and it was an explicit aim among the women to introduce and establish the prayer as an indisputable part of the group's weekly programme.

Zikir under the Command of Women

After the more or less individually performed *öğle namazı*, the group was brought together in the largest room of the vakıf merkezi. As the collective prayer began, the room was ritualised as a proper place for prayer, becoming the *tevhidhane* of the vakıf while the open space in the middle of the living room became its *meydan*. The leading women were anxious to stress that the prayer was to start at a specific and previously announced time. Depending on the season and the length of the day, the namaz hours shifted. Mostly, however, the ceremony started around two o'clock in the afternoon. Before sitting down in the significant circle (*halka*), all the participants greeted one another in a ritualised manner in order to pay respect (*saygı göstermek*), often by kissing cheeks three times and embracing. To show respect, a younger woman may first kiss an older woman's hand and then bring the back of the hand to her own forehead. The latter used to be the conventional way for younger women to greet older women. The custom is kept up today in religious families and conservative circles. There were also other ways for younger women to show respect for older ones at this point of the meeting: they might help put on the white socks that are considered suitable for the occasion, or they might go and fetch things that would be handy to have after the ceremony, such as rosaries, handkerchiefs etc.

The circle was formed as the women sat down on the floor, relatively close to one another. One or two elderly women with painful legs or backs sat on a sofa close behind the women on the floor. The very act of sitting down functioned as the sign that the ritual was starting. It was always a sitting zikir (*kuud zikir*) among the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi followers; they did not move in circles (*devran-i zikir*), unlike the Halveti Cerrahi men. There was never any rising or turning; the women remained seated throughout the ritual. The given form for the zikir is the circle or, when larger groups come together, parallel ranks. However, the theological and practical function is the same: all participants face the centre. The circle was greatly cherished and conceived as a symbol of

5. As the introductory chapter pointed out, the documentation of the actual rituals was totally dependent on notes from continuous observations, since the women would not accept any form of recordings, video or audio-tapes.

unity and safety; "I am under my sisters' protection", as a young participant exclaimed. The term for circle (*halka*) was also used as a metaphoric expression for the zikir ceremony as such and for the congregation.

The first part of the ceremony was an intercession (*dua*) led by one of the senior women, abla, not the same woman who later led the zikir proper. Abla was among those who had actually met the hoca and listened to his sermons. Her leading position was of a very special kind. She was generally called abla, meaning older sister, an honorary name also used outside the family when showing respect for a woman with reference to her age or qualifications. Abla was the main character when it came to interpreting the will of the hoca Her dreams were conceived within the group as messages from him. It was the woman herself who interpreted the hidden (*batın*) meaning in the dreams. Abla's moods were carefully observed, and the slightest headache was considered an omen. At this point conversation with her was restricted to spiritual matters, and the tone was subdued. Her frail health held her back to some extent in the daily activities. Yet it was beyond doubt that she was the woman with the greatest authority and that abla had the last word when important issues were to be decided. Thus was it not surprising that she conducted the opening phase of the zikir. In Turkish tasavvuf terminology, the expression *meydan açmak* (literally to open the meydan) indicates both opening and taking command of the zikir. In a tarikat environment, is it most unusual for these duties to be divided during one zikir event.

Abla's voice had a rhythmical intonation as she pronounced the dua, and the repetitive character of the whole event was already indicated at this stage when the women forcefully answered "Amin!" to the causes prayed for. The response functioned like a chorus in a hymn. The more intensely the topics of the dua were pronounced, the shorter and louder the lines. The intercession had a dual character. Not only was it an invocation in which Allah was approached by way of direct and highly formalised speech in an archaic language; in some sequences the prayer also came close to a sermon with long narrative commentaries (*tefsir*) on the situation in Turkey, combined with references to the Kuran. The contemporary state of disorder (*fitne*) in society was a frequent theme, as well as expressed expectations of a new society governed by structure and congruous thought (*fikir*). The statements were met with cries of recognition, "Amin!". This part of the zikir meeting could be compared to the Friday *hutbe* given to male audiences at the mosques an hour before. Contemporary life as experienced in the local surroundings or as perceived through the media was the main inspiration for the remarks and effusions by the older woman. Depending on what topics were of current interest, the intercession took about twenty minutes. The woman who led this introductory part of the meeting was emotionally involved to a very high degree, as was shown in her way of underlining her message with the tone of her voice and her body language. She moved her body heavily back and forth, raised her arms and turned her face up towards the ceiling as if she spoke directly to heaven, or she slowly bent for-

ward, lowered her voice, and gave all participants grave glances from time to time. The sermon speech was interwoven with invocations of holy persons, the prophets, saints etc., in more formalised ways. Every pause in the intercession/sermon was answered with a vigorous "Amin!" from the other women. Abla cleared her somewhat hoarse voice and continued for as long as she had important issues to bring up for intercession.

When particularly sensitive issues were raised, some women sighed heavily as a confirmation of what had been said. These sighs did not only accompany the comments about the sorrows of and misrule in this world (*dünya*), but also the expressions of trust in Allah and hopes for the future. World events were mixed with quite local, and sometimes even private, issues. Four key concepts often occurred during these rhythmical praying intermezzos: the conditions of *dünya* that would lead some people directly to Hell (*Cehennem*), or – if they woke up in time, repented, and followed the straight path (*yol*) – that would lead them to Heaven (*Cennet*). There were no advanced intellectual ambitions behind the duas; rather, it was the emotional expressions that had the most lasting impact on the participants. A basic polarisation was constructed between wish for Heaven (*Cennet arzusu*) and fear of Hell (*Cehennem korkusu*) – and it was up to the participants to choose which road to take. Warning examples could always be brought up from recent events as presented on television and in daily papers and tabloids. The fourth concept, sin (*günah*), served as the logical link between the other three. More than pointing to the needs for the individual to repent or the comfort of the true belief, abla's central theme was the polarisation between the friends of Islam and its enemies. She constantly created metaphors for insiders and outsiders and the accomplishments of the vakıf were part of this struggle. Conventional Sufi concepts were seldom brought up.

After some twenty minutes the intensity of the dua was transposed into a second more contemplative phase of the zikir ceremony, readings from the hoca's sohbets. The leadership of the ritual was now handed over to the young woman who had most of the practical responsibilities for the vakıf and who was also the person in charge of the printed editions of the hoca's teachings. She also mastered this act as a reader from the texts and as an interpreter.

During this part of the ceremony, the young leader sat on a cushion covered with white lacy cloth that symbolically served as a pulpit (*minber*). This distinctive spot for formal speech may be seen as another similarity to the Friday *hutbe*, a mode of giving women access to theological discourse in a dignified form. The book was opened at random (*istihâre*), which was seen as Allah's guidance as to what text was the most relevant for the occasion. The term *istihâre* is otherwise traditionally used of active dream interpretation.[FL] A prayer is said before bedtime, and whatever happens in the ensuing dreams is acknowledged as a message.

6. This is in contrast to the formalised dream interpretation (*vahy-i ilâhî*) made by a *mürşid* during a sohbet meeting, when a disciple is encouraged to tell of a dream that stands out from others and the master is to judge the mürid's spiritual development from its content.

