

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**MASTER THESIS**

**THE MAKING OF AN ORDER:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ROMANI SUFIS IN USKUDAR**

**HAKTAN TURSUN**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS**

**ISTANBUL, 2019**

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**by**

**HAKTAN TURSUN**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Sociology.**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS**

**ISTANBUL, 2019**

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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ÖZ

BİR TARİKATIN İNŞASI:  
ÜSKÜDAR'DAKİ ROMAN SUFİLERİN ETNOGRAFYASI

Tursun, Haktan

Sosyoloji Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı

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Bu tez Roman sakinleriyle bilinen Üsküdar Selami Ali Mahallesi'ndeki Gülşeni-Sezai tarikatının oluşum ve dönüşüm sürecinin izini sürmektedir. Tipik bir tasavvufi hareketi oluşturan unsurlar karizmatik bir lider, kutsal bir mekan ve ritüellerle tecessüm eden inançlar sistemi olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu çalışma boyunca bu üç bileşenin Selami Ali bağlamında inşası ve Roman kimliği ile sufi kimliğinin sufi kimliği ile uyumu incelenmektedir. Sonuç olarak yaygın olan önyargısal kanaatin aksine Roman ve sufi kimliklerinin farklılıktan ziyade paralellik arz ettiği ve bunun da mahallede yeni dergahın yerleşmesine katkıda bulunduğu yargısına varılmaktadır. Saha çalışması bir aydan uzun olmayan aralıklarla, 2018-2019 yılları arasında 18 ay boyunca sürmüştür ve bu süre zarfında katılımcı gözlem ve derinlemesine mülakat yöntemleriyle bu çalışmanın ana verileri toplanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tasavvuf, Roman Kimliği, Kutsal Alan, Karizma, Ritüel.

## ABSTRACT

### THE MAKING OF AN ORDER: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ROMANI SUFIS IN USKUDAR

Tursun, Haktan

MA in Sociology

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This thesis traces the formation and transformation process of the Gulsheni-Sezai Sufi order in Selami Ali neighborhood in Uskudar, known for its Romani inhabitants. Three components of a representative Sufi group have been determined to be a charismatic leader, a sacred space and a set of beliefs reified with rituals. Throughout this study the establishment of these three components are examined within the Selami Ali context; and the reconciliation of the heterodox Sufi identity with Romani identity is analyzed with a conclusion that contrary to stereotypical view that the Romani people are discordant with religion, the Sufi Muslim identity and Romani identity have more parallelism than difference and this is why the neighborhood could easily embrace the newly founded Gulsheni order. The fieldwork was carried out in a period of 18 months between 2018-2019 with intervals not longer than a month, during which the data for this study was collected via in-depth oral interviews and participant observation.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Romani Identity, Sacred Space, Charisma, Ritual.

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic research carried out in Selami Ali quarter of Üsküdar municipality of Istanbul between December 2016 and May 2019 with intervals not longer than a month. The neighborhood is known for its Romani community and has a notorious name for narcotics. However, that is not the only feature that the quarter is known for, since the Ottoman era, that location has been home to many Sufi lodges, so much so that the main avenue of the quarter was named ‘Tekke Kapısı Sokak’.<sup>1</sup> The juxtaposition of these two outwardly contrasting lifestyles and cultures yields one of the most intriguing Islamic communities in Istanbul; Selami Ali Gulsheni Dergah.<sup>2</sup>

The dergah’s Efendi<sup>3</sup> is also a native of Selami Ali with a Romani background. In Turkey, this is not a very common situation. Moreover, his closest disciple who is like his personal assistant is a woman. Therefore, the community subverts the racial and gender hierarchies of Turkish social structure in multiple ways. First, since the establishment of the order, the Efendis have always been of Romani origin teaching and leading the order, which includes non-Romani people from high social classes. Second, the fact that a woman is the second leading figure after the Efendi is also an unusual case within the Islamic circles in Turkey.

The number of followers is not many; 30 to 40 people are attending the meetings regularly. The meetings take place twice a week and always start with a dinner, which is followed by a longish lecture by the sheikh that is called *sohbet* in Turkish. Around 10 pm the singing and ritual begins and usually lasts around an hour. Framed drums are usually the only instruments used during these *zikir* ceremonies where the members usually sing along and move their upper bodies together with the rhythm of the music. In Ramadan, everyday Iftar is given out to the residents of the neighborhood and also eaten in the dergah.

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<sup>1</sup> The Door of the Sufi Lodge Street

<sup>2</sup> Sufi Lodge

<sup>3</sup> Efendi is the title used for Sheikhs in some orders.

During the lectures, sometimes the sheikh tries to explain the concept of Vahdet-i Vucud with various examples and sometimes he interprets the verses and stories in the Quran from a *batini*<sup>4</sup> perspective. In the chapter where the sohbet are analyzed his teachings will be discussed in detail. The vocabulary he uses and the philosophical depth of the topics he covers makes these lectures very hard to grasp for people without previous knowledge of the Sufism. The level of comprehension and retention of this information by the attendants is questioned in the chapter about sohbet as well.

I was introduced to the group by a sociologist who, while he introducing me, told the sheikh that I would be there for research purposes and the Efendi was content with the idea that I was going to write a thesis about them. The Efendi himself has no problem with publicity and he uses Facebook very actively. He posts texts, pictures and sometimes does live broadcast of the activities in the dergah via Facebook.

In Turkey after the closure of Sufi orders by law in 1925 in an attempt to secularize the country, most of the orders either ended their activities or went underground. Later, the rigidity of the state against religious organizations was loosened and some Sufi groups started to resurface and present themselves publicly. Recently, Sufism became remarkably popular among many people in Turkey, which can be understood from the consumption of books and TV shows with Sufi motifs. However, serious academic studies regarding the heterodox Sufi groups actively functioning in Turkey are very few in number. Therefore, a study regarding this esoteric Sufi order within this marginalized neighborhood might yield valuable data about heterodox interpretations of Islam in Modern Turkey and the interplay between the Sufi and Romani identity.

This study examines the formation period of the order through data gained from in-depth interviews with the witnesses of the initiation of Sufi activities by Kenan Efendi, the charismatic founder of the Gulsheni Order in the Selami Ali quarter. How Kenan Efendi founded the Sufi ideas first in the minds of the people in the quarter and later how he became an embodiment of the charismatic Sufi Sheikh via a

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<sup>4</sup> Batini means esoteric or inner, it denotes a metaphorical interpretation of Islamic sources.

narrative of extraordinary qualities attributed to him. Next, the process of localization of the order in a *dergah*, which was inscribed with sacrality through symbols and through the charismatic personas of the *Efendis* is analyzed. Eventually, the interplay between the Romani identity of the inhabitants of the neighborhood and the formation of a Sufi order is discussed with a conclusion that the Romani qualities of the people in Selami Ali contributed to the formation of the new order.

The first chapter of the current study problematizes and analyses the ethnographical methodology used in studies on the Sufi orders in the world and in Turkey with examples from the literature and discusses the position of the ethnographer in this research. The research process and the factors that might have influenced the validity and reliability of this study such as the vertical and horizontal position of the researcher and the effect of his presence are discussed in detail in this chapter. The question of the nativity of the ethnographer is also dealt with referring to Kirin Narayan's work under the same title.

The second chapter deals with the perception of Romani identity in Turkey and the historical and social elements that contributed to the construction of that perception. After this general discussion, the Romani community of Selami Ali is specifically analyzed and information is provided in regards to the history of the community and their current situation. Different sub-groups in the quarter and their interrelation together with each other is examined in this chapter. Eventually, the current Sufi groups and their activities in the quarter and the religious market there is analyzed alluding to the Rational Choice Theory.

The meaning of Sufism and the emergence of Sufi orders in the world is discussed in the third chapter. The life of Ibrahim Gulsheni and the perception of his order by Ottoman clergy are examined in order to detect the elements that continued and those which have been transformed. The general discussion attempts to situate the Gulsheni-Sezai order within the vast category of Sufi orders in the world and to show the traditions that the current practices of the Gulshenis in Selami Ali stem from.

The construction of the leader's charisma in the Sufi tradition in general and specifically the ways the Gulsheni *Efendis* in Selami Ali quarter have been attributed

with charismatic qualities is analyzed in the fourth chapter. Together with sacred space and set of beliefs, a charismatic leader is determined as the required components of a Sufi order. Elements such as dreams and silsile (chain of ascription) are discussed in detail as the factors that legitimate the authority of a Sufi sheikh. Brief biographies of Kenan Efendi, Hayrettin Efendi, and Ömür Efendi are provided with a chronological order with a theoretical discussion of their succession and charismatization process.

Sacralization of a profane space in order to create a sacred space for the activities of the order is analyzed in the fifth chapter. The location of the dergah and its visibility from outside is discussed with reference to current favorable conditions in Turkey in terms of Sufi activities due to the political atmosphere resulting from the rise of Justice and Development Party. The transformation was ensured with changing the inner design of the space which used to be a home appliances store. The main questions of the chapter are “what constitutes a sacred space in Sufism?” and “what are the specific symbols and objects in the Gulsheni dergah that distinguishes it from a profane space?” A number of objects from the dergah such as the calligraphies, the photos of the previous Efendis and deer horns are semiotically analyzed with reference to the literature about their connotations.

The third component of a Sufi order is their beliefs and practices, which is what any religious faith consists of according to Durkheim. The two reproduce each other and are closely intertwined therefore they are both handled under the same title in chapter six. As is the case with the majority of Sufi orders in Turkey, the Gulsheni order in Selami Ali also follows the Vahdet-i Vucud teaching that was systematized by Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi. This worldview has social and practical implications that are observable in the practices of Gulshenis as well. The zikir ceremonies, the rite de passage ceremony, the *ziyarets* made to Hasan Sezai’s shrine in Edirne are examined under this title.

The last chapter deals with the reconciliation of the Romani and Sufi identities. These two layers of identity seem to contradict with each other in the mind of many Turkish people. The religiosity of Romani people has always been approached with suspicion in Turkey which can be inferred from the Jizya tax levied from Romani

citizens of the Ottoman Empire and/or “Kipti” religion written on their identity cards in the early republican era.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **ETHNOGRAPHY and METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1. A Review of Sociological Studies on Sufism**

Sufi orders are usually closed systems and it is not always easy to penetrate into their circles in order to gather data that will help researchers gain insight into the central themes and inner dimensions of the orders. This might be the reason why most of the studies of Sufism are historical work on the orders in the past based on the written sources. However, a few researchers in the world and in Turkey successfully managed to carry out ethnographical studies about the form and function of contemporary Sufi orders, which are still active in the modern world. I intend to analyze the sociological literature on Sufism in three categories: the research undertaken by western authors in other countries than Turkey; those carried out in Turkey by western scholars and the ones done by Turkish scholars about the Sufi orders in Turkey.

The work by Micheal Gilsenan (1973) analyses the foundation process of Hamidiya Shazeliya order by Salama ibn Hassan Salama and its structure and activities in Egypt. He chronologically narrates the transformation of the order in order to adapt to the changing conditions brought about by the modernization of Egyptian society. His work is a result of his fieldwork in Egypt between 1964-1966. Because the order he studied was founded in the early 20th century, Gilsenan was able to trace the establishment of the order via first-hand narrations of the members, which bears similarity to this study, therefore, Gilsenan's detailed monography of Hamidiya Shazeliya was one of the biggest sources of inspiration and guidance for this work.

Vincent Crapanzano's work on Hamadsha order in Morocco came out in the same year with Gilsenan's work. Crapanzano based the book on his anthropological observations in 1968 in Meknes city of Morocco as well as several villages where the tombs of the saints are located. The book gives room to the narrations of the local individuals and mixes the narratives with the interpretations, which makes reading it easier and more interesting. The vivid descriptions of the Hamadsha ritual, which includes head-slushing in trance, help the reader experience the extraordinariness of the ritual. Crapanzano approaches the rituals of the order from a Freudian



perspective and calls his work “a study in Moroccan ethnopsychiatry.” Neither Gilsean nor Crapanzano gives any information about the process of their fieldwork and their relationship with the order they study. However, from the work they put forth one can infer that they did a meticulous and detailed observation in the field.

Another major work on Sufi orders was *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* which was edited by Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (1998). The book challenges the idea that Sufism has lost its significance and actually has “died” because of the new economic and social structures enforced by modernization. Focusing on the Sufi “cults” operating in South Asia the book demonstrates how the charismatic and emotion based Islam still dominates many parts of the world in the modern era. Almost all the articles in the book are written based on anthropological observation of various orders in South Asia in the 1990s.

The book by Ian Richard Netton titled *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (2000) looks into the ritual practices of Nimetullahi and Naqshbandi orders in England. The author tries to locate the Sufi rituals within the mainstream Islamic practices such as salah, fasting, and Hajj. Although the book was criticized by some authors for failing to keep the promise of “revealing the world of Sufi ritual” it still provides the Sufism reader with a great deal of insight regarding where the Sufi practices fit within the pillars of mainstream Islam and how this renders Sufis alienated from the majority of Muslims (Seesemann, 2002).

Although her work was more theological than sociological, no study of Sufism should go without mentioning the name of Annemarie Schimmel whose writings on the meaning, history and current form of Sufism inspired many researchers. Especially her book “*Deciphering Signs of God*” helps the sociological researchers with their analysis of sacred time, sacred space and sacred action in Islamic context. Schimmel lived in several Muslim countries such as Turkey and Pakistan and had the chance to gain first-hand insight into the beliefs and practices of many Muslim communities, therefore, his work is worth mentioning among the anthropological works on Islamic groups.

As for the studies on Turkish Sufi groups undertaken by western scholars, Nancy Tappers' (1990) fieldwork in Eğirdir provincial town in south-western Turkey is one of the early examples of such work. She stayed in the town together with Richard Tapper for a period of 15 months between 1984 and 1988. In this study, she focuses on the visitations of Saint tombs and mevlid gatherings of women in the town and analyzes the social and implications of these rituals in terms of gender, movement and social exchange. Although it is not directly about an organized Sufi order, Tapper's work is an enlightening and exemplary for the sociological study of religious practices.

Another study that focuses on female Islam in Turkey is the one by Catharina Raudvere's 2003 book named "The book and the roses: Sufi women, visibility, and Zikir in contemporary Istanbul." Her fieldwork was carried out between 1993-1998 among a group of independent Sufi women carrying out their activities under a foundation named "Gönenli Mehmet Efendi Vakfı." With the example of this small group Raudvere traces the process of how Muslim women in Turkey find themselves new activity areas thanks to the advantages of modernity and how they gained visibility through their activism. The book contextualizes the activities of the group within the wider political and economic conjuncture in Turkey and compares them with those of Halveti order in Turkey, because of the author's earlier familiarity with them.

David Shankland's "The Alevis in Turkey" is a book based on the social anthropological work of the author in 1988 in the Black Sea Region of Turkey in an Alevi village. Although the book describes and analyses the beliefs and rituals of Alevi inhabitants of the village in one chapter, Shankland is mainly concerned with locating the Alevis within the modern Turkish state. He focuses on their position as the outsiders in a state where citizenship is mainly defined with attributes of Sunnism and Turkishness. The relationship between the Alevis and the Turkish state and a general anthropological definition of their life in the village diminishes the religious dimension of the book, however, considering the small number of such studies undertaken by western researchers in Turkey it is still a valuable work.

The studies undertaken by Turkish scholars on Sufi groups in Turkey are usually written in the last decades because constitutionally these social organizations and their activities are illegal and the sociological researchers could write about them after the softening of the rigid political tone against the Sufi orders after the rise of political Islam in Turkey in the 1980s. In this regard, Fulya Atacan's Ph.D. thesis on the Cerrahi order in Istanbul, published in 1989, is one of the preliminary works. In that study, Atacan examines the transformation of religion in Turkey as a result of social change through the changes occurring within the Cerrahi Sufi order. She concludes that "as an intermediate form Cerrahi order partially preserved the classical tariqa structure while many elements of classical tariqa structure had either been transformed or lost." In order to gather data for her work, she attended the sohbet and zikir gatherings of the order between 1984 and 1987, interviewed members of the order and analyzed the written literature of the Cerrahis.

Şerif Mardin's work on Said Nursi and the movement he started also looks into "Religion and Social Change in Turkey" as its name suggests. With 16 editions, Mardin's book is probably the most popular sociology of religion book in Turkey. The book was published by an American University in 1989 which was eleven years after he decided to study the group in question which indicates the amount of time and effort for the book (Şentürk, 1998). Mardin's brave enterprise to study a controversial and almost taboo issue in those years and eventually managing to deal with the topic with a sociological and scientific attitude was appreciated by social scientists such as Recep Şentürk, yet his work was not without criticisms both from the conservative milieus and the liberal ones. However, it would not be wrong to say that his work encouraged similar attempts to study Islamic groups from a social anthropological perspective in Turkey. Mardin locates the Nurculuk movement in the Turkish society contextualizing it referring to the political and social reforms and intellectual and religious developments in the country.

Another well-known social anthropological study on religion is the Ph.D. thesis of Tayfun Atay submitted to a university in the UK and later published in Turkey with the title "Batı'da Bir Nakşi Cemaati: Şeyh Nazım Kıbrisi Örneği" (A Naqshi Order in the West: The Case of Sheikh Nazim Kibrisi). His fieldwork was also in England in the early 1990s because the order had a strong base in London. His detailed work

describes the theological, social and political dimensions of the order as well as their rituals. The author also spares a chapter about the difficulties he experienced during the fieldwork and his personal relationship with the Sheikh.

In addition to these studies, Emin Yaşar Demirci's (1996) Ph.D. thesis on the Iskenderpaşa Group situates the group vis-à-vis the elements of Ottoman and Turkish modernization; M. Ali Kirman (2000) studies Süleymancılar community and looks at the new organization styles of religious groups in republican Turkey with through the example of Süleymancı Group; Gözde Özelce (2017) specifically focuses on the female Sheikhs and their followers in her recent work on the followers of Cemalnur Sargut and Hayatnur Artıran; In his PhD thesis Can Ceylan (2014) also looks into the Kenan Rifai's followers and being a member of the group himself he reports first-hand experiences and observations; and lastly Gamze Sart focuses on non-formal learning processes through the rituals of Kadiri groups in Tophane and Eyüp districts of Istanbul.

Moreover, recently a number of M.A thesis were written on active Sufi groups in Turkey. Almost all of those theses came out after 2002, which might be a result of observable visibility of the Sufi orders in the public sphere due to the political developments in Turkey. As a result of the favorable atmosphere in Turkey towards the Sufi groups, it might have become easier to collect data and study those social communities. Through a search on the Higher Education Council's thesis database, I came across nine M.A thesis written after 2006 on Sufi groups. Five out of these nine theses focuses on the female members of the group they studied.

## **2.2. The Research Process: Ethnography and Methodology**

The data needed for the study is gathered via qualitative research methods, namely participant observations, life stories, and in-depth interviews carried out during the fieldwork in Selami Ali quarter of Uskudar. According to Anthony Giddens "fieldwork usually generates richer and more in-depth information than other methods. And ethnography can provide a broader understanding of social process" (2006:86). H. Russell Bernard states that "Participant observation fieldwork is the foundation of cultural anthropology. It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record

information about their lives” (2006: 342). Due to the open nature of the community studied for this thesis, participant observation was not very challenging. The level of participation in the participant observation process might differ from research to research. Below is the table Kathleen M. Dewalt (2011: 25) prepared by combining the continuum of participation by Spradley (1980) and Adler and Adler’s (1987) membership roles taken up by researchers in the field. Considering my field study, I concluded that moderate participation and peripheral membership are the closest categories that are compatible with the participant observation style followed during this study.

**Table 2.1. Correspondence of Spradley’s Continuum of Participation with Adler and Adler’s Membership Roles:**

<b>Continuum of Participation</b>	<b>Membership Roles</b>
Non-participation	No membership role
Passive participation	No membership role
Moderate participation	Peripheral membership
Active participation	Active membership
Complete participation	Full membership

DeWalt defines moderate participation as the type of participation when the ethnographer is present at the scene of the action, is identifiable as a researcher, but does not actively participate or only occasionally interacts with people in it. Later she adds that it can also include a somewhat higher level of participation (2011:23). Spradley (1980: 62) states that moderate participation allows ethnographer to maintain a balance between being an insider and outsider, between participation and observation.

As for the membership roles, it is considered that I was, for the most part, a peripheral member based on Dewalt’s definition of the term. She defines it as follows:

The lowest level of involvement is the role of peripheral member. For Adler and Adler, this role applies to individuals who hold back from central members in the groups with whom they are working. Peripheral-member researchers become part of the scene, or of one group within it, but keep themselves from being drawn completely into it. They interact frequently and intensively enough to be recognized

by members as insiders and to acquire first-hand information and insight. In active membership, the researcher takes on some or all of the roles of core members...In full membership, the researcher becomes immersed in the group and takes on an identity of the group. In both the roles of active and full membership, the researcher takes on some or all of the core membership responsibilities and duties. These roles most closely resemble the role of the classic participant observer (Dewalt, 2011: 24).

During my observation period, I tried to neither other myself from, nor identify with the group I engaged with in order to avoid what is referred to as “going native” in anthropology literature. I tried to keep a certain distance and place myself to a point whence I could observe the group and take part in their *sohbet* and *zikir* rituals but I never joined the group via the Gulsheni rite of passage, which is explained in detail in the chapter on rituals. Ömür Efendi several times implied that sometimes people come there with different intentions and eventually be part of them, which I interpreted as an invitation and preferred to stay silent. Some days when I arrived at the lodge (*dergah*) early, I helped with cooking and cleaning, which can be a participatory act because this is part of a members’ *hizmet* (service) responsibility towards the order. These both helped me to find a chance to chat with group members in an authentic, non-organized context and set up close, non-hierarchical relationships with them. Especially some elderly Romani members’ attitude towards me changed after we peeled eggplants or vacuumed the carpet together.

The position of the researcher has been a point of discussion among anthropologists and ethnographers. The question of ethnographer’s hierarchical power relation with the group being studied is what I call the *vertical position* of the researcher, and the proximity of the researcher to being a member of the group and the level of his participation is what I refer to as *horizontal position* of the researcher.

At the beginning of the participant observation period, which started in January 2018, I was placing myself below the group and I was feeling like an intruder, and I did not know how they perceived my presence. Therefore, during the initial months, I almost never had the courage to ask questions to the group members for a long time. Later, as a result of our chats with them about topics not related to the research and my help with chores, I began to sense that my vertical position became more even and I began to feel more comfortable about my questions.

As many researchers concluded from their own experience fieldwork transforms the ethnographer. No researcher reaches the intellectual, cognitive and emotional position that he held before he started the fieldwork. Whether it is a religious community, an African tribe, or a village community one studies, it is the case (Atay 2017: 191). Throughout the research, every ethnographer goes through a deep learning experience, both about the life the world and life outside him/her and parallel to this (perhaps more important than that) about himself or herself (Crick, 1982: 20). I was no exception to this fact and I also took my share from this transformational experience. As someone with a classical *Sunni* Islamic background, I was quite startled about both the practices and beliefs of the group when I was first introduced to them. For the first time in my life, I was joining an Islamic circle with mixed genders and more shocking than that the daily Islamic prayers were not being performed. *Vahdet-i Vucud* was another very perplexing phenomenon for me. I used to feel very strange and distant to the group during the initial months, yet in time that feeling faded away and I began not to be bothered by the unorthodox practices as well as the discourse. Not only about the unorthodox Sufi groups, but my perception regarding the Roma people has also been transformed during this period. Just like many Turkish people, I would have never imagined a group of Romani people to get into philosophical or theological discussions about the cosmos, God, and existence.

I am aware that this familiarization with the studied community or social group bears the risk of yielding subjective and biased results. As expressed above, I have not associated or identified myself with the group, yet I only came to a position, which Brian Morris refers to as “critical sympathy” (2004: 13). Recent discussions of the ‘rationality debate’ have emphasized the importance of critical rationalism when approaching religion and the need to separate philosophical issues relating to truth and existence from the scientific approach to religion.

W.S.F. Pickering indicates that Durkheim also emphasized the importance of that sympathetic attitude towards the religion during such studies:

When the subject for analysis is religion, the scientist, according to Durkheim, must be someone who has a certain natural sympathy with the believer and with the ideals of his religion. The scientist must stand where the religious person stands and see the situation through his eyes. Hostility, especially an initial

hostility, is as it were counter-productive... Durkheim employs the analogy of seeing colors: he who does not bring to the study of religion a sort of religious sentiment cannot speak about it! He is like a blind man trying to talk about color... In the speech just mentioned, Durkheim repeatedly states that the scientist has to be 'religious'. Thus: There cannot be a rational interpretation of religion, which is fundamentally irreligious; an irreligious interpretation of religion would be an interpretation which denied the phenomenon it was trying to explain (Pickering, 1984: 96).

Şerif Mardin, one of the most well-known sociologists of Turkey, was discriminated in academia for many years due to his sociological work on Said Nursi (1877-1960)<sup>5</sup> and the Nur movement. His application for membership was rejected by TUBA (Turkish Academia of Sciences) three times. During an interview, the head of the institution, Yücel Kanpolat, told the journalist Sefa Kaplan that “Şerif Mardin shined Said Nursi, that’s why we did not make him a member (Aktay, 2017).” The fact that Mardin did not attack Nursi and his movement and did not label them with adjectives like backward and anti-democratic disturbed the academic authorities and he was penalized for that because he was seen as one of them.

