

SECRETS AND REVELATIONS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE
NUSAYRI COMMUNITY IN THE KARADUVAR DISTRICT OF MERSİN

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ABSTRACT

SECRETS AND REVELATIONS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE NUSAYRI COMMUNITY IN THE KARADUVAR DISTRICT OF MERSİN

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The main aim of this thesis is to present an ethnographic study of the Nusayri community in the Karaduvar district of Mersin to examine how it negotiates maintaining religious teachings and practices secret in the process of interacting with other communities and reproducing Nusayri belief. In addition to ethnographic field research in Karaduvar, two virtual communities that Nusayris frequent were studied to examine the negotiations on the revelation of Nusayri esoteric knowledge and secret ritual practices. The ethnographic data were collected during two months of fieldwork in Karaduvar and twelve months of online study of two virtual communities.

Research findings show that although the intentional concealing of Nusayri religious knowledge and ritual practices have historically played an important role in the survival of the Nusayri community and belief, partial revelation of secrets are becoming more common and acceptable. Both the internal dynamics of the Nusayri community and the socio-political context in Turkey have contributed to this process. The result of the continuous negotiations among Nusayri sheikhs and followers is that while social secrecy is increasingly revealed, esoteric secrecy is maintained to a large extent. The disclosure of secrecy is particularly supported by younger generations, university graduates, Nusayri intelligentsia, and those Nusayris who live outside of their hometown.

Keywords: Religious secrecy, esoterism, virtual communities, Nusayris, Karaduvar.

ÖZ

SIRLAR VE İFŞALAR: MERSİN'İN KARADUVAR MAHALLESİ NUSAYRİLERİ ÜZERİNE ETNOGRAFİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Mersin'in Karaduvar mahallesinde yaşayan Nusayri cemaatinin etnografik bir sunumunu yapmak, belli gizli dinsel öğretileri ve dini ritüelleri nasıl sürdürdüklerini Nusayrilik inancının yeniden üretilmesinde ve diğer topluluklarla olan etkileşim sürecinde topluluk içinde yaşanan tartışmaları ortaya koymaktır. Karaduvar'da yapılan saha araştırması yanında, Nusayri ezoterik (batınî) bilgisinin ve gizli ritüellerinin ifşa edilmesinde yaşanan tartışmaları daha geniş boyutta açıklamak için Nusayriler tarafından oluşturulan iki sanal topluluk araştırılmıştır. Saha araştırmasından elde edilen veriler iki ayda tamamlanmış ve sanal topluluklar üzerine olan araştırma ise on iki ay sürmüştür.

Araştırma sonuçları göstermektedir ki; Nusayri dinsel bilgisinin ve ritüellerinin gizlenmesi Nusayri topluluğu ve dini ritüel pratikleri varlığının sürdürülmesinde tarihsel olarak önemli bir rol oynarken, sırların kısmî olarak ifşa edilmesi yaygınlaşmakta ve önemli bir kesim tarafından da kabul edilebilmektedir. Hem Nusayri topluluğunun kendi iç dinamikleri ve hem de Türkiye'deki sosyo-politik durum bağlamında bu kısmî ifşa süreci devam etmektedir. Bu süreçte, Nusayri şeyhleri ve mensupları arasında süren müzakereler neticesinde sosyal gizlilik artarak ifşa edilirken, ezoterik gizlilik büyük ölçüde devam ettirilmektedir. Gizliliğin kısmî ifşası çoğunlukla üniversitede okuyan, üniversite mezunu olan, memleketi dışında yaşayan özellikle genç kuşak ve aydın kesim tarafından desteklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinsel gizlilik, ezoterizm, sanal topluluklar, Nusayriler, Karaduvar.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We are all, in a sense, experts on secrecy.

Sissela Bok (1989: xv)

1.1 The Research Problem

This study is about secrecy in a religious community. The word secrecy is a broad concept that includes a wide variety of meanings, interpretations and its uses. In her an important study, Sissela Bok writes that “anything can be secret so long as it is kept intentionally hidden” (Bok, 1989: 5). From this point of view, she defines secrecy as “intentional concealment.” In other words, the term secrecy refers to the resulting concealment. Michael Lindsay points out that secrecy is a socially constructed category and it should be considered as a social phenomenon (Lindsay, 2006: 397; Urban, 1998; Laurel, 1998; Christopher, 2002; de Jong, 2006; Chilson, 2010). Georg Simmel’s landmark essay on secrecy proposes that all social relationships “can be characterized by the amount of and kind of secrecy within them and around them” (Simmel, 1906: 462). Similarly, Bok argues that we live in a society where almost every person and institution more or less has closely guarded secrets (Bok, 1989: xv).

In this sense, it can be mentioned that there are various forms and cultures of secrecy in human beings, organizations or institutions. More clearly, it can be said that all over the world a state, a government, a private company, a religion, a journalist, a doctor, a minority community and so on has needed to keep information or an event secret. Consequently, for all individuals, organizations, institutions, or agencies “secrecy is indispensable (...) as fare” (ibid.: 18). Besides, they need to accompany a certain level of concealment or openness in order to maintain their survival. In

particular, in democratic societies, governments are demanded by their citizens to be a particular level of openness and more transparency which strengthen democracy in a country. In a memorandum¹, published in the Federal Register in 2009, Barack Obama announces that “government should be transparent.” In this memorandum, he draws attention to danger of secrecy in a government administration. The danger of secrecy, according to Bok (ibid.: 26), obviously goes beyond the risks to those who keep secrets. The general public tends to be more transparency. In addition, most of governments demand from religious groups to be more transparency (Barkun, 2006: 297). Therefore, these religious groups in such a case are compelled to reduce level of secrecy in their secret practices or they reveal “imagined secrets.” In this context, Micheal Barkun states that after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the government have demanded more transparency from the religious groups in US:

During periods of social or political tension, religious secrets take on a broader and more sinister importance, for they may be seen as evidence that a religious community has unsavory beliefs or behaviors that it must be hide. At that point religious secrets may be perceived as indicators of danger. We entered such a period after the September 11, 2001, attacks. Some manifestations of Islam have come to be regarded as potential threats to public security (...). (Barkun, 2006: 276)

As examples of different secret groups, communities or societies might be mentioned Freemasonry, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Brazilian Condombles, Nusayris, Satanist groups, Fethullah Gülen Movement, Buddhists etc. All these have a culture of secrecy. Among these varied secret groups and communities, it is said that Freemasonry has most members from all over the world and has been described as the largest secret society on earth - Freemasonry (Cohen, 1971: 427; Hodapp, 2005: 1). According to Hodapp, the Freemasons are the first, the biggest, and the best-known gentlemen’s organization in the world. Cohen (ibid.) and Hodapp (ibid.) state that

¹ For more information please visit:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/

Freemasonry is not a secret society; rather it is a society with secrets. As a society with secrets they have Masonic secrets known by only initiated members of the society.

Similarly, the Karaduvar Nusayris is a religious community with secrets and secret ceremonies. They do not accept known as a closed community. In this study, I wish to examine how secrecy is maintained, carried out in a Nusayri community in Karaduvar. The community has lived as a closed religious community and has conducted its religious ceremonies secretly for centuries. Secrecy has been an indispensable strategy for the followers of Nusayri belief to survive. It can be said that if they did not developed it, the belief would be disappear. However, although in the past secrecy was used to as a strategy to continue their existence, today they need to reduce level of secrecy in their religious worships and doctrine that has been practiced secret for centuries. The need for reducing level of secrecy in Nusayri belief is that high level of secrecy stigmatizes both members of the community and the belief.

The study is intended to contribute to our knowledge on how can a secret religious belief transmit and maintain its secret inner teachings and ritual practices, and to our understanding of secrecy in a religious community in the information age of the twenty-first century. Today, the ability to maintain secrecy is not completely under the control of the sheiks or followers of the Nusayri belief. Moreover, there are tensions and negotiations among members of the religious community on level of the Nusayri secrecy. Considering this fact, in the case of the Karaduvar Nusayri community, this study intends to understand how a religious community transmits its secret inner teachings and religious ritual practices, and which kind of tensions and negotiations occur and ongoing among members of the community.

Here I intend to shortly state the starting of my thesis about Nusayris and secrecy to illustrate what I did before carrying out such a study in a secretive community. On a middle of May midday at university campus in 2008, after the course of Methods and Techniques of Social Research I was walking with my a classmate,

Halil Karaçalı. As far as I remember we were talking about the lecturer, Assist. Prof. Aykan Erdemir, research methods especially on advantages of participant observation, Alevis, and each other's academic interests. At that time I was thinking about my thesis topic. While we were discussing the Alevis in Turkey, a thought struck me: why I do not carry out a fieldwork on Nusayris/Arab Alevis known as a secret religious community in the Karaduvar district of Mersin. My family has also lived in Mersin since 1984, and I have lived in there on summers.

I had many close friends who were members of the Nusayri religious community at highschool, *Salim Yılmaz Lisesi*, between 1995-1998. At that time, because there was not a highschool in Karaduvar, those who wanted to continue to receive education after the secondary school had to go to city centre of Mersin. At school they were all shoulder to shoulder. When there was a fight between a Nusayri student and a non-Nusayri student, almost all Nusayri students used to come to help him. One of the Nusayri students at school was my classmate, and both of us played football on the school's football team from the first year to the last year. We rarely talked about our religious beliefs and religious practices at that times. One day in the summer of 1999, he invited me to his house to eat *hırısı*, a kind of Nusayri traditional food. When I told my parents about going to Karaduvar, they did not approve. The reason for my parents' negative response, parallel to the general bias towards Arabs, Nusayris were known "not clear" society by them because they are "Arab." Despite my parents' biases towards Arabs, they have many friends who are Nusayri since then.

After my friend went to start his undergraduate education at Osman Gazi University in Eskisehir, one year later I also had a change to receive undergraduate education at Anadolu University in Eskisehir. We were housemates for four years in Eskisehir. At present he lives in Karaduvar with his family. When my thesis topic came to my mind, I thought that before I decide to carry out a study on Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar, I had to ask my closest friend whether or not I can carry out a

fieldwork in Karaduvar; otherwise, it could not be possible to conduct a research in a closed and secretive religious community in a certain neighbourhood.

Within the same day when I had struck upon to conduct an ethnographic research on Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar, I called him up to ask whether I could conduct a research in their religious community, and if he also could help me or not. After I briefly mentioned to him about my research plan, as first reaction he was a bit surprised. Then, I gave more information about my aim and the study, he responded as follows:

You know would I help you anytime about this issue, but I also have to ask my family especially my father. If they do not strictly oppose your study about us, I do not think they will take a negative view of this study, I will help you. However, if we ask them, your research would be better because in the Karaduvar almost everybody know very well my father. After I mention this issue my parents, I will call you. (...)

As he mentioned above and I have recognized in the my fieldwork, his parents are conservative about their esoteric (*batini*) and closed religious teachings and secret ritual practices. On the evening of the same day, he called me and said briefly:

I talked with my parents about your research on us. They stated that they do not oppose your study. However, before you start your study in Karaduvar you should talk with my father about the study; otherwise, some residents of the neighborhoods might disturb you when you walk around in the neighborhood. Many of the neighbors do not know you. (...)

After this telephone call, I started to review existing literature on Nusayri religious community who are known to carry out secret rituals of initiation and secret religious performings. In addition to this, when I went to visit my family, each time I went to Karaduvar in order to carry out unsystematical observations.

As it can be clearly understood from the telephone conversation between my Nusayri friend who has been my friend for approximate fourteen years and I, followers of Nusayri religious belief have endeavored to keep their secret religious inner knowledge and rituals practices secret from non-Nusayris, and maintaining them secret today. Nusayri religious belief system, a complex system of doctrine, rituals, and beliefs, merits a long study of its own. I have begun the work of such a study, by collecting the sociological and ethnographic information on Nusayri community.

After reviving of the existing literature and carrying out my first stage of fieldwork, while I was discussing and negotiating with my supervisor, Assist. Prof. Aykan Erdemir, he suggested to me to go on to study on secrecy and Nusayri secret ritual practices. Following this fruitful meeting, I specifically started to focus on Nusayri secret rituals of initiation (the custom of unclehood / *amcalık geleneği*), secret collective worship (*ı-sala*) and the festivals (the Festival of Ghadīr Khumm / 'īd al-ghadīr). In this context;

The goal of this study is to present an ethnographic study of the Nusayri community in the Karaduvar district of Mersin to examine how it negotiates keeping certain religious teachings and practices secret in the process of interacting with other communities and reproducing Nusayri belief. As a religious minority community and secret society Nusayris have made an endeavour to keep their inner teachings and rituals secret up to today. As an outsider to secrets of the community, I experienced an interrelated set of tensions: between concealing and revealing secret religious knowledge and ritual practices or limits of secrecy.

Despite many slaughters and pressures, Nusayris have been able to maintain and keep their certain secret religious rituals and rituals of initiation into religion. My hope was also to explore and examine how this is maintained and kept secret, and at present time whether it is really maintained and kept secret as in the past or at a certain level of secrecy.

The concept of secrecy in a group or community can be explained in terms of different aspects. Karaduvar Nusayris have esoteric religious knowledge and perform their practices secret. I have mentioned before, the term secrecy is defined as a “intentionally concealment” by Sissela Bok (1989: 5). In addition to this definition, de Jong (2006), following the Georg Simmel’s conceptualization of secrecy (1906), argues that the best way to study secrecy in human cultures and religions is to study secrecy as a social phenomenon. The first time secrecy was distinguished as “esoteric secrecy” and “social secrecy” by Clark Chilson (2010). According to Chilson, distinction between social secrecy, which based on two or more people intentionally desclousing something from others, and esotericism (esoteric secrecy), in which a deity is the primary “owner” of a secret, is helpful when analysing complexities of secrecy. Therefore, from the Chilson’s point of view on distinguish secrecy, we need to distinguish between social secrecy from the esoteric secrecy in Nusayri religious doctrine and ritual practices.

Based on this approach to secrecy, I believe that religious secrecy in the Karaduvar Nusayri religious community should be studied as a social phenomenon and a social secrecy. Approaching the research subject of the study from this angle, in order to explore tensions and negotiations among members of the Nusayri community, which originate in concealment and reducing secrecy in secret ritual practices and secret knowledge, I asked a list of questions to the participants. In this sense, my main research questions in this study were the following:

- 1) How do Karaduvar Nusayris define themselves?
- 2) How does secret or esoteric knowledge affect Nusayris’ social secrecy and religious practices?
- 3) Do Karaduvar Nusayris want to live in the presence of a homogeneous religious space and neighborhood?

- 4) How are the initiation rituals into the belief and secret collective worship affected by urban life, increasing of education level, becoming heterogeneous social structure of neighborhood, closing of borders with the city?
- 5) Is there a tension on secrecy between Nusayri males and females?
- 6) How secret knowledge is protected against people inside and outside the community?
- 7) Which strategies have been developed by the community?
- 8) What kinds of punishment are given to people who do not veil the secrecy?
- 9) What do they think about intentionally keeping religious knowledge secret at present?
- 10) What do young and elders, and women and men think about concealing and revealing of secrecy?

1.2 The Research Methods

For this study, I conducted two ethnographic fieldworks in Karaduvar. The dates coincided with the community's religious days and festivals that are important days for my research question. I carried out my first fieldwork between 7 November and 7 December 2009. In this period of the fieldwork, the community's most important festival, the Festival of Ghadīr Khumm (ʿīd al-ghadīr), was celebrated on Saturday 4 December 2009. I conducted the second fieldwork between 12 December 2009 and 12 January 2010. In that time, there was a private festival of my Nusayri friend's father. Although, the total days I passed in the field may be short, before carrying the two ethnographic fieldworks, I had observed some festivals and stayed at my friend house many times in Karaduvar. At those times I was also writing short field notes about the rituals of religious practice; titled "an everyday life in Karaduvar on 7 June 2009" and "a private festival in a summer day in Karaduvar August 2009." For instance, according to one of those short notes, on 21 August 2009 at my friend home in Karaduvar, my close Nusayri friend's father was carried out a private festival

conducted every year by him. In order to observe this religious festival, I wanted to stay at my close friend's home where the festival was celebrated. On the 19th of August, I mentioned this issue to my friend, he said "*I should ask my parents because it is not my decision according to our tradition.*" Next day, he called me and he said "*My mom did not permit you to participate in the festival, but she said you can come tomorrow early morning and you can help me to distribute stuffed aubergines².*" Although we were friend for almost 15 years, I could not stay at their home because the collective worship was carried out by initiated males before day. This religious ritual practice is carried out in secretly. When I arrived at 8.00am, four women and two men were working at the inner court of the house. At the centre of the inner court, there were big cauldrons in which there were stuffed aubergines. Everybody was tired because they had been working from the evening to that time. During writing of my thesis, I was also benefit from these short notes. Moreover, in addition to this short notes, during my research, I used four different methods to collect a rich data: observation, interviews, life histories, and internet search (public and private internet forums).

1.2.1 Observation

In this study, because the topic of investigation and the research subject are sensitive issues, and also because there has been no similar research done before, I decided to conduct my study through a qualitative approach, and in a parallel with this approach to conduct an ethnographic research. As a research technique an ethnographic study aims to explore and describe more detail and more deep data. Therefore, for such a study, the most suitable research technique was ethnographic research. The potential benefit of carrying out an ethnographic study on the concept of secrecy is to provoke great awareness of relationships between those realities and

² Stuffed aubergines is kind of meal that is cooked with aubergines, rice and meat from sacrificed animal, and it is distributed to those who participate in collective worship and to all neighbourhoods.

tensions which are immediately apparent and those which are not. I should state that the practices of secrecy that are performed by people in a particular place and time cannot be generalized into overall form of secrecy.

In Karaduvar, I carried out in-depth research. Through the fieldwork, to collect the data on secret religious rituals, rituals of initiation into the belief, religious festivals, increasing or reducing social secrecy, and also tensions and negotiations among the community, I stayed mostly at my friend's family's house in the Karaduvar. By this means I could conduct participant observation. Because of the feature of a closed community, participant observation was very fruitful in collecting rich data.

Many thanks to my friend and his family, I could observe and deeply understand a Nusayri family's everyday life in Karaduvar. During this process, in evenings I interviewed with my friend's father and his brother, and also in mornings with his mother at breakfasts. At these times, in an ordinary environment I could ask questions that I was curious about. On Saturdays, all family including their married children and grandchildren get together at their parents home where I was staying.

In addition to this participant observation in Karaduvar, I had chance to observe and interview with people at Fishing Port and Local of Karaduvar (*Karaduvar Balıkçı Barınağı ve Lokali*), Karaduvar Sports Club Association and Local (*Karaduvar Spor Kulübü Derneği ve Lokali*), Karaduvar District Mutual Assistance and Solidarity Association (*Karaduvar Mahallesi Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği*), at a fish restaurant, at a grocer, at a grilled meat restaurant, and street alleys of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, I had chance to observe the festival of Ghadīr Khumm (ʿīd al-ghadīr), and participate in a visiting (*ziyaret*) with my Nusayri friend's family in Adanalıoğlu district of Mersin. This provided me with the opportunity to observe how a secretive Nusayri religious community carries out a religious festival (of which some

parts are closed to non-initiated and non-Nusayri people) and to visit a sacred place, Tomb of Sheikh Mahmut (*Şih Mahmut Ziyareti*).

1.2.2 Interviews and Life Histories

I implemented observation with interviews. I carried out indepth-interviews with the religious leader, chief of the district, youth and women, elders, those who live and work outside the district in the same time.

The interviews consisted of nineteen questions. Although the same question set was applied in each interview, sometimes additional questions were asked to interviewees to take more deep data. And also, sometimes the orders of posing questions had to be changed by the interviewer. The questions were asked to find out what members of the Nusayri religious community think about the secrecy, secret collective worships, concealment and revelation of secret knowledge and holy days and festivals, how they define themselves.

To record the interviews, I used a voice recorder. Before the interviews, I asked for permission from the participants to use a voice recorder during the interview. Six of the participants accepted to be recorded their voice by the researcher. Those who did not accept to be recorded their voices were not insisted by the researcher. Apart from these six participants, I took notes during the other nine interviews. On the evening of day I interviewed I wrote this notes on the computer.

The interviews were implemented in different places. Some interviews were carried out at participant's private house, some at participant's workplace, some at the locals or at the association which are at the seaside. During carrying out interviews and taking rest at local, I drunk too much tea at the local. Besides this, sometimes I played rummikub and backgammon with my close friend and other members of the community. I was introduced to other members of the community by my close Nusari

friend. In this way, I became much more known and trusted by the members of the community. I also interviewed with the sheikh at his home, in his office. His office is on the ground floor of the his house.

The indept-interviews lasted for between fifty minutes and two hours. The duration of the interviews depended on the participants' level of interest, knowledge, education level, and also my ability to maintain the interview. During the interviews, although I tried to abstain from to "esoteric secrecy" (*batini sır*), four participants in somehow mentioned it. In relation to the duration of interviewing with the Nusayri males, interviewing with the Nusayri women took a longer time than males.

During the field reserach, I was attentive to be different ages, sex, marital status, education, and job of participants. Taking into account these criteries, I interviewed with eleven Nusayri males and four Nusayri females; total fifteen participants. The age range of the participants is between 23 and 84 years old. One of the participants did not speak Turkish very well. Because I could not speak Arabic, I was able to conduct the interview with a 84 years old woman through the help of my close friend.

I also implemented two life histories with the two of the participants. They were oldest ones of the participants. One of them was an 84 years old woman, and the other was an 80 years old man. The woman has four sons and three daughters, all of them are alive. In addition to her children, she has also thirty three grandchildren. Through these two life histories, I could explore the transformation of Karaduvar from proclamation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 to today. The man I intwrviewed remember the day on which Atatürk visited to Mersin. According to an insctructer, Hasan Kendirci, at Mersin University, Atatürk visited Mersin between 20-23 May 1938, and on 20 May he also visited Karaduvar and Kazanlı by a boat.³ As Kendirci

³ For more information please visit: <http://www.mersin.edu.tr/icerik.php?hid=2724>

mentioned, according to the elder Nusayri man during the visiting, Atatürk did not fall from the boat.

1.2.3 Internet Research (Internet Forums)

Another data collection source of this study was internet research. According to a research “ICT Usage in Households Survey Results in 2009” conducted by Turkish Statistical Institute (*TUIK*), the internet is used by mostly young in Turkey.⁴ Concordantly to this usage of internet results, the Nusayris also use the internet. On the internet, there are many of internet public forums⁵, private forums⁶, facebook groups⁷, and also webpages of Nusayri associations and foundations. I studied these websites and forums regularly in order to find out what have been publicized, how much they are publicized, is there a tension between those who have revealed the secret religious knowledge, religious inner teaching, and so on in the internet and those who oppose this disclosures, of secrecy and who are the members of the internet forums and groups, etc.

⁴ For more information please visit: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr>

⁵ AleviWeb: <http://www.aleviweb.com/forum/>; AleviForum: <http://www.aleviforum.com/>; Nusayri-Alevi Forum: <http://www.nusayrialevi.com/>

⁶ Arap Alevileri'nin Buluşma Noktası / Aleviforum: (<http://www.nusayriforum.org/>)

⁷Nusayri: <http://www.facebook.com/Nusayri>; Alevi Islam: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361&v=wall#!/group.php?gid=119543900361&v=info>; Adanalı Fellahlar: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=8133380819>; Arap Aleviler (Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Tarsus) Birlikten Kuvvet Dogar <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=166976090370>; Mınnına <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=6054456739&ref=ts>

1.3 The Field Site

1.3.1 Mersin

Mersin is a Mediterranean seaport on the south coast of Anatolia (2009: 1.640.888 inhabitants).⁸ It is situated at the extreme western end of the *Çukurova* (Cilician) plain. The modern port, constructed in the 1960s, is an outlet for the agricultural produce and minerals of *Çukurova* (Benton, 1971: 200). In the seventh volume of *the Encyclopedia of Islam*, it is stated that Mersin itself, historically, is of no great antiquity, having replaced the Roman harbour town of Soli-Pompeipolis, the ruins of which lie immediately to the west in Mezitli district of Mersin. Also, to the north-west of Mersin is situated the Neolithic *höyük* of Yümüktepe [at present called *Yumuktepe*], which was well-fortified in the 5th milenium BC.

