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## Contents

**A. Niazi,**
Ph. D. (Hist), IOS RAS,
Deputy editor of the bulletin "Russia
and the Moslem World"

## ISLAMIC VALUES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ISSUE OF CULTURE AND PROGRESS

The manifestations of the global systemic crisis started to track at the end of the last century. But now the global instability, which covers all areas of human life, has increased dramatically. The instability of the global political, economic, financial and energy systems has increased, cultural development and rapprochement of peoples moves back, the economic capacity of the biosphere is falling apart.

This situation is due to the dictates of neoliberal ideology and practice, established in recent decades. Economic dominance is evident in the neoliberal project, the idea of democratization of the world is secondary. It is used more as a political tool for the promotion of leading transnational capitalist model, and as a selective tool.

The neoliberal economic doctrine was developed in the late 1970s to revitalize the economies of the UK and the U.S. It was assumed a gradual release of the market from the tutelage of the state and of social obligations and the adoption of a new world monetary and

financial system. This project has significantly transformed into a kind of philosophy of the world civilization development over time. Its supporters have started reorganization of the world as soon as the Soviet system began to collapse, proclaiming that the free market was the engine of progress. Neoliberalism radicalized significantly during this time. It was proposed much stricter reforms known as "shock therapy" for post-Soviet economy, in contrast to the recommended earlier for a number of developing countries. There was an attempt to extend the project of neoliberal globalization on the planet after the fall of the socialist camp. Postulates of neoliberalism began to apply in war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan after coalition forces entered there. As a result, long-term socio-economic and political crises have taken place[1].

The neoliberal theory has generated the dogma and the West continues to rely on them by inertia in its relations with the East. The West is not homogeneous, but it continues to examine changes at the political level in the rest of the world through the prism of this particular project, giving advice that is often refuted in practice. The formula of progress for others is the opening of the market, following the tenets of monetarism, privatization the state property, the dollarization of the financial system, export orientation, minimization of the social responsibility of the state, its presence in the economy, its protectionist actions, and all this in the most radical forms. In most cases, following such recommendations in practice leads to opposite results[2].

Experience of world development shows that the most pressing problems have not been solved within the globalist model in recent decades. It is focused on speeding up economic growth, maximization of consumption and cultivation of hedonism and self erecting various obstacles in its path of socio-economic, political, military, cultural and

natural character, to overcome which is becoming increasingly difficult. At the same time there is an active search for another significant and technological paradigm of development now, designed to change consumer attitude to life on a conscious saving of the world and human in man. Of course, there can not be a universal prescription for curing diseases of our time. It is impossible to make everyone happy, but mankind is capable of creating more fair, reasonable and stable peace. It seems that the concept of sustainable development, created under the aegis of the UN, is a consolidating antithesis to the neoliberal project. The time of its realization and implementation is just beginning.

The key principle of the concept is the need to balance economic, social and environmental well-being. The scheme is offered for inter-supported, socio-natural evolution through the introduction of alternative energy sources, resource-saving and clean technologies, adoption of lean socio-economic models of production and consumption control, which is called "green economy". The new settings are designed around this basic objective: on the world political and economic order, the role of state and market, education and public awareness; problems are solved for self-management and social responsibility of business and government. Serious attention is paid to the support and development of culture, and preservation of traditional spiritual values and their crucial role in the formation of new vectors of progress. The concept of sustainable development regenerates the progressive system of views on the harmonious arrangement of the world. Its content is continuously expanded and crystallized. The theory of sustainable development is international, open to progressive ideas of East and West, is able to expand and absorb the experience of different cultures.

Islamic heritage can give a lot of useful on the way out of the global systemic crisis. Faith, Ethics and Law, linked together in Islam,

have retained to this day the pursuit of justice, mutual responsibility for the present and the future, for the spiritual and physical health, the care of the family and the needy, caring attitude to the world, diligence, temperance, condemnation of greed and parasitism among Muslims. Millions of people follow or try to follow these principles. Islam is a way of life, preserving human dignity and spiritual balance. More and more Islamic social and environmental organizations appear today, contributing to the common cause of protection of man and nature. Serious works on the theory and practice of sustainable development in the Muslim world are beginning to be published. Examples of elements of Islamic economics, social policy and philanthropy are becoming more relevant. These factors can be successfully applied in the common cause of formation of a new vector of progress.

The coordinate system of world development suggests the forced abandonment of the priority of economic growth over social development and ecological safety, which should result in strengthening the regulatory role of the state to tighten control over consumption and production and, in some cases, reductions in the developed countries for the sake of the environment and prevention of conflicts motivated by the struggle for resources[3]. Many liberal-democratic model of personal priority over the public may change to socially oriented. Certain democratic norms and personal freedoms in their current manifestation of Western will have to sacrifice in favor of the collective rights and responsibilities. Another problem, no less important, is to assist developing countries in acquiring new technologies and, perhaps in exchange for raw materials.

There is a tendency to strengthen the state regulation and the planning of socio-economic development in Russia now. Only fragmentary changes in individual sectors can be seen now. A comprehensive economic restructuring required in the coming years,

and in the mobilization regime[4]. It is not a return to the directive planning, but to the targeted development programs, the indicative plans, defining breakthrough industries and enterprises and the volume of their financing.

Development of methods to reduce the inflationary component of economic growth and the transition to a full-fledged banking, financial and investment system from the monetarist policy of containment of the money supply, has an important place in the aforesaid macro-economic strategy. Such a system should be aimed at deliverance of the Russian economy from a rigid binding to service the needs of the world market and the interests of foreign creditors, as well as at meeting the monetary demand in the real economy and the expansion of consumer purchasing power.

In this regard, the system of Islamic banking has attracted a growing attention of Russian experts and the public, including the Russian Orthodox Church. It shows stable development of its own financial mechanisms in the past decade[5]. Experience of Islamic commercial companies, charitable funds and waqf in a number of Muslim countries, the strategic use of state resources, and the planning of socio-economic development, that are based on social and ethical principles of Islam, is no less interesting. This can be called the experience of Islamic economics, which is implemented in different countries in various versions, without presenting a single model. This is only the beginning of the practical ways of the Islamic economic alternative[6].

The peculiarity of the Islamic economic thought is basing on the fundamental religious and ethical principles – a ban on usurious percent; a ban on non-working, unearned income received in the course of fraud or gambling; distribution of contributions and taxes to benefit the poor through the various governmental and non-governmental

religious organizations; equality of all forms of property, but the restriction private property in the vital sectors of the existence of the state; ensuring equal access to resources and consumer goods while leaving the state as the main owner on public property – land, water resources and bowels.

Islamic economics puts the ethical principles at the heart of economic relations, rather than the bare material calculation. Private property is sacred in it. Therefore, restriction on the use of private property to the detriment of the interests of the Muslim community itself does not limit the property, but only its use. State social and economic management and planning should be carried out to achieve a balance of personal and public interests, but the freedom of enterprise can be installed in different borders depending on the changing conditions. As a rule, state intervention in its economy grows and manifests itself in the regulation of prices, financial flows, protectionist measures, subsidizing vital industries, reduction of the presence of private companies in them. It is important to note one more fundamental position in Islamic economic theory, which leads to the rejection of the global speculative activities. An unearned income arising from a random set of circumstances (in gambling, for example) without application performance of resources (capital, labor, and so on.) is unrighteous. On this basis, the modern financial system has been sharply criticized by Muslim scholars, since it allows to maneuver the enormous monetary flows at the global level for the purpose of their own extended reproduction without the production of the actual product. The relationship between the real economy and its finances in cross-border speculative operations has been lost. They have gained unprecedented power over the economy, received independence from the productive part. International financial markets have become

increasingly unpredictable and can cause unintended consequences. productive force.

Various alternatives are available to overcome this phenomenon in the world economy – from imposing very high taxes on the super profit of speculators of world class, and to the introduction of the single international means of payment. The concept of the Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance Malaysia is interesting in this context, which proposed a monetary unit for international payments – "the gold dinar"[7]. Perhaps this concept will be developed in the coming years. Correction of global speculative mechanisms in the direction of tightening control over them will follow, and Islamic banking will have a significant impact on the global credit and economic practice, in particular, the expansion of non-traditional credit transactions, limiting the trans-speculative operations, and may be on the introduction of a single international settlement currency.

The principles and practical steps for the forming of Islamic economics, coupled with examples of social structures of a number of Muslim countries, demonstrate a specific the "third way" of development – a middle way between the extremes of neo-liberalism (deregulation of the economy, naked materialistic calculation domination of selfishness and personal motivation) and rigid socialist (communist) experiments, reducing private property, individual incentives and the freedom of citizens to a minimum. Many countries have been through extreme, and now turn to traditional moral and ethical values in the creation of a new social and technological order.

The Islamic concept of the middle way covers the most important areas of life of Muslims, from theology and education, and to law and economics. Aspiration to balance private and public interests, preservation of high ideals of Islamic culture prevails in it. Islam does not reject the market economy, but it requires a reasonable and fair

regulation of it. At the same time it limits the market society of boundless consumption, calls for moderation and harmony with the environment that meets the fundamental values of sustainable development[8].

* * *

Obviously, we are painfully entering a new era of human progress, reinterpreting the past and present, trying to return to the universal morality, notions of honor, duty and virtue which have been accumulated over the centuries. We are gradually returning to the high culture in which traditional social values have unchangeable creative significance. The culture is a point of support for our development, which is called progress.

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[3]  The functioning of communities by increasing the exploitation of nature has its limits. Depletion of ecosystems under intensive resource consumption causes serious disruptions in the life of society. Many socio-economic models, whether developed or developing countries, are beginning to lose the prospect of development. They also inhibit the overall global development, built on the wasteful, consumer attitude towards nature and man

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**I. Babich,**
Dr. of Science (Hist.), Chief researcher
at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAS

## MUSLIMS OF MOSCOW: THE FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AS ELEMENTS OF CIVIL ACCORD IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY[*]

The process of religious revival occurs spontaneously in the most cases both without appropriate support and control of the religious structures, and without cooperation with the state ones. Islamic and Orthodox development takes place with difficulty in Russia, in spite of the state assistance. The growth of ethnic and religious factors in the lives of Russians does not help with unification of the citizens – with

civil agreement, but on the contrary – the representatives of different ethnic groups, different religions, are moving apart. The main objective of the formation of the modern general cultural foundation is to create the conditions for Russia's multicultural community, to strengthen the unity of the state and to establish the intercultural dialogue and civic harmony, *based on national and religious diversity of the peoples* of the Russian Federation.

This article deals with the problem of establishing the basic methods and the formation of civil accord in Russia on the example of the ethnographic and cultural analysis of ethnic and religious situation in Moscow.

*   *   *

Moscow has long been a key subject in many ethnographic and cultural studies. Many Russian ethnographers have considered its problems in their works.[1] But first, they investigated only some religious organizations of Moscow – mainly Orthodox and Islamic communities. Second, they described the religious life in these communities, but not *the nature of the relationship between religious organizations*, both at the level of religious leaders, as well as at the level of relations between parishioners. *Relationships of parishioners belonging to different faiths*, as well as correlating with them issues related to *the study of tolerance and the identification of objective and subjective sources of latent and open conflictness*, were put at the forefront in this work. Moscow has emerged as a multi-religious city during the centuries. There are areas of residence both ethnic and religious communities, which have been largely mixed with other ethnic and religious groups and formed the historical patterns of behavior over time. Questions regarding: firstly knowledge of the history of this religious community in Moscow, and, secondly, relations between representatives of various religious organizations and associations as equal

citizens of Russia and Moscow residents have been included in the questionnaire because of the peculiar historical past of Moscow.

Accommodation of believers in large metropolitan areas results in changes for both national culture and patterns of behavior, and religious community and identity, as a result of the globalization of culture. It is necessary to pay attention to the relation of religious and ethnic identity, on the implementation of national and religious ceremonies in the study of ethnic and religious situation in Moscow. Believers, who live in Moscow, are included in the complex religious – state relations, and socio-political relations to a greater extent than in other regions of Russia.