Tayfun Atay, a well-known anthropologist of religion in Turkey complains about the irreligious interpretation of religion that Durkheim warns about. After publishing his Ph.D. thesis on the Naqshbandi Order in England under Sheikh Nazim Kibrişi, he was attacked by Turkish academia for indicating an empathic attitude to a social group that was frowned upon by the Turkish intellectuals. As we understand from his prologue for the recent edition of his book, he was accused of betraying Atatürk and his Secular Republic by academia (Atay, 2011). The lack of sympathy for anything Islamic among Turkish certain groups of Turkish intellectuals that dominated the academia until very recently is the reason why there are not many remarkable ethnographic or anthropological studies about Islamic groups in Turkey, although Turkey is home to many such groups. According to Atay, there is a group of academics who see religion as an anomaly and form their questions regarding religious movements as “What is the possibility of this anomaly’s harming the society? What can be done to cure this anomaly?” If the group studied is a Sufi order, what is expected from you is to look at the strategies adopted by the group in order to undermine the regime, which evil power resources are feeding them, what

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<sup>5</sup> A Muslim thinker and author whose Risale-i Nur collection played a vital role in the revival of Islam in Turkey.



kind of financial and spiritual benefits does their leader gain from this cult and such antithetical and biased questions form the basis of such studies by prominent names of Turkish social science tradition which does not see religion as the subject of science but as the enemy of science (Atay, 1998).

I personally observed and experienced that tendency of people to treat the ethnographer as the representative of the group he/she studies. During my research, I made a presentation at a university regarding the research process and my observations about the Gulsheni Order in Selami Ali. After the presentation, some students from the audience tried to explain to me why it is Islamically wrong to have a mixed zikir, or why Vahdet-i Vucud is not Islamic. I noticed that they do not see me as a researcher, doing academic work about the group, they see me as a member and representative of the group, therefore I was held accountable for everything they practiced or believed.

The other end of the continuum consists of studies that are written by authors who identify and associate themselves with the group they study. Their sympathy for the group might obstruct their scientific stance and critical analysis. Frances Trix's book named *Spiritual Discourse: Learning with an Islamic Master* (1993) on Baba Rexheb and his Islamic Bektashi community in Michigan or Cemil Şahinöz's (2009) work on Nurculuk Movement are two examples of such perspectives. The former is more like the narrative personal experiences of a western woman discovering and becoming a disciple of a Bektashi Sheikh based in the USA. The latter approaches the order with a more sociological tone, yet the tone of the author gives away that it is written from the perspective of a member of the group.

When everything discussed above is taken into account, we see that there are three factors that put pressure on the ethnographer during such studies: his own beliefs and worldview, the group being studied and the bigger audience which usually consists of academic readers. The worldview of the researcher could be totally opposite to that of the studied group or the researcher might be a proponent of the same view. In both cases, the researcher needs to endeavor to keep a scientific and objective tone.

The group studied is a stress factor for the researcher because as opposed to the ethnographic studies of the past where the subject was unable to reach the work written about them, in the modern world the groups are curiously waiting for the outcome of the observation and interviews done with them. As they welcome and help the researcher, the researcher feels a sort of gratitude for them and this might cause the fear of disappointing them by writing anything negative about them. For this work specifically, this is a consideration I have in mind while writing the thesis about the Gulshenis of Selami Ali. If written scientifically and objectively, however, no work should offend a social group. If the tone is aggressive and antipathetical to a certain way of life or group of people, then we can assume that the study is not written in a scientific manner.

The readers of the works of ethnographies on religious groups can also be a source of anxiety for the researcher. Apart from the criticisms of academia regarding the methodology and content of the work, the general audience might be resentful and critical about the findings of a research. Metin Karabaşoglu's (2004) harsh criticism of Şerif Mardin's book on Said Nursi can be an example of such reactions.

### **2.3 The Blue Notebook Effect: The Presence of Observer**

A significant feature of this study is that I was introduced to the group as someone who wanted to do an ethnographic study about the order and the Efendi. In order for the group to feel comfortable with my presence, I expanded my observation to a long period of time -around three years, which made my presence less noticeable because I have been visiting the Dergah for around three years, although I have not participated in every meeting. After some time, I noticed that my researcher identity was forgotten by many of the members and for them, I was simply one of the attendants of the dergah. Even Efendi himself stopped asking me about my thesis and on Facebook and other platforms started to write me messages asking how I am doing and inviting me to the gatherings if I could not attend for a long time. Later on, I discovered that this is called tracking a follower and it is one of the duties of an Efendi. Kenan Efendi would go to people's houses, or the coffee houses they attend to bring them to dergah if they missed the gatherings for a long time. These invitations for me were one of the indicators that my position in the eye of the Efendi

was more than just a researcher.

In addition to that after a while, I stopped taking notes while observing the activities in order not to make them feel under scrutiny because as DeWalt suggests “occasionally taking jot notes overtly can serve as a reminder to people that research is occurring during informal interactions” (1980: 164). To avoid this I wrote down my fieldnotes soon after I left dergah and if something significant was told during the lecture, I referred back to the audio recordings and I recorded because upon noticing that many people record the lectures (sohbets) of Efendi I started to record him as well. Moreover, according to Robert M. Emerson, not focusing on taking notes during participant observation “allows an intense immersion in daily rhythms and ordinary concerns that increases openness to others’ ways of life.” (Emerson, 2011: 22) In the same book the authors emphasize the integrality of field notes in the ethnographic research process as follows:

The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on. Indeed, the term “participant observation” is often used to characterize this basic research approach. But, second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others. In so doing, the researcher creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences. These two interconnected activities comprise the core of ethnographic research: firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world that draw upon such participation (Emerson, 2011: 22).

## **2.4 In-Depth Interviews**

Beside participant observation, semi-structured interviews yielded significant data for this study. The semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to maintain the interactive character of the conversation while leading the conversation to get the answers to prepared questions. In that way, the interviewer can react to the responses of the interviewee and check the validity of the answer as well as giving the interviewer to ask for clarity (Bailey, 1882: 182). It offers flexibility and in-depth information about the subject.

For this study, I interviewed six female and five male members of the community. Because it was not a gender-segregated community I had the chance to talk to both male and female followers of Gulsheni order. Efendi himself and his closest disciple were my main informants in the order. Interview settings were usually in the dergah or a café close by. The interviews started with detailed life stories of the interviewees with the methods of oral history studies. The life stories were eventually coming to the dergah and their personal relationship with the dergah. Social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp was also used as a communication tool with the followers and some questions were asked via them. They sent me their responses as written texts or voice records on those platforms.

I started the interviews after a year of attending the dergah in order to establish a rapport with the group. As Crick suggests throughout anthropological studies the ethnographer is not the only person observing, the community members also observe the anthropologist and speculate about the attitude, actions, and behaviors of the researcher (1982: 25). Knowing this I tried to avoid any action or behavior that would give away my personal way of believing and practicing religion.

Selami Ali Gulshenis are almost entirely a non-scriptural religious community. I have never seen a book in front of the Efendi while he is giving the sohbet. Although there is a bookshelf in the dergah, judging from the books there, one can say that they are not chosen according to the beliefs of the order. Sayyid Qutb's tafseer, *In the Shadow of Quran*, which is a very non-esoteric commentary of the Qur'an occupies a large space in the bookshelf, which indicates that these books are not put there in order to be followed. When I asked about the books they read, Efendi gave me a small booklet written by Ömer Baba in Edirne. He said it is the only book they give out to *ikhwan*. This booklet, together with the Facebook entries of Efendi is the only scriptural data sources utilized in this study.

## **2.5 Life Stories**

Life history narratives are acknowledged forms of qualitative data gathering tools in many fields of social sciences such as history, psychology, and anthropology. As Robert Arkinson states "Life story interviewing is a qualitative research method for

gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life that is transferable across disciplines” (Arkinson, 2002: 121). Charlotte Linde informs that “life history has always been used as a method of data collection in anthropology, in spite of doubts about its scientific rigor. In this context, a life history is a subject's account of his/her life, guided by questions from the anthropologist” (Linde 1993: 47).

With my informants whom I interviewed multiple times, the initial interview was in the form of life story interview where I let my informants tell their life stories without my direct control, however, to keep the conversation going I was responsive during the interviews and sometimes I asked questions in order to let my interviewee talk further. Following the Bogdan and Taylor’s advice that interviewers should not interrupt when taking life stories (1975:45), I tried not to interrupt my informants during the interviews. In order not to spend time thinking about questions to ask during the interviews, I kept a list of questions with me during the interviews. The main purpose of the life story narratives was understanding the profile of the members of the order in detail and attempting to figure out the meaning and place of the dergah in their lives.

## **2.6 The Question of Nativity**

In her 1993 essay titled “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” Kirin Narayan is tackling the question of nativity for researchers studying social groups in their own countries of origin. She first lays out the colonial origins of the term native informant whose opposite was real anthropologist. Such a category emerged because ‘there was little question about the "civilized" outsider's ability to represent "primitive" peoples, and so it was worthy of note when a person excluded from dominant white culture was allowed to describe his or her own society” (Narayan, 1993: 682). The author goes on to add that because of multiplexity of the identity of both the researcher and the members of the social group, a total indigenous, insider perspective is an impossible expectation.

In the case of this study, for instance, there are elements in my identity that places me as a relative insider to Gulsheni order in Selami Ali quarter and there are factors

that make me an outsider. That I am from Turkey and so is the group I deal with, brings me closer to being an insider than say an American colleague, yet even an American anthropologist would not be a total outsider to the group because there would still be many shared cultural practices in the global world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even though I am from Turkey, I am not from Selami Ali, I am not following a heterodox Sufi interpretation of Islam and I am an academic all of which puts me at a distance from the community. Therefore, the nativity or indigenesness must be taken as a continuum, not as absolute and essentializing categories.

Furthermore, this native informant or indigenous perspective concepts imply that each member of the studied group is totally the same. Yet, age, occupation, ethnic background, gender and many other features would naturally differ in any social group, which means there is no researcher who can be identical to the social group studied, which would enable him/her to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world.” (Malinowski 1961: 25). In terms of education, for example, the Gulsheni order accommodates people with university degrees speaking foreign languages as well as illiterate people whose only language is Turkish. There are members of various age group and financial backgrounds. Therefore, as Narayan states “given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference” (Narayan, 1993: 680).

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH CONTEXT

#### **3.1. Being A Romani In Turkey: Identity and Perception**

Romani people in Turkey and in many parts of the world Romani people correspond to the “strangers” category of Zygmund Baumann’s classification of social groups. In Turkey, Romani people do not belong to the in-group, nor to the out-group, because they have been living in Turkey for centuries and they speak the language, they are definitely not like what Germans or Japans are to us. These are the people Bauman referred to as ‘strangers’. “They are neither a part of ‘us’ nor ‘them.’ Neither friends nor foes. For this reason, I do not know exactly what I should make of them, what to expect, how to behave” (Bauman, 1990: 55). Georg Simmel’s definition of the stranger in an article from 1950 is also very suitable for portraying the image of Romani people in many parts of the world as well as in Turkey.

The stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries. But his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself (Simmel, 1950: 402-408).

The Roma communities in different parts of Turkey are exposed to what Erving Goffman put forth as the “tribal or racial stigmatization which can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family” (Goffman, 1963: 4). According to Bauman’s theory, the dominant groups within the society acts in three different ways in order to solve the question of strangers: sending those strangers to where they came from (especially for ethnically alien immigrants), to commit a genocide; or separate them geographically, spiritually or both (Bauman, 1990: 61). History has witnessed all three types of those so-called solutions. In the contemporary era, one can say that the most common reaction to the Romani strangers is the separation option. Extensive numbers of ghetto communities and diasporas in many major cities of the world is an indication of this. The system often

creates conditions that leave those people no other option but to live ‘outside.’ Selamsız is an example of diasporas created by geographical separation.

Of course, before the physical separation, the spiritual separation had to be guaranteed through constructed prejudices and stereotypes usually disseminated by means of legendary stories including misinformation that would scare people away. I remember the first time I was going to the Romani street the owner of the local shop told me that I will get robbed if I go there with my camera, or they are dirty people and even if you put them in a palace that wouldn’t change. I recently came to know that a belief among Turkish people is that if a man sleeps with a Romani girl he will be impure for forty years no matter how many times he performs the *ghusl*<sup>6</sup>. Another well-known myth made up to vilify gypsies goes like this:

When Nemrud wanted to throw the prophet Abraham into the fire, the catapult did not work because two angels were holding it to save him. Then the Satan told Nemrud to have two siblings commit adultery so that the angels will go away. Then he had two siblings with names Cin and Gen have sex there and the people coming from their lineage are Gypsies who are cursed by God for incest. Due to the curse, they will never have a bed to sleep and a country to live in (Alp, 2016: 154).

That story specifically portrays the separation as if it is race and lineage oriented, but the matter of the fact is Romaniness cannot be explained with racial or ethnic features because there is no homogeneity among the gypsies (Özateşler, 2016: 27). Hancock notes that ‘the word “Romani” is often applied to any people who conform to the perceived image, whether they are ethnic gypsies or not’ (1987: 145). There are people from many different racial backgrounds that are labeled as gypsies because of their way of life. One of the followers of Ömür Efendi from Selamsız, Bircan Hanım, once told me “I am not a Romani, I am Pomak, I have become a gypsy here.” According to this statement, one can become a Romani later in life, which indicates it is more of a lifestyle than a race. If we compare this to Mustafa Aksu’s (2016) story in his autobiographical book, we can conclude that passing to Romani identity is much easier than getting out of it. In that book, Aksu narrates how

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<sup>6</sup> Islamic term for washing the whole body for physical and spiritual purification.



his Romani identity chased him all his life despite his attempts to hide it from other people. When understood that he was of Romani origin, people started to mistreat him to the point of depriving him of his basic rights such as marriage or working. In his book, there are a lot of examples of how gypsies are stamped with “otherness” even in encyclopedias written by Turkish Ministry of National Education or Administration of Religious Affairs. In one of the entries, Romani people are described as “people with weak belief, who does not pay attention to nikah (Islamic marriage) and circumcision. Aksu claims that in a book published by Mazlum-Der it is written that “gypsies are not Muslim, nor Christian. They do not have a certain religion” (Aksu 2016: 21).

In their study on Romani Identity Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers include “language, nomadism, self-identification and the relationship between Gypsies and wider society” (2008: 13) as the components of defining Romani ethnicity. For Selami Ali case, only the last two of these features can be employed because they are no more nomads and they do not have a separate language anymore. Maybe only a slight accent that emerges when they are among themselves and some words such as ‘Bulgarya instead of Bulgaristan.

In his article named “Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies in the Ottoman State” dealing with the social status of Gypsies in Ottoman Empire, Eyal Ginio, (2004) puts forward that although as a Sharia state Ottoman state system categorized their subjects in terms of their religious orientation, Gypsies (*kıpti*) were segregated from both Muslim and non-Muslim categories and a third category was created solely for them. As a result, the society consisted of Muslims, non-Muslims, and Gypsies in the mind of an Ottoman Statesman. A clear indication of this was the fact that they had to pay Jizya, the tax that non-Muslim Ottoman subjects had to pay, even if they proclaimed to be Muslims. What was the reason for this segregation? European sources indicated the Gypsies’ religious laxity as the major reason for such a discriminatory tax (Ginio, 2004: 130). Another reason of this marginalization was probably the distrust of Ottoman authorities in the religiosity of Gypsies, which might have stemmed from the stigma of Gypsies as people living outside the accepted norms no matter what religion they claim to follow. Angus Fraser argues that “the Gypsies’ lot was better than that of their counterparts in Europe since they

were not demonized and subsequently systemically persecuted” (1992: 171).

One can see that republican Turkey inherited this religious marginalization attitude against the gypsies. At the beginning of the Republican era, the part in the Identity card for religion the word `kipti` was written for gypsies (Öke & Topuz, 2010). Kipti is a word derived from the word Egypt because in the Byzantine era gypsies were thought to have originated from Egypt (Mezarcioglu, 2012). Even today there is a common belief that Romani people do not adhere to any religion, they just pretend to follow the religion of people they are around (Altinoz, 2013: 302; Strand, 2006: 97). That is why what Ömür Efendi is doing is revolutionary in multiple ways. He subverts the socially constructed role given to him at the bottom of the class hierarchy (Mayall 2004: 2). And becomes a religious leader for not only gypsies but also for non-Gypsies. In the same way, he subverts the gender roles in the Muslim community and chooses a female follower of his as his closest disciple and probably the next Efendi of the group after him. Maybe he adopts unorthodox interpretation of Islam because he knows that as both Liegeois (1987) and Belton (2005) argue that “a sense of opposition to the dominant culture is an important factor in shaping Romani identity” and this deviance from the norms of the system is what is attracting gypsies to his way (cited in Bhopal & Myers 2008: 25).

### **3.2 Sufism In Selami Ali**

Since the first arrival of Ottomans, Üsküdar has always been a central place for religious activities. Because the people who were going to set out for pilgrimage to Makka would gather in Üsküdar and famous Surra Ceremonies would take place there, hence Üsküdar was seen as a blessed land for Ottomans. Furthermore, the fact that Üsküdar is the beginning of the territory which is directly connected to the Holy Land without and sea or water in between Muslim Ottomans would call Üsküdar the soil of Makka.<sup>7</sup> As a result, many mosques and dergahs of many different Sufi schools were founded there. In his introduction in the book named Dergahs of Üsküdar, Ahmet Yüksel Özemre argues that within the districts of Istanbul there has not been any other district whose spiritual life has been more intense and colorful than Üsküdar (2004: 10). Ibrahim Hakkı Konyalı gives the number of mosques in

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uskudar.bel.tr/tr/main/pages/tarihce/25>

Üsküdar as 147 in his two-volume book on the history of Üsküdar. Konyalı (1976) and Yorgancıoğlu (2004) lists 67 Sufi dergahs in his study. Moreover, there were 6 churches and 2 synagogues in the same region and around twenty thousand Armenians lived in Bağlarbaşı quarter, which is just above Selamsız (Yorgancıoğlu 2004: 10).

The Romani community has also been influenced by the Sufi spirit of their neighborhood. When asked about his family's religiosity Ömür Efendi told me that his father who would attend Friday prayers and fast in Ramadan was listening to *Mevlid*<sup>8</sup> programs on TV on *Kandil*<sup>9</sup> nights and cry. His mother was praying 5 times a day. Regarding Sufism, he told that his grandmother would take his older brother, Ömer, to the tomb of Feyzullah Efendi and make him circumambulate around it. She would say that 'Ömer is tied to Feyzullah Efendi.' He explains that this was the culture my grandmother grew up in, therefore even though the state closed down the Sufi lodges in the early years of the republic in the 1920s, this culture would prevail.

Feyzullah Efendi's<sup>10</sup> dergah was called Hindiler Tekkesi.<sup>11</sup> Considering that it was not uncommon for Ottomans to name a dergah based on the ethnicity of its adherers, Özbekler Tekkesi, for instance, was named so because people from central Asia would come and stay there, we can conclude that Hindiler Tekkesi had Indian members. According to Zakir Şükrü Efendi's account, the dergah was opened in 1737-38 by Sheikh Seyyid Feyzullah Efendi El Hindi. The date coincides with the time when Romani people started to dwell in the quarter. When we look at the chain of Sheikhs (*silsile*) that served in this dergah we see that five of them had 'hindi' (Indian) title in their names<sup>12</sup> (Tanman, 1998). Considering the theories that attribute Romani people's origins to India this dergah gains special significance among all the dergahs of Selamsız. The entry about the dergah in the encyclopedia of Islam written

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<sup>8</sup> Birthday of Prophet Muhammed.

<sup>9</sup> Sacred nights in Islamic calendar. The word Kandil is the same with candle in English because of the Ottoman tradition of lighting candles in the Mosque Minarets at those nights.

<sup>10</sup> A sheikh of Hindiler Dergah in Selami Ali quarter who died in 1748.

<sup>11</sup> The lodge of Indians.

<sup>12</sup> Bereket Efendi el-Hindî; Emânullah el-Hindî; Sergürûh-ı Rahîmullah Şah el-Hindî (d. 1193/1779); Mehmed Mültân el-Hindî (d. 1202/1787-88); Abdullah Yâr el-Hindî (d. 1238/1822-23),

by official religious administration of Turkey tells that ‘The neighborhood of the dergah is surrounded by colorful houses of Gypsies, and it is seen that those who reside there embraced Sheikh Feyzullah El Hindi as their own saint and take care of his tomb<sup>13</sup>. It is hard to conclude that the reason this dergah was opened in Selamsız is because of Indian origin of Romani people dwelling there because Romani people do not show any connection to India or being Indian today, but maybe in the past, they were more aware of their origins.

Today there are several active Sufi lodges in Selamsız in the close vicinity of Gulshani Dergah. Around 100 meters down the main street, there is a Naqshibandi dergah linked to Menzil group whose Sheikh Serdar Bey is a distant cousin of Ömür Efendi. Only once I saw him visiting his cousin in the Gülsheni dergah. The dergah opened around ten years ago with the financial support of Menzil tariqa. They focus on saving the young inhabitants of the quarter from drug addiction and alcoholism.

On Katibim Aziz Bey Street, which is approximately 200 meters away from the Gülşheni dergah, there are two Cerrahi and one Melami dergahs. The Melami dergah was founded by Femi Ozden who is in the Melami dergah in Macedonia now. current Efendi’s name is Oktay, who was a follower of Kenan Efendi during his lifetime, however, after he passed away Oktay Efendi started to attend the Melami dergah and eventually became its Efendi. Although a number of Kenan Efendi’s disciples chose to follow the Melami dergah, Fehmi Efendi and Ömür Efendi are still friends and I have been informed that when Fehmi Efendi comes to Üsküdar, he visits Ömür Efendi in his dergah.

The two Cerrahi dergahs are close proximity but they do have any interaction. One of them is under the leadership of Yaşar Efendi and the other one is under Muhsin Efendi. The two fell out some years ago and for some time Yaşar Efendi attended the Gulsheni dergah. Later, he founded his own dergah and those who left Ömür Efendi and did not join the Melamis use his dergah’s space to perform their rituals.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hindiler-tekkesi>

### 3.3. Research Context: Selami Ali Quarter

Selami Ali is one of the quarters in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul on the Asian side. Although its official name is Selami Ali, mostly it is usually referred to as Selamsız which literally means “without a *selam*<sup>14</sup>.” The name comes from Sheikh Selami Ali who was known for not saluting people when he was in public (Tatcı, 2006). Selami Ali Efendi was a 17<sup>th</sup> century Sufi Sheikh in Celveti Order whose dergah was in that quarter and his tomb is still there<sup>15</sup> (Kara, 2009: 348). Selamsız is known to be one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Istanbul due to the high rate of drug abuse (Milliyet, 08.11.2014).

Selami Ali has been one of the Romani settlements of Istanbul for centuries. It is hard to pinpoint when exactly Romani people started to dwell here but the oldest mention of them is in a Kadı record from the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century. The record mentions a mosque named *Çingene Fırını* Mosque (gypsy bakery) located in the neighborhood (Canpolat, et al 2008). However, Although Evliya Çelebi (1611-1683) reports that there are seventy Muslim, eleven Greek and Armenian quarters and one Jewish quarter in Üsküdar he does not say anything about a Romani community. We can conclude that although there were some Romani populations in Üsküdar they had not yet comprised a community worth mentioning at that time. According to Mehmet Nermi Haskan Selamsız gypsies arrived there in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, possibly between 1730-1735 (Haskan, 2001: 448).

The population of Romani people in Selamsız is estimated to be between 3000-4000 in a study by Canpolat (2008); however, according to a Council of Europe report, in 2011 the Romani population of the quarter was about 1,400 in 310 households.<sup>16</sup> The reason of such a difference between the two figures regarding the number of Romani people is because their identity is no more very distinct and visible therefore determining who is Romani who is *gajo*<sup>17</sup> is not very easy (Özateşler 2014: 29; Bhopal & Myers 2008: 13).

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<sup>14</sup> Selam can mean salutation or peace.

<sup>15</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/selami-ali-efendi>

<sup>16</sup> Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM). *Meeting Report: 2nd Meeting, Istanbul, Turkey, 22-25 November 2011*. Council of Europe, 3 February 2012.

<sup>17</sup> a term Romani people use for non-Romani people

As it is the case with other Romani communities in Turkey, the Gypsies of Selamsız are not homogeneous (Özateşler 2014: 28; Strand, 2006: 97). Taner Canpolat and Muammer Ak who studied the community for Üsküdar Symposium in 2008 state that the community consists of 5 subgroups: 1-Kağıtçılar, 2- Tavukçular 3- Adapazarlılar, 4-Tekke Kapılılar 5-Bandırnalılar (Canpolat & Ak 2008). However, during my interviews, I have been told about only three main groups: Tekkekapılılar, Bandırnalılar, and Adapazarlılar. Tavukçular is a nickname given to Adapazarlılar so they both refer to the same people. It can be assumed that Kağıtçılar is the name for given to Bandırnalılar. The division of these three groups came up during almost all of my interviews with my informants and it has a significant role in the self-identification of the residents of Selamsız.