According to many people in Mersin including Nusayris, there are no native people. Mersin is a city formed by migration for about 160 years. The city has lately become an increasingly heterogeneous city following the arrival of numerous migrants of different ethnic and religious background such as Turks (Sunni), Alevis, Kurds, and Arabs. This makes it necessary to examine the ways in which different communities in Mersin cope with the challenges of reinventing their traditions and boundary maintenance.

In Mersin, Nusayris live in Tarsus, Karaduvar, Kazanlı, Karacailyas, Adanalioğlu and Yakaköy village. There is no current total number of the followers of the Nusayri belief in Mersin.

⁸ For more information please visit: <http://report.tuik.gov.tr>

1.3.2 Karaduvar

Karaduvar (ancient name *Anchiale*) is located at the eastern side of the city of Mersin along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. According to an official person, head of the Karaduvar district, the number of inhabitants is almost 20.000, of which %25 is non-Nusayri. Nusayris in Karaduvar speak both Arabic and Turkish in their everyday life.

The history of Karaduvar dates back to Neolithic period (ca. 3600 BC) and continues unbroken through Chalcolithic and Early Bronze ages (Güler et al., 2009: 204). According to the head of the district, 58 years old, Karaduvar is a settlement established in 700 BC. He also said to me “*My father was born in 1932, he said us we came here before about 40-50 years ago.*” In addition to this, an elder Nusayri man, 80 years old, said to me “*my father and three grandfathers lived here, which means at least 150-200 years ago.*” However, in his article titled *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Adana, Tarsus ve Mersin*, which is based on Ottoman archive on Nusairis of Adana, Tarsus and Mersin between 19-20th century, Ali Sinan Bilgili states that the first document was dated 16 November 1893 (Bilgili, 2010: 74).

The area has been traditionally and historically associated with agricultural activities although the agricultural areas have been markedly decreasing since for three decades due to the industrial and urban expansions. Crops which are grown in the area include pepper, green bean, tomato, radish, leek, chard (*pezik*), purslane, cauliflower, savoy cabbage, leaves and salad herbs, and citrus fruits, most of which are native to Mediterranean region. Women and men work together in the field. Also, all year many people come to the area to work in the crop fields. The area has fertile alluvial soils and mild climate. In the region, agricultural activities have been continued since the Nusayris came to the area. Because of agriculture, members of the community were called “Fellah” by other communities in Çukurova region (in provinces of Mersin, Adana, and Hatay).

In addition to agriculture in Karaduvar, fishing is another important source of income to local economy. Many of the Nusayris in Karaduvar are engaged in fishing. Moreover, there are three big fish restaurant in the neighborhood. Most of the restaurant customers come from the city centre to eat fish, and also alcohol is drunk in the restaurants. Apart from the restaurant, there are many fish stores, two groceries, approximately five package stores, approximately three greengroceries, approximately five cafes (*kahvehane*), two petrol stations, barbers, and so on.

Moreover, there is one Health Occupation High-school (*Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu*) opened in 2003, one high-school, two elementary schools; one health care centre, a mosque established in 1987, an assembly house, and one police station; one NGO (Karaduvar District Mutual Assistance and Solidarity), a sport club association (Karaduvar District Sports Club) and two trade bodies (Karaduvar Association for Protection and Development of Greengrocers (*Karaduvar Yeşillikçileri ve Sebzcileri Koruma, Geliştirme ve Kollama Derneği*) and Karaduvar Fisheries Association).

The houses in the Karaduvar are mostly one or two story houses. Many of the houses have inner courts and gardens or they are in their own fields. Therefore, they can carry out their festivals and religious practices in these places of the houses.

The city [Mersin] was alien to us in the past⁹

At the Karaduvar district, industrial areas are founded side by side with areas of intensive agriculture. After the establishment of ATAS, petroleum refinery in Karaduvar in 1962, the area has become the centre of attraction for a wide variety of industrial activities ranging from petrochemical to energy and chemical to fertilizer production. In 1970, a diesel-fired thermal power plant was established in the site and

⁹ Önceden şehir bize yanabıydı.

closed down in 1994. Furthermore, in 1972, a nitrogen fertilizer factory was also established in the area. Although, ATAS, refinery phased out its crude oil-refining operations; however, its petroleum hydrocarbon storage and transport activities are still operative. (Güler et al., 2009: 204)

1.4 The Research Subject

1.4.1 Short History of Nusayris

History

The sect was formed in Iraq in the mid-3rd/9th century (Gibb and et all, 1995 146). According to both Nusayri and non-Nusayri writing the origins of the Nusayri “religion” are connected with the figure of Muhammad b. Nusayr, a devotee of the tenth and eleventh Shī‘ī Imams, ‘Alī al-Hā-dī (d. 254/868) and Hasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/873/4). The term “Nusayriyya”, the most common appellation of the new religion, apparently goes back to Ibn Nusayr. All of the appeltaions signify the self-perception of the Nusayris as the unique and the only true monotheistic belief, distinct from the rest of the Islam, including Shī‘a. (Bar-Ashar & Kofsky, 2002: 1-2)

According to Doğruel, after the Karbala in 608, two religious group were formed: the followers of ‘Ali including Nusayris and other Muslims (Doğruel, 2006: 6). Because of this event, some of the followers of ‘Ali had to migrated from Iraq to Syria. Then, for fear of Ottoman’s pressure and persecution Nusayris hid in the Nusayra Mountains (*Jabal al-Nusara*) on the border of the Syria and Turkey. These Nusayra Mountains, where the bulk of the Nusayris live in numerous small villages, can be described as exceptionally poor (Osslon, 1998: 167). Some followers of the Nusayri belief arrived up to the Tarsus and Silifke districts of Mersin (in the site of *Çukurova region*) Turkey. After this event, Nusayris have tried to keep their inner teaching and rituals secret for centuries. Secret teachings are a part of the Nusayri belief. In the

history of the Nusayri belief, followers of the religious community have been exposed to many pressures and slaughters. Despite these sufferings, they have been able to survive until today. At present, they carry out their inner teachings and rituals secretly. Non-members of the community are not given permission to participate in the secret ceremonies.

According to Nusayri tradition, Ibn Nusayr was the favourite disciple of the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askarī, who entrusted to him a new revelation which was to constitute the nucleus of the Nusayri doctrine. (ibid.)

On the appellation of Nusayris there are different claims. Two of them would be appear more correct. One of them, according to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the Nusayris themselves derive the name of from that their eponym Ibn Nusayr (ibid.). The other appellation is based on a mountain in Syri, *Jabal al-Nusayra* (the Nusayra Mountain).

When following the history of the religious belief, they have been named under several different terms; in general “*Alawite, Alawi, Alawiyyah, Nusayri, Nusairi, Ansariyya*”, in Turkey “*Nusayri, Nusayri Alawite, Nusairi, Fellah, Arap uşağı, Araplar (Arabs), Alevi, Arap Alevi (Arab Alevi)*. In a similar way, in Karaduvar members of the community used different names for their religious appellation; *Arap Alevi* (Arab Alevi), *Nusayri, Fellah, Nusayri Arabı* (Arab Nusayri), and *Çukurova Alevileri* (used by the sheik in the Karaduvar). In his book, *History of Alawites (Ta’rīkh al-‘Alewiyyīn)*, published in 1924 in Arabic, et-Tavil used the term Nusayri, which was replaced for the first time by “Alawi”.

Current Distribution

The Nusayris mostly live in Syria and Southern Turkey, in the provinces of Hatay, Adana, and Mersin (Olsson, 1998; Türk, 2005). In addition to these areas, they

also live in Lebanon and Israel. In Lebanon there is a Nusayri minority immediately to the south of the Syrian frontier (Gibb and et all, 1995: 146).

According to Osslon (1998: 167), the Nusayris make up 12 percent of the population of Syria. I have not been able to access recent statistics, but the population figure for 1970 in Syria 680.000 and in Lebanon 9.000 (ibid.).

Since the 19th century, Nusayris have become established on *Cukurova*. According to an prediction in 1921 in Turkey, there were approximately 80.000 Nusayris (ibid.). According to Osslon, there were 185.000 Nusayris in Turkey (ibid.). According to an Ottoman document, in Adana in 1893 there were 40.000 Nusayris (Bilgili, 2010: 76).

Doctrine

Nusayris beleive in a tirinity of *Ayn-Mim-Sin*. According to Nusayri belief system, in the beginnig of time, the souls of the Nusayris were lights, sorrounding and praising God: then they rebelled against Him, disputing His divinity. From the onwards, they have been thrown down from the celestial heights and exiled on the earth, where they are enclosed in material bodies and the condemned to metempsychosis. During their fall, the supreme God appears to them seven times, calling for their obedience, but they refuse. In each manifestation, God, who is called “the essence” (*ma ‘nā*), is accompanied by two subordinate hypostes, “the mana”(*ism*) and the “Gate” (*bāb*). In earthly life, this trio is revealed in numerous for instance: the *ma ‘nā* is incarnated in Abel, Seth, Joseph, Joshua, ‘Asaf, St. Peter and ‘Ali b. Abī Talib. All of these are therefore manifestations of the divinity. The central trio of the islamic period is ‘Ali (*ma ‘nā*), Muhammad (*ism*) and Salmān al-Fārisi (*bāb*). The eponym of the Nusayris, Muhammad bin Nusayr, was the *bāb* of the eleventh *imām* al-Hasan al-Askarī, whose secret revelations he confided exclusively to the Nusayris (ibib.: 148).

To Nusayris, according to Moosa, Ali b. Abī Talib, the blood cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, is the last and only perfect one of the seven manifestations of God (Moosa, 1988: 324). Moosa proceeds that Ali b. Abī Talib is also the one who created Muhammad and taught him the Quran. Although Moosa wrote in his book, *Extremist Shiites; The Ghulat Sects*, as “Ali b. Abī Talib is God: the very God of the Quran”, as far as I explore from my field study, actually Nusayris in Karaduvar, see Ali b. Abī Talib as “God is Ali b. Abī Talib”. These two sentences are not the same for Nusayris, and their esoteric meaning is different. According to what most of the people I interviewed in the field said to me “*according to our belief Ali is a light (nur).*” In addition to Ali, other eleven Imams, Prophet Muhammad, Hatice, Salman al-Farisi are light.

Nusayris believe that the Quran has both esoteric (allagorical / *batini*) and exoteric (*zahiri*) meanings. Nusayris believe that the esoteric meaning is known only by the twelve Imams, and later the *bāb* (Salmān al-Fārisi) and the prophet Muhammad.

Women are excluded from the initiation into the religion because according to Nusayri doctrine and belief they are born of the sins of devils. However, Nusayri women work together with men while they are preparing a festival. For instance, during the Gadir Khumm festival women work much more than the men. Although women are not allowed to participate in the rites of men, by working at the festivals or holy day they believe that they earn good deed.

Because of their closed religious life and keeping religious knowledge secret, according to Türk, there are few researches and books on Nusayris/m in Turkey. However, in the last decade there has been many studies published on Nusayris in Turkey and in the world.

1.4.2 A Secretive Religious Community: Nusayris in Karaduvar and Mersin

The first reliable source about when Nusayris were seen in Mersin is based on a written official document related with missionary activity on 16 November 1893. According to Ali Sinan Bilgili, the first document was written by *Zühdi Paşa* who was the Ministry of Education, dated 16 November 1893, the last one was a document which was sent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Hariciye Nezareti*) to Grand Viziership (*Sadaret*) dated 11 June 1895 (Bilgili, 2010: 73). According to this Ottoman document, from the early 1880s the missionaries made an endeavor to convert people from Muslim to Christianize. The most active of missionaries' activities is American Protestant Girl School (*Amerikan Protestan Kız Mektebi*). The head of the school was a doctor, Dr. David Metheny. Between 20 and 25 Nusayri girls were brought to Mersin from Lazkiye and Syria, and they were educated according to Protestant believes and doctrine.

In a parallel with this historical evidence, also a member of the Nusayri religious community mentioned such an event in that time. He, who was 58 years old, said “*our fathers told us that there was a Protestant school in Mersin.*”

According to Abdülvahap Korkulu, those who are Arab families were brought to Mersin when a crisis in the British apparel industry was occurred in 1864. The aim of this migration was to drain marshy ground between Mersin and Tarsus. Then, cotton was grown on the field. Those who worked on the cotton fields were brought from Hatay and Adana to Mersin.

In Mersin, Nusayris in live in district of Tarsus, the neighborhoods of Kazanlı, Karaduvar, Karacailyas and Adanalıoğlu, and in a village called Yakaköy. In addition to Nusayris, the Christian Arabs live in *Nüzhetiye* and *Camişerif* districts of Mersin.

1.5 The Difficulties of Studying Secrecy in a Religious Community: A Sociologist's Views

First of all, secrecy in a religious community is a difficult and complicated object to study. However, if you have a contact person as I have, it can be more easier. For instance, before I interviewed a member of the community, I used to give my friend's name and his father name. Thus, I was able to provide a environment of trust. Despite this very important contact person and also his father, there were some difficulties during my fieldwork. One of them was to interview people who have intentionall kept his religious knowledge a secret.

As a researcher or an "other" doing a fieldwork on festivals and ceremonies of a secretive religious community was difficult for some reasons. The first and an important one of these reasons is that non-Nusayris are still not allowed to participating in rituals of initiation and collective worship in Karaduvar. Because of historical security reasons, except for initiated Nusayri males, nobody else is allowed to hear or to join in these secret religious ceremonies. In the historical process, to survive they had to perform their religious traditions and rituals secretly.

The exchange between researcher and informant is rarely a clean one (Johnson, 2002). The Nusayri beleif and performing system are structured by a hierarchic system of initiations with increasing access to the secret knowledge and secret ritual practices. In Karaduvar, most of those who are celebrated a private festival every year are very strict on secrecy of religious practices. They talk with a non-Nusayri on different issues such as a religious practice, but they do not give detail info about it.

As outsider to esoteric secrets and social secrecy of the Nusayri religious community, I experienced a related set of tensions: between concealing and revealing of "esoteric secrecy" and "social secrecy" by the members of the community. According to Bok, "these tensions invite the clues and the taunts that may in turn

increase the conflict felt by outsiders between wanting to unmask and to respect the secret” (Bok, 1989: 36). During the fieldwork, I felt such situations. For instance, when I was walking through the streets in the neighborhood, I saw a preparation of a private festival. Then, I called my close Nusayri friend who was my contact person, and I mentioned the preparations of a festival by three women in front of a house. After I asked him whether we would participate in or observe the festival which will be carry out at the evening or not, he said to me “*If I go with you there, the community will not approve. Such an event is not good for my prestige in the community. If you want to go, you can. ...*” As a secret keeper and an initiated member of the community he has a big responsibility towards his religious uncle/*ğam-mu seyyid* and the community. Therefore, because of this sacred and psychologically big responsibility, most of members intentionally keep their inner teachings and secret religious practices secret.

While talking about their general rituals or doctrine, Nusayris in Karaduvar are comfortable. However, when they are asked about their secret rituals or initiation practices, they mostly give some partial information but again it is not detailed.

1.6 The Organization of the Study

I have tried to organize this study in ways that address the how secret knowledge is transmitted and practiced in a Nusayri religious community. I limit my attention to only a certain form of secrecy and explore and analyze it in a manner that avoids the misunderstandings about my research subject. To limit the scope of the study, I will focus on the social secrecy that goes on how inner teachings, religious knowledge and ritual practices are transmitted to new generations and the social secrecy that is practiced in the religious festivals and collective worships.

My decision was to make the first study on the directly secrecy in a Nusayri religious community in Turkey. Much work on Nusayris in Turkey has already been carried out on other issues. Religious secrecy is mostly practiced and reinvented in the

rituals of initiation into the religion and in collective worships among the religious community.

I divide the study into five chapters. In the first chapter of the study is the introduction part, which has summarized the questions of the study, the reason for the interest in the research topic, the methodology of the study, the research site, and the research subject. In this chapter, I have described the field site in a detail. Moreover, I have given sociological and historical information about inhabitants of the field site.

The second chapter starts with the theoretical framework of the study to analyze the existing literature on secrecy, secret knowledge, and secret societies. This is followed by an interpretation of the concept of secrecy, especially on sociological and anthropological works, most of which base on fieldwork, are analyzed. During the literature review, I look at different works on different religious groups or communities on Nusayris or another communities or societies. In the third part of the second chapter, I define some key concepts that are related to the Nusayri religious group and the concept of secrecy. Following this, lastly I define my position on secrecy that I take in this work.

In the third chapter of the study, I present the ethnographic evidence from the field research. In the first section of the third chapter, learning secrecy and concealing secret by male candidates of the Nusayri religious community will be analyzed. Here, the main findings of the study will be presented. Although I was not allowed to participate in a secret religious ritual or ceremony, I have used several strategies. They are based on the premise that the ethnography requires both a great deal of empirical evidence about the lives of another people and a great deal of care to avoid misunderstanding the evidence. Therefore, I was very careful about on this misunderstandings of the community by non-Nusayris. With this in mind, I gathered a rich empirical information about the Nusayri religious community. The chapter starts with the institution of unclehood that is crucial importance for the religious community

in order to be transmitted the secret knowledge and secret practices to new generations. Moreover, in this section, which rules are loosen, which kinds of negotiaons are discussed, and which kinds of solutions are found will be analzed. The second section of the third chapter continues with a description of the qualifications of the *telmiz* or initiate. Following this, the qualifications of *Ĝam-mu Seyyid* (religion uncle / din amca) will be described and analzed. In the last section of this third chapter, I will describe how a Nusayri initiation into religion is carried out at present in a specific place.

In the fourth chapter, I continue to present the data from the fieldwork. The chapter starts with the description of Nusayri ceremonies and festivals. In this section of the four chapter I give historical informatin from written sources and analyze the data which was gathered from the interniews. Following of this, I mention about Nusayri religious festivals in Karaduvar, and how they are carried out at different circumtances at present. In the third section of this chapter, I present the a historical data from written sources and the data from the field research. In this chapter, I also present data related with the disclosure of secret through the festival of Ĝhadir Khumm and collective worships, *sala*.

In the fifth chapter, I present the data from two virtual communities (online forums) in which followers of Nusayri belief are active participants. I studied these two virtual communities, *aleviform.info* and *AleviForum*, in order to see the big picture that illustrates negotiations and tensions on reducing level of secrecy in Nusayri religious belief among members of the Nusayri belief, and between Nusayris and other followers of beliefs on the internet environment. In my fieldwork in Karaduvar district, some members of the Nusayri belief mentioned that their some secret knowledge and secret ritual of practices had been revealed on the internet, books, and other written publications. Accordingly, some of the participants stated that they were sad because of these revelations of secret Nusayri beliefs. However, in contrast to this impression, other members of the community were supporting this kind of publicizing of Nusayri

belief system on the internet, on television, or in written forms such as book. But they particularly stated that if Nusayrism or Nusayris are informed malevolently, they stated that they would absolutely oppose to such an effort.

In the last chapter of the study, conclusion, I try to shortly summarize the findings of the study as the answers of the research question and I also argue that Nusayris' religious secrecy and social secrecy is more open than before. Although, before the early 2000s there were few works on the Nusayrism and Nusayris, the written works and researches have increased. Today they are more comfortable when they carry out a religious ritual such as Ghadir Khumm festival in Karaduvar.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Secret die, but secrecy grows.
Paul C. Johnson (2002: 26)

If one "knows," one cannot speak; and if one speaks, one must not really "know."
Hugh B. Urban (1998: 210)

2.1 The Interpretation of Secrecy

Before going on to describe and explore secrecy among the secretive Nusaysi religious community in Karaduvar, it is worthwhile exploring current approaches to secrecy, definitions of secrecy, and some important concepts of secrecy. The following review of the literature represents the literature pertinent to my research study.

Simmel on Secrecy

Georg Simmel's one of the many insightful essays is "*The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies*"¹⁰ which was first translated into English in 1906. Simmel, in this essay, saw secrecy as a central social issue in almost every aspect of ordinary life as well as in the special context of secret societies. To categorize secrecy, he analyzed many social fields of human life such as the relations between individuals, relations between individuals and organized social groups or relations between organized social groups (Simmel, 1906: 441-470). According to him, all people such as a merchant, a teacher, or, A and M know something else about each other but they do not reveal it. Sociologically, according to Simmel, all people intentionally or unintentionally conceal

¹⁰ Originally published in Georg Simmel, *Soziologie, Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908), chap. 5. Translated as Part 4 of Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950).

something from one another, and also every relationship between two individuals or groups could be characterized by the ratio of secrecy that involved in it. In this sense, Simmel defines the secrecy as “*one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity*” (ibid.: 462). Furthermore, according to Paul Johnson, which is based on Simmel’s view – a functionalist one:

(...) secrecy cannot disappear because it is necessary to both formation of intimacy within human societies and the possibility of the establishing and self expressing individuality within them. (Johnson, 2002: 25-6)

After describing secrecy, Simmel pointed out some points on secrecy; secrecy is a universal sociological form; secrecy may embrace the highest values; secrecy is not in immediate interdependence with evil, but evil with secrecy; secrecy sets between men; secrecy involves a tension which, at the moment of revelation, finds its release; and it is a sociological expression of moral badness (Simmel, 1906: 463-5).

“privately constructed secrets versus socially constructed secrets”

At this point we need to analyze the concept of secrecy in Simmel a little more. According to Laurel, a sociologist, Simmel distinguished two types of secrets (Laurel, 1998: 330); “privately constructed and concealed secrets which are about the self”, and “socially constructed and concealed secrets which are about social units” (ibid.: 209). These two types of secrecy also show differences in the transmission of secrecy. In privately constructed secrets, a ceremony or a ritual practice is not carried out in order to transmit the secret knowledge or a practice. On the other hand, as a social unit all religions have some secrets or secret knowledge, which are not transmitted to everyone. In secret societies, in general, religious secrets and teachings are transmitted under the control of religious leaders in a religious ritual which is carried out in private places.

Secret societies

While secrecy, according to Simmel, is a sociological ordination that defines two-sided relation of group elements, or rather in connection with other forms of reaction constitutes this total relation, it may further, with the formation of “secret societies,” extend itself over the group as a whole (Simmel, 1906: 469-70). He proceeds that as a sociological situation having a secret as an individual or a group leads to isolation or in contrast “egoistic individualization”. When we think about a secret group or a religious community, the sociological meaning of this form of secrecy becomes internalized. Therefore, there would be exclusion of non-initiated persons in order to maintain the group’s life. In this sense, according to Simmel, the basic purpose of maintaining the secrecy for an individual or a group is *protection*. For this reason, protection of secrecy is a very important responsibility for all members of the secret group or society. The possession of full secret knowledge does away with the need of trusting, while complete absence of knowledge makes trust evidently impossible. Therefore, secrecy is transmitted to new generations by secret initiation ritual practices in a specific order. Additionally, according to Simmel, the secret societies seek means psychologically to promote that secretiveness that cannot be directly forced onto new candidates (ibid.: 473). Consequently, the oath and threats of penalties including the death penalty are mostly used to protect the secrecy by such societies and communities.

“secrecy and confidence”

From this explanation of secrecy as a means of protection of the group or community, Simmel turns to the *confidence* in secret societies, which is actually a mutual confidence of its members. Because of this, confidence is the most important natural force for the secret societies. At this point, according to Simmel, “*the secret society is distinguished in principle from the individual who seeks the protection of secrecy*” (Simmel, 1906: 470).

