Production of mystical Islam in Europe: Religious authorization in the Süleymanlı Sufi community

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Abstract This article examines the production of religious authority among the Süleymanlı, a branch of the Naqshibandiyya order, which is the largest Sufi community active among Turkish-origin Muslims in Europe. Like other Islamic organizations, the Süleymanlı claims to represent "true Islam," which they construct during their central communal ritual, *hatim*, in which religious knowledge is produced and disseminated. The interaction of a religious corpus of assertions, media of representation, and social organization during this ritual produces its "criteria of Islamic validity and priority" which authorizes mystical Islam. European adaptations of the Islamic tradition require an analysis of how Islam is authorized rather than simply what "European Islam" is or who speaks on behalf of it, individually or communally.

There is growing scholarly interest in examining how Muslim immigrants in Europe negotiate between the universal and particular aspects of Islam, and whether such negotiation has resulted in the adaptation of Islam to the liberal and secular norms of the European public sphere, producing the emergence of so-called "European Islam". There are two possible approaches to this question. One is to focus on changes in religious practice caused by the European environment, like an emphasis on individualization and the privatization of religiosity. Accordingly, some scholars suggest that "European Islam" limits itself to the private sphere and is pursued as an individual form of spirituality to assure Muslim civil participation in European cultural pluralism (Tietze 2001; Roy 1998). They suggest that the individualization

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of religious authority can lead to the liberalization of Islam because individual choice in religious practice disentangles the presumed ties between ethno-national identity, cultural tradition, and religion (Cesari 2004, 43–64). However, this argument has been criticized on various grounds (Salvatore and Schireen Amir-Mouazimi 2002; Peter 2006). Individualization of religiosity does not necessarily mean its privatization, because personalization of religion can become very public by seeking public recognition of individual difference (Casanova 1994; Taylor 2002; Volpi and Turner 2007:4).

This article uses the other approach, which examines the process of creating religious authority through Islamic communities operating in the religious market of Europe. The principle behind this approach is that transnational Islamic communities founded in Muslim-majority countries have followed the immigrant population to Europe, where they retain an influence over the individual religiosity of their adherents (Allievi and Nielsen 2003), yet are themselves not immune from change and adaptation to their new environment. The templates which categorize Islamic communities according to their level of adaptation in Europe can only provide snapshots of these communities, which downplay this long-term negotiation process (Schiffauer 2007). Moreover, using liberal democratic criteria to measure the "Europeanization" of Islamic communities subjects the complexity of their religious authority and knowledge production to prescribed expectations of private and individualized religion. Understanding the authorization of religious knowledge in Islamic communities is central for analyzing the ongoing localization of Islam in Europe, which involves negotiation between the "universalism" of sacred texts and the particular context of adherents' practices (Bowen 1998).

Based on intensive fieldwork conducted between 2003 and 2005 in Germany and the Netherlands in Turkish Islamic communities, this article examines the production of mystical Islam in Europe through the case of the Süleymanlı Sufi community. Islamic community (cemaat in Turkish) refers to an informal network based on shared interpersonal experience in socio-religious activism and discourse. This network produces and transmits a coherent interpretation of Islam through its activities and institutions, which include associations, federations, foundations, schools, and mosques within civil society and independent from the state. These are transnational networks that emerge in Muslim-majority countries and spread around the globe. Their founders' model of organization and discourse maintains collective religious identity with some level of local adaptation in Europe. For instance, transnational Islamic communities that had focused on attempting to change the political systems of their countries of origin reoriented themselves to seek recognition of Muslim identity in the European public sphere (Canatan 2001; Bowen 2004). Sufi orders are prime examples of transnational networks that are active among Muslims in Europe (Malik and Hinnells 2006; Raudvere and Stenberg 2009). Transnational Islamic communities in the form of Sufi orders (Atay 1996; Werbner 2003), political Islamic movements (Mandaville 2007a; Schiffauer 2000), or Islamic networks (Agai 2004) move their ideas, projects, funds, and activists around the globe and respond to local conditions.[1]

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[1] This process is well captured within Arjun Appadurai's concept of "glocality" (1996) in which the negotiation of religious authority takes place between the global and local levels (Mandaville 2007b:103)

There have been a number of studies of formal Islamic organizations and institutions such as fatwa commissions, mosque associations, Islamic institutes, and state-recognized representative bodies of Muslims in the production of Islamic knowledge and authority in Europe (Allievi and Van Bruinessen 2008). There are competing religious authorities speaking in the name of Islam in Europe including independent intellectuals, charismatic preachers, and the Internet (Cesari 2004). Although these formal institutions and actors are often the subject of study, grasping the source of religious authority in the network of Islamic communities is challenging because of their informal and interpersonal characters. Islamic communities are very influential in shaping Muslim religiosity in Europe because they incorporate several of these institutions and actors in their network. Islamic communities often have an umbrella organization such as a registered foundation, association, or federation that represents all the institutions of the community, which allows them to join state-recognized Muslim representative bodies. They educate their imams in their educational institutions and raise effective preachers in their large congregations. They often run a large network of print, visual, and internet media through which they disseminate their interpretations.

Jonker (2005, 172; 2004, 66) introduces the concept of a "Sufi lay community" among Turkish Muslims, which is useful for understanding transnational Islamic communities such as the faith-oriented Nur movement, political Islamic Milli Gorus, and the Sufi Süleymanlı. Jonker justifies the concept of "lay community" for three reasons. Firstly, she rightfully points out that these lay communities are a modern phenomenon because they treat society as an object to be renewed. As she puts it: "For Muslim lay communities in Europe, the religious motive is the spreading of the divine message" (Jonker 2004, 66). However, the Süleymanlı case needs some qualification because their major form of activism is to reach out to Muslims by teaching Quranic recitation instead of reaching out to non-Muslims (Jonker 2002, 137). They believe that the Ottomans were the last Islamic state and there will not be another established because Tunahan, the thirty-third and last spiritual master before the end of times, had already arrived. So, their purpose is to seek the salvation of one's self, family, and close relatives by joining the Süleymanlı path.

Secondly, she suggests that the spiritual is no longer central among lay communities and is only secondary to the renewal of society (Jonker 2004, 66). The Süleymanlı are very cautious in exposing their Sufi practices and beliefs, including mystical and secret rituals, such as *rabıta* and *hatim*. However, they are focused on these rituals to attain spirituality and ultimately salvation through the *tasarruf*, or the divine capacity for guidance of the master Tunahan.