In the 2000–2010s, about 45 communities of different religious faiths, churches, denominations, sects were functioning in Moscow. The confessional dominants of Moscow at the present stage are: Russian Orthodox Church (227) organizations: Protestant (254), Jewish (17), separated from Orthodox Church (8), Old Believer (7); Muslim (6); Buddhist (5); Hare Krishna (4); Scientology (1).

### They were selected:

1. The so-called traditional religions, in those, that have become dominant in the past and continue to remain so – Orthodoxy and Islam.

2. Religions, that have appeared in Russia in general, and in Moscow in particular, in the previous centuries and are the "historical" religions in Moscow – Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant (Baptist), that Believer, Armenian Church, Judaism.

3. Religions that have emerged as a result of joining the national borderlands – Buddhism.

4. Religions that have been popular during the twentieth century in the world, but appeared in Russia only after perestroika, "post-

Soviet" ones – Seventh-day Adventists, Salvation Army, charismatic movement, Unification Church, New Age.

On the one hand, there is a wider range of "new religions" presented in Moscow in comparison with the regions, and on the other hand, traditional religions are more popular in the capital region. Therefore, new religious communities, such as "New Age", were included in the survey on religious organizations and communities, and at the same time, the survey of representatives of traditional religions – Christianity and Islam was held in a larger percentage.

Table 1

**Distribution of informants by number and age groups**

| Religious Community / Age | 15–29 | 30–39 | 40–59 | 60–80 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **First Group** | | | | | |
| Russian Orthodox Church | 5 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 16 |
| Muslim Communities | 6 | 3 | 13 | 3 | 25 |
| **Second Group** | | | | | |
| Anglican Church | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Armenian Apostolic Church | 2 | 2 | 3 | | 7 |
| Church of Evangelical Christians Baptists | 6 | 3 | 2 | | 11 |
| Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith of Pentecostals | 6 | 1 | 3 | 10 | |
| Jewish Church | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church | | | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Roman Catholic Church | 3 | 1 | | | 4 |
| Old Believer Church | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Evangelical Church | 1 | 2 | | | 3 |
| Common Faith Church | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| True Orthodox Church | 2 | 1 | | | 3 |
| **Third Group** | | | | | |
| Buddhist Community | 4 | 2 | 3 | | 9 |
| **Fourth Group** | | | | | |
| Seventh Day Adventists Church | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Salvation Army | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Charismatic Church | 2 | | | | 2 |
| New Age | | 3 | | | 3 |
| Methodist Church | 3 | | | 1 | 4 |
| Presbyterian Church | 2 | 1 | | | 3 |

Table 2

## Distribution of informants along ethnic lines

| Religious Community ethnicity | Russians Peoples | Peoples of Caucasus | Peoples of Central Asia | Tatars | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **First Group** | | | | | |
| Russian Orthodox Church | 16 | | | | |
| Muslim Community | | 5 | 4 | 15 | Iranian |
| **Second Group** | | | | | |
| Anglican Church | | | | | American, Russian, Jew |
| Armenian Apostolic Church | | Armenians – 7 | | | |
| Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists | 10 | | | | Mordva |
| Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith Pentecostals | 10 | | | | |
| Jewish church | | Georgian Jews – 2 | | | Jews – 6 |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church | 1 | | | | Russians Germans – 3 |
| Roman Catholic Church | 3 | | | | Polyak – 1 |
| Old Believer Church | 3 | | | | Belarusian – 1 |
| Evangelical Church | 3 | | | | |
| Common Faith Church | 3 | | | | Polyak – 1 |
| True Orthodox Church | 2 | | | | Ukrainian – 1 |
| **Third group** | | | | | |
| Buddhist community | 7 | | | | Cech – 1 Calmac – 1 |
| **Fourth Group** | | | | | |
| Seventh Day Adventists church | 4 | | | | Ukrainians – 2 |
| Salvation Army | 2 | | | | Moldovan – 1 |
| Charismatic church | 2 | | | | |
| New Age | 3 | | | | |
| Methodist church | 1 | Georgian – 1 | | | Koreans – 2 |
| Presbyterians | 3 | | | | |

Selection criteria for the respondent population of Moscow and Adygea. *National identity*: members of religious organizations and communities with different *ethnic identity*, were selected for the survey. For example, Tatars and the inhabitants of the Caucasus were selected among the Muslims practicing Islam, not only foreigners but also Russian people were selected among Anglicans, etc. These ethnic differences are particularly important for the study of religious groups such as Muslims. The study of correlation of both *religious and ethnic identities* is among the key aspects of the project, so the nationalities of the respondents are the main indicators of the nature of this correlation. Tracking the links between religious affiliation, ethnicity and special relationships to other religious groups is important for the project. Particular attention is paid to the Caucasus background.

*Age affiliation.* Since almost all religious groups and organizations appeared in the 1990s (when the laws, relating to freedom of speech, appeared in Russia), the majority of parishioners – adherents of religions – belong to particular age groups. Followers from older age groups prevail in the religions, that have historical roots in Russia, younger believers are among adherents of the new religions. Interconnection can be traced between age and nature of the chosen religious movement, peculiarities of religious activity, and so on, in this project.

*Authority and leadership of an informant.* It was important for this survey to attract people with a general recognition, respect and influence among certain groups. At the same time, ordinary parishioners who do not have any influence and authority are also important. The study of this dichotomy – leaders and ordinary parishioners of a religious community – will reveal its endurance, its structure and basis of its activities and vitality. It is important to involve its *leaders* – members of the group for the survey, who are entitled to

take decisions in significant situations, because of their personal prestige or positions. At the same time, as the life of leaders, so the life of *laity* are important for this study.

There were 132 respondents in Moscow. The following 21 religious organizations were selected for the project.

1. The so-called *traditional religions*, i.e. those religions that have become dominant in the past and still remain so – Orthodoxy and Islam (41 people);

2. Religions, which appeared in Russia, in general, and Moscow, in particular, in the past centuries, that are *"historical"* religions in Moscow (in our opinion) – *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant (Baptist), Old Believer, Armenian Church, Judaism* (61 pers.).

3. Religions, which appeared in Russia as a result of accession of the national borderlands to Empire – *religion of "national borderlands"* – *Buddhism* (9 pers.).

4. Religions, which were very popular in the world in the 20th century, but appeared in Russia only after perestroika – *"post-Soviet" religion* – *Adventist Church, Salvation Army, Charismatic Church, Unification Church, Church-moon, "New Age"* (21 pers.)

*National identity.* The following nationalities were selected for the survey: Russian, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars, peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, also Poles, Americans, Germans and others. *Authority and Leadership of an informant.* Were selected: 15 religious leaders and 117 members of religious communities.

*Dichotomy: Muscovites – not Muscovites.* 115 Muscovites were surveyed, only 10 of them have become Muscovites over the last 5–7 years, the other – earlier, not Muscovites – 20 people.

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It is important to proceed from the fact that the real socio-economic and political factors *may underlie* the confrontations, collisions and conflicts in the study of the role of religious identity in the socio-political life, whether it is peace or conflict during the life of peoples. Interconnection has been considered: between social problems in the metropolis Moscow and the level of religious tolerance; the degree of social justice by the authorities of Moscow and the Russian government to ensure acceptable conditions of social existence of all people – both believers and seeking to free religious life.

A key approach to the study of the topic was the disclosure of the nature of inter-religious relations in society by *revealing the specifics of mentality of a religious community* and a human being within it through the prism of the religious culture. *It revealed the external signs of indicators of religion and ethnicity, allowed to comprehend the essential specifics of the ethno-cultural and religious communities*, differing from other ethnic and social groups. Thus, the study of religious traditions – is close attention to the religious culture as *a specific factor of individual and social development.*

The study of religious conflicts took place in the context of the study of the religious life, life, world outlook, and only then, in terms of conflict resolution, and it has become the fundamental methodology of the project. Issues of religious conflicts has not been accentuated in the survey and study to get the most adequate, realistic and clear data on the level and degree of tolerance in contemporary religious communities. *The method*, which is common in the western cultural studies and cultural anthropology of law has been chosen for the survey. The method describes the "religious practices" through the study of the most typical conflicts for the group of respondents.

The level of conflicts in Moscow is significantly higher, than in other Russian regions, primarily because of the closer people's living in the conditions of the large and complex city. There is greater amount of information as there are more respondents, on the one hand, but the information is more difficult to get, as people prefer to conceal it to a greater extent than in regions, on the other one.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

The article presents the preliminary results obtained during the initial processing and systematization of data in monitoring the ethno-religious cooperation in Moscow, focusing on Muslims.

Transformation of the majority of religious conflicts into *interpersonal ones*, when the conflicting parties do not associate their causes with religious affiliation, has become an important feature of life in Moscow. The manifestation of the universal moral norms in the behavior of a particular person is more important for Muscovites than *the reflection of certain moral norms of a religious cult in his behavior.* This proves that Muscovites are able to respond properly on and deal with conflicts, on the one hand, and  existence of hidden forms of inter-religious conflicts, on the other one.

Another feature of the believers is *a deliberate attempt to isolate themselves from other religious groups* in Moscow . The believers seek to limit their communications *only by the members of their community*, because of the large population of Moscow, and they have *no interest in everyday life of other religious communities*. Muscovites *prefer to avoid contact with representatives of other religious communities* in everyday life, in order to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, and they do not seek to defend *their religious truth* before the representatives of other religious communities in comparison with the representatives of republics of the North Caucasus, for example[2]. The

majority of Moscow's population forms its own identity on the basis of cultural or *civil (secular)* identity.

### The main reasons for open religious conflicts:

– Closeness of confessions to the government agencies, obtaining a number of state benefits and therefore non-compliance with the law on freedom of conscience (for example, "State Orthodoxy" causes extremely negative reaction of many parishioners of other cults).

– Differences in religious practices and holding them on the territory of Moscow, displeases not supporters of the religious cult.

– Churches struggle for increasing their flock, which the leaders made within permitted missionary activity, position of the Orthodox religion as the dominant one in Moscow is negatively perceived by believers of other faiths.

– There is considerably less disagreement within individual groups of Christian directions, "historic churches" rather than between them and other confessions.

– The presence of political and state, rather than personal, conflicts. It is connected with the basic rules and their compliance during registration of religious associations and organizations.

– Availability of insignificant ethnic conflict in religious communities, as the majority religious groups tend to mono-ethnic composition of their communities.