Until now I have mentioned about Simmel's views on secrecy and secret societies as a general characteristic of all social interactions. However, if two or more people conceal something, the significance of secrecy expands to a social group as a whole. At this point, concealing a secret as a group creates a separation (Murphy, 1980); between men and women (or females and males); a "second world" (Simmel, 1906:462); "secret societies" (ibid.: 470); or a "secondary structure" (ibid.: 483).

Secrecy After Simmel

The sociological study of secrecy has been influenced by the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman is best known for his "dramaturgical" approach, which views people as actors and their behavior as orchestrated performances following largely pre-established scripts (Goffman, 1959). Goffman stated that human life is divided between public "onstage" and private "backstage." I think the people's private "backstage" actions are associated with the "second world ["esoteric world" in secretive Nusayris's words]" (Simmel, 1906). In everyday life, people give to themselves role as the immediate, which are played while concealing other aspects that would conflict with the role.

The continuing interest by a sociologist on secrecy is illustrated in "*Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*", edited by Stanton K. Tefft (1980). In the introduction part of the book, Tefft presents approaches to secrecy. According to him, secrecy plays an important role in the sociocultural processes involved in the formation, maintenance and dissolution of social structures at all levels of sociocultural complexity (1980: 35). In this sense, he also notes that "*secrecy process can have a major influence in shaping human life, creating new social institutions.*"

Secrecy after 1990s

In 1993, *Secrecy and Concealment in Mediterranean Religions* was published, in which there are twenty articles that are relevant to the theme of secrecy or esoterism. In the introduction chapter of the book, Kippenberg and Strousma state that secrecy has helped and permitted the transformation of certain drawbacks in Men's social condition into positive and enduring behaviour and perceptions (Kippenberg & Strousma 1995: xxiv). Kippenberg and Strousma argue the following:

In their existential understanding of secrecy, religions enhance the meaning of interior, individual experience. Further, the acceptance of concealment as a form of piety can protect the individual from outside threats, as well as facilitate the coexistence of rival interpretations in cults and religions. On the other hand, the history of religions has shown that secrecy's effect is not limited to being beneficial. While it strengthens individualism, it may also legitimate hypocrisy and acquiescence in, or the implementation of authoritarian rule. (Kippenberg & Strousma, 1995: xxiv)

From this point of view, secret societies or secret communities that conceal their inner teachings, and do not allow outsiders to participate in secret initiations or collective worships use secrecy as a strategy for survival. In these secretive groups, confidence and trust is important to maintain their religious practices or other aims. In a similar way, Nusayris as a religious minority practice some of their religious teachings and practices after 'Ali was killed while praying in the mosque of Kufa in Iraq, in 661. Since then secret initiation rituals have been carried out by the secretive Nusayris, under no circumstances non-Nusayris. Non-Nusayris or non-initiated Nusayris are not permitted to enter the collective worships and initiations under any circumstances. Therefore, the religious ceremonies are maintained in the private houses of followers of Nusayri religious community.

In 1999, an edited volume with eleven essays was published titled *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, which set as its focus on the role of secrecy in the history of religions (Wolfson, 1999: 4). The essays mention secrecy in different religions and in different historical and social contexts. In these essays, each author, according to the Wolfson, presented an aspect of secrecy from a specific cultural context without attempting to impose any generic definition. Although, according to Wolfson, the essays draw from examples from different religions and areas, some common features of the nature of secrecy and esotericism can be defined (Wolfson, 1999). For instance, (a) esotericism can be defined as “an issue of social power and authority” rather than a secret knowledge that is intentionally keep secret (Urban, 1998), (b) “the logic of esotericism is dialectical that is between the secret that is concealed and the secret that is revealed,” and (c) esotericism can be taken into consideration as “a cross-cultural phenomenon” (Wolfson, 1999: 2-4).

Secrecy after 2000s

Then in the early 2000s, according to Clark Chilson, two excellent monographs based on ethnographic research on secrecy in religion were published: Hugh Urban’s (2001a) book, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tatra, Secrecy, and Power in Colonial Bengal*, on Kartābhajā or “Worshippers of the Master” in India, and Paul Johnson’s book on Candomble in Brazil. In his study, as it has been mentioned in the introduction part of the study, Urban tries to explore the form of secrecy in Kartābhajās” which is an Indian religious movement (Urban, 2001: 4). This book, according to Chilson, is an important source because in his book Urban proposes a new approach to the topic of secrecy in general by focusing on one specific esoteric tradition; Kartābhajās.

Paul Johnson, furthermore, in his study on Candomble intends to explore the secrecy as a sociological concept. According to him, Simmel’s essay on secrecy is the first serious attempt in the sciences to classify types of secrecy and interrogate the conditions for their appeal (Johnson, 2002: 25). He proceeds that nobody ever went

beyond Simmel's sheer suggestive categorization. Among secret societies, according to Johnson, three types can be recognized from Simmel's forms of secrecy (ibid.: 27). First of all, there are some secret societies, which require "a hidden group of people." As an example to this type of secret society, the secretive Nusayris had to hide in Al-Ansariyah Mountains, which are a mountain range in north-western Syria running north-south, parallel to the coastal plain, for many years for fear of slaughter by Sultan Yavuz who was the leader of the Ottoman Empire. In a second type of secret society, others who did not go to the the mountains lived in the city and were not hidden in body but rather "guarded their religious affiliation as secret." Some followers of the Nusayri religious community lived and worked in different cities in Syria but they could not reveal their religious beliefs. A third and more common type is "*relatively* secret societies." They always have some advantages of a certain mobility. They do not conceal their membership but they do not reveal their inner religious doctrines and practices. The secretive Nusayri males in Karaduvar describe themselves as Nusayri, but conceal their specific ritual practices and procedures.

However, according to Johnson, these three types of categories that explain the secret societies are not enough to explain and understand all of them. A fourth possible class of secret societies, in addition to those specified by Simmel, is for those group "for which existence, membership, and procedures are public, but whose interpretation of those procedures are regarded as secret" (ibid.: 27 [Keen, 1994]). The fifth and final type of secret community, for Johnson, is "composed of groups for which secrecy becomes the sociological end in itself, where the community's very purpose is to conceal a [an esoteric] doctrine [and religious gnosis]" (ibid.). Thus, according to Simmel, for the purpose of mutual guarantee of secrecy the initiated constitute a community (Simmel, 1906: 477). In light of these theoretical explanations and discussions, one of my approaches to secrecy is based on Simmel's work as my first point of departure to explore secrecy in Nusayri religious community.

After giving Paul Johnson's four types of secret societies, Maria Dakake (2006: 329-30) criticizes him in her article, *Hiding in Plain: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam*. According to Dakake, none of four types of secret societies do fit totally with early Shi'ism [somehow including the Nusayris].

I nevertheless defend Johnson. At present his categorization, which is based on Georg Simmel's early work on secrecy, is, despite some deficiency in explaining the secrecy of the early Shi'ism, including the secretive Nusayris in the past, a convenient reference to explain secrecy in secretive Nusayris in Karaduvar at present. Besides this, although Dakake has mentioned to Shi'ites' changing historical circumstances, she has not taken account of specific circumstances of other religious groups in Islam.

In April 2006, an edited volume with 12 original essays on the secrecy in Japanese religion up to the 18th century and 3 others on secrecy in religion outside Japan was published by Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen titled *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (2006). In general, these important essays on secrecy trace out the secret characteristics and practices in Japanese religion. In the book, in an essay, *Secrets and secrecy in the study of religion: Comparative views from the Ancient World*, written by Albert de Jong, discusses secrecy in relation to privacy, esotericism, mystery, and other restrictions. According to Chilson, in his article on secrecy and esotericism de Jong states the following:

... distinction between social secrecy, which is based on two or more people intentionally hiding something from others, and esotericism, in which a deity is the primary "owner" of a secret, is helpful when analysing the complexities of secrecy in Japanese esoteric Buddhism. (Chilson, 2010: 203 [de Jong, 2006: 42])

Following this volume, in the same year in June, an important and comprehensive special issue of the *Journal of American Academy of Religion* on secrecy and religion was published. The issue contained seven essays and a

bibliographic essay. In this bibliographic essay, *Religion and Secrecy: A Bibliographic Essay*, Ann Williams Duncan states that the role of secrecy in religious traditions is more attractive to the researchers because of the events of the early twenty-first century such as September 11 (Duncan, 2006:470). She also points out that sociologists, anthropologists, and theorists of religion have attempted to study secrecy as the only fundamental element of religiosity. However, “secrecy”, according to Duncan, “is perhaps most evident in specific religious traditions” (ibid.). Also, according to Chilson, after the mid-1990s some scholars (*Hugh Urban, Pul Johnson, Ian Kenn, Elliot Wolfson, Hans Kippenberg, Guy G. Stroumsa*) shed much needed light on the nature of secrecy in religion (Chilson, 2010: 707). In Table 2.1, which was prepared by Gary T. Marx & Gleen W. Muscherf (2009), the number of studies on secrecy and secret societies can be seen. In my opinion, in his warning Duncan is right in stressing the importance of secrecy in certain religious communities or social groups. Although for instance, Georg Simmel’s studies such as *The Metropolis, The Philosophy of Money*, and *The Stranger* are widely used in sociology, his study on secrecy, *The Secret and the Secret Society*, is rarely or never taken into account.

According to Dakake, much of the work on secrecy and religion in recent years has been done in the context of anthropological studies of contemporary religious groups, whose use of secrecy is largely related to their minority or marginalized status (Dakake, 2006: 325).

Table 2.1: Use of “Secrecy” and “Secret Societies” as Article Keywords, 1900-Nov. 2007 (Source: Marx & Muscherf 2009: 229)

Database	Soc. Abstracts		Legal Coll.		Comm. & Mass Media Complete	
Decade	Secrecy	Secret Societies	Secrecy	Secret Societies	Secrecy	Secret Societies
2000s	113	26	40	2	20	-
1990s	54	14	19	3	5	-
1980s	33	25	13	1	9	-
1970s	15	8	5	-	4	-
1960s	6	6	37	1	-	-
1950s	6	6	4	2	1	-
1940s	3	4	-	-	-	-
1930s	5	4	1	-	-	-
1920s	-	8	-	5	-	-
1910s	2	10	-	-	-	-
1900s	1	19	-	-	-	-
Total	232	130	92	14	39	-

Notes: Subjects searches of academic databases were limited to refereed journal articles published January, 1900 to November 30, 2007.

Consequently, I would like to mention an article on secrecy which has been fruitful for my study on secrecy in the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar, and also could be beneficial for other similar works studying the notion of secrecy. In his article “*A Religion in Death Throes: How Secrecy Undermines the Survival of a Crypto Shin Buddhist Tradition in Japan Today*” Clark Chilson states that “*the secrecy of Urahomon is more social than the esoteric*”(2010: 203). Chilson’s analysis of secrecy provides new insights into the basis and significance of the process of revelation and concealment. I here quote Chilson:

To understand how “esoteric” religions are different from underground ones, we need to distinguish between esoteric secrecy and social secrecy. To make a simple distinction, esoteric secrecy relates to divine concealment of ultimate truths

while social secrecy refers to intentional concealment by people of things less than ultimate. (2010: 203).

From Chilson's point of view on secrecy, in order to explore and explain secrecy in a religion or a religious community, we need to study secrecy as esoteric secrecy and social secrecy. He bases on Albert de Jong's definition of esoteric. According to Chilson, de Jong states that "*as a general term - the word esoteric refers to system of interpretation focusing on finding extraordinary realities behind ordinary texts, persons, or objects*" ([de Jong, 2006] Chilson, 2010: 203). Moreover, Chilson proceeds that *esoteric interpretations are often referred to as and 'secret' the 'owner' of the secret (i.e., the secret keeper) is a dividing being*. Based upon this view, this understanding of "esoteric" can be applied to Nusayri religious belief. Therefore, my second point of departure to explore secrecy in secretive Nusayri religious community is Clark Chilson's conceptualization of secrecy in religion as esoteric secrecy and social secrecy.

So, I should expand on Chilson's conceptualization of secrecy in religion. According to Chilson, the way esoteric secrets are disclosed also distinguishes them from social secrets. Although esoteric secrets are revealed in ritual contexts which induce an experiment that allows the secret to be comprehended, just viewing or hearing about an esoteric secret or reading about it, would lead to misunderstandings of the secret. In contrast to this, social secrecy are generally revealed and understood through modes of learning and local language. More specifically, if a religious group or a religious community conceals its religious practices and rituals, their secrecy is not esoteric, but social. Whereas esoteric secrets are inner doctrines of a religion, social secrets are created by people when two or more people intentionally hide something from others or the non-initiated. According to Chilson:

When those who claim to possess knowledge of esoteric teachings and rituals designed to reveal esoteric knowledge conceal that knowledge from others and transmit it to others in

places and ways not revealed to outsiders, they are wrapping those esoteric doctrines and practices in a layer of social secrecy. (2010: 204)

In light of this approach, the coexistence of both types of secrecy is widely found in Nusayri religious community. Within the scope of the custom of unclehood, for instance, esoteric teachings are transmitted from the *ğam-mu seyyid* / the uncle to the *telmiz* or initiate, and are not to be revealed to non-Nusayris who are not in the lineage. When I consider my research subject, in general, the followers of Nusayri belief have concealed their esoteric lineages from others. They have concealed themselves through social secrecy. For the members of Nusayri religious community, social secrecy has been used as a way of avoiding persecution or slaughter. Therefore, social secrecy allows them to maintain their religious practices and avoid external attacks.

From Chilson's point of view on esoteric secrecy and social secrecy, social secrecy is a form that is defined by Sissela Bok as "intentional concealment" (Bok, 1989: 5). Secrecy also, according to Bok, "denotes the methods used to conceal, such as codes or disguises or camouflage, and the practices of concealment ..." (ibid: 7). In addition to this explanation, she gives an example that anything can be secret such as a path, a riddle, a jewel, an oath as long as it is kept intentionally hidden. The word secrecy refers to the concealment (ibid.: 6), which is also the form of secrecy defined by Georg Simmel as a "*sociological technique*" (Simmel, 1906: 483-495).

2.2 Literature Review on Secrecy and Secret Societies

This study is the first to tackle the problem of secrecy and revelation in a Nusayri community in Turkey. I have reviewed literature especially fieldworks parallel to the topic of the my study. The main points of these works, as far as I could reach up to the time, are summarized as follows:

One of works on secrecy is William P. Murphy's article (1980), *Secret Knowledge as Property Power in Kpelle Society: Elders versus Youth*, which is based on his fieldwork among the Kpelle society, which was carried out in 1973-74. For Murphy, Kpelle society provides an ideal case study of secrecy because the institutionalization of secrecy is a paramount and pervasive feature of social life (1980: 194). The question "How is secrecy controlled by elders?" has an important meaning for my study because it is known that secrecy among Nusayri community especially for elders is crucial for their future. Especially elders think that if those who are not Nusayri learn their esoteric secrecy, their social structure, and order based on secrecy can be destroyed. Moreover, to Murphy, the secret itself "*creates the separation and exclusion*" between males and females in ceremonies and religious performings. Besides this separation, elders have maintained the esoteric knowledge with the religious leaders. Murphy states that elders in community seek to protect and promote their versions of history.

A study on secrecy in religion was carried out among Lugbara (from 1949 to 1953) by John Middleton, a social anthropologist. In his article that is based on his fieldwork, *Secrecy in Lugbara Religion*, Middleton discusses some definite dimensions of secrecy in one African religious system, that of the Lugbara of Uganda. His primary concern is on the place of secrecy in the belief system and social organization. Besides this, Middleton states that a kind of Prophet will one day return to the world, which bases on gnosticism. This situation is similar to secretive Nusayris because they believe that The Prophet Mehdi will return to the world one day. To sum up, Middleton has shown that for Lugbara what is secret, hidden from ordinary men, is associated with Divinity. Men, except (to a limited extend) rainmakers and prophets, cannot understand the secret, and thus cannot control it. As it is seen among Nusayries, secrets are not transmitted to women or children because it is thought that women and children may reveal their esoteric secrets to people outside the community, which might lead to dangerous results for the community.

One another fieldwork on secrecy and religion was carried out by Charles D. Piot, between 1982 and 1984. In his article (1993), *Secrecy, Ambiguity, and the Everyday in Kabre Culture*, he states that “My own attention to the role and importance of secrecy in Kabre was slow in coming. It was not until my third field trip, after having already spent 21 months among Kabre, that I became aware of its significance. This was in part because Kabre do not have secret societies and very little of the esoteric knowledge possessed by elders is concealed from other members of the community.” This article proposes an interpretation of Kabre everyday secrecy that relies on indigenous understandings and attempts to move beyond the functionalist assumptions of many previous analyses of secrecy in Africa. Finally, according to Piot, in Kabre culture the secrecy has an important place among people’s everyday life and discourse.

Studies on Nusayris and Nusayris’ Secrecy

When I collectively look at these studies or publications on secrecy and religion summarized above, there are many works on secrecy in different religious traditions, in different places, and also at different times. However, I have not seen one single work that directly tackles the problem of social secrecy in a Nusayri/Alawita community in the literature of secrecy in religion. Although there are many fruitful and important theses and books on Nusayris or Arab Alevi/Alawites in Turkey, none of them has specifically and directly carried out a fieldwork on secrecy and concealment in secretive Nusayri religious community.

In 1922, *Secrets Sects Of Syria And The Lebanon* was written by Bernard H. Springett. He attempts to search various ceremonial initiations, manners, and custom from Syria and Lebanon. In the book, about the origin of the masonic rituals of Freemasons, Springett states that “we came from the East and proceeded to the West” (Springett, 1922:5). This book is a fruitful source to explore the history of initiational ceremonials, feasts, divinity, incarnation, theology and doctrine of Nusayri religion. Between pages 148-153 the initiation into the Nusayri religion is cited from *Sulaiman*

Efendi of Adhanah (his book's name is *The Book of Sulaiman's First Ripe Fruit* that reveals most of the mysteries of the Nusayri belief system). When I compare my field notes and those which were written in Springett's book, I can say that they are similar in many ways. In account of closed and secret structure of the religion, it can be said that its rituals and ceremonies have been maintained for centuries.

In 1924, a book called in Turkish *Arap Alevileri Tarihi (Târîhi 'l- 'Aliviyyîn)*¹¹ was written by a Nusayri, Muhammed Emin Ğalip et-Tavil. Bying writing history of a secret religious community, the writer, as a member of the community, aimed to tell all pressures and persecutions to which they have been exposed. This study is known as the first study written by a member of the community. In the book, he bases his arguments especially on his religious education and observations at the times.

A study on Nusayris titled *The Nusayrî- 'Alawî Religion: An Inquiry into Its Theology and Liturgy* was written by Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky in 2002. This study is based on written works by both Nusayris and non-Nusayris. According to these two researchers, little study has so far been devoted to the Nusayri religion. They have contributed to many issues about the Nusayri theology and liturgy. For example, they have traced Nusayri trinitarian theology from seventh century to thirteen century. Besides this, in the book they have presented a deep knowledge and discussion on the Nusayri gnosticism, the mysteries of Nusayri Divinity, and the Nusayri calendar, and catechism [initiation into religion] of the Nusayri religion. For me, especially the chapter of *A Catechism of the Nuşayrî Religion* of the book is very beneficial in order to learn the Nusayri secret rituals of initiation from the written works. Because of limited written sources on the Nusayri initiation, I could not understand this secret ritual. In this sense, at the beginning of the study, this chapter of the book was helpful for my study on the initiation into the Nusayri belief system.

¹¹ The book was firstly published in Arabic in 1924 in Beyrut.

On the initiation into the Nusayris of Syria, as far as I have seen in the literature, a researcher, Bella Tendler Krieger who is PhD student at Princeton University, has carried out a research on initiation in Nusayris through written Nusayri texts for two years. As Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky's work (2002), she has carried out her research through Nusayri written works.

2.3 Concepts of Secrecy and Nusayri Belief

First of all, I should state that this study is not about revealing secrets but rather about social secrecy in Nusayri religious community. So, some key concepts relating to secrecy and Nusayri religious community must be explained. To this aim, I will give some historical background and definitions of syncretism, esoterism, gnostic, and dissimulation (*taqīya*).

2.3.1 Syncretism

Syncretism, in the *Dictionary of Religions*, is defined as “the fusion of religious cults or movements” (1984: 317). In this situations of intercultural contact, the religions, spontaneously or by intentional adaptation, tend to interact among each other. In more simple terms syncretism means “the mixing together of two or more elements” (Bowie 2000: 252)

According to Peter van der Veer, “syncretism, is a term that in comparative religion refers to a process of religious amalgamation, of blending heterogeneous beliefs and practices” (van der Veer, 1994: 208). It is an aspect of interaction over time between different groups. Syncretism also refers to the synthesis of different religious forms. For Shaw and Stewart, anthropology itself is both a syncretizing and creolizing discourse and a discourse about syncretism (Shaw & Stewart, 1994: 22).

Paul Johnson defines the terms “*secretism*” as “*the active milling, polishing, and promotion of the reputation of secrets*” (Johnson, 2002: 3). He also adds that “secterism” is freely and generously shared. Similarly, according to Chilson, secretism “refers to the active invocation of secrecy as a source of group’s identity, the promotion of the reputation of special access to restricted knowledge, and the successful performance or staging of such access (Chilson, 2006: 2). Parallel to this explanations of the “sencretism”, the Nusayris who live in the East of Turkey (in Hatay, Adana, and Mersin) have many mutual holy and festival days with different religious origins. The Nusayri belief system, according to Bar-Ashar and Kofsky, is a clear example of a syncretistic religion (2002: 1). In addition, it also compose and fuses elements of different cults and creeds of very different, and remote, origins. For example, among these, to Bar-Ashar and Kofsky, are various pagan beliefs (residues of ancient Mesopotamia and Syrian cults), as well as Persian, Christian, Gnostic, and Muslim—both Sunni and Shi‘i—religious teachings, practices, and doctrines. These are a mirror reflecting the syncretic nature of the Nusayrism. In this sense, the Nusayri beliefs system have syncretized different traditions and customs of other believes in the process.

2.3.2 Esoteric/ism

The content of the word "esotericism" is small (*eso* signifies “within,” “inside,” “into;” and *ter* suggests an opposition). According to Antonie Faivre, "esotericism" shows itself to be expandable, transparent, and semantically indeterminate (Faivre 1995: xi). "Esotericism" generally associates the idea of "secrecy," of a "discipline of the arcane," of knowledge limited to groups or associations that are called "secret." (ibid.: xii)

According to Urban, it has been recently argued; perhaps it is best to view esotericism as an issue of social power and authority rather than as a hidden symbolic content that is deliberately withheld (Urban, 1998: 209-248).

In this respect, Nusayri religious community has certainly an esoteric belief. Nusayri new generation, for instance, is initiated into the religious belief under the control of *ğam-mu seyyid* through secret initiation ceremonies in stages. In order to be admitted they have to swear not to reveal secret knowledge with people who have not been admitted to the religious community in the proper ways. The esoteric character of the Nusayri religious community is similar to other esoteric religious groups. Its ceremonies, symbols, secrets, rules, and customs are belieffully transmitted "from male generation to male generation."

2.3.3 Gnosticism

It is possible to speak of esotericism with reference to "gnosis". Gnosis is defined as knowledge. In a sense, gnosis is a superior way of understanding of the universe or the divine trinity. In Greek, gnostic means knowing (Elizabeth and et all, 2006: 179). The term is widely used in the German-speaking world to refer to Gnosticism.

