



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi  
The Journal of International Social Research  
Cilt: 8 Sayı: 37 Volume: 8 Issue: 37  
Nisan 2015 April 2015  
www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

## THE ROLE OF A RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE IN THE FOUNDATION OF FEMALE PIOUSNESS: LEGITIMIZATION OF HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS

Fatma Zehra FİDAN\*

### Abstract

This study was conducted for the purpose of understanding how functional the religious narrative is in establishing and maintaining the female piousness in modern life. Participant observation was performed during the religious communions organized by women, and the obtained data were scrutinized via the means provided by the narrative discourse analysis. In the research we carried out, it was found out that the subjects considered by the opinion leaders to be religiously important were discussed in these communions, that religious narratives were frequently analyzed in the conversations among women, and that they were interpreted and actualized by depending on the basic principles of the religious group they belonged to. The narrative was interpreted within a rational system by the female opinion leader of the group, and an absolute obedience to the Guide of the Path was legitimized.

**Keywords:** Female Piousness, Religious Narrative, The Guide Of The Path, Obedience, Narrative Discourse Analysis.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Belief systems are not new constitutions subjectively put forward by individuals in their developmental process but states of affairs that have been transferred from generation to generation and have maintained their existence throughout human history; therefore, they comply to the cultural traditions in which they exist within the emotions and considerations of individuals. (Argyle and Hallahmi, 2004: 253). Being the narrators of Islamic belief systems, religious narratives play a significant role in the foundation and substitution of female piousness in modern life.

How myths, narratives and tales connect humans to one another, in what way they generate the individual's identity, personality, and senses, how they make it possible for man to comprehend himself/herself and how they shape life itself are the major questions still left unanswered (Teske, 2006). Having a more extensive use and function than the stories used for the purpose of emphasizing several important points in the sociological descriptions of religion, a narrative has been used to highlight the important aspects in the disciplines of truth and virtue/merits since the time of Buddha and Jesus Christ, the Prophet (Roof, 1993: 298). The religious narrative with its cultural medium quality by which the belief systems express themselves has the power to shape the world and to persuade the reader to adapt to its own theme; shaping our desires and wishes, our attitudes and vital practices or annihilating the existing forms is the most characteristic feature of these narratives/stories (Comstock, 1993). A narrative gives shape to the development of the identity and reconstructs life by drawing mythic and narrated forms that exist within its cultural heritage. Besides, a narrative constitutes our actions in the moral world and may have the potential to both heal and fail for individuals; in addition, it is also likely to provide a solution to alienation-estrangement and split personality (Teske, 2006).

It is possible that religious narratives be accurate or inaccurate (Comstock, 1993); in this context, the narrative approach does not deny the fact that the religious experience has an objective existence; yet, the objective existence of the experience is a temporary flow and what remains, on the other hand, is the transfer, which is the narrative itself. This is the datum through which a sociologist needs to discover and study the comprehension activity that bears several meanings and inferences in itself (Yamane, 2000). Every

\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Celal Bayar Üniversitesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü.

culture is equipped with an accumulation of semantics/meaning; thus, it is difficult to talk about a language developed at a certain level, and about symbols, a system of communication, a belief order and mythology, and a life style deprived of the customs/moralssubjected to them (Inam, 2004: 37- 38). A significant element of the verbal/oral culture and the most important of oral forms of art, a narrative (Ong, 2010: 165) is of vital importance in the constitution of such accumulation of semantics/meaning. In this study, how women benefit from religious narratives in constructing and substituting their religious/pious lives and how they implement these through understanding and interpreting them are of fundamental importance in this respect.

The reviewed narrative is associated with the power relations within religious groups in terms of the fact that it advises obedience to the opinion leader referred to as a guru or a mentor /a sheikh, who is one of the most important figures within the basic dynamics of religious groups. As is known, a religious group / sect has a mission involving purpose, strategy, value and behavioural standards to express and legitimize itself. The mission is determined by a guide/ mentor approved by the general community, and the members within the group can exhibit their obedience and commitment to the group through their actions. The required actuality is arranged by the mentor who determines the behavioural standards; in this context, one of the major elements of the mission is to show obedience to the mentor (Murray, 2002). Weber legitimized the voluntary obedience of the group members to their opinion leader and the power relations that showed up within this context by bringing the selected personal qualities of the charismatic authority forward as *superior and natural*. However, Bourdieu, who did not confine the concept of charisma to mere leadership but made this idea into a trait/ an aspect of legitimacy by expanding it, advocates that a *symbolic power* is fabricated by turning the self-seeking power relations into the intentions of selflessness or intentions with no self-seeking goals. According to Bourdieu, the symbolic power is the power of “blessing”, and “sacralization” (Swartz, 2013: 67- 72).

In this study, with reference to the women’s approaches to the subject in the review we made, the Weberian conceptual frame will be preferred, and the references of our preferences will be explained when required.

## 2.OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to understand how functional the religious narrative is in establishing and maintaining the female piousness in modern life. In the context of the narrative reviewed, the aim to understand in what way the obedience to religious group leaders to whom the members are committed to is ensured by benefiting from religious narratives has become quite clear.

During the research period, we participated in the religious conversations organized by women in order to be able to achieve positive and sound results. The halaqas (religious gatherings) at which we took part in as listeners and made participant observations are the basic sources of the data we obtained for the matter involved. The narrators/story-tellers who manage such religious gatherings and tell the religious *truths* to the listeners and, in a way, undertake the mission to educate them are the women who are considered important, consulted and obeyed and followed by small groups of women. These women are the people whose managerial competence is approved by the opinion leader at the top of the religious system they are subjected to, and also they are those who are also approved of performing educational tasks in the religious arena, again, by the same top leader; therefore, they can also be named as *the opinion leaders* in a restricted sense (Fidan, 2015). At the halaqas (religious gatherings) we had attended, we tried to understand and comprehend how the sacred stories told by the opinion leader were interpreted and how those interpretations played a part in different categories of the religious daily lives of women<sup>1</sup>. In the process of knowledge acquisition, we avoided concealing the researcher identity that is generally applied in anthropological researches (Karasar, 2005; Sencer, 1978); although we behaved like those belonging to the group, the real members were usually aware of our researcher identities. We avoided voice recording in the process of the participant observation; yet, we recorded our data by taking notes both during the religious conversations and afterwards.