Lastly, "Turkish Muslim lay communities distance themselves from sheikhs and state theologians alike" (Jonker 2004, 66). This has to be qualified for the Süleymanlı because they believe that their founding sheikh Tunahan is still alive. A guest speaker preached to a whole congregation of Süleymanlı in the monthly meeting in Utrecht that "the death of Piran [Tunahan] is disappearance to the eyes of gafil [ignorant]." They believe that he is at another level of life, still having *tasarruf*, which is found in other branches of the Naqshibandiyya as well (Geaves 2009, 69). The Süleymanlı fear the persecution of the Turkish state which banned the traditional Sufi orders, so they reject any claims of being a *tarikat*, or Sufi order. Although Jonker recognizes that the Süleymanlı maintain the main Sufi feature, which is

divine inspiration through *silsile*, a chain of spiritual masters, she falls short of expanding on the details of the process through which this works (Jonker 2005, 176) – what I call the mystical mode of authorization.

Each Islamic community produces religious knowledge and authorizes its form of Islam as the "true Islam." This article argues that the authorization process is based on the mutual determination of (1) a religious corpus of assertions, (2) the media of representation, and (3) social organization during the production and dissemination of religious knowledge, which creates "criteria of Islamic validity and priority" (Barth 2002; 1994). Each Islamic community is constituted in periodic face-to-face gatherings in which the participants internalize this authorization. The Süleymanlı community's mystical mode of authorization takes place during the communal ritual of *hatim*, which is the main activity through which the Süleymanlı produce and disseminate their interpretation of Islam. The formation and impact of the mystical mode of authorization on the daily activities of the Süleymanlı illustrates the role of contemporary Sufism among Muslims in Europe.

The contribution of this article is to illustrate how rituals remain strong media of representation within Sufism because they embody mysticism in action, with selective access. The emergence of new media in the dissemination of religious ideas changes the character of religiosity because it empowers different social actors and increases access to religious knowledge, which result in a "fragmentation of authority" (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). For instance, using the new technology of CDs transformed the methods for cultivating the pious self through listening to religious poetry (Eisenlohr 2006) or listening to taped sermons challenging the reason-based public sphere (Hirschkind 2001). However, this article analyzes how rituals, as media of representation, impact the content of the Islamic message and the social organization of the community. The secret knowledge of the Süleymanlı path is embodied in rituals such as *rabıta* and *hatim*, which cannot be communicated through mass media. The Süleymanlı community originates in Sufism, which views ritual as the most powerful enactment of faith and teaches that true Islamic knowledge is accessible only to chosen individuals who become spiritual vessels of God through these rituals.

Turkish immigration and Islamic communities in Europe

Turkish Muslims established a secular republican nation-state on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. M. Kemal Ataturk led an independence war and became the founder of the Turkish Republic in order to realize the westernization project, which had already begun in the 19th century (Mango 1999). In order to break away from the old regime, any activity, symbol, or group associated with the old regime was strictly forbidden and replaced with new "European" practices. Sufi orders were outlawed, rim hats replaced turbans, the Turkish language was "purged" of Arabic and Persian influences, and the Latin alphabet was introduced. The Kemalist grip continued until after the Second World War. The growing conservative middle class, disenchanted with the top-down modernization project, sought opportunities through rapid urbanization and labor migration to Europe beginning in the early 1960s. The war-torn countries of Western Europe initiated "guest worker" programs to invite

laborers to fulfill the needs of low-skilled labor for the heavy industrial sector. Despite the end of legal migration in 1973, immigrants grew in number through family unification and de facto settlement in Europe.

The changing character of the self-organization of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries is intertwined with this labor migration history. The overwhelming majority of labor migrants from Turkey in the 1960s was from rural areas and had low economic status and education. Labor unions were the initial forms of immigrant self-organization in Europe. In the 1970s ethnic and religious organizations began to provide social solidarity among immigrants. Family unification in this period has shifted the immigrant profile from single male workers to include women and children. Mosques helped people find jobs and became the new locus of socialization in the ethnic and cultural tradition of the immigrants, through the transmission of linguistic and religious capital to the younger generation. Since the mid-1990s, Islamic communities and their mosques have taken on the role of mediator, reconciling the different expectations of their followers with those of the European authorities.

Islamic communities confirmed the ethnic identity of their followers, and Muslims differentiated their mosques and religious leadership as "Turkish," "Moroccan" or "Pakistani" based on the ethnic majority of the congregation. However, security concerns in Europe after September 11, 2001 confirmed the emergence of a new category, "Muslims in Europe," which defined different ethnic communities from Muslim-majority countries as one unified religious group. In this context, the intersections of ethnicity, poverty, and religion became potent fuel for identity politics and social discrimination (Cesari 2004). Analysts have tried to explain failing socio-economic integration through the incompatibility of Islamic beliefs and practices with the liberal democratic social structure in Europe. However, the state demanded that "Muslims" accept "European" values and standards of conduct.

The term "Muslims in Europe" obscures the rich diversity of Islamic communities in Europe. Different Islamic communities serve as religious authorities in each ethnic community among Muslims. There are currently half a dozen Islamic communities active among the four million Turkish Muslims in Europe.[2] Since the mid-1970s, these communities have created a variety of institutions including mosques, foundations, media outlets, and schools (Landman 1992). There are 2.5 million Turkish Muslims in Germany, the first country to invite "guest workers" from Turkey in 1961. Turkish Islamic communities founded their European headquarters in Germany, where Turkish-origin Muslims now make up more than two-thirds of all Muslims.[3] This makes Turkish Muslims and their Islamic communities the dominant factor in the making of Islam in Germany. Netherlands has the next largest Turkish

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[2] This is according to a report of the Turkish Studies Center in Essen, Germany titled "Economic data on Turks in Europe" in 2006. Source: *Milliyet*, January 12, 2007.

[3] The largest Islamic community in terms of affiliated-mosque numbers among Turkish Muslims in Europe is Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.*), with 100,000 members and 750 local associations running mosques in Germany with official links to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. Islamic Community Milli Görüş (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş e.V.* [IGMG]) is the strongest carrier of political Islam with 70,000 followers running 270 local mosque associations. Turkish nationalists are organized as Union of Turkish-Islam in Europe (*Union der Türkisch-Islamischen Kulturvereine in Europa e.V.*), which controls 122 mosques with 11,000 members, and which involves following the principles of orthodox Islam with an added nationalist bent. These figures are from Atilgan (1999).