In the Continuum Dictionary of Religion, gnosticism is defined as following:

A religious movement of late antiquity which regarded material existence as the imperfect creation on an inferior god (*demirgue*) and strove for the release of the human self or spirit (*pneuma*) from the body and its return to the divine realm of light. (edit. by Pye, 1994: 96)

According to *the Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, sometimes after 765, the doctrine of the *Nur Muhammadi* ("the Muhammadan Light") being attributed to the sixth generation descendant of 'Ali, Ja'far as-Sadiq [who has an important place among the Nusayris]: thereupon follows of a shower of sparks which is the appearance of the "Seveners" who are, in fact, various Gnostic groups in Islam (2002: 290).

According to Bar-Asher and Kofsky, mentioning an ancient Nusayri myth, “the souls of gnostic originated in the divine world of light that existed before the creation of the material world” (2002: 75). Besides this, according to Nusayri theology, they state that Adam’s expulsion from paradise can be interpreted similarly to the myth of the fall of the souls (ibid.: 76). Paralleling this Nusayri myth and theolog, during my fieldwork some Nusayris told me similar explanations about their souls. For instance, they claim that they interpret the Quran correctly because they use a technique that is allegorical interpretation. Also, they state that the inner or esoteric meaning of the Quran are taught to new generations. They also believe that their souls originated in the stars.¹² Before they were sent to the world by Allah [during my fieldwork some of the participants said to me He was also ‘Ali], their souls were stars. Also they believe that after seven times of transmigration (*tenasüh, tanasukh*), those of true believers become stars in the great world of the light. An elder and retired Nusayri male while talking in a local in Karaduvar told me:

Look, what do you think about our souls? Where they are going after we die? Our souls as Nusayri are born seven times in different bodies. Every life time can be different. Some of them can be two months or seventy years. But, our souls are circulated up to seven, it can not be more according to our belief.

While he told me this incarnation the muezzin started the call for prayer from the mosque. At the same time a dog that was lying in the garden of the local started barking. The owner of the local, about 40 years old, and who was talking with us asked

¹² Also on this issue Sulaimān Efendi (al-Adhani in Kitāb al-bakūra, pp.59-62) states that “All of the Nusairīs that in the beginning, before the existence of the world, they were shining lights and luminous stars and that they used to distinguished between submission and rebellion, neither eating, drinking, nor excreting, but beholding ‘Ali ibn Abī Tālib in the yellow aspect. They remained in this condition 7,077 years and 7 hours. Then they thought among themselves, “As for creation, there has not been created anybody nobler than we”. This was the first transgression that the Nusairīs committed. ...” Olsson, Tord (1998), *The Gnosis of Mountaineers and Townspeople: The religion of the Syrian Alawites, or the Nusairīs in Alevi Identity*, Edited by Tord Olsson, Elizabeth Ozdalga & Catharina Raundvere, Published by Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul.

to elder: “*Uncle why do they bark when calling the prayers?*” The elder man responded as follows “They were humans before their incarnation. Because of not believing and praying to 'Ali, they passed into dogs.” This Nusayri belief of incarnation is also told in *Kitâbu'l Mecmu*.¹³

Thus, Nusayri literature and secretive Nusayris use different symbols and myths. For the Nusayris, knowledge means above all true perception of the mystery of the divine trinity: 'Ali, Muhammad, and Salman (*AMS*). In the secretive Nusayris' collective worships, worship of God is identified with gnosis, therefore it is progressing in this secret knowledge of 'Ali, which constitutes secretive Nusayri collective worship. Moreover, in the secret ceremonies *AMS* is symbolized as divinity.

In summary, Nusayris claim that as esoteric they interpret the Quran allegorically; therefore they can have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of the divine trinity. Besides this, they also declared that they as Nusayris were created by Allah as “chosen ones/people” (*seçilmişler olarak yaratıldıklarını*).

2.3.4 Ta'wil and Taqīya (Dissimulation)

Ta'wil and taqīya are practiced by the members of the Nusayri religious community when they need to conceal their religious beliefs, practices, and inner

¹³ In his article titled *The Belief in Rebirth of the Druses and Other Syrian Sects (Folklore, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun. 30, 1928), pp. 133-148 Published by: Taylor & Francis)* Theodore Besterman cited from Rene Dussaud (*Histoire et religion des Nusairis (Paris, 1900), pp. 161*) as following: “The sacred book of the Nusairi is the Kitab al-Majmu, a brief document consisting of sixteen short sections. From it, and from lesser sources, we learn that the Nusairi look upon rebirth as a terrible necessity, continued until the soul is purified. When initiating a new adept the Imam says to him, -" If you unveil this mystery, the earth will not suffer you to be buried in it, and on your return you will not re-enter a human envelope: no, when you die, you will enter the envelope of a degrading transformation whence there will be no deliverance for you, forever and ever." The soul of one who is observant passes through only seven lives; otherwise he is condemned to journey through eighty incarnations. As has been seen, it is even possible for a soul to be obliged to enter an animal. Such is the fate of those who do not pray to 'Ali ibn Abu Talib: they pass into camels, mules, donkeys, and sheep. Nor are all human incarnations looked upon as equally fortunate: the worst fate is to be reborn into a Jew, a Sunnite, or a Christian. Finally, the purified soul takes its place among the stars.”

teachings. According to Tord Olsson, ta'wil is "the allegorical interpretation of the Koran and the Islamic rituals" (Olsson, 1998: 180). He also states that Alewives [Nusayris] in Syria apply to the ta'wil in secretly, towards the interior of the communication and in the communication between its members (ibid.).

In *the Encyclopedia of Islam*, "takiyya" is defined like other words from the same root, *tuka*ⁿ, *tukāt*, *takwā*, and *itikā'*, as "prudence, fear" [...], and also, from the root *k-t-m*, *kitmān* "action covering, dissimulation" as opposed to *idhā'a* "revealing, spreading information," denotes dispensing with the ordinance of religion in cases of constraint and when there is a possibility of harm (2000: 134).

In addition to this definition of taqīya, in the same encyclopedia mentioned above, it is also mentioned that although Sunni authorities state that the question was not such a burning one, according to al-Tabari on sura XVI, 108 (Tafsir, Bulak 1323, xxiv, 122): "If any one is compelled and professes unbelief with his tongue, while his heart contradicts him, in order to escape his enemies, no blame falls on him, because God takes his servants as their hearts believe" (ibid.).

Another definition of taqīya is given by the *Continuum Dictionary of Religion*. According to this dictionary,

"*taqiya*" (Arabic: 'caution', 'fear'), in Islam, has been described by an early authority as the action of one who, in order to escape his enemies, is compelled to profess unbelief with his tongue while his heart contradicts him. But blame does not fall upon him as God accepts what is in his heart. (1994: 96)

Among the Alawites in Syria, the taqīya is practiced to conceal their inner teachings or esoteric knowledge and to give a false information of one's religion in situations of political or religious menace (Olsson, 1998: 180).

2.4 My Approach to Secrecy

Secrecy as Phenomenon and Concept

I have thus outlined some of the main theoretical approaches to secrecy and put forward several definitions of secrecy. Furthermore, I have summarized some works on secrecy. It is clear that secrecy is a sociological phenomenon of the greatest importance, as Simmel mentioned, which also involves both concealment and revelation. I now propound briefly the position on secrecy that I take in this study.

Secrecy is a general and particular sociological phenomenon that can take a variety of forms under different circumstances. This feature of secrecy was a problem for me in the beginning of my study. The first point that I had to tackle was how I should conceptualize the concept of secrecy. Before deciding on a definition or conceptualization of secrecy, with the direction of my supervisor Assist. Prof. Aykan Erdemir, I have read many studies on secrecy, secret, secret knowledge, revelation, and secret societies in different religious traditions, in different places, and also at different times. I did not pay attention to whether these studies are directly related to Nusayris or Nusayri belief system. During this researching and reading process, I have found many studies including Brazilian Candomblé,¹⁴ Freemasonry, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Mafia.

One of the studies is *Secret Knowledge as Property Power in Kpelle Society: Elders versus Youth*, which was written by William Murphy (1980). In this short article which was based on a fieldwork, I found some key words that are secret, secret knowledge, secrecy as a power by elders. From this study, I found out another study on secrecy titled *Secrecy, Ambiguity, and the Everyday in Kabre Culture*, which was written by Charles D. Piot (1993). In this short article, Piot draws attention to secrecy in everyday life. He also mentions the role of secrecy, which was very important for me

¹⁴ Afro-Brazilian religion cultivating orixás, or the locale of such practices.

because from this point of view I have tried to understand secrecy in the Nusayri religious community. Moreover, in this context, I have searched articles that are written or studies on secrecy and the role of secrecy. But, these were not satisfactory for me to understand the secrecy in a religious minority group.

After doing these researches and reading, I found an article by Georg Simmel titled *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies*. This study is very significant - for my study because thanks to Simmel I became hopeful about studying secrecy in a socially secret religious community. Apart from Simmel's study on secrecy or secret societies I had not found a study that is directly focuses on these sociological phenomena. In general, I base my study on secrecy on Simmel's sociological concepts of secrecy and secret societies. In this sense, I take Simmel's work on secrecy as my first point of departure to explore secrecy in the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar.

Simmel's broad conceptualization of secrecy and secret society could help me understand and explain the notion of secrecy in secretive Nusayri religion, but it was not sufficient. The basic of secretive Nusayri religious community is an esoteric (*batin*) and external (*zahir*) religious community. They have carried out some of their religious ceremonies such as collective worships and rituals of initiation secretly. In addition to this, non-Nusayris and Nusayri women and non-initiated males are definitely not allowed to participate. Also, the collective worships and rituals of initiation are carried out in private houses. Therefore, in order to understand deeply how an esoteric religion maintains and keeps secret its religious rituals and practices at this time, I needed to distinguish secrecy. I carried out fieldwork, but I could not exactly describe secrecy in Nusayri religious community that is also mainly esoteric. At this point it was crucial to distinguish social secrecy from esoteric secrecy. I use the term secrecy to refer to any behavior in which people intentionally conceal information and ritual practices from others.

To understand a phenomenon like secrecy requires an approach that does not begin and end with a holistic system or approach. Thanks to Clark Chilson's distinguishing of secrecy in religion or religious communities I have understood secrecy as an phenomenon and concept in the Nusayri community. According to Chilson, to understand how "esoteric" religions are different from underground ones, we need to distinguish esoteric secrecy from social secrecy. Briefly, to Chilson, although esoteric secrecy relates to divine concealment of ultimate truths, social secrecy relates to "intentional concealment" (Bok, 1989) by people of things less than ultimate. From this point of view, Clark Chilson's distinguishing social secrecy from esoteric secrecy is my second point of departure to explore, understand, and explain secrecy in Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar.

Conclusion

In this second chapter, I have outlined the existant literature on secrecy and secret societies, and I have also defined my conceptual place among them. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political theorists, and theologians have undertaken studies of religion and secrecy in general. The first time secrecy is sociologically used by Georg Simmel in his article in 1906. In this article, after he explained the term secrecy in a detailed manner, he stated that secrecy is "*one of the greatest accomplishments of humanity*", and it must be considered as a sociological phenomenon. According to Simmel, there is a close relation between secrecy and confidence among secret societies. After Simmel, some sociologists studied on secrecy. One of them is Erving Goffman. According to him, human life is divided between public "onstage" and private "backstage". Thi conceptualization is similar Nusayris's interpretation of religion; according to Nusayri tradition there are two meanings of the suras in the Quran, and one of them is lived as esoteric and the other is lived as external.

After 1980s, more important works on secrecy and religion published on secrecy and religion. Some of the studies are composed of collected essays on secrecy. For instance, some of them are titled as follows: *Secrecy and Concealment in Mediterranean Religions (1993)*, *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions (1999)*, *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion (2006)*, and *Religion and Secrecy (2006)*. When these works on secrecy and religion are overallly evaluated, a photograph has been emerged to follow secrecy which must be studied and considered as a social or sociological phenomenon; otherwise, it could not be explored and explained. In addition to this, when secrecy in religion or a religious group or community is studied, according to Chilson (2010), secrecy must be divided as esoteric secrecy and social secrecy.

From this point of view, in this study when I analyze secrecy and negotiating of it in Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar, I have utilised Georg Simmel's and Clark Chilson's conceptualization of secrecy.

CHAPTER III

LEARNING SECRECY AND CONCEALING SECRET

*'Secrecy process' can have a major influence
in shaping human life, creating new social institutions.*
Stanton K. Tefft (1980: 37)

As a religious belief, the Nusayris have historically lived as a secretive minority. Secretive Nusayris are known as a community with secrets. The concealing of the secret religious knowledge, the religious training, the esoteric interpretation of the Quran, and the secret practices transmitted from generation to generation is accepted as a very important “sacred” responsibility for all Nusayri males. To protect their communities from the slander and slaughter of “other religious groups”, secretive Nusayris have disclosed their teachings only to fully initiated members sworn to keep secret those teachings secret.

In the literature conceptually there are two kinds of explanation of secrecies that are “esoteric [bâtin] secrecy” and “social secrecy”. In his article, Chilson defines esoteric secrecy as a theological side and content of the secrets of the religion or the religious community (2010: 203). In the article, social secrecy is defined as a typically revealed and comprehended through normative language and modes of learning, not through an experience induced by a ritual. Moreover, Chilson says that when a religious group conceals its practices so outsiders may not view or learn them; their secrecy is not esoteric, but social. Social secrets are created by people when two or more people conceal something from others. So if a religious community has practiced secretly a secret festival, an initiation rite, and a secret ceremony to which others or non-initiated people are not allowed to participate, this community is defined as a

secret community. Therefore we can define the Nusayri religious community as secret community.

All Nusayri males are responsible for learning the secrecy and concealing the secret. The Nusayris are very secretive about their religious beliefs (Moosa, 1987: 372). To learn the secret and the religion and also to be a member of the community, young Nusayri males have to pass secret initiation rituals that take about nine months, and are a central component of the social, religious and cultural life of many Nusayri males. This custom is called “*ğam-mu seyyid*” which is also called the institution of unclehood or the custom of unclehood. This term is also used to refer religion uncle or uncle. However, there are some specific compulsory prerequisites that young males have to fulfill in order to be allowed to start Nusayri secret initiation rites.

Tefft states that “‘secrecy process’ can have a major influence in shaping human life, creating new social institutions” (Tefft, 1980: 37). As Tefft mentions in this sentence, a similar secrecy process has occurred within the secretive Nusayri community. For example, in consequence of this secrecy process, different practices and institutions have occurred in the Nusayri religious community. One of the most important and fundamental of these institutions is the institution of unclehood that includes learning secrecy and concealing the secret religious knowledge and religious teachings. Thus, the control over the secrecy provides a safety for the community. To participate in a Nusayri initiation rite you must be an initiated Nusayri male; otherwise, it is impossible. Although there is no such a social punishment in Nusayrism, those who do not obey the religious and social rules are ostracized from the religious ceremonies and the community, and they are also not allowed to participate in *ı-salas*. Such persons are called “*memnu*” in Karaduvar. In a different place where Nusayris live, such persons may be called different names. However, as far as the participants told me, today the social punishments are not applied as much as in the past.

Non-Nusayris and non-initiated males are not allowed to participate in initiation rites and the *ı-salas*. I wanted to observe an initiation rite ceremony but it was not possible. Because I am not a Nusayri, they did not give me the permission to participate in an initiation rite. On account of this obstacle, in order to understand and describe the Nusayri initiation rite I asked some questions to people such as how the institution of unclehood worked in the past and how it works today.

For the names of young males who started the initiation ritual I was told different names such as *telmiz*, *tilmiz*, *sabi*, and *tilmit*. A person with whom I interviewed used to refer the young non-initiated males *telmiz*. But persons I interviewed and who knew me before the interview mostly used *telmiz*.

In this chapter, I present the data from the field research, and four descriptive publications (Türk, 2005; Keser, 2004; İšođlu, 2005; Aslan, 2003) addressing the initiation rituals of secretive Nusayri belief. Following this, I will describe and analyze the initiation process and the institution of unclehood: the process of learning secrecy and concealing secrets, qualities of the *telmiz*¹⁵ and *đam-mu seyyid*, rituals of initiation. And lastly I evaluate the chapter; what kinds of changes have occurred in the process, how they reproduce the religious and cultural boundaries that are changing, what different opinions about practicing the initiation rituals and the religious training. The term *telmiz* is commonly used to refer to the Nusayri children being initiated by the *đam-mu seyyid*.

3.1 Transmission of the Collective Secret: The Institution of Unclehood

For the first time I heard the custom of unclehood [*amcalık geleneđi*] in secretive Nusayri religious belief from my classmate when I was in high school. At that time, I knew nothing about the secretive Nusayri religious community or Nusayrism,

¹⁵ The term *telmiz* is commonly used to refer the Nusayri initiate children. In addition, the term is used in some places where Nusayris live in Turkey.

but by talking with my classmate - who had completed Nusayri religious training - I learned some general things about the religion of the community and the Nusayri initiation rituals. After I said “I am Alevi”, his first question to me was as follows; “*What is the meaning or place of Ali in your belief? (Sizin inancınızda Ali'nin anlamı ve yeri nedir?) How do you perceive Ali? (Siz Ali'yi ne olarak görüyorsunuz?)*” Despite the fact that both of us defined ourselves as Alevi and some of our religious practices and institutions were similar, I recognized that many of Nusayris’ rituals and religious practices differ from the ones I know as a member of Alevi belief. The institution of unclehood in Nusayrism and the institution of *musahiplik* in Alevism resemble each other in some aspects, but at a closer look there are also significant differences.

The institution of *musahiplik* also called fraternity of the path (*yol kardeşliği*), brotherhood, the custom of ritual siblinghood, and other world fraternity (*ahiret kardeşliği*) is ‘a fundamental institution of Alevism’ (Yaman & Erdemir, 2006: 82). In this Alevi custom, ‘two unrelated lay men together with their wives enter into an irrevocable kinship relationship (*musahiplik*) that demands total solidarity [...], as well as mutual encouragement and exhortation to walk the Alevi path’ (Zeidan, 1995).

As implied above, the institution of unclehood and the institution of *musahiplik* in some aspects resemble each other. In the custom of unclehood and in the institution of *musahiplik*, virtual social relationships are deeper than a blood relationship. According to these two institutions, intermarriage between the two families is strictly forbidden (Gülçiçek, 2004: 1263). The virtual affinity is also very important for these two communities in terms of keeping social control and maintaining the solidarity. Through both institutions, the religious knowledge and the doctrine of the communities are transmitted from generation to generation. In the institution of *musahiplik*, *talips* (initiates) are initiated during the *ikrar ayini* (ritual ceremony) with the help of the religious guide (*rehber*) (Yaman & Erdemir, 2006: 82). In a similar way, young

Nusayri males are initiated into religion by the help of the *ğam-mu seyyid* in the institution of unclehood.

The situation and place of women in *musahiplik* and the custom of unclehood is different. To participate in the initiation ritual is strictly forbidden for women and non-initiated Nusayri children. They just serve in good deeds (*hayırlar*). Contrary to this, female Alevi children are accepted to initiation into the religion. They also take active a role in religious worship, called *cem ceremony*. Transmission of the religious knowledge and practices of Alevi community to female Alevi children is widespread. Whereas, regarding the institution of unclehood, Nusayri women cannot participate in religious ceremonies, Alevi women can participate in and they can also be assigned duties and responsibilities in religious ceremonies. Revealing of the practices and doctrines of Alevi belief has increased since 1990s (Şahin, 2002). Such a process, however, has not taken place (at least not to this extent) in the Nusayri community.

After this short comparison of these two fundamental institutions in the two communities, I can then look closer at the institution of unclehood of secretive Nusayri religious community. In transmitting the secret knowledge to new generations and concealing it from persons or groups outside the community, the most significant mechanism is the institution of unclehood. '*ğam-mu seyyid*' or "*emmü'l seyyid*" is used to refer to the religion uncle (*rehber* and *spiritual guide*). In Arabic "*amm*" "*ğam*" and "*emmü'l*" refers to paternal uncle and also in Karaduvar where I did my fieldwork people mostly use "*amm*" and "*ğam*" to refer to paternal uncle. The terms of *sayyid*¹⁶, *seyyid*, *seyit* or *sayit* refer to people who are descendants and certain relatives of the Prophet Muhammad. The term also came to denote the direct descendants of the Prophet through his grandson, Husayn, the son of the union of the Prophet's daughter,

¹⁶ Sayyid: originally, chief, e.g. of an Arabian tribe, and then, Islamic times, a title of honor for descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, being in this respect in many ways coterminous with the term of sharif. (Bosworth and et al, 1997: 251)

Fatima, and his son in-law (and cousin), Ali. In *Kitabu'l Mecmu*, *seyyid* is used for Muhammad and Salman who were created by Allah.

In secretive Nusayri religious belief, the secret and esoteric knowledge and rituals are transmitted to new generations by the *ğam-mu seyyid* or 'religious uncle' (*din amca*). During my fieldwork, the interviewed and observed persons used *ğam-mu seyyid* and religion uncle to refer the instructor of the religion. However, in some places (in particular in Hatay and Adana) where Nusayris mostly live, "*am-mu seyyid* (Türk, 2005), *em-i seyyid* (Keser, 2004), *amme seydi* (İşoğlu, 2005), *Emm'l Seyyid* (Çağmlar, 2006), *ğam-mu seyit* (Aslan, 2003), and *ammis* (Moosa, 1987)" are used for the religion uncle who teaches the religion to new generation.

Although over time this institution has gone through some changes in terms of form and process, in essence the institutional relevance is still in place (Türk 2005; Keser 2006; Olsson 1996). In Nusayri belief, the institution of unclehood seems to be the only way that maintains and transmits the secret knowledge and inner teachings under the circumstances as well as other secret societies and religious communities. Therefore, some of the secretive Nusayri religious and ritual practices still are conducted secretly. As in other secret communities or groups Nusayris do not approve the publication of their sacred texts and thereby the revelation of their secrets.

Depending on the institution of unclehood, in the process of initiation into the Nusayri belief, young Nusayri males begin to learn by word of mouth some of the secret knowledge of the belief. As Bar-Asher and Kofsky mentioned '*initiation into the mysteries of the religion seems to have played an important role in the process of shaping and maintaining the special Nusayri identity ...*' (As Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002: 164), via this institution religious identity is constructed.

In the most general sense, to Türk, through the institution of unclehood many significant roles are fulfilled, and it can be seen as "acculturation" (Türk, 2005: 82). So

when we consider this significant role of the institution of unclehood within the community as an example of secret life and ritual practice, it is a vital custom of the religious community to maintain their survival. Also it helps to maintain the social system. Thus, thanks to the institution of unclehood, Nusayrism has preserved the feature of being a secret religion and they have tried to keep secret principles of their belief since their emergence.

This custom has inner meanings and roles within the community. One of these roles is that it creates a strong social solidarity among the secretive Nusayri members. The meaning and significance of the *ğam-mu seyyid* can be seen as an example; for the Nusayri males he is more important than a biological paternal uncle or a “*ğam*”. The *ğam-mu seyyid* and the *telmiz* should help each other for all kinds of problems. Another role of the custom of unclehood is passing on religious knowledge to following male generations through the *ğam-mu seyyid*. Also, this institution constructs a social control among the secretive Nusayri members. Different social, religious, politic, and cultural roles of the institution of unclehood can be summarized as follows: emergence of solidarity between members of the community, reinventing traditions, constructing a border towards other ethnic and religious communities, and reproducing secretive Nusayri religious identity.

Initiation is defined in the Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology as “a ritual which marks the transition from one status to another” (2006: 489). To the institution of unclehood, young males, between the ages of 13 and 15, roughly around the age of physical puberty, are initiated into secretive Nusayri religion. During initiation into the religion, the *telmizes* begin to learn some of the secrets of the sect. Even though this ritual is secret, some Nusayris I interviewed were willing to explain what it is. Prayers which are from the sacred and secret book *Kitâbu'l Mecmu* and their inner meanings are taught under the guidance of the *ğam-mu seyyid*, for instance. According to Riley (1874: 189), “the rites of initiation, which are administered to

youths before they are grown up, and which last several days, are frightful in the extreme, attended by threats, imprecations, and blasphemous oaths, declaring their lives forfeited if they expose the secrets of the order.” As Riley mentions and emphasizes, an important part of the initiation rite in the community is fear which is a way to concealing the secret.