---

<sup>1</sup>The religious narratives which are functional in the education and training of women at the halaqas (religious gatherings) are referred to as *sacred stories / sagas* both by the narrators and by the listeners. For this reason, though we may have referred to the text we have reviewed and analyzed in this study as a *sacred story*, it will be discussed as a religious narrative. Thus, the conceptual content of a *sacred story* is not included in the boundaries of this study.

The halaqas are the social activities in which the women identifying themselves as religious/pious Muslims come together for the purpose of thriving in terms of religious knowledge, achieving spiritual contentment and benefiting from the positive effects of social solidarity. Due to their multi-functional/versatile effects in human life, the *halaqas* conceptualized in the sociology of religion are quite efficient in the female education aiming at shaping women's religious lives in particular, apart from the other functions they have (Fidan, 2015). During the halaqas where religious texts are read, interpreted and narrated (mediation) to those involved, the narratives are quite functional to set the foundation of how religious subjects in theory are put into practice<sup>2</sup>. The religious narratives told during these gatherings (halaqas) make major contributions to developing and shaping individual piousness (Kayıklık, 2014: 193; Hökelekli, 2013: 299). In this knowledge exchange among women, there is an interaction taking place between the narrator-> perceiver (MacKinnon, Fairchild, Fritz, 2007; Rucker, et al, 2011; Kenny, 2012a, Kenny, 2012b), and the interpretation of the narratives reach the perceiver/listener women mediately (Preacher and Hayes, 2004), as the result of which the actual practices put forth by the narrator according to the mediated narrative are considered to be the services to be performed *on the path of becoming a better devotee*. During the religious educational activity in question, the narrator/listener relationship is classified/positioned hierarchically, and rather than a mutual knowledge "exchange", a "presentation of knowledge" takes place. The hierarchy at issue by which obedience to both the narrator and to the leader of the religious group engaged with is anticipated is legitimized through the religious narratives/stories told during the gatherings, and obedience becomes the major component of the foundation of religious female identity.

The identity with no ontological or essential/subjective reality is formed within the relationships between individuals or among groups (Bilgin, 2007: 35). Identity, which is socially built up, approved or at least recognized with a set of intellections unique to itself, is efficient in terms of the fact that one is in harmony with a given set of values, that s/he interprets the data with the help of several mental models or pre-apprehension and acts towards them by reacting at certain parameters (Schick, 2001: 17- 18). Being in a process of continual rebuilding and never getting complete, the identity is aware of the fact that it is open to change; thus, the construction of identity is a process with ups and downs (Kellner, 2001:195-196). It is possible to state that this process is associated with accepting and integrating with the comprehensibility norms of "one's consistency and determinedness/persistence" founded and maintained socially, as can be read in Butler's remarks (Butler, 2008: 66). The religious female identity established during the female conversations will be able to belong to the collective religious identity to the extent that it integrates with the norms that are functional in the permanency of the group itself. The intensity of demands towards the attachment in question will determine the process of thinking and behaving in compliance with the norms. Our main problematic point in this research, however, is not this process itself but in what way religious narratives are functional in founding the identity of the women participating in this process.

### 3.METHOD

The data required for the research question were obtained through the participant observation during which we were able to acquire first-hand knowledge (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011:170). Beyond purely collecting data in this research, the data obtained by means of this method (Göle, 1998) that aimed to perform the field study and obtain data in an interaction provided at full length and maintained between the social actors and sociologists will be analyzed through the means provided for us in the narrative discourse analysis. Discourse, a central part of our lives (Potter and Wetherell, 2004), is defined as a theoretical point of view and methodology rather than a method (Nikander, 2008), and beyond purely being a statement, it is identified as a wide range of social practices comprising the examples that are not unique to the language itself (Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton, 2008). Language is the means by which we express ourselves and things and all. To us who speak, language is not an object but a means to interrelate (Ricoeur, 2009: 95), and it is the thoughts that make language, which is a dynamic process, progress further. The main argument of the discourse analysis is also to identify the power that dominates the flow of thoughts (Chafe, 2001). According to Foucault, such power is intrinsic to the domination prevalent in various social identities; yet, the principal domination is implemented over the scientific truth and righteousness regime. In this context,

---

<sup>2</sup>In almost all the religious conversations we attended, the religious conversations are supported by *sacred stories*; however, the ways of interpreting these *sacred stories* are different. The difference is that such narratives belonging to the verbal/oral culture are dealt with merely as records of parables in some female groups, while in some others, these narratives allow for learning lessons of actuality on the basis. In this study, the ways of secondary-discussion of *sacred stories* will be analyzed.

language is totally a discourse thanks to the unique power of a word that builds a bridge between notation (system of signs) and the presence of that which is indicated or pointed out (Foucault, 2001: 143- 150). Discourse, in order to be able to guarantee its own existence, organizes itself once again and protects its power/ faculty while, at the same time, it excludes several discourses (Foucault, 1987: 27)<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4.NARRATIVE DISCOURSE ANALAYSIS

*Once there was a guru and his followers who were taking a long journey to a distant land. When evening fell, they found themselves in a forest. The guru said to his followers: " fill your pockets and carpetbags with all the stones you come across on your way".*