Muslim population in Europe. According to official figures there are nearly 325,000 Turks and over 260,000 Moroccans in the Netherlands (Van Herten 2007). Turks, and the next largest ethnic group of Muslim immigrants from Morocco, comprise nearly eighty percent of all Muslims in the country.

Each Turkish Islamic community initially established branches among Turkish immigrants in Europe to support their projects in Turkey, which expressed dissenting ethnic, ideological, and religious identities in public life. The Milli Görüş and Süleymanlı communities institutionalized themselves primarily through mosques. The Diyanet, which is the representative of Turkish state-controlled Islam, expanded into Europe with the outward goal of counterbalancing religiously dissident groups after the 1980 military coup (Mumcu 1987). There has been fierce competition among Milli Görüş, Süleymanlı, and the "official Islam" of the Diyanet, which focuses on loyalty to Turkish state, national solidarity among Turkish Muslims, and an ethical, individualized, and private Islam (Doomernik 1991). These groups justify their differences through their different priorities and fields of activism—Milli Görüş focused on the recognition of Islam in public life, Süleymanlı in Quranic courses, and Diyanet in promoting Turkish nationalism and solidarity.

Islamic communities produce, represent, and supply a variety of Islamic interpretations to believers as they go through the stages of temporary labor migration to permanent residency and citizenship. Institutionalization of Islamic diversity allows Muslims to compare and contrast these Islamic communities as suppliers of religious interpretations and socio-religious services (Yukleyen 2009). However, Muslims are not just passive consumers of religious services but also participants in the process of interpretation. They have questions and make demands of religious authorities, as activists in and financial supporters of Islamic communities. If Muslim activists or followers are not content with their religious communities, they switch affiliation (Sunier 1992, 157). Their choices determine the final dispensation of financial and human resources in this faith market. Thus, the competitive capacity of Islamic communities among themselves depends in part on their internal religious authorization.

The Süleymanlı Sufi community

The Süleymanlı (also called Süleymancı) community is originally a branch of the Naqshibandiyya Sufi order founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1959), a member of the late Ottoman *ulema*, in Istanbul. After the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Tunahan focused his activities on teaching Quranic recitation. This was his central mission, and he has not produced any scholarly work except for a pamphlet teaching the Arabic alphabet, despite his two separate degrees in law and theology. Tunahan is accepted as the thirty-third and last segment of the Naqshibandiyya *silsile*, the spiritual chain connecting sheikhs of this order to Prophet Mohammad. He is considered the last because his followers believe that the end of time has come and an Islamic state based on sharia-law will never be established again.[4]

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[4] The Süleymanlı consider the Ottoman state as the last Islamic state. They do not accept any of the contemporary states ruling according to Islamic law, such as Saudi Arabia, as a true Islamic state.

   The Süleymanlı have had unstable relations with the Turkish state, mostly favorable, but at times antagonistic. Tunahan founded his first official Quranic course in 1952 under the control of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs' Istanbul branch (Aydın 2004:311). Despite pressure from the state against religious activities, Tunahan had one thousand pupils when he died in 1959. Although he had not appointed anyone to take his place, Kemal Kaçar, his son-in-law, became the leader of the Süleymanlı while Tunahan remained the spiritual master. To counter the turmoil of Turkish politics, Kaçar allied with the center-right parties until his death in 2002. Afterwards, a rivalry between two brothers over the Süleymanlı community's leadership ended with the consolidation of Ahmet A. Denizolgun's victory.

   In the early 1970s, the Süleymanlı began to organize among Turkish immigrants in Germany. They were among the first to organize mosques because they had trained religious cadres. The Süleymanlı center in Europe is an umbrella organization called the Union of Islamic Culture Centers (*Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren e.V.* [VIKZ]) in Cologne, Germany. They currently oversee 274 mosques in Germany and also have separate organizations in other European countries.[5] They provide imams and prayer halls for Muslims, and Quranic schools where children learn to recite the Quran in Arabic. However, in the early 1980s the Diyanet took control of the majority of the mosques founded by Turkish immigrants. Despite this take-over, Netherlands Islamic Center Foundation (*Stichting Islamitisch Centrum Nederland* [SICN]), the Süleymanlı umbrella organization, now administers 48 mosques in the Netherlands.

   Their primary field of activity is the Quranic schools where children learn the recitation of the Quran. This is a ritualistic practice in which the students learn the Arabic alphabet in order to recite the Quran in accordance with *tecvid*, the rules of recitation and Arabic pronunciation. Although they can recite in Arabic, they do not know Arabic and cannot understand the meaning of the recitation. Precision in pronunciation and reproduction of the Quran, the word of God, affirms their concern to maintain and pass on the Islamic tradition to the next generation as they received it themselves. This practice comes from the idea that, in analogous terms to the Quran, true knowledge is fixed and memoriazable (Eickelman 1992, 644), however it requires mystical initiation to access the inner meaning. Novices interested in this have to attend communal rituals until they are tested to be serious enough to be initiated into the community.

Mystical mode of authorization: *Hatim* communal ritual

The Süleymanlı produce, disseminate, and represent their religious authority and knowledge through collective rituals called *hatim*, which illustrate the three aspects of the anthropology of knowledge: basic religious assertions, media of representation, and social organization. *Hatim* provides the "repetitive, persistent effects of mutual constraint and influence" in the realization of the mystical mode of authorization (Barth 2002, 3). The senior speaker at the retreat program in a Süleymanlı mosque encourages participation in every *hatim*. "In Turkey we do the

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[5] Source is www.vikz.de, August 17, 2005. According to other sources VIKZ has 290 mosques (Golberg 2002, 43).

hatims twice but in Europe it is three times a week. It has been this way for more than fifteen years as far as I know. We will go on like this as long as it is seen necessary by our leaders. We should try our best to come to all these hatims." The Süleymanlı require *hatim* participation for community inclusion. They meet once at the house of an initiated member during the week and the other two meetings take place during the weekend at their mosque. The exact times of *hatim* vary slightly according to the country and mosque, and also depending on the members' working hours.