Respect and fear at the same time¹⁷

As I have mentioned before, there is still a fear that secrecy or secret religious knowledge might be learnt by others who are not Nusayri. The community had to organize as a secret society. Those who are fully initiated and who swore themselves to keep their secret can learn the secrecy of the religion; therefore, initiation is a vitally important ceremony for Nusayris. Also in order to keep their secret religious knowledge and out of respect to their ancestors, they do not share it with people outside the community. An old Nusayri male, I stayed at his home when I was conducting the fieldwork, explained this attitude concealing the secrecy as follows: ‘That’s life; it is inevitable (*Bu böyle gelmiş, böyle gider*)’¹⁷. Another Nusayri male demonstrated the situation of those who passed the initiation rite towards their religion uncle as follows:

A common psychological impact of all of us [Nusayri males]:
Respect and fear towards the religion uncle and paternal
uncle.¹⁸

As implied earlier, the religion uncle resembles an uncle who is in the paternal line, but I should emphasize that he is more important than the latter within the secretive religious community. For example, when a *telmiz* see his *ğam-mu seyyid* in somewhere else, he must salute and kiss his hand. One day I was walking at the city centre of Mersin, where I conducted fieldwork, with my close friend, who was an

¹⁷Saygı ve korku iç içe.

¹⁸ Hepimizde olan ortak bir psikolojik etki, din amca ile gerçek amcaya saygı ve korku.

initiated Nusayri, when seeing his religious uncle, he immediately saluted to him and kissed his religious uncle. Thus, in the community and also in the religious ceremonies, the *ğam-mu seyyid* is more respected than the sheik.

With the *ğam-mu seyyid*, virtual kinship ties, and depending on this custom certain prohibitions are applied, and some concepts are used in the community. Secretive Nusayri community rules do not allow a marriage among brothers and sisters. As Nusayri male who took religious education is seen as *ğam-mu seyyid* religious child. *Telmizes* should accept the uncle's daughters as their sisters. They cannot marry them. The reason why a *telmiz* cannot marry the uncle's daughters is that he takes the religious education in *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home. But, he can marry with his paternal uncles' daughters.

Those who take religious training from the same uncle are seen as religious brothers (*din kardeşi*). *Ğam-mu seyyid*'s wife is called religious mother (*din anne*) by *telmizes* who are initiated by the *ğam-mu seyyid*. And also *ğam-mu seyyid*'s students are called as religious son (*din oğlu*) by the uncle and his wife. With regard to religious son, a married Nusayri woman told me the following:

For example I have 12 religious sons. I mean I have a son who is at my age. Before I met with Ali [her husband], he initiated him into religion. When I was his wife, he became my religious son. After I married him, we got six more religious sons, for instance. I have encountered those who were surprised to this situation. It is really very good thing for solidarity.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mesela benim 12 tane erkek, dinden oğlum var. Yani benimle yaşıt oğullarım var diyeyim sana. Ali ile tanışmadan önce sonuçta o öğretmiş ona. Ben onun eşi olunca o benim din oğlum oldu. Ben onla evlendikten sonra mesela 6 çocuğumuz var. Bu duruma hayret edenlerle çok karşılaştım. Paylaşmak adına çok güzel bişey bu.

As I said above, the intermarriage between religious brothers is strictly forbidden in the community. But despite this prohibition, such an event has occurred in the past. A female Nusayri told me as follows:

I am 35 years old. Such an event has occurred. It resulted in ‘Look! Do you see the results of such an event’ by elders. The emergence of such an event is impossible in here. The girl and the boy were aware religion siblings. The girl was a teacher in Diyarbakır and the boy was doing military service there at the same time. In a way they could not resist the prohibition of intermarriage between religion siblings. They are judging the religion and they see themselves justified. In the end, they married. Their families completely opposed this marriage. Both families disinherited them. But they did not listen and started their own household. They had one child who is handicapped. [...] But right now marriage is over. It has resulted in an exemplary case. They do not understand each other. They divorced. The child is living with his grandmother. When these issues come up, old aunts say “Look! We say intermarriage between religion brothers is sin. But nobody believes us. And this is how Allah punishes it – it can also be during lifetime.”²⁰

‘Despite of everything, we will continue our belief’

When a male Nusayri child, whose father is member of secretive Nusayri belief, reaches puberty, he is sent to an uncle or a Sheikh (*Şeyh*). This must be kept secret

²⁰ Evet ben 35 yaşındayım. Böyle bir olay yaşandı. Ve artık hani inanış gereği midir? Ya da zaten olacağı vardı oldu ama tesadüf mü? Ama insanlar hep ‘Bak görüyor musun?’ dedirtecek şekilde sonuçlandı. Neden? Çocuk işte hani din kardeşi, din kız kardeşi ile zaten bunu burada yapmaları imkansız. Kız Diyarbakır’da öğretmenken çocuk da orda askerlik yapıyor. Birşekilde bu güce karşı koyamıyorlar. Dini ayırgılıyorlar ve kendilerini haklı görüyorlar ki evlenmiyorlar. Evlilik bitti şu anda. Aileler tamamıyla karşı çıktı. Kızın ailesi evlatlıktan reddetti, oğlanın ailesi evlatlıktan reddetti. Dinlemediler ev açtılar oturdular, bir tane çocukları oldu. Doğan çocuk özürlü. İşte insanlara ibret verci bir olay olarak sonuçlanıyorlar. Ayrılıyorlar zaten hiçbir şekilde anlaşamıyorlar, kanlı bıçaklı oluyorlar. İkisi nasıl o aşk evlendikten sonra dehşete dönüşüyor. İkisi de kılıçları kuşanıyor. Aileler de yok ortada. Ayrılıyorlar. Oğlan çocuğa babaanne bakıyor. Kız sonradan yeniden evleniyor, çocuk sonradan evleniyor. Ama çocuk yolda giderken bisikletten düşüyor, kafayı çarpıyor, bir ay yoğun bakımda kalıyor. Kulağının birinde şuan duyma kaybı var. işte hani bu konular konuşulduğu zaman yaşlı teyzeler ‘bak işte görüyor musun? Biz günah diyoruz kimse inanmıyor. İşte Allah bile bu şekilde cezalarını veriyor ve hayattayken de veriyor ki bize ibret olsun diye.

from people outside the community. Neither this ritual nor where he is sent to learn the religion is directly said by the members of the community. When I interviewed a married Nusayri man who was very conservative about this topic, he did not directly say where a male child is sent: ‘a Nusayri child about 14-15 years old is sent to somewhere else in order to learn his religion’ (*İşte 14-15 yaşına gelen çocuk dinini öğrenmek adına bir yerlere gönderilir*).

3.1.1 Qualifications of the *telmiz*

Those who want to or are sent to learn the religion must have some characteristics and qualifications. Otherwise they are not admitted to secret initiation rituals. The need for an intense concealment and secrecy by the community throughout history resulted in some hard rules and responsibilities for a *telmiz* who wants to or should learn the secretive Nusayri religion. Although the community maintains teaching religious practices and rules of the Nusayri belief, there is no effort to spread the religion and it is only transmitted to those whose parents are members of the Nusayri community (Keser, 2006: 84).

According to my field research and my observation, and also to İšoğlu’s (2005) and Keser’s (2006) field researches, Çağımınlar’s interviews (2006), and Moosa (1987), a Nusayri male candidate must have the following prerequisites to be allowed to start the initiation ritual; (1) the *telmiz*’s parents must be persons belonging to the secretive Nusayri community, (2) the *telmiz* must be male, (3) he must have a good mental health, (4) he must be around the age of physical puberty, between 13 and 15, and (5) he has to have the capacity to learn the religion and to conceal secrets.

*You cannot become a Nusayri Arab, you are born as one*²¹

²¹ Nusayri Arabı sonradan olunmaz, doğulur.

The first prerequisite is on the issue of the *telmiz*'s parent's Nusayri origin and religious background. There are different rules and obligations in different places where Nusayris live. For example, in Hatay a Nusayri boy's both father and mother must be Nusayri, according to Türk (2005: 82). Another example is from Matti Moosa who says that 'instruction is also confined to those who were born to Nusayri parents' (Moosa 1987: 373). In my fieldwork, I realized that if a young Nusayri male married with a girl who is not a Nusayri, and when they have a male child, secretive Nusayri traditions, teachings, customs, secret religious knowledge, and the rituals can be taught to this child by a religion uncle. Similarly, according to İšoğlu who conducted a field research in 2005 in Adana, Antakya, and Samandağı where most of secretive Nusayri population lives, to be able to participate in the initiation ritual, only the father needs to be Nusayri (İšoğlu, 2005). From these perspectives, Nusayri males of mixed marriages especially of non-Nusayri mothers cannot be initiated. I think that in the secretive Nusayri religious tradition, in the process, some prerequisites have been changed or relaxed the prerequisites of rigid rules in order to survive.

Thus, although all Nusayri men's sons can learn the religion, the son of a Nusayri woman who marries a man outside the community cannot learn or teach secretive Nusayri religious traditions and customs. A Nusayri man explained that why they give permission to a male Nusayri child to learn the religion is that the child learns secretive Nusayri religion and secrecy because his father is a Nusayri. For him, it means that there is a male based lineage system among the Nusayris. Another 43 years old and married Nusayri woman explained the situation as follows:

If my daughter marries a boy who is not from us, my grandchildren could not learn our religion. That is for sure. She will marry knowing these hard rules. It sounds that this is not correct in terms of equality, because if my sons are married with girls who are not from us, my grandchildren can learn our religion. If my daughter wants to continue my charity [hayrımı], why she couldn't? Her only fault would be to love

someone from another race. I don't know how it can be but now we could do not do this.²²

The second prerequisite is that the *telmiz* must be male. In the institution of unclehood, there is no place for Nusayri girls. While religious knowledge and rituals are transmitted to young men, young girls do not undergo a similar initiation. Nusayri girls and women do not receive initiation to secret religious knowledge because they are considered to “not have souls” and to not be able to keep secrets. And if they married a non-Nusayri, they might reveal their secret religious knowledge and practices to their husbands. On the issue of women participating in the initiation ritual and the religious ceremonies, a woman told her experience of this issue as follows:

As women we have prayers ourselves. There is a logical explanation why it is like that. It used to be criticized in the past. I understand the issue. Earlier I was also against it, why do they teach to my brother but not to me? My father told me to sit down, he said that: “look my daughter; during ı-salas you might kiss hands of each other, and you say we are religious siblings. Can you imagine that you and your husband sit side by side? In this prayer you are a religious sibling, can you marry your religious sibling? Is it possible?” So he was right at this issue. I was very satisfied that they are reasonable. You are a unit in the *ı-sala*. That community becomes a unit.²³

When a young Nusayri girl starts menstruating, she is provided a brief basic religious training by an old woman who is not her mother. For instance, old Nusayri

²² Mesela benim kızım bizden olmayan biriyle evlendiği zaman benim torunum bizim dinimizi öğrenemiyor. O kesin yani. Onu bilerek evlenecek. Biraz haksızlık gibi geliyor ama oğlum bizden olmayan bir kızla evlendiği zaman benim bu torunum bizim dinimizi öğrenebiliyor. Benim kızım benim hayrımı yapmak istese niye yapmasın? Tek suçu başka bir ırktan birini sevmek olacak. Bilmiyorum bunu zamanla aşar mıyız aşmaz mıyız? Bunu bilmiyorum ama şimdi yapamıyoruz.

²³ Bizim de [*Nusayri kadınlar*] kendi dualarımız ve namazlarımız var. Çok mantıklı bir açıklaması var bunun böyle olmasının. Önceden de çok eleştirildi. Ben de kanaat getirdim, ve çok hoş gördüm. Daha önce ben de karşı geliyordum işte niye abime öğretiliyor da bana öğretilmiyor diye. Otur kızım dedi babam bana, bak kızım işte bak namazda yeri gelir birbirinin elini öper biz din kardeşiyiz dersin, sen eşinle yan yana geldiğini dölünebiliyor musun? Dedi. Din kardeşi oluyorsun, sen kardeşinle evlenebilir misin? Mümkün mü? Yani orda çok haklı. Ben çok haklı olduklarına kanaat getirdim. Sonuçta cemaat içinde bir selam anında kardeş oluyorsunuz. Bir bütün oluyorsunuz. O cemaat bir bütün oluyor.

women are teaching young girls: How to take ablution? Which prayers must be read when they take ablution? Women are just participating in and working for religious festivals and *hayri* or *hasni* (*hayırlar*) which means performing good deeds. Apart from these religious practices, women are completely excluded from all religious rituals and practices. A married Nusayri woman showed her own reaction as follows:

Religion is being imposed on male children by appointing an uncle. But in this community, the situation of women is really worrying. Why? In order to protect the thing that is called secret, they have not shared it with us because they think that women are gossipy. Therefore, they said to women [...] in times when you are ritually clean²⁴, you should bath and take ablution, and then recite the kalima shahadah (*şahadet getireceksin*). And they taught to women just some few prayers. There are some prayers, ‘you get them!’ And that’s all. Women are only serving as the ones performing good deeds. In other words, in both festivals and good deeds services are done by women. The responsibility of the males is to sacrifice. The responsibilities of women are to make bread, to clean the meal, to cook it, to distribute it, to wash up, and other works.²⁵

The third prerequisite is that the *telmiz* must have a good mental health. This means that if he has a problem in terms of a good mental health, he would not learn the secret and would reveal them to people outside the community. There are a total of 16 prayers of secretive Nusayri belief and they are long and hard to memorize. Therefore,

²⁴ For example, during menstruation periods women are considered unclean and excluded from all religious ceremonies.

²⁵ Kadın olduğu için bu işte babadan oğula zaten amca tayin etme yoluyla çocuklara dinleri empoze ediliyor. Ama kadın çok üzücü durumda bu toplumda. Neden? İşte bu sır denen şeyi korumak adına kadınların biraz böyle biraz daha geveze oldukları düşünülerek, kadınlara çok fazla bişey verilmemiş. Kadına demişler ki işte sen ayın muayyen günleri dışında ve adetinin temiz olduğu günlerde banyonu yapacaksın şahadetini getireceksin, abdestini alacaksın, al sana abdest duaları onları öğretmişler. İşte fatihani okuyacaksın al sana fatiha. Bir kaç namaz suresi var al sana onlar. Zaten bizim toplumumuzda şekilcilik yok. Kadınlarda da erkeklerde de. Bu kadar başka hiç birşey vermemişler. Kadın sadece hizmet edecek. Yani yapılan bayramlarda, hayırlarda hizmet kadın düşer. İşte ekmeğin yapılması kadınlara, kurban kesimi erkeklere ait, işte etin yıkanması, pişirimi, dağıtımı, bulaşıklar şunlar bunlar hep kedinlara ait.

a certain cognitive and intellectual level is required. I have not encountered a situation where a young Nusayri was excluded from the initiation because of the prerequisite nor heard of one during the field research.

Being around the age of physical puberty is the fourth prerequisite of the institution to start religious training. On the issue of age to initiate, there are different implementations. The age range of the initiation, in general, is between 13 and 18. According to people I interviewed in the field, the rite age range is between 13 and 15. Even sometimes at 11 years children can start to initiation into the religion, which is up to the child's level of learning and his family's decision. For example, especially the sheiks' children start initiation before the age of 13. The reason why Nusayri males are initiated into religious training at early ages is that at these ages they can be easier brought under social control and canalized towards a religious education. In addition, at these ages some of them start to work and go to different places for education. In such a situation, the child's physical conditions are not taken into account and the boy can start the initiation rite. If a child does not accept the initiation rite into religion, he is not forced by his parents or the community. However, parents encourage their sons to learn their religion.

Lastly, the *telmiz* has to have a mental capacity to start the initiation into the religion. Some capacity for keeping secrets is indispensable for concealing the secret religious knowledge. Because of this reason, if he has a problem about the mental capacity, he can start the religious training in the later years; otherwise he can not start. On this issue, the parents and candidate religion uncle decide whether he can learn or not.

As a result, in order to start to initiation into the religion, a Nusayri male has to fulfill all the conditions I have mentioned above; otherwise it is not possible for him to learn the religion and become a member of the community.

During ceremonies of the initiation rites, the community, the sheik, and religion uncle have the right to decide whether the *telmiz* is allowed to start the religious training or not. A religion uncle told that such a case occurred in the community. The case was described as follows:

At the first ceremony of the initiation rite, the candidate's religion uncle knew that the candidate had been smoking. In this ceremony, the candidate's religion uncle said to the community that 'he smokes; he should not smoke. Otherwise, I do not accept this responsibility.' At the second phase of the initiation rite, the candidate was still smoking; therefore, the candidate's uncle did not accept him as a *telmiz*. Another uncle also has not accepted him as *telmiz*.

From this point of view, the community cares about the social and cultural habits of the new generation. They are trying to keep away the new generation from bad habits. Thus, there are different roles of the institution of unclehood like social control, social solidarity, and a healthy society.

3.1.2 *Ĝam-mu Seyyid* (Religion uncle / Spiritual guide) and his Qualifications

As a secretive Nusayri sect the religious education was the sheikhs' (*religious sheikh*, Moosa, 1987) duty in the past, but today all Nusayri males who were initiated into religion can be selected to be responsible for the religious training. Like Nusayri male candidates, also the *ĝam-mu seyyid* must have some qualifications in order to give qualitative religious training to new generations. In the past, the *ĝam-mu seyyid* was selected by the candidate. But today, the *ĝam-mu seyyid* can be selected by the candidate's parents. The families encourage their sons to go next to their religion uncle to learn the religion. About the selection of the *ĝam-mu seyyid* an initiated Nusayri male told to me as follows:

According to procedure, the religion uncle is selected by the child. Again depending on the situation, the child's family could engage in the process as in the past. But today the family

is more determinative than the child. I mean because the families took this religious training, under all circumstances they are trying to send their children to a religious uncle.²⁶

Some qualifications of the religion uncle can be summarized as such; respectable, moral, pious, trusting, well knowing prayers and he must not be a close relative of the child. There is no restriction in terms of age to become a religious uncle. Every Nusayri male who successfully completed the religious training can be a religious uncle. But, he cannot be selected among members of the close family such as his brother, his father, his maternal uncle, or his paternal uncle. An uncle can raise maximum 51 *telmizes*.

˘ If the religion uncle dies, goes on a journey or moves to another locality, a second religion uncle is appointed to continue teaching the *telmiz* and complete his initiation.

A married Nusayri woman I interviewed in the field demonstrated the uncle's place within the community as follows “*religion uncle is the first door before running to the father.*” That is the religion uncle is the first one to turn to in the case of a problem. However, some people especially elders complained that the *muhip* do not visit their *ğam-mu seyyid* at present. The term *telmiz* is normally used to refer for those who start to initiation in Nusayri community in Karaduvar. The degrees in Nusayrism are in ascending order: *telmiz* or initiate and *muhip* (initiated member). Therefore after the third stage of the rituals of secretive Nusayri initiation, the new member of the community is called as *muhip*.

²⁶ Usule göre din amca çocuk tarafından seçiliyor. Gene duruma göre eskiden de ailenin devreye girdiği de oluyordu. Fakat şimdi çocuğun da devrede olmasıyla daha çok aile belirleyici oluyor. Yani aileler de bu kültürü aldıkları için çocuklarının da her şart altında en azından dini eğitimi alması için amcaya gönderiyorlar.

Although the uncle should fulfill some qualifications to give a good religious and cultural education, according to many Nusayris, they cannot show the expected performance. As far as I was able to see in the field and to learn from the different researches conducted on Nusayris, many religious uncles do not have a profound religious training themselves. A Nusayri (male, 45 years old, and artificer) I interviewed in the field summarized uncles' situation as follows:

To me, Nusayris who live here [in Karaduvar] know little about their belief today. In the past, they knew much more than today. I think the reason is that the institution of unclehood is not enough work and the uncles are not educated themselves according to today's conditions.

3.2 The Construction of Boundaries: The Ritual of Entering into the Belief

As in other secretive communities the initiation rituals are accepted as a very important ceremony for the secretive Nusayris. The religious knowledge and the initiation ritual practices are the exclusive privilege of the male. In secretive Nusayri religion, religious knowledge, prayers, mysteries of the religion, and basic beliefs that are seen secret are transmitted from generation to generation by “[secret] initiation rituals” (Olsson, 1996; Türk, 2005; Keser, 2006). Through this initiation rituals and the religious training that starts after initiation the new generation gets a religious identity. In this way the religious community reconstructs boundaries and tries to protect and maintain these boundaries for a long time.

In the transmission of the secretive Nusayri religious traditions, according to Olsson (1996: 179), the three degrees of initiation are still the crucial practice, which means that the initiation ceremony is completed with the three phases. The reason for the three phases is to ensure the safety of the religious knowledge as in this way control over the *telmizes* is stronger. During the three phases of initiation, young Nusayri males are initiated into the secrets of the belief stage by stage. To start learning the secrets, however, in addition to the other requirements, the *telmizes* have to demonstrate their

trustfulness to the community in a ceremony in the presence of sheikh, Naqib²⁷, Necip²⁸, *ğam-mu seyyid*, the *telmiz*'s father, and other at least two witnesses. In the religious ceremony, the Nakib sits on the right of the sheikh and the Necip sits on the left of the sheikh.

Initiation into the mysteries of the sect is a significant ceremonial process in the secretive Nusayri religious system. The founders of the belief could not reveal their religion openly, especially for fear of Sunni Muslims' slaughter. They were able to develop a specific structure of initiation into the religion in order to preserve and to maintain their life and belief. The Nusayris are performing two main versions of the initiation ceremony being in general similar to each other but differing on minor parts (Moosa, 1987; Türk, 2005).

The initiation sequence includes the major ritual performances in secretive Nusayri religious community. The Nusayris' ceremony of initiation consists of different parts which depend on their subgroups. Today, while Haydaris are performing the initiation in three phases, Kalazis perform it in a single-stage. The first type ceremony which is carried out by Haydaris, according to Moosa, is contained in ancient Nusayri sources; the second type, single-stage, is described by Suleiman al-Adani in his *Kitab al-Bukara* (Moosa, 1987: 373). The original of the ceremony of initiation is in three stages implementations. Actually, there are no many differences between these two applications (Türk, 2005:90). In the implementation of single-stage, after the prayer to appoint the religious uncle, the *telmiz* is directly sent to the uncle's home. In the implementation stage, the entire initiation rite is performed in three parts. Because of economic conditions of the families, they are mostly doing single-stage ceremony.

²⁷ A servant [naqip] whose business is to proclaim the titles of his master [the sheikh], and to introduce those who pay their respects to him (F. Steingass, 1992: 1396). Also, the Naqip represents Muhammad in the Nusayri religious ceremonies (Moosa, 1987: 376).

²⁸ Nejip or *Necip* is a servant who responsible for some duties in the *ı-sala* or collective prayer, and who partakes of the sacrifice. In addition, in the Nusayri religious ceremonies the Nejip represents Salman al-Farisi (ibid.: 276).

Additionally, as a result of migration to centre of the cities and the rise of level of education, some Nusayris prefer a single-stage ceremony. Another important reason is that to start the initiation rite, the *telmiz*'s family has to fulfill some responsibilities that are of a high financial cost.

All three stages of the initiation ritual are carried out by the religious leader of the community; the sheikh²⁹. As I have mentioned above, the Naqib, the Necip, the *ğam-mu seyyid*, the *telmiz*'s father, and at least twelve witnesses attend to the initiation rite. The witnesses testify that the *telmiz* or initiate is of good conduct and will never betray the secrets of his religion. In all the phases, before the *telmiz* is brought to the room in which the ceremony is conducted, persons who participate in the ceremony under the sheik leadership perform *ı-sala*³⁰. The *telmiz* can enter the room after this collective prayer.