## Table of responses of Muslims of Moscow (25 people)
### (Cathedral Mosque in Moscow, Prospekt Mira)

| Relation to other religions | Conflicts between Muslims and members of other confessions | Differences in the System of moral Values in Orthodox, Islam and other Faiths |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Neutral, tolerant | It happens misunderstanding | Differences in dogma and moral values are the same everywhere |
| Tolerant | Presence of hidden and open conflicts between Muslims and members of other confessions | |
| Tolerant, normal attitude towards all religions, respectful | There is no conflict | |
| Normal and tolerant | There was a conflict of the local community in Sergiev Posad, which is an Orthodox city, and there were calls to ban the construction of mosques, were threats against Muslims. The imam of the mosque was beaten up a couple of years ago. | |
| Respectful, each religious denomina-tion has a right to exist, adequate | There was no | No significant differences |
| Neutral | Have friends among Orthodox Christians and members of other faiths. Relations are good. The main thing – we must respect each other. There was no conflict on religious grounds, but there were discussions, conversations with adherents of other faiths. She mentioned arguments, hadiths in favor of Islam, trying not to offend other people's religion. | |
| Good, with interest, the main thing – human relations | Have friends, acquaintances among Orthodox and other denominations. Relations are very good. There were no conflicts. | |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Good | We are not happy – there are not enough mosques. Religious issues are resolved not on common sense and the law of conscience, but the "parochial" control. | |
| Good | There are disputes at work, but end peacefully.<br>Infringed the rights of Muslims in Moscow, few mosques.<br>There is a prejudice against us in Moscow. There are small conflicts at work, especially during a fast. Many people are wondering, asking questions. The informant explained, and people settle down, they start to treat him in a different way. | |
| Good, but there are few believers of both Muslims and Orthodox, in reality, there is sympathy for people of other faiths, if these people are decent and honest – it does not matter what religion. | There are friends and neighbors of other faiths, congratulates them on holidays, eats matzo and Easter cakes, treats the national Tartar sausage "Kaze". Tries to avoid misunderstandings, however, criticizes the policy of Russian Orthodox Church for the introduction of religious instruction in schools, as it separates very much on confessions: "Science to the school, religion to the church." | |
| There is sympathy for all religions since they call for good. If people comply and follow the commandments, they are good and honest, then there is sympathy for them, too. | There are friends and neighbors of other religions. There were no misunderstandings and conflicts on religious grounds.<br>There are claims to Russian Orthodox Church, as the state provides much more support for this organization than others, even though we live in a secular state. | |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Loyalty, tolerance, sympathy for other religions. | There was not, but people watch without sympathy, "not-good" often. Met with the Orthodox girl, proposed to her, she offered to take her faith; refused, they broke up. | No difference |
| It is easier to find common ground with believers of other religions than atheists. | There was not conflict, there is a mutual understanding at the everyday level; religions unite more than divide, if believers are not fanatics; the difference is not very noticeable in normal conversation; if we talk about religion more deeply, then there will be differences, but everyday level superficial, and therefore the differences are not perceived. | |
| Normal. | Normal communication with representatives of other faiths, general birthday parties, various non-religious holidays. | There are differences, it is an indisputable fact, but there are so many coincidences for some certain values, and moral laws. General – humanness, humanity. |
| Good | There was not. | There are differences, but they are not very striking, there are more correspondences. |
| Good | Many friends, good mutual relations, common interests and topics of conversation. We meet, we go to the movies, in the cafe. There have been conflicts, like all human beings, but not on a religious theme. | |
| Neutral | Polite to the representatives of other faiths; Although arguing with them sometimes, but stops the dispute in time. | There is no difference as Christians perceive the religion of monotheism little differently. |
| Neutral. | There was not conflicts | There is no difference, since all religions teach morality – this is the main aspect |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Normal. All people are equal, all believers of every religion inherent kindness and sincerity. The true believer will not ever declare that he is right, and his faith is better, he will live in peace and harmony, will try to look for ways of friendliness and tolerance. | There are friends among representatives of other religions. Relationships are very good, often spend time together, communicate and are friends. Religious affiliation is not important for the informant, she is interested in the essence of a person, his qualities, the way he relates to people around. But there have been cases of religious misunderstanding. | There is no difference in principle, that is, when it comes to moral qualities and values, then all religions teach the same, all religions teach goodness, mutual understanding and respect, the true worship of God. |
| Calm and respectful; sympathy may be toward represen-tatives of other religions, but not religions themselves. | There are friends who profess another religion, there was no conflict. | All religions are almost identical, as God is one in essence, so religion is also one. |
| Quiet, respectful. | There are friends – Christians; but there were threats from members of other faiths. | There are differences |
| Quiet, respectful, have sympathy for other religions, but religions themselves. | There are friends – Christians. | There are differences |
| It is quite calm, since Muslims are required to maintain good relations with all according to Islam, there is sympathy for people of other faiths, but not the faith itself. | There are Orthodox friends, there were no conflicts. | There are differences |
| Good, but negative to sects. | There are friends, colleagues among Orthodox and other denominations. Mutual relations are very good. The rights of Muslims are infringed in Moscow. Few mosques. | |

So, the main forms of activities to enhance the positive inter-religious dialogue should be recognized as follows:

1. The formation of ideas among members of different religious communities concerning *the relativity of "religious truths",* about different ways of their searching and recognizing the right of a person to live a different life, and to practice a different "truth" than its counterparts in the religious community.

2. The formation of a unified *non-religious system of values*, using entire Russian intellectuals, and that will be able to "work" outside the religions on the entire Russian territory. This value system can be supplemented with the spiritual values of different religions, but the foundation of the system of values has to be "secular", "civil".

3. The introduction of the policy of multiculturalism in Russia to facilitate the severity of the problem. The policy of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism has always held in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet period as the coexistence of peoples can not be organized on other principles within the framework of such a large state. The Soviet slogan "friendship of peoples" is relevant today in many ways. However, *the introduction of multiculturalism in contemporary religious and cultural – ideological circumstances of the Russian Federation requires a competent and serious approach to solve the problem.*

4. Formation of the general field of secular spirituality. The local intellectuals should form a modern multicultural space, where the history of the North Caucasus' peoples, the traditions of Highlanders, Cossacks and Russians, Islamic and Orthodox values, all of them will find a niche in the current socio – economic and political life of the peoples of the North Caucasus. Increased attention to the formation of the unified field of common cultural and civic identity of the power and executive bodies in the republics of the North Caucasus.

5. The process of religious revival is accompanied by a number of circumstances that constantly require *the formation of certain relations between the state and civil society in the development of religious movements in Russia* , as the spread of numerous religious movements gave rise to religious conflicts, both among the clergy and members of the community.

In general, Inter-religious dialogue and concord are real in Moscow today. State and other institutions should promote the establishment of the dialogue in order to weaken the contradictory tendencies separating Moscow society and preventing the unification of the region's population[3].

### Notes

[1]  M.Yu. Martynova, N.M. Lebedev. Molodye moskvichi. Krosskulturnoe issledovanie. [Young Muscovites. Cross-cultural investigation] Moscow, 2009; V.C. Malkova. Moskva – mnogokulturnyi megapolis. [Moscow – is a multicultural megalopolis.] Moscow, 2004; Molodye moskvichi: otnoshenie k istori i itraditsiyam (sociologicheskoe issledovanie). [Young Muscovites: attitude to the history and traditions (Sociological investigation)]. M., 2002; V.C. Malkova. Polietnichnaya Moskva v nachale novogo tysyachaletya. [Polyethnical Moscow at the beginning of the new millennium.] M., 2007; P.V. Ostapenko, I.A. Subbotina. Moskva mnogonatsionalnaya. Starozhily imigranty: vmeste ili ryadom? [Multinational Moscow. Old-timer immigranty: together or nearby? ] Moscow, 2007; M.Yu. Martynova (editor). Molodezhnye subkultury Moskvy. [Youth subcultures of Moscow.] M., 2009; I.Yu. Martynova, N.M. Lebedeva Molodezh Moskvy: adaptatsiya k mnogokulturnosti. [Youth of Moscow: adaptation to multiculturalism.] Moscow, 2007.

[2]  I.L. Babich. Vzaimootnosheniya mezhdu pravoslavnymi i musulmanami na sovremennom Severnom Kavkaze. [The relationship between the Orthodox and Muslims in the modern North Caucasus] // Religion and civil society in Russia. M., 2012; I.L. Babich. Sootnoshenie religioznoy islamskoyi etnicheskoy identichnosti na sovremennom Severnom Kavkaze.[Value of religious (Islamic), and ethnic identity in the modern North Caucasus.] // Traditions and innovations in the field of ethnic and religious interactions. – Kazan, 2012.

[3] I.L. Babich. Mezhreligioznyy dialog na sovremennom Severnom Kavkaze: mif ili realnost. [ Interreligious dialogue on the modern North Caucasus: Myth or Reality.] // 1150th anniversary of Russian statehood. Veliky Novgorod, 2012.

**Gabriel Pirický**,
scholar of the Orient

**THE İSMAILAĞA COMMUNITY:
SHIFTING RELIGIOUS PATTERNS
IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY**

**Introduction**

The İsmailağa branch of the Nakşibendi Sufi order is considered to be among the most traditional (*gelenekçi*) and conservative in Turkey, whilst for the secular establishment of the country it represents the incarnation of reactionary religious forces (*irtica*). Members of the İsmailağa community (*cemaat*), which is led by Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu Hocaefendi, are well-known for their "Islamic" dress code (*kılık kıyafet*) and their "authentic" beliefs, which are supposed to be in conformity with those of the Prophet Muhammad, and their network of Qur'anic schools; but also for living in ghetto-like conditions in Istanbul's Çarşamba district. Based on fieldwork research and qualitative interviews conducted with several members and observers of the İsmailağa community, this study focuses on its activities and explores the environment of this under-researched and relatively new Sufi branch within the context of fast changing conditions. Also, it addresses some aspects of religion – state relations in Turkey within the specific context of the İsmailağa community. Not to be forgotten is the fact that certain influential Turkish media groups, especially the *Doğan Grubu*, have constantly demonized the order, by

fostering various conspiracy theories and attaching derogatory labels. One objective of this contribution is to look at the interaction not only between the community and secularists but also among Islamists themselves. Here, two developments have played a major role: first, the measures taken against the religious *cemaat*s after the so-called virtual military coup in 1997, and second, the expanding space for a more rationalist Islam after the triple victory of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) in general elections since 2002.

### Urbanization, migration and societal transformation through *cemaat* communities

Before undertaking a deeper analysis of the İsmailağa community, some background information is required to clarify what is meant by the term *cemaat* (Arabic *jamāʻa*), which can be translated as community. For an exploration of the issues we can start with the ideas regarding the rapid urbanization and transformation of Turkey developed by Ali Bulaç, the leading Islamist intellectual, sociologist and thinker. Bulaç had already engaged more deeply with the effects of modernization on modern cities in his earlier work, *Din ve modernizm*. Here, he characterizes cities as centers of manipulation where people are controlled and overwhelmed by materialism, with spirituality being highly neglected. In such a situation the only place for powerless human beings to take refuge is their private life[1]. According to Bulaç, the rapid urbanization of Turkey throughout the course of the 20th century brought about the biggest trauma the Turkish society had faced in recent decades. Starting from the 1950s and continuing well into the 1990s, the mass migration from villages to towns had a twofold effect on Turkey: it not only changed the country but also caused a radical

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[1] Ali Bulaç, *Din ve modernizm*, 193, 217.

transformation; indeed, the appearance of Turkish cities witnessed a dramatic upheaval. As a consequence, the sudden urbanization caused deep transformations in society and politics, with changes that had to be taken into consideration by Islamist circles as well. New identities emerged or re-emerged in urban milieus, which fundamentally affected society as a whole.

As traditional networks of *hemşehrilik* (co-localism) were unable to face up to this challenge and individuals started to lose their roots and traditions, the task of creating a modern urban identity and solidarity was taken over by the *cemaat* communities themselves, and they have been able to fulfill both religious and social needs[1]. To use Agai's words, "the *cemaat*s have arisen in order to fulfill religious and social needs as well as to form their own organizational patterns in accordance with specific contexts," and have created "societal spaces that are free from the hegemonic discourse of the [Turkish] state."[2] As an urban phenomenon, *cemaat*s, which have developed through migration, have been successful to such a degree that Bulaç is able to speak of the "age of religious communities" (*cemaatler dönemi*). In his words, this represents "the biggest phenomenon of postmodern times." These *cemaat*s not only create social spaces that are free of hegemonic state discourse, but they also fill the moral vacuum (*ahlâkî boşluk*) and bring more selfconfidence in the community's ability to solve various social issues.[3] Bulaç goes as far as to say that after the 1950s the dynamism behind the Turkish modernization project, initially imposed from above, shifted significantly to become a grassroots movement,

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[1] The phenomenon is described in Turkish as *hemşehrilik* or compatriotism and refers to people who are immigrants (in Istanbul, Ankara or elsewhere) from the same village, town, county or region of Turkey. Regrouping migrants from the same geographical space not only strengthens their identity but also creates an informal link involving mutual assistance.

[2] Bekim Agai, Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs, 51–52.

[3] Ali Bulaç, "Cemaat ve devlet." *Zaman*, September 12, 2000.

powered from below (*alt üst oldu*). Uninterrupted migration from the villages to large cities completely altered the demography of modern Turkey and resulted in the state ceasing to be able to manipulate religion from the centre; Islam as a 'cultural texture' of Turkish society began to take over the lead. Yavuz argues that "Islamic rituals and teachings are reinterpreted under these new urban conditions to provide the cognitive means to understand the social and political world of a new and unsettling urban life."[1]

Although Bulaç uses the reinterpretation of the city's importance mainly in connection with the global Gülen community, the same is true in respect of other *cemaat* communities in Turkey as well. No matter how dissimilar their individual organisational patterns are, *cemaat*s have been created in order to satisfy religious and social needs. Far from being archaic structures, these communities have become in many cases the dynamo for social change because "their values and morals also helped the individuals to mitigate the negative effects of capitalist and egoistic society."[2] At the same time, *cemaat*s do not function in order to fulfill individual needs, but rather they exist with the aim of enforcing collective principles.[3]

It is however important to remind ourselves that from the legal point of view no Muslim *cemaat*s have guaranteed legal status or rights in Turkey. In this sense, the term *cemaat* can only be officially used for non-Muslims, such as Armenians, orthodox Greeks or Jews, all of whom enjoy guaranteed rights both domestically, through Turkish legislation, and internationally via the Lausanne treaty.