Although my Tekkekapılı informants stated that they originally come from Bulgaria, Tekkekapılılar has always been boasting about being the oldest dwellers of the quarter and see the other groups as intruders and invaders who came there and brought nothing but nuisance and troubles. Tekkekapılılar means ‘those from *the door of Sufi lodge*’ because the main street of the quarter was called Tekkekapısı in the past because the doors of two major dergahs used to be right across each other. Tekkekapılılar are known to associate themselves with Ottoman high culture and as one of my informant told me they used to call Bandırnalıs disbelievers and Bandırnalıs would call them Armenians because they had been living together Armenians and they were likened to them by the Bandırnalı people.<sup>18</sup>

One can still see the residuals of the conflict among the groups. A 70-year-old Tekkekapılı woman told me that “those bad people came later’ before that there were Armenians whose houses were destroyed due to a fire and they left. Our origins are from here”<sup>19</sup>. Efendi who is usually a very calm and cheerful person tells me during one of our interviews that in “after 1975 unstable people came to the quarter from Adapazarı and they brought knives, guns, curse words, fights and unrest.” When I ask if Adapazarlılar Romani he says “no they are not but they hide among the Romani. Their lifestyle does not fit ours” he continues, “we are artisans their life is based on cheating, they are not like us.” Then he likens their occupation of the

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<sup>18</sup> Personal Interview with Meryem Afacan. 01.26.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>19</sup> Personal Interview with Meral Hanım. 31.12.2017, Üsküdar.

quarter to how Israel occupied Palestine. “That tiny Israel became huge Palestine. The same thing happened here, this family came then that family came and people gave up going out so that their children do not have trouble and they took over the place<sup>20</sup>.” His tone softens when he starts to talk about Bandırmalılar. He repeatedly says they came in the 50s and there weren’t any Bandırmalı in the quarter before that time. ‘However’ he says ‘today everyone marries girls from each other, kinships have been established. Therefore, it has been better, because kinships have been formed.’ He continues ‘Bandırmalıs are very soft people, they are not aggressive people.’ When asked if Bandırmalıs are Romani he says ‘yes they are.’ I asked if Tekkekapılılar are Roman and he said ‘yes Tekkekapılılar are also Roman, we come from the same culture.’ However, Ömür Efendi’s cousin who does not attend the Dergah says they are not Roman, they came from Bulgaria. Apparently, being a Romani has different meanings for them. Efendi is proudly expressing that he comes from a Romani origin and Adapazarlılar cannot qualify to be Romani because they are criminals.

According to a non-Romani follower of Ömür Efendi who has been in the quarter for ten years now and has listened to the narrations of all groups, the reason Bandırmalıs were able to take over the quarter was the ostentatious wedding ceremonies and wasteful lifestyles of Tekkekapılıs. They would sell their houses in order to pay for wedding ceremonies. During our first interview with Ömür Efendi which took around ninety minutes, he spent around twenty-five minutes describing the wedding customs of Selamsız people. Romani people are stereotypically known for their love of entertainment and extravagance, yet Bandırmalıs would not waste their money for weddings, instead, they would save for buying estate. Moreover, every member of the house would work, from children to the elderly. That is how they became the majority of estate owners in the quarter despite their extreme poverty when they first arrived in Istanbul. One of the Bandırmalı ladies around 60 years old told me that they were given staples of animals to live when they first came to the quarter. They were looking for houses to rent and that was what they were offered. One could feel the anger and bitterness in her tone. Later she told me however, they made so much money that they bought apartment blocks.

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<sup>20</sup> Personal Interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 03.01.2018, Üsküdar.

In the article by Canpolat & Ak (2008) a subgroup named Kağıtçılar is mentioned yet I have never come across a group under that name during my field research. They might have been called with that name due to their profession as paper collectors for recycling because this is one of the jobs Romani community in different parts of Istanbul has been engaged in. However, as I myself witnessed in Hasanpaşa quarter of Kadıköy probably they were forced to give that job up by the municipality. This might have forced them to move to elsewhere in order to be able to continue paper collection work or chose another occupation and stay in Selamsız. In either case, we do not have a subgroup earning their lives by in that way and named with that name. Among the women in Selami Ali, working in a Turkish Hamam is very common. They work in Hamams in Uskudar and in the Fatih area. For the men selling goods on the streets such as vegetables and fruits is common.

Among the people I interviewed nobody remembered a second language being spoken in their houses. Only one lady named Leyla herself was able to speak Romani language but she came to the quarter from Kocaeli, and her mother is from Tekirdağ so she does not represent Selamsız Romani community. During our interviews, Ömür Efendi repeatedly used the word ‘assimilation’ when I asked about the Romani language.



## CHAPTER IV

### SUFISM AND GULSHENIYYE AS AN ORDER

The terms Sufism and Sufi have been circling in many platforms from media to literature, yet what exactly meant by them varies dramatically. For some Muslims, it is a level of practicing Islam reached only after the perfect practice of scriptural rules of sharia; for others, you do not even need to be a Muslim to be a Sufi. Hence, similar to other spiritual concepts the concept of Sufism is an elusive category loaded with a great deal of ambivalence.

Micheal Gilsenan defines Sufism as “mystical life as it has developed with the general framework of Islam” (1973: 1). Fulya Atacan defines it as “the activity of Muslims trying to understand the existence of Allah through their personal experience (1990: 23). Some other authors simply defined it as Islamic mysticism (Atay 2011: 37; Schimmel, 2018; Lings 2005). Many scholars agree that the word Sufi derives from the word *suf* which meant wool because the early Sufis were wearing clothes made up of wool. In the early period of Islam, wearing wool was a symbol of spirituality and rejection of worldly pleasures (Lings 2005; Schimmel 2014). Another view, usually held by Sufis themselves relate the word to the word “saf” which means pure and clean (Atay 2011:38; Arvasi, 1990:8). Ceyhan relates the word to Suffe, a structure adjacent to Prophet’s (pbuh) masjid where some of his companions were studying and preparing for Jihad and learning from the Prophet (pbuh) staying away from worldly pursuits as much as possible (2015: 33).

From Ibn Khaldun’s discussion of the etymology of the word Sufi, we can conclude that there was a debate about the origin of the word in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as well. The citation below shows the different views about the meaning and origin of the word and Ibn Khaldun’s own view regarding it.

Theories deriving the word from assafa' (purity, sincerity), or from as-suffah (bench), or from as-saff (row) are improbable from the point of view of linguistic analogy." (Al-Qushayri) continued: "The same applies to the derivation from as-suf (wool), because the Sufis were not the only ones who wore Wool." I say: The most obvious etymology, if one uses one, is that which connects the word with as-suf, because Sufis, as a rule, were characterized by the fact that they wore

woolen garments. They were opposed to people wearing gorgeous garments, and, therefore, chose to wear wool (Muqaddima, VI: 16).

There has been controversy among scholars about whether Sufism was an appropriation of already existing non-Islamic mystical movements such as Judaism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism into Islam or was it a purely Islamic form of spiritual improvement and getting closer to God. Among the Orientalist scholars, it was common to attribute Sufism to non-Islamic mystical currents that were prevalent at that time (Konur 2000 :13; Güngör 1996: ). On the other hand, other scholars claimed that the source of Sufism is Quran and Hadith, and they quoted these sources to indicate that this way of practicing Islam has its origins within the religion itself. A balanced stance can be acknowledging both Islamic encouragements of this lifestyle through the Quran and the example of the Prophet (pbuh) and later on external influence on Sufism, which is the conclusion Annemarie Schimmel reached according to her encyclopedia entry about Sufism in Britannica.

Though the roots of Islamic mysticism formerly were supposed to have stemmed from various non-Islamic sources in ancient Europe and even India, it now seems established that the movement grew out of early Islamic asceticism that developed as a counterweight to the increasing worldliness of the expanding Muslim community; only later were foreign elements that were compatible with mystical theology and practices adopted and made to conform to Islam (Schimmel, 2014).

Maybe the answer to this question must be sought within human nature. It is undeniable that spirituality and gnostic knowledge was already an existing phenomenon in the world before Islam arrived, and other traditions of spiritual improvement has been there separate from Islam because humans by nature in need of such endeavors and human soul requires a mechanism that would activate its potential powers and from an Islamic perspective human beings are like a child separated from its mother as a result always seeking ways of getting closer to their Creator. This is why the word *tariqa* means a road, or a pathway to an end goal, which in the Sufi sense is *fenafillah* i.e reaching God.

For many Muslim scholars such as Martin Lings or Ibn Khaldun Sufism started with Prophet Muhammad himself. It did not have a name but the essence of it was always there. Quoting two scholars from 10<sup>th</sup> century Lings writes the following:

Today Sufism (tasawwuf) is a name without a reality. It was once a reality without a name.' Commenting on this in the following century, Hujwiri adds: 'In the time of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors this name did not exist, but its reality was in everyone. Now the name exists without the reality (Abu l-Hasan Fushanji, quoted in Lings, 2005: 45).

The citation below from Ibn Khaldun's magnum opus, *muqaddima*, is valuable for it gives the definition of Sufism and the reason why the name Sufism did not appear until the later centuries:

Sufism is based on (the assumption) that the method of those people (who later on came to be called Sufis) had always been considered by the important early Muslims, the men around Muhammad and the men of the second generation, as well as those who came after them, as the path of truth and right guidance. The (Sufi) approach is based upon constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, aversion to the false splendor of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, property, and position to which the great mass aspires, and retirement from the world into solitude for divine worship. These things were general among the men around Muhammad and the early Muslims. Then, worldly aspirations increased in the second [eighth] century and after. People now inclined toward worldly affairs. At that time, the special name of Sufis (Sufiyah and Mutasawwifah) was given to those who aspired to divine worship (Muqaddima VI, 16).

As we see the initial era of Sufi lifestyle did not have an organized movement, and they were not called Sufis however, the lifestyle was practiced by individual Muslims. Because devotional and ascetic pietism was a very general practice there was no need for giving a separate name to such people. This era until the end of the second century after the hijra is usually called *zuhd* period when individual Muslims followed a mystical and devotional lifestyle by abstaining from the worldly pleasures. Ahmet Karamustafa points out that until the Sufism was established, there was certain level of tension between those who interpreted the message of Islam as a total abandonment of worldliness and focusing on the otherworldly endeavors and those who interpreted them differently and worked for their livelihood and accumulated wealth (1994: 35). Abu Zar Ghifari's abandonment of the community because they began to eat until they were full, may be the earliest example of these conflicting interpretations. The group of Muslims who preferred a more ascetic and

other-worldly lifestyle were called *zahids* and this ascetic way of life for some scholars is actually present in the essence of Islam (Konur 2000, Karaatli 2006, Kose 2012).

The increase of wealth and luxury among Muslims started during the Umayyad Era (661-750) because of the new empire whose borders reached distant parts of the world. And the rich and extravagant lifestyle of Umayyad Sultans caused reactions and protests among the Muslims some of who gathered around the grandchildren of the Prophet and initiated a more esoteric stream of Islam. In addition to Umayyad Sultans, the chaos caused by Khawarij, forced some Muslims to escape from society and follow a secluded lifestyle.

The Umayyad period (661-750) also witnessed a systematization of Islamic jurisprudence and the clergy who worked in the codification of these normative laws of Islam were associated with the Umayyad Palace which was one reason for protest against them. Moreover, some Muslims found those law-based Islam too mechanical and dry and leaned for more spiritual and esoteric interpretation rejecting the legalist view of *Ulema*. And they started to challenge the authority of Ulema with their claim of reaching the *Truth* with mystical experiential methods instead of studying the books that were written by the Ulema. The Ulema perceived Sufis as a threat and this conflict sometimes culminated in executions of Sufi leaders such as Hallaci Mansur (Kara 1990: 34).

Himmet Konur argues that in the protest against the Umayyad Palace the Ulema (scholars) and the mystics were together (2000: 19), however, the dichotomy of scholars versus Sufis is a valid analytical duality for many scholars (Atacan 1990; Crapanzano 1963; Gilson,1973; Atay, 2011). Werbner & Basu highlight this dichotomy even while defining Sufism “as a realm of Islamic emotional discourse opposed to the ‘cold’ and ‘technical’ constructions put forward by theologians and judicial scholars.” Although this tension between these two ways of practicing the religion softened in time and turned into a *madrasa* versus *tekke* split, criticism of law-based orthodox version of Islam is a part of the Sufi narrative, which I could easily observe during my fieldwork (1998: 8).

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the efforts of reconciling the two sides reached a certain level of success. Especially thanks to writings of Ghazzali (d. 1111) who was both a scholar and a Sufi, Sufism began to have a complementary rather than opposing role towards the work of scholars. The scholar Sufi Sheikhs started to emerge in the Islamic world. Gilsenan tells that Sufi Scholars were also very common in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Azhar University of Cairo;

...the Azhar University of Cairo itself, a bastion of orthodoxy, has from the sixteenth century been a centre of Sufism and it appears quite clear that in succeeding centuries there was a high level of overlapping between Sheikhs of the Orders and the 'ulema' and legal officers, for reasons we shall come to later in this study. It is, therefore, the process of the relationship, its fluctuations over time, that need to be stressed (Gilsenan, 1973: 12).

The Ottoman example of reconciling the two sides is very remarkable. One of the most prominent advocates and teachers of Wahdat al Wujud philosophy, Davud-u Kayseri was appointed as the founder president of the first Madrasa of the new state. This is a major indicator that the Ulema versus Sufi dichotomy was actually a fluctuating social phenomenon and newly founded Ottoman State took early precautions in order to avoid this conflict by uniting the two sides under the same educational institution.

The second phase of Sufism starts with the formation of lodges, which led to establishments of associational brotherhoods in different parts of the Islamic world which was already expanding from India to North Africa. This period is referred to as *Tasawwuf* period in the history of Sufism. Where and when exactly was the first lodge established is not certain, however, there is a consensus that these associations started to emerge in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. These structures had different names such as *tekke*, *dergah*, *hankah*, *zawiye*, *ribat*, *buk'a*, *imarat* in different parts of the world (Ceyhan, 2015: 32). Later these lodges assumed social functions in addition to their religious functions and started to be used as schools, caravanserais, commercial and social focal points, law courts, banks, storehouses, poor houses, burial grounds, and the source and channel of divine grace (Gilsenan, 1973: 4).

Formation of *tariqas* as organizations with a network in different parts of the Muslim

world and with an internal organizational and hierarchical system marks the third phase of the establishment of Sufi orders. The loose and individual associations now started to expand as networks of brotherhoods that had a chain of reference that always starts with the current Sheikh or Baba and leads back to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This systematization era is around the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Crapanzano 1973: 17).

The spread of tariqas in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was partly due to the internal and external conflicts that caused instability and social dislocation. Dynastic struggles within the Muslim world, Mongolian attacks and Crusaders are main factors that caused a certain level of turmoil in the Muslim world. In times of chaos and turbulence, the orders represented permanence and continuity. Moreover, they function as domains of associational life for people who recently converted to Islam or who migrated from their lands. Especially for the newly converts orders offered an important milieu for cultural adaptation to the new religion and lifestyle. And as Gilsenan also alludes, this adaptation period sometimes resulted in incorporating local customs and beliefs into their new lifestyle and caused criticism against the Sufi orders for accommodating such non-Islamic practices of indigenous cultures. Despite these accusations, it is a historical fact that the orders helped spread Islam in many parts of the world by functioning as missionaries (Gilsenan, 1973:2).

Despite the initial conflict between the Umayyad Dynasty and Sufi groups, later Muslims states such as Seljuks and Ottomans reconciled with those groups and this cooperation benefited both sides in expanding and settling in new territories gained through war. Based on Caravan routes, with a humanist approach towards people of different faiths, Sufis were one of the causes of conversion of many nations into Islam. Despite being a heterodox Sufi organization, Bektashi order, for instance, was one of the most prominent Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire. With their less rigid tone regarding the laws and practices they might have functioned as indeterminate forms and assured a smooth transformation from Christianity or paganism into Islam in many parts of the Ottoman Empire but particularly in Balkans (Inalcik, 2009: 22).

The groups gathered around lodges caused large numbers of people to live in groups together and this made it easier to control them. Especially when there was a need for

recruiting soldiers or commissioning military actions the existence of these groups was very convenient. Furthermore, the orders functioned as mediators between the state and the people, which again contributed to the easy management of a population spread around the vast lands of the Muslim states at a time when communication and transportation was not very developed and states depended on local tribal chiefs or other associational leaders for assuring the social order (Inalcik, 2009: 25).

Gilsenan defines Sufi orders as “the notion of a fraternal organization founded on principles held to be Islamic, bound together by loyalty to a Sheikh or Guide (murshid) who is at the head of a pyramidal hierarchy of ranks, and is thought to be connected by a chain of grace or blessing and sometimes blood kinship to a founding Saint” (1973: 5). Other than these characteristics everything else in an order can vary, therefore, he notes, “The term ‘Sufi Order’ is not in any useful sense a sociological classification.” Because there is great variety in regards to the structure, the function, the beliefs, the rituals of the Sufi orders or tariqas (Gilsenan 1973: 5). Tayfun Atay also warns against falling into the trap of essentialism while doing anthropological studies regarding any religious group because even within the same group there can be a great diversity in the way religion is practiced and expressed (Atay, 2011: 26). Sami Zubaida is another author who emphasizes the diversity among the Muslim groups and one of his criticisms to Ernest Gellner’s Muslim Society book is its essentialist approach towards the Muslim groups (Zubaida, 1995). In the article responding to Gellner’s book Zubaida highlights the diverse forms and functions of Sufi orders saying:

There are many different kinds of Sufi orders, some more ecstatic than others. These cater for the religious needs of various urban strata, especially the illiterate lower orders, who, like their tribal brethren, are not satisfied with a diet of scripture and law, but need audio-visual excitement. In the urban setting, however, Sufism does not play the vital (Durkheimian) social role it has in the tribes. It does, nevertheless, provide forms of organization, charisma, leadership and following, which satisfy needs not to be found elsewhere in this supposedly egalitarian and unorganized religion (Zubaida, 1995: 164).

The number of Sufi orders is very hard to estimate. The classical sources mention twelve main tariqas but there is no consensus regarding which ones are those twelve. From these main tariqas, many sub-branches flourished in time and reached thousands. Only Shazeliyye order has more than a hundred sub-branches (Güven,

1999). Sufis themselves have always acknowledged and celebrated this variation in the practices of different orders and said: “there are as many paths leading to God as the number of children of Adam.” Of course, this has not been very well accepted within the orthodox Sunni circles. Among the unorthodox groups, on the other hand, this approach to salvation yielded countless groups with different inner structure, different rituals and beliefs, and different goals.

#### **4.1 Sufism In Anatolia**

As in many parts of the world, Islam in Anatolia also developed a “high” version and a “folk” version. What anthropologists and sociologists called high Islam was the type of Islam that was more scriptural and that produced an advanced and refined art and culture and usually spread in cities (Ocak, 2016: 15). This interpretation of Islam had a more orthodox character. The other interpretation of Islam was the popular folk religion that was mostly prevalent among the villages and nomadic tribes. This version of religion included mythological and cultic elements and produced a popular culture and art. Folk Islam also had two types. The first one is the one adopted by those who accepted *sunni* Islam. The second type is a more heterodox version of Islam represented today by Alevi or Bektashi people in Anatolia (Ocak 2016: 16). As Ahmet Yaşar Ocak maintains, folk religion in Anatolia is not necessarily Alevi or Bektashi, the majority of those belonging to this form of religion was actually Sunnis. The veneration of legendary Sufi characters such as Haji Bektashi Wali and Yunus Emre is a distinctive feature of this Anatolian folk Islam.

According to Ocak who is the most well-known academic studying the heterodox groups in Anatolia, the heterodox Anatolian Islam was distinguished from the orthodox Islam in three dimensions:

- a) Political dimension: Sunni Islam has usually been the preference of the states with the only exception of Safevids. Heterodox Islam was in the position of a parallel Islam that represented the ideology of social groups that could not get along with the state authority.
- b) Social dimension: Sunni Islam was usually preferred by the sedentary groups while heterodox Islam generally formed the beliefs of nomadic groups.



- c) Theological dimension: While Sunni Islam has a developed and written theology based on Quran and Sunna, Heterodox Islam had a non-systematic, mythological, syncretic and oral theology, or better said a mosaic of belief (Ocak 2016: 17).

Being at the crossroads of numerous civilizations it was only natural for Sufism in Anatolia to be influenced by multiple streams and have a colorful character. Different Sufi schools such as Andalusian school which displayed a moralist character, Iraq school which emphasizes asceticism, and Iran school whose focal point was ecstasy and aesthetics. Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi is known for bringing the Iranian school with his Mevleviye order that has been impacting religious and cultural life in Anatolia. Muhyiddin Arabi brought Andalusian school and Vahdet-I Vucud teachings to Anatolia in the same century and his teachings had a deep impact on many Sufi orders (Ocak, 2016).

However, the most influential school of Sufism in Anatolia has been the central Asian school represented by Hoja Ahmed Yesevi. Nakshibendiyye, Kubreviyye, and Halvetiyye orders all share the qualities of this school of Sufism (Ocak 2016; Atacan 1990). Due to Mongolian occupations Central Asian orders spread to India and Anatolia during the Seljuk period. From these orders, Kubreviye, Suhreverdiye, Halvetiyye gained basis in cities while Kalenderiyye, Haydariyye, and Yeseviyye gained importance among rural areas and nomads. The Babai-Vefai order which was part of rural-nomadic group started a rebellion against Seljuks in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the rebellion was suppressed violently. Some of these dervishes escaped and sought refuge in Ottoman lands. The most famous of these Sufi dervishes is Sheikh Edeb-Ali because of his role in the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. Young Ottoman Beylik did not make the same mistake Seljuks made and internalized the Sufi orders in the state and employed them as socialization mechanisms in the newly captured lands (Inalcik 2009: 17-26).

In addition to their socialization function, the for the Ottoman Empire military function of Sufi orders was vital. They were the official order of Janissaries until the abolition of the division by Mahmud II. Visiting Anatolia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Battuta writes about the extreme hospitality Ahi zawiyas in the Ottoman Empire that

were helping travelers. This indicates that Sufi orders were also functioning as charitable organizations which were earning income either by farming on the given land to them or were sponsored by rich state officials (Atacan 1990: 25). We also know that occupational guilds were also related to Ahi fraternities. They had the authority to release moral and ethical codes of doing business and if a member violated them they could be expelled from that occupation by Ahis (Inalcik 2009: 37).

In the land registration records of the Ottoman Empire, there are many instances of Kalenderi dervishes who establish their zawiya in the wilderness and later getting it approved by the Sultan as Waqf. An interesting case reported by Halil Inalcik includes these sentences “In Saruhan in the foothills Suca Abdal, Sinan, Ismail, Mustafa, Ali, Kaygusuz and other dervishes rented a place from Sipahi (local feudal leader and landowner) cleaned its stones and trees made it a homeland, established their zawiya and received waqf permission from the Sultan.” This indicates that Sufi dervishes also had a role in the urbanization of Anatolia, creating new residential areas (Inalcik 2009:23).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *Kizilbash* rebellions supported by Safavid State, which followed Shia Islam, pushed the Ottoman State to a more Sunni Islam, and Sunni Islam gained more official status in the state. Halvetiye Order, known for their close relationship with Beyazid II, gained more importance in that context. Their center, which was initially in Amasya, was moved to Istanbul at that time. As Selim I became the Sultan, Ulema’s criticism of Halvetiyye increased because of its association with the previous regime (Martin, 1978: 277).

In 1812, the Ottoman Empire released a law and took all the tariqas under state control and after the Tanzimat Era, an institution named Meclis-i Meshayikh was founded under the SheikhuIslam. In 1918 a regulation was published and all the tariqas in Istanbul were placed under Meclis-i Meshayikh and the ones in other parts of the Empire were placed under local Muftis. This regulation ended the financial and administrative autonomy of the orders (Ceyhan, 2011: 38).

## 4.2 Sufi Orders in Republican Era

One of the first things Mustafa Kemal did when he started his work for the Independence War was sending letters to the Sheikhs of tekkes in Anatolia. Tekkes contributed to the national struggle with all their potential. The first parliament founded in 1920 included many Sheikhs as members. In 1924, the Administration of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) was founded and dergahs were given under its control. In 1925, following the Sheikh Said rebellion all the dergahs were closed with “the law regarding the closure of tekkes and zawiyas and Turbes,” and Menemen Incident that took place shortly after the law was presented as a justification for the decision. Consequently, Diyanet was rendered the only institution with the authority to carry out any type of religious activity in the country (Ceyhan, 2011: 38). The law did not only enforce the closure of dergahs it also forbade (and still forbids) the use of religious titles such as Sheikh or Baba and veneration of shrines and tombs (See App. 1).