The secretive Nusayri community with whom I conducted my field research in Karaduvar performs the three-stage ceremony. The initiation into the religion takes nine months (Moosa, 1987; İšoğlu, 2002; Keser, 2005; Türk, 2005). According to the three stage ceremony, initiation into the religion is carried out with the following three months totally nine months. The reason for the duration of a total of nine months is that this process is seen as a normal pregnancy; ending in 'a second birth'. When the first stage of the initiation, symbolized by the 'marriage' of the neophyte to his instructor, has been accomplished, the neophyte then waits for nine months, [...] at the end of which the final stage of the initiation, called Rutbat al-Sama, is celebrated (Moosa, 1987: 375).

²⁹ Sheikh denotes etymologically "someone whose age appears advanced and whose hair has gone white", used for a man over fifty years old. The term sheikh may be applied to the head of a religious establishment (madrassa, dâr al-hadith, ribât, etc.), and the only Muslim scholar of a certain level of attainment (in the biographical collections, the term generally linked with others, such as imâm). (Bosworth and et al, 1997: 252)

³⁰ The term *ı-sala* means collective prayer (*toplu namaz* / cem ceremony).

The First Stage of the Initiation Rite: “Tadeyî / Girdi”

The parents of the male child decide whether their child is mentally ready to receive a religious education or not. If they believe their son can learn and keep secret the religious practices and knowledge, they decide who can be their child’s *ğam-mu seyyid* or religious uncle. Before the first-stage of the initiation the candidate’s family requests and offers an initiated Nusayri male to become *ğam-mu seyyid* to their child. The family must receive approval from the candidate *ğam-mu seyyid* before the initiation ceremony.

The first-stage of the initiation, called ‘*tadeyî*’ [*başlatma* or *girdi*], is generally designate a *ğam-mu seyyid* and a decision making whether the *telmiz* is eligible or not to begin the initiation rite. This stage can be seen as a testing of the capacity and willingness of the *telmiz* by the community who participates in the initiation. The gradual instruction itself is understood as a part of a process in which the religion uncle is supervising the younger males.

A Nusayri male told me that the process of initiation into the Nusayri religion is carried out as follows:

Maybe you have observed or you have seen in your interviews; a child who is between 14 and 15 years old is sent to somewhere to learn his religion. Depending on his capacity of perception it takes one week, ten or fifteen days etc. He does not return to his family. There are some specific prayers; he does not return to his family until he reads, memorizes, and understands all of these prayers. After that, his religious duties begin (*dîni vecibelerin startı verilir*). Later, he takes ablution; he starts performing prayers, and then he participates in the religious ceremonies. He starts listening to the Koran.³¹

³¹ Bizde işte belki gözlemlemiştinizdir ya da röportajlarınızda vesaire işte karşılaşmışsınızdır. İşte 14-15 yaşına gelen çocuk dinini öğrenmek adına bir yerlere gönderilir. İşte çocuğunu algılama kapasitesine göre 1 hafta, 10-15 gün vs çocuk ailesine dönmez. İşte belli süreler var, işte o süreleri okuyup algılayana kadar ezberleyene kadar O çocuk ailesini göremez. Ondan sonra dini vecibelerinin startı verilir. Ondan

In this citation the man does not directly refer to the institution of unclehood and *ğam-mu seyyid*. He just shortly summarizes the basic rules and process of the secret institution ritual. This kind of explanation was very common among members of the community. In general, if a Nusayri needs to keep secret something else related with secret religious knowledge, ceremonies etc. from “others”, as it can be seen in the citation, the man just gives some too general information; or he does not share the secret religious knowledge and practices with “others”. However, some members of the community even elders who are more educated than other members shared information with me about the secret religious practices and texts of the community.

Karaduvar Nusayris sacrifice animal in almost all religious feasts. These feasts can be religious days or special days but they have to sacrifice and they cook *hırısı* or “*çorba*.” If the *telmiz*’s parent’s economic condition is not sufficient and they could not sacrifice, within the community they can announce that their child starts to initiation into the religion. On the day of the first stage the *telmiz*’s father should be ready with an animal which must be male for sacrifice. Nusayris absolutely do not eat meat from female animals because they think that female animals could be unclean or pregnant. Nusayris mostly sacrifice ram, but if the *telmiz*’s family’s economic situation is not good to sacrifice a ram, they can sacrifice a rooster.

The secret ceremony of initiation takes place in the biggest room of the *telmiz*’s family’s home. The room must not be seen and heard by Nusayri women, non-initiated children and non-Nusayris. The house must be cleaned before the ceremony; therefore, every place in the house is cleaned. To perform the collective worship, the community is clustering in the biggest room of the house. Almost all members of the community prefer their house for the initiation rite because they believe that if they do this initiation rite in their own homes, it would be more morally beneficial than if done in

sonra abdet alır, ondan sonra namaz kılmaya başlar, ondan sonra mevlütlere gitmeye başlar, Kuran dinletilerini dinlemeye başlar.

the “assembly house”. They also believe that the more secret the more auspicious. In my field area, there is also a big house with high walls in front of the mosque that is the single one of this kind in the district. Those who have lived out of the district, and whose house is not convenient for the ceremony can use the place for their different religious aims. Although in Nusayrism there is no an assembly house (*cemevi*), some member of the community said that “*Have you seen our assembly house?*” For instance, a married woman who was 43 years old said: “*I do not know whether you ask or not we have a ‘hayirevi’ (assembly house). Also there is a new one. Have you seen it?*” As far as I found out there are at least three assembly houses in Karaduvar.

Those who participate in the ceremony must take ablution before entering the ceremony. As I have said earlier, the initiation ritual is carried out with the candidate *ğam-mu seyyid* and at least twelve people including the initiate or *telmiz*, the *telmiz*’s father, the sheikh, *nakip*, *necip*, and at least two witnesses. After entering the room, apart from the *telmiz*, the community sits with bent knees in a half-moon shape in front of the sheikh. The *naqib* sits on the right side of the sheikh and the *necip* on the left. Those who want to participate and those who are invited can participate in the ceremony, but they must be Nusayri and male.

Getting started the *ı-sala* (collective prayer), *nakfi*³², basil (*reyhan*), *caysiltib*³³, jug, and glasses are brought on a tray. In the mean time, the sheikh reads some suras from the *Kitâbu’l Mecmu* (which is written by Kasım et-Tebarani). While the sheikh is reading the *soorah al-Fatehah*, the collective prayer starts. Later, the basils are distributed to the community. To smell good, these plants are rubbed with their hands. In the mean time, the sheikh reads the basil prayer (*miss prayer – koku duası*) with the community. Shortly after, a kind of beverage that is called ‘*caysiltib*’ is distributed to

³² *Nakfi* is a kind of beverage, and which is actually a freshly squeezed grape juice. The *nakfi* is called *dem* in Alevi culture in Turkey. Because of some reactions from people who are from the outside the community, Nusayris call the *nakfi* as a grape juice.

³³ *Caysiltib* is a kind of beverage. When it is prepared, seven kinds of spices are added to the beverage.

the community. When the *ceysiltib* is prepared, seven kinds of spices are added into the hydromel. The grape juice (*nakfi*) or the hydromel is drunk firstly by the sheikh and then the *telmiz* and the community who participate in the initiation ceremony. All of the people including the sheik drink from the same glasses.

While they drink the *ceysiltib* or the *nakfi*, the sheikh reads the *tib* prayer. The ceremony continues with the *tib pray*. After reading this prayer, the *buhur* (or sometimes called as *bahur*) that is a kind of incense is burned which gives a mystic atmosphere to the environment.

The last thing before starting the ceremony is that redemption [*arinma*] prayer. The sheikh tells the community ‘everyone gets redemption’ (*Herkes arınsın!*). After praying redemption, the ceremony starts. In the ceremony, such prayers are said; *İşara*, *Sücut*, *Aleviyye*, and *Selam* (Türk, 2005: 93).

The *telmiz* is brought in the room after *İşara* prayer. He kisses the hands of the elderly at the ceremony. And then he stands next to his religious uncle. The sheikh says him to say ‘Esselamun Aleyküm’. After that firstly he kisses the hand of *ğam-mu seyyid* and then he kisses the hand of the sheikh. Why he firstly kisses the hand of the *ğam-mu seyyid* is that *ğam-mu seyyid* is much more respected person for the *telmiz*. The religion uncle and the *telmiz* then sit down cross-legged in front of the sheikh. The *telmiz* has to vow strict secrecy. When the sheikh asks the *telmiz* ‘Why did you come here?’ he responds with ‘I came to learn the secret. I can keep the secret. I have capacity to conceal our secret’. Then he tells who his religion uncle is. After that, the sheikh tells him the results of revelations of the secret religious knowledge to non-Nusayris, Nusayri women, and insane people, and also he demands to swear not to reveal the secrets. And later, if the sheikh believes in the *telmiz*, he gives some advices about respecting his religious uncle, parents, and elders. Subsequent to advices by the sheikh, freshly squeezed grape juice is drunk. Nusayrism is not a single consistent and codified cosmological system with a fixed set of religious practices. Whereas in

Alevism the grape juice is called *dem*, as I explained above in Nusayrism it is called as *nakfi*. The ritual of drinking *nakfi* or *dem* is based on the Assembly of Forty (*Kırklar Meclisi*)³⁴. What does the *nakfi* or the *dem* represent in both Nusayrism and Alevism? There is a principle in Alevism that “*The path is one, journeys a thousand and one*” emphasizes that as a result of social realities there may exist variations in form stemming from regional and cultural differences although the essence remains the same (Yaman & Erdemir, 2006: 69). This kind of understanding emphasizes pluralism and tolerance, and also provides a unity and solidarity among the members of the community. So in Nusayrism the *nakfi* represents a unity among members of the community. In addition to the *nakfi*, sometimes hydromel is drunk in religious ceremonies.

In this first stage, nothing is transmitted to the *telmiz* about the secrecy or secret prayers. A short and general statement about the Nusayrism is whispered to the *telmiz*,

³⁴ This event is accepted an important fact for their understanding of Imam Alī by Nusayris. The Bektashii version of the event is described by Fredrick De Jong in his article (1989) “The iconography of Bektashiism: A survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art” as follows: “During the *mirac*, Muhammad the Prophet request God to remove the veils between them so that His prophet might not only hear Him but also see Him. This request was granted: the veils were not removed and Muhammad found himself face to face with the Imam ‘Alī. During his miraculous nocturnal ascent to the Throne, Muhammad had met a lion on his way and had thrown a ring in the animal’s mouth to distract and silence him. Later, at a certain moment during the Assembly of Forty, ‘Alī suddenly took this same ring out of his mouth and gave it back to Muhammad.

In order to gain access to this event, Muhammad had to belittle himself before the door of the house of his daughter Fātima where the meeting was in progress. When he was eventually admitted, after announcing himself not as the Prophet but as the poor one (*al-fakir*), he saw a gathering of 39 people, including the Twelve Imams, his daughter Fātima, and his wife Khadija, presided over by the Imam ‘Alī. Muhammad then proceeded to ask about the nature of the curious gathering and was told that this was the Assembly of the Forty. When he replied by observing that there were only 39 persons present, it was pointed out to him that their number was forty because of the spiritual presence of Selmâ-i Pâk (Fârisî), the aid and companion of the Imam ‘Alī [...]. Thereafter, ‘Alī took a grape from the table in front of him, pressed it, and began to fill the glasses on the table with its juice from which those present drank. Then intoxicated, the party rose and started to dance, moving around in a circle with each of the participants turning simultaneously around his own axis. The main liturgical gatherings of the Bektashis and the aleviis are basically dramatic re-enactments of the *Kırklar meclisi*.”

Also, according to De Jong, “the Imam ‘Ali is also known as *al-haydar* (the lion) and as *asad Allah al-ghālîp* (the victorious lion of God).” (De Jong, 1989:16) This understanding of Imam Ali is believed by secretive Nusayris but they do not reveal it, which must be secret.

and he is ordered to swear forty times by the sheikh. The sheiks make the *telmiz* repeat around 100 times, depending on the learning capacity of the *telmiz*. After this, the *telmiz* kisses the hands of the sheikh, the religious uncle, elders in the room and gets out of the room. And after the *telmiz* leaves the room, the community prays a collective worship. Thus the first stage of the initiation into the religion ceremony is completed.

At the end of this initial stage of the ceremony, *hırısı*³⁵ made from sacrificial meat is eaten. Although the tradition is that firstly those who participate in the ceremony take the meal, in practice it is also distributed to people who come to take the meal before.

The Second Stage of the Initiation Rite: “*Tudeynîs / Orta*”

From the first stage of the initiation rite forty days later, the community gets together at the *telmiz*'s house, and they practice rituals which are performed at the first stage. The period is called “*Tudeynîs / Orta*”. Duration between the first and the second stages can be different from the one area to other. But during my fieldwork people mostly say that it takes forty days. At the second stage of initiation into the religion, the sheikh firstly asks to the community and then asks to the *telmiz* whether he did what he said in the first stage or not, whether he concealed the secrets or not. If the sheikh takes positive responses from the *telmiz*, he will give him the first secret knowledge: the words of AMS (*Ayn, Mim, and Sin* or *Str (secret), Ayn, Mim, and Sin*). The meanings of these words are not said the *telmiz* at this stage. The sheikh makes the *telmiz* repeat these words 100 times in the morning and in the evening. The teachings are transmitted orally to the *telmiz*. After learning this basic secret knowledge about the Nusayri belief, the *telmiz* is seen as a member of the community. At the end of the ceremony, the community leaves the room in which the ceremony is conducted and they eat a meal made from sacrificial meat.

³⁵ It is a kind of Nusayrsi traditional dish made from cracked wheat and meat.

Actually the first and the second phases are seen as a test for the *telmiz*. In these first two stages it is understood that the *telmiz* will be loyal to the *ğam-mu seyyid* and whether he keep the secret entrusted to him or not. If the *telmiz* reveals the knowledge he learned during the first two stages, he is not allowed to enter the third stage. Religious knowledge is not taught to him, and the person is denounced as “*düşkün*” (ostracism). According to Erdemir and Yaman (2006: 69), the institution of *düşkünlük* has significant functions for the maintenance of social order among the Alevi community. *Düşkünlük* is a humiliating situation for an Alevi, and brings about exclusion from the community. Similar practices are valid for Nusayris.

The Third Stage of the Initiation Rite: “*Tıdlıhâ / Çıktı*”

About nine months later after the first stage of the initiation, the third and last stage (called “*Tıdlıhâ / Tıtlıga / Çıktı or Tuluğ / Çıkma*” is conducted in the *telmiz*’s house. Up to this stage the *telmiz* shows his reliability to the *ğam-mu seyyid* and the community. At this stage those practiced earlier are also repeated here, but the last stage of the ceremony of initiation is very lengthy, containing many prayers, invocations, and others. In addition to previous practices, at this stage if the real religion uncle (*ğam-mu seyyid*) is sick and goes abroad, an *ammu dehel* (alternative religious uncle) is appointed.

At each stage the *telmiz* learns more than at the one before about the secret and meaning of the secrecy, but full understanding does not come until the end. During the approximately nine month period, the *telmiz* receives instructions in secretive Nusayri belief.

The sheikh asks to the *telmiz* what he learned up to that time. And then, the responses that are given by the *telmiz* are nodded to by the community who participate in the ceremony. The requirements are imposed upon the *telmiz* or initiate during the initiation ceremony. The sheikh makes the *telmiz* forty times or sometimes said

millions of times swear an oath of initiation vowing strict secrecy in front of the community. At this stage swearing is very important for the safety of the secret. Therefore, this oath is practiced more detailed than in previous ceremonies. About this stage of the initiation a young Nusayri female told me:

In this phase, the uncle is accepted in the presence of witnesses, and you [*telmizes*] are taken oath millions of times. They ask: ‘If we bring your uncle’s shoes here, do you kiss it?’³⁶

The question in the citation above “*If we bring your uncle’s shoes here, do you kiss it?*” asked to the *telmiz* by the sheikh in the secret initiation ritual illustrates that commitment of the *telmiz* to his religion uncle or *ğam-mu seyyid* is important. In his book, Moosa cited from Renè Dussaud’s book (Historie Et Religion Des Nosairis): “*the shaykh orders the young man to place the slippers of his Imam on his head as a sign of humility*” (Moosa, 1987: 373). At present, some of those with whom I interviewed and who are male said to me this is practiced. However some of them said that this practice is not maintained anymore. Because they said me as a result of some social demands and expectations, and negotiations between the sheikh and the community, this type practices are not applied anymore. As it can be seen from this negotiation between the sheiks (also naqib and necip) and members of the community, some practices and strict rules, which were carried out in initiations, have been changed in the process.

After this strict oath, the *telmiz* is asked ‘*Who is your religious uncle?*’ by the sheikh. Finally, the sheikh commits the *telmiz* to the trust of the religious uncle. In a representative manner, the *ğam-mu seyyid* and the *telmiz* leave the room. By this way, the initiation into religion is finished. After the end of the third stage of initiation, the *telmiz* is sent to *ğam-mu seyyid*’s house with *ğam-mu seyyid* to learn the religion.

³⁶ Bu aşamada şahitler huzurunda amca kabul edilir ve milyonlarca kere yemin ettirilir. “Amcanın ayakkabısını getirsek buraya öper misin?” diye sorarlar.

Before the *ğam-mu seyyid* leaves the *telmiz*'s house, he is given the most delicious piece of the sacrificed animal as gift.

For a non-Nusayri, as I mentioned earlier it was impossible to participate in a Nusayri initiation ritual. Because I know the obstacles to participate in initiation ceremony, I did not insist on such an action and also I was not invited. But, in order to learn and to describe what is done in a Nusayri initiation ritual some researchers who are non-Nusayri to get help from someone who is Nusayri. One of the researchers is Ahmet Türk. According to him, who carried out an ethnographic research in Hatay, to ensure not to reveal the secrets of the belief, the *telmiz* is demanded to put his hand on the Koran and to swear forty times (Türk, 2005: 98). Also he describes this ritual practice as follows:

After the candidate swears, the sheikh joins the candidate's and the religious uncle's hands, and then drops *nakfi* from their thumbs to their palms. Later, the sheikh, the religious uncle, and the candidate boy have a sip from the same glass of *nakfi* [in Alevis this ritual is called "*sır etmek*" (keeping secret)]. In the mean time, the sheikh is praying for *nakfi*. The sheikh calls witnesses. The number of witnesses must be at least seven. Oath must be as such; kissing Quran three times and touching it the forehead three times. A table is brought in front of the religion uncle and the candidate. The Quran is put onto the table. The religion uncle and the candidate put their left hands on the Quran; the right hands are also put onto the Quran in a way that their thumbs touch each other. Meanwhile, the witnesses are putting their right hands on the candidate's head, and put upon their left hands to the candidate's and the religious uncle's hands. While this way, the boy swears forty times in front of his religious uncle. After that, the sheikh asks the witnesses whether they witness or not. They say 'we are witnesses too'. The boy swears forty times; also the witnesses say that we are witness. And then, all witnesses hold hands to cross and kiss. After that, the religion uncle kisses the boy's

forehead, and later the boy kisses the sheikh' and the elders in the ceremony, and he leaves the ceremony.³⁷

“Second House”: Religious Training at Ğam-mu Seyyid’s House

After the third phase, the *muhip* is able to start to learn the secret teachings, and he goes with *ğam-mu seyyid* to *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house. During this time, these teachings are not all taught at once, they are taught in the order.

When the *muhip* arrives to the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house, a traditional meal, *kahk sibiye*, is cooked and it is distributed to the community. The aim of this practice means to inform all the community that a *telmiz* starts to learn the religion. Hereafter, *ğam-mu seyyid* is the closest person to the *telmiz*: the *ğam-mu seyyid* is his father, *ğam-mu seyyid*'s wife is his religious mother, and *ğam-mu seyyid*'s children are his brothers.

“Culture of Concealment”

The *muhip* has to stay at his religious uncle's home until he learns all secret prayers and some of religious inner teachings. Although the details of what is actually taught during the religious training at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home are not known, almost all people say that during this religious training, the

³⁷ Aday yemin ettikten sonra şeyh, adayın ve amcanın ellerini birleştirerek ikisinin başparmaklarının arasına bir damla nakfi damlatır. Daha sonra şeyh, amca ve aday çocuk, aynı bardaktan birer yudum nakfi içerler [Alevilerde “sır etmek” olarak yapılan bir ritüel]. Bu sırada şeyh nakfi için dua etmektedir. Şeyh bu olaya kefil olmak isteyenleri davet eder. Kefil sayısı en az yedi olmalıdır. Yemin, Kur'an-ı Kerim öpülüp üç kere altına değiştirilerek yapılır. Daha sonra amca ve çocuğun önüne bir sepha getirilir. Sephanın üzerine Kur'an-ı Kerim koyulur. Çocuk ve amca sol ellerini Kur'an-ı Kerim'in üzerine, sağ ellerini ise baş parmaklar birbirine değecek şekilde yine Kur'an-ı Kerim'in üzerine koyarlar. Kefiller sağ ellerini çocuğun başının üzerine koyarlar. Çocuğa, din amcası huzurunda “Kimsenin malına, rızıkına göz dikmeyeceğine ve kendisine öğretilen sırları hiçbir surette açığa vurmayaacağına” dair kırk kez yemin ettirilir. Şeyh, kefillere kefil olup olmadıklarını üç kere sorar. Onlar da hep bir ağızdan kefil olduklarını söylerler. Çocuk kırk kez yemin eder; kefiller de kefil olduklarını ifade ederler. Daha sonra bütün kefiller, birbirlerinin ellerini çapraz olarak tutar ve öperler. Din amcası çocuğun alnından öper sonra çocuk da şeyhin, din amcasının ve törendeki yaşlıların elini öpüp odadan çıkar ve törenden ayrılır.

muhip learns 16 prayers from the sacred book, *Kitâbu'l Mecmu*, religious practices, and some prayers that are read when taking ablution. The second surah is given after the first surah is memorized by the *muhip*. Without learning all prayers, the *muhip* cannot leave the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home. During this period the *ğam-mu seyyid* also tells the hidden meanings of the sures, ayn-mim-sin, secrets of Ehlibeyt, all things that are related with external and internal, and the external and internal meanings of the Koran.

After the religious training the *muhip* is tested. If he tells all things which are taught in the religious training, he is released. But if he cannot tell all things he learnt, he is not released until he tells all things that he learnt. When the *muhip* succeeds in memorizing all things taught by the *ğam-mu seyyid*, he is taken by his parents. The parents bring various gifts to give to the *ğam-mu seyyid* in order to take their child. The responsibilities and solidarity between the *muhip* and the *ğam-mu seyyid*, and the relation between the two families continue forever.

In the past during the period of the religious training, the *muhips* were wearing towel around their neck to show that they are at his religious uncle's and that they are learning secret teachings. But during my field research I could not see such a child, and nobody told me about such a practice in present times. An initiated Nusayri male, whose religion uncle is his aunt's husband and who appeared to be in his thirties, told me:

When I was child there were a few houses in the district. And in my time a child [*muhip*] wearing a towel around his neck was reading book on the roof [the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s roof of house]. Because of locality, there were few houses, and the people could see and know each other more. We were also encouraged children who take religious training. In other words, ***we were wondering the secret***. At that time I asked to my mom why they are wearing a towel she said to me "You will learn its

meaning when you grown up.” But now I have not seen a child sitting on the roof of any house. No longer have children remained in the family [at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house]. The custom of unclehood is not as widespread as in the past.³⁸

The duration of staying at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house depends on the *muhip*'s capacity of learning the prayers. According to some Nusayris I interviewed, this duration in the past was about a year. But today this duration of staying in *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house is significantly shorter than in the past, between one week and one month. Therefore, as many Nusayris stressed the quality of the religious training is negatively affected. The *muhip* just learns the prayers, but details of the religion are not taught in this short period.