*Some of the followers thought: "what sense does it make to carry all those loads of stones on us in this challenging journey?", and they just put a few stones in their pockets and went ahead, while some others showed their obedience to their leader by filling their pockets and carpetbags only with a few stones. A few of the followers, on the other hand, filled all their pockets and carpetbags fully with as many stones as they could find, thinking : " if our leader wants us to do this, there must be some wisdom in what we do." In the end of their journey, when they finally made their way out of the woods which was full of darkness and danger and reached the daylight, the followers saw that what they considered to have picked up as stones were actually invaluable jewellery.*

The interpretation of this religious narrative contains the following discursual categories:

- The events taking place in our everyday lives are not as they seem to be.
- The journey is challenging. Such a journey can only be possible under the guidance of a path guide ( mentor/sheikh with a perfect/absolute quality).
- It is obligatory to obey the guide of the path.

The interpretations put forward on the basis of these headings and the behavioural patterns advised to the listeners will be analyzed through the means provided for us by the narrative discourse analysis.

##### 4.1.The events taking place in our everyday lives are not as they seem to be

This expression, which we can resolve with the basic argument of phenomenological sociology that states: "Nothing is as it seems", (Çiftçi, 2003:121) corresponds to "*wisdom / hidden cause*" in the religious literature<sup>4</sup>.

The general approach in the way the sacred story is dealt with discusses the narrative beyond the verbal/lexical meanings in it, and in a metaphoric sense it comprises, according to the category of meanings /implications which it is desired to be expressed within. In the narrative we analyzed, what is considered in the first place is the pointless task that the guru asked his followers to do. However, the guru (mentor), who has transcendental traits beyond the knowledge and good manners of ordinary people – this is the *truth* expected to be absolutely believed in and the *truth* emphasized frequently during the religious conversations, which are the acquisitions attained by the guru through his connection and closeness with God – is such a person of wisdom that s/he cannot demand anything insensible and useless from her/his followers. Therefore, this *truth* that is to be accepted in the first place and that incorporates the followers into the religious collectivity prevents the listener from *suspecting the guide of the path* and leads him/her into the quest for wisdom. In this context, in the process of the presentation of the narrative, the construction of an identity that endeavours to apprehend the invisible behind the visible in compliance with the current paradigm is being performed.

##### 4.2.The journey is challenging. Such a journey can only be possible under the guidance of a path guide (mentor/sheikh with a perfect/absolute quality)

A narrative is passed on to the listeners through a metaphoric method. The journey in the story told corresponds to the life on earth; any sort of trouble and challenge encountered by people in their daily lives are dealt with as the major components of the journey. Accordingly; the highway that represents the mundane world drags one into diverse winding roads with great or petty troubles within life itself. All of these winding roads are implicit in the journey of life, which is one big global and holistic test.

---

<sup>3</sup> The narrative discourse will ground its own epistemology, in other words, its pre-propositional consistencies over righteousness and fallacy on other outer impacts, or it will utilize its own self-consistency in the justification of its impositions. Therefore, on the basis of the characteristic of the discourse

<sup>4</sup> Wisdom refers to " the quality of being in the know of the truth of all existence and performing auspicious deeds according to it". Abdullah Yeğin (1983) .*Osmanlıca-Türkçe Lügat*.İstanbul: Hizmet Vakfı Yayınları.

The fall of the evening, the forested area or the flowing stream<sup>5</sup> stands for the fact that life in this world is rather tumultuous and challenging. Different challenges throughout the journey are of significance in terms of revealing man's helplessness at the present moment of his/her life or regarding his/her future. For a person who has accepted his/her own helplessness and weakness in a real sense, the indispensability of having a guru/mentor (the guide of the path) all throughout this challenging journey is *naturally* brought into the open in the process of narration.

The fact that the stones collected by the followers upon the request/order of their path guide turn into precious jewellery in the end of the challenging journey is of significance in terms of both referring to the transcendental traits of the guru and explaining the material/spiritual abundance to be attained by the follower by obeying his/her leader. The differences among the followers in listening to what their path guide tells them to do are, in some cases, encoded as a *pot*, and in some others, as a matter of *preference*. The *pot*, in a sense, is the concept indicating the personal quality; the magnitude or the compactness of the pot is indicative of being the criterion to benefit from the *sea*<sup>6</sup>. The *preference*, on the other hand, shows the free will of the follower in his/her life on earth, beyond the personal capacity and quality. No matter how large the follower's pot is, s/he may not prefer to receive as much water from the *sea* as her/his pot could retain. However, the power of belief that those with large *pots* will ultimately make *good preferences* increases the importance of bringing such people into the group. In presenting the religious narrative to its listeners within this system, it is possible to see the way of reasoning that allows the narrator (mediator) to transfer his/her ideas and beliefs to the listeners (audience) thanks to the character of mediation. This metaphoric manifestation of discursive narrative provides a privileged place in the conference of the social reality desired to be accepted by the audience (De Fina and King, 2011). Separately, making comparisons between the challenges described within the sacred narrative and the mundane world is important in terms of maintaining the perceptual integrity within the listener:

\* Just as the travellers' journey route in the story is full of darkness, horror and dangers, so is this world, where we are also travellers, full of horrible and mysterious dangers. The concepts encoded as *danger* involve different categories, from macro- to micro- and from the physical universe that seems infinite to social life. For instance, our future appears to be dark to us, and it is a mystery how it will meet us. In the same way, the earth we live on and the sky over us are full of unknown dangers, and man has no power to dominate his/her natural environment.