At this point of the ritual, too, there was sometimes a fairly extensive interpretation (*tefsir*) and expository discourse on what had been read, made by the same woman. The length of this phase of the zikir depended on whether there was any private or political theme of particular concern to the women. In contrast to the public gatherings held on Thursday, interpretations were never interrupted by questions or comments from participants. The zikir meetings were of a contemplative character, whereas the other meetings were didactic. When it came to the content of the interpretation, it mainly addressed the same themes as the previous intercession had raised, although the mode of articulation was now less affective – not because of the ritual itself, but because of the different personalities of the women who took the lead in various parts of the ritual. The variance of bodily expression indicated the flexibility present within the zikir performance. The different modes of expression depended on the speakers' attitudes rather than on different stages of the prayer. The readings from the printed edition of the sohbets, or from unpublished notes taken down by some of the older women, were sometimes multiplied up to three or four times and were pervaded with appeals such as exhortations to work for a genuinely Muslim society, spread the words of the hoca, or pray for various causes. Readings were made both from the printed version and from the notebooks kept at the vakıf merkezi. Their length could vary from intriguing comments for ten minutes to short appeals. There were recitations from the Kuran between the sohbet readings, often not performed by the woman who read from the words of the hoca, but by a younger woman who had prepared to read a sure or part of a sure.

During the time of the fieldwork a second collection of texts from the hoca was under preparation, so the readings from old notebooks were sometimes undertaken according to the same haphazard method. It was during this kind of reading that the personal vird of a woman was assumed to be revealed. Emotionally, she would directly recognise what words were meant for her in her daily personal duas. In all, this more intellectual part of the zikir ritual took at most 45 minutes.

The next phase of the prayer was the singing of ilahis, which also constituted the beginning of the actual zikir, the repetition itself. A Yunus Emre ilahi on zikir may be quoted, in Schimmel's translation (1975:331), to give an indication of the style and themes of the hymns:

> With the mountains, with the stones
> Will I call Thee, Lord, o Lord!
> With the birds in early dawn
> Will I call Thee, Lord, o Lord!
>
> With the fishes in the sea,
> With gazelles in deserts free,
> With the mystics' call "O He"!
> Will I call Thee, Lord, o Lord!

The verses of the hymns were sung alternately by one or two of the more senior women, who could also alternate in a mode of improvisation as long as the chorus was the same. In some popular printed editions of ilahis, the choruses are marked with bold letters to indicate the collective part. The ilahi singers corresponded to the role of the musicians during a more formalised zikir gathering at a tekke establishment. The hymns during zikir were mostly of a traditional character, not the recent compositions discussed in previous chapters. No instruments were ever used by women during these zikir meetings. They used their bodies as instruments in some respects, that is to say their voices and the sound of clapping hands or of palms tapping on knees.

An ilahi with the chorus "Lâ illâhe illallah" (the first part of the profession of faith (*kelime-i tevhid*) interwoven in most forms of prayer) was always chosen as the first one, and collective expression was more and more emphasised. When the phrase "Lâ illâhe illallah" is used as zikir, it is, according to Yunus Emre (534),

> honey for those who are bees,
> a rose for those who are nightingales
> (Schimmel 1975:332).

It is no coincidence that the profession of faith was chosen as the starting-point of the zikir, but a mark signifying that the additional zikir prayer is something close to the obligatory Muslim duties. In addition, words represent unity (*tevhid*) more than anything else. As among all Muslims, this was one of the absolute key terms at communicative levels, representing unity within the group as well as with the worldwide Muslim community (*ümmet*).

After one or two ilahis, the *kelime-i tevhid* chorus went on continuously while one or two women sang the last verses as an upper part. When the verses were concluded, the chorus "Lâ illâhe illallah" still continued and developed into a traditional zikir. Now a third woman entered the ritual arena as leader of the final phase of the ceremony. She was not involved in the other activities of the vakıf to the same extent as the others. This zikir leader travelled a long distance in order to come to the vakıf merkezi, and she usually only attended once a week for the zikir event. This woman was also known to be a *hafız*, i.e. she had formally been recognised as knowing the whole Kuran by heart. There was a warm intensity in her way of conducting the group. She permitted emotional expression, but was herself fairly restrained and took the lead for the first time during the ceremony by beating the rhythm with her fist on her lap. The actual sound of the tap was very weak, and the indication of rhythm was as much visual (her hand falling regularly on her lap) as it was auditory. Not far into the last hymn a change in respiration was apparent among the participants. It became very regular, short, and constantly increased in intensity. The mode of breathing was individual (in intensity and loudness) while the utterances remained collective (the names that were pronounced constituted the basic rhythm) at the

same time. The interplay between the individual woman (being behind her white veil) and her fellow performers was subtle. During both intercession and zikir, some of the women would sigh and shout aloud "Ya Rabbi!" or "Allah!" as a contrast to the collective rhythm. Instead of breaking the atmosphere, the individual cries added to the beat and underlined what had been said in the dua or mentioned in the ilahi.

The most frequently repeated names in the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi group are also the most conventionally used in Turkish Sufi circles: "Lâ illâhe illallah", Allah (God), Hay (The Living) and Hu (Him), or a rhythmical combination such as "Allah-Hay-Hay-Hay". The rhythm of the zikir depends on three factors: the breathing, handclapping on the lap (only the zikir leader), and the choruses of the ilahis. The verb "to make zikir" (*zikremek*) was used for the collective activity, the phrase implying that the individuals were to fall in (*esmek*) one by one.

The rhythm was now emphasised more explicitly through bodily movements. Although the women sat during the whole ceremony, the body language of individuals was of a highly personal character. Most of the women were very consistent in their ritual behaviour; they did not change it in between various ritual events. The mode of expression was a question of personality. There was a variety from minimal nodding movements with the head (the traditional interpretation is that the head is turned away from the heart when the negative part of the formula of unity (*şehâdet*) is uttered, "there is no god", and turned toward the right as the positive is said, "but God") (Geels 1996:238) to more extensive movements when the body was thrown back and forth in a rhythm of its own. Like the bodily movements, the degree of emotional involvement varied a great deal. Some women were decidedly minimalistic in their expression, while others acted out their emotions from the beginning; they rocked, they shook, they sighed and sometimes shouted aloud "Ya Rabbi!", Oh, Lord! as an invocation and as an indication of the companionship between themselves and their zikir sisters.

The collective rhythm rose and fell during the ceremony, depending on the women who led the ilahi singing and the zikir leader who, during this part of the prayer, tapped her hand on her lap to make distinct indications of the rhythm. It was also this woman who indicated when the repeated name was to be changed. From the longer and more melodious formula of unity, there was a shift to just pronouncing the word God, Allah. With its two syllables it was possible to make the expression short and stressed, and the breathing likewise. During this sequence of the ceremony, bodily expression reached its peak. Some women jumped on their knees and raised their voices. Of course factors like age and weight determined the extent of the physical expression, but there was no difference in principle between younger and somewhat older praying women. Rather, individual modus was apparent. When compared to the expression of other "names", the period during which the name Allah was expressed with intensity was relatively short. It ceased when yet another ilahi with a very

sophisticated melody was intoned. The chorus went "Allah Hu, Allah Hu, Allah Hu". Most women joined the chorus while those who acted out most intensely in their bodily expression only very slowly calmed down and continued the shorter and less melodious "Allah!" When the verses of the ilahi sung in the background had ended, the chorus had developed into something that was more of a sound than a tune.