In the period of religious training, the *muhip* is not allowed to go to the house of his biological family. The *muhip*'s family can go to the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house, but they cannot see him very often. When the *muhip*'s family goes to see him, they take some gifts for the *ğam-mu seyyid*.

A Nusayri female (43, primary school, married) whose son had started initiation explains the custom of unclehood as follows:

In our belief, before a child [the *muhip*] goes to the religious uncle's house, it is like preparing for a birth. Firstly, the first religion uncle is appointed, and then the second is appointed because in the process of nine months ten days, 'God protects him!' He could be sick or go abroad. If the first uncle dies during this time, there is an alternative [*ammu dehel*] uncle. That's something very good. For example, when a man and a woman decide to marry, they are at the same time going to be candidate to be a father and a mother. On that day also the

³⁸ Benim çocukluğumda mahallede evler azdı ve benim zamanımda boynunda havlu olan çocuk damda kitap okurdu. Lokallikten dolayı yani evler o zaman daha azdı ve herkes birbirini daha çok görebiliyordu, tanıyordu. Bizler de o çocukları görünce onlara özeniyorduk. *Yani sırrı merak ediyorduk*. Anneme nudurumu sorduğumda bana “Büyüyünce öğreneceksin” demişti. Ama ben şimdi hiçbir evin damında bir çocuk göremiyorum. Artık ailede kalınmıyor. Amca kültürü artık eskisi gibi yaygın değil.

child has religious uncle, and he is a candidate to be religious uncle. After 40 days, which they say HALF, again they sacrifice and pray in order to (for God) to grant. The first secret is given to the *telmiz*'s ear. That *telmiz* is reminded of his uncle, his grandfather, worship. Do you know that he is tested? That is a test and a testing process. I mean they say 'Hereafter, you are not a child, you are growing, and you are going from adolescence into maturity. The secret is given to the *telmiz*. After half time, day by day to count account, nine months ten days later, on tenth day you sacrifice, to let blood. If your economic situation is not good to sacrifice, there is a charitable foundation. Someone from us certainly helps you. However, even if your economic situation is not good to carry out a festival [hayır], you should fulfill this ritual. An animal is sacrificed, and then the *muhip* is sent to his religious uncle's house. When he learns his religion, he would return his home. If he learns it, he would return on second day. Or if he learns the religion after three months, he would return the next day. If he cannot finish the religious training in one year, you cannot take him home. He should learn his religion; otherwise he cannot return to his home.³⁹

Some points that are related with the custom of unclehood and that are mentioned in the citation above must be highlighted. First of all, this citation is taken from an interview with a married Nusayri woman. Despite her being a woman, she knows about the process of secret initiation rituals, which must not be seen and heard by women. Second point is that the woman said that the *muhip* can stay at the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home even one day that is up to the *muhip*'s learning and perception level of

³⁹ İşte bizde bir çocuk amcasına gitmeden önce bir doğuma hazırlık gibidir. Önce birinci amca, sonra ikinci amca tayin edilir, Allah korusun başına bişey gelir diye. Hani 9 ay 10 gün içinde bişey olursa diye. Hasta olabilir, yurt dışına çıkabilir. O sürede amca ölürse yedek amcası var. Düşünebiliyor musunuz, çok güzel bir şey bu. İlk amca mesela bunlar tayin edildikten sonra, amca belirlendiği gün bir erkele bir bayanın evlendiğini düşünün kesin anne babalığa aday oluyolar. Bu çocuklar da amca tayin edildiği gün din amcası olacaktır. O, adaydır. 40 gün geçtikten sonra işte yarım dedikleri şey yine kurban kesilir duası okunur Allah ona nasip etsin diye. O çocuğun kulağına sır verilir. İlk sır. İşte amcası dedesi hatırlatılır ona. İbadeti ve onu denerler. Biliyor musunuz? O denemedir, deneme süreci. İşte sen artık çocuk değilsin, büyüyorsun bir ergenlikten olgunluğa gireceksin. Sırrı verilir. O yarımından sonra gün gün sayılır. 9 ay 10 gün sonra, 10'uncu günün içinde mutlaka bir kurban kesersin, kan akıtacaksın. Senin durumun olmayabilir. Vakıf var, bizlerden biri mutlaka sana yardım eder. Durumun yoksa da yapacaksın. Kurbanı kesilir, duası okunur. O gün amcasıyla yollanır. İşte dinini öğrendiği gün geri gelebilir. Bu bir gün de öğrense ikinci günde gelir. 3 ayda öğrense hemen ertesi gün gelir. Bir yılda da bitirmezse, sen onu eve almazsın. Dinini öğrenecek öyle gelecek.

the secret prayers. At present day, as far as people told me the duration of staying at the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home is shorter. Therefore, the quality of religious training, rate and quality of speaking Arabic, loyalty to keeping secret the religious knowledge and practices, and maintaining of the feasts are decaying year by year.

Relationship between the *ğam-mu seyyid* and the *muhip* does not finish after the religious training. The *ğam-mu seyyid* is accepted *telmiz*'s second father the rest of their lives. The *muhip* must be respectful towards his *ğam-mu seyyid* as much as respecting towards his father. The *ğam-mu seyyid* and the *muhip* help each other forever.

3.3 “Associated with adapting to the world changes, transformations”: Changes / Adaptations in the Secretive Nusayri Religious Training

As it can be in all societies and religious communities, secretive Nusayris also have experienced some changes in their social, cultural and religious life. As far as I could see and observe during my field research, at present time after the initiation rite, staying at *ğam-mu seyyid* house is not as widespread as in the past. According to written sources on tradition and the interviews I carried out, in the past the duration of the religious training at the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home would take between one month and three months, which actually depends on the learning capacity of the *muhip*. Moreover, according to the procedure of the institution of unclehood, the *muhip* must stay at his *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home until he learns all prayers. But today this custom has changed due to some sociological phenomenon; difficulty of living conditions, urbanization level, modernization, increases in education level, individualization etc. As it can be seen from the citation below, which was taken from an interview with a 29 year old Nusayri male, some practices of ceremonies and rituals of the custom of unclehood have been changed in terms of the form because of these sociological changes.

A university graduate student, for example, said to me as follows:

Do you go near *ğam-mu seyyid*? I went. How many days did you finish? There are different durations of religious education such as in one week, in one month. What are these differences? Principally there is an original version of religious education. There is no one who wonders what we learn. According to me, the basic thing that must be discussed is this issue. The sheik and *ğam-mu seyyid* must tell this difference. However nobody asks this issue. If he asks, the religion is improved. We have some questioning strategies that come from our education. But not everyone can see it.⁴⁰

The rituals of secret initiation ceremony have fulfilled different important roles for both young Nusayri males and the religion uncles: shaping personality, reinventing the secret rituals, and maintaining the social and religious system. In this respect, the *muhip* not only learns the mysteries of the secretive Nusayri religion but also he is prepared for a new life term. With these features of the secret initiation rituals, the initiation also can be seen as a rite of passage. The *telmiz* must pass the initiation in order to be a member of the community; otherwise, he cannot participate in religious ceremonies and religious meetings to which just only initiated males can attend. If the candidate is accepted to the religion after the secret initiation rituals, he is seen as an individual and only then he is accepted passed from childhood to adulthood. From this time forth, other members of the community see him as one of themselves, and he is more respected by the community. When it comes to the situation of the women, there is nothing like a secret or open ritual practice.

Some young Nusayri males I interviewed during the field research did not share or explain any of their secrets. However, an old Nusayri man said me: '*We have two important and crucial secrecies. One of them is known as 'Ali is God, God is Ali'. But*

⁴⁰ Amcanın yanına gittin mi? Gittim. Kaç günde bitirdin? Bir haftada, bir ayda, 40 günde gibi böyle bir süre vardır ve bu farklılık nedir? ... Şimdi öncelikle bunun bir orjinali var. Biz neyi öğreniyoruz diye sorgulayan da yok. Bence esas tartışılması gereken bu. Bunu hocanın kendisi de amcanın kendisinin anlatması lazım. Ama kimse sormuyor. Sorsa geliştirecek. Bizim eğitimlikten gelen sorgulama tekniklerimiz var ama bunu herkes göremiyor.

if we explain the other one, it creates bad results in terms of our security.' As he said, the first secret can be and is known by people outside the community. This secret is sometimes indirectly sometimes directly written in the books (Türk, 2005: 103; Özbek, 2006: 89).

If an initiated Nusayri reveals secrets to people outside the community, he is discriminated against by the society at large. Although there is a clear proscription about sharing religious secrets with people outside the community, there is no clear social punishment about revealing the religious secrets with Nusayri women and non-initiated males.

In the field work, I wanted to interview with young Nusayri males but some of them were reluctant to be interviewed. Although most of the young Nusayri males had finished religious training successfully and were accepted as a member of the community, many of them seem to know only little about the contents of their secret text/s and theology. A narrative which circulates among the young males makes this attitude clear: one of the young males said the following: *'I don't know very much about our religion, you should talk with old people'*. One reason why they did not accept to talk with me might be that they do really not know very well their religion very well. Another reason might be although they know their religion; they did not want to give an interview and tried to escape by doing practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*).

As far as I see, some of the young Nusayris really do not know the religion and the religious practices very well not only traditionally and culturally but also historically. Most of the people I interviewed have complained about the religious education given by the *ğam-mu seyyid*. A narrative that circulates among the member of the community makes this clear. A young Nusayri male teacher showed this deficiency of the religious training given by *ğam-mu seyyid* as follows:

As I said before, not only Nusayri girls who learn their religious identity at university but also Nusayri males try to learn their religion in their first year of university. I think this is where the problem lies. Why? They are 18 – 19 years old and these are people who have received religious training. ... ‘Allah Allah they ask to us very interesting things: What is our belief? What are our differences from a Sunni sect? Where are we situated within Islam? They are trying to learn these things during holidays. What is wrong here?’ I think either family training or the religion uncle training is not enough. [...] For me, the reason of this problem is that religion uncles who give religious training do not sufficiently know the religion.⁴¹

Our religious training has been also retrograded⁴²

As it can be understood from the citation above, some Nusayris especially higher educated persons argue that the religious education and the initiation rituals are retrograded. Reasons for the retrogradation of religious education and *ğam-mu seyyid* are different. Because the *ğam-mu seyyids* do not develop their religious knowledge and do not read different kinds of books, they could not give a high-quality religious education to new generations. Therefore, this new generation tends to look for other sources: written sources in internet and internet forums.

Associated with adapting to the world changes, transformations⁴³

According to my observation in the field, there are different perceptions and ideas about the situation of unclehood, the sheikh, new generations, and *ğam-mu*

⁴¹ Az önce kızlar için söylediğim üniversitede kendi kimliklerini öğrenen kızlar değil, erkekler de gelip araştırmaya başlıyorlar. Burada acı olan bence bu. Niye? Genç 18-19 yaşındaki genç ki bu insanlar da bu din eğitimini almış, az önce anlattım, amca olayı, o komite olayından geçmiş, o öğrenci bile üniversiteye geldikten sonra araştırmaya başlıyor. Allah Allah bunlar bize çok ilginç şeyler söylüyorlar, bizim gerçek inancımız ne? Sünnilik mezhebinden nasıl ayrılıyor? Biz İslamiyet’in neresindeyiz? diye araştırmaya başlıyor. Peki, burada yanlış olan nedir? Ailenin eğitimi ya da amcada alınan eğitimin eksik olduğu. E niye orada eğitimi vermiyoruz, ya da o amca olayı neden var bunu bilmiyoruz. Ben bunu şunu şuna bağlıyorum; bizim din eğitimi almak için gittiğimiz amca dediğimiz kişiler yeterince donanımlı mı? Değil.

⁴² Dini eğitimimiz de yozlaşıyor.

⁴³ Dünyaya ayak uydurmayla alakalı değişimler, dönüşümler.

seyyid. A married woman described the situation of the community, the religious education, speaking Arabic, and the families' dilemma between their children's language and education as follows:

Look, people has demonstrated fully respect to that institution. ... I could not believe this. Why? My husband is 45 years old. When my husband and my father were going behind them, [which means that after initiation rituals, the *muhip* learns the religion under the guidance of the *ğam-mu seyyid*] they could understand Arabic very well; therefore, they could understand all meanings of the prayers that were given to them and learning them by heart was easier. However, when my son goes behind his uncle, this in itself is already an exception, because not all children do this [initiation ritual] or their parents do not want this [initiation ritual]. I said my son's *ğam-mu seyyid* that please teach or show the prayers' Turkish versions to my son. This is really very painful because my son does not understand a thing what he reads [in Arabic]. I and my husband have not spoken much Arabic at home. For the last three-four years when I realized this deficiency in spoken Arabic, we have started to speak Arabic – again at home. If you do not speak it at home; the child does not understand Arabic. Then, the child says that “what are these things I read; I could not understand the meaning of the prayer”. And he is taught the prayers in Latin letters. We learn Turkish very well. We attach importance to dialect. If the child does not speak Arabic, we do not get angry with them. But if they do not speak Turkish very well, we get angry to them. In Karaduvar, many people send their children to schools in the city centre because they hope that by doing so their child's speaking [Turkish] would be improve.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Bakın tamamen o kuruma saygı duyuluyor. İçi boşaltılıyor. Ben buna inanıyorum. Neden içi boşalıyor? Benim eşim 45 yaşında. Eşim ve babam yaşındaki insanlar amcalarının arkasından gittikleri zaman Arapça o kadar güzel anlıyorlardı ki verilen her bir duadaki anlamı çok iyi anlayabiliyorlardı. O yüzden ezberlemesi daha kolay oluyor. Ama şimdi benim oğlum amcasının arkasından gittiği zaman, benim oğlum bir istisna, nedir çünkü her çocuk bunu yapmıyor ya da her çocuğun ailesi bunu istemiyor. Hocam ne olur Türkçesini de yapın dedim. Bu çok acı bişey. Çünkü benim çocuğum okuduğu bişeyi anlamıyor. Ben evimde eşimle çok az Arapça konuşuyorduk, son 3-4 yıldır bunun farkına vardığım için evde Arapça konuşuyoruz eşimle. Evde Arapça konuşmuyorsunuz, çocuk Arapça anlamıyor bu sefer senin karşına geçip “ne o mır mır ne okuduğumu anlamıyorum ki” diyor. Ve Latin harfleriyle o duaları alıyor. Türkçeyi çok güzel öğreniyoruz. Biz lehçeye çok önem veriyoruz. Çocuk Arapça konuşmazsa kızmıyoruz, ama Türkçeyi düzgün konuşmayınca kızıyoruz düzgün konuş diye. Karaduvar'da birçok insan çocuklarının konuşması düzelsin diye çarşıdaki okullara gönderiyor.

When we look more closely at the citation above, according to this woman, the situation of custom of unclehood has changed for two main reasons: the first is decrease of respect towards the institution of unclehood and the second one is the decrease of understanding and speaking of Arabic among the Nusayri new generations. These are the main issues the religious community is confronted with.

A Nusayri woman in whose house I stayed for some time during my field research was also suffering from similar issues. She told me that *“in the past we were talking about our belief, ancestors, and religion much more than today: because of television we do not talk about our religion; therefore, both the new generations and we forget our religion.”*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar has maintained its secret religious practices such as rituals of initiation into the belief. And they have also kept them secret from non-Nusayris. In this meaning, the custom of unclehood is crucial for the transmission and reinvention of secret rituals and knowledge. Today, Nusayri families in Karaduvar have encouraged their sons to start the religious training under a religion uncle.

However, there are some problems that are mainly related with the custom of unclehood and the ritual of initiation into the belief. One of the problems is that the ritual of initiation is not conducted in three stages by telmiz's parents. Why they do not carry out three stages initiation ceremony is mainly economic reason. The cost of a Nusayri religious festival is high for some Nusayri families. Those whose economic condition is not enough to carry out three stages rituals of initiation apply different ways. They, for instance, do not sacrifice animal in the first two initiations or symbolically a rooster is sacrificed. Despite these issues, most of Nusayris in Karaduvar fulfill their religious responsibilities under all conditions.

Another problem related with the custom of unclehood is religion uncles' sufficiency on giving a quality religious training to new generations. According to many members of the community, especially the young Nusayri males, *muhips*, the religion uncle do not study to improve and refresh their religious and intellectual knowledge. Therefore, according to a significant number of people in Karaduvar, the new generation gets further away from the religious performing and religious customs.

To sum up, the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar has tried to cope with the new problems, and has also reproduced itself. Although the Nusayris known as a secret or closed community in terms of social secrecy, they are open to new ideas and they are open-minded apart from their sacred and secret religious knowledge and the ritual of initiation and collective worship.

CHAPTER IV

NUSAYRI CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

*They have a secret that is the only indispensable thing.*⁴⁵
A young Nusayri male

All societies and religious communities have their own significant religious festivals and memorial days. Nusayris have many memorial and festival days with different religious origins: Islamic, Arabian, Persian, and Christian. They do not differentiate regarding their importance, and all the memorial and special days of the prophets, which are celebrated as a festival. In this respect, although they celebrate similar festival with members of the Orthodox Sunni Muslims and other religions, some rituals and practices of the community are specific to the Nusayri religious community. Secretive Nusayris, for instance, celebrate some of their holy prayers and some stages of the festival secretly.

In this chapter, I will mention Nusayri festivals and specifically describe a Nusayri religious festival that is accepted as the most important one; the festival of Ghadīr Khumm. Secretive Nusayris pay attention to keeping some parts of the fasts, religious practices, and prayers secret from the outsiders for several reasons.

During my fieldwork I tried to understand how Nusayris keep some stages of the festivals that are the most important ones secret; which practices have been changed in terms of the secret and the secretiveness. At present time, the secretive Nusayris face a dilemma. This dilemma involves two conflicting obligations: to reveal or to conceal the social secrecy of the community. Different people or groups deal with it by trying to

⁴⁵ Vazgeçemeyecekleri tek şeyleri sırlarıdır.

balance the two. According to members of the community, both women and men, some changes are required to be able to maintain their religious practices at present. And also according to this group, if they open their religious festivals and collective prayers to non-Nusayris, assertions about and biases against Nusayris would disappear. In addition to this, they claim that they do not need to maintain social secrecy anymore.

The secrecy of Nusayris is both esoteric and social. In this respect, I can say that a significant number of members of the community including some elders think that apart from “the esoteric secrecy” such as the initiation rite, and the collective worships or the *salas*, other festivals and religious ceremonies can be opened to non-Nusayris. Furthermore, this group maintains that non-Nusayris can participate in the social secrecy of their festivals and some religious traditions and practices.

Moreover, in this chapter, I will also describe the following: how Nusayris as a secretive religious community maintain and preserve the festival secrets, which levels are opened or publicized to non-Nusayris in this information and technology century by means of controlling; which negotiations have been established between the members of the community; who defines the level of openness; whether there is tension among members of the community and the religious leaders (sheiks).

4.1 Nusayri Religious Festivals and Ceremonies

The festival tradition is important in Nusayri religious community. In Nusayri religious tradition there are two kinds of festival called “*iyd*” and “*leyli*”. Whereas *Iyd* takes all day long, *leyli*, which means sacred night, takes a night. This kind of distinction is not seen in Sunni Muslim festival tradition.

One major written source of information about the secretive Nusayri religious festivals is the *Kitâbu'l Mecmu* (Book of feasts), by the prominent Nusayri, Abū Saïd Maymūn b.Qāsim al al-Tabaranī. He states that secretive Nusayris celebrate many

Festival days in a year. The Nusayri holy festivals have been somehow influenced by Sunni Muslims, Arabians, Persians, and Christians (Moosa, 1987: 382). For instance, a Nusayri woman mentioned a mutual festival day, Epiphany / *Eğli Kıddes / Ğid Kıddes*, with her Christian friend. These two women were also working in a project together, which was carried out in Karaduvar. That day, they celebrate the revelation of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ. She said to me “*we celebrated the Eğli / Ğid Kıddes, with my Christian friend ... yesterday on 6 January. They threw a wooden crucifix to the sea for celebrating the baptism of Jesus Christ.*”

In this part, apart from the festival of *Ghadīr Khumm* which is of great importance for the secretive Nusayris, I shall only mention a few names and origins of the Nusayri festivals. Although, according to the 2010 Nusayri calendar, there are approximately 47 festivals, excluding the private festivals, I mention only the most celebrated festivals. And I also describe only one of them; the festival of *Ghadīr Khumm* (Id al-Ghadir). The reason for this limit is that I was in the field during the festival, and I was also able to directly observe it. I was able to participate in some stages of the festival.

Arabian Festivals

Nusayris celebrate many Arabian religious festivals including the festival of *Ghadīr Khumm (Id al-Ghadir)* over the course of the year. For example, they celebrate the *Id al-fitr* (Festival of Ramadan), the *Id al-Adha* (the feast of sacrifice), the *al-Ahad*, *Mubalaha*, the *Firash* (*‘īd al-Firāsh*), the *Dhikr Id Ashur (the Day of ‘Āshūrā)*, the *Remembrance of the Middle of Shaban Night*, etc.

Persian Festivals

The secretive Nusayris celebrate two festivals of Persian origin; the *Nawruz* and the *Mihrajan*.

Christian Festivals

Many Christian origin festivals are celebrated by the secretive Nusayris. For example, *Dhikr Laylat al-Milad* (Remembrance of Christmas Eve), Epiphany, Pentecost, Palm Sunday, and the feasts of Saint John the Baptist, saint John Chrysostom, Saint Barbara, and saint Mary Magdalene.

4.2 Nusayri Religious Festivals in Karaduvar

In Karaduvar the Nusayri festival and feast days are conducted regularly. In the field some people said: “*We have approximately one hundred and fifty festivals in a year.*” Many of them, however, are not known by outsiders. This number of the festivals clearly illustrates that in the long history of Nusayris religious community they have different and original religious traditions and ritual practices.

Nusayrism is a clear example of religious syncretism (Moosa, 1987; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002). Albert De Jong states that “as a general term” the word esoteric refers “to as system of interpretation focusing on finding extraordinary realities behind ordinary texts, persons, or objects (De Jong, 2006: 39). He points out that esoteric secrecy is related to the interpretation of the hidden or secret knowledge. This understanding of “esoteric” can be applied to secretive Nusayri religious community. The Nusayris’ esoteric secrets are commonly revealed in the ritual contexts that allow the “secret” to be comprehended.

Clark Chilson, however, specifies that just reading about an esoteric secret or hearing about it, would lead to wrong understanding of it (Chilson, 2010: 203). He continues that, in contrast, social secrets are typically revealed and understood through normative language and modes of learning, not through an epiphany induced by a ritual. In addition to this, Chilson states that a religious group conceals its practices and

rituals so outsiders may not view, hear, or learn them (ibid.: 204). In contrast to esoteric secrets, social secrets are created by people when two or more people hide something from others. This kind of secrecy is the form of secrecy that Sissela Bok describes when she asserts that “anything can be secret as so long as it is kept intentionally hidden” (Bok, 1989: 5). This definition of social secrecy is applied to the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar where I conducted a fieldwork. In this sense, I think that the secretive Nusayris festivals are a good example to understand social secrecy.

Having a festival takes a really important place in the social and cultural life of the secretive Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar. Almost all families have at least one religious festival that is repeated every year. If an owner of the festival dies, the festival is carried out by her/his child/ren. This kind of religious and cultural practice creates a positive situation and solidarity among the members of the community. For example, a couple of days before the festival Nusayri women living in the neighborhood and outside the neighborhood get together in order to cook large thin flat bread, a traditional type of bread, which is distributed in the festival with the *hirisi*. This work is carried out exclusively by young girls and married women. They believe that working for the festival is a possibility of acquiring merit for the women, since they are not allowed to participate in the *sala* or the collective worships. So, I can say that having the secrecy creates a schism between males and females. The division of the services at the festivals is determined according to knowing the secret or not.