I encountered the *hatim* in the Süleymanlı mosque I frequented when eight members of the congregation stayed after the communal evening prayer. They knelt in the corner of the mosque in the shape of a circle, their knees touching one another. Everyone put on a blue *takke*, the religious head cover for men. A man in his early forties who was sitting outside the circle called me to kneel next to him and made sure that our knees touched each other. I kept participating in *hatims* throughout my fieldwork and learned that this ritual serves as the central activity for the production and transmission of mystical Islam.

The Süleymanlı *hodja* of the mosque or a pre-designated senior disciple is in charge of the *hatim*. The leader of the *hatim* session counts the initiated members in the inner circle and divides up a thousand *Ihlas*, a short chapter from the Quran, for silent recitation during the ritual. The leader signals the next stage by reciting chapter two, verse 200 from the Quran invoking *rabıta*, which for the Süleymanlı refers to the meditation of one's sheikh. After this five to ten minute long meditation, everyone in the circle silently recites their share of the thousand *Ihlas*. The leader signals the pace and transition from one stage to the next in the ritual. At the end, everyone holds up their hands to make supplication and they breathe into their hands and pat their bodies with them. The ritual ends when the leader concludes with a short prayer that God may accept their *hatim* and prayers.

After this ritualistic stage is over, those in the circle relax their feet after kneeling motionless for about half an hour. Often the leader of the *hatim* gives a five-to-thirty minute talk, which typically includes an interpretation of a verse from the Quran, anecdotes from the lives of the prophets or spiritual masters, or an account of Tunahan's miracles. Before they leave, the *hoca* asks participants to volunteer for activities such as fund raising, tutoring in Quranic recitation, and maintenance of the mosque, and announces upcoming events.

The Süleymanlı community's central activity is the *hatim*, in which their religious authority is institutionalized through the interaction of central assertions, social organization, and media. We can analyze how each aspect reinforces the others during *hatim*. Firstly, to believe in the Süleymanlı assertion that Tunahan is the spiritual master of our times is a prerequisite to join this path. As a new student of the Süleymanlı way, members encouraged me to join their path. When I asked them about written sources to read and inform myself with first, they replied that this path can not be learned through reading and that it must be learned through experience and full participation in the *hatim*. Participation requires accepting without doubt that Tunahan is the last *Mürşid-i Kamil*, the highest spiritual master to guide Muslims to salvation, which is the first and foremost assertion to be accepted to join the Süleymanlı way. They recognize that there are other Islamic scholars and spiritual masters, but Tunahan is exalted as the last one with the divine mission to provide spiritual guidance. The novice is initiated into the community only after he

or she affirms Tunahan's spiritual status. Only after initiation can one join the inner circle during the *hatim*, and others form an outer circle.

Secondly, in the initiation ceremony only qualified leaders reveal the mystical and secret ritual of *rabıta*, which is the medium in which the basic assertion that Tunahan is the *Mürşid-i Kamil* is represented. His spiritual powers rely on a genealogy of spiritual masters that goes back to Prophet Muhammad. God has transmitted His divine light (*nur*) to the Prophet Muhammad who is the source of all divine light on earth. The Prophet, in turn, has transmitted this light to his companion Abu Bakr, and the chain continues through the centuries, ending with Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (Silverstein 2008, 126–127). They call this the Golden Chain (*Altun Silsile*) and Tunahan belongs to the Naqshibandiyya order's *silsile*. These spiritual masters provide the means to reach *nur*, which brings spiritual purity and ultimately salvation. This spiritual guidance of a Sufi master provides access to the inner and true meaning of the Quran, which is not accessible to others.

The role of Sufi masters as intermediaries to religious truth through *rabıta* could potentially challenge the principle of *tawhid* (the unity of God) and the direct relationship between God and believer in Sunni orthodoxy. However, all the Süleymanlı leaders I talked with justified it by using the analogy of an electrical system. The voltage at the place of electrical production is high so there are regulators that convert it to the level of home use. Just like this, divine light is so powerful that we need Sufi masters as intermediaries to regulate it for individual usage. They compare this to the prophets who bring the message of God to the people. They argue that if there were no intermediaries between God and human beings, it would not be possible to understand His will.

There are different ways of doing *rabıta* which mark various positions in the social organization of the Süleymanlı. The first-level initiate performs the basic level, and with more religious education and activism, more elaborate ways of doing *rabıta* are revealed. The mystical power of *rabıta* to provide salvation and its secrecy as a medium of representation allows for maintaining the boundaries of the Süleymanlı community and its internal hierarchy. In each *hatim*, the insiders who know *rabıta* and those that do not are redrawn in the seating arrangement. *Rabıta* represents divine light as a flow that comes through the hierarchy of *silsile*, and this reinforces the hierarchical social structure of the organization. *Hatim* is only led by those who are higher in this social organization.

Thirdly, the centralized, hierarchical, and clearly bounded social organization of the Süleymanlı reinforces the basic assertion and medium of representation. In the talks following the *hatim*, often the topic is about the miracles of Tunahan and the centrality of *rabıta*. "If there is rabıta there is everything, if there is not, there is nothing" is an often quoted phrase from Cırpanlı hoca, one of Tunahan's closest disciples. In contrast to local Suleymanli mosques, the *hatim* are carried out at the centers once a month, emphasizing the centralized structure. The hierarchy in the social organization is reinforced through the levels of *rabıta*. The strict control of membership and initiation rites strengthens the assertions about the spiritual status of Tunahan.

Initiated men call each other *ihvan*, brother, and women call each other *ehavat*, sister. Süleymanlı refer to non-initiated people as *zahiri*, those that only see the outward appearance and do not have access to the true inner meaning, the *batıni*. There is a clear distinction between initiated and non-initiated. If someone is

sympathetic to the Süleymanlı he/she would be called a *muhibban* (sympathizer), but if he/she is not initiated, he is not *ihvan* or she is not *ehavat*.

The *hatim* ritual is a disciplinary circle for deviant *ihvan* or *ehavat* within the community. For instance, women in the Süleymanlı community are not allowed to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca because the congestion during the *tawaf* (ritual visit of Qa'ba) is considered immodest. A new initiate of the order told me that his wife, a long-time *ehavat* of the Süleymanlı, decided to join her husband for the pilgrimage. Upon their return she was not accepted into the communal ritual, *hatim,* for some months, though she continued to participate in rituals at the outer circle. After this period, the central authority considered that she had suffered enough for her mistake and they accepted her back into the inner circle of *hatim*. This example indicates that individual deviation from communal religious authority is punished by limiting access to religious knowledge. Süleymanlı discipline and order comes from high levels of group conformity and cohesion, which is produced through the practice of *hatim*, which institutionalizes strict control over access to the mystical spiritual secrets.