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[1] Hakan Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey, 83.
[2] Michelangelo Guida, «"The New Islamists" Understanding of Democracy in Turkey: The Examples of Ali Bulaç and Hayreddin Karaman,» 354–55.
[3] Ali Bulaç, *Din-Kent ve Cemaat: Fethullah Gülen Örneği*, 27–33. Unlike *cemaat*, the term *cemiyet* signifies for Bulaç an association of individuals with common aims (as in *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, the Committee of Union and Progress).

## The İsmailağa community: the (ultra) conservative *cemaat* in modern Turkey

The İsmailağa community (*İsmailağa Cemaati*, also *İsmail Ağa Cemaati* or more archaically *Cemaat-i İsmailağa*) is sometimes also called the *Çarşamba Cemaati*, referring to its main and "sacred" location in Istanbul, or the Community of Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, in reference to their current leader.[1] It is one of only five currently existing main *cemaat* communities of the Turkish Naqshbandiya (*Nakşibendilik*), the others being the İskenderpaşa community (*İskenderpaşa Cemaati*), the *Süleymancı* branch, the *Erenköy Cemaati* and the *Menzil Köy Cemaati*. The İsmailağa community belongs to the same Sufi tradition as other *Nakşibendi* branches such as *İskenderpaşa Cemaati* or even the Gülen community, and all of them are networked through loose relationships that serve as the means of cohesion. At the same time, differences do exist among various branches, with some groups being more narrowly traditionalist and closed, while others are more globalized and inclusive. Turkish Islamism is very intimately connected with the *Nakşibendi* order and practically all successful segments of pro-Islamic politics in Turkey have been influenced by its teachings. A further unique feature that defines Turkish Islamism can be characterized as "the... enduring tradition of Sufism," which is again particularly embraced by the *Nakşibendi* order and its various branches. *Nakşibendilik* is even sometimes identified with the so called "Sufi fundamentalism" or as an alternative to both Islamism and modernism.[2] Their *tasavvuf* is based on Hanafi *fiqh*.

Although nowadays members of the community can be seen in many other neighbourhoods of Istanbul, especially in Sultanbeyli, the

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[1] Not to be confused with the town of Çarşamba in the Samsun province. The community is sometimes also referred to as the sub-order (of the *Nakşibendi* order) or *dergâh*.

[2] John O. Voll, "Contemporary Sufism and current social theory," 285.

Fatih-Çarşamba district is still regarded as the community's nucleus (*çekirdek*).[1] According to Genel and Karaosmanoğlu "Çarşamba resembles any other lower-middle class district of Istanbul, but it is transformed by the dominance of Islamic practices and paraphernalia...[it] is representative of a cultural rupture in Turkey, reflected in the Islamic thought of the 1960s...[although] this way of interpreting and living Islam is bound to change with the growing number of young believers..."[2]. The strict observance of Muslim practices and rules that are deduced from the Prophet Muhammad's own words and habits (*sünnet*) is essential for the community.

Çarşamba still resembles an Ottoman *mahalle,* spreading over several blocks, where a rather small community lives according to strictly conservative and puritan norms, having their own identity and spirit of solidarity, as well as a common religion and culture. In a sense, it is not an exaggeration to say that the *cemaat* is proud of establishing an "Islamic ghetto" and living in spartan conditions. According to Çakır, their neighbourhoods or quarters, which have specific rules and discipline, were set up in a form reminiscent of "Islamic cooperatives."[3] In this context, some observers underline the fact that the classical Sufi lodge of recent times now has its best exponents in the İsmailağa community, even though there are new departures in various respects. For example, the typical silent *Nakşibendi* form of reciting God's name (*zikir*) nowadays resembles something that is more akin to preaching.

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[1] More on Çarşamba district in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansıklopedisi Cilt 2*, İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1994, 472; or Hilmi Köksal Alişanoğlu, *Çarşamba – Cibali – 20*. İstanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2009. According to the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, the name Çarşamba (Wednesday meaning Wednesday market) refers to the town of Çarşamba on the Black Sea coast. This area saw a re-population after the Ottoman victory in 1453, with settlers coming from the Black Sea region.

[2] Sema Genel, and Kerem Karaosmanoğlu, "A New Islamic Individualism in Turkey: Headscarved Women in the City," 475.

[3] Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve slogan*, 317.

Among the *cemaat* members, the most widely read book is probably the Sufi Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's famous *Mektubat* (Letters).

Çarşamba is also part of the much broader "sacred area" of Istanbul that is formed by the three neighbouring districts: Fatih, Fener and Balat.[1]13 This area, crowded with mosques, churches and synagogues resembles, according to some observers, a small-scale Jerusalem (*Kudüs*), with Christians, Jews and Muslims living side by side. Whilst Fener, populated by many Christian communities, was for centuries the seat of Orthodox Christianity (as well as the Orthodox Patriarchate the municipality is home to the Bulgarian church), its patriarchy still holds a special place today, even after the departure of almost all Greeks from the area. Sephardic Jews have been resident in Balat since the 15th century and have been responsible for building the Ahrida Synagogue, the oldest and most beautiful in Istanbul, and the Çavuş baths. However, the demography of the region has changed in favour of Muslims throughout the course of 20th century.

Further areas with significant concentrations of supporters of Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu in Istanbul include the municipalities of Eyüp, Küçükçekmece, Üsküdar, Beyköz, Sultanbeylı, and especially Ümraniye, a poor district on the Asian shore with a population approaching 700,000. In the provinces they are mainly concentrated in cities such as Trabzon, Tokat, Adapazarı and İzmir. Jean-François Pérouse mentions that the *cemaat* of Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu connects some of the eastern Black Sea coastal regions, especially around the town of Of, with Istanbul's district of Gaziosmanpaşa, by means of the municipality of Fatih.[2] Moreover, it is noteworthy, as Meeker has argued, that in "Istanbul the Oflus were able to devise new kinds of

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[1] Ersin Kalkan and Cansu Çamlıbel, "İstanbul'daki küçük Kudüs: Çarşamba." *Hürriyet*, February 28, 2010.

[2] Jean-François Pérouse, "Aux marges de la métropole stambouliote: le quartiers nord de Gaziosmanpasa, entre Varos et Batikent."

interpersonal associations, some of them mercantile, some of them benevolent, some of them intellectual, some of them religious, and some of them criminal."[1]

According to Hülür, the İsmailağa branch characterises life in big cities as places of freedom and *baraka*, and contrasts them with small towns and villages that are spiritually dead. In big cities the behaviour of believers is less controlled than in smaller places, where life-styles are more influenced by various pressures from the wider community of Muslims.[2]

Despite the fact that the İsmailağa *cemaat* is a relatively close-knit community, estimates put their membership at 100,000, a number that includes community supporters with significant influence in society. Claims of 10 million members and supporters seem to be largely exaggerated, a fact that has recently been confirmed by the Consensus Public Opinion Centre. According to the daily *Milliyet*, which relies on Consensus' polls, out of some 4.5 million people who are at present affiliated with *cemaat* communities in Turkey, approximately 7.2% are attached to the İsmailağa group, that is far lower than the biggest community of Gülen followers (61.8 %).[3]

The İsmailağa community is a *cami hareket* (mosque movement) and its members call themselves *ehli sünnet ve cemaat* (people of tradition and the community). This serves to remind us how seriously they take their affiliation with Sunni Islam. When addressing each other, members of the community use expressions such as '*ihvan*' or '*ihvan kardeşimiz*' (our *ihvan* brothers) and speak about '*tarikat kardeşliği*' (brotherhood or fraternity). On the İsmailağa community's

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[1] Michael Meeker, A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity, 388.

[2] Himmet Hülür, "Technology and Naqshbandi Sufism: An Empirical Analysis of İsmail Ağa and İskender Paşa Branches," 330.

[3] The İsmailağa community also stands behind the Süleymancı and Menzil communities, see *Milliyet* June 22, 2011.

website one is confronted with the headline "*Bizim yolumuz sohbettir. Bir ilim ve kardeşlik cemiyeti*" (Our path is through conversation. A knowledge and brotherhood society).

This is how Hülür described the community more than ten years ago on a microsociological level: "[The] İsmail Ağa Dergahı promotes, on the one hand, the view that its disciples should cut off some of their ties with the dominant institutions and seems to advocate an inner spiritualization through taking them into its own web of relations... on the other hand, an ideology of mass mobilization for the aim at mass salvation...isolates the relations of its adherents from the non-believers in order not only to keep them apart from the distortions they would come face to face with, but also to prepare them as the possible agents of a mass salvation."[1]

Far from being universalist or proselyte, the *İsmailağa cemaati* encourages endogamy and a wide degree of isolation, while keeping an eye on its closed territory. Many of those living in Çarşamba are educationally disadvantaged, members of the proletarian, petit bourgeois or lumpen-proletariat classes, including artisans and traders (*esnaf*), and only a small number are university graduates. Those of their members who have academic degrees, acquired them mostly in countries such as Egypt or Pakistan. In economic terms, supporters of the İsmailağa community fall into lower income categories. The funding of the community is provided through the *İsmailağa Vakfı* (İsmailağa Foundation). There are also other associations (*vakıflar*) that stand alongside the community such as *Bilgi ve Hikmet Evi – (Dâru'l-hikme)* or *İlim Araştırma ve Kültür Derneği* (the Association for Scientific Research and Culture).

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[1] Himmet Hülür, "Technology and Naqshbandi Sufism: An Empirical Analysis of İsmail Ağa and İskender Paşa Branches," 333–334.

As with the Aczmendi branch of the Nurcu movement, they are recognizable by their social behaviour and dress code, identifying them as a distinctive subculture.[1]

They made a bold impression whenever they were engaged, often provoking significant turmoil. Besides playing tambourines during regular mosque prayers and shaking their long and braided hair when performing *zikir*, they achieved wider attention when intending to pray publicly at the Hagia Sophia Museum. Based in the suburban slums (*gecekondu*), without any historical background, they represent, unlike the İsmailağa cemaati, a handful of poor youngsters.

While not refraining from providing political support to Islamic parties, the *cemaat* members themselves say that the community has no ideological structure (*İsmailağa cemaatinin ideolojik bir yapısı yoktur*) and political motives. In the past, supporting political parties, such as those created by Necmettin Erbakan and the *Milli Görüş* movement, or occasionally also the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi, ANAP*), seemed to be a sign of pragmatism.

In daily practice, they specialize in Qur'anic study courses for both boys and girls, but at the same time dismiss the approach taken by the educational network around the Gülen movement (the so-called *Fethullahci okullar*). Although, according to Yüksel, it is erroneous to describe them as true specialists in Arabic syntax (Arab. *nahw*) and morphology (Arab. *sarf*), the community does excel at producing books for teaching elements of religion (*İlmihal*).