The description of the difficulty of man's journey on earth, after mentioning the possible dangers in the physical environment, is reinforced with the similar examples within daily life: Individuals who become impoverished after a wealthy state, women deserted by their spouses once their beauty fades away, mothers who are refused to be taken care of when they get old and sent to old age asylums by their children and those who lost their memory when they were really accomplished scientists, etc. In particular, the emotional motivations of the audience are elevated through the examples given about the renowned faces of the artistic community or those from social life. After the physical and social worlds outside man have been described in this way, the helplessness and weakness of man doomed to live in such a horrifying universe is depicted:

\*Man loses beauty though s/he is in love with it. Film stars are given as the most effective and known examples in this matter, hence, the perceptual integrity is ensured in the audience.

\*Health is the most valuable treasure of all; yet, it may decay despite all the means of modern medicine. Examples of the patients assuming that they are quite healthy but unaware of the fact that they are decaying from within and also examples of many diseases are presented to the audience, to which they take part in from time to time, as well.

\*Man is particularly attached to his/her immediate family and makes a lot of self-sacrifice for them but may not receive that much in return; man is helpless in getting the love and care as s/he desires. The examples of unfaithfulness described for the matter involved is so effective in elevating the emotional motivations of the audience that they are sometimes seen crying during the conversations.

In the social article we reviewed, the narrative discourses built through the examples from daily life in a rational consistency make it possible to construct the identity related to it: The construction of discourse regarding the *dangerous and horrifying journey* brought with it the construction of the identity referring to the

---

<sup>5</sup>The forest in the sacred story is depicted as "a flowing stream" in some narrative styles. As is understood, what is important is to demonstrate the hardship of the journey in question. .

<sup>6</sup>The *sea* is a metaphorical expression referring to the vastness and depth of the guru.

*scared passenger of this world who is in danger*, and the construction of the expressions, such as *incapability, weakness and helplessness* brought about the construction of the identity referring to *man incapable of achieving his/her desires and wishes, man weak or insufficient in meeting his/her needs and man helpless against the existential dangers s/he comes across*.

On the other hand, the construction of the expression, '*seeking salvation/ achieving salvation*', which is the ultimate goal of the construction of a narrative discourse, allows for the construction of the identity referring to *man attaining salvation*.

After having provided a reasonable integrity between needs and desires and the incapability, weakness and helplessness in achieving them, it is now the time to construct the identity of *man seeking salvation and reaching salvation*. It is inevitable for man who is extremely incapable and weak against the dangers of the physical and social worlds outside him/herself to want to feel him/herself *powerful/strong and secure* in such a vulnerable state. All that empowers man and provides security for him/her is the faith to God (Allah). However, although having Faith in God may resolve a number of problems, the consistency of the system of belief and actions is only possible under the guidance of a guru/mentor. The intensity of the requirement for a path guide is, again, put forward through the examples given from our daily lives:

\*Vaccination prior to an onset of a disease will prevent man from diseases. The mischief and evil deeds we confront in this mundane life are sort of diseases to us; thus, we need to be vaccinated and become stronger before the mischief/disease occurs, and the vaccination can only be performed by the physician.

\*A student who studies his/her lessons before the exam day arrives and completes his/her homework given by his/her instructor in a self-disciplined manner succeeds in the exam without suffering from any challenge, as the result of which s/he earns various rewards. The major and the most important parts of the courses and the method of study, on the other hand, are only known and taught by the teacher specialized in his/her field.

#### **4.3. It is obligatory to obey the guide of the path.**

As is seen, one of the most significant points drawing attention within the narratives told at halaqas is the presentation of the topics desired to be narrated to the audience within a rational system by giving a variety of examples of the situations women find themselves in within the natural cycle of daily life. The exemplification in this form of narration is based on the narrative method within the Qur'an (Koran)<sup>7</sup>. In particular, the examples presented to the women of high educational levels contain within themselves the scientific truths<sup>8</sup>.

After having explained the importance of the need to have a guru/mentor in order to complete this journey in the best way, the time now has come to internalize obedience. The necessity to obey the path guide / the guru is based on the following discursual system:

\*Every subject is known and mastered by the specialist in that field.

\*The specialist would never like his own field to be interfered with, nor does s/he allow for any action like that.

\*Obedience is not of use to the one who is obeyed but the one who does obey.

The expressions like specialist, speciality and specialization are the main concepts of modernity, and the importance attached to them has reached its peak in this modern age (Giddens, 2004; Wagner, 2005; Jameson, 2004). At this stage, right across the identity of the *weak, helpless and ignorant man* that was constructed in the former steps comes the construction of the identity of the *blessed figure* who is *in the know of existence* and who *has attained God's consent*, referring to the specialist in his/her own field. Having been constructed, within the subject coherence, in the sense of "the specialist figure specialized in the spiritual/incorporeal field", this identity totally corresponds to the guide of the path, in other words, the cult

---

<sup>7</sup>Several subjects within The Quran are described by giving examples from the parables of the Prophet, and these parables are quite functional in religious education. Kenan Sevinç (2011). Parables of the Modern World: Criticism of Certain Well-Known Novels Within the Frame Psychology of Religion. pp. 125-129. *Journal of Intercultural And Religious Religion*. Volume. 1.

<sup>8</sup>The levels of female conversations are different. Friday gatherings are usually the organizations attended by the elderly, illiterate and unemployed women. Those who are employed and highly-educated generally carry out such conversational programs at weekends with women who apply to their own traits. Therefined and in-depth analysis of the religious narratives are performed among these women, whereas no in-depth analysis is made in the first group of women.

leader/sheikh or the guru/mentor in this sense. In this social article where the conventional and modern concepts are intermingled, the sheikh (cult leader) is *the specialist in his/her own field* in terms of the fact that s/he has been advanced in the spiritual path and has experienced things that can never be confronted and experienced by ordinary people. The authority of the guru in this field is based on both his/her *vast wisdom and knowledge* and the experiences of *austerity and benevolence*<sup>9</sup> gained among the followers.