Thus, the *hatim* ritual reinforces the centralized social organization, the mystical medium of *rabıta*, and the assertion of Tunahan's special status. This inter-determination creates the Süleymanlı criterion of Islamic validity, which is *batıni* (i.e. real) religious knowledge produced by the higher initiates in the order. The basic assertion that the true meaning of Quran is accessible only to those who are initiated by the members of the *silsile* creates a community boundary impenetrable to outsiders. This boundary is formed through initiation rituals and redrawn at each *hatim* through the seating arrangement. Only those who are initiated are allowed to sit in the inner circle, while uninitiated individuals form a second circle. For these followers, mystical religious knowledge formulated in the *rabıta*, given only to the initiated, and preserved as secrets, counts as true Islam.

Süleymanlı criteria of Islamic validity

The Süleymanlı often avoid engaging in any discussion of religious questions with other Muslims. However, the following conversation between a Süleymanlı and his guest provides a helpful example that illustrates how the Süleymanlı criterion of religious validity is applied in practice. Osman, one of my informants, invited me to join him on a visit to his sister who is a Süleymanlı living in another town in the Netherlands. Osman did not get along with Hasan, his brother-in-law, also a Süleymanlı. They are both first generation immigrants in their late fifties. In the house, men and women were segregated. Young men served tea and the adults talked about the Süleymanlı mosque that is being renovated in town. Osman was complimenting them on their progress in renovating the mosque.

The tone of the conversation changed when Osman and Hasan began to debate the religious status of slaughtering an animal. Conventionally, it is *vacib* (required religious practice) to slaughter an animal every year, share the food and celebrate it as a day of religious festivity called *Kurban Bayramı* in Turkish. It was only one week before *Kurban*, and there had been a long debate on Turkish satellite broadcast about the religious status of this practice, whether it was *sunnah* (religiously recommended) or *vacib* (religiously required). Osman said that he listened to

scholars such as Ali Bardakoğlu, head of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı [DİB]), who argue that *kurban* is recommended but not required, since there is no clear command regarding it in the Quran.

Hasan was discontent with Osman's explanation and made several counter arguments. His main point was that there may be many scholars and spiritual leaders, but Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan was the *Mürşid-i Kamil* (the highest spiritual master). "Ustaz [referring to Tunahan] says that Kurban is obligatory and this is enough for me." Moreover, he added "[Süleymanlı] religious leaders are more knowledgeable than those you listen to on TV. They speak Arabic and have all the proofs that *kurban* is required, which I do not know, but I follow what they say." He recommended that Osman do the same and follow reliable religious leaders. Osman was on the defensive; he said that he offers *kurban* every year anyhow.

This anecdote indicates that when the Süleymanlı are challenged on a religious question they turn exclusively to their religious leaders for their opinions. The Süleymanlı religious authority is institutionalized in such a way that followers exclude other Islamic interpretations as non-authoritative and unreliable. The reason given here suggests the significance of the learned cadre of the Süleymanlı and their informal religious seminary in Istanbul, called *tekamül*. Moreover, the mystical mode of religious authorization and religious learning are intertwined in hierarchical stages of initiation and study.

Internal hierarchy is created through the Süleymanlı system of religious education. I met some of the young students who learn the recitation of the Quran at the Süleymanlı mosque on their way to the initiation ritual for those fourteen or older. After the first level of initiation, successful students are selected by an exam and join the next stage of religious education where they learn Arabic at the European headquarters of the Süleymanlı in Cologne, called *tekamül-altı*. A young Süleymanlı who opted out of *tekamül-altı* complained how his friends at *tekamül-altı* are discouraged from continuing their college education because spiritual knowledge is considered superior to scientific knowledge.

As the last stage, those who are successful with their studies go to Istanbul for a year-long intensive religious training, called *tekamül*. They study Arabic and the classical texts of the Hanefi School of Law. They also listen to the pupils of Tunahan. They read Ismail Hakkı Bursevi's mystical exegesis of the Quran, called "*Ruh-ul Beyan*." Their completion of the program and the spiritual approval of the leaders make them *hoca* and they receive an *ijazat*, or diploma. Each of them is appointed as a *hoca*, to be the religious, organizational, and spiritual leader of a Süleymanlı mosque where they organize and lead *hatims*. My Süleymanlı hoca informant explained to me how he completed this challenging seminary, which produces 1200 graduates every year. My closest Süleymanlı informant explained how the *hocas* are initiated into higher stages of *rabıta* and how this makes them spiritually superior upon their graduation from *tekamül*.

The leader of the Süleymanlı community in Istanbul legitimizes the religious leadership of each Süleymanlı mosque, and this creates a centralized social structure. Süleymanlı mosques are highly centralized and they take special pride in their centralized structure. Each mosque raises funds and they are collected in their center and redistributed to the branches that need funding for renovation or for establishing a new branch. Every mosque is accountable to the Süleymanlı national center in the

country. In the Netherlands the center is in Utrecht. Each mosque and its community work to fulfill the expectations of the center. The center monitors the performance of the branches in raising funds, the number of Quranic course students and initiated members. Their performance is individually evaluated and compared to their performance in the previous year. In yearly meetings, the national leader announces the names of mosques that have highest level of performance in order to increase competition among the branches.

Their European headquarters is in Cologne, Germany. All the students that are selected to go through the religious training program in Istanbul have to be educated in Cologne first. Cologne headquarters is accountable to Istanbul, where the current leader resides in Tunahan's house. Tunahan is also buried in Istanbul where his followers come to visit and seek his blessings. Visiting the tomb of Tunahan is considered an important ritual: a visit must be made at least once a year, and this makes Istanbul the spiritual and organizational center of the Süleymanlı community.

The leaders of the community after Tunahan are not spiritual but organizational leaders. They strengthen their leadership through the centralized and hierarchical social structure among the Süleymanlı religiously-trained individuals called *hoca*. One of my informants, Sami Hoca, referred to the social hierarchy within Süleymanlı as the means that provides discipline: "As Süleymanlı you obey your superior. Now, my superior is Orhan Hoca, of course not him personally because before him there was İsmail Hoca and before him there was another hoca. So, I am bound by the position that is above me. I do what they tell me."