Calling themselves the advocates of the "Age of Bliss" (*Asr-ı Saadet*), they attempt to revive the lifestyles and practices of the mythical era of the Prophet Muhammad and the first four so-called righteous caliphs (cca. 622–61). The paradigm of *Asr-ı saadet* is

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[1] Members of the Aczmendi cemaat led by Müslüm Gündüz first became known for wearing black turbans, dark-coloured robes and walking through the cities with sticks in their hands.

reinterpreted time and again in accordance with contemporary needs by various Islamist movements worldwide, but in Turkey it also implicitly incorporates an anti-nationalist stance. The "Age of Bliss" as a political slogan, however, may have different meanings in various situations when interpreted by distinct communities.[1]

Within the international context, the İsmailağa community has strong links with Indian and Pakistani Muslims. In Europe, their presence is linked to local Turkish communities in Germany, Austria and Belgium. More concretely, the United Kingdom Turkish Islamic Association (*İngiltere Türk İslam Cemiyeti*), based at north-east London's Aziziye mosque, is close to the İsmailağa cemaati, albeit while officially declaring that it does not have links with any religious group or *cemaat*. The chairman of its Administrative board (Fahri Hoca) considers himself to be a *halife* or disciple and representative of Mahmut Hoca.[2]

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the community sent emissaries to the newly independent Muslim countries in order to establish contact with local Naqshbandis. Bayram Balcı examined their activities in Central Asia and the Caucasus while pointing out that until 1997, the year of the post-modern coup in Turkey, the group regularly received students from these regions and trained them in Istanbul.[3] It has been particularly successful among Sunni Azeris and Georgia's south-western autonomous republic of Adjaria, inhabited by the so-called "Muslim Georgians." On the other hand, among other countries such as Uzbekistan, they met with the

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[1] While all pious Muslims believe that *Asr-ı Saadet* was the ideal age in Islamic history, only radical Islamists argue that the *Asr-ı Saadet* society was a classless society that contemporary Muslims should imitate by distributing their property or spending it for the sake of Islam.

[2] Yakup Çoştu, "Londrada Türklere Ait Dini Organizasyonlar," 88–89.

[3] Bayram Balci, "Between Islam and Secularism: Religious Policies of Turkey in the Turkish Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus," 115–16.

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deep mistrust of the local authorities. In addition, the İsmailağa community organizes campaigns to promote the Palestinian cause by helping Palestinian Muslims and harshly condemning Israel. The community considers the activities of the Zionist Jews as being deeply rooted in the communist way of thinking.

### From Ebuishak İsmail Efendi to Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu

The community owes its name to the İsmailağa Mosque that was built in 1723, and to its founder, Ebuishak İsmail Efendi, who came to Istanbul from Mecca. When building the mosque, he was inspired by the sacred Meccan Qacba and the mosque has exactly the same dimensions. The current leader of the *cemaat*, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, is one of the few living prominent sheikhs in Turkey, and is sometimes said to be the doyen of all Turkey's Muslim *cemaat*s. He was born in 1931 in Of, near Trabzon, and is a student of *Nakşibendi* Sheikh Ahiskalı Ali Haydar Efendi (?–1960). Ali Haydar Efendi lived during both the Ottoman and Republican eras so that the community is sometimes referred to under his name as the *Ali Haydar Efendi Grubu* (Group of Ali Haydar Efendi).[1] Ali Haydar Efendi was jailed for six months for organizing protests against the western way of dressing in 1926. Overall, so it is said, his personality may be characterized by reference to the Qur'anic phrase "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong", in Turkish "*emr-i bi'l-maruf ve nehy-i ani'l-münkar*" (*iyiliği emredip kötülükten alıkoyma*), which is a principle that even today is highly valued by the *cemaat*.

After Ali Haydar's death in 1960 the role of sheikh was taken on by Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu (Mahmut Efendi), who had previously

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[1] More on Ali Haydar Efendi in Sadık Albayrak, *Şeriat yolunda yürüyenler ve sürünenler*, 154–58.

served in the Gümüşhanelı mosque, which was led by the charismatic Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Kotku. After Kotku's death, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu began to act more independently. This change was triggered principally by the different opinions that developed between him and Professor Kotku's successor, Mahmud Esad Coşan.[1] He separated from the *İskenderpaşa* community in 1972 and gradually established a new branch of the Naqshbandiya order, the İsmailağa community. Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu started his activities in *İsmailağa Camii* in 1954 so that his full title reads as *Efendi (İsmailağa) camii şerifi imam-hatibi*. Mahmut Efendi, who is also referred to as *Efendi Hazretleri* (His Excellency the Master), is the thirty-sixth sheikh in the Nakşibendi *silsila*. The title Efendi Hazretleri is usually accompanied by the saying *Kuddise Sirruhu* (Holy be his soul).

Generally, Mahmut Hoca prefers verbal teaching and personal contact, and this is also why he has not engaged in writing books for a long time, He considers writing to be against the sharica (*şeriat*). Nevertheless, in Sufi literature, those charismatic leaders who possess both religious and mystical knowledge, as well as knowledge of worldly sciences, are called *zü'l-cenaheyn* or "double-winged." The elders of the Khalidi branch of Nakşibendis, starting with Khalid al-Baghdadi (1779–1827), are basically all *zü'l-cenaheyn*. The educational and literary activities of Mahmut Hocaefendi have to be considered from this viewpoint as well. Unlike the İskenderpaşa community, which emphasizes education on the basis of *hadith* and sunna, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu remains closer to Sufism based on *fiqh*, firmly

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[1] The well-known İskenderpaşa Naqshbandi branch's success story is closely related to its famous and charismatic leader, Sheikh Mehmet Zahit Kotku (1897–1980), who maintained a substantial influence over religious, political and social life in Turkey even after his death. Under Kotku's successor Esat Coşan (1938–2001), the group has been transformed into the network of economic, educational, religious and media enterprises and endowments that has enormously influenced the political life.

anchored in the Hanafi legal school.[1] He is inspired by the works of Abu Hanifa and his successors, while being suspicious of any novelties. Inside the community, the close relationship between *murid*s and the *mürşit* is of great importance, and Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu is respected to the point that his speeches are usually not subjected to criticism or deconstructing.

Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu's still unfinished Qur'anic commentary, *Ruhu'l- Furkan,* is an example of the type of judgmental commentary (*ahkam tefsiri*) that first explains the meanings of individual words in the Qur'anic verses, only than placing their meanings (*mealler*) into context, and concluding with a commentary. Once finished, his *tefsir*, which also criticizes the interreligious dialogue, should print. Another of his books is regarded as an important work, *Risale-i Kudsiyye Şerh ve Tercümesi*, being a two volume poetic work on the founder of *İsmet Efendi Tekkesi* (The dervish lodge of İsmet Efendi), called Mustafa İsmet Efendi.

Another highly appreciated activity of Mahmut Hocaefendi is connected with the *sohbet*s, which took place after Sunday morning prayers in the Sultan Selim mosque. Although the conversations took place in the early hours of Sunday morning, people attended in huge numbers so that the event had a special place on the religious map of the community. After 1995, Hocaefendi's conversations were published under the title *Sohbetler.* They appear in four volumes, based on the notes taken by students during his morning sessions.[2] According to Silverstein, who has studied the Gümüşhanevi branch of the Nakşibendi order, the devotional practice of *sohbet* is not so much a 'mystical experience' or 'intimate union with God,' as much as being an exposition on ethics, the focus on the need to discipline the base self

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[1] Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve slogan*, 65.
[2] *Sohbet* or "conversation in companionship" is for them more important than *rabıta*, the link between the shaykh and his disciple.

(*nefs*).[1] With *Efendi Hazretleri*'s deteriorating health conditions morning *sohbet*s finally came to a close in 1998, when Mahmut Hoca also left the post of *imamlık* at the İsmailağa camii.

Ahmet Mahmut Ünlü (born 1935), familiarly known as Cüppeli Ahmet or "Ahmet in the garment," is a possible successor to the congregation leader Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu; he is also a controversial preacher (*vaiz*). He is well-known for his *sohbet*s on the internet and CDs. His popularity continues to remain high so that whenever he comes, for example, to preach at the Sultanbeyli's Ulu Mosque, people attend in huge numbers.[2] His name used to be mentioned in connection with an unlicensed *külliye* (*medrese* and other buildings around the mosque) in the Çavuşbaşı district of Istanbul. For engaging in these activities Cüppeli Ahmet spent almost three years in prison.

Although preaching modesty and frugality, numerous people have indicated that there is a huge gap between Cübbeli Ahmet's words and his deeds. The Turkish tabloid media usually follow the eye-catching stories surrounding Cübbeli Ahmet with great interest, some of them publishing articles and photographs that recount his trips and holidays abroad, others questioning his sincerity through reference to his luxurious residence in Istanbul. Despite advising members of the *cemaat* to stay away from beaches, Cübbeli Ahmet goes swimming and jet skiing wearing only shorts and accompanied by bikini-clad women. The attention of the public has been caught by Cübbeli Ahmet's holiday photographs. Although previously condemning the practice of bathing on beaches, he and his wife have failed to comply with this prohibition. Moreover, his wives often dress in designer labels with expensive accessories. One can only speculate as to whether or not it is due the

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[1] Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and modernity in Turkey: from the authenticity of experience to the practice of discipline," 42–44.

[2] Cihan Z. Tuğal, "The Appeal of Islamic Politics: Ritual and Dialogue in a Poor District of Turkey," 260.

impact of other *cemaat*s, such as the Gülen movement, that the group members who previously avoided traveling abroad are now taking part in visits to foreign countries.

In the forefront of community preachers we also find the following personalities: Hızır Ali Muratoğlu (imam of the Çukurbostan mosque), Bayram Hoca who was referred to as a "walking library" (*ayaklı kütüphane*) because of his high level of knowledge, Ahmet Vanlıoğlu, Abdullah Vanlıoğlu, İlyas Vanlıoğlu, Cemal Terzi, Adil Gökburun and Abdullah Ustaosmanoğlu. They are well-known for taking a firm stand against the West and for being inspired by the work and life of the Egyptian Islamist theorist Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) who, however, in sharp contrast to them, dismissed Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*).

Among Turkish intellectuals who have had a great impact on members of the İsmailağa community we should also mention Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–83), an exceptionally influential political activist, novelist, poet and philosopher, who formulated the ideas of an Islamist-nationalist movement in Turkey. Kısakürek's strongly anti-communist and anti-Western ideology sought to synthesize Turkish nationalism with the Ottoman heritage and Islam, while at the same time emphasizing the need for a new morally strong ruling elite that would be deeply embedded in conservative Muslim values.[1]

## Two symbolic buildings: the "Qacba-Mosque" and the İsmailağa Qur'anic school

The İsmailağa mosque still remains the most important place of worship for the community. It was constructed by the fifty-sixth Ottoman *şeyhülislam*, and former *kadi* of Mecca, Ebuishak İsmail Efendi (1645–1725) in 1723. Situated in *Cevecibaşı mahallesi*, the

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[1] Hakan Yavuz, Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey, 137–39.

mosque is built of brick and its height, length and width are identical to the measurements of the Meccan Qa'ba. The walls of the Qa'ba all have different dimensions (11.68 m; 12.04 m; 10.18 m; 9.90 m), and the same is true of the mosque. The central dome of the *cami* was built during the age of tulips (*lâle devri*) in the baroque style. Seriously damaged by an earthquake in 1894, the İsmailağa mosque with its minaret was only reconstructed in 1952. The mosque is managed by the *İsmailağa İlim ve Hizmet Vakfı*. Next to the mosque is a small burial place with four tombs of *şeyhülislam*s. One notable feature is that the muezzin based at the mosque reads the ezan without a microphone. In addition, the house of Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu is separated from the mosque only by the *İsmailağa Çıkmazı* (a blind alley), but there is an overpass so that the ailing Hocaefendi does not need to cross the street when going to the mosque.

The commitment to ensuring the survival of religious education stands high among the priorities of the İsmailağa community, which manages the largest Qur'anic school (*Kuran kursu*) in Turkey. It is said that its building is among the biggest in the greater Middle East region.[1] The huge building near the İsmailağa mosque is situated only a few hundred meters from the equally grandiose Greek Orthodox school, which was built in the 19th century.[2] The Turkish Sociologist Müfit Yüksel, who often provides a television commentary on events concerning the İsmailağa community, interprets the territorial proximity of both buildings as a struggle for visual and factual dominance over the Fatih and Fener districts, indeed over the whole metropolitan city of Istanbul. He also suggests that by allowing the construction of this

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[1] Thierry Zarcone, La Turquie moderne et l'islam, 226.

[2] The Greek school known as *Megali tou Genous Scholi* (Great School of the Nation), responsible to the Orthodox Patriarchate, has an immense importance to all Greeks in Turkey and beyond. It was originally established in 1454. Today's building dates from 1882.