The main reason for our determining the conceptual frame as Weber-based lies in this aspect; the followers have totally believed in the charismatic traits of the path guide who is going to lead them to salvation in this world and in eternity, or rather, who is going to be the means for it. The mystic narratives going round and round as to the experiences undergone along with the path guide<sup>10</sup> increases the importance of the inapproachability of the guru in the eyes of his/her followers. Therefore, obeying the path guide does not become an obligation but a requirement, and getting closer to the guru from whom the follower can ask for his/her austerity and compassion granted by God turns almost into an ideal. In Weber's statements, in the background of the voluntary obedience to the charismatic leader lies his/her extraordinary traits (Weber, 2006: 326), at which point the power of the guru, being the major factor in the organization of religious life, is unquestionable.

The fact that the specialist does not accept any criticism over the deeds s/he does with respect to her/his own field, and his rightfulness in this matter provides a significant basis as to avoiding criticism over the decisions made by the guru. A physician specialized in his/her field never discusses the treatment method of the disease with his/her patient in particular; the physician's concern in the treatment process is to perform his job, beyond which there is no other profit earned by him. Thus, doing exactly anything the physician asks for is only in the best interest of the patient.

The expressions like *gain, gaining profit* that are reconstructed through such examples are the main arguments of the modern world, and suggests a different view of the jointing of the religion and modernity to one another by intermingling. Besides, despite the fact that *criticism* is one of the most important concepts that distinguishes what is modern from what is conventional, the expressions like *avoiding criticism* or *obeying* that are made up appear before us as the arguments feeding the historical conflict between what is modern and what is religious.

Such *truths* described in a rational system during the religious conversations are particularly faced with a certain level of resistance performed by the highly-educated women in the beginning, however, these women, who turn towards inner discipline for the purpose of criticizing their own *ego self* and earning the *consciousness* to become a truthful believer, renounce their resistive points in time.

This renunciation is not stripping off yourself/ your own individuality for somebody else, but it rather represents stripping off / being redeemed from your ego self<sup>11</sup> in order to attain God's consent under the guidance of a leader on that spiritual path.

---

<sup>9</sup>Benevolence means that an eligible and blessed figure in the sight of Allah (God) protects and helps a person with the hand s/he gives. Abdullah Yeğin (1983) . An example to such benevolent acts reported by the women who said that they got their sheikh's/ mentor's immediate help is as such : One of the women had a fight with her husband, and she locked herself up in a room because she was totally scared of her husband's utmost rage against her. While her husband was trying to force the door to open, the phone rang at that moment and it was the Master Highness on the line warning her husband: "Don't you ever dare to lay your hand on my faithful sister!" and put the phone down.

<sup>10</sup>It is not the business of sociology or a sociologist to determine whether or not all that has been told about the charismatic leader (sheikh/ guru/mentor) are real or just dodgery as expressed by Weber; what is important is the absolute belief of the mass in their leader's traits. Max Weber (2006). *Sosyoloji Yazıları*. (Çev: Taha Parla). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

<sup>11</sup>Restriction of the ego self is based on The Quran, and the three definitions of the ego self contained within three separate verses of The Quran leads the way for the Muslims to constitute a theory regarding the ego self. *One's baser self (The animal self/ nafs (nafs-al-ammārah);(12/53)* is the most wicked enemy of all, however, this baser self can still be educated through the efforts to be performed towards its main traits/qualities.(The Great Jihad (holy war)). Thus, the educated and trained ego self becomes *Nafs-al-lawwama* (the self-accusing self, 75/ 2/The reproachful self/nafs), which is not so remote from the Western consciousness concept. And finally, after having attained the state of *Nafs-i-mutma'inna*( the self attaining confidence /self at peace, 89/ 27), is called back/reclaimed. Everyone is created of body and soul / self ego (nafs); in this context, Islam states the fact that humans will be judged equally before the laws of religion; yet, some people who can allow themselves to undergo the educational process in question have more benediction in them and are referred to as " the blessed." Annemarie Schimmel (2004). *Tanrı'nın Yeryüzündeki İşaretleri*. (Çev: Ekrem Demirli). İstanbul: Kbalcı Yayınları.

This importance attached by women to the obedience to the leader of religious sect where they feel a sense of belonging in particular and the *religious service* undertaken by religious sects are, in other words, associated with the *disclosure* mission and with maintaining the permanency of the religious sect, since the power of a deed necessitates having a mission related to that deed and bearing the element of service to the cause; otherwise, the state of affairs conceptualized by Weber as "the curse of worthlessness" will cause the group to fail (Weber, 2006: 184). Hence, being able to ensure the desired success depends upon the guidance as to what the individual must perform or what s/he must avoid, and it is at this point that the importance of the mission and the charismatic leader falls into place (Murray, 2002). After ensuring the followers' obligation to obey their guru as a collective intention, the ultimate goal, then, is the manifestation of the actuality determined by the guru/mentor. The statuses based upon the function emerging at the time of the social manifestation of this collective intention (Searle, 2005: 117) take shape within the context of the followers' obedience to their leader, because apart from the fact that the status of the sect leader develops on the basis of the function to maintain the deeds of the sect/group in compliance with the religious ideology, the permanence of the sect member's sense of belonging to the collectivity depends upon the fact that s/he obeys the basic principles of the sect and adopts and practises them through her/his actions. However, as we have already seen in the narrative reviewed, what the guru asks his followers to do can, most of the time, be irrational, which makes it hard for the student to show obedience in this respect. The expressions like *gain*, *test (exam)* that are constructed in the context of obedience to the path guide comes into view as the key concepts in the rationalization of obedience. Obedience to the path guide who knows how to earn God's consent with his/her extraordinary traits better than any ordinary person is the best short-cut for the individual to benefit from the mundane/corporeal life in this world.