Religious origins of Nusayri festivals, as I mentioned before, are varied; they have been influenced from different beliefs, geographical regions, and Abraham religions but mostly from Islam, specifically Shi‘ī. However there are also some differences between Muslims who are the majority sect of Islam and Nusayris on festival dates and religious practices. For instance, two belief groups use different calendars: whereas Nusayris uses the Qameri calendar, Sunni Muslims uses the Hijri

calendar. The Nusayris in Karaduvar do not see themselves as Muslim. An elder Nusayri male clearly separated themselves from the Sunni Muslims as follows:

We use the qameri calendar. The form of our tracing of Islam is different because foundation of Islam traces the qameri calendar. In thin meaning we accept Islam as a value, we are not Muslim. For example, because we trace the qameri calendar, between us and our Sunni brothers, we fast 30 days but they fast 29 days.⁴⁶

In the history of the secretive Nusayri religious community, followers of the religion were exposed to terrible treatments, slaughters, and denigration by Sunni Muslims since the Karbala and during the Emevis and Ottoman period (Et-Tavîl, 2010; Olsson, 1998; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002; Türk, 2006; Keser, 2006; Uluçay, 2003). When I asked people “*Why are you still practicing the rituals as a closed community in terms of your secret religious training and secret or closed religious practice?*” most of them remembered those days when their ancestors were slandered, slaughtered, and excluded. For an elder Nusayri male, “*as a religious minority community we had to create a type of secret life and belief to maintain our life.*” In addition to this, they said to me “*thorough all of our history we have been exposed to many pressures, slanders, and bloodbaths.*”

In this meaning, despite all these experiences, they are able to maintain their ritual practices, collective prayers and religious trainings as a closed community with esoteric and social secrets. Some of Nusayris are still afraid that similar religiously motivated violence towards them could happen in modern Turkey. For example some interviewees gave me examples of the bases of fears the slaughter; *Maraş* massacre (1978), *Çorum* massacre (1980), *Sivas* massacre (1993), and *Gazi* massacre (1995). As

⁴⁶ Biz Kamar takvimini takip ederiz. İslamiyeti takip etme şeklimiz farklı. Çünkü İslamiyetin kurulması Kameri takvimini takip eder. Biz o zaman İslamı değer kabul ediyoruz, biz Müslüman olmuyoruz. Şimdi biz Kameri takvimini takip ettiğimiz için bizim Sünni kardeşlerimizle aramızda mesela biz orucu 30 gün tuttuk onlar 29 gün tuttular.

it can be seen in this example the Nusayris see their future mutually with Alevis, but in terms of concept of the religious practices and the religious festivals according to them, Alevis' belief is different from that of the Nusayris.

Another example is about the secretiveness of the festival and other social practices. According to a young initiated male whom I interviewed, the reason why they practice or teach the religion secretly is generally for security, as well as political, and historical reasons. He explains why Nusayris have performed the religious activities secretly and his reaction about misstatements and slanders. He said to me:

Secret performing [of the worship, prayer, and the festival] originated in the foundation of the religion. Even some hadiths says "After returning from the mosque, Prophet Mohammed closeted himself away in his room to pray his specific prayer." We justify ourselves from this point. It says "The hidden is special" "Secret is special." We try to live this special life, and make a living. I do not care if someone calls me "irreligious, atheist."⁴⁷

Also another young male explained why they are still practicing their festivals secretly or closed to non-Nusayris and non-initiated Nusayris as follows:

Primarily there is a religious phenomenon and in its emergence there is such a [secrecy] phenomenon. There has been the secrecy since the beginning of the religion. It started secretly and it was maintained secretly. In this way they have been able to protect their identity. Maybe in this way they have gained power. First of all there is a habit [related to the secrecy]. If this situation is described as religion or belief, Nusayris do not want to give up this habit. They think that if they give up this habit, they will lose everything they have. This is the primary reason. When we come to political cases: these people [his ancestors] lived under the Ottoman's

⁴⁷ Bu dinin temelinden kaynaklanıyor gizli yaşanması. Hatta bazı hadisler der ki "Peygamber efendimiz camide namazını kıldıktan sonra döner evinin odasına kapanır ve kendine has namazını kılardı." Biraz da biz ordan yola çıkıyoruz. "Saklı olan özeldir" diyor. "Gizli olan özeldir." Ve bu özeli kendimizde yaşamaya, yaşatmaya çalışıyoruz. Dışardan bana benim için dinsiz, ateist demeleri beni çok etkilemiyor.

pressure, and they rightly hid themselves from them. There is a little effect on secrecy but because of political or security reasons they were kept secret from [Ottoman's pressure].⁴⁸

In this context, as a young Nusayri initiate, he clearly explains that there are two main reasons why they had to hide from others; including Sunni Muslims and Ottomans. As it can be seen from all sources since the occurring of the religion, followers of Nusayri belief that in order to survive, to maintain their religious beliefs, and to keep their religious identity and practices, they had to live secretly. Although, as he says, there is currently no threat or danger, because of historical habits they carry out their religious training, religious ceremonies, and festivals secretly. Almost all Nusayri women and men offered this explanation about their secrecy. For instance, a woman told:

There was a dissenting opinion between prophets. Maybe the hidden secret is that. People think that they will get a reaction. There is resentment to *Caliph Ebu Bekir, Omer* and *Osman*. Our society does not like them. That is the secret; there is no other secret apart from that. But if we look at the issue from another perspective/ from the other side, other sects do not like Hz. Ali. There are many sects which do not like him. For years, Hz. Ali's name has been completely forgotten in the mosques.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bugün şimdi öncelikle burada bir din olgusu var ve çıkışında böyle bir olgu var. Başından beri bu gizlilik var. Bu zaten gizlilik içerisinde ortaya çıkmış ve bu şekilde yayılmış. Bu şekilde benliklerini korumuşlardır. Bu şekilde belki güçlenmişlerdir. Her şeyden önce bir alışkanlık var. Buna din deniliyorsa ya da inanç bundan vazgeçmek istemiyorlar. Bunu kaybettiklerinde o zaman herşeylerini kaybedeceklerini düşünüyorlar. Öncelikli neden bu. Siyasi olaylara geleyim. Tabiki Osmanlı'nın baskısı altında yaşamışlar ve haklı olarak saklanmışlardır. Temelin etkisi var ama biraz da siyasi olaylardan dolayı, güvenlikten dolayı saklanmışlardır.

⁴⁹ Peygamberler arasındaki muhaliflik var. Şimdi sır olarak gizlenen belki o. Tepki görüleceğine inansılıyor çünkü. Hz. Ebu bekir, ömer ve osman'a bir kırgınlık var. Onlar bizim toplulumuz tarafından sevilmiyor. Sır bu yani, başka sır denen bişey yok. Ama öte taraftan baktığımız zaman Hz. Ali de diğer mezhepler tarafından sevilmiyor. Sevilmediği birçok mezhep var, yıllarca hutbelerde Hz. Ali'nin adı camilerde hiç geçmiyor.

Similarly, many Nusayris hold onto their collective memory. As a result of persecution, Nusayris had to maintain their own religious rituals and practices secretly in Syria and in Turkey for centuries. After the establishment of Republic of Turkey in 1923 both Alevis and Nusayris could live in a safer condition than they could before the Republic. Although there has been no open threat towards Nusayris since the foundation of the Republic, as a historical responsibility towards their ancestors their knowledge and religious practices and ceremonies are carried out secretly, and non-initiated persons are strictly not allowed to participate. Despite keeping the festivals and religious ceremonies secret, as far as I could see in the field and I heard from people, Nusayris are more comfortable explaining religious identity and religious practices at present. For example, after I asked a-43-year-old married woman what she thought about practicing and performing her religious belief and worship from her childhood to today, she told me:

At present it [performing a belief or worship] is comfortable. Now it is more comfortable. In the past we needed to hide much more things. I mean [keeping secret of our belief and worship] was known as the demonstration of respect for our ancestors. Because of our worship is secret, i.e., by our males, normally our females also perform five time prayer. We also believe in fasting, we fast. That's different but it was more secret in the past, today it is more comfortable. Today we can say [we fast]. We are Nusayris; our belief is that we do not believe in praying in a mosque in any case. If we believe that Allah is omnipresent, it is also stated in the prayer: "I am where you think of me," he says.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Şimdi daha rahat. Şimdi çok daha rahat. Daha önce çok daha şeyi gizleme gereği duyuyorduk. Dediğim atalarımıza olan saygımızın göstergesi olarak biliniyordu. İşte ibadetimiz gizli olduğu için, erkeklerimiz tarafından yani, normalde kadınlarımız da o beş vakit namazını okuyan insanlar. Oruca da inanırız, oruç da tutarız. O ayrı ama eskiden çok daha gizli kalıyordu, şimdi çok daha rahat. Şimdi söyleyebiliyoruz. Nusayriyiz, bizim inancımız şu, yani illaki bir camide ibadet edilmesi gerektiğine inanmıyoruz. Yani Allahın her yerde var olduğuna inanıyorsak, duasında bile var "beni düşündüğün yerde varım" diyor.

The confidential Nusayri religious festivals must be kept secret. The outsiders are not told why and when they are celebrated. A calendar of the festivals is prepared under the control of the sheikhs every year. Last year the Ghadīr Khumm was celebrated on Friday, December 4, 2009. This year the festival of Ghadīr will be celebrated on December 11, 2010.

The calendar including festival dates and names is prepared and distributed to all owners of the feast days. Thus every owner of festival can know when s/he celebrates his/her festival in new year. For example, related to the dates of festival a married woman said:

All of them are obvious. At the end of the every year these calendars are distributed to us. These are written one by one, and then they are distributed to the owners of benefactor. Everybody knows when her/his festival will take place, and s/he makes her/his plans accordingly.⁵¹

This edict made it clear that the sheiks have very important responsibility towards owners of the festivals. There are two kinds of calendars. One of them includes general festivals that are celebrated by all the community such as the festival of Ghadīr Khumm or the *Firash* (*īd al-Firāsh*). The other includes private festivals of the owners of the festivals, which are celebrated every year on the same dates. The first calendar is accepted as more secret than the other.

The population of the district is increasing every year (according to the head of the district, whom I interviewed). After the opening of the health occupation school, many university students have rented houses in the district. As a result of the increase in population, they have new neighbors who are non-Nusayri. The demographics of the

51 Hepsi belli. Hocalarımız tarafından sene döndüğü zaman bizlere bu takvimler dağıtılır. Bunlar tek tek yazılıyor, hayır sahiplerine veriliyor. Herkes hayrının hangi güne denk geldiğini biliyor ve ona göre kendini ayarlıyor.

district are shifting away from homogeneity towards heterogeneity. Some members of the community are worried about this changing of structure of the population of the district. To this group, when they live with together non-Nusayris, they could not practice their secret religious practices comfortably. This heterogeneity compels some members of the community to be more careful when they practice religious practices especially for the *sala*. One of the owners of the festival who was an elder woman, and who celebrates a festival every year said to me that she is thinking about moving because a Kurdish family bought a house in front of her house. She said her neighbors can see what she does during the festival, and that makes her sad. As far as I know she plans to move to another street in the district at the end of this summer. One of those who oppose the migration of non-Nusayris to the district said:

It would be better if they [those who immigrate to the district] are from us. For instance, I oppose this migration. Of course they can come to the district, we are shopkeepers, and we need them to earn money. Working together [with non-Nusayri persons] is okay, but I do not support their settling among us.⁵²

4.2.1 The Hosting of the Festival

For many Nusayri people holding a festival is an important religious practice. Every Nusayri person and family wants to organize a festival in order to feel better and to fulfill a religious duty. However, because of considerable expenditure on preparations for the event, everyone is not able to have a festival or collective worship. On the other hand, some families on high incomes celebrate multiple festivals in a year because these are part of a cultural inheritance from their fathers and mothers. If a Nusayri person has a festival, s/he has to celebrate it every year on the same date. Except for a male one's, all interviewees' families have held a festival.

⁵² [Mahalleyme göç edenler] bizden olsa daha iyi diyoruz. Mesela ben karşıyım. Gelsin tabi esnafız kısmetimiz olacak. Bereğber çalışmak tamam ama aramıza gelip yerleşmelerine ben hoş bakmıyorum.

As it can be seen in the names of the Nusayri festival, the hosting of the festival (*bayram sahipliği*) is given different names in different places. For instance, in Adana the hosting of the festival is called “*mevlit sahipliği*” (an Islamic memorial service). *Mevlit* is a *mesnevi* which tells about Prophet Muhammad’s birth and life, which is called Mevlit ceremony. The reason why this religious ceremony is given different names in a religious community could be a fear of pressure of others. I think giving different names as a strategy is a way of protection for Nusayris living with other religious groups, especially against Sunni Muslims.

Elders of the family bequeath something to their children on condition that is used in the festival after they have died. In Karaduvar, elders mostly leave territory to their children. The people believe that if the income coming from inheritance is used for the wrong purposes, it is ruined for inheritors, and also they are damned. Maintaining a festival left from a mother or father is not compulsory for their children. But all Nusayris want to continue holding their festival. Organizing a Nusayri festival is economically difficult. In Karaduvar, it is said that if you organize a festival, you should cook *hırısı* which must be sufficient to feed at least approximately a hundred and fifty people.

The Nusayri religious festivals are passed down from generation to generation. For example, a married Nusayri woman said to me as follows:

We grew up in a family of ten siblings. Before I was born, my father had a charity that is celebrated on May 27 of every year. Everyone knows the day of good deed. I can give as an example our house; my father’s good deed has been celebrated for 40-45 years.⁵³

⁵³ Biz 10 kardeşlik bir ailenin içinde büyüdük. Ben doğmadan önce babamın bir hayrı var. Mayısın 27’nci günü her sene bu yapılır. Herkes kendi hayrının gününü bilir. Mesela bizim evi ben örnek vereyim, artık 40 küsur 45’inci yıla geliyor babamın tuttuğu hayır.

4.3 The Festival of Ghadīr Khumm

4.3.1 The Revelation of Secrets: The Day of the Ghadīr Khumm

The day of Ghadīr Khumm (‘*īd al-ghadīr*’) is known as the most important one of the Nusayri religious festivals. To Bar-Asher and Kofsky, among the festivals of Shī‘ī origin into the Nusayrī calendar, ‘*īd al-ghadīr*’ is of major importance (2002: 120). The event is celebrated by Nusayris in different names in different places: ‘*Id al-Ghadīr*’, ‘*Iyd-il Ğadir*’, ‘*Ğiyd El Ğadir*’, ‘*Eğdil Ğadir*’ or *Festival of Ghadīr* (ibid.: 154).

The reason why this festival is the most important one for Nusayris is based on an event called Ghadir Khumm (the pool of Khumm, situated between Mecca and Medina). In this event before Mohammad Prophet died, he revealed that after him Imam Ali would be “the leader” (*mawlā*) at the site. Et-Tavīl describes “*Gadir Humm Biati*” described in detail in the newly published book⁵⁴ as follows (2010: 35):

On the 18th of Dhul-hajjah, after completing his last pilgrimage (Hajjatul-Widaa – in Turkish: Veda Hacı), Prophet was leaving Mecca toward Medina, where he and the crowd of the people reached to a place called Ghadīr Khumm [which is close to today’s Juhfah]. It was a place where people from different provinces should say Good bye to each other and take different routes for their home. In this place, the following verse was revealed:

"O Apostle! Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; and if you don't do it, you have not delivered His message (at all); and Allah will protect you from the people ..." (Quran 5:67).

⁵⁴ et-Tavīl, Muhammed Emīn Gālip “Tarihü’l-‘Aleviyyin.” It is translated from the Arabic to Turkish by ismail Özdemir (2010) as the name of “The History of Arab Alevi,” Karahan Kitabevi, Adana.

At the Ghadir Khumm, Prophet said the following about Imam Ali:

“Whosoever’s master (*mawla*) I am, this Ali is also his master”⁵⁵ (Et-Tavîl, 2010: 35).

The same event is interpreted in the history of the Shī‘ī-Sunni controversy:

“He of whom I am the *mawlā*, ‘Ali is also the *mawlā*. O God, the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy” (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu, allāhumma wāli man wālāhu wa-‘ādī man ‘adāhu*). (Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002: 121)

The event is interpreted differently in Nusayri religious doctrine. Because of this esoterically interpretation, there is a disagreement regarding the meaning of the *mawlā*, the key word in this account, between Sunni Muslims and Nusayris. Bar-Asher and Kofsky describe the source of this separation in their book ((Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002:121) as follows:

In Sunnī sources, *mawlā* is taken mean “a friend” or “kin.” Hence in the Sunnī interpretation, the Prophet did not mean to express any political or religious stance regarding the status of ‘Alī, but simply wanted to urge his followers to hold his cousin and son-in-law in high esteem. Shī‘ī tradition [including Nusayris], in contrast, relying on another meaning of *mawlā* - namely, “patron” or “leader”- interprets the Prophet’s words as an explicit nomination (*naṣṣ*) of ‘Alī as his successor and hence claims that this sentence should be rendered as: “Of whom I am a patron, ‘Alī is also a patron.”

This clear explanation summarizes the important part of the event of Ghadīr Khumm, for secretive Nusayri religious community. The event is also called “*Ghadīr Khumm Biati*”. The Nusayris think that although they obey the *Ghadīr Khumm*, Sunni Muslims do not obey it. According to the Nusayri doctrine, there is also an esoteric interpretation of this event; in this event the Mohammad Prophet was revealed the many secrets of Imam ‘Alī on that day. For instance, according to al-Tabaranī, an

⁵⁵ *Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha ‘Ali yun mawlahu.*

important Nusayri theologian, the Prophet is said to have pronounced these words in favor of ‘Alī: “*man kuntu mawlāhu fa- ‘Alī ma ‘nāhu*” (cited by Bar-Asher and Kofsky from al-Tabaranī⁵⁶, 2002:122). The meaning of the *AMS* including *ma ‘nā* is revealed to the *telmizes* who are initiated into the Nusayri religion within the context of the custom of unclehood. Moreover in his same book, al-Tabaranī proceeds to explain the importance of this day in the Nusayri calendar:

“For on this [day] the *mā ‘nā* reveals itself through its essence, and its *ism*, Muhammad, is revealed with it (the *mā ‘nā*), summoning it and pointing to it, and his *bāb*, Salmān, summon it (the *ism*), guiding people to it (the *mā ‘nā*) and testifying for and against them”⁵⁷ (cited by Bar-Asher and Kofsky from al-Tabaranī, 2002: 122).

In this respect, the day of *Ghadīr Khumm* is celebrated as the most important holy day by the secretive Nusayris in Karaduvar. Also some members of the community believe that on the day of the *Ghadīr Khumm*, even hellfire had died. For example, for an elder Nusayri male, “*Ghadīr Khumm is our most important festival, it is very important, and it is the most secret festival.*” Another Nusayri male also drew attention about the Festival of *Ghadīr Khumm*:

[...] In Karaduvar people celebrate the Eḡdil Fatr [*Ghadīr Khumm*] and pray at our *cemevis* (assembly houses), and then they eat soup and meat (*hīrisi*). It is the highest form of Islam. It is also our most important religious festival. *Ghadīr Khumm* is a day on which Mohammad Prophet was returning from the

⁵⁶ Abū Saīd Maymūn b. Qāsim al al-Tabaranī, *Kitāb sabīl rāhat al-arwāh wa-dalīl al-surūr wa-l-afrāh ilā fālig al-aṣbāh al-ma‘rūf bi-majmū‘ al-a-yād*, p.54, lines 8-9, edited by R. Strothmann, *Der Islam* 27 (1994-1946) (German Title: *Festkalender der Nusairier Grundlegendes Lehrbuch im Syrischen Alawitenstaat*).

⁵⁷ For more information about the importance of this day in the Nusayri calendar please see book “*The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion; an enquiry into its theology and cultures,*” written by Bar-Asher and Kofsky (2002), pp.120-128, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Hajjatul-Widaa, he gave the power of attorney to Ali Prophet.
It is the one of the most valued religious festivals.”⁵⁸

In historical sense, this case and the day of Ghadīr Khumm are celebrated every year by secretive Nusayris as Imam ‘Ali’s followers. The events at Ghadīr Khumm are advanced as one of the most important arguments for their thesis concerning Imam Ali. On account of the historical meaning of that day; followers of Imam Ali celebrate the day as a biggest day of the year. This historical day, however, is not celebrated by Sunni Muslim as in Nusayris in Turkey because according to them this day actually is not very important in the Muslim history. For example, Ghadīr Khumm is not seen in the list of religious days, religious calendar, prepared by Director of Religious Affairs⁵⁹, which is announced every year. Moreover, the Sunni interpretation of Ghadīr Khumm is made in the light of the events immediately preceding it, namely that Imam Ali had just been criticized by the army he was leading for rescinding an order given by his deputy to distribute a ration of new clothing from the spoils of war (Drake & Davis, 2002: 153). In this context, although, for Nusayris, this day is an exceptional day of the year, for most of Sunni Muslims in Turkey it is actually not a very important day. A Nusayri male explained why Ghadīr Khumm is the most important day for their religious doctrine and tradition as follows:

I spoke with you earlier about the *Eğdil Gadir* festival that is one of our most important festivals. It sounds logical to me after starting to question it. Is it superior to Feast of the Sacrifice? Surely it is more superior to the Feast of the Sacrifice that has been observed for four thousand years and it was started with Abraham the prophet. *Eğdil Gadir* has more recent history [than the sacrifice holiday]. [On that day] the Prophet I believe in gave the procuration. If they [she means

⁵⁸ [...] Eğdil Fatr insanların yine bizim buradaki dini inançlarımıza göre insanlar birlikte cemevinde ibadet ederler ve ibadet ettikten sonra çorba ve et yerler. Bu İslamiyetin en güzel şeklidir. Ve bizde en büyük dini bayram, Hz. Muhammed’in Veda Hutbesi / Veda Haccı dediğimiz, Hz. Ali’ye vekaleti verdiği gündür. Biz de buna en çok değer verdiğimiz dini bayramlarımızdan bir tanesidir.

⁵⁹ For more information please visit: <http://www.diyamet.gov.tr/turkish/dy/Diyamet-Isleri-Baskanligi-AnaMenu-dini-gunler-ve-geceler-182.aspx>

Sunni Muslims] believe the Prophet [Mohammed], I can see giving the procuration as the biggest festival.⁶⁰

4.3.2 Shopping of Materials used in the Festival and Secretiveness

Before the Ghadīr Khumm the host of the festival has to prepare and buy all materials used in the festival and collective worship “*sala*.” The owner of the festival generally buys a calf (*dana*) and at least a ram a few days before the festival takes place. Nusayris mostly sacrifice animals during their rituals and visit the shrines.

Sacrifice tradition is very important in secretive Nusayrism. Thus the animals that are sacrificed have to be very healthy and young. The calf, for example, must be at least one year old. The ram must be at least 5-6 months old. A Nusayri elder said that “*The animal must be healthy because we sacrifice it for Allah.*”

In addition to the animal that will be sacrificed, flour, wood, vegetable especially stuffed aubergines, rice or wheat, ceysiltib, incense, basil et cetera, are necessary. The host of the festival is responsible for buying these goods. Some owners of the festival said to me when they buy these materials from a non-Nusayri shopkeeper in the city centre, he could wonder, and then he could ask why they buy something such as rice or aubergine too much. An elder and retired male who was 65 years old, told me an interesting event about their festival shopping. He said that when he went to buy rice to make stuffed aubergines; shopkeeper who was scaling the rice was bewildered since he bought so much rice. He continued that he had to explain why he needed so much rice:

⁶⁰ Yani bir Eđdil Gadir bayramını sizinle konuşmuştuk, en büyük bayramımızdır