Qur'anic school without the permission of the authorities, the Turkish state indirectly created a counterweight to the historically strong presence of Orthodox Christians in the area. Symbolically, this response to the historically significant Byzantine and Greek identity of the area has encouraged the Muslim-Turkish side to increase its efforts at demonstrating who is currently the real master in Istanbul.[1] Although nowadays only a small number of non-Muslims live in the neighbourhood, the Muslim majority clearly strives to use history in order to

The site of the İsmailağa Qur'anic study centre building (*İsmailağa Camii Kuran Kursu*) – about 2,800 square meters – was bought at the beginning of 1980s, after the closure of the Arda cinema (*Arda Sinemasi*) which stood on the land. The building is situated on the highest of seven of Istanbul's hills and it has space for a maximum of 850 students.[2] Although the official decision issued in 1996 required the destruction of the eight storey edifice, which had been built without permission, in practice, the building has remained untouched.

Although religion may only be taught in government-approved schools in Turkey, unsanctioned religious education (e.g. *kaçak Kuran kursları*) is widespread in the country and, in fact, infringements of the law are rarely prosecuted. The İsmailağa community members have been regularly criticised for sending their children to 'madrasa-like' schools at the age of four, in sharp contrast with the country's secular laws that allow teaching religion to children only after the age of twelve. Operating clandestine Qur'anic courses without the consent of

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[1] Ruşen Çakır, "İsmailağa cemaati ve Fener Patrikhanesi." *Zaman*, September 13, 2006; and Ruşen Çakır, "Aczimendilik gecekonduydu, İsmail Ağa ise gökdelen." *Zaman*, September 15, 2006. legitimize its dominance over the area. The multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity of the area often remain forgotten, as if Erbakan's catchphrase "Istanbul – the Islamic city" represents the only true reflection of the city to its population.

[2] See «"Dokunulamayan" Kuran Kursu binasi.» *Hürriyet*, September 7, 2006.

the highest state governmental body, the Presidency for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), was seen as unacceptable by the authorities. Among the list of measures taken after February 28, 1997, the socalled "virtual" coup d'état, was the demand to curtail all kinds of financial resources from non-governmental religious communities and brotherhoods. Consequently, in the following years, the possibilities of delivering unsanctioned religious education were significantly restricted.[1] The closing down of *Kur'an* courses combined with other restrictions on Islamic activities represented a major blow for the İsmailağa community, seriously limiting their influence among believers.

In response to the ultimatum of the military authorities, several branches of the Turkish *Nakşibendi* order, which had previously often competed with each other, began to seek rapprochement. Later, allegedly, sheikhs from the three major branches of Naqshbandiya order, Esad Coşan for the İskenderpaşa community, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu and Sami Efendi, the leader of the Erenköy community, decided to give their support to the Islamist Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP) with Recai Kutan as its chairman.[2] The *İsmailağa Cemaati* is to a large extent a closed organization, in which instruction is intensive and requires full commitment to the life in the community. Members perceive the external world in principle as the abode of evil, and community members are called on to convince the outside world that change is possible only if people join the *cemaat*. On the one hand, therefore, the brotherhood calls its adherents to break numerous ties with the outside world and national institutions. On the other hand,

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[1] Directive 3 of the National Security Council decision no. 406 issued on February 28, 1997 ordered: An eight-year uninterrupted education system must be implemented across the country and necessary administrative and legal adjustments should be made so that the Qur'anic courses, which children with basic education may attend with parental consent, operate only under the responsibility and control of the Ministry of National Education.

[2] Thierry Zarcone, La Turquie moderne et l'islam, 243.

some members of the branch desire to save the whole of mankind and thus produce their own ideology of mass mobilization.[1] Indeed, followers are required to live in isolation from unbelievers and all the evil world in order to become, in the long run, the vanguard of mass salvation for the whole of mankind. Interpersonal relationships, television broadcasting, the economic system, the educational system, and urban life are defined by the community in principle as a network of evil that is in need of the cleansing breath of Islam, in the form of the Qur'an and the sunna.[2]

While the influential community of İskenderpaşa has gradually opened up towards the external world and its members have voluntarily entered into modern educational, economic and media institutions, members of the İsmailağa Cemaati, by contrast, has retired into their own shell. Personal contacts between members of the İskenderpaşa group and various supporters of the İskenderpaşa community are common even today and sometimes the difference between the two disappears as a result of an "open door" approach. In sharp contrast, belonging to the İsmailağa affiliation is interpreted much more rigidly and requires "more intimate" links that demand the separation of members from the wider range of people who are interested in learning more about them.[3] Weismann, for example, mentions that in contrast with the İskenderpaşa community, in the İsmailağa mosque he was required to convert to Islam before he could be given an interview with one of the leading community figures.[4]

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[1] Himmet Hülür, "Technology and Naqshbandi Sufism: An Empirical Analysis of İsmail Ağa and İskender Paşa Branches," 333.

[2] Ibid., 306.

[3] Ibid., 308.

[4] Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 155.

## Emphasis on morality and "true Islamicity"

In order to fill the moral vacuum (*ahlâkî boşluk*) within the urban setting, the İsmailağa community's strategies focus on practices and principles that are usually identified with the most conservative segments of Turkish society, people who are struggling hard to cope with both the material and emotional impact of mass migration.[1] A total focus on "true Islamicity" and appearance is probably the main factor that differentiates them from other Turkish *cemaat*s. The attitude of the İsmailağa cemaati in relation to television broadcasts has aroused widescale interest in recent decades. Disputes over the "Islamicity" of watching television are nothing new in the Muslim world. In 2004, for example, *Dar al-ulum* in Deoband, the largest Islamic seminary in India, issued a fatwa that prohibited watching television on the grounds that broadcasts include immoral programs.[2] *Dar al-ulum* also stressed that it is improper to use television for Islamic missionary purposes.[3]

Although television in itself is considered useful by the İsmailağa community, given the content of broadcasts, it is held as being mostly harmful to humans. Most community members believe that an intelligent person's spiritual life should not be flooded by the content of television programs. Television affects family life and harmony, as well as conversation between close relatives; it flirts with human desires and basic instincts, such as the sexual drive, instead of focusing on people's attention towards the Creator and Islamic values. Television broadcasting may be useful only if fully supervised and managed by Muslims, thereby preventing its negative effects. In this way alone is it possible to prevent the spread and glorification of godlessness, immoral behaviour or excessive sexual desire. After seeing something *haram* or

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[1] See also Ali Bulaç, *Din-Kent ve Cemaat*, 66–73.
[2] Yoginder Sikand, "Deoband's War on Television: Fury over a Fatwa," 48–49.
[3] Ibid.

doing something wrong, members of the community usually repent by listening to *sohbet*s. But, the watching of television is also considered to be harmful for a different reason: advertising campaigns broadcast on screens incessantly motivate people to go shopping and what is more, to purchase things they do not need.

The regulations of Mahmut Efendi in this respect, however, demonstrate significant inconsistencies, as indicated by the internal instructions banning the watching of television broadcasts. Many community members used to watch television from time to time, arguing that in the past the sheikh himself had allowed people from his immediate surroundings to do so. Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu justified his decision by arguing that people who surround him were providing him with information about domestic and world events, especially on developments in the Islamic world, information that he used for the benefit of the whole community. Nevertheless, in reality, even the İsmailağa community must gradually come to terms with some aspects of modern life and moderate their self-imposed "sanctions." Tuğal summarizes that "as the practice of the main body has failed to live up to its own ideology, ideology itself has started to change, which has caused cracks in the community."[1]

In contrast, radio broadcasting is seen by the community as more acceptable, although community members believe that a female voice over the ether is contrary to Islamic values. Even more useful are personal computers that enable people to watch permissible CDs or particular programs. Followers and supporters of Cübbeli Ahmet, for example, are currently using print and the web to disseminate their views. The internet is seen mostly as more acceptable because it can

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[1] Cihan Z. Tuğal, "The Appeal of Islamic Politics: Ritual and Dialogue in a Poor District of Turkey," 262.

operate without presenting pictures of human beings.[1] Moreover, it can also be used as a tool for propaganda purposes. In 2010 the İsmailağa community, for example, used its website to provide computer games simulating revenge attacks linked to the deadly Israeli attack on the humanitarian aid naval convoy heading for the Gaza Strip. Generally speaking, disagreements in the way the media are used by the community have led to some friction and it is especially the younger generation that is more likely to make compromises even in cases where they are not in accordance with the official ideology of the community.[2] The emphasis of the *cemaat* on morality and Islamicity is even more evident in the area of education. The *İsmailağacılar* stress that schooling and science in the Turkish educational system are characterized by being strictly separated from faith. Therefore, according to the prevailing view inside the community, the younger generation should not be sent to these institutions. Moreover, they argue that the education system is at all levels aimed at combating Islam and secularizing society.

That is why children should study the Qur'an, the Arabic language and the eternal truth contained in the works of prominent mystics in separate schools which avoid presenting negative views of Islam. Memorizing the Qur'an (*hafizlik*) is one of the primary duties that pupils are obliged to follow. The emphasis on teaching Arabic and Arabic writing does not correspond with the aspirations of the country's lay circles, which in the early days of the Republican era pushed for a ban on the use of the Arabic script. The alphabet revolution in Turkey in 1929 led to a break with the former Turkish-Muslim heritage and

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[1] More information on the *cemaat* webpages: http://www.ismailaga.info; http://www.ismailagacami.com and http://www.ismailagacemaati.com; see also http://www.beyan.com.tr; http://www.arifandergisi.com; http://www.furkandergisi. com; and http://www.dayanismavakfi.org

[2] Cihan Z. Tuğal, "The Appeal of Islamic Politics: Ritual and Dialogue in a Poor District of Turkey," 262.

studying the Arabic language is now, after *hafizlik,* the most important objective of the *İsmailağa* community in relation to the younger generation. One of my informants has told me that he attended the İsmailağa Qur'anic course since the age of twelve. In spite of not being among the in-group of the İsmailağa members, he had studied *hafizlik* for two years and then Qur'anic sciences for another five years. Although he had not studied at secondary school, he had passed all his examinations and been accepted at university. In general, he underlined, the fact is that former students of the İsmailağa Qur'anic course had a better level of knowledge and gained higher grades than those who graduated from regular secondary schools.

Not only does the community condemn the co-education of boys and girls, but it does not allow teachers to be of a different sex to their students. This is an additional reason for refusing to send their children to higher education institutions. The community sees the solution of this situation in the reopening of Muslim madrasas that could also end the "imitation of the West." Boys and girls are educated separately within the community in a spirit of strict rules. Christopher Houston recalls the late 1980s when girls who attended the Qur'anic courses in Üsküdar's suburb of Selamsız received detailed instructions on how to behave in everyday life. They were instructed to put a pinch of salt on their tongue before eating as the Prophet Muhammad had reportedly done, and, in addition, they were given instructions on cutting their nails by starting first with the middle finger, and provided with directions on how to dress or cut their hair.[1] Similarly, strict rules were provided concerning how to eat: girls were not allowed to use forks or slice bread, and it was permitted only to break bread with both hands. During menstruation underpants and bras were prohibited because, as the argument ran, they were largely made by male hands. The girls

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[1] Christopher Houston, Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State, 54.

were also told which prayers should be recited upon entering and leaving the toilet or in which direction to bow when using it.[1]

## Traditional clothing habits
## of the community

The special significance of the dress code in Turkey dates back to the Ottoman period, although the Republican era establishment followed an even more consistent policy in this regard. Republican intellectuals, similarly to the Ottoman ones, stressed the importance of focusing on aspects of everyday life as a means of creating a modern Turkish human being. The new republic emphasised the importance, among other things, of the external image and appearance of citizens, which should conform to Western standards.[2] For example, as expressed by Atatürk in his *Nutuk* (Long Speech), "the fez had to be removed. Because the fez was sitting on our heads as a sign of ignorance, bigotry and hatred in the face of civilization and progress." Approached from this angle, garments used by the İsmailağa community represent a clear negation of these efforts. What is more, the dress code of their members is considered as a challenge to Turkish modernization and Westernization.