Seeing that *gain /earning* is the most significant goal for man, it is inevitable to face with challenges (test/exam) on the path to gain; moreover, one who wishes to reach God is close to the ethics of the ordeal. It can be stated in this approach of women that the obedience to the path guide is legitimized with the viewpoint similar to the morality of the Protestants, which sanctifies the sufferings experienced on the path to attaining the sacred gain and which gives the follower's *own ego* the right to live prosperously only after having performed the deeds desired by God (Weber, 1999: 134-136)

#### **4.4.Positions of the Subject**

This aspect can be said to be the ultimate goal in the construction of the identity of *man discovering the ways of attaining salvation*. As we have previously mentioned, although there is a path guide, at the top level of religious sects, whose charismatic influence is unquestionable, the female narrators with the authority to train and educate women are also, sort of opinion leaders. These women teach religious knowledge to the women below their level and are the loyal students of their top level guru while guiding their students through actual practices; all that they defend as true is the truth of their guru. In this respect, considering how great the women populations in numbers, and also the impossibility of submitting the problems of each woman within these populations to the top level guru, the necessity to show obedience to the opinion leaders who are the narrators within these groups automatically comes to surface. It followed from our participant observations in the women populations at the halaqas that this hierarchical structure categorized within a rational system were quite functional. The women showing absolute obedience to their opinion leader are found more praiseworthy within a collective structure, whereas those remaining weak in terms of obedience, though not regarded as fully outside this collectivity, are still kept distant from the center of the sect.

The condition of the young girl within a religious sect where the fact that women are not of a highly educational standard and are unemployed is accepted as the main principle sets a good example to this matter. The young girl received all the education and training recommended by the sect; yet, due to her discontentment, she also went to a university. In order not to be socially excluded from the higher education environment, she preferred wearing a *ferrace* instead of a closed modest dress/ *burqa*<sup>12</sup> to be worn by



religious women within the sect. Although the young girl loves her group very much and adopts all the teachings of this group, she thinks she cannot represent them as she should, which is also supported by her mentor and is expressed in this way: "We, too, love her very much but if she were one of us, she wouldn't be doing that". The young girl who does not follow the basic principles of the sect with her special preferences, such as taking a higher education and dressing up differently, is loved by the women and her mentor within the sect; however, she is placed into the position of a *female subject incapable of fully belonging to the group*. Similarly, the woman who refuses to return to her husband who she lives apart from despite her mentor's suggestions is placed into the position of a *not showing patience and disobedient female subject*, which is just the opposite of the *female subject showing patience to all the oppression and torment her husband causes her*.

The individuals resisting to the homogenous structure attempted to be formed within the religious sects are not totally excluded due to such attitudes but their individual *gaps/defects* are tried to be eliminated in different ways. Nevertheless, certain levels of disengagements from the sect are observed in the women who did not or could not obey the basic principles of the sect and continuously received warnings because of this. As this is another research topic, it will not be analyzed in this article.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Goffman's metaphor of a theatre scene could be useful in understanding the obedience to opinion leaders shown by the followers (Bilgin, 2007: 292) with the sense of belonging to a religious sect of ethnic or religious basis which cannot base the individuality / propriety of disbelief or sense of belonging on their principles. In order to understand the content of the staged play, the obligation that not only the scenario but also those happening behind the scenes be well-known made us face with the deeds of the social arena where the critical debate is a taboo (Billig, 1996: 45- 46). Our main problem is how religious narratives are made functional in getting women to show obedience to their opinion leaders. The answer to this question also pushed us closer to the answer to the question as to why and how the followers within the religious sects show their obedience to the path guide hierarchically at the very top level in comparison to their degree and to their opinion leaders whose authorities were approved.

Bourdieu says the obedience shown by those under dominance, that which makes one understand revolt or resistance at a minor level is the reason that the tendencies/dispositions are rectified according to the circumstances. To him, one of the major tasks of sociology is to investigate under what circumstances these tendencies are socially formed. (Bourdieu-Wacquant, 2012: 65). In this context, while we are trying to comprehend the obedience of the female followers to their path guide/ guru (mentor), we need to state that the Weberian conceptual frame provides more appropriate answers to our questions.

The mystic orientation of the opinion leaders with sect spirit in particular who belong to religious groups is a known fact. As is known, based on the Prophet Muhammad's request from God: "*God! Please show me the object as it is!*", the mystics recognize and adopt the knowledge that there exists an innate sacred reality within an object and act according to this knowledge. Mystics' orientation towards the essence and the truth of the object also requires different experiences and perceptions regarding the *essence* (Işık, 2011). The commitment and obedience of the followers to their path guide will be more readily comprehended in this manner, since the path guide who is familiar with the mystic/ spiritual experiences that can be regarded as *extraordinary* by ordinary people has transcended himself/herself to a certain extent compared to an ordinary person in the eyes of the followers; the cause of the charismatic effect pointed out by Weber is hidden exactly within this transcendent state. In the reviewed narrative, the fact that the stones picked up by the students turn into jewellery refers to the profit to be gained as the result of obeying the path guide as well as indicating the extraordinary traits of the path guide. In this respect, it would be effective to emphasize the charismatic traits and mystic power of the path guide in ensuring obedience to him/her.