The reactions to the decision by the Sufis were threefold: those who obeyed the law and continued their lives with other engagements, those who opposed the law and resisted and those who believed that dergahs were not necessary for continuing Sufism and continued to do Sufi activities in an unofficial and disorganized way<sup>21</sup>. During the multiparty era starting in 1950, the rigid atmosphere against the tariqas was slightly softened, however most of those who were educated in the dergah system and had the qualification to be a Sheikh had passed away and due to the long interruption and oppression period the new Sheikhs did not have the necessary training and knowledge to lead an order (Kara, 2011: 113). Especially after the 1980s, the law banning Sufi activities was selectively applied; the state officials were attending the Mevlevi ceremonies in Konya, which was (and is) technically an illegal act. Eventually, it became like the case of Hat Law, it remained in the constitution but it was not enforced.

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<sup>21</sup> Ömür Efendi told me that in 1980s the Sheikh of Ömer Kerman in Edirne would take his disciples to the cinema, make them sit in the front row and sitting behind them he would lead the zikir and they would do zikir in the cinema when the film began and lights were off. If any of the disciples raised their heads to look at the film he would hit him with his stick. Ömür Efendi told this to explain that remembrance of Allah is part of human nature and cannot be removed with prohibitions (Personal Interview with Ömür Coşkundere, 03.01.2018, Üsküdar).

With the rise of Turgut Özal who had close contacts with İskenderpaşa Sufi community in the political hierarchy of Turkey, an era of relative visibility in the public sphere started for Sufi groups in Turkey in the late 1980s (Yaşarçı, 1996: 157). The funeral of famous Cerrahi Sheikh, Muzaffer Özak was an indication of this visibility. His body was buried in the Cerrahi dergah in Karagümrük with the permission from the Council of Ministries chaired by Özal. The permission was granted in one day (Milliyet, 16.12.1985). In the 1990s, Özal became the president of Turkey and in his era, the politicians banned from politics, such as Necmeddin Erbakan returned to Turkish political life. The conservative party founded by Necmeddin Erbakan under the name Refah Party won the elections and until the intervention of the military on 28 February 1998, the conservative and religious groups experienced a very comfortable period.

Despite the traumatic interruption of religious activities and practices in Turkey following the 28 February military intervention, after the rise of Justice and Development Party in 2002 a resurgence of the orders was observable. The elections results boosted the confidence of conservative Muslims. Furthermore, the availability of support from the state and the disappearance of the fear of persecution paved the way for more public activities for religious groups in a larger sphere of activity from media to education.

Following these developments, over the last fifteen years, attending Sufi lodges became a popular activity partly because of its representation in the popular culture and literature. Popular books by Elif Shafak and Ahmet Umit or Iskender Pala including plots and characters inspired from Sufism and Sufi elements in TV shows such as *Diriliş Ertugrul* or *Yunus Emre* rekindled the nostalgia about the spiritual activities of the past. 2007 was declared Year of Mevlana by UNESCO, which created interest in Rumi and his work not only in Turkey but also in other parts of the world. However, this did not bring back the classical dergah Sufism where a lifelong dedication was required. Instead, it created new forms of organizations and practices where the absolute authority of the sheikh as the spiritual leader lost its strength. A new type of “spare time” Sufism emerged especially among the middle-class urban class women who seek spiritual experiences with occasional participation and

without too much commitment (Hendrich, 2011: 4-8). At this point, we have to say that Naqshbandi orders are exceptional in that they still try to stick to the traditional ways and follow the sharia as much as possible. However, among Mevlevi, I personally have never seen a group who requires three-year dervish training or Halvetis who still do forty-day seclusion as part of their spiritual education.

All in all, although in a transformed and adapted and, in my opinion, secularized form, Sufism still prevails in Turkish religious culture and as Beatrice Hendrich states “Despite the state’s efforts to regiment the religious field, the field beyond the tutelage of the Diyanet keeps expanding and diversifying (Hendrich, 2011: 5).

### **4.3 Halvetiyye as An Order**

Throughout history each tariqa developed its own methods of taming the evil self (nafs) and spiritually educating and elevating their members. One common method was seclusion for a certain period of time in a dark room with little food and drink. Halvetiyye order gets its name from the word *halvet*, which means seclusion, because of the importance it gives to seclusion as a spiritual training method. Ebu Abdullah Ömer bin Ekmeleddun Geylani (1397), who later was called Ömer el Halveti, is accepted as the founder of the order. Ömer el Halveti was trained under his uncle in Harezm and he became famous for his long *halvet* (Konur 2000: 25). Although he is acknowledged as the founder of the order, Ömer el Halveti did not train successors and send to different parts of the world, therefore his order did not expand outside the Shirvan city in today’s Azerbaijan.

The person who systematized the order and helped spread it to different parts of the world was Yahya Shirvani (1463) who was called *pir-i sani* (the second founder) as a result. He scripturalized the code of the order and added five more *esma* (names) to the seven holy names recited in Halveti Zikr. And most importantly, he raised Sheikhs and sent them around the world in order to spread the Halveti way. He sent around 360 khalifs to different parts of the Muslim world and helped spread the order in Anatolia, Balkans, Middle East, North Africa, Central Africa, and South Asia (Ceyhan, 2015: 699). He was not only an ordinary Sufi Sheikh but also one of the pioneers of Sufi literature (Budak, 2014: 32). Yahya Shirvani was struggling against

the *batini* (esoteric) interpretation of Islam and defending sunni view (Rıhtım, 2013: 265). This is interesting because later orders following a *batini* reading of Islam will stem from halveti order, one of which is Gulsheniyye which is the topic of this study.

Halvetiyye is called factory of orders because more than fifty orders stemmed from it and it has the highest number of tekkes in Anatolia and Balkans (Ceyhan, 2015: 707). Halvetiyye spread especially among Turkish inhabitants of Anatolia via Yahya Shirvanis students and formed the basis of folk religion among Sunni Muslims in Anatolia. In the time of Beyazid II, the Halveti order was the strongest order in Istanbul as well. Throughout Ottoman Empire twenty-one ottoman Sultans were followers of Halveti order, which by itself indicates how influential the order was in the Empire (Budak, 2014). Furthermore, according to the report by the Council of Sufism in Egypt in 1980, the most prevalent order in Egypt is also Halvetiyye. According to the report the order is represented in Egypt with 19 sub-branches (Ceyhan, 2015: 709).

Hans Joachim Kissling was one of the first scholars to study the history of Halveti order. In his article, he gives detailed information about how Bayezid established a close relationship with a Halveti sheikh named Celebi Efendi and their cooperation enabled Bayezid to defeat his brother in the struggle for the throne and led Halvetiyye to be the most influential order in the Empire (Kissling, 1994: 28). Kissling actually implies that Halvetis were behind the assassination of Fatih Sultan Mehmet due to his disapproval of certain Halveti practices. Analyzing such claims is beyond the scope of this thesis but such a claim requires decisive evidence rather than personal opinion. His tone of describing the events happening in the era also gives the implication that the only concern of the order was gaining power, which does not fit into the Sufi character of Halvetis.

The Halveti teachings became more orthodox when the order get closer to the center of the Empire from the peripheral Anatolian cities. They started to write and publish treatises and books justifying and legitimizing their group zikr practices with music. Sumbul Sinan Efendi was one of the earliest sheiks of a Halveti tekke in Istanbul. He is renowned for his debates with scholars after Jumua prayers in central mosques. Being a sunni scholar himself, Sumbul Sinan Efendi knew how to defend the

practices in a language comprehensible to the Ulema of the time. Moreover, in his public preaches he would accuse the scholars of trying to win the Sultan's favor with attaching Sufis and according to Kissling, after this speech the next day eighteen scholars came to him and offered their loyalty (Kissling, 1994: 29).

After Bayezid II passed away his son Yavuz Sultan Selim came to power and the short time he ruled was not very favorable for Halvetis because being the only Ottoman Sultan who visited Makka and performed Hajj, Yavuz was strict about his sunni beliefs and practices. His disapproval of Halveti ways escalated to a point where he sent his men to destroy the central Halveti asitane (central tekke) to demolish it and use the stones to construct a kiosk for him. However, Sumbul Sinan Efendi scolded and dismissed those men fiercely and astonishingly Yavuz Sultan Selim did not insist on his intention but later he executed Koca Mustafa Pasha who was the most important patron of the order (Kissling, 1994: 30).

Kanuni Sultan Süleman's Era witnessed many new sub-branches of Halvetiye order opening in Istanbul. A Halveti Sheikh called Merkez Efendi was a very close friend of Kanuni and this helped them to become the most influential and powerful order in the Empire. However, when the Empire started to lose lands in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Halvetiyye also started to lose its power. The other orders such as Naqshibandiyya, Celvetiyye, and Kadiriyye started to ascend to power after that era (Karaatlı, 2006: 35).

#### **4.4 Ibrahim Gulsheni**

Ibrahim Gulsheni had a life of more than one hundred years with great influence in Sufism in all over the world. The tariqa he founded spread in Egypt, Istanbul, Diyarbakir, and Edirne during his lifetime. Later on, Gulsheni dergahs were opened in Alexandria, Makkah, Aleppo, Urfa, Damascus, Antalya, Bursa and Balkans.

Although we do not exactly know the year he was born most sources agree that it was around 1420s. There is even disagreement about whether he was born in Diyarbakir or Azerbaijan's Barda city. From *Amidi* nickname given to his father, we can conclude that he was originally from Diyarbakir (Azamat, 2000: 301). Despite

the fact that Diyarbakir's population was mainly Kurdish in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, no source refers to his probably Kurdish ethnicity (Emre 2017: 49). The main source of information about Ibrahim Gulsheni's life is written by his Muhyi who was a murid of Ibrahim Gulsheni's son. In his hagiography, Muhyi writes that Ibrahim Gulsheni himself claimed to be a descendant of Oghuz Ata, the forefather of House of Osman. This genealogy might have been attributed to him in order to increase his prestige and status in the eye of Ottoman people (Emre, 2017). Moreover, Uzun Hasan, the ruler of Aqqoyunlu State who protected Ibrahim Gulsheni also claimed to be descendent of Oghuz Ata.

As his father, who was an Islamic scholar himself passed away when Ibrahim was two years old, therefore his uncle who was a Sufi sheikh himself brought him up. At the age of fifteen, he left his home in order to study in Maveraunnehir. However, when he arrived in Tabriz he met Uzun Hasan's Kadiasker Molla Hasan who convinced him to stay with him and study in Tabriz. He finished his Madrasa education in Tabriz and was known as Molla Ibrahim. Upon a complaint about him, he was introduced to Aqqoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan and he gained his respect and trust to the point that he served as his private ambassador. At that time he was a very respected and valued man not only in the eye of the ruler but also among the people. Moreover, he became so wealthy that he sent five-hundred gold coins to his uncle as a gift (Konur 2000: 107).

The 16<sup>th</sup>-century hagiographer who gives the most detailed information, Muhyi informs that Ibrahim went through a period of *cezbe*<sup>22</sup> and gave away whatever he owned in the way of God. In such a psychological crisis he took a wine bottle in his hand and walked in public like a drunken person as a show of *melamet*<sup>23</sup>. This might be why Gulshenis in Selami Ali tell that their path has *melamet* in it and Melami order is close to theirs.

One day Uzun Hasan's brother Uveys comes to Tabriz with his unusual dervish outfit. When asked about which order this clothing belongs he replies that it is the order of Dede Ömer Rusheni and praises him. Uzun Hasan sends Ibrahim to Karabag

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<sup>22</sup> *cezbe* is a state of madness stemming from spiritual experiences.

<sup>23</sup> *Melamet* is doing something unislamic in public in order to tame your ego.



to invited Dede Ömer to Tabriz. His encounter with Dede Ömer marks the beginning of how Molla Ibrahim is going to turn into dervish Ibrahim. Although not immediately, Dede Ömer responds to the invitation and comes to Tabriz. Ibrahim's psychological crisis continues for sometime after Dede Ömer's arrival in Tabriz, despite that he must have continued his training because Dede Ömer declares him as the next Sheikh a few days before his death, and Ibrahim becomes the Sheikh of Halveti Rusheni order in Tabriz (Konur 2000: 109).

Due to political turbulence in Aqqoyunlu State Ibrahim and his family went through a tough time and he went to Hajj in 1495 with a great number of his followers and he met scholars from Egypt. Shortly after he came back to Tabriz, the city was taken over by Shah Ismail and Ibrahim left the city and moved to Diyarbakir with his family. He stayed there for five years until Diyarbakir was taken by Emir Bey who was a Turcoman ruler with an alliance to Safavids. He left for Maras, then moved on to Jerusalem where he did *erbain*<sup>24</sup> and continued to Egypt (Konur 2000: 118).

Egypt was ruled by Mamluk Sultan Kansu Gavri who welcomed the Sheikh and invited him to Cairo from his initial zawiya in another part of Egypt. In Cairo, Ibrahim visits all mosques in the city and decides to perform *erbain* in a mosque in Babuzuveyle district and later settled there. When Egypt was taken by Ottomans, Yavuz Sultan Selim visited him there and asked if he needed anything. Thereupon, Ibrahim requested that the land around Mueyyide Mosque be given to them and a *dergah* built for him there, which was accepted by the Sultan (Konur, 2000: 129).

During the reign of Kanuni Sultan Suleyman Ibrahim Gulsheni was summoned to Istanbul for an investigation despite his old age and his blind eyes. According to many historians, he was above one hundred years old when he came to Istanbul. Although some scholars believe that this was purely because of Pargali Ibrahim Pasha's personal grudge against him because when Ibrahim Pasha came to Cairo, Ibrahim Gulsheni did not personally go visit him but sent his son instead and the Pasha was offended by this (Konur 2000: 125). Another important factor that created suspicion about Ibrahim Gulsheni was his son Ahmed Hayali's marriage to Tomambay's wife after Tomambay passed away. Moreover, some of his followers

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<sup>24</sup> *Erbain* means forty in Arabic. It refers to staying in seclusion for forty days as a practice of spiritual training.

were soldiers and in general, his followers' were known for their extreme loyalty to the Sheikh which worried Istanbul that he might declare his sovereignty in Egypt. However, when he was being questioned in Istanbul the jury included Islamic scholars of the time who questioned his beliefs in an indirect way, which indicates that actually, an important accusation against the Sheikh was heresy<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, when he came to Istanbul for six months Ibrahim Pasha sent Şeyhülislâm Kemalpaşazâde, Fenârîzâde Muhyiddin Efendi and Kâdirî Efendi who were all scholars to attend his *sohbets* and find out if he is telling anything heretical. If it was only a fear of him declaring his sovereignty in Egypt, he would not have sent scholars, instead, ordinary informants would do the job. Eventually, the Sheikh successfully passed the investigation and interrogation and he gained the favor of Kanuni Sultan Suleyman who ordered that Sheikh's eyes be operated<sup>26</sup>. His eyes were healed and the Sheikh started to see again. He stayed in Istanbul for a while preaching in big mosques such as Hagia Sophia and when he was departing for Egypt the Sultan gave a banquet in his honor and he gave his farewell speech at Beyazid Mosque. He left his disciple Hasan Zarifi as his deputy in Istanbul who opened a Gulsheni dergah in the city (Muhyi-yi Gulsheni, 1982; Ocak 2016: 457).

#### 4.5 Gulsheniyye As a Tariqa

Gulsheniyye is a sub-branch of Halveti order's Rusheniye branch however, it gathered teachings and practices of several other orders in itself. As Sufism reached its peak in the thirteenth century with teachings of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi and Ibn al-Arabi, he did not add anything further to their teachings, but he adopted their teachings, therefore, his work was permeated with their influence.

His magnum opus Ma'nevi that consisted of forty thousand lines was a *nazire*<sup>27</sup> to Rumi's Mesnevi. A line in it indicates that Gulsheni dervishes were also reading

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<sup>25</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> century writer, Evliya Celebi also tells that he was summoned to Istanbul for Ebussuud's accusations of heresy and Shiaism (Seyahatname (1996 edition) 1:198).

<sup>26</sup> Ibrahim Gulsheni's audience with the Sultan was the theme of first drama of Turkish theater, written by Hayrullah Efendi.

<sup>27</sup> Nazire is a poem modeled after another poem in respect to both content and form.

Mesnevi<sup>28</sup>. Another poem by him named *Çobanname* was a translation of one of the stories in Rumi's Mesnevi. Many terms used in Gulsheni dergahs such as *asci dede*, *nevniyaz*, *meydan hizmeti* were all taken from Mevlevi terminology. It is a common belief among Gulshenis that Rumi foretold the emergence of Gulshenis in his Divani Kebir with two lines that included names Gulsheni and Rusheni. Moreover, Ibrahim Gulsheni had three more rooms added to his dergah so that it resembles Mevlevi dergahs (Konur, 2000: 122).

In a story narrated about how Ibrahim Gulsheni was saved from a dungeon in Cairo, we understand the sympathy of Gulsheniyye followers towards not only Mevlevi order but also Kalenderi and Haydari orders which are categorized as heterodox orders belonging to Iran-Khorasan school. The story tells that when Ibrahim Gulsheni was prisoned by Tomambay, Sultan Divani (a Mevlevi sheikh) took Mevlevi dervishes on his right side, and Kalenderi and Haydari dervishes on his left side came to Cairo to save Ibrahim Gulsheni (Güngör, 1982: 22).

Ibrahim Gulsheni also had *melamet* in his mystical teachings and practices (Konur, 2000: 75). Melamiyye is a movement which emphasizes privacy of piety and its adherents were known for committing sins publicly as a way of showing their imperfection as a way of self-blame which is the verbal meaning of *melamet* (Azamat, 2004: 25). In his biography, we read that during his training under Ömer Dede Rusheni, Ibrahim used to wear a lambskin on his head instead of a Sufi cap. This was a clear indication of *melamet* in Tabriz where such movements were prevalent. Abdalbaki Gölpinarli also draws on this similarity between Melamis and Gulshenis and he says this was not simply a resemblance in beliefs they were also closely networked to each other (Gölpinarli 1969: 215).

The parallelism between Gulsheniyye's interpretation of Ibn Arabi's Vahdet-i Vucud teaching and that of Melamiyye explains why Gulsheniyye was the only order that was accused of heresy though it was one of many orders that followed the same teaching (Emre 2014). An expert on dissident religious groups, Ahmet Yasar Ocak states that no other sub-branch of Halvetiyye had followers who were blamed for

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<sup>28</sup> "Gülşenî dervîşi güldür goncalardır Mevlevî / Bülbül-i şeydâ okur geh Mesnevî geh Ma'nevî."

heresy as many as Gulsheniyye. The only order that had such accusations more frequent than Gulsheniyye was Bayrami Melamiyye (Ocak, 2016: 394).

16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman clergy was not very fond of Halveti way of Zikr with music and *Sema*. Probably, that's why Ibrahim Gulsheni tried to avoid cities under Ottoman rule throughout his life and only became an Ottoman citizen when Egypt was taken over by Ottomans. The fatwa given by Chief Judge of Egypt, Civizade Muhyiddin Mehmed Efendi, against Ibrahim Gulsheni indicated that he was right in his avoidance. In that fatwa, Çivizade wrote that followers of Ibrahim<sup>29</sup> are disbelievers and heretics, they must be avoided, they cannot lead prayers and the animals they slaughter will not be halal to eat. Gulshenis took the case to Sheikhuislam Ebussuud Efendi, complaining about the fatwa. Ebussuud who would later give fatwas for executions of Gulsheni Sheikhs responded with a general response which did not directly say that they are not heretics.

...and the community and that the ones who practice according to the sacred canonical law and the ones who follow on the path of the followers of the predecessors, as it exists, are acceptable. Saying that they are from the path of Shaykh Ibrāhīm does not make blame and assault lawful and permissible on them (Ocak 2016: 396).

Shortly after this fatwa, however, during the lifetime of Ebussuud Efendi, a considerable number of Gulsheni disciples and Sheikhs were executed for heresy incriminations. Latifi, a contemporary ottoman author attributes this to the influx of new followers to the order without any restriction and control. He says those who fell into the “valley of heresy and legitimization” were not rejected from joining the order and so they took the name Gulshenis. Ostensibly, after the death of Ibrahim Gulsheni, the members started to show more extreme behaviors that created suspicion about them (Konur, 2000: 156), which culminated in the execution of one of their prominent Sheikhs Muhyiddin Mehmed el Hizir Karamani, which shocked Gulsheni followers of the time and made them to behave more cautiously (Emre, 2017: 240; Konur, 2000: 157).

Karamani's case is important to understand in order to have an idea about Gulsheni teachings at that time, or at least how Gulshenis were perceived in society. We have

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<sup>29</sup> In these Fatwas, Gulsheni followers were referred to as *Ibrahimpliler* (Ocak 2016).

the court records of the testimonies of ten witnesses in the court and the fatwa given against him by Ebussuud Efendi. Moreover, Muhyi-i Gulsheni was an eye witness of the incident and he details the case defending his fellow Gulsheni Sheikh. Ocak summarizes the accusations against the Sheikh by the witnesses as follows:

- a) *Vahdet-i Vucud*: The accusation related to *Wahdat al Wujud* worldview is the first one, in all testimonies. From them, we can conclude that the way Karamani interpreted and preached *Wahdat al Wujud* philosophy was similar to the one *Bedreddin-i Simavi* (Sheikh *Bedreddin*) preached and sounded very much like pantheism. One of the witnesses, *Vefai Dede*'s testimony roughly translates like this<sup>30</sup>:

... he attributes the universe to divinity and denies the multiplicity of beings. He gives the example of real existence saying *Zeyd*'s head is not *Zeyd*, his hands and feet are not *Zeyd*, his totality is *Zeyd*. When a calligrapher writes, he writes *elif* and it becomes *elif*, he writes *ba* and it becomes *ba*, however, all is ink in reality. Christians became disbelievers because they fixed divinity on three, we do not become disbelievers because we fix divinity on the whole existence (Ocak, 2016: 443).

This testimony is particularly relevant to this study because the example given by Karamani to explain *Vahdet-i Vucud* resonates with the examples I heard in *Gulsheni dergah* in *Selami Ali*. This indicates a certain level of continuity in the narrative of the order despite years of gap between the two Sheikhs and despite the long interruption of Sufi activities by the state. The following accusation gives away the *Gulsheni* approach to the belief in resurrection followed by the order which bears similarities with that of *Gulshenis* in *Selami Ali*:

- b) *Resurrection*: According to the testimonies of the witnesses the Sheikh denied the notion of resurrection and he would ask "who came from the other side and informed you about it?" (Ocak 2016: 404).

Except for what he said about the Prophets and his superiority over other people, the quotations from the sheikh resonates with what I personally heard during the *sohbets* in *Gulsheni dergah*. In defense of Karamani, Muhyi tells that Ebussuud's fatwa was because of his jealousy of Karamani which started because of a student who left Ebussuud Efendi's lectures to attend Karamani's *sohbets*. A point in favor of Muhyi's claim is that although Ottoman judges usually utilized Hanafi interpretation of the law while dealing with heresy cases, Ebussuud Efendi gave his fatwa according to Maliki School (Emre, 2017; Ocak, 2016; Konur 2000).

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<sup>30</sup> Translation by the author, Tursun, H.

Although not mentioned in the case of Karamani, a common criticism against the Gulshenis was their Zikr and Sema ceremonies in the fashion of *Kizilbash Jams* and where the disciples would be drawn into ecstasy and allegedly during the lifetime of Ibrahim Gulsheni they would prostrate before him. Moreover, calling God with the pronoun “hu or huve” was perceived as changing the name of God. However, as Side Emre detected the role of ritual practices of *devran*<sup>31</sup> and *sema* in the matters of heresy were not consistent in the Ottoman Era (Emre, 2017: 271).

#### 4.6 Sezaiyye

The Gulshenis in Selami Ali follows the Sezaiyye sub-branch of Gulsheni order. Founded by Hasan bin Gulsheni, also known as Hasan Sezai, (d. 1738) in Edirne. Hasan Sezai is known for his *Mektubat*, the compilation of his letters to his family members, his followers, Ottoman administrators, scholars indicating that in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gulsheni order established a vast network which included Ottoman officials. His order spread mostly around Edirne and his shrine in Edirne is a common *ziyaret*<sup>32</sup> destination for the Gulshenis of Selami Ali.

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<sup>31</sup> A way of performing *zikir* with music, in circles and standing

<sup>32</sup> a type of minor pilgrimage where sacred places are visited.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MAKING OF A SAINT: CHARISMATIZATION AND LEGITIMIZATION

#### 5.1 Kenan Saldak: The Founder

Gulsheni order was initiated in Selami Ali by Kenan Saldak in 1989. All my informants agreed that there was no active Sufism in the neighborhood until that date. However, as Ömür Efendi informed me that there was a culture of or dedicating newborn babies to the dead Sheikhs buried in Selami Ali. He narrated:

My grandmother used to take my brother Ömer to Feyzullah Efendi's tomb and revolve him around the tomb and say about my brother "Ömer is tied to Feyzullah Efendi." You see people were coming from a culture of being tied to a place. They were people of the Republic but they grew up with Ottoman Culture.<sup>33</sup>

The narrative indicates that although there was not an organized Sufi activity going on in the district, the residuals of Ottoman Sufi culture were still present. Kenan Efendi revived these faded feelings from the ashes and established the order almost from scratch.