The power and control of the Süleymanlı community leaders is absolute because of their spiritual powers, which give them access to mystical worlds of spiritual beings. Sami Hoca explained to me as follows how Süleymanlı believe in the Council of Spiritual Beings:

"We believe that at heyet-i Ruhan [Council of Spiritual Beings] composed of Kırklar [The Spiritual Beings known as the Forties] Yediler [the Sevens] and Üçler [Threes]. They decide what needs to be done and the priorities for Muslims on earth. Through the line of our superiors they tell us what to do. Since those at the headquarters [of Süleymanlı] have access to the Spiritual World, they see everything and we followers do not. They are like in a higher spiritual place to see better than we can. So, we obey what our superiors tell us to do."

Sami Hoca told me that his duty is to satisfy the head *hoca* in the mosque, because this will make the national *hoca* in the Netherlands happy. The leader of Süleymanlı in the Netherlands reports to the headquarters in Germany and they are in turn responsible to the leader of the community in Istanbul, who is in spiritual contact with the founder Tunahan. In this quote, Sami Hoca was using the spiritual chain ritualized in *rabıta* and *hatim* as a template to justify his responsibilities and social position in the hierarchical and centralized social structure.

The trajectory of the Süleymanlı way in Europe

Religious authority expresses its power by controlling the boundaries of religious knowledge and the social boundaries of the community. There are various processes

by which religious authority shapes religious interpretation. Firstly, religious authority sets the agenda for the community and provides a general orientation for the community's activities. The Süleymanlı are inward-oriented because they are interested only in deepening the Muslim spirituality of their own members, and not in the developments of the wider *ummah*. The religious agenda of the Süleymanlı excludes any Islamist ideas, such as controlling political power to reform society.

This is because the Süleymanlı believe that Tunahan is the last *Mürşid-i Kamil* and that the end of days is close. Their eschatological scenario is based on Ismail Hakkı Bursevi's *tafsir*, (exegesis of the Quran), which gives its *batıni* meaning. Accordingly, there is no point in trying to change the state or the whole of society for better because the end of days is close. Relations with developments in the world are mediated through mystical and spiritual beings. Their conception of the outer world depends on the intermediary role of spiritual beings. The spiritual beings have access to all the developments that take place on earth. Sami Hoca said that for this reason the Süleymanlı are not interested in world affairs, including the war in Iraq.

Süleymanlı also refrain from engaging with native Europeans on the individual or institutional level. I visited another Süleymanlı mosque, where two non-Muslim Dutchmen had been joining the *hatim*. They came to tutor students and joined the *hatim* circle afterwards. They considered *hatim* a spiritual meditation, but the leaders of the branch were surprised and became suspicious of them. The leaders consulted the headquarters in Utrecht to decide what to do with them. In this case, they were told to let them join the *hatim* circle, but in general the Süleymanlı are not interested in converting non-Muslims to Islam.

Süleymanlı are also inward-oriented in their relations with European governments. They are the only Sunni organization that has not joined the Contact Organization of Muslims and Government, or *Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid* (CMO), in the Netherlands. The Süleymanlı's public relations director told me that Dutch officials had called him and personally extended their invitation to join CMO. According to the spokesperson, they did not join because they want to keep their activities at the grassroots level. Süleymanlı are unwilling to engage in Dutch governmental institutions.

Religious authority shapes religious interpretation by establishing its own priorities in religious activities. The religious priority of Süleymanlı has been to teach Quranic recitation to Muslims and especially the younger generation. Tunahan first initiated Quranic courses in response to the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin in early Republican Turkey. Quranic courses have become the main activity of Süleymanlı mosques in Europe. The founding of the Islamic Academy of Villa Hahnenburg (*Islamischen Akademie Villa Hahnenburg* [ISLAH]) in 1999 was an attempt to diversify Süleymanlı religious activities and reduce their isolation from the larger European society (Karakaşoğlu-Aydın 1999). However, Denizolgun, the leader of Süleymanlı in Istanbul, abolished ISLAH in 2001, arguing that the Süleymanlı religious priority is Quranic courses and that other activities are distractions (Jonker 2002, 137).

The example of ISLAH indicates that transnational Süleymanlı religious authority exercises its control by reasserting religious priorities. Tunahan used Quranic courses to spread Muslim religiosity within the Jacobin secularism of early Republican Turkey. ISLAH's activities resonate with democratic and multicultural

Europe. However, the Süleymanlı leader reasserted his power and religious priority, squashing this movement's attempt to adapt to its surroundings.

Local-level leaders also create conformity to the traditional method, agenda, and priority of religious activities among the Süleymanlı by monitoring and disciplining their followers. Their encounters with, and responses to, internal challenges indicate how religious authorities monitor followers at the local level. The commitment of the Süleymanlı leadership to their top-priority activities creates discontent among followers and provokes criticism.

Nevertheless, followers who demand change from within are silenced through various arguments, including the invocation of Tunahan's mystical powers. Zeki, a man in his mid-thirties who runs a grocery in Rotterdam, entered the room when I was sitting with two *hocas* in the administrative office of the Süleymanlı mosque. He said that he would not bring his child to the Süleymanlı Quranic course because he did not see any improvement in the educational system and method. He reminded them that he attended the Süleymanlı course in 1984 and said that nothing had changed since then. He complained about two main issues. He claimed that *hocas* do not know how to relate to young students because they do not understand the mindset of young people. Secondly, they do not supervise the students on their homework and do not monitor their progress closely enough.

The *hocas* developed a number of arguments against these charges. Sami Hoca reminded Zeki that he should not generalize because his observations are based only on the Süleymanlı mosque in his neighborhood. In response, Zeki replied that he believed the traditional methods of the Süleymanlı are insufficient and that this explained why no young members are joining the Süleymanlı. Sami Hoca replied that joining the Süleymanlı is a matter of divine will and nothing can be done about it. Everyone is responsible for their share of the work, and Zeki should do his part by inviting his friends. He reminded Zeki to keep bringing his contributions to the mosque and promised that as *hocas* they would take care of the students. He asserted that *Piran* (Tunahan's title as the spiritual leader) would help them perfect their shortcomings.