Charisma only holds inner will and control, and a charismatic leader sets his/her hands to a task that applies to him/her and wishes to have a mass of followers with obedience merely based on the mission s/he undertakes. His/her success depends on whether s/he can find such elements or not (Weber, 2006: 327). The

---

<sup>12</sup>*Burqa* (closed modest dress) is the clothing determined by the sect leader as the apparel of pious women. Formed of a single cloth, the burqa or the closed modest dress of pious women, though they may be worn in various colours, are still desired by the sect to be worn in black colour. *Ferrace* is a black-coloured apparel sewed up rather in the form of a topcoat; it has a more *modern* implication compared to the *burqa*.

obedience here is determined by the emotions of very strong fears and hope. The fear of being punished either in this world or on the other side, or the hope to get rewarded, the fear that the supernatural powers or the powers that be will take revenge on him/her, and in addition, any sort of sense of interest are all quite important factors in prompting and maintaining the obedience to the path guide. The obedience to the "mission call" of the charismatic leader is neither due to general laws nor due to conventions and customs; the followers of the charismatic leader obey him/her only because they believe in him/her (Weber, 2006: 134; Aron, 2004: 413).

In the construction and substitution of female piousness in the modern world, ensuring obedience to the leader (guru/ sheikh) of the religious group /sect affiliated to is of great importance in terms of maintaining the existence of the group. The sustenance of the group functioning of a religious sect and the permanence of the influence of the charismatic leader also are of great significance in implementing the religious missions. In ensuring obedience to the sect leaders, the religious narratives scrutinized during the sect conversations in which women participate for various reasons are quite functional in maintaining the necessary rationalization, because a narrative has a rich cultural background and an impact not to be underestimated on the identity construction of individuals. Resolving the stories within the religious narratives in a metaphorical way and comparing the actualities within these stories with the facts of life provides an integrity in the mental perception and elevates the emotional motivation; thus, thanks to this method of guidance, the obedience performed shows up or is shown as a behavioural pattern that is beneficial not to the one obeyed but to the one who obeys.

Right at this point where we have emphasized the power and the influence of a religious narrative, it is of significance to also consider the matter in a more different perspective. Comstock underlines the fact that one of the major characteristics that distinguishes man from others is the ability to "make a choice" and suggests contemplating over the background of our selection of narratives. A narrative allows us to organize time and to add themes into the story, in other words, we, humans, make up stories/narratives in line with our own beliefs and value judgments, and even our own interests (Comstock (1993), and then we *put these into the service* of humanity. Therefore, it is of great sociological importance why narratives are not fictionalized in this way but rather in another way or why this narrative, and not that one, is selected to pass on to the audience during the female conversations. The relations of power and dominance based on the ground of a narrative by Foucault (2001; 1987) should, in this context, be taken into consideration once more.

## CONCLUSION

Whereas the starting point of the religious history of humanity was a world of divinity, the point it has reached in our age is the world freed from incantation or from magical /occult meanings. The female piousness experienced in full view of the modern world that appears to claim to have been refined from incantation or the occult – at least the piousness experienced by the women affiliated with a cult or a religious order – is being constructed and maintained within the context of full obedience to the guru/mentor by relying upon his/her metaphysical characteristics.

Obedience to the path guide/ guru, which is one of the most important parameters of female piousness, is manifested in the form of showing complete obedience primarily to the top leader of the sect, and then to the opinion leader whose authority has been approved by the top mentor, within the context of hierarchical classification of power relations within religious groups. Religious narratives are quite functional in maintaining this relationality perpetuated by the religious groups for the purpose of preserving and sustaining their power. The religious narratives told at *halaqas* which play a major role in the religious daily lives of women are interpreted in line with the basic principles of the group, and the behavioural patterns unfolding due to these interpretations become the determinants in the construction and substitution of religiosity.

Within the religious groups (sects), the obedience of the followers to their group leader is considered obligatory in order for that mission to be implemented in a consistent way within itself, and thus, the women are educated and trained in this matter. In this context, the narratives with significant functions are interpreted through a metaphorical method, the construction of identity is performed through the narrative discourses organized, and the obedience legitimized in cognitive processes within a rational system becomes the major component of female piousness.

---

The women showing absolute obedience to their path guide are appreciated and praised by their opinion leader and other followers, whereas those who fail to show the expected obedience, though they may not be pushed off of the group, cannot attain a central significance within the group.

A few questions we would like to raise at the end of this research may play a key role in the reconstruction of female pioussness: Why are the themes contained within the religious narratives mostly about the women who are exalted to the degree of a Saint/Ave by showing absolute patience to the challenges and injustices in life and to male subjects? In the themes of religious narratives, why are women always in the position of the ones who "ask /get permission", while men are always in the position of the ones who "are requested / give permission"?