Kenan Efendi<sup>34</sup> was born in Sarıköy town of Sakarya in 1952. He is neither a Tekkekapılı nor a Bandırmalı yet he is Romani himself. He came to Istanbul at a young age, initially lived in Gultepe where another Romani community of Istanbul lives, then comes to Selami Ali. He used to work as a street seller. He was an active communist therefore when the 1980 military coup took place he escaped to Sakarya and hid there for a while. He burns all his leftist books but this does not save him from getting arrested. His wife who was working in a military officer's house as a cleaner, tells the situation to the officer and he saves him from the prison and sends him to Yalova with his personal jeep. He stays in Yalova one week and comes back to Selami Ali.

From his pre-Islamic lifestyle, we can see that he was always an intellectual man. A detail in the narration above might be normal for an ordinary person, yet having so many books at home for a Romani man who works as a street seller in 1980s is an

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<sup>33</sup> Personal interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 01.03.2018, Üsküdar.

<sup>34</sup> Kenan Saldak will be referred to as Kenan Efendi.

extraordinary situation. This intellectual endeavor by him was well known by the community and as one of the superior qualities of him. Ömür Efendi narrated from him that he was able to finish one book in a night. While telling me this, Efendi expresses his bewilderment by saying “can you imagine that! Imagine a man who reads one book a night!” He also praises his intelligence and ability to understand things quickly which he says enabled him to be able to talk non-stop for hours. Ömür Efendi narrated:

He was a man of Ibrahim-nature, I mean he was very clever, very smart, I mean his ability of comprehension was very high when he listened to something he would take it into his memory and add to it. He had a side like that. He used to say himself, he would say if I sow one into ikhwan (brothers) I want to harvest ten. Because he was like that, that is when he was sown one, he would sprout ten. He was very smart. I used to tell myself that if he had a text in his text he can speak ten minutes, twenty minutes then when the text is over he would have to stop talking. Where does he find so much talk? I used to wonder from where does so much talk come to him. Later I realized that he was telling (describing) himself<sup>35</sup>.

Although he learned the basics of Sufism from Ömer Efendi<sup>36</sup>, he did not suffice with that knowledge. He added to his knowledge of Sufism through books. A disciple of him who was with him during these early stages told me that when he first became a Sufi and came to the neighborhood, Kenan Efendi searched the bookstores of Istanbul for 20-25 days in order to find Hasan Sezai’s Divan, and eventually found it in a small bookstore. His son also reported that one day his father asked him to read Seyyid Muhammed Nur al-Arabi’s<sup>37</sup> book so that they can tell it to people. Here we see that he also applied to Melami sources to find things to share during his sohbet, probably because he was aware of the connections between the two tariqas.

Another text he was reading and giving out his disciples was the little booklet named Haqq and Human<sup>38</sup> written by Ömer Efendi. This was a 17 pages pamphlet back then, and a tiny book now including basics of Vahdet-i Vucud and bits of advice and warnings to Sufis with quotations from Sufi poetry. Ömer baba is said to have told his followers that he would leave a book to his followers when he dies, this book will

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<sup>35</sup> Personal interview with Ömür Coşkundere in 01.03.2018, Üsküdar.

<sup>36</sup> Ömer Kerman (d.1983) was the Gulsheni Efendi in Edirne who caused the conversion of Kenan Efendi to Islam and taught him Sufism.

<sup>37</sup> A 19th century Melami Efendi, known as the founder of third era of Melamiyye.

<sup>38</sup> Hak ve İnsan



make it unnecessary for them to look for a Murshid<sup>39</sup>. He also recorded his reading of the book in a cassette and Kenan Efendi had one copy of it too.<sup>40</sup>

Another friend and disciple of Kenan Efendi informed me that even when he was a member of DEVGENC, a communist organization in Turkey in the 1980s, he was responsible for brainwashing people, because he was very good at convincing people, and even back then all he wanted was equality for people. During those years, when he was given a big amount of money by a rich person he did not keep any of it; he gave it out to poor people around him. Even after he became an Efendi, tells my informant, he never asked us to call him that way. If someone addressed to him as Efendi, he would always say “We are friends, we are brothers.”

The story of how he became a Sufi himself is one of the common narrations circulating among his followers. During my interviews, I was told two versions of the story with overlapping parts and differing details. The one Kenan Efendi’s son, Cengiz Saldak told me is as follows:

Kenan Efendi was a passionate communist and atheist before he encountered Ömer Efendi in Sakarya. Ömer Efendi was normally based in Edirne, but that week he came to Sakarya to visit his *murid* Salih Efendi who was a Romani Sufi too. Upon hearing that an Islamic preacher came there, Kenan Efendi goes to the sohbet in order to refute him in front of people and block his propaganda. While Ömer Efendi is giving his speech about God, Kenan Efendi objects to him saying “There is no such God!” Upon this Ömer Efendi responds: “My son, I am also telling that there is no such God.” At first, Kenan Efendi thinks Ömer Efendi is also a communist, disguised as a preacher trying to turn people away from religion but later during the sohbet Ömer Efendi throws an ashtray in front of him and asks him “does this have a maker?” And when he responds affirmatively another question follows “Do you never look at the mirror?” meaning that how can you be without a maker if that ashtray cannot. That day Kenan Efendi comes home and tells my mom that he wants to make Wudhu (ablution).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This statement is significant for telling us about the function of Murshid for Ömer Efendi: merely a transmitter of knowledge. A book or a cassette could do the same thing therefore he said it wouldn’t be necessary for them to look for a Murshid. Although this statement sounds very contrarian to general teachings of Sufism, we have to interpret in the transforming world of Ömer Efendi where Sufism was banned and gathering around a Murshid could be prosecuted, therefore he might have come up with this solution to spread the knowledge without having to gather around a person.

<sup>41</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 01.05.2019, Üsküdar.

Ömür Efendi's version of the story is as follows:

Kenan Efendi was introduced to Ömer Efendi during his military service by someone named Bedri. When he meets Ömer Efendi, Kenan Efendi says “ don't tell me about God, I do not believe in him.” Ömer Efendi responds, “I do not believe in him, either.” Seeing that Kenan Efendi is surprised, he continues, “My son we do not believe in the God up there, but we believe in the God in human.” Kenan Efendi was impressed by this answer. Later, during the sohbet Ömer Efendi shows his hand and says “look, my son, if there is a shadow there must be the reality too, we are shadows of God, and God is our reality. “ Kenan Efendi later told me that he felt very overwhelmed by emotions after listening to this and he wanted to perform *salah*.<sup>42</sup>

An essential element of such religious groups is such legends regarding the founding fathers of the orders. As Vincent Crapanzano, who studied the Hamadsha order in Morocco, states such “legends create wonder and awe in the individual and affirm the position of the saint, whose role is of central importance in the lives of his devotees” (Crapanzano 1973: 31). He also adds that “the legendary versions of a single saint's life vary from region to region, from individual to individual, from circumstance to circumstance.” Despite the fact that Kenan Efendi's conversion took place in the 1980s and he passed away only twelve years before I carried out these interviews, the varieties of the story have already been developed. This might have stemmed from the lack of written recording of the events among the Gulshenis and/or from the schism in the order after his death. The two sides might be emphasizing different sides of the story. The former version focuses on logical proof of the existence of God, and the latter focuses on the effectiveness of Vahdet-i Vucud's message.

Eventually, Kenan Efendi becomes a *murid* of Ömer Efendi and visits him every weekend in his shop and learns about Sufism and comes to Selami Ali as a Sufi and starts to share his knowledge with people. He starts his preaches first outdoors for some years then people opened their houses for the gatherings. Later a coffee house named Gulshen Tea House was rented and eventually dergahs of different sizes opened for the sohbet, zikirs and other activities. It seems that Kenan Efendi first ensured that there is an audience, a body of followers before he opens his dergah. By

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<sup>42</sup> Personal interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 01.03.2018, Üsküdar.

the time when the first dergah was opened the number of his disciples had reached sixty.<sup>43</sup>

However, he was well aware that not all the people there were attending the dergah with the same intention. He actually categorized the people present in dergah gatherings in three groups: those who are there for passing time and escaping from their wife and children, those who come for tea and zikir, and those who come there for Allah. He would say those who come for Allah would stay, therefore he would start his special and private sohbet after midnight. He would refer to that particular group as “my 27-degree group<sup>44</sup>”, which is a phrase whose meaning is still unclear to me. This inner circle of elite disciples would later act as the heirs to the order after the passing of the Sheikh and work as the early recruiting elite during the establishment of the order.<sup>45</sup>

A peculiar characteristic of Selami Ali Romani community is, and maybe all Roma communities are their fondness of addressing people with nicknames. I observed that this creates a communal spirit and helps with strengthening associational ties. Kenan Efendi was called Çavuş by the people in Selami Ali. Çavuş means sergeant or non-com in the army, yet he did not have that rank in the army. According to his son, the reason he was given that nickname was his ability to organize people well. Among the Romani Sufi community in Sakarya, he was called Kara Sultan<sup>46</sup> (Black Sultan) as a reference to his dark complexion.

In many Sufi schools, Efendi, Baba, Sheikh, Murshid are not only guides in the way to reach God, but they are also compassionate father figures protecting and providing for their children. The word *evlad*<sup>47</sup> is often used in the meaning of followers or disciples of a Sheikh. Kenan Efendi’s son, Cengiz Saldak, tells an anecdote from his father’s life, which indicates that the spiritual children were more important than his biological children. One day through the end of his life, Kenan Efendi wakes up from sleep and says “bring me my children, there are things I have to tell them.” We went

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<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with Yaşar Münir. 04.13.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>44</sup> Personal Interview with Cengiz Saldak 05.01.2018, Üsküdar

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>46</sup> Kara means black or dark in Turkish.

<sup>47</sup> Children

to him, he said “No, my real children, I saw the Pir in my dream, he said you wasted a lot of time of ikhwan,” Then we invited ikhwan and he made a sohbet on nothingness. Cengiz Saldak remembers another episode from his childhood where his father gives out everyone a piece of paper with a lesson written on it for ikhwan to memorize. He skips his own son and says “ I cannot give him until he wants it, he will have to demand it.<sup>48</sup>” He was teaching his followers the place he gives them by this way. The bond between him and his disciples is superior to biological connection and one gets the blessing with merit, no other way.

This compassionate father image permeates through most of the narrations about him. A recurring anecdote told me by multiple informants from his life is related to his self-sacrifice to be with his followers. Kenan Efendi was diagnosed with lung cancer and he was in such a severe condition through the end of his life that he was unable to walk. Despite that, he asked his family members to carry him to dergah in order to carry out the “duty that was bestowed on him.” Later, I learned that there were some problems in the dergah during those days that was heading towards its dispersion and closure. He went to the dergah in such a condition to save it, “to keep its fire alive.”

If someone skipped the sohbet several times, Kenan Efendi would go and bring him to dergah from his home or from a coffee house. He would follow his disciples like a father follows his children. “Efendi is a father, a mother, he has the manifestation of Rahman and Rahim on him<sup>49</sup>.” says one of close friends and disciples.

Kenan Efendi went through tests like many saints and successfully passed them, proving his merit for the position. His conversion was not just a philosophical one, his old friends with whom he drank, struggled for their cause and grew up together could not accept his change. They would come to the dergah drunken and invite him back to his old lifestyle, they would even shout and cry<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, he was invited to join Cerrahi order by their Sheikh, Sefer Dal, and offered a lot of material support, yet in spite of his extreme financial problems, he turned it down saying “ I would

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<sup>48</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>49</sup> Personal interview with Yaşar Münir. 13.04.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>50</sup> Personal interview with Recep Karasakal. 13.04.2019, Üsküdar.

come if you can show me my Efendi.” He would not go to work because of his work to illuminate people and he was in extreme poverty all his life.<sup>51</sup> This also signifies the acknowledgment of Kenan Efendi’s superior qualities by other orders’ elites and approves his legitimate position with the confirmation of a well-respected Cerrahi sheikh, not only by his followers.

Ibn Khaldun also alludes to the poverty of men of religion and provides two explanations for it, one of which is in accordance with how my informants explained the causes of Kenan Efendi’s poverty. Ibn Khaldun states that:

Furthermore, because the things (the religious officials) have to offer are so noble, they feel superior to the people and are proud of themselves. Therefore, they are not obsequious to persons of rank, in order to obtain something to improve their sustenance. In fact, they would not have time for that. They are occupied with those noble things they have to offer and which tax both the mind and the body. Indeed, the noble character of the things they have to offer does not permit them to prostitute themselves openly. They would not do such a thing. As a consequence, they do not, as a rule, become very wealthy (Muqaddimah V: 7).

An important episode in the life of Kenan Efendi is his fall out with Salih Efendi of Sakarya. My informants from Sakarya reported that if someone came to visit Kenan Efendi from Salih Efendi’s group there, he would get very angry to the point of banishing them from attending his dergah. He was not as eloquent in speech as Kenan Efendi, yet he had his own special aura and as we see in the narrative of their separation, his interpretation of Vahdet-i Vücut was the as that of Kenan Efendi.

The problem between him and Salih Baba... Kenan Efendi used to taste <sup>52</sup>Vahdet-i Vücut in a very internalized manner. He would say ‘today there are those who taste it better than Muhyiddin-i Arabi but they don’t say it due to edeb (respect). He used to mean himself. He was not after fame. He would say ‘we don’t want a horde like a shepherd.’ He once said there is Allah, there isn’t anything else. Salih Efendi said ‘there are Jinns, there is verse in the Quran.’ Whether they have a separate existence or not was the point of dispute. A week before Kenan Efendi’s death, Salih Efendi’s ikhwan came to him. They said ‘Salih Efendi opened a path for himself, what would happen if you just said Jinns exist and not separate us.’ My dad got very angry. He told mom to put a towel at his back. He said “ I am already dying, do you want me to commit shirk while I am dying. There is God, nothing else.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>52</sup> The Sufis I interviewed usually use the phrase “zevk etmek” i.e to taste instead of to understand.

<sup>53</sup> Personal Interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

This incident indicates that he internalized the *Wahdat al-Wujud* weltanschauung so deeply that he could sacrifice his relationship of his close friend and fellow Gulsheni brother Salih Efendi for a small detail related to it. Those who loved both sides told me that Salih Efendi was like Shams, full of spirituality that actually kindled the fire in Kenan Efendi who was like Rumi full of eloquence and beautiful depiction of the truth.

The first organized crowded public occasion of the Selami Ali Gulshenis was the funeral of Kenan Efendi. As it is the case with funerals of many Sheiks, his funeral was an impressive public event that made many people aware of his importance and brought new members to his order. A lady I interviewed confirmed this saying that she decided to join the group after witnessing the funeral of Kenan Efendi and experiencing a sort of spiritual awakening. Kenan Efendi's son informs that the very crowded funeral influenced people and they started to regret that they had not noticed such a *veli*<sup>54</sup>. Those who knew Efendi started to tell his stories in coffee houses after the event. We learn that even some Alevis came to offer their condolence. One such Alevi man lamented saying “ Oh the dark boy, you had Ali and Muhammed in you. This must have impressed people because they still remembered this detail vividly.<sup>55</sup>

Drawing on the death of Saint Salama in Egypt, Micheal Gilsenan states that the disappearance of the physical presence of a saint may actually not influence his role in a tariqa (1973: 44). The shrine he is buried or the *dergah* he founded continues to serve as the concentration center of his power and function as a representation of his presence. Moreover, the death of a saint usually strengthens his spiritual position because miracles attributed to him becomes even wider and more of them than not those who were not regarded as a saint begins to be treated as one after their demise. The narrative of the post-funeral realization of Kenan Efendi's value in Selami Ali confirms this point. Even when his followers get together every year to commemorate his death anniversary, part of the ritual-like program is to gather in a place and tell memories and stories of Kenan Efendi. As one would expect, these are stories reifying his spiritual superiority and strengthening his position.

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<sup>54</sup> a holy man; a saint.

<sup>55</sup> Personal interview with Recep Karasakal. 14.03.2019, Üsküdar.

Gilsenan binds the post-mortem perpetuation of the saint's role to the following conditions:

However, it must be reasserted that the continuation of his reputation, its growth or diminution, and the ensuring of the viability of the organization founded by him are crucially affected by other external and internal factors. This particularly involves the transmission of authority, and processes of maintenance and control within the tariqa; the nature and function of its teachings and the activities demanded of the committed; the relation of these to the wider social situation; and finally the continued relevance of the ethic and ideology of the group to what Kari Mannheim has called the collective purposes of the time (Gilsenan 1973: 44).

Even though the services offered and the activities demanded from the newly founded Gulsheni dergah was relevant to the Selami Ali community after the demise of its founder, the first condition i.e the smooth transmission of authority was not ensured during the lifetime of the Sheikh, therefore his death caused a crisis of succession and eventually a schism within the order. This is a common trait of most of the movements whose foundation is ensured by a leader relying on charismatic authority because as Jennifer Epley points out in such authorities the focus is on the present moment and "charismatic leadership, therefore, carries within itself its own demise for it cannot last forever. There are eventually problems with the routinization and succession of charisma" (Epley, 2015: 8). In the case of Gulshenis the routinization of the order, which would result in a bureaucratization of the authority and management, did not take place very efficiently either and consequently, after Kenan Efendi's death, the order went through a period of crisis. Kenan Efendi must have noticed this need around the end of his life because as we learn from his son, through the end of his life he combined pages from books teaching how to make ghusl (ablution), how to perform *namaz* and the stages of *nafs*.

The life of Kenan Saldak can be divided into three parts. First, his pre-Islamic atheist and communist period which was still an endeavor for good in a different way, because he was fighting social injustice and trying to create an equal world for people.<sup>56</sup> The second phase of his life begins with his conversion to Islam which started his training in Sufism under Ömer Efendi while he was doing his military service in Edirne. He did not rely only on the sohbet of Ömer Efendi to gather knowledge and started to read books and listen to cassettes to increase his knowledge

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<sup>56</sup> Personal interview with Yaşar Münir. 14.03.2019, Üsküdar.

of Sufi teachings. This is the gestation period of his Sheikh self. His inborn qualities of philanthropism and thirst for knowledge, which were manifested in his previous lifestyle, were channeled towards the Sufi path. Now he was reading books on Sufism instead of Communism and was trying to help humanity not via leftist activities but by spreading the spiritual wisdom he gained. This endeavor of sharing led to the third phase of his life as a Sufi sheikh, as an Efendi in the Gulsheni jargon.

The final step of such a process would normally be the delegation of his authority to the elite members of the order and send them to different places to function as his proxy and found their own dergahs but this did not take place. He expressed his regret when a disciple of Naci Efendi from Bursa came to visit him. Kenan Efendi gave him a book to take to Naci Efendi and said, “tell him that we could not raise a Gulsheni in Uskudar<sup>57</sup>”. This is an implication to his failure of transferring his authority to the next Efendi who would ideally be trained by him.

## **5.2 Legitimization of Authority**

The master and disciple relationship between the *murshid* (master) and the *murid* (disciple) is an essential part of Sufi orders. The ones who enter the path of tariqa naturally acknowledge the authority of the *murshid* in order to release one’s self and reach union with God under the guidance of the one who had already passed the stages of the Sufi path and realized that, because although everyone has the potential quality of union with God but it cannot be uncovered without a guide who is called *murshid* in the Sufi lexis. Absolute submission to the *murshid* is a necessary part of this journey. The *murid* must be in the hands of his murshid like the corpse in the hands of the washer of the dead (Trimingham 1971: 29).

The importance of finding a murshid is a common subject mentioned during sohbet in the current dergah. The murshid is venerated in the Gulsheni order as chosen servants of God for illuminating people. The current Efendi of the order used the phrase ‘God’s servants who are on duty are working in the streets.’ while he was describing the days when Kenan Efendi was doing his sohbet outside in the early

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<sup>57</sup> Personal Interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.



days. This statue of being chosen and charged with the task awakening people needs to be proven with extraordinary, sometimes even supernatural acts. Such attributes are absolutely necessary in order to establish a Charismatic leadership in a Weberian sense who defines charisma as:

[A] certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader (1978: 328).

In the Sufi context, such extraordinary attributes are called *keramets*. *Keramets* are graces of God to a *murshid* that distinguishes him from ordinary people and legitimizes his authority. What exactly constitutes a *keramet* is not certain, different religious and social groups define it differently (Atacan 1990: 73). Analyzing the *keramet* narratives about Sheikh Salama Ibn Hassan, Micheal Gilsenan concludes that people belonging to different educational and social groups narrate different qualities or deeds of the late sheikh as *keramet*. Educated people focus on the learning and qualities of his character while less educated ones would focus on supernatural phenomena like dreams and hearing his voices (Gilsenan 1973: 34).

In the Sufi literature, there is a separate genre of books telling about the *keramets* of Sufi masters. These are called *menakibname* in Turkish, meaning short stories narrating *keramets* (Konur, 2000: 92). The Gulsheni order acknowledges the existence of such supernatural attributes in the Sufi masters, which can be understood from the *menakibname* of Ibrahim Gulsheni written by one of his son's disciples named Muhyi. Some examples of those *keramets* attributed to Ibrahim Gulsheni are that his birth was foretold in the *Mesnevi* book of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi in a poem; he talked wisdom when he was a baby; he possessed the knowledge of unseen which enable him to foretell the future events; he could subjugate wild animals; when someone harmed him they would be immediately punished with a catastrophe; he could heal the sick; he had extraordinary poetical ability and so on (Konur, 2000: 92-104).

The common discourse on *keramets* among the Selami Ali Gulshenis is that they should not be too much focused, they might happen as a grace of God but they can

distract someone too because people might think of themselves more than who they actually are and end up in arrogance. One should not look for them but if it happens should be thankful. Cengiz Saldak informs that sometimes the novice member can smell beautiful fragrances or when he is in trouble he can be extraordinarily saved and such states might boost his ego; therefore Kenan Efendi would always deemphasize their significance.

In the case of Kenan Efendi, the most commonly narrated exceptional quality he possessed was his extraordinary knowledge of very sophisticated philosophical matters and his beautiful eloquence that one could listen for hours and not get bored. However, what makes these qualities even more astonishing is the fact that he is a primary school graduate, a Romani man with no formal education. An anecdote his son narrates is meaningful in explaining that Kenan Efendi was aware that as a Romani person with a dark complexion he was not expected to know about any profound matters. Cengiz Saldak narrated:

How can a primary-school-graduate Romani become so profound? One day a journalist comes. He asks questions and Efendi answers. He asks and Efendi answers. He says I have visited so many dergahs, Such as thing can't happen! Efendi says, "you say this can't happen because I am a Romani with a dark face. This is Allah's miracle. Maybe because he was combining his political period with Sufism in 93s he was talking about black holes. He was giving sohbet about the breath we take in our mouth that finds life and changes while exiting. Nobody knew about things like black holes in those days. He had to explain things with very nice examples because of people's level."<sup>58</sup>

The same is true for the current Efendi, Ömür Coşkundere. Almost all the attendants of the dergah that I interviewed told me that one of the things that impressed them most was the unexpected depth and eloquence of the sohbet given in a Romani neighborhood by a Romani person. "It was like a fairy tale," told me one of my informants, "a primary school graduate in a Romani neighborhood is making sohbet on tevhid, Vahdet-i Vucud and tasawwuf". I personally experienced the same astonishment especially regarding the vast vocabulary he uses. Both from the classical Sufi lexis of the Ottoman era, and from the modern philosophical words that even many educated people would know.

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<sup>58</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

A sohbet usually takes place for around three hours. And as I observed Efendi never runs out of things to talk about or pauses, which was another impressive phenomena for me, and as he told me during an interview, Ömür Coşkundere himself was also astounded about the length of time Kenan Efendi could preach without looking at any books or notes.

I used to say to myself 'If he had a text in his hands, he could only talk that much. He could talk twenty minutes then when the text is over he would have to stop. Where does he find so much talking? Where do all these talks come to him; I used to wonder. But later, I understood that he was talking about himself. Yunus Emre talked about himself with mountains and stones, and birds at dawn. However, because he took himself away, he talked about God Almighty. But God was in Yunus, not somewhere outside Yunus. Therefore, I mean those who reached that level of fineness of Sufism can talk for days even if they don't have a book in their hands. Why? Because if trees were pens and seas were ink Lord's knowledge cannot finish. Then where is the Lord? Lord is the *murshid-i kamil* himself. That is, when God starts to tell about himself through humans, when he starts to talk you cannot stop him because His knowledge does not finish<sup>59</sup>.

As we understand from these statements, it is God himself speaking through the murshid. We should not think this is peculiar to Sheiks, according to Vahdet-i Vucud worldview it is actually God speaking and acting through all of us, however, what makes the speech endless in the speech of the Sheikh is the fact that God is speaking about his qualities and his knowledge, which is infinite.

The fact that Kenan Efendi had a gestation period during which he might have learned all these information does not contradict with his charismatization, because as Weber explains, there is a type of charisma which can be produced artificially through some extraordinary means. However even then, "it is assumed that charismatic capability can be developed only in which the germ already existed but would have remained dormant unless "awakened" by some ascetic or other means." Kenan Efendi had the inborn talent of being able to learn quickly and convince people with his speech even when he was an atheist, so he had the "germ" which was awakened through Ömer Efendi's intervention and his self-studies.