Members of the İsmailağa community are well-known for their strict 'Islamic' dress code (*kılık kıyafet*) in its authentic interpretation which is supposed to be in conformity with that of the Prophet Muhammad. In general, the *laik* sensitivity of secular people in Turkey is more widespread when seeing somebody from the İsmailağa cemaati on the streets or when learning that their prayer halls are apparently closed outside of prayer times for persons who are not associated with the *cemaat*. Whereas on the street it is impossible to recognize who is from the Gülen or Menzil community and who is not, with the İsmailağa group things are different. Bearded men wearing baggy

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[1] Ibid.
[2] See e.g. Seçil Deren, "Kültürel Batılılaşma," 384.

trousers (*şalvar*) and women in dresses with veils (*çarşaf*) that only leave the eyes exposed to the outside world are clearly distinguishable from the other people. More specifically, they do not generally wear ready-made clothes. Tailors in Çarşamba provide members of the community with their outfits, sewn according to the "rules" practised at the time of the Prophet. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of the Haredi Jewish neighbourhood, *Mea shearim,* in Jerusalem, where life is regulated by the strict adherence to Jewish law. The visual differences that both Turks and foreigners encounter when visiting Çarşamba may also be accompanied by an awareness of the use of idioms and vocabulary that are rare elsewhere, such as when men on the streets greet each other with "*es selamü aleyküm*" or when one is addressed with the words "*bereket olsun*" while paying for a cup of coffee.

The portrayal of the *İsmailağa Cemaati* as deeply backward looking and Islamist is often accompanied by photographs of their attire. Moreover, in Turkey the İsmailağa dress code is often taken as the litmus test of the basic difference between fundamentalists and secularists. The portrayal by Turkish journalists and *paparazzi* is sometimes done in such a dishonourable way that Dumanlı is certainly right in stating:

*"This is my suggestion for the photographers who tend to use their cameras as if they were bazookas: If you have the guts, go to the centre of New York and try to harass people as much as would normally do in Turkey. You may go to, for example, Brooklyn. You will see that all shops, markets and streets are organized according to the basic Jewish tradition. You will find a city which is far more pious than the streets where the İsmailağa community lives and which you tried to present as an 'autonomous zone.' If you have the heart, go and attempt to cover the stories, as you do in Turkey, of the people who wear the Jewish skullcap or a fedora walking with the Torah in their hands,*

*accompanied by headscarved wives and children with kippah. No, you cannot do it, because you do not have the right to do so."*[1]

The fact that community members dress differently and grow beards, however, does not mean that the clocks stopped in Çarşamba at the time of the Ottomans (*Çarşamba'da saatler Osmanlı'da durmuş*), as a popular saying goes. Of course, they still dwell in *kıyafet*, especially while praying in their turbans made of long and white muslin. But unlike in the past when men wore thin-soled light rubber shoes (*cizlavet*) produced by the Cizlavet factory that was closed down in the 1990s, nowadays *cizlavet* are seen only on older men. The *şalvar* is disappearing in favour of a twelve-fold, and also a six-fold *pontul* with a special pocket for a mobile phone. Furthermore, men's clothing increasingly includes a specially designed vest shirt (*yelek gömlek*). Men cover their head while praying with a *beyaz sarık* (white turban) instead of a *takke* (close fitting hats).

As soon as men began changing their appearance, women also began to dress differently. Before they had dressed in the same way, whatever the season, but currently the latest fashion trend has taken the place of unfashionable dresses. The *çarşaf*, that used to be black, now appears in dark blue, brown or cream. Even under their black garments women have started to wear make-up. Non-alcohol based *helal* perfume made of rose water or the so called "hajj oil" (*hacıyağı*) can now be bought, although young women prefer Armani or Lacoste brands.

Occasionally, recommendations from Mahmut Efendi regarding dress code rules become the subject of disputes within the community. He preaches in his sermons that religion requires that the supporters of *cemaat* should wear long robes (*cüppe*), a turban and close fitting hats (*takke*). His opponents argue, however, that this argument is based on an unreliable hadith, and that at the time of the Prophet Muhammad all

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[1] Ekrem Dumanlı, "What rights do you have." *Today's Zaman*, May 8, 2008.

men without exception in Arabia wore such garments which means that the robe or turban had no religious significance at all.[1]

Although the concept of *bid'at* (Arab. *bid'a*) or corrupt innovation is central to the thinking of the branch, in their everyday life change is no longer taboo. Some time ago, when a bank was opened just opposite of the İsmailağa mosque, it had to be closed down because local people arranged their financial transactions differently. However, nowadays times have changed and many members of the community possess bank cards. Interestingly, although smoking is also considered *bid'at*, some of them do in fact smoke.

### Inventing the enemy: media coverage of the İsmailağa community

The history of modern Turkey is full of accusations of fanaticism, treachery, reactionary and anti-state activities vis-à-vis the *Nakşibendi* brotherhood and its various branches. Among these, the *İsmailağa* community is visually exposed and thus constitutes a notoriously easy target. The often extreme representation of the İsmailağa community in the media can be characterised by the claim that the community has turned into a state (*devlet olmuş bir cemaatten bahsediliyor*).

Some powerful Turkish media groups, such as *Doğan Grubu*, the owner of *Hürriyet*, *Radikal*, *Posta* and until 2011 also of *Milliyet* and *Vatan* dailies, have in recent decades constantly demonized the community and fabricated various conspiracy theories and unflattering labels, such as *irtica*. In trying to prove that the community poses a threat to the Turkish state and has a secret agenda, they have not refrained from mocking and constantly defaming the *cemaat*. The

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[1] Cihan Z. Tuğal, "The Appeal of Islamic Politics: Ritual and Dialogue in a Poor District of Turkey," 263.

portrayal of the İsmailağa community as deeply backward looking and Islamist became a particular problem following the funeral service in January 2004 for Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu's daughter in the Fatih Mosque, which was attended by *cemaat* members in "typical" attire. Various people referred to its members as antimodernists, a folk group, and radical associates of Iranian fundamentalists. The *İsmailağa* group was even accused of failing to pay taxes.[1] However, when we study the *cemaat* in detail, it soon becomes clear that it is very much afraid of any activity that might weaken the state because of the anarchy that could follow.[2] Contrary to what is often circulated in the Turkish press, members of the community pray for the preservation and protection of the state and the Turkish army. Indeed, they take the following slogans seriously: "*Vatanımızı, milletimizi ve devletimizi koru*;" "*Devlete ve millete zeval verme*;" "*kutsal vazifesi – askerlik yapmak*" (Protect our fatherland, nation and state; Do not harm the state and the nation; To do military service is a sacred duty). Equally less well known is the fact that printed materials with links to the community condemn what is sometimes referred to as "Islamic terrorism." According to them, the term "does not exist, because there are only terrorists who misuse the word Islam."[3]

Most of the negative articles amount to nothing more than simplistic and sensational stories pretending to be scholarly or historically grounded. For example, the *İsmailağa Cemaati* has been compared to the *Kadızâdeliler*, the religious movement that gained control over the Ottoman government in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.[4] This

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[1] Doğan Sarsar, "Cemaat konuşuyor." *Radikal*, September 13, 2006.

[2] Ruşen Çakır, "İsmail Ağa cinayeti provokasyon olabilir ama tutması imkansız." *Vatan*, September 4, 2006.

[3] "İslami terör yok, islam'ın güzel ismini kullanarak terör yapanlar var." *Beyan* 59 (Jan 2004), 26–27.

[4] Murat Bardakçı, "Geçmişin iktidar cemaati olan Kadızâdeliler'in yerini şimdi İsmailağa Cemaati aldı." *Hürriyet*, June 10, 2006.

group of radical and intolerant ulemas, who were named after their leader and famous âlim, Kadizâde Mehmet Efendi (1582–1635), gained influence within the sultan's palace and started to implement strict rules in relation to what they saw as the true meaning of Islam. Their golden age came with Sultan Murat IV (1623–40) who issued a ferman prohibiting smoking tobacco and drinking coffee, and his brother Ibrahim *Deli* ("Mad", 1640–48). *Kadizâdeliler* ideologically recognized only the authority of the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions, at the same time denouncing all kinds of innovation (*bid'at*). Soon, they controlled most religious foundations in Istanbul and enforced public morality and shari'a law. As they declared that the sufis were the worst heretics, and ensured that the *tekke*swere closed and the dervishes imprisoned, it is hard to understand in what ways the İsmailağa community could be accused of resembling them. Unlike the İsmailağa *cemaat*, the *Kadizâdeli*s encouraged political instability and public disorder to the point that they "challenged the ulema hierarchy by attempting to perform the hierarchy's job."[1]

The *İsmailağa Cemaati* have on several occasions made headlines in the Turkish press, for example, when Ali Hasan Ünal, the mufti of Üsküdar, who had criticized the community, was assassinated in 1982. Mahmut Hoca, together with several Naqshbandi sheikhs, was accused of being behind Ünal's murder, but was later acquitted. The mufti's assassination was said to have been ordered in the İsmailağa mosque, after a secret meeting that declared a fatwa sentencing him to death. In support of this argument, Ünal was said to have demanded that students on the Qur'anic study courses should be dressed in European clothes.

In another media-driven case, Ali Hızır Muratoğlu, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu's brother-in-law (*damad*) and imam of the Çukurbostan

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[1] Madeline C. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, 170.

mosque in the Fatih district, was shot by a gunman in the İsmailağa mosque in 1998. His murderer has never been caught. Imam Bayram Ali Öztürk, a prominent retired figure of the İsmailağa brotherhood, was killed in 2006 during morning prayers at the mosque and the killer was lynched soon after by worshippers. No action in terms of a legal case was taken against those who lynched the killer and the authorities made no arrests. The fact that both imams were murdered in public when they could have been simply killed without witnesses while walking on the street, shows that the acts were intended to be public executions among the community's own believers. Subsequently, speculation was rife in the press that the aim of the second killing (*cinayet*) was to push the group out of the Çarşamba district and cause disunity or a split among members of the community.

According to certain reports, as a result of this, further activities of the İsmailağa community were exposed and these included accusations that the group practised underground shari'a trials presided over by *kadis*.[1] On the other hand, as Müfit Yüksel mentions, both Islamic and Kemalist circles were unhappy about his view that the community represents the balancing force to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

Recently, the community was mentioned in an indictment relating to the Ergenekon affair, a criminal organization attempting to overthrow the government. The existence of Ergenekon, a behind-the-scenes network including members of the armed forces who attempted to use ultranationalist ideology in order to incite chaos, has long been suspected. But the current investigation started in 2007, when a house in Istanbul's Ümraniye district that was being used as an arms depot

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[1] See "Secular Turks Criticize the U.S. Ambassador for Dismissing Warnings Against Rising Islamism in Turkey," (note 12), *Special Dispatch No. 1345* , MEMRI November 3, 2006. (available on http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/1931.htm)

was discovered by the police. As became clear in 2009, the İsmailağa probe that started in 2007 failed to find any evidence to prove that the community was working as an armed organization prepared to use violence. After two years of monitoring the phone calls and correspondence of several İsmailağa officials, the investigation of Erzincan Chief Prosecutor İlhan Cihaner announced that his office had found no evidence of violence or a threat by the community during the course of the investigation.[1] However, the intercepted conversations of politicians and businessmen close  to the AKP government uncovered demands in favour of the İsmailağa community in relation to granting tenders and employment to members of the *cemaat*. Cihaner was later imprisoned, as he allegedly had links with the Ergenekon group.

In the meantime, rumors circulated that the Ergenekon trial had caused serious differences within the İsmailağa community. An emotionally charged atmosphere developed after Cübbeli Ahmet Hoca put up five Atatürk posters in the premises of the *Kasr-i Arifan* journal that has been under his influence since its appearance in 2007.[2] Moreover, it was this wing of the İsmailağa community that published supportive articles in relation to Kemal Atatürk and the War of Liberation 1919–23 (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*). These steps have been criticised by another wing of the İsmailağa group around the *Furkan* journal, which has been published by Saadettin Ustaosmanoğlu, the nephew of Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu since 1995. Among the adherents of Saadettin Ustaosmanoğlu's group is Salih Mirzabeyoğlu, the leader of the Great Eastern Islamic Raider's Front (*İBDA-C, İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncılar Cephesi*). According to Shmuelevitz and Bennett "the İBDA-C, often referred to as a Sufi political movement (*tasavvufi siyasi hareket*), became close to İsmailağa and adopted their *Furkan* magazine as its

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[1] *Today's Zaman*, January 5, 2010.
[2] *Kasr-i Arifan* is the name of the village close to Bukhara where Shah Naqshband was born.

own."[1] In fact, even if there is a certain degree of familiarity and cooperation between the İBDA-C and İsmailağa cemaati, the organic link does not exist (*organik bağlantısı yok*).

After the arrest of *Furkan*'s editor-in-chief in 1998 in connection with the relationship with İBDA-C, and following his prison sentence and release in 2005, the journal continued to be published as *Yeni Furkan* (New Furkan). Furthermore, whereas the *Furkan* journal praised the Ergenekon operation, the *Baran* journal, that is also close to Cübbeli Ahmet, criticised it as a campaign managed jointly by the US and Israel. Not surprisingly, the *Furkancı*s also oppose Cübbeli's 'music policy,' especially the live programs broadcast by Lalegül FM, the radio station that has been established by Ahmet Hoca in recent years. This radio station mostly plays *ilahis,* which are entirely vocal hymns recited during worship. But the most important cause of rivalry is, almost certainly, the fight over the future leadership of the İsmailağa cemaati, which is on the agenda because of Mahmut Efendi's old age and poor health.

The İsmailağa Cemaati has also earned occasional harsh criticism from the state Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*). Its former chairman, Ali Bardakoğlu, and various inspectors of the *Diyanet* have pointed out that Muslims who are not members of the community are discriminated against in the Çarşamba district mosques because they can not be seated. *Diyanet* officials have claimed that gradually the religious community is being transformed into a community claiming its own mosques, which is unacceptable. Moreover, they have claimed, although the main Qur'anic school functions under the supervision of the state, behind the curtains of

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[1] Aryeh Shmuelevitz and Mitchell Bennett, "Turkey (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti)," 593.

private houses in Çarşamba the unofficial Qur'anic study courses forbidden by the authorities are mushrooming

## Winds of change: The transformation of Turkish Islamism

Throughout this paper I have argued that the simplistic descriptions of the *İsmailağa cemaati* based solely on religious understanding is insufficient and misleading. As shown by Bulaç, Turkish migrants have step by step been able to adapt to city life, as well as to cope with both the material and emotional effects of mass migration, through the activation of *cemaat*s. In this respect I also share Bulaç's view that without this type of communalism (*cemaatleşme*) the situation in Turkey could have been even more complicated. Moreover, "there is today a close alignment of the *cemaat*'s interpretation of Islam with what one could call the contemporary Turkish Sunni orthodoxy, as represented by senior scholars at the official Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs and the semi-official Institute for Islamic Research (*ISAM*) in Istanbul. It is thus no coincidence that ISAM's recently published two-volume *İlmihal* ('Muslim catechism') emphasises the important role of *tasavvuf* in the Islamic tradition, without, however, mentioning the significance or even existence of Sufi *cemaats*."[1] The further enlargement of the religious community in Turkey since the mid-1970s has made the establishment of the *İsmailağa cemaati* much easier. Group solidarity, personal loyalty, comradeship, social class, in-group localism, networking, patron-client relationship or specific identity, have all played an important role within the İsmailağa community, but the same is true in connection with other professional, religious, ideological or political groups in Turkey.

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[1] Heiko Henkel, "One foot rooted in Islam, the other foot circling the world," 111.

The transformation of Turkish Islamism after the ascent to power in 2002 of the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party has put pressure on other segments of Turkish Islam and they in turn are beginning to shift their understanding of their own identity as well. When researching the İsmailağa community, it makes sense to mention in this context that as part of his education, the current prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attended the *imam-hatip* school situated close to the İsmailağa camii, and visited both the mosque and the nearby Qur'anic course. More importantly though, apart from this personal journey, the *cemaat* perceives Erdoğan as a close "fellow combatant," who has taken the community under his wing.[1]

On the one hand, the AKP has attempted to introduce Islam-based morality into Turkish politics and this has been welcomed by the *cemaat*s. On the other hand, diminished pressure from the state authorities has allowed them to act more freely. This can be best illustrated by reference to the İsmailağa cemaati. It has been my aim to highlight some of these developments in recent ears and show important changes. Whereas in the past the press, television or foreign travel were considered as prohibited innovations by the members of the branch, nowadays they seem to be admissible (*caiz*), together with presenting themselves on the internet. Furthermore, my personal conversations with supporters of the *cemaat* have confirmed that in recent years they have also entered the media sector with the aim of promoting their own commercial objectives. This is important because, as stressed by Bulaç, no *cemaat* can function without reference to economic reality and the ability to be financially self-sufficient.[2] It is widely accepted, however, that the Islamization of consumption

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[1] "Erdoğan has reportedly been associated with the İsmail Ağa section of the Nakşibendi [order]," according to Angel Rabasa and Stephen F. Larrabee. *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, 14.

[2] Ali Bulac, Din-kent ve Cemaat, 18.

patterns, as in the case of the İskenderpaşa community, is not sufficient for members of the İsmailağa community.[1]

Any discussion on the future of the İsmailağa community should also be set in a more detailed way against the background of the concept of *bid'at* or corrupt innovation, which is central to the thinking of the branch. Although the *cemaat* adheres very much to the principle of the unacceptability of any *bid'at*, substantial changes have been occurring as the pressure from the secular and military circles diminishes. In general, the adoption of "innovations" is mainly popular with the younger members of the community, who are the most likely to "modernize." But, unlike the İskenderpaşa community, whose disintegration in the past was speeded up by the entrepreneurial activities of so called "green capital" (*yeşil sermaye*), the İsmailağa brotherhood, at least so far, has resisted such a fundamental transformation. In addition, the community encounters a more general problem: how to use modern technology without being affected by the associated values.

It remains to be seen how far all these changes will impact on the intellectual world of the community. Here, the underlying hypothesis is that with the transformation of Turkish Islamism as represented by the AKP or the Fethullah Gülen Movement, other segments of the Islamist scene are also being pressurized to react, not least by shifts in their identity. The nature of socio-religious movements in Turkey has changed significantly in the last decade and long established stereotypes are not reflected in reality anymore. The socio-political atmosphere after the ascent to power of the AKP government in 2002 has bolstered the more rationalist Muslim communities that rely on the use of pragmatic and non-confrontational methods on a large scale. This has been to the disadvantage of those *cemaat*s which relay to a

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[1] E.g. Rusen Cakir, Ayet ve slogan, 317.

larger extent on the charisma engendered by their association with sheikhs, such as Mahmut Hoca. This, together with the closing down of most Qur'anic study courses attributed to the *İsmailağa cemaati* after the 1997 military intervention, has contributed to the falling number of their adherents. Although the İsmailağa community is representative of the most traditionalist (*gelenekçi*), "authentic" and conservative (*muhafazakâr*) communities in Turkey, it is at the same time marginal, elders-dominated and one of the weakest (*en zayıf olanlardan biri*), as best characterized by following its own traditions, and remaining aloof from the power struggle.

Far from being based on simple participation as is the case with the so-called "sociological Muslims," the engagement with faith in the İsmailağa community is constant and active. As has been discussed throughout this paper, their attachment to the traditional *tarikat* relationships, including its powerful religious hierarchy, seem to be stronger than in other *Nakşibendi* branches. It is, therefore, not surprising that they are disapproved of and in varying degrees discouraged by the secular nation-state culture that portrays them almost as a pathological deviation within Turkish Islam.

The debate about the nature of the *İsmailağa cemaati* is only slowly unfolding in scholarly literature, but several assumptions have already been made, albeit, except for the work of Ruşen Çakır, without any serious research work being undertaken on the community itself. Zarcone, for example, has classified the group as fundamentalist, while Rainer has argued that the *cemaat* members are radicals.[1] For Bulut, their ideas and practices place them among the so-called "reactionary factions" (*irticai fraksiyonlar*).[2] According to Yavuz, it is ruralism and conservativism that sets them apart, together with the Menzil Cemaati

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[1] Thierry Zarcone, *La Turquie moderne et l'islam*, 413; and Hermann Rainer, "Die drei Versionen des politischen Islam in der Türkei," 53.

[2] Faik Bulut, *Ordu ve Din*, 438.

of Adıyaman.[1] Houston offers an outlook on the İsmailağa community, characterizing it as an Islamist caste.[2] Yet another scholar, Marc Saurina i Lucini, holds that the community, which can be seen as ultraconservative, anti-systemic and radical, has not contributed to the process of modernization in Turkey.[3] Furthermore, Genel and Karaosmanoğlu have concluded that the residents of Çarşamba "embody both a confined, and an ahistorical Islamic identity in Turkey."[4] According to Pekoz the community, which currently votes in general elections either for the AKP or the Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), has always felt close to all the parties of the Turkish right, although it does not wish to participate openly in political activities.[5] However, individual members of the brotherhood do have political messages that sometimes appear in print or on the internet. Saadettin Ustaosmanoğlu, the editor of *Yeni Furkan* journal, for example, has said that "Turkey is used by the West, the West isn't sincere." He adds, "since Turkey is a bridge between East and the West, according to the Western mind, Turkey can play an important role to smooth the waters when the time comes for the West to account for its wrongdoings against the East."[6]

The accusations of plotting against the Turkish secular state on various levels seem to be largely unfounded and misleading. Whereas the Islamist threat in Turkey is a real one, it is certainly not the *İsmailağa* community that is by any means a major player in this. In a

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[1] Hakan Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey, 140.

[2] Christopher Houston, Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State, 53.

[3] Marc Saurina i Lucini, "Los grupos religiosos (cemaat) y el secularismo en la esfera pública en Turquía," 153.

[4] Sema Genel and Kerem Karaosmanoğlu, "A New Islamic Individualism in Turkey: Headscarved Women in the City," 475.

[5] Alex Mustafa Pekoz, Le développement de l'islam politique en Turquie. Les raisons économiques, politiques et sociales, 139.

[6] Molly Moore, "Western Businesses Embrace Turkey as E.U.'s Resistance Grows." *The Washington Post*, December 12, 2006.

quest for real threats that lie outside of this conventional *cemaat,* one is tempted to conclude that the İsmailağa community can only be classified as a pseudo-threat to the secular order. One example of a real threat is Turkish Hezbollah. However, during recent decades, the security forces have closed their eyes to the activities of Turkish Hezbollah, a militant and radical anti-secular organization, because it has been fighting against PKK militants. To some extent, Hezbollah has been accused by its rivals of being too closely connected to the Turkish intelligence services. According to Çakır, it is insufficient to portray religion-state society relations in Turkey as a clash between progressive and reactionary forces and it is also not helpful to identify communalism (*cemaatleşme*) with "the abuse of religion." He also warns that each campaign against "reactionary" religious forces (*irtica kampanyası*) ultimately backfired on secularism (*laiklik*). Therefore, to say that the İsmailağa community is either a "symbol of reaction." a "state agent" or "a neighbourhood's fool", does not explain the true face of religion in the country.[1]

Typologically speaking, the İsmailağa community corresponds to what Bulaç calls the "limited-field *cemaat* type" (*sınırlı alan cemaati*) which is characterized by the withdrawal into the self, unpretentiousness, a closed sphere of activity and a "*demodernist*" life-style.[2] In the cosmopolitan environment of Istanbul's metropolitan culture, the İsmailağa community provides a platform for a traditional and ultraconservative rural culture. As with other *cemaat*s, it provides support and assistance not only in religious matters, but also in many social areas, such as job searches, education, charity or the search for financial resources. Their religion resembles a sub-culture and community members struggle with the dilemma of how to use modern

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[1] uşen Çakır, "Aczimendilik gecekonduydu, İsmail Ağa ise gökdelen." *Zaman*, September 15, 2006.

[2] Ali Bulaç, *Din-Kent ve Cemaat*, 19–20.

technology while at the same time keeping a distance from the values it conveys. Finally, it is an unpolitical *cemaat*. According to members of the community, to take an active part in political associations could result in an undesired departure from Sufi disciplines and principles. The big question, of course, is what will happen when the charismatic Mahmut Hoca leaves the scene. The *Nakşibendi*s of various offshoots, however, have always been able to reinterpret their principles and practices in response to changing circumstances or the preferences of their leaders.

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