The first strategy that the Süleymanlı *hocas* used to was to trivialize the criticism by questioning whether the evidence was representative. Ordinary followers do not know the developments in all the branches. Each follower can only bring in examples of failure from their branch, which are never representative enough to justify general claims of failure. General observations on the lack of young followers are attributed to mystical powers and the will of God. No efforts are made to develop more effective and rational strategies to address shortcomings. The *hocas* invoke the spiritual power of Tunahan with the authority of being senior initiates who have better access to the spiritual world. In order to become Süleymanlı, one has to be initiated by senior initiates, which provides superiority and authority over juniors.

Even if there is a clear failure in the decision of the leader, it is explained away through the division between the *zahiri* and *batıni*. The mystical mode promotes the idea that nothing is what it seems (i.e. *zahiri*) but there is a real reason behind it (i.e. *batıni*). A clear example of this is the failure of Ahmet Arif Denizolgun from the center-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi* [ANAP]) to be elected in the 2002 Turkish parliamentary elections. Followers explain that this only seems like a failure but in fact it has helped the community. They believe that their support for the

Motherland Party reduced the Turkish state's political pressure on them because they did not support any pro-Islamic party, such as the Justice and Development Party or the Felicity Party. This unexpected benefit is presented as the *batıni*, or real reason behind the apparent failure of the leader only after the fact.

The approach that there is another real world, accessible only to the spiritually privileged, behind what we see can promote conspiratorial thinking. For the Süleymanlı, inter-religious dialogue for example is, at worst, a conspiratorial project of non-Muslims to dilute Islamic faith and, at best, unnecessary for Muslims to engage in. Sami Hoca from the Süleymanlı mosque believed that inter-religious dialogue was another extension of debates about reforming Islam. He believed that such dialogue is planned by non-Muslims to corrupt Islam, so that it is diluted like Christianity and Judaism. Without giving any names, he referred to some Muslim leaders' (i.e. Fethullah Gülen) meetings with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in 1998 as the highest level at which inter-religious dialogue is carried out. He believes Muslims who engage in inter-religious dialogue to reach out to non-Muslims are naïve to believe that they may convert anyone to Islam. Non-Muslims who engage in inter-religious dialogue are more knowledgeable about Islam than Muslims. He believed that international institutions fund these inter-religious dialogue projects in order to corrupt Islam. He admitted that this sounded like a conspiracy, then paused and added that he believed it was.

Regional and national leaders of the Süleymanlı visit their mosque branches to encourage conformity about religious positions with regard to new questions. Taner Abi, the head of Süleymanlı in the Netherlands, visited the mosque I frequented and gave his opinions on inter-religious dialogue. The Süleymanlı have their own public relations expert who is in charge of relations with the state, and he raised these questions. Taner Abi's answers reflected the same line of reasoning as Sami Hoca's.

> "If the goal [in inter-religious dialogue meetings] is to have dialogue among religious people to solve their common problems, then it is possible. They could meet to solve the problems of writing the ingredients of all food products so that pork or fat of the animal is known to followers of religions that prohibit eating it. However, in these meetings… they discuss principles of faith. Religion is not like man-made law or constitutions so that you may discuss it. You cannot open your religion for discussion. We may discuss the colour of your jacket or customs, but not religion."

He concluded that organizers of inter-religious dialogue activities wanted to trick Muslims. "Their goal is to confuse Muslims, dilute their belief and weaken their faith. They have done it with their own religion and now they want to do it with Islam." Since Christianity and Judaism are corrupted, he told me, they are trying to do the same to Islam.

He also said that, while there are Muslims using inter-religious dialogue to reach out to non-Muslims, his priority is to reach out to Muslims. He was also concerned that interaction with followers of other religions caused an appreciation of their faith. He quoted Pope John Paul II saying that when Christians discuss inter-religious dialogue, they do not want faithful Catholics to believe in the beliefs of other religions. This dilutes the purity of one's faith, Taner Abi warns. Muslims should

understand this as much as the Pope. This explanation shows how the *zahiri/batıni* distinction, which can be seen as a way to go beyond the limits of the law to attain the spiritual essence, can become self-constraining by feeding suspicion of activities such as inter-religious dialogue. Despite challenges, the Süleymanlı authorities respond to their new environment in Europe not by changing the tradition but trying to preserve it.

Europeanization of the Süleymanlı?

The Süleymanlı have an inward-oriented and centralized religious authority, which makes their religious discourse less responsive to the European setting. Süleymanlı are known for their close adherence to classical Islamic law. They strictly follow the Hanefi School of Law. They follow Tunahan who believed that the classical texts have addressed all the questions. Rather than engaging in *ijtihad*, developing new religious opinion, they feel that the existing religious opinions need to be followed.

The Süleymanlı avoid engaging in any debate on the reformation of Islamic thought. I asked several Süleymanlı *hocas* about issues that arise among Muslims in Europe, such as the religious status of the headscarf and co-education in swimming classes. Sami *hoca* replied that such questions are related to the debate about reforming Islam. He said he despises scholars who discuss reforming Islam such as Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, a professor of Islamic theology in Turkey. In order to look more closely at some of these questions, I will examine below two particular questions to see how the Süleymanlı religious authority influences religious interpretation.

The first example involves an internal challenge among Süleymanlı leadership, which rarely occurs in front of a crowd; however I witnessed one during the annual meeting of the Süleymanlı in the Netherlands. Representatives from each Süleymanlı mosque gathered for this event. After the annual evaluation of 2004's fundraising and other community activism, there was a brief question and answer period. A few questions addressed problems related to this or that local branch. However, one question concerned Süleymanlı's adaptation to Europe. One of the *hocas* asked the leader of the Süleymanlı whether it was better to have Muslim graveyards in Europe rather than send their deceased back to Turkey. He added that it was time to shift their focus from Turkey to Europe. The leader gave a brief answer. He said that this was a social process and the people still wanted to be buried back in Turkey. He signaled that they would follow this social process and avoid doing anything that would hasten it.

This annual meeting served as a gathering for socialization and recreation rather than internal assessment and critique. The meetings on the second day reported on the progress of the various branches of the community and encouraged people to continue their current religious activities. The question-answer section was short and the answers to challenging questions were brief, as the above example indicates. In other words, Süleymanlı religious authority values the preservation of the status quo more than change.

The second example involves the Süleymanlı's approach to gender relations, which reflects their tradition of very strong gender segregation. In all Süleymanlı mosques, there are separate rooms for women with a separate entrance. In this way,

men and women never intermingle. The only place where they interact minimally is in the shop of the mosque. The mosque owns the shop and all members are encouraged to do their shopping there, but otherwise contact between the sexes is minimal.