A friend and disciple of Kenan Efendi, Yaşar Münir, told me this when I asked him about Kenan Efendi's Keramets:

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<sup>59</sup> Personal Interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 03.01.2018, Üsküdar.

About Keramet, it was like this sultanım,<sup>60</sup> after he passed away his keramets started to be apparent. He said when he was 40 ‘if I pass through 51, I can live until 80.’ He passed away at the age of 51. He would always say ‘ Sons do not focus too much keramets, stories of flyings and so on. Of course, Allah shows it. The biggest keramet is taming your nefis. Beauties (meaning keramets) would occur from Çavuş but he would always hide.

For example, we would see dreams. We would see *mana*<sup>61</sup>. He would not give much importance to *mana*. He used to say “focus on reality. Such things (dreams) are nice, they are letters. Allah knows where your nefis is. Although he would not pay much attention to keramets, manifestations would take place. A beautiful side of Çavuş was his always focusing on knowledge and he slowly started to awaken the quarter<sup>62</sup>.

An educated disciple of Ömür Efendi told me another type of keramet calling them fantastic things:

You come here with a question in mind, suddenly you see that *sohbet* has that topic! This arouses curiosity. But after a while, it stops. Because now you are expected to experience, not focusing too much on such things. Or for example, you see a lot of things in your dreams. When I first came here, you can ask other friends too, a person sees dreams, I mean very different dreams are seen. However, in the education system coming from Kenan Efendi rather than progressing according to dreams... They are envelopes, I mean letters but don't get too obsessed with them. They should be something for you but you must focus on your progress in your life.<sup>63</sup>

The emphasis on the occurrence of keramet to the newcomer or novice was also visible in Cengiz Saldak's account. Karamet is known as a dangerous phenomenon that might distract its performers from the real purpose of their path and even cause a type of *shirk* if it becomes the aim of worship (Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah). According to Imam Rabbani the saints who do not show keramet might be superior to the ones who do because as both Gulsheni interviewees stated its main function is to encourage the person and increase their faith, therefore if someone already has a high level of faith they would not need to witness a keramet (Mektubat, 293). In conclusion, the de-emphasis of Gulshenis regarding the keramets has its background in the vast Sufi literature.

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<sup>60</sup> This is a common way of addressing one another among the Gulsheni community. It means ‘my sultan.’

<sup>61</sup> *Mana* originally means meaning. Gulshenis refer to dreams with that word.

<sup>62</sup> Personal Interview with Yaşar Münir. 14.03.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>63</sup> Personal Interview with Meryem Hanim. 26.01.2019, Üsküdar.

However, dreams are traditionally an important part of Halveti order. Niyazi-i Mısri, a Halveti *pir* wrote a book about the meanings of dreams. Traditionally, the Efendi interprets the dream of the *murid* and assigns him *wird* or other works accordingly. Kenan Efendi was not denying the importance of dreams but he would also not encourage dealing too much with them. He would say “ If I fly a plane in my dream, would anyone let me fly it when I wake up in the morning?” which means that although they are helpful for motivation of a *murid*, one should not rely too much on them because they do not have much relevance to the real life. The example he gives also implies that a disciple should not claim to have a higher position than others, or claim to have reached the level of *murshid* due to a dream, the pilot in Kenan Efendi’s metaphor resembles a *murshid*’s position because both lead people to a certain direction.

Once I witnessed a lady from Gulsheni dergah telling her dream casually to Ömür Efendi and she asked if it is a sign that her faith increased and Efendi simply confirmed. Seeing this when I asked him about dreams and their importance he gave me this answer:

Dreams turn a person inside out. Their identity, their sicknesses... It shows them all. But we cannot judge people looking at their dreams. At the end of the daydreams show what people keep in their subconscious. Then *sohbet* according to it is needed... chat (*muhabbet*) is needed. For example, while gold represents love of the world in other schools, in Hasan Sezai it means spiritual values. For example, entering a gold store and buying golds indicates that the consciousness of that person’s *nafs* has risen; that spiritual shopping has happened. For example in Hasan Sezai, strolling in bazaars means playing with your *nafs*<sup>64</sup>.

The role of dreams, according to his account, are very similar to their role in Freudian psychoanalysis. They are windows to the subconscious and based on them a competent person can diagnose a person’s spiritual state and the medicine they need.

Miracles in Islam are God’s confirmations of the authenticity and legitimacy of a person’s message. *Keramet*’s have the same role in legitimizing the message and authority of a Sheikh. However, with the effect of modernization the definition of

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<sup>64</sup> Personal Interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 04.02.2019, Üsküdar.

keramets transformed from supernatural incidents such as healing the sick or being in multiple places at the same time to more subtle and ordinary things like being able to attract people of high social status around him or giving good advice (Atacan, 1990: 74).

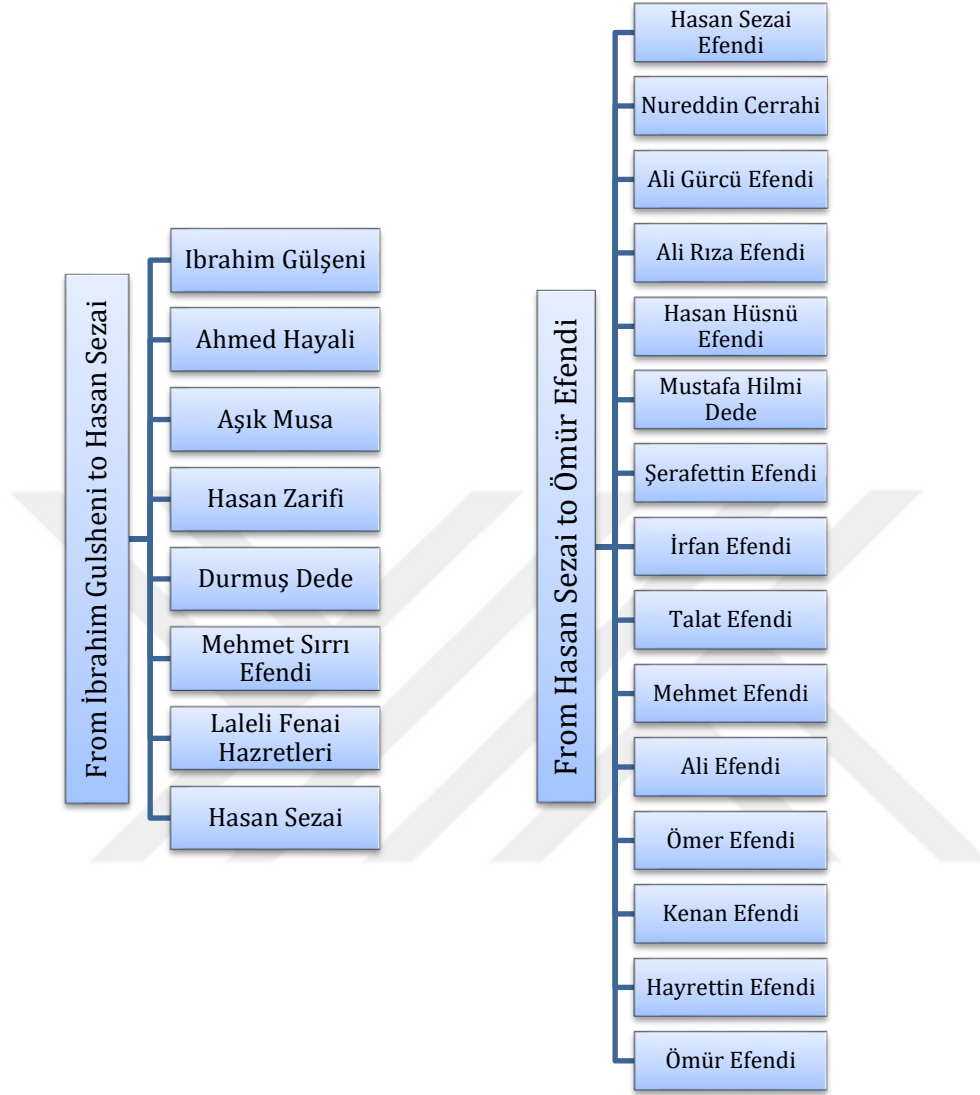
### 5.3 Silsile as a Source of Legitimization

In the early days, Sufism was more about experiencing rather than learning and teaching theosophical theories. They were trained in meditation, self-mortification, and remembrance of God to reach *ma'rifa* through ecstatic stages. Tariqa literally meant a certain way of completing this experiential journey and the *murshid* was the guide in this journey, without whom one could get lost. At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, these tariqas became more institutionalized and centralized and each of them was associated with a chain called silsile which reached to the Prophet through the founder of the order who is called *pir* in Halveti lexis. Therefore the Sheiks obtained the roles of heirs of the *pirs* of that specific order (Trimingham, 1971: 10) and the heirs of the Prophet (Atacan, 1990: 72).

What was handed down from a sheikh to the next was a sort of secret esoteric knowledge. This eventually led to the belief of sheikh being a mediator or intercessory between men and God. When a new member comes, the Sheikh possessing the knowledge of formulae that the new-comer needs, gives them a set of *wird* to recite based on their state (Trimingham, 1971: 13). This relationship is often explained with a metaphor of doctor and patient relationship among the Gulshenis. People come to the *murshids* with illnesses and they give them medicine based on their illnesses. This medical knowledge inherited from the *pir* of the order via a blessed chain. In the case of Gulshenis, Kenan Efendi and later following Efendis are representatives and proxies of Hasan Sezai Efendi.

Being part of a silsile is one of the most essential requirements of the legitimacy of a Sufi master because this indicates that the person completed the necessary training and got the permission to establish a dergah from a recognized master. It is very similar to the diploma or license system in the modern world (Ceyhan, 2015: 37). There are cases where a Sufi master without a silsile established a dergah based on a

dream in which he was given the permission, however, these are very rare cases and usually, those masters did not have proxies continuing their order.<sup>65</sup>



**Table 5.1. The Silsile of Selami Ali Gulsheni Order based on Ömür Efendi's account.<sup>66</sup>**

Kenan Efendi was ascribed to that blessed chain of saints via Ömer Efendi who was connected via Mehmet Efendi and it goes on until the chain reaches Prophet Muhammad via Hazreti Ali. The persons in the Selami Ali Gulsheni silsile are reified with their pictures in the wall of the dergah. However, as is seen in the picture there are two lines of pictures. The line on the left is the silsile of Cerrahi order from Muzaffer Efendi to Haluk Nur Baki Efendi. The association of the newly founded

<sup>65</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 05.01.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>66</sup> Sohbet record of Ömür Efendi. 02.04.2019, Üsküdar.

order with a strong order like Cerrahis who are known for being one of the few orders whose chain is not interrupted during the Republican era and whose dergah was not closed because it was officially registered as a Music and Culture Center, strengthens the position and legitimacy of the Gulshenis.

Another reason of that might be that Yaşar Efendi, the Efendi of a Cerrahi dergah which is around two-hundred meters from the Gulsheni dergah, was a member of Gulsheni dergah for some time after the death of Kenan Efendi. These photos might have been hanged with his suggestion. As another sub-branch of Halveti order, Cerrahis have commonalities with Gulshenis, yet their tariqa is known for being more methodical and more orthodox in terms of following the requirements of Sharia.

The previous Efendis in the silsile of the Gulsheni order is counted by name during the prayer part after the zikir ceremonies. Ömür Efendi usually prays that their souls be present, and their blessing and help (*himmet*) be with them eternally. This functions as a reminder for the attendants about the background of the order. Even though he is not in the Gulsheni Silsile, he also utters the name of Nureddin Cerrahi, probably because of the aforementioned reasons. The prayer after one of the zikir rituals was as follows:

Ibrahim Gulsheni's; Veled-i Sultan Ahmed Hayali's Aşık Musa Hasan Zarifi's; Durmuş Dede's; Mehmet Sırrı Efendi's Laleli Fenai Hazretleri's; Hasan Sezai's; Nurettin Cerrahi's; Ali Gürcü Efendi's; Ali Rıza Efendi's; Hasan Hüsnü Efendi's; Mustafa Hilmi Dede's; Şuayb Şerafeddin Efendi's; İrfan Efendi's; Talat Efendi's; Mehmet Efendi's; Ali Efendinin's; Ömer Efendi's; - Salih Efendi's; -Kenan Efendis's; Hayrettin Efendi's souls be at rest. May salam be upon their spirituality.<sup>67</sup>

#### **5.4 Succession of the Position and Hayrettin Efendi**

There are several ways a successor is chosen after a Sheikh passes away. Sometimes it is the descent of the previous Sheikh so his son takes over the order, sometimes it is the advice or appointment of the Sheikh when he was alive and sometimes the elite members of the group determine the next Efendi (Gilsenan 1973: 75, Atacan 1990: 79). Once that choice is made the new Efendi becomes the new ring in the chain of

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<sup>67</sup> Sohbet record of Ömür Efendi. 02.04.2019, Üsküdar.



blessing, the silsile. Hayrettin Efendi's succession was assured by the second option. Kenan Efendi told his followers that they should gather around Hayrettin Efendi after him. A friend of Kenan Efendi, who was in the inner elite group of the order informed me that there were three candidates and they suggested Hayrettin Efendi because "his clothes are clean, he is working as a driver and he is a good person and he said okay."<sup>68</sup>

Hayrettin is known for his calmness. "Suskun Baba" (Silent Baba) was his nickname because he would not talk very much. Ömür Efendi was leading the rituals and doing the *sohbets* even though Hayrettin Efendi was officially the Efendi. Apart from his silent personality, Hayrettin Efendi's job was another reason he could not spend a lot of time in the dergah, he was a taxi driver and he had to work at night sometimes even when there is Zikr in the dergah. The reason Ömür Efendi was not chosen as Efendi despite his competence is not very clear to me because this was a sensitive topic and I did not want to cause any discomfort by questioning it, however, I have been informed that he had fallen out with Kenan Efendi shortly before he passed away.

After two years of his appointment, Hayrettin Efendi could not attend the dergah for around six months because of his illness. In October 2009, he passed away and this is when the real crisis of succession started. As Hayrettin Efendi did not point to anyone as the next Efendi now the other two methods of selection had to be utilized. The option of descent was available because the son of Kenan Efendi grew up and he was skilled enough to take over the order, however, because Ömür Efendi was already running the dergah and giving the *sohbets* he was naturally a reasonable option as well.

Eventually, Ömür Efendi was chosen by the inner elite as the Efendi, however, in around a year's time, a big schism movement took place and almost all those who were in the dergah during the time of previous Efendis left the dergah, except for one person who chose to stay with Ömür Efendi. Again, the reasons and details of this separation are not going to be dealt with. Some of those who left joined the Melami

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<sup>68</sup> Personal interview with Yaşar Münir. 04.13.2019, Üsküdar.

dergah in the vicinity and actually its current Efendi is one of those who left Gulsheni dergah. Others stayed with the son of Kenan Efendi and continued their rituals in the Cerrahi dergah whose Efendi is also a former attendant of Gulsheni dergah. As is seen here the movement Kenan Efendi initiated in Selami Ali yielded several offshoots under different names.

### **5.5 The Current Sheikh: Ömür Efendi**

Despite the schisms and objections, the current Efendi of the Dergah is Ömür Coşkundere. He was born in Selami Ali quarter of Üsküdar in 1961. His mother's family is from Selami Ali but his father's parents came from Thessaloniki to Şile in the 1870s, then they live in different parts of Istanbul and eventually in 1935 they settle in Selami Ali quarter as well. His father was doing various jobs such as collecting junk for recycling, selling animal feed and working as an ironsmith. At the same time, he was the district representative of the Democrat Party. His father was an ordinary Muslim, attending Friday prayers and watching and crying to Mevlid recitations on T.V but his mother was pious. She was praying five times a day and fasting all Ramadan. She has a reputation for being very generous in the Selamsız quarter.

Ömür Coşkundere went to school only for 5 years and finished primary school. After graduation, he started to work with his father who had started to do polishing work for Tofaş car company, and as he explained in detail they were earning enough amount of money to buy a flat with 18 months' saving. Later they started seasonal jobs such as selling vegetable in the streets. He started to smoke and drink when he was in primary school and he says before meeting Kenan Efendi I was drinking day and night. He says Kenan Efendi gave us another drink and what I drank with my ears was sweeter than what I used to drink with my mouth. When he first met Kenan Efendi while he was preaching Sufism to people outside, he would go listen to him while drinking. He gave up smoking when he was 53 years old. In 1980 he went to Kars for his military service and there he contracted sciatica due to the cold weather. That time he recovered but in 2002 the disease recurred and rendered him unable to walk. For 7 years until he had an operation in 2009 he had to sit in the dergah. Now he is able to walk but still, he has a little disability which is noticeable from the way

he walks and sits. He has to use many pills and his followers, pay extra attention that he takes them on time.<sup>69</sup>

Ömür Efendi is known for his eloquence, kind personality, and beautiful voice, all three of which add to his charisma and bring him followers from different social and educational backgrounds. He is from a Tekkekapılı origin, and this might be another element of respect for him within the Romani community. However, since 2014, the demography of the dergah has dramatically changed and today Romani attendants of it are the minority. Ömür Efendi almost reestablished the order by creating a new network of followers and a new patronage system legitimizing his position. He is actively sharing his views on social media, especially on Facebook, and in conferences and speeches when he is invited.

What makes someone a leader is the presence of followers. And the rise in either quality or quantity of followers increases the charisma of a leader. The fact that academic people, celebrities, people with high-paying jobs come and listen to Ömür Efendi definitely has a positive effect on the construction of his charisma. Multiple times I saw celebrity actors and actresses coming to the dergah and the treatment of Efendi to them was not any different from how he treats any other guest. This was seen as a very positive quality of him by some of the followers I talked with. Moreover, as a Romani citizen whose ethnic background has always been marginalized and stigmatized Ömür Efendi is doing a revolutionary thing; The *gaji* is coming now to listen to their Sheikh. This must be flattering the national pride of Romani people in the neighborhood.

Ömür Efendi has never gotten married therefore he has the quality of celibacy which is a form of asceticism and self-mortification. Although I have never heard this comment from any of his followers, this might be another element that elevates his position in the eye of his followers, because in the zuhd period of Sufism and in some orders such as Qalandaris celibacy was a celebrated state because it was associated with abandoning the worldly pleasures and pursuits (Geoffrey 2010: 66). The seven years he had to stay in dergah and never go out due to his illness may similarly be seen as a seclusion period typically seen in the lives of Sufi leaders.

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<sup>69</sup> Personal interview with Ömür Coşkundere. 03.01.2018, Üsküdar.

## CHAPTER VI

### GULSHANI DERGAH OF SELAMI ALI AS A SACRED SPACE

#### 6.1 Location and Visibility

The way dergahs are aligned on the Selami Ali Avenue, the former name was Tekkekapsi, and the manner they designed their windows' and entrances resemble a bazaar where different shops are trying to attract customers. Gulsheni Dergah used to be a store where home appliances were sold; therefore it has a very large window facing the main road. So does the dergah of the Nakshibendi order whose window has a huge tea pod image with a text next to it explaining the importance of modesty with a metaphor of how tea pod bows down before the teacup despite its relative greatness in size (see figure 6.1). Gulsheni dergah's window reads "Gulsheni Sezai Dergahı Güzelleştirme ve Yaşatma Derneği (The Foundation of Beautifying and Maintaining Gulsheni Sezai Dergah)." and there is an image of a Gulshani turban (see figure 6.2). The green turban wrapped around a cap without any folds was the distinctive headwear of the Gulshenis. According to Salih el-Istanbuli, who studied the symbolic meanings of various clothes and accessories worn by Sufis between 1900-1908, Prophet (pbuh) would wear green turban whenever he ascended to heavens, which took place thirty four times (Istanbuli, 2005: 34). The green color is a respected color in Islam because it is the color of paradise according to a verse in Surah Rahman (Istanbuli, 2005: 35).



Figure 6.1: The entrance of the Naqshibandi Dergah



Figure 6.2: The exterior sight of Gulsheni Dergah.

The density of dergahs in such a small vicinity creates a rich religious market. The proponents of religious choice theory maintain that not only the demand in the market creates supply, the supply in the religious market also creates demand. Grace Davie puts it this way “religious activity will increase where there is an abundant supply of religious choices, offered by a wide range of 'firms' (religious organizations of various kinds); it will diminish where such supplies are limited” (Davie, 2007: 67). What that means in the Selami Ali context is that the reason most of Selami Ali people belong to or has belonged to a Sufi order at some point in their lives is that the religious supply offered in the neighborhood is rich and various. The probability of finding a religious order whose style appeals to them is higher for people living in that neighborhood compared to other parts of Istanbul. From the fact that almost all dergahs have their gatherings on Saturday and Thursday evenings, one can deduce that they do not want people attending multiple orders. They want them to make a choice that is why they have their rituals on conflicting times.

The dergahs' owe their visibility to the current political atmosphere in Turkey. Until very recently one would not expect a Sufi lodge to be able to put itself in public via a sticker on its windows or in any other way. During the opening ceremony of the current dergah district governor, mayor of Uskudar, governor of Istanbul and professor Mahmut Erol Kilic, who is one of the most prominent professors in Turkey on Sufism, were all present, which is very significant in telling how the political and academic authorities changed their stance about Sufism (Gönüler, 2016).

This desire to be visible manifests itself in different ways in the Gulsheni order. In the previous dergah was much smaller in size, therefore there was not sufficient space to cook and wash the cauldrons, so such chores were carried out outside. This would raise curiosity among by passers and would bring new people and donations to the dergah. Although the new dergah offers a much bigger space for cooking and eating, especially in Ramadan it is customary for Gulshenis to set tables and eat and share their food with others. This also creates visibility and helps with the publicity of the dergah.

The stickers, the outdoor activities, and organizations such as Hasan Sezai commemoration nights all signify a desire for advertising the order and bringing more people. Whether this desire of recruiting more people creates a certain type of competition among the various dergahs functioning in the quarter is a question that requires a deeper observation of interrelation of the different orders, which is outside the scope of this research. However, it was deducible from my observations and interviews that there is such a rivalry between the dergah and those who left the dergah and continue their activities in the Cerrahi dergah.

Apart from functioning as natural promotions displaying the dergah's social activities, such gatherings outside are appealing to the Romani people. It is known that Romani people are fond of spending time outside their houses and socializing on the pavements or spaces in front of their homes rather than indoors. Therefore, if the Gulsheni dergah were not in Selami Ali district we might not see this level of outdoor activities.

Kenan Efendi started his sohbetts outside as well. People would gather around him and sit on bricks or stones to listen to him. Later they decided to gather in coffee houses in early 1990s. When their number reached around 60, the coffeehouse started to complain about them so they decided to open a place for themselves and rented a little place and opened it under the official disguise of a coffee house. There they started to offer dinner to people before sohbetts, mostly modest food such as peas or beans. For five years they stayed there and then for around 3 years the order was again without a stable place. They squatted derelict houses or gathered in the wellhole of an apartment block. In 2002 they again rented a very small room close to the current dergah. When Kenan Efendi passed away in 2005 they moved into another relatively bigger room and stayed there until in 2016 they rented the current dergah with the support of Üsküdar Municipality.

Kenan Efendi started preaching outside in the street and gather followers before the order was founded. If the neighborhood had not been a Roma majority area, this might not have been possible. Because people would not have sat outside and listened to someone for so long, or squat evacuated houses together with Kenan Efendi for listening to his sohbetts if it weren't for their Romani background. This is where the Romani identity of his audience helps with the Sufi practice. The outdoor is not an unusual habitat for a Romani, therefore, these outdoor sohbetts might have felt quite ordinary for the initial followers. If it were a Gaji <sup>70</sup> group of people, the founder would probably look for a closed space first to start sharing the message. This absence of a standard locus or deterritorialization of the order must have contributed to the survival of the movement because until 2002 when AKP came to power all types of religious gatherings were under the strict scrutiny of the state.

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<sup>70</sup> A term Romani people use for non-Romani people.



Figure 6.3: Tevhidhane of the Dergah.

The current dergah was opened in 2016, shortly before I began to attend the dergah for observation. It is a two-floor building with a door opening to the main road (see figure 2). Needless to say, upon entrance to the dergah shoes are taken off and there is a shoe shelf on the right side of the main entrance. The entrance floor consists of three parts. When you enter the dergah the first part is where the dinner is eaten, behind which is the kitchen and a staircase that leads to the upper floor which is half the size of downstairs. The upper floor is the personal home of Efendi. It has three small rooms and a bathroom. One of the rooms has more traditional design covered with divan on three sides and with calligraphies on the walls. One of the other two rooms is Efendi's bedroom and the other one is something like a living room with modern Sofas.

After the kitchen, there is another door that opens to the room where the sohbet and zikir take place. In other Halveti or Cerrahi dergahs this section is usually called *tevhidhane*, or *semahane* yet I have never heard this word in the Gulsheni dergah. The size of this room is approximately the same as the outer part. Right after the door of *tevhidhane*, on the left side, there is a small restroom and on the right side, there is a little storage where some dry food and some appliances such as vacuum cleaner is kept. The restroom is not used on sohbet days and there is a note on it



requesting that. Three sides of the room are covered with brown sofas and there are cushions around the room with similar brownish colors. The entire floor is covered with carpet and if the sofas are full attendants sit on the carpet or cushions.