#### REFERENCES

- ARON, Raymond (2004). *Sosyolojik Düşüncenin Evreleri*. 5. Baskı. (Çev. Korkmaz Alemdar). İstanbul: Bilgi Yayıncılık.
- ARGYLE, Michaej & HALLAHMÍ, Benjamin- Beit (2004): *Dini Davranış Teorileri*. (Çev. Ali Kuşat, Mehmet Korkmaz, İsmail Güllü). Erciyes Üniv. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, sayı. 16.
- BİLLİG, Michael (1996). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- BİLGİN, Nuri (2007). *Kimlik İnşası*. İzmir: Aşına Kitaplar.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre& WACQUANT, J. Loic (2012): *Düşünimsel Bir Antropoloji İçin Cevaplar*. 6. Baskı. (Çev. Nazlı Ökten). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- BUTLER, Judith (2008): *Cinsiyet Belası*. (Çev. Başak Ertür). İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.
- CHAFE, Wallace (2001). "The analysis of discourse flow", *The handbook of discourse analysis*, p. 671-687.
- COMSTOCK, L. Gary (1993). "The truth of religious narratives", *International journal for philosophy of religion*, 34(3), 131-150.
- ÇİFTÇİ, Adil (2003). *Nasıl Bir Sosyal Bilim*. Ankara: Kitâbiyât.
- De FINA, Anna & KING, A. King (2011). "Language problem or language conflict? Narratives of immigrant women's experiences in the US", *Discourse Studies*, 13(2), 163-188.
- FİDAN, F. Zehra (2015). *Modernlik ve Dindarlık Arasında Kadın*. Opsiyon: İstanbul.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (1987). *Söylemin Düzeni*. (Çev. Turhan Ilgaz). İstanbul: Hil Yayınları.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (2001). *Söylemin Düzeni*. (9- 42) *Ders Özetleri*. (Çev. Selahattin Hilav. İstanbul: YKY Yayınları.
- GİDDENS, Anthony (2004). *Modernliğin Sonuçları*. (Çev. Ersin Kuşdil). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- GÖLE, Nilüfer (1998). *Modern Mahrem: medeniyet ve örtünme*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.
- HÖKELEKLİ, Hayati (2013). *Din Psikolojisi*. 10. Baskı. Ankara: TDV Yayınları.
- IŞIK, Caner (2011). "Anadolu Mistisizminde Gerçeklik Ve Deneyim", *Alevilik Araştırmaları Dergisi*. Kış. Sayı. 2.
- İNAM, Ahmet (2004). "Yobaz Yaratan Dünyayı Anlamaya Doğru", *Doğu Batı*, 4. Bas., Yıl. 1. Sayı: 3. p. 37-42.
- JAMESON, Frederic (2004). *Biricik Modernite*. (Çev. Sami Oğuz). Ankara: Epos Yayınları.
- KARASAR, Niyazi (2005). *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemi*. 15. Baskı. Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım.
- KAYIKLIK, Hasan (2014). *Din Psikolojisi Bireysel Dindarlık Üzerine*. 2. Baskı. Adana: Karahan Kitabevi.
- KELLNER, Douglas (2001). *Popüler Kültür ve Postmodern Kimliklerin İnşası*. (Çev. Gülcan Seçkin). *Doğu Batı*.
- KENNY, A. David (2012a). *Mediation*. April, 3. <http://davidakenny.net/cm/mediate.htm>. *Erişim Tarihi: 13 Ekim, 2012*.
- KENNY, A. David (2012b). *Reflections on Mediation*. University of Connecticut. <http://davidakenny.net/doc/orm.pdf>. *Erişim Tarihi: 13 Ekim 2012*.
- MACKINNON, P. David; FAIRCHILD, J. Amanda&FRITZ, S. Matthew (2007). *Mediation analysis. Annual review of psychology*, 58, 593.
- MURRAY, J. Robert (2002). *Religious Communities and Their Mission. Journal of Religionand Health*, Vol.41, No. 2.
- NIKANDER, Pirjo (2008). *Constructionism and discourse analysis. Handbook of constructionist research*, 413-428.
- ONG, J.Walter (2010). *Sözlü ve Yazılı Kültür*. (Çev. Sema Postacıoğlu Banon). İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.
- PREACHER, J. Kristopher & HAYES, F. Andrew (2004). *SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 36(4), 717-731.
- POTTER, Jonathan & WETHERELL, Margaret (2004). *Discourse analysis. Handbook of data analysis*, 607-624.
- RICEOUR, Paul (2009). *Yorumların Çatışması*. 1. Cilt. (Çev. Hüsamettin Arslan). İstanbul: Paradigma Yayınları.
- ROOF, C. Wade (1993). *Religion and narrative. Review of religious research*, 297-310.
- RUCKER, D. Derek ve diğerleri (2011). *Mediation Analysis in Social Psychology: Current Practices and New Recommendations*. *Social And Personalty Compass* 5/6 (2011): 359- 371. 10.1111/j.17519004.2011.00355.x.
- SCHIFFRIN, Deborah; TANNEN, Deborah & HAMILTON, E. Heidi (Eds.). (2008). *The handbook of discourse analysis*. John Wiley&Sons.
- SCHICK, C. İrvin (2001). *Batı'nın Cinsel Kıyısı*. (Çev. Savaş Kılıç, Gamze Sarı). İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları.
- SCHIMMEL, Annemarie (2004). *Tanrı'nın Yeryüzündeki İşaretleri*. (Çev. Ekrem Demirli). İstanbul: Kabalıcı Yayınları.
- SEARLE, R. John (2005). *Toplumsal gerçekliğin inşası*. (Çev. Muhittin Macit-Ferruh Özpilavcı). İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık.
- SENCER, Muzaffer (1978). *Yakut: Toplumsal Araştırmalarda Yöntembilim*. Ankara: TODAİE Yayınları.
- SEVİNÇ, Kenan (2011). "Parables of the Modern World: Criticism of Certain Well-Known Novels Within the Frame Psychology of Religion", *Journal of Intercultural And Religious Religion*. Volume. 1. p. 125-129.
- SWARTZ, David (2013). *Kültür ve İktidar*. 2. Baskı. (Çev. Elçin Gen). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- TESKE, A. John (2006). *Neuromythology: Brains and stories. Zygon*, 41(1), 169-196.
- WAGNER, Peter & KÜÇÜK, Mehmet (2005). *Modernliğin Sosyolojisi: Özgürlük ve cezalandırma*. (Çev. Mehmet Küçük). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- WEBER, Max (1999). *Protestan Ahlakı ve Kapitalizmin Ruhu*. (Çev. Zeynep Gürata). Ankara: Ayraç Yayınları.
- WEBER, Max (2006). *Sosyoloji Yazıları*. (Çev. Taha Parla). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- YAMANE, David (2000). *Narrative and Religious Experience. Sociology of Religion*. 61:2, 171-189.
- YEĞİN, Abdullah (1983). *Osmanlıca-Türkçe Yeni Lügat*. İstanbul: Hizmet Vakfı Yayınları.
- YILDIRIM, Ali & ŞİMŞEK, Hasan (2011). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.