Despite this lack of contact, there is a high level of endogamy. Senior members of the community often work as match-makers. Remzi, one of my close informants was a twenty-four year old Süleymanlı searching for a suitable partner. He often emphasized that it was best to get married to someone from within the Süleymanlı community, but also complained that it was very difficult to get to know young women because they had nearly no contact.

Remzi had been in the Netherlands for several years. His brother was in the Netherlands for an ever longer time. We went to a conference on family and education at the Islamic University of Europe. One of the three speakers was a covered woman. He told me that it is not possible for the Süleymanlı to have a woman talk in public. He added that listening to the voice of a woman is *haram*, religiously prohibited, for those who are unrelated to her. "We have listened to the *hoca hanım* [title used for religiously learned women] but we all have *nefis*, [carnal desires], and I also looked at her. You can not help but look, but I saw that most men turned their faces from her."

He explained that the meeting of men and women is not accepted in Süleymanlı circles. "Even if you visit the home, you never see the face of the wife." He added that this is the same reason why the Süleymanlı community do not allow their women members go on the religiously obligatory *hac*, pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. I asked him how pilgrimage was practiced at the time of the Prophet. He agreed that there were a hundred thousand companions at the time of the death of the Prophet who made the pilgrimage. Nevertheless, he concluded that the Süleymanlı authorities did not allow women to go on pilgrimage. Rather, men went on pilgrimage on behalf of women to fulfil their religious obligation. His commitment to the Süleymanlı religious authority made him discard any alternative religious knowledge or interpretation.

These examples indicate that The Süleymanlı believe that true Islamic knowledge is not accessible through exercise of the intellect. Reading books, although helpful, does not provide true Islamic knowledge or spiritual advancement. They believe in an inner meaning (*batıni*) of the Quran, which is attained only by those who have spiritual access. Reason does not play a role in finding Islamic truth and knowledge. Instead, it is submission to a spiritual master that opens the path. Mystical connection with the sheikh, which is ritualized, creates true Islamic knowledge. In the words of one disciple, "in order to enter this path, you have to hang your reason at the door like you hang your coat." "This path is about submission and seriousness," as another one put it.

Despite the anti-reformist attitude of the Süleymanlı, they have authorized some practices that illustrate how they can be adaptive to European conditions. In the 1990s, there was an overall shift among Muslims in Europe in considering home mortgages as religiously permissible (Bowen 2005). Surprisingly, however, the Süleymanlı was the first community to maintain that a bank loan or getting interest from a bank in Europe was religiously permissible. The Süleymanlı were often criticized by members of other religious communities because in allowing such practices, they engaged in *rib'a*, or usury, outlawed in Islamic law. The Süleymanlı,

however, based their decision on the Hanefi School of Law's ruling that a Muslim can do transactions involving interest in *Dar-al Harp*, the Abode of War, in which they include Europe. The Süleymanlı do not believe that there is *dar-al Islam* on earth, including Saudi Arabia. In other words, the practice of the "orthodox" Süleymanlı may appear more adaptive to Europe but the Süleymanlı believe that they are strictly following the religious laws of the Hanefi School rather than making any changes to the received tradition.

The Süleymanlı community's commitment of strict adherence to the Hanefi School of law in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) can result in seemingly "unorthodox" practices. The most debated practice of the Süleymanlı in Europe is that they do not pray *isha* (evening prayer), the last of the five daily obligatory prayers in Islam, for several months in summer. This too is explained by reference to religious orthodoxy. Imam Azam, the founder of the Hanefi School of Law, ruled that time is a "reasonable condition" for the obligation of prayer. Much as a believer with one arm needs only to wash that one for the ritual ablution to be religiously valid, if there is no proper time, there is no prayer for that time. Since parts of Europe are so far north that the sky does not become dark enough for the *isha* prayer, it is thus not obligatory and need not be performed. This example indicates that the Süleymanlı take the conditions of Europe into account in their Islamic interpretation, but they justify it in the name of tradition, rather than adaptation, in this case by invoking the *ijtihad* (religious adjudication) of the eighth century Islamic scholar and founder of Hanefi School of law. Thus, the Süleymanlı take the geographic and non-Muslim majority conditions of Europe into account to justify using bank interest and praying four rather than five times a day, albeit in the name of preserving the tradition.

Conclusion

Local conditions have shaped the understanding and practice of Islam (Geertz 1968; Eickelman 1976). The flexibility and inner diversity of Islam has enabled its endurance in Europe. The lack of a single religious authority within Sunni Islam leads to the emergence of multiple authorities that speak in the name of Islam. Islamic communities are competitive authorities because they are large enough to mobilize resources and small enough to build personal relations. Analyzing the construction of religious authority among Turkish Islamic communities allows us to examine the development of Islamic interpretations and how Islam and Europe have shaped one another. The religious authority of Islamic communities develops multiple forms of Islam through processes of validation, prioritization, confirmation, and elimination.

Analysts often categorize Islamic communities according to their religious interpretations from moderate to radical but they do not explain how these interpretations are produced. This article has argued that the way in which religious authority is produced influences religious interpretation. The Süleymanlı appear to be a conservative community but such labels mislead from the process of religious authorization (Schiffauer 2007, 92). Mystical modes can produce unexpected interpretations (i.e. abolition of *isha* prayer) because the followers are bounded by

corporate religious authority. The mystical religious assertions that are transmitted through initiation rituals create hierarchical and centralized social organization. The ritual of *hatim* represents and reaffirms the mystical assertions and centralized social organization. This can result in a mix of "reformist" and "orthodox" practices. Each Islamic community has a different degree of adaptation depending on how it creates their religious authority. The Süleymanlı community adapts to Europe but in the name of maintaining tradition.

Thus, the study of the production of religious authority and knowledge challenges the idea that there is an inherent incompatibility between Islam and liberal democracy. Islam in Europe becomes what its adherents make of it, depending on the different ways in which they make their interpretation of Islam authoritative. However, this does not suggest total relativism in which Islam is endlessly malleable. Instead there is a negotiation between Islamic tradition and the particular ways in which religious authority is constructed among Muslims. The emergence of "European" adaptations of Islamic tradition requires an analysis of how Islam is authorized in Europe rather than simply what "European Islam" is or who speaks on behalf of it, individually or communally.

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