## **6.2 Ritual Transformation Of Commercial Space Into Spiritual Space**

The Sufi who comes and knocks the door of a dergah wants to pass from a state of profanity to a state of sacredness and passing to the other side of that door or threshold physically, brings about a transformation of state towards the intended state of being, that is why the door as a vital piece represents the whole for the members. Annamarie Schimmel draws on the etiquette of dergah where the faithful rub their faces on the threshold like a broom and kiss it as it represents one's means to meet the saint. Writing about sacred spaces in Islam such as the mosque, the tombs of saints and Makkah, Schimmel also mentions the dergahs as sacred spaces in Islam and tells that although they have different names and functions in different parts of the world one thing is common for all Sufi institutions: "none of them is a 'consecrated' building. For the pious, they assumed a sacred quality owing to the master's and the dervishes' presence" (Schimmel 1994: 50).

Phina Werbner draws on a reciprocal and circular relationship between the authority and charisma of the Sheikh and the sacred space. She puts forth that "the moral conquest of alien space is a test of charismatic authenticity that legitimizes the rise of new "living saints." because if a Sheikh can reappropriate an alien space and establish a new "regional cult", by "inscribing his charisma on the new place (maqam) he has founded. This very act of inscription constitutes the ultimate proof that he is, indeed, a saint" (Werbner, 1996: 312).

One day, when I was sitting in the *tevhidhane* of dergah by myself, I witnessed an elderly lady entering the room. She bowed down while she was passing through the threshold. The reason underlying her act of veneration was because "for religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others" (Eliade, 1957: 20). For the believer some spaces are sacred and others are profane; and for the lady the threshold she passed was the line between the profane and the sacred space, which required a

differentiated mode of behavior than an ordinary place. According to Eliade, for the religious mind the sacred space constitutes a point of reference for orientation in the otherwise amorphous and chaotic world and it helps a believer “found the world” around a center, a fixed point. For the attendants of Gulsheni Dergah, the dergah might be bearing the meaning of such a point for them.

The experienced members of the dergah refer to it as “the door.” For instance, during a personal interview an attendant of the dergah uttered this: “Before I came to this door, I was searching. I was trying to understand Sufism. Allah blessed me and I found this door<sup>71</sup>. The narrative makes sense when we understand what the door that separates the sacred space from the profane one signifies:

The door that opens on the interior of the church actually signifies a solution of continuity. The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds-and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible. ... Numerous rites accompany passing the domestic threshold-a bow, a prostration, a pious touch of the hand, and so on (Eliade 1957: 25).

The building where Gulsheni dergah operates used to be a furniture store, a space with no imprint of holiness or religiosity. No theophany or hierophany incident is narrated about that place, it does not have the architectural forms usually associated with sacredness in the Muslim world, such as a dome or a *mihrab* for prayer. If the order decides to move to a bigger space as they did some years ago this building can be evacuated by the lodge and can again be used for worldly, material, and secular purposes, which means that this place is “not intrinsically but ascetically sacred<sup>72</sup>.” This applies to the Mosques in Islam whose buildings are sacred per se, but it is the place of ritual which stamps it with function and meaning. The Arabic word for Mosque is masjid which literally means a place of prostration. Similarly, the words used for the most sacred part of a dergah is called *semahane* or *tevhidhane* the place of ritual zikr ceremonies that may not be the only sacralizing factor but definitely one that contributes to it.

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<sup>71</sup> Personal interview with Ahmet Vedat. 12.05.2019, Üsküdar.

<sup>72</sup> A phrase from “<https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sacred-space>”

In 2014 the store was rented and it was transformed into a sacred space by bringing not only Efendi and his followers there but also other things that invoke a religious emotion and things that have symbolic religious value. As Durkheim says those sacred things can be anything such as a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a word, etc. (Durkheim, (1995) [1912]: 137). Those symbols and objects gain meaning referring to the religious context people believe in. And as Jonathan Z. Smith suggests sacred spaces are “focusing lenses” (Smith, 1978: 88) that

...focus attention on the forms, objects, and actions in it and reveal them as bearers of religious meaning. These symbols describe the fundamental constituents of reality as a religious community perceives them, defines a life in accordance with that view, and provides a means of access between the human world and divine realities” (Brereton, 1987).

This does not mean that those objects do not have a symbolic and religious meaning outside the dergah; it means that the dergah makes their meaning more visible because of the spiritual context they appear in. Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973: 89), stresses the importance of symbols as bearers of religious “moods and motivations” and by bringing certain symbols to the dergah, catalyzer and perpetrators of certain moods and motivations were also carried there.

### **6.3 Symbols / Icons**

In this chapter, the symbolic meaning of some of the objects is going to be analyzed. This is a significant part of studying the sacralization of the dergah because as Talcott Parsons states “sacred objects and entities are symbols. The problem then becomes one of identifying the referents of such symbols. It is that which is symbolized and not the intrinsic quality of the symbol which becomes crucial” (Parsons 1944: 206).

#### **6.3.1 La Ilahе Illallah and Ataturk’s Picture**

Once you step into the outer door of the dergah an unusual juxtaposition meets the eye, a calligraphic inscription of La Ilahе Illallah phrase written with Arabic Alphabet

on a black background with gold color, on the right wall a little below it is a picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk with his military uniform. Knowing the role of Atatürk in the history of dergahs and Arabic Alphabet, how are we to interpret that? Considering the fact that dergahs are legally still closed and they are seen as places threatening the republican values and undermining Kemalist Republican values, the presence of Atatürk's picture can be a way of refuting that accusation. It might be a tradition inherited from the days when the police would raid the dergahs and arrest people. The statements of a close friend and disciple of Kenan Efendi confirms this point:

In fact, at that time even high-rank people came to the dergah from the intelligence. They came, inspected, what are doing, they said. In those days reactionism (irtica) incidents were happening; they were raiding everywhere. Not even one police officer was coming to our Gulsheni tea house. Why not? Because it was obvious, there was the picture of Atatürk. One side of us, for example, we are Turkish I mean, we are nationalist. One side of ours, we love Atatürk, because you know what he did, its all known to us, reforms and all. there will be those who dislike Atatürk, it is none of our business. We know that Atatürk was connected to a Melami Efendi. There was someone named Ankarali Ismail Efendi. There was Melamiyye behind Atatürk. You know he had Quran made from his own budget<sup>73</sup>.



Figure 6.4: Two Contrasting Images: Atatürk and Calligraphy

The proposition that Atatürk was a Melami Sheikh became popular when a Greek academic named Christos Retoulas gave an interview in 2013 to a Turkish

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<sup>73</sup> Personal interview with Yaşar Münir. 04.13.2019, Üsküdar.

newspaper where he claimed that Turkish secularization period was based on Vahdet-i Vucud philosophy because Ataturk was a Melami Sufi. However, from the explanations of the informant, it is obvious that this had to do with avoiding the pressure from the police (Yildiz, 2013).

The Kemalist regime tried to secularize the public sphere by decorating it with sculptures of Ataturk (Gur, 2013) and his pictures proliferated in homes and businesses as a potent symbol of the secular Turkish state (Özyürek, 2005) because as Melda Yeğenoğlu states “the Kemalist project did not limit its formation of a new society to the radical reorganization of the public realm. The private sphere was also subjected to a thorough intervention” (Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 227). The reorganization of the private sphere was ensured by spreading “fetish objects” such as icons of Ataturk in homes offices, cars, on dresses and even on bodies (Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 231).

Hence the Kemalist regime waged a semiotic war against the Islamic elements in the public as well as the private sphere and wanted to stamp both of them with the symbols of the new secular order. The symbols, however, are like the weapons forgotten on a battlefield; they can be captured by the enemy and used against the manufacturer of them (Khayati, 1966: 173). This is what happened to the symbol of Ataturk’s portrait in the dergah as well, the Gulshenis undermined the meaning of that image and loaded it with the one that helps their side in this “semiotic guerilla warfare” (Eco, 1986: 135). The Ataturk image in the dergah did not represent the secularizing force that closed down the Sufi lodges and fought against Islam; he was a Sufi himself practicing the Melami teachings. Moreover, the chosen picture had a military uniform on him, alluding to the “Gazi (victor in a holy war) character, who was “the creator and defender of territorial-defensive Turkish nationalism against the expansionists” (Gur, 2013: 347). This can be interpreted as an example of reversing the discourse of the hegemony as a tactic of resistance.

### **6.3.2 Deer Horns**

An interesting object in the dergah is the deer horns hanged on the wall behind where the Efendi sits. It is stuck on a framed brown paper on which the story of Hasan Sezai’s keramet that includes deer horns is written. The story briefly goes like this:

One day a prostitute decides to repent and start a pious life, however, the men who know her previous life do not leave her alone. To ask for help she comes to Hasan Sezai and he gave her permission to stay in the part of dergah spared for women. While she is staying there, people start to spread nasty rumors about the woman and the sheikh. One day they hanged a deer horn <sup>74</sup>on the gate of the dergah. Hasan Sezai responded to that with patience and asks the horn to be taken in the dergah. In a short, while those who spread the rumors and those who listened and did not say anything catches mage which cannot be treated with medicine. Hasan Sezai sends news that their cure is in his dergah. They all came to the dergah and Hasan Sezai gave them the dust of the deer horn they hanged on the door which cured their skin disease. Out of regret for what they did and for the gratitude they donated a lot of money to the dergah with which the fountain in front of the dergah was built<sup>75</sup>.

The head of the deer is the token of a sacred narrative and its presence in the dergah reminds the spiritual power of their *pir* Hasan Sezai thus confirming the legitimacy of their path. However, in the collective memory of Anatolian people, it has far deeper meanings alluding to pre-Islamic mythologies and post-Islamic narratives. Deer has been an important motif in art, literature, and beliefs of Anatolian peoples from Hittites to Turks. Especially in Bektashi order deer has a special spiritual importance (Uçar 2014). Geyikli<sup>76</sup> Baba, a well-known Bektashi saint is known for his friendship with deer (Ocak, 1996: 45). Another narration tells that he was riding deer like Saint Nickolas who is an Anatolian character as well.

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<sup>74</sup> In Anatolian culture, horn symbolizes a cuckolded man who does not mind his wife's indecency. The word for such a man is *boynuzlu* literally meaning horned.

<sup>75</sup> Translation by the author, Tursun, H.

<sup>76</sup> Geyikli means "with deer"



Figure 6.5: Deer horns and the explanation about them.

A Spanish traveler in early 15<sup>th</sup> century describes a village inhabited by Dervishes who hang deer, goat and ram horns on the door of their hermitages and “further it is their custom to carry about with them these horns as trophies when they walk through the streets; and all the houses of the Dervishes have these horns set over them for a sign” (Clavijo, 1928: 139). The depiction indicates that the horns of animals including deer assumed symbolic meanings among certain Sufi groups in the very early periods of Sufism.

### 6.3.3. Caligraphies

“Calligraphy is said to be the most quintessentially Islamic of all Islamic arts” (Shick, 2008:1) and it is the most commonly used decoration element in the sacred spaces. As an art form that has close ties with the Quran and other Islamic texts, it has the power of endowing the space with a religious aura. This might be stemming from the fact that almost all Mosques are decorated with calligraphic texts, therefore, the space with calligraphy might have a resemblance to Mosques in the mind of Muslims. Regarding their semiotic significance, Irvin Cemil Schick has a comprehensive and multiplex approach:



Islamic calligraphy is deeply polysemic. At the most basic level, of course, it embodies written text, and as such expresses *symbolically* the meaning - whether literal or metaphorical, denoted or connoted- of that text. But that is not all. As a highly visual art, Islamic calligraphy sometimes means *iconically*; and as a practice that is, at least in the Turkish context, intensely imbricated with politics, it also means *indexically* (Schick, 2008: 1).

As a visual art, calligraphy's pictorial value most of the time gains superiority over its textual value. Hence, as Schick indicates with several examples in an article titled "Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy", it is not something read, rather it is something looked at. Especially after the ban of the Arabic alphabet in 1928, Turkish people's relationship with calligraphy must have changed dramatically. Calligraphy assumed a symbolic meaning of representing the Ottoman Era and Islam in general. Traditionally, *dergahs* were the centers of artistic works such as poetry, calligraphy, and *Ebru*. Therefore, it is only natural that the Gulsheni *dergah's* inner walls are covered with calligraphic artworks written with the Arabic script which most of the attendants of the *dergah* cannot read textually but can appreciate its sacredness. For many Turkish people, any text written with Arabic script has a certain value of holiness due to its resemblance to the Quran. I heard from multiple people that when they found a chocolate package or rolling paper for cigarettes that had an Arabic text on it, they would kiss them and put them in a high place as a sign of their respect.



Figure 6.6: Some of the calligraphies on the walls of the dergah.



Apart from being textual and pictorial, calligraphy also has a political meaning in modern Turkey. As the new regime forbade the Arabic alphabet, the calligraphy was also forbidden as a form of art, therefore anything written with that alphabet implies longing for the past and functions as a sort of symbol of resisting the reforms.

Despite the fact that not many people attending the dergah can read and decipher the meanings of the calligraphic art on the walls, they are not arbitrarily chosen. They usually have a relevance to the beliefs and values of the Gulsheni order. Below are some examples of the calligraphies decorating the walls of the dergah.



Figure 6.7: Calligraphy with Quran 1:115.

The textual meaning of this calligraphy is: “So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah” (Quran 1:115). This is one of the verses quoted by proponents of Wahdat al-Wujud philosophy. In the book he wrote to summarize the Gulsheni worldview and values Ömer Kerman also quotes this verse and says that this is the proof that nothing other than God exists, everything is him (Kerman, 1983: 2).



Figure 6.8: Calligraphy with Quran 13:28

This verse translates as “Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!” (Quran 13:28). The word translated as “remembrance” is zikr in the Arabic language, the same word used for the ritual in the dergah, therefore the presence of this calligraphy has also relevance to the context it is in.



Figure 9: Hilyes from the dergah.

Hilyes are an important part of Ottoman Calligraphy culture. They include the portrayal of Prophet Muhammad’s physical and spiritual qualities based on the narrations. Because drawing his appearance and depicting him in visual form was prohibited, Hilyes with their textual description of the Prophet became a means of remembering him. They usually follow a standard design similar to the one in the dergah. In the Ottoman era, there was a folk belief that those who possess Hilya in

their houses will be protected from troubles in both worlds (Freek, 2009: 195). On the Internet I came across contemporary Sufis believing in that Hilye releases an immense amount of spiritual energy (baraqa) and a Hilye could intercede for its maker on the Day of Resurrection<sup>77</sup>.



Figure 6.10: Calligraphies with Ibrahim Gulsheni's name.

It is a tradition to have the name of the founder or the *pir* of an order's name written with an exclamatory 'ya' and honorific 'hazreti' in the Sufi dergahs. Here we have the name of Ibrahim Gulsheni. The 'ya' at the beginning of the name is like akin to the exclamatory 'oh' in English while saying 'Oh Lord please help me' for example. It signifies the invocation of the Sheikh's spirituality.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.almirajsuficentre.org.au/qamus/app/single/520>

#### 6.3.4. Pictures of Gulsheni and Cerrahi Efendis

For an orthodox Muslim, it might be unusual to see pictures of humans in a religious sphere, however, it is a common practice to hang the pictures of previous Efendis in Sufi lodges. I personally witnessed the same practice in Cerrahi and Melami dergahs I visited. In the Gulsheni dergah, there are photos of three Gulsheni Efendis and three Cerrahi Efendis. On the left side from top to bottom Ömer Kerman, Hayrettin Efendi and Kenan Saldak were aligned. On the left Muzaffer Ozak, Sefer Dal and Haluk Nur Baki were hanged. Around a year ago, one more photo was added to the collection, the photo of Salih Efendi from Sakarya and the photo of Muzaffer Özak moved to the other wall.



Figure 6.11: Pictures of Gulsheni and Cerrahi Efendis

I learned that Salih Efendi's photo was there initially but because of someone entering the dergah aggressively and shouting that it must be taken down, they took it down. Regarding who did that and why I could not get information. All they said



was “some drunk person” did that. This might be related to the schism after Ömür Efendi’s appointment as Efendi. As discussed earlier, the reason Cerrahi Efendis are in the Gulsheni dergah might be legitimizing the new dergah by ascribing it to an old and well-accepted tradition.

### 6.3.5 Books in the Bookshelf



Figure 6.12: Books in the bookshelf

In the *semahane* of the dergah, there is a bookshelf with various type of Islamic books ranging from the tafseer of Sayyid Qutb to a series of commentary on Futuhat-i Mekkiye by Ibn Arabi. There are Quran translations and some modern books about Sufism. The books with their classical Ottoman style covers definitely add to the spiritual atmosphere of the room and contribute to the creation of a sacred space.

### 6.3.6 Hz. Ali Images

A subtle detail in the room is a small wooden model of Hazret-i Ali’s famous double-pointed sword named Zulfikar. As mentioned earlier, Gulsheniyye is part of

Halvetiyye order whose silsile reaches the Prophet (pbuh) via Ali. Maybe due to influence from Anatolian and Iranian Alevi orders, Halvetiyye has a strong tendency to favor Ali above other companions of the Prophet, and their dislike of Muaviye is a result of the historical narration of conflict between the two sahabis. A member of the order told me that after she invited her parents to a speech Efendi gave they questioned why he always talked about Ali.



Figure 6.13: Double-Pointed Sword and Hazreti Ali Pictures

During my interviews, I noticed that the experienced members of the order refer to the order as Tarikat-ı Aliye. The emphasis here is on the word Ali, although in that phrase the word is an adjective meaning elevated.

### 6.3.7. The Lambskin Cushion of Efendi

This cushion made up of lambskin is literally the *maqam*<sup>78</sup> of the Sheikh of the dergah. One of the Sheikh's titles is *postnişin* which means "the one who sits on the lambskin." Therefore, bringing it to the new dergah means bringing his spiritual center to the new space.

Salih El-Istanbuli spared a chapter for the spiritual meanings of the *post* (lambskin) in the dergahs in his book on symbolism in Sufism. He reports several narrations about the meaning of that object in the dergah. First, he tells that that lambskin represents the skin of the ram that God sent to Abraham (pbuh) while he was attempting to sacrifice his son Ismail. Second, When Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) ascended to Mi'rac the angels carried him on a bed with five corners. With four legs and a head, the lambskin also has five corners, therefore it represents the bed prophet was carried with. Third, the five corners have many numerical meanings such as five times ritual prayer a day, the five relatives of the prophet (pbuh) called "Hamse-i al-i aba" and five pillars of Islam. He concludes the part saying that a Sheikh's sitting on a *post* for the first time is comparable to a Sultan's sitting on the throne for the first time (Istanbuli, 2005: 225-230).



Figure 6.14: The lambskin (post) of the dergah.

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<sup>78</sup> The position, the place.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONSTRUCTION OF BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Emile Durkheim defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 129). The construction of Gulsheniyye in Selami Ali was not a religion but a religious community based on pre-existent customs, which required a unified system of beliefs and rites. The reason I deal with the rites and beliefs in the same chapter is the close cause-effect relationship between the two.

#### **7.1 A typical Thursday or Saturday Evening**

Although Efendi is always in the dergah and welcomes visitors every day, the ritual days of the dergah are Thursdays and Saturdays. A typical Saturday starts with the food given out to the people queuing in front of the dergah, continues with *sohbet* and ends with the *zikir*. The people in the neighborhood know that every Saturday there is food distribution at the dergah, therefore, they come at around 6 pm and wait for it. I have been told that this practice helped the Gulsheniyye spread in the neighborhood. The food is usually cooked by elderly female members of the dergah and served by the younger ones. The menu usually includes stews with chickpeas, beans served with rice or macaroni. When I asked Efendi about the food he told me that this is a three-century-old tradition; “dergahs are not only places for spiritual nourishment they also provide physical nourishment<sup>79</sup>.”

Opposing the occidental sociological tendency of searching for a material interest behind this apparently altruistic behavior, Pnina Werbner interprets such food offerings in Sufi lodges as “perpetual sacrifice” (1998: 95). She states that experiences of altruism and humanism are what energize Sufism. Especially among the Sufi orders who follow a Vahdet-i Vucud oriented ontology humanism is very common because as the most elevated manifestation of God, humans have divinity in them, therefore serving a human equals to serving God. The frequent saying often

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<sup>79</sup> Personal Interview with Ömür Coşkunder. 09.04.2017, Üsküdar.



repeated by politicians in Turkey, “to serve a human is to serve God<sup>80</sup>” has this notion behind it. This act of generosity is attributed to the Efendi of the dergah, therefore his image as a compassionate father giving out generously is also perpetuated by this philanthropic act.

Then while Efendi is in the *semahane* welcoming and talking to the visitors, the inner members of the dergah work on preparing the dinner to be eaten in the dergah. The food is eaten all together and usually, a prayer is recited afterward. The prayer is different from the traditional “sofra duası” in terms of its lack of reference to paradise. Efendi asks for the permanence of the dergah, increasing the ties of brotherhood among the members during his prayer and thanks Allah for the food.

Then everyone goes into the *semahane* section and the *sohbet* begins. I use the word *sohbet* instead of a lesson or lecture because it has wider connotations than only listening to a lecture. Algar (1992: 213) defines *sohbet* as “keeping the company of the sheikh and of one’s fellow disciples in accordance with precise behavioral norms with disciple’s firm conviction in the exclusive effectiveness of his sheikhs’ *suhba*.” The reason for the emphasis on companionship is related to the root of the word in the Arabic language, it has the same root with the word “sahabe” companion. Moreover as Algar explains the disciples of Ömür Efendi usually believe in the transforming power of his *sohbets* and usually, no question is asked to him during the *sohbets*. And throughout my participant observation period, I have never witnessed anyone objecting or opposing to anything the Efendi tells.

During the *sohbets*, Efendi generally preaches about the *Wahdat al-Wujud* to the attendants with examples such as this: ice, snow, and water all consist of H<sub>2</sub>O, in the essence, it is the same material. In a similar manner, although the existence seems various in the essence they are all the same. They are all God manifesting Himself in different forms. He also gives the example of a theater player who changes clothes and acts different roles but in the essence, he is the same person. Similarly, he gives the example of a shadow theater, although on this side of the curtain we are watching different characters moving and speaking actually behind the curtain there is one

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<sup>80</sup> Halka hizmet Hakka hizmettir.

man, such is the universe where we see different beings yet they are only God's different manifestations. Looking at the court records of Sufis accused of heresy, we can see that they gave almost the same examples to explain the Vahdet-i Vucud creed. Although there are differences in the practices, the continuity in beliefs is evident. If a person believes that they have a separate existence than God', Efendi tells that they are committing the greatest sin of *shirk* because in his way of translating "La ilahe illa Allah" means "there is no existence other than God."

Efendi's sohbet usually includes complicated and abstract explanations regarding the ontology based on Muhyiddin-i Arabi's teachings. He details how God manifests itself through stages or stations of manifestation such as *lahut*, *ceberut*, *meleket* and *nasut*, and how they relate to human consciousness. The sight is usually quite impressive to observe. The social context of Selami Ali and the content of the sohbet are quite juxtaposing and one cannot help but ask if the attendants, some of whom are people with almost no formal education comprehend them. When I asked this question to an educated and experienced disciple of Efendi, she told that they might not be able to tell you the names of the terms but they internalized the worldview of Vahdet-i Vucud. She witnessed the dialogues during a funeral, which confirmed that they indeed know what it means to be a Vahdet-i Vucud believer even though they cannot explain it. An elderly female member of the dergah also told me that although she cannot solve what Efendi tells in her brain, she feels and experiences them.

The belief of Vahdet-i Vucud ontologically equalizes all beings and all human beings. This, naturally, appeals to the community of Romani people who have been treated as inferiors for centuries even by the orthodox religious elite. Now through teachings of Vahdet-i Vucud, the borders disappear and men, women, Romani or German they all become the different garments of the same Divine Being. Moreover, this does not only operate in the level of theory, but also its practical implications are visible in the dergah. Efendi is Romani and he has followers from all ethnic, social, financial classes. Even celebrities come to the dergah and are not treated

differently<sup>81</sup>. There is no distinction of men and women in the dergah and the next Efendi may be a female one because such divisions all evaporate in the view of Vahdet-i Vucud. Even the borders between the sacred and the profane get very blurry according to this view because there is nothing which is not divine.

Another prominent characteristic of Gulsheni *sohbets* is the *batini* interpretation of the Quran. According to this hermeneutic style, almost all the verses must be understood metaphorically, rather than literally. For instance, While talking about the chapter of Yusuf (pbuh) in the Quran, Efendi teaches that Yusuf refers to our intelligence, his brothers are different attributes of our egoistic self (nafs). The well his brothers threw him into is the pit of existence that we wrongfully claim sometimes. The caravan leader who found the Yufus and took him out of the well represents the *murhsids*, the Efendis who take us out of this pit of claiming existence. He enters into your ear with his *sohbets* like the caravan leader sent down a bucket to take out Yufus. Seven years represent seven stations of existence, which corresponds to the seven names of Allah that halvetis recite in their zikr and so on. He interprets the whole story in an allegorical way.