In contrast to the diffuse transition between ilahi and zikir at the beginning of the repetition, the end of the ceremony was very clearly marked. The zikir leader bent forward and closed the zikir part of the meeting with a lengthy call: "Huuuu". The mode of expression was fairly dramatic, and the length of the cry had the function of a final chord. The Arabic word *Hu* means "Him" and is the traditional way of indicating the end of a zikir prayer, irrespective of whether the session is long or a short.

The pulse of the ceremony waned slowly, but some of the women could not immediately stop their intense breathing and thereby broke the – until now highly collective – pattern of behaviour. The zikir leader took up a hymn of quite another character than the ilahis sung during the zikir, with a much more meandering tune; the only words, "Allah Hu Ekber", God is greater, were chanted in unison by those women who had managed to stop breathing heavily. The melody and the rhythm seemed to have a calming effect, and to some extent this sequence of the ceremony served to unite the group again. The women who found it hard to stop breathing laboriously were gradually helped to ease their breathing, and their rocking body movements ceased. The soft singing continued until all women had reached a point when they were able to really end the ritual. In a much more austere mood than the atmosphere just a few minutes before, the Kuran was recited, most often by a young woman who did so as an honorary task. The recital was followed by a shorter and more concentrated intercession than the one at the beginning of the ceremony, and it was answered by collective cries: "Amin!"

At the final stage of the zikir, the participants recited "al-Fathia", always invited in a loud voice by the same young woman as at all Gönenli Mehmet Efendi meetings (this has been the case since I met the group the very first time back in 1993). The reciting was done by everybody in a low, almost mumbling voice with hands outstretched and palms open. The Fathia prayer closed with the hands brought up to the face, so that the blessing came close to the body, as if it was absorbed. "Al-Fathia" is very often used in commemorative ceremonies such as zikir, mevlid or Muharrem gatherings to mark the starting-point or finale or a phase shift in the ceremony. Generally speaking, it has the function of calling the attention of the participants toward a shared focal point. Theologically, this short sure is considered to hold the fundamental base (*esâs*) of religion as well as being the source (*kenz*) of spiritual inspiration; ritually, it is formulated as a petition (*dua*) and thanksgiving prayer (*şükür*). It is also a healing prayer (*şifâ*) and praise of Allah (*hamd*) – all said in a few lines.

After the final prayer the circle was broken, and the thin white veils were lifted

from the women's faces. The participants were warm and exhausted; some perspired heavily in their many layers of apparel. The intensity made the room hot and steamy even in wintertime. The women took off their large white robes, and some refreshed themselves in the bathroom while others went directly to the kitchen to prepare tea. It was apparent who had which duties and held which position within the vakıf group. Two or three women continued to sing ilahis and said the Muhammed blessing; others gathered around abla, the woman who performed the sermon-like prayer at the beginning of the zikir ceremony, to talk with her, or to put questions to her and ask for her advice, or just to relax in her presence.

It is not unusual to come across rumours among (more or less secular) people with some knowledge of Sufi traditions that tell of the "wild" meetings when women perform zikir on their own. There are stories of uncontrolled emotions, loud cries, and floods of tears. A favourite theme in this context is women being so absorbed in their prayer that the headscarves fall off their heads. Having witnessed a great many women's zikir ceremonies, I can say that this has only happened a few times and only to one woman at the time, never with an entire group. On all occasions when the headscarf has fallen off a woman's head, the circumstances have been extraordinarily uneasy, either in a social sense or on a personal psychological level. One particular event may serve as an example. Owing to a combination of general political turmoil (an unstable and insecure situation for religious activism such as the vakıf's) and the relevant person's being in a tense situation in her personal life (family conflicts), the young woman concerned was patently vulnerable. She was treated with understanding and affection, and as she moved her body heavily back and forth, suddenly the scarf (or rather the three layers of head covering) slipped off her head. It is unthinkable to pray uncovered in other situations, but apparently no one wished to disturb her zikir prayer. As soon as the tempo of the zikir slowed down, the young women sitting next to her gently lifted the headscarf layers back to her head, embraced her and patted her calmingly.

When a woman falls into an affective state, cries, shakes, or thrashes about in violent bodily movements, the participants sitting around her usually try to comfort her during the ongoing zikir. They put their arms around her to calm her down, fondle her, and pat her head in order to ease the bodily convulsions. In the tarikats that practise loud and collective zikir, it is not rare for participants to move their bodies more or less vigorously in time with the verbal expressions: the head in lateral movements or the body back and forth. As Timothy Fitzgerald writes: "all significant personal experience is significant precisely because it is generated within and interpreted by means of an institutional, social context" (2000:128). The only shared meaning of the emotional eruptions were those communicated with the fellow participants during the ritual and the zikir leader neither encouraged nor condemned.

The degree of intensity varied between individuals, but zikir at the vakıf was still a matter of collective expression. During some zikir ceremonies, emotions

were acted out much more strongly than at other times. The reason was not always obvious to me. The atmosphere was often very affective, bordering on the tense. Some women could suddenly cry vehemently and fall into each other's arms.

The Hour(s) After the Zikir

During the hour(s) following the zikir, tea and snacks were served and most of the women stretched out for a while. Some of the younger ones rushed off to their duties at the pastry shop. As soon as some women had recovered their breath and the prayers in a formal sense could be said to have finished, a lot of simultaneous activities took place. There was light chatting immediately after the zikir, and some of the leading young women were most often involved in the never-ending practical tasks of the vakıf (telephone calls, preparing meetings and appointments etc.). Around 8 p.m., when dinner was served, there were about ten women left and the meal was eaten in a family-like atmosphere.

The hours after the zikir were not only spent with handicraft, cooking, and leisure. Some women sat from time to time producing craftwork for an upcoming *kermes* or carrying out other practical things for the vakıf. After a pause with tea for an hour or so, some of the older women reunited in the corner of the living-room where the zikir took place. They closed the doors to the room in order not to be disturbed and started a new prayer session with some similarities to the previous zikir as well as to the *tesbih* meetings.

As noted before, the issue of possible tarikat affiliation, or even influence, among the women was always a sensitive topic. As a matter of fact, the practices as conducted must be regarded as a mix of various local tasavvuf traditions: Nakşbendi, Halveti, and to some extent Kaderi. Some of the regular visitors, although no one in the core group, had had Nurci contacts (Netton 2000:86ff.). The *hatmihace* (or in its more Ottoman form *hatm-i hâcegân*) prayer though, is a clear Nakşbendi influence and had apparently been cherished among women in the neighbourhood for generations. It was clear from the beginning of the fieldwork that an outsider's presence was not appreciated during this form of prayer; in fact no one was admitted who was not directly involved in the ceremony, hence the closed doors. This mode of prayer was particularly connected with the women who followed the Nakşbendi leader Es'ad Coşan at İskender Paşa,

In the first edition of the *Evrad ve Tesbihat*, there was a section on the *hatm-i hâcegân* prayer which was removed in the second printing of the booklet. The reason, according to one of the leading women, was that the *hatm-i hâcegân* is a form of prayer that one must have permission (*müsaade*) to perform. It could have been misused, intentionally or unintentionally, if left in print. The printed instruction reads: "To perform these lessons, whose reward is so great, one must have the permission of the *mürşid*" (*Ecri çok büyük olan bu dersleri*

yaptırmak için mürşidinden izinli olmak gerekir). The *mürşid* in this case was the deceased hoca, and the women who took part were almost all old enough to have met him personally. In other cases the dreams of abla gave an indication of what was permissible and what was not, and she actually decided who would participate and who would not. The prayer session was called lesson (*ders*), both in print and in conversation. This was an indication that the *hatm-i hâcegân* was viewed as further spiritual training; an individual was selected to perform (*izinli olmak*, literary to be with permission). Locally, the leadership said to be based on oral tradition and transmitted from one woman to another. When one leader passed away (or grew very old), the duty was supposed to be continued. This process was talked of as part of the vakıf's theological history and links to established tarikats. The technical transmission of ritual practice was less controversial than claiming authority as successor of the hoca.

The name of the prayer comes from the Arabic term *khatm*, to complete (i.e. in traditional interpretation, to read the Kuran from beginning to end), and the second part of the word, *hace*, is from the Persian term for hoca. In other words, the expression means "the completion [of the recitation] of the hoca". The leader of the prayer is simply called "the person who conducts the lesson" (*dersi yaptıran kişi*), and she indicated the theme(s) for the current petition. Usually it was a small group of older women who took up the *hatm-i hâcegân* prayer in a corner of the living-room, and abla was almost always among them.

One hundred small white stones were distributed among the participants and the leader who began the session by reading the İhlâs and Fatiha sures. The latter put a number of stones in front of each participant; usually the stones were evenly distributed, but beginners got fewer. Each stone (*taş*) represented one *Salâti Münciye* prayer, which is very much an equivalent of the *Salâti Tefriciye* read at the *tesbih* meetings on Thursday afternoons. During this ceremony as well, participants – in this case six or seven women – sat in a circle, and when a woman had completed one prayer she discreetly threw one stone into the centre of the circle where finally all hundred stones piled up. The *hatmihace* leader closed the session with a solemn prayer; this was not the time for vocal emotions. The repetetive form, nevertheless, made it resemble of zikir.

In other parts of the apartment domestic activities dominated. The atmosphere was relaxed, and everybody present could look back on an intense week of activities. Not that the weekend was leisure time; especially since the pastry shop had opened, there were a lot of practical things to take care of. Dinner was served on the floor in the traditional Turkish manner that is hardly customary in urban areas any more. Sitting on the floor was not enforced by a shortage of chairs, but more likely yet another traditionalist mark from the leading women of aspiring to what was conceived as *Osmanlı* style and to resemble the manner in which meals were still consumed at the tekke establishments in function. An oilcloth was laid on the wall-to-wall carpet (sometimes, when there were many women present, a second one was added to form an L). If the pastry shop had closed and the work over there was finished for the day, one or two women

popped over to the vakıf merkezı for an evening meal. Two women from the zikir group almost always took the responsibility for cooking as their special duty, spending the time directly after the ceremony in the kitchen preparing the meal. There was no sumptuousness – that would have been very much against Sufi principles – but the meal was rich and carefully prepared according to traditional recipes from the Turkish/Anatolian cuisine. The dinner was opened with collective grace, including al-Fatiha. There was a variety of dishes, starting with soup. Pots and pans filled the oilcloth, and the meal and the conversation took about an hour. The meal was served in the same room where the zikir had taken place some hours before, but not in the same part of the room. There was nothing sacrilegious about this arrangement. The reason was mainly practical; the room was the most spacious area in the apartment. The space for zikir was a temporal construction built on the purity rituals, the intention, the circle, the white dresses, and the commemoration and repetition. When the zikir ceremony was closed, the place was open for construction of another space, ritual or not.

Those who went back home for the night left at around 10 p.m. It was not accepted as proper for a woman to be out later than this without male company. However, departure might be delayed when Ramazan and other periods of fasting fell in the summertime and the fast-breaking meal could not be taken until very late. Other women chose to spend the night at the vakıf.

Zikir at a Traditional Tekke. A Brief Comparison

To conclude this section of the book, a brief comparison may be made between the zikir performers at the vakıf and women's zikir practices within the Halveti Cerrahi tarikat. Information about the latter is based on observations most of which were made at an early stage of the fieldwork, in 1993 and 1994. In order to be able to point to some significant differences as well as similarities between an institutionalised tarikat and a more recently established endowment, a brief outline of the tekke's background is supplied below.

The Halveti Cerrahi tekke, situated only a few blocks away from the vakıf merkezi in an area known as Karagümrük, is a renowned place for zikir ceremonies and other Sufi practices.‡ Because of its position as a centre for the performance of Ottoman music, the tekke is known to and visited by people far beyond religious circles. The comparison between the tekke and the vakıf is not made at random. Some of the senior women who are nowadays active at the vakıf were regular visitors to the Halveti Cerrahi tekke ten years ago. In the

7. The Halveti Cerrahi tekke in Karagümrük and its activities are discussed by Lifchez 1992:77f.; Feldman 1992:197f. et passim; Atacan 1990; Clayer 1996:490; Geels 1996. In his collection of Cerrahi legends, Mustafa Özdamar summarizes the activities at the Karagümrük tekke with the phrase *Aşk, meşk ve zikir*, meaning "Love, sacred musik and zikir" 1995:207ff.).

1960s and 1970s, this location was one of the few places that carried on holding formal, at least semi-public, zikir meetings that were open to women. Friendships and networks established in the women's gallery at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke still bore fruit in the much more public activities of the late 1990s.

An Endowment for Folklore Studies

The Halveti Cerrahi is a sub-branch of one of the major Sufi orders in the Muslim world, Khalwatiyya[8] in Arabic or Halvetiye in Turkish, with a long and diverse history.[9] One of the distinctive characteristics (at least in historical times) that have given the order its name was the practice of *khalwa* in Arabic and *halvet* in Turkish, "contemplative retreat".[10] Today it is only practised in rare cases, being more significant as a part of legendary history. There are three major sub-branches of the Halvetiye active in contemporary Istanbul, the Şabani, the Cerrahi, and the Uşşaki, each of them with sidelines of their own. In 1921 there were ten Cerrahi tekkes in Istanbul alone, and in all over forty tekkes in the city were connected to the Halveti tarikat. Today, however, none of the other branches has a tekke as well preserved and functional as the Cerrahis have in Karagümrük.

The Cerrahi tarikat in Karagümrük has been well established in the local life of the district since 1721, and like the *külliye*s around the major mosques it has functioned as the basis for a variety of religious and social causes. The tekke complex was officially closed down, like other lodges, in 1925; but the Sufi activities have been kept alive during the last thirty years thanks to the tekke's having claimed to be a vakıf for folklore research, Türk tasavvuf müzikisi ve folklorunu araştirma ve yaşatma vakfı. This characterisation is to a great extent true, as the group has cultivated a profound antiquarian interest in instrumental music as well as songs and hymns in the Sufi tradition. For a long time the members have collected manuscripts, built up an archive, and trained musicians and singers. Some of the most appreciated contemporary Turkish musicians with an *Osmanlı* repertoire have trained and taken part in ceremonies performed at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke. Several editions of ilahis with texts, melodies, and instrumental tunes have been published.

8. The history of the Khalwatiyya and its many sub-branches is discussed by Martin 1972; Trimingham 1971:74ff., 186ff.; Baldick 1989:114; Kara 1994:71ff.; Clayer 1996:484ff.; Knysh 2000:268ff.

9. In the third section of Atacan's book about the Halveti Cerrahi sub-branch in the Karagümrük district in Istanbul, there is also a historical survey of the tarikat (1990:40ff.). Atacan's discussion of the social and ritual life of the tekke is based on data collected between November 1984 and July 1987.

10. *Halvet* means retreat in solitude for devotion or meditation. Some branches constructed caves or small rooms at shrines and tekkes where the derviş was locked up in order to be able to concentrate up to forty days. Baldick 1989:114; Knysh 2000:268ff.

When it comes to core activities such as zikir and fundamental theological considerations, the similarities between the vakıf's activities and the tarikat's outweigh the differences. A significant difference, though, in comparison with the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı was the ritualised veneration of the founder (*pir*) of the Halveti Cerrahi branch, who was publicly acknowledged as a saint (*veli*) and conceived as being present and conscious in his tomb (*türbe*), prepared to consult with the devotees addressing him. At the salutation window (*niyaz penceresi*), at the very entrance to the tekke complex, the visitors paid their respects to the pir of the tarikat and his successors. They kissed the grating, standing in front of the window with heads bowed and arms crossed over the chest in a posture suggesting humility. The pir was recognised as a spiritual elder, who still communicates with his late followers through prayers and dreams. When temporal guests, unfamiliar with Sufi practices, asked about the custom, the Cerrahi dervişes strongly stressed the *pir*'s role as a model and a teacher – not a mediator. As discussed above, any hint of a mediator between the individual and Allah is a focal point of Islamist criticism.

The prayer at the gate was considered an initial preparation for the commemorative events that followed during the evening. It also seems apparent that some visitors had a more affectionate relation to this form of prayer and to the deceased master than others who passed by quickly. The former thus stayed in front of the salutation window for longer confabulations with the pir and his successors.

At the time of the fieldwork observations, there was a wide range of visitors, regular or occasional, to the tekke, most often from the lower middle class (Atacan 1990). There were not only Cerrahi dervişes who arrived for the evening meetings, but members from other tarikats too, as well as people who were not initiated at all. Of special interest were the many non-Muslim visitors who came in increasing numbers to the meetings at the tekke. The location was even mentioned in some guidebooks as a place where tourists could experience a "real" Sufi environment. The non-Muslims were received with great warmth, and some male dervişes had been assigned the special duty of introducing the tarikat to foreign guests. Socially, these temporal visitors played a considerable role at the meetings. Most came for just one evening, whereas a few came regularly over the years. In this heterogeneous group there were quite a few non-Turks, men and women, who had been initiated as dervişes in the Halveti Cerrahi order. It is far beyond the scope of the present study to discuss the reasons behind these conversions. However, the presence of guests, tourists, recent converts, and New Age seekers moving within the tekke establishment is an important factor to remember when picturing the circumstances of the Cerrahi women's zikir practices, both the regular Thursday evening ceremonies and the exclusive women's zikir once a month. The non-Turkish women (converted or not) moved with ease in the men's quarters outside prayer time, unthinkable behaviour for an ordinary female Turkish member. To provide an idea of the scale of such conversions, it may be mentioned that the Cerrahi virdcollection is also printed in an English edition. This edition is mainly intended for the

North American Cerrahi sub-branches of converts, but it was also distributed in Istanbul. The booklet supplies translations of the vird sequences, using its own method of transliteration of the Arabic parts (Kuran verses, standard prayer-phrases) in order to help readers familiar with English to pronounce their vird.

When it comes to networks and business contacts, the social importance of the formal order for its members cannot be overestimated. As Fulya Atacan has shown in her study of the tarikat's activities in the 1980s, the Cerrahi network offered the male dervişes a basis for many important relations, a continuation of the guild-like character of the Ottoman tarikats. Bearing in mind the considerable increase of the population over the last fifty years and the almost uncontrolled growth of the big cities, it is understandable that a family-like structure like a tarikat can be experienced as a compensation for networks lost because of urbanisation and migration.

In contemporary Istanbul, most women of the Halveti Cerrahi order are more or less newcomers in the metropolis, facing inflation, unemployment, housing shortage, and overcrowded flats. Families are split because of work migration inside and outside Turkey. In this environment many women find themselves alone in new situations. Some of them established a strong social identity with the group in Karagümrük, where they could form new bonds and relations outside the family without transgressing any borders of moral behaviour. Even so, the women of the Halveti Cerrahi order were far from being a homogeneous group. Three groups of female Halveti Cerrahi dervişes could be distinguished among all women who were present at some of the week's three meetings. First, there were the more senior women who frequented the tekke as part of their family traditions. With a sweeping generalisation, it may be said that these women had the least complicated relationship to the order, and that for them its ritual life bore the hallmark of rural virtues and a small-scale setting. To these women the modes of zikir prayers were familiar (from the well-trodden Sufi path) and an unambiguous part of local ritual life. Few of them, if any, had any close contact with the secular school system at any higher level; and they had never really been forced to navigate Kemalist society, whether at a personal or a professional level. Many of them were born in the countryside, but had spent the better part of their adult lives in an urban setting. The middle-aged women constituted the smallest group. As with the elderly women, their acquaintance with Sufism sprang from their family background, and they were socially well integrated in the order. These women were the daughters of Kemalism, however, and in their younger days religious activities were if not deliberately hidden, then at least not something that was energetically advertised. Their contacts with institutionalised Kemalism were much more profound than those of their mothers. The third group, made up of young women, was very heterogeneous. It partly consisted of not very well-educated women who were often at home with small children and had little if any professional experience. Like the older women, they often came to the tekke accompanied by other family members, and the better part of their social network was within the order. In sharp contrast to these traditionalists were a new kind of

younger women who had joined the order over the past few years. These women were well-educated; many of them were young professionals or university students. Participation was a personal choice for them, and they were fully aware of what the headscarf and the long skirt symbolise in mainstream secular society. These often very articulate young women represent the resurgence of Islam in Turkish society today. Their aspirations and aims – how they constructed tradition differently for different purposes – indicated the complexity of the conflicts that the Halveti Cerrahi order faces today. In the case of the new, single Halveti Cerrahi women, it is not only in the construction of meaning within the traditional frameworks of legends and story-telling that the new modes of transmitting messages manifest themselves. A new *şeriat* orientation is also present in their black cloaks (*çarşaf*). This new generation of well-educated women have a favourable outlook on religion and play an active part in society to a much greater extent than previous generations. Leading lives that differ from those of other women visiting the tekke, they will have new expectations and demands on the order in the future. Most of them share an acceptance of the political commitment that comes with wearing covering (*tesettür*) on campus. Like the Nakşbendis, many male Cerrahis have been involved in politics under the name of conservative nationalism, the way politics and Islam have been united in Turkey after World War II. The straightforward attitude of these young women can be somewhat disturbing to the men. Quite a few of them came on their own or together with their female friends, not necessarily with their family. It was not unusual for them to be associated with other groups that expressed a very unfavourable attitude towards tasavvuf practices. Among such groups zikir was mostly if not rejected, then at least frowned upon as constituting "folk religion". Some of the hostile groups did not only warn young members against participating in zikir meetings but actually tried to hinder them. The performance of zikir was the nexus of a considerable conflict for the women in *çarşaf*. With their black garb on, they were visible as newcomers among the traditional Cerrahis. They were regarded as ignorant about tasavvuf and at the same time feared as spies sent by *şeriat*-orientated groups in order to find blameworthy conditions. Their double loyalties were highlighted at the tekke, and their dilemmas when defining their positions resembled those of the vakıf women.

A Thursday Evening at the Cerrahi Tekke

Every Thursday, standing rotating zikir (*devran-ı zikir*) is performed by the dervişes at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke.[11] The following observations were made in 1993–94. In the hours preceding the ceremony, about 75 women of all ages trick-

11. Antoon Geels has analysed a Thursday zikir meeting at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke from a psychological point of view (1996). His study is based on observations and a video recording made by the dervişes themselves during his fieldwork in 1989, and it deals in detail with

led into the women's part of the establishment, many more during Ramazan, Muharrem and other festivals. Some came very early for social reasons; they would sit and chat before prayers started or receive a meal as part of a charity programme. Women could reach the women's part on the upper floor of the tekke establishment (*haremlik*) directly by way of a staircase on the outside of the main building, without entering the men's part (*selamlık*) at all. The upper floor has several rooms for social activities and meals, and doors to the gallery above the "large square" (*büyük meydan*), the grand circular prayer room of the male dervişes. The Thursday meetings follow a set pattern: first evening prayer, then dinner with night prayer to follow, which turns into the vird attributed to Pir Cerrahi himself, and then finally the zikir prayer that can last for several hours. During the intense ceremony, some of the more customary of the "most beautiful names of God" are repeated for long periods of time. Basically, the conventional succession of *Esma-i Seb'a* is adhered to. The zikir began as sitting zikir (*kuud zikri*), and – ideally – twelve sheepskins (*post*) on the floor formed the inner of several concentric circles. The şeyh had one coloured in blue and one in red; he would sit on the red one and have the blue one on his left. These skins represent his authority and are referred to as the "throne" (*taht*). Some hallowed objects, like an incense-burner and water bottles, were used in a ceremonial manner during the seated part of the prayer. Like the *post*s they indicated the hierarchies among the praying men; it was an honorary task to bring the incense-burner in front of the seated şeyh. The popular interpretation was that the prayers flew to heaven like the smoke curled towards the ceiling. As the tempo, the bodily movements, and intensity of the zikir increased, the male dervişes rose and moved in circles, postures that actually define the ritual as a *devran-i zikir*. Finally they formed a spiral with the şeyh in the centre. The lead singer (*zakir*), or the group of musicians, zikir singers and *hafız*es, occupies a profoundly significant position in the ritual. Sophisticated music was well-integrated into the zikir by the Cerrahis,[11] but hardly had any close connection with the women.

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one particular meeting. It was the film from this occasion, mentioned in the introduction, that once aroused my interest in Sufi rituals. Geels's article supplies a lot of details as regards the zikir that do not diverge in any crucial respect from my observations at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke in 1993 and 1994. As a male scholar, Geels did not have access to the women's part of the tekke. Yet a discussion of how maleness is communicated in narratives and in the body language of the ceremonies would have been interesting. Geels's classification of the zikir into three phases (sitting in a circle; standing in a circle and circling; and standing in opposite rows) is not applicable to the women's ceremony, since they have to sit. Nevertheless, I find the term "phase" with its association to rhythm useful when separating the specific parts of the zikir.

12. The number of sheepskins shifted from Thursday to Thursday depending on who were present among the leading *dervişe*s. The number twelve is a Shia influence from Ottoman times, referring to the twelve imams who are conceived as having the key to esoteric knowledge.

13. Stokes 1992:203ff.; During 1995.

As mentioned before, not all women who took part in the zikir were initiated members, dervişes. In this area the Cerrahi meetings were among the more accessible ones, and women from the neighbourhood came more or less regularly to the various meetings at the tekke. These were women who shared a general interest or curiosity, but women on pilgrimage to Pir Cerrahi's tomb were also frequent visitors. The latter group often consisted of members of some of the many Halveti branches, and they came on organised bus tours from places far and near. They paid their respects to the honoured Pir Cerrahi by the windows of the *türbe* and then proceeded directly to the women's part. The women followed the canonical prayers conducted from the *büyük meydan* on the gallery or, if they arrived late, in one of the additional rooms, using one of the many prayer rugs that were at hand in order to establish a proper space for prayer.

The closer the meeting drew to the final canonical prayer of the day (*yatsı namazı*), the more people arrived. In the crescent-shaped gallery overlooking the *büyük meydan*, the women sat very close to one another on the crowded floor, and it was almost impossible to move when seated. It was very hot and dark. Only down in the men's part were some weak lights burning. The women followed the zikir and the accompanying prayers and hymns in the same way as the men did, at least for the first part of the ceremony. But they could not rise or form any circles while acting out their postures. At first the sheer spatial distance between men and women was so conspicuous to a me as a visitor that it tended to become the fundamental category for descriptions and interpretations. Locally, though, the distance was apparently understood and interpreted in another way. When asked, women mostly answered that they performed zikir together with the men, but at different locations of the tekke. The distance was a prerequisite of both parties in order for them to be able to conduct the prayer in a proper way.

From the beginning, it was noticeable that the women placed themselves on the gallery in different groups. My first impression was that these groups were age-related or to some extent family-related. After a while it became apparent that there were also ideological and theological implications in the seating. It was clear that the intensity varied between the segments of the crowded gallery, as did the dress code. There were women dressed in the all-black *çarşaf*, most of whom were not initiated members; at the time, quite a few of them were university students. Their unique position in this particular context, in terms of education as well as social mobility, made them stand out among the other Cerrahi women, and not only because of their black robes. These women seemed to have an ambivalent attitude towards the zikir practice as such. They sometimes acted more like observers than participants, attracted and still dissociated. When asked, they accentuated personal reasons for participating, and it was among these women that I made the contacts that finally led me to the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı.

I never met anyone from the vakıf's core group at the Cerrahi tekke, only two

elderly ladies who seemed to move on the outskirts of both groups. During the zikir the young students were very restrained in their mode of bodily expression, in sharp contrast to another group of younger and middle-aged women who acted out their engagement in a very vehement manner. The latter group struggled to sit as close to the latticework of the gallery as possible in order to be able to see the şeyh from there and be able to follow the way in which he conducted the ritual. Even if they did not have the ambition of following the indications of the şeyh directly, the women changed the rhythm of the zikir when the men downstairs did so, more like a second wave than the response to a direct command. For the women of this emotionally expressive group who were very conscious about the zikir, the contact with the şeyh himself was of the utmost importance.[14] They had a very affectionate relationship with him and were always very emotional when speaking about him. Some of the Turkish women who had returned to religion, and almost all of the Western women converts, had an extremely emotional relation to the şeyh at the time, Sefer Dal, whom they referred to with the honorary title Efendi (meaning "master" in the tekke context) in their conversations. A piece of candy received from Efendi was treated as a precious gift, and a cigarette was consumed whether the recipient was a smoker or not.

The spatial division between the sexes during prayer was a matter of course, as it was for most of the other activities. The women's part in the upper floor of the main building was obviously separate. During the evening meal, served between *akşam namazı* and *yatsı namazı*, most of the converted women sat either at the şeyh's table in the men's quarters or at least in the same room as the şeyh. Those women were also always present in the conversation room (*sohbet odası*) after the zikir was completed, at the Monday meetings with musical performance (*musikî faslı*), and the Saturday meetings for theological conversation, sohbet. This behaviour would have been unthinkable for the Turkish women, with very few exceptions. During my time at the Halveti Cerrahi tekke there was especially one woman, a quite famous intellectual screenwriter and filmmaker, who had made a very public "turn" (*dönme*) back to religion, "to the headscarf", and joined the Halveti Cerrahi tarikat. She had access to the şeyh's dinner table and his attention on the same terms as Western women. Ayşe Sasa is portrayed in Elizabeth W. Fernea's *In Search of Islamic Feminism* (1998:224ff.) and may serve as yet another example of the wide spectrum of women attending the meetings at the Cerrahi tekke. In a manner rather

14. The şeyh at the time of my fieldwork at the Halveti Cerrahi in 1993 and 1994 (as well as during Antoon Geels' visit) was Sefer Dal, who passed away in 1999. Dal succeeded the highly West-orientated şeyh Musaffer Ozak, who with his many books translated into English and tours in the West, presenting tekke music and zikir in concert halls, gathered huge crowds and many more visitors. "the extraordinary power and musical prowess /- - -/ won the hearts of Americans and Europeans, who organized several 'concerts' abroad for him. Disciples of the sheikh opened a branch of the order in New York City, which brought the order disproportionate visibility in the Western scholarly community" (Kafadar 1992:313).

typical of intellectuals, Sasa explains her "revelation" in psychological terms to Fernea, who retells: "her rediscovery of the religious faith into which she was born had saved her from depression, 'from madness', she insisted. 'I have never been so calm and contented'" (1998:225). Emotional stability is stressed, rather than a return to theology and dogma.

Like myself, women outsiders such as visitors and occasional female tourists were always welcomed to the *selamlık*; but we were basically treated as honorary males rather than as women. When the spatial separation between men and women is discussed, it must be remembered that within the men's quarters too hierarchies are very strict when it comes to access and visibility, owing to the Sufi ideology of ranks. It is a considerable honour to be anywhere close to the şeyh. Whenever he arrived or left, there were crowds waiting to catch a glimpse of him or to touch him as he passed on the pavement from the gate at the salutation window by the tomb until he entered the men's quarters on the ground floor. Most men never came any closer to him during the evening. The hierarchical circles of the zikir could even be observed at dinner-time. The şeyh, his closest men, and guests of honour (often one or two Western women) sat in a small room at a round table under a calligraphic map in the shape of a tree showing the şeyh's predecessors. It was considered a great honour to be invited to the şeyh's table. Everybody sat on the floor covered with kelims, the tables were of the low Ottoman kind, and a high-ranking derviş served the şeyh and his company as an honoured task. There were some other tables in the şeyh's dining room; but in addition to that there were two other crowded rooms with dinner guests and some feeding of poor people who did not attend the zikir.

Up on the women's floor, dinner was eaten in a less formalised fashion, although the şeyh's wife presided with some old ladies at her side and occasionally with one or two guests of honour. As the women of this tarikat wear no visible signs of status in their dress, unlike the men with their caps and vests, few formal duties were maintained. By and large, the serving aspect of female *dervişlik* followed the traditional age hierarchies, and the younger served the old. Social differences in terms of economic ability and education also determined roles and duties to be undertaken. During the regular evening meetings on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, no woman took up any teaching activity of any kind at the *haramlık*.

Women's Zikir Ceremonies

Once a month some of the Halveti Cerrahi women came together for a zikir ceremony of their own. On these occasions no man was present at the tekke at all, and all duties were administered by women. It was difficult to find out whether these gatherings were a recent phenomenon or not. Different persons gave very dissimilar answers. A plausible assumption seems to be that the various kinds

of meetings that Muslim women have traditionally held in their homes were now recognised as a more formal semi-public ritual, open to anyone who chose to come. Domestic gatherings of a more or less religious character have always been important arenas for women's religious practices, but they were almost always restricted to quite a narrow group. This development was very similar to what happened at the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı, with the significant difference that the vakıf group went much further in their ambitions and were completely in charge of their own business. They were not restricted by any formal rules, nor by those conventions that dominate the atmosphere of the institutionalised tarikat.

On a Friday afternoon once a month, the women's zikir at the Halveti Cerrahi was led by two women appointed by the şeyh. The women's gathering was also an early-afternoon event. A room adjoining the gallery was used for these meetings at the tekke. On some occasions, a larger room downstairs was employed for the purpose. This area was formally part of the *selamlık*; but the *büyük meydan* was never, as far as I know, used by women. The sequences of the ceremony follow the established pattern within the order. The repeated names were very much the same as during an ordinary zikir at an Halveti Cerrahi Thursday evening meeting, as well as at the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı. The intensity was higher when the women of the tarikat performed zikir on their own. Still, the room was so overcrowded (and not circular like the *büyük meydan*) that the women could not rise to their feet. There was never a standing *devran-ı zikir* among the Cerrahi women. When asked, most women answered that they thought standing zikir improper for women, being so physical and too direct. But the intensity was as ardent as on Thursday nights, and the prayer (as zikir mostly is) was accompanied by heavy bodily movements and fervent emotional expressions.

In many respects, the women's zikir at the vakıf and at the tarikat had many features in common. The basic structure of the ceremony, the names, the ilahis, the bodily movements, and the gestures were common to both contexts. When performing zikir on their own, Cerrahi women did not command any of the musical splendour that is so significant for the male dervişes of the tarikat. There was ilahi-singing, but it was not performed by professionals and semi-professionals as was the case during the evening/night meetings downstairs; there was Kuran recitation, but not of any elaborate kind; and no instruments were used, either during the zikir or afterwards. The mode of performing zikir was fairly similar at the two locations, even though the vakıf's zikir circle was smaller and made up of individuals who knew one another well. The most significant difference was the absence of the didactic dimension at the tekke. Women there did not take it upon themselves to be interpreters of theology, as happened during both dua-prayers and sohbet-readings at the vakıf.

Describing women's activities as in terms of a lack or an absence in relation to what men accomplish, instead of focusing on what women actually do, carries a risk: that of emphasising the imbalance that is already so apparent in the

literature on Muslim women's rituals. That risk was of course easier to avoid when analysing the vakıf than when describing the Cerrahi tekke, where women's own rituals always possessed exceptional status. There the shadow of the şeyh remained present and the memories of the grand zikir the night before lingered. Very few of the Western women who had such honourable seats and privileges during the Thursday zikir were present on Friday afternoons. There are two plausible reasons for the absence of these women. First, some of them may simply have been unaware that the Friday meetings took place as they were never announced. The relevant information was orally spread (in Turkish) and mostly circulated in the women's quarter of the tekke, where these women spent very little time. The meeting of course had its approval and blessing from the şeyh, but it was hardly an event that he or any of his closest dervişes would recommend anyone to attend. The women's zikir was known of among men in general, but few of them were aware of the schedule even if females from their own family attended. Second, although some Western women with a comparatively long-term relationship with the Cerrahis did know about women's zikir, they chose not to attend. One explanatory factor might be their strong emotional relation to the şeyh. His presence was crucial for their experience. Many of these women had also adopted the common male attitude among the Cerrahis that the women's zikir was by necessity on a lower spiritual level (*makam*) compared to the performances led by the şeyh.

The women's zikir at the tekke started gradually, reached its climax under the strict control of the leader, and slowly faded away while the women sang ilahis. In all, the ceremony took about an hour and a half. As in many similar situations, when asked participants testified that the zikir ceremonies were often both longer and more intense during the important holidays – as if I, as a visitor, might have been disappointed. Well acquainted with the orientalist image of thrilling rituals, these informants obviously felt a need to confirm that a good zikir is a long zikir. Pieces of sugar and candy that had been placed close to the zikir leaders during the ceremony were afterwards distributed among the participants. Bottles of water and garments from the sick were also collected after having received *bereket* from the zikir. These items were carefully brought back home by relatives, and the extended presence of the ceremony was thus offered to the sick and feeble. Tea, snacks, and sweets were shared in small groups while some participants remained with the zikir leaders and talked to them, maybe sharing some confidence. Others continued to sing ilahis, and yet others entered the rooms next to the prayer room for a chat and some social activities.

Women's zikir was not centred around one charismatic person, i.e. the zikir leader, as was the case when the şeyh Sefer Dal led the Thursday ceremonies and as happens quite frequently in Sufi circles. If anything, the female zikir leader acted on his behalf. The same was true of the ceremonies at the Gönenli Mehmet Efendi vakfı, where the leader controlled prayer within their given limits but was not in focus as a person. Nevertheless, the women's zikir at the tekke

gave the impression of being an exception and a parenthesis. It was thanks to the good will of the şeyh that the women were allowed to have access to the tekke premises.

The women at the vakıf merkezi had achieved what Virginia Woolf long ago pointed out as necessities for intellectually emancipated women: money, and a room of one's own.

POLITICAL SUFISM AND SPIRITUAL ISLAMISM

Epilogue

The vakıf studied in the present book was a tiny group in relation to the Turkish Islamic movement as a whole. Its choices and endeavours were, nevertheless, symptomatic for the 1990s in Turkey. The history of how a private prayer circle developed into an established endowment with multiple obligations is a mirror of how Islamist women have gained access to new spheres of action, thereby obtaining a new visibility, during the last few decades. Challenging both secular norms and the Muslim establishment, such women activists can no longer be placed on the fringe when mapping Islamist activities. The present case-study indicates a position at the cross-roads between Islamism and Sufism; both sources turned out to offer profound arguments in pursuit of legitimacy. The commonly assumed dichotomy between these two major theological currents in Turkey did not operate in late modern metropolitan environments.

Sufi Activists

Based on the Ottoman alphabet, the following folk etymology is widely spread in Turkey today in legends and popular tracts: a derviş is a person who avoids this world (***d***ünya), hypocrisy (***r***iya), wealth (***v***arlık), falsehood (***y***alan), and lust (***ş***ehvet). This play with words is a recapitulation of the moral imperative of most Sufi theology about the necessity of a conscious reduction of the ego, combined with a demand for generosity and self-sacrifice (*fütüvvet*). It is questionable whether the women of the studied vakıf should be labelled dervişes, a term never used among themselves for self-defining purposes. It was not that they did not fit into the popular understanding of the concept; but in most respects the women strongly marked their position as being Sufis outside the established tarikat system.

According to the same kind of popular sayings, a derviş should strive to tear down the four veils that obscure the ultimate spiritual insight and unity with Allah: worldly life (*can*), property (*mal*), position (*makam tutkusu*), and attachment to sin (*günaha düşkünlük*). This short catalogue also constitutes a good summary of the ambitions of the vakıf activists. In this respect they walked along the Sufi path (*yol*) by means of their endeavours, both in the eyes of the local public and in terms of their own expressions.

The three sections of *The Book and the Roses* are orientated towards three societal levels where the activities of contemporary Turkish Islamist women can be observed. First, a historical background and the contemporary political con-

text were sketched. The conventional academic understanding of concepts like power, influence, and politics is often too narrow when it comes to describing and analysing women's activism. In the current case, no unambiguous picture of the vakıf women's relationship to their local community could be established. That relationship was conditioned by temporal constellations bound to specific situations, and to the women's ability to negotiate. None of the members of the vakıf group went public as a private person. The only woman who took on the obligation to speak in public did so as a spokesperson of the vakıf. When the women worked and mobilised in the Fatih district, they were protected by their vakıf as an organisation and by the respect (*hürmet*) they had gained as unselfish welfare-workers. In order to maintain their respectability and improve their own sphere of independence, they devoted themselves to the demands of other people and never expressed any claims for their own part.

Activists Exuberant with Zikir

The second section of the book is therefore focused on the vakıf as a working group and on the hoca in whose name it was established. The vakıf was organised as a microcosm. Not only did the rooms and the activities resemble the Ottoman *külliye* complex with all its facilities for spiritual and physical needs; the vakıf merkezi also kept a piece of the black Kabe cover together with relics from their hoca. Hereby they became a part, albeit a very small one, of the world-wide Muslim community (*ümmet*) while being faithful students (*talip*s) of a Sufi teacher deeply rooted in the local norm-system as regards theology and ritual practice. In their search for Muslim authenticity, the women extolled the *selef* ideals as pronounced by the Islamist movement. In their aesthetic ideals they were part of a general trend towards Ottomanism, apparent far beyond religious circles. As they were Sufi disciples, tasavvuf traditions offered the vakıf women models of how to formulate theology and organise ritual gatherings. All three sources were claimed as legacies. Their wandering hoca (*gezip dolaşan hoca*) was well remembered in local legends, and the memory of him was their foremost shield against any purist criticism. By adhering to his theology and instructions for prayer, the women of the vakıf connected with various forms of devotion as practised by Nakşbendis, Nurcus, and Halvetis in the district. The publications of the hoca's sohbets and prayers (*tesbih*) were enduring signs of their devotion.

Thirdly, the present book deals with ritual life at the vakıf merkezi. It was hardly a novelty in the Fatih district to have women in command of prayer meetings. Throughout Muslim history, women (not only in Sufi-orientated congregations) have organised prayers and recitals from the Kuran, and they have voiced interpretations of holy texts and legends in short sermon-like speeches. The distinctive feature of the vakıf was that the women performed additional prayers in accordance with the instructions of a deceased hoca of their own choice – a spir-

itual teacher whom they also claimed to be in continuous contact with through dreams and sudden revelation (*istihâre*) for further guidance. In contrast to other activities, the zikir prayer on Friday afternoons was a ceremony which was only open to the inner circle of the vakıf. According to Sufi tradition, this intense prayer should only be performed with proper knowledge and with approval of a spiritual authority.

Although the vakıf was a small association compared to other groups within the Turkish Islamist movement, assuming responsibility for long-term commitments such as regular teaching, prayer circles, and the running of a pastry-shop and a library placed the leading young women in a new social category: that of unmarried, comparatively well-educated women who had themselves established a full-time alternative to professional life on the open job-market. Hard work for the neighbourhood earned them respect and was their foremost way to gain support, financial and other, as well as to their chief means of attracting new working members to the group. Their engagement in the many manifestations of the Islamist movement (defence of the İmam Hatip schools, support to the Islamist party and its prosecuted leaders etc.) was based on the fundamentals of Sufi theology (taming the self and readiness to sacrifice); but the consequences of their Sufi activism were undoubtedly political.

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