As I said earlier this metaphoric approach applies to all the verses including the verses about the pillars of faith such as the hereafter, hell and paradise and the verses about the practical requirements from Muslims such as *salah* or pilgrimage. This is where the close connection between beliefs and the practices clearly appear because as a result of such an interpretation the Gulshenis or any people who read the religion in a *batini* way do not follow the rules of Sharia such as praying five times a day or dressing in a certain way. For this type of heterodox Sufis, those who understand the religion that way are not wrong but they follow the lowest level of understanding Islam. For them *sharia* is only the first step, then comes *tariqa*, then *haqiqa*, the truth and finally *marifa*, the gnostic knowledge of God. Those movements claim to read the religious text at the levels of *haqiqa* and *marifa* which is the inner, esoteric meaning of it which is called the *batini* meaning in Arabic and Turkish.

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<sup>81</sup> I personally witnessed that when Efendi saw a famous actor drinking tea in the dergah, he asked him to serve tea to everyone and he did.

To me, one of the most striking of these batini readings was the way Efendi explained the hereafter, hell, and paradise. Efendi explains that they are here, one should not understand them as coming back to life after death. Our inside is hereafter and our body is dunya (the world). When we commit evil and our world darkens it is the hell and the opposite is paradise. They are all related to our state of being in this world. If you look for paradise, says Efendi, the zikr gatherings are the gardens of paradise. After my interviews, I concluded that among the attendants of the dergah, there is heterogeneity in their beliefs regarding the unseen realm, but in their practices, there is more homogeneity.

## **7.2 Zikir as Spiritual Energy**

The most important observable practice of Gulshenis is the zikr ceremonies in the dergah starts after the sohbet at around 10:00 pm because the neighbor living upstairs does not allow them to continue it after 11:00 pm. Selami Ali Gulsheniyye is a flexible and loose organization without mechanical rules of systematization and this is also visible in the zikir ceremonies. Gulsheniyye being a sub-branch of Halvetiyye follows the custom of performing out loud zikr, however, unlike other Halveti tariqas that usually have a standardized, ritualistic zikir where certain number of recitations are made in a certain musical tone and so on, the zikir in the Gulsheni dergah is mostly about singing along with the Efendi and rocking the head right and left or back and forth according to the rhythm. Only repercussions are used as instruments during it and Efendi is usually the one singing unless there is a guest who is known for his musical abilities such as Rahmi Olcay, a professional *Ilahi* singer who sometimes attends the zikirs. The other participants usually sing along and sometimes they repeat the same phrases such as “Allah ya daim” as back vocal while Efendi sings the lyrics. The same thing happens with heavy exhalations of the name *Hay* rhythmically while Efendi is singing. The *ilahi* songs are usually traditional *ilahis* whose lyrics are Yunus Emre or Niyazi Misri poems. It usually takes around thirty minutes to an hour. During the zikir there usually is no sitting arrangement, people join it from where they are already singing, however, sometimes 4-5 male members go in front of Efendi and do it in a row and in harmony with each other while moving right and left. The tempo goes from slow to fast and the

ceremony ends with the recitation of Fatiha and prayer of the Sheikh to which after each sentence the audience responds with “amin.”

One can see that the zikir is appreciated and enjoyed by especially the Romani attendants. They close their eyes and show signs of slight delight while participating in it. Even those who seem tired and sleepy during the *sohbets* are usually very awake and active during the zikir. Gilsenan mentions the criticism of Ulema that for some Sufis zikir became an end in itself and a vehicle for popular catharsis and emotional indulgence instead of a means of fulfilling a religious intention (Gilsenan 1973). Although we cannot see their intentions, from an outside perspective the same criticism can be made for some of the attendants of the dergah. However it may look like an end in itself, for the order, the zikir ceremony has a socialization function. An educated female member of the order emphasized the emotional impact the zikir had on her, on her first visit of the dergah.

During a speech he gave Professor Mahmut Erol Kilic mentioned the Gulsheni dergah in Uskudar. He told that after a Romani tailor become a Sheikh the interest in Sufism among the Romani citizens increased. He added that it is possible to sense a Romani touch in their zikir (Gönüler, 2016). The professor might have observed the manner *ilahis* were sung with passion and with Romani tones of music.

In his book named *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Collins outlines the four elements of a successful interaction ritual as follows:

1. Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not.
2. There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded.
3. People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other's focus of attention.
4. They share a common mood or emotional experience (2004: 48).

Although its structure is loose and flexible the zikir in the Gulsheni dergah involves all the elements. Only the second one is a little blurry because the door of the dergah is open to anyone therefore even though the zikir takes place behind two doors from the street, technically anyone passing by can come and join. As the members in the

group can observe and feel each other's awareness and experience the emotions become more intense in a group zikir. Doing the same thing with a group, even if it is not something religious increases the motivational and emotional dimension of the action. We can consider the football fans in a stadium or people attending a rock concert as examples. Their energy is usually much higher than a person listening to the same music alone or watching a football match alone.

In the same book four outcomes of interaction rituals that possess the aforementioned elements are counted in this way:

There are four main outcomes of interaction rituals. To the extent that the ingredients successfully combine and build up to high levels of mutually focused and emotionally shared attention, participants have the experience of

1. group solidarity, a feeling of membership;
2. emotional energy [EE] in the individual: a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action;
3. symbols that represent the group: emblems or other representations (visual icons, words, gestures) that members feel are associated with themselves collectively; these are Durkheim's "sacred objects." Persons pumped up with feelings of group solidarity treat symbols with great respect and defend them against the disrespect of outsiders, and even more, of renegade insiders.
4. feelings of morality: the sense of rightness in adhering to the group, respecting its symbols, and defending both against transgressors. Along with this goes the sense of moral evil or impropriety in violating the group's solidarity and its symbolic representations (Collins, 2004: 49).

Overall summary of these four can be expressed as that successfully performed ritual increases devotion to the order one follows. I interviewed women from Selami Ali who comes to dergah just because of the zikir part. One of them expressed this by saying "I used to be against all these, but when I listened to Ömür Efendi's ilahis I got captured and I decided to attend this dergah, not the previous only female one I used to attend." Considering the stereotypical association of Turkish Romani communities with music, we can argue that the emotional energy emerging in the Gulsheni dergah zikir might be more significant than other dergahs.

### **7.3 Rite de Passage**

Another important rite that creates a feeling of membership and community among the Gulsheni's is the initiation ceremony, a type of rite de passage. If someone wants to become a disciple of Efendi and officially be a member of the Gulsheni Order, they let him know before a sohbet and during the zikir ceremony a short ritual is

performed during which the person who wants to join the order sits in front of Efendi and Efendi holds his hand, the tenth verse of Surah Fath from the Qur'an is recited in Turkish: "Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah . The hand of Allah is over their hands. So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself. And he who fulfills that which he has promised Allah - He will give him a great reward." (Sahih International) This reminds the new disciple that the instrumentality of the Efendi to reach God. In Turkish, a common saying within Sufi circles is "Hand to hand and hand to God<sup>82</sup>" which emphasizes the importance of Silsile that leads to God. Then three times Efendi asks "I accept you as my disciple, do you accept me as your *murshid*? And three times the person replies "Yes, I do." The resemblance between this ritual and the marriage ritual in Islam is apparent, and in the Sufi discourse, it is possible to come across the comparison of the two.

Van Gennep (1909) who coined the term rite de passage compared the society to a house divided into rooms and corridors and these passages to leaving one room and entering another one. Gennep names the three stages of passage in this way: "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites* (1977: 21). The rite in the Gulsheni order is a postliminal rite where the new disciple enters into the sacred world of dergah and the authority of the Efendi that will guide him in his/her journey to salvation. This third phase is usually characterized by ceremonies where 'sacred bond' or 'sacred cord' is widely uttered and sometimes externalized with symbols such as a belt, a ring, or a crown (Turner 1967: 23). I have not witnessed a physical object representing the passage but the sacred bond or cord discourse is a common theme in the dergah. What is given to the new member is the task of doing zikir silently without moving his lips and tongue. When I asked my informant how this is done she told me that it is a *sir* (secret) that they try to learn all their lives. The symbolic meaning of that ability to say the name Allah while one's tongue is

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<sup>82</sup> El ele el Hakka.

attached to his/her palate is being with God and remembering him even when someone is among other people, seemingly doing other tasks<sup>83</sup>.

#### **7.4 Mevluds**

Another category of rituals in the dergah are the death anniversaries of previous Efendis in Selami Ali, namely Hayreddin Efendi and Kenan Efendi. Although a *mevlid* is not recited, these ceremonies are called *mevlud*. The only difference from an ordinary zikir day is the soda and sweets that are given out in the dergah after the zikir as a charity for the soul of late Efendi. In addition to that, the food given out from dergah is rice and chicken because this is a typical *mevlud* food in Turkish culture. Mevlud gatherings where people recite a poem narrating the story of the Prophet's (pbuh) birth is an important part of Turkish Islam among women. As Tapper states "*mevluds* are regarded as presents for the souls of the dead, while those who participate in the service are themselves believed to gain merit (sevab) from the gifts (Tapper, 1990: 246).

#### **7.5 Hasan Sezai Ziyarets**

Although not in fixed times, a couple of times a year the members of the dergah performs a *ziyaret* to the shrine of Hasan Sezai in Edirne. I purposefully employ the word *ziyaret* instead of pilgrimage because of the difference between the two concepts. Pilgrimage entails a more organized and greater movement than *ziyaret* which is defined as "voluntary movement for the purpose of paying respect, implicitly to a person or shrine whose authority is thereby acknowledged" (Tapper, 1990). For the Selami Ali Gulsheni community the *ziyaret* to Hz. Hasan Sezai's tomb has the additional function of reminding the members of what order they follow. In a context with so many different Sufi orders, this helps them to reorient themselves with the path they chose to follow and remind them of the legitimacy of their silsile. At the end of the day, the sacrality of the dergah they attend is attained via its ascription as a proxy to the dergah of the *pir* who founded the Sezai sub-branch of Gulsheni way. During the visit, the traditional norms of a tomb *ziyaret* are

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<sup>83</sup> (Personal interview with Meryem Afacan, on WhatsApp (28.05.2019).



performed which includes respectfully entering the presence of the tomb slightly bowing and reciting three surah *Ihlas* and one *Fatiha*.

## 7.6 Hasan Sezai Hz. Commemorations

The grandest organization of the Gulshenis is the annual Hasan Sezai Commemoration. It takes place in one of the convention halls of Uskudar Municipality with more than two hundred participants usually in the month of May. The event is advertised with posters like the ones below and famous Sufi speakers such as Cemalnur Sargut or Mustafa Ozdamar are invited. The program includes speeches by the invited speakers and followed by a Sufi music concert. Hasan Sezai Commemoration night is the time when the order presents itself to the public and declares its legitimate position through the attendance of well-known Sufi speakers to the event. The organization is carried out by the members of the order who dress traditional Sufi *haydari* vests in red color during that night.



Figure 15: Hasan Sezai Commemoration Night Invitations

## CONCLUSION

Sufism and Romanism have more in common than most people in Turkish society believe. I maintain that if it weren't for the Romani character of the neighborhood a group like Gulsheniyye would not have flourished in Selami Ali. I say a group like Gulsheniyye because if it were a more orthodox and rigid form of Sufism, it might not have found itself a fertile ground to grow in Selami Ali either. There are various reasons why I reached this conclusion.

The Romanis are known for their free spirit and non-conformity to legal or social norms which caused them to be categorized as marginal people throughout history. As Ocak's (2016) and Ahmet T. Karamustafa's (1994) work on heterodox Sufi groups indicated, such Sufi groups were also categorized as groups outside the acceptable boundaries of the social norms so much so that they were labeled as heretics and disbelievers and were executed, as we saw in the case of some of Ibrahim Gulsheni's successors. Adopting a nomadic lifestyle both groups were resisting to be localized which contributed to their marginalization and stigmatization as the elusive other that might cause disorder due to their dissident and unusual practices.

During the Republican era following the closure of Sufi lodges and ban of any activity pertaining to it, the Sufism, in general, was stigmatized and marginalized. It was no longer an element of the high culture of the Turkish lifestyle but something that went underground with the stigma of something that can create disorder. This is one way the two lifestyles ended up being in the same social category. In other words, the two met in the margins.

In the early 1990s when Kenan Efendi began working on the establishment of the new order, Sufism was still an illegal activity that could be persecuted by the government forces. Maybe this is why Kenan Efendi started his activities in the streets and for many years the movement did not have a location. If the community had not consisted of mostly Romanis that might not have happened so easily, because the Romani lifestyle is characterized by its tendency to the outdoors rather than indoors and their ability to relocate easily. This deterritorialized and

decentralized beginning of the new movement kept it away from the attention of the authorities and when the first dergah was opened Efendi already had enough number of followers to protect him and the political atmosphere of Turkey had shifted towards a more tolerant direction towards the Sufis.

The tactics that were utilized by the Selami Ali community in order to maneuver against the state strategies and policies required a certain level of knowledge and experience of being able to tackle scrutiny and being able to avoid the law enforcement units. The tactic of hanging the picture of Atatürk in the dergah was the result of knowing how to deal with the oppression and continue walking in the margins without confronting the hegemonic power. Here I am employing the concepts of strategy and tactics in the sense Michel de Certeau (1984) outlined them in his book titled “The Practice of Everyday Life” and arguing that thanks to their long history of struggle and resistance against the strategies of organizational power structures they had developed the skills of seizing tactics to defend themselves, which paved the way to initiate the illegal organization of Gulsheni dergah.

The Romanis have the attributes of Bedouin and nomadic groups rather than sedentary ones in the Ibn Khaldunian categorization of the social groups. Although Selami Ali Romanis have long been settled in that location, their tribal *asabiyya* ties, and their semi-nomadic lifestyle because of their journey to southern Turkey in Summers to work in the tourism sector, their inhabitation in a shanty town style of neighborhood for a long time are some of the elements that pushes them closer to the Bedouin category. According to Ibn Khaldun people living in this style are more courageous than sedentary people who are accustomed to being protected by laws and the city walls. The Romani in the case had the courage to start a new Sufi movement despite its dangers, which indicates their bravery in the face of persecution and their disregard for legal norms. This is another factor that convinces me that the Romani identity of the neighborhood constituted a favorable soil for the growth of the movement.

As we understand from Mustafa Aksu’s testimony the Romanis were never allowed into state mechanisms and were never given governmental jobs. Their relationship with the government was minimal in many ways; therefore they did not fear to lose

their jobs or any other type of benefit from the state apparatus. Like the Bedouin in the Ibn Khaldunian sociology, they minimized their needs and dependencies, which renders them brave when doing something that contradicts the status quo.

Something told by one of my key informants who spent a long time with the current Efendi sheds light on the fact that Selami Ali has developed into being a distinct and separate micro-system where the legal and social norms of other parts of Istanbul do not function. The translation of her anecdote is like this:

It was around 2010s, we were going to a dergah in Kasimpasha, we lost the way and Efendi asked a police officer for directions. He said, “we are going to the Rifai dergah, where is it?” I said “Oh no!” It might be okay in the quarter (Selami Ali) because it is natural here but... My comment is that: because this place, I mean the Romani neighborhood has a special place, there is no concern or fear from the secular situation and system<sup>84</sup>.

It seems that even in 2010s dergahs were perceived as illegal, underground institutions by the educated and non-Romani narrator of the story. For the Efendi living in the milieu of Selami Ali, on the other hand, it is only natural to ask the direction of a functioning dergah to a police officer because dergahs are natural part of daily life because the state propaganda against them via educational sources and the media might not have penetrated into the world of Selami Ali Romanis because almost none of them pass through the educational institutions of the state.

The practices of Gulsheniyye such as the zikir with music might have been another reason for the Romanis to get attracted to the dergah more easily. The Romani people are stereotypically known for their love of music and entertainment and during the zikir ceremonies, this is easily observable not only from the way people seem to cherish the ceremony but also from the way they can easily merge into the zikir with their percussions. Almost all the middle-aged men can play reperussions during the zikir and *ilahi* sessions.

Ernest Gellner who based his theory of Muslim society on Ibn Khaldun’s social theory virtually describes the situation in Selami Ali community under the title of the urban saint:

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<sup>84</sup> Personal Interview with Meryem Afacan. 01.26.2019, Üsküdar.

But the towns do not provide a base only for the scholarly, Unitarian, puritanical faith of the bourgeoisie. Not everyone living in the city is comfortable, sober and contented; not everyone looks to religion for a ratification of his own cherished place in the world and the cautious, orderly lifestyle which goes with it. Some, on the contrary, look to it for an escape from an unsatisfactory or even intolerable condition. The city has its poor; they are uprooted, insecure, alienated, with little inclination towards the more abstract and arid branches of theology. What they require from religion is a consolation or escape; their taste is for ecstasy, excitement, stimulation, absorption in a religious condition, which is also forgetting. They crave the audio-visual aids of faith, whether in the form of music, dance, intoxication, trance or possession. Mystical states, with or without pharmaceutical aids, appeal to them more than scholarly precision or learned distinctions. So, like the tribesmen, but for other reasons altogether and in a different style, they need a religion externalized in ritual and personality. For the tribesmen, the festival is an externalization and highlighting of their effective social groups, in true Durkheimian manner. For the urban poor folk, it is compensation for the absence of such groups (Gellner, 1983: 48).

Social discrimination and exclusionary policies that led to poverty, unemployment, and other problems which naturally create a need for a center of escape and refuge for the community of Selami Ali too. Selami Ali has been known for the circulation and consumption of narcotics for many years, which is an indication of this need to an escape from the harsh reality. The dergah which offers a religious condition with audio-visual aids externalized in ritual in the form of zikir and in the persona of the Efendi could be also functioning as a center for escape. The two gatherings a week with food, sohbet, and music has the function of festivals mentioned in the final sentences of Gellner's statements above. In addition to that within the disorder of the shanty town, dergah must have created a certain center of orientation, a cosmos within the chaos.

Lack of formal requirements in Gulsheni Sufism due to its heterodox orientation might have been another point of attraction for the Selami Ali community. During my observations within the neighborhood, the dergah of an order with orthodox practices was closed due to lack of attendance. We can conclude that the product if offered did not appeal to the client base in the quarter. The Islamic dress code, praying five times a day, not drinking alcohol and such constraints might have been hard to practice for the Romanis who are characterized by their reluctance to comply with constraints and regulations. The statements below by the son of Kenan Efendi confirms this point.

And unfortunately, in the Romani community, 80-90 percent of those who met Sufism have a deficiency in practicing sharia and belief in the hereafter. Do you know why? This stems from the understanding that love and Sufism give them. Think about it, before coming to this path, There is a God in heavens who follow you, hush, don't do that there is punishment and so on... you are in such a mentality. There is fire and stuff... And this God becomes simpler for you, the One who sees through you, speaks through you... He comes down and starts to resemble you<sup>85</sup>...

According to this explanation, there is a close connection between disregarding the sharia rules and Vahdet-i Vucud creed, and the history of Sufism confirms this connection. Almost all the non-conformist and dissident social groups in the Ottoman Empire followed this view (Ocak, 2016). As Mr. Saldak articulates this theosophy brings divinity down from the heavens to the earth and yields a different relationship with God which is more horizontal than vertical. Moreover, as discussed earlier as a result of this view of everything being one and the same in essence all the social hierarchies and categories melt down and disappear. The Romani is no more any different from the Turk or the man from the woman. It appeals especially to those who are in the lower social strata because it elevates them to the same level with even the most distinguished members of society.

In the case of Selami Ali Gulsheni order, this appeal to the national senses is even more because in this dergah the Gaji is coming to there to be dominated and subjugated by a Romani. Witnessing this not only increases the charismatic aura of the Romani Efendi in the dergah but also boosts the self-esteem of the Romanis. Considering that some of the Gajis attending the dergah are celebrity idols of other Gajis one can only imagine how remarkable this positive impact is.

Judging from the testimony of one of my non-Romani interviewees who engaged with the Romani community in Sakarya, I reached the conclusion that if Kenan Efendi were not a Romani the movement in Selami Ali might not have started. He narrated that for five years he strived among the Romanis for five years teaching them about Sufism and guiding them but whenever a Romani Sheikh would come there, they would “sell him out” and go to him. Giving him all the secret knowledge that non-Romani Efendi had granted them.

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<sup>85</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 01.05.2019, Üsküdar.

The Melami character of Gulsheni teachings is another reason that enabled it to be embraced by the Romanis according to the account of Mr. Saldak:

.... However, the understanding of Sufism that Romani system embraces is usually Melami system. I mean today if you go to the Romani quarter in Bursa Kemalpasha, it is based on Melami system; if you go to Gazi Osman Pasha mostly is based on Romani system. Romani people mostly adopted Melamiyye system because it is practical, easy and its explanation and narration can address everyone's intellect. I mean for those who are interested in Sufism<sup>86</sup>...

We have to remember that Gulsheniyye is the most Melami of Halveti orders (Ocak 2016: 397; Golpinarli, 1968: 215), and Kenan Efendi's last will that the Gulshenis must cooperate with Melamis shows that Selami Ali Gulshenis were well aware of that parallelism. Melamiyye has always been associated with a lack of care for the legal requirements of religion, instead of focusing on the divine love that is expressed in the form of poetry, music, and zikir. The Melamis are known for their dissident and protest stance against the social institutions and norms which is manifested with public violations of social and religious norms. As Bhopal and Mysers express “, a sense of opposition to the dominant culture is an important factor in shaping Romani identity” (2008: 25). Therefore, the Sufi orders with Melami teachings such as Gulsheniyye appeal to the Romani people. The simplicity of Melami teachings was suggested, as another reason of this attraction, yet as expressed previously, the Gulsheniyye ontology, which is a common theme in the dergah, does not seem to be a very simple system to explain.

Finally, after analyzing the compatibility of Sufi and Romani identity from all the rational perspectives, I want to conclude this discussion with the Sufi view of the issue. Sufism teaches to be humble and the first step of beginning this journey is getting rid of one's ego and pride. The Romanis do not have as much pride and ego as the other modern social groups, therefore for them progressing on this path is easier than others. A story told by Kenan Efendi reported by his son expounds this fact very well:

A dervish served an Efendi for twenty years. On the path, there was a poor drum player Romani. This is also narrated by Efendi. A manifestation (zuhurat) takes place and the drum player becomes a disciple to the Efendi. 6 months later he gets his icazet (certificate). Of course, the other 20-year long disciple gets jealous. He questions this saying I served for twenty years... (Efendi says) My son, he is a poor

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<sup>86</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 01.05.2019, Üsküdar.

drum player, when I abolished his wall, not other wall appeared behind it. But whenever I demolish a wall of yours another wall appeared... another one appeared...

That is, there are good sides, beautiful sides of Kenan Efendi and our quarter and community. The good side is, their egomania is not very high, their egos are not very high, they have no arrogance and believe me in our upbringing, we are also like this in business life. I mean, when we do business we behave with an air of wretchedness around the people we are going to earn money from. This is the general situation as a society<sup>87</sup>.

In addition to lack of arrogance, another very Sufi characteristic of Romanis I observed is their contentment with what they have and their lack of concern about tomorrow. This state is called *tevekkul* in Islamic context and it is a desirable result of Sufi path and Romanis seem to have mastered it already.



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<sup>87</sup> Personal interview with Cengiz Saldak. 01.05.2019, Üsküdar.



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## APPENDIX 1

### Translation of Law of Closure of Tekkes and Zawiyas

Law 677 which prohibits and abolishes the profession of tomb-keeping, the assigning of mystical names, and the closing of tekkes (dervish lodges), zaviyes (central dervish lodges), and tombs.

(1) All the tekkes and zaviyes in the Turkish Republic, either in the form of wakf (religious foundations) or under the personal property right of its sheikh or established in any other way, are closed. Those used as mosques [cami] and mescits (small mosques) may be retained as such. (2) All of the orders [tarikatlere] using (titles such) as sheikh [sheyhlik], dervish [dervishlik], disciple [müritlek], senior dervish [dedelik], leader of the Mevlevi Order [chelebilik], descendent of the Prophet Muhammad [seyitlik], sheikh [babalik], descendent of the Prophet Muhammad [emirlik], dervish leader [nakiblik], deputy sheikh [halifelik], fortune-teller [falcilik]. . . . Service to these titles, and the wearing of dervish costume are prohibited. The tombs of the dervish orders are closed, and the profession of tomb keeping is abolished. Those who open the closed tekkes or zaviyes, or the tombs, and those who reestablish them or those who give temporary places to the orders [tarikatlere] or to people who are called by any of the mystical name mentioned above or those who serve them, will be sentenced to at least three months in prison and will be fined at least fifty Turkish liras(3: added 1949). (For the use of the titles) Sheikh, Baba, and Halife such as found, not less than six months in prison and a heavy fine of not less than 500 Turkish liras, and not less than one year (in prison) for another offense. (4: added 1950) The tombs of great and famous Turks [Türbelerden Türk büyükler] and those with great artistic value can be opened in public, by the Ministry of Culture. It is necessary to appoint civil servants for their maintenance.

(translation belongs to [www.dar-al-masnavi.org](http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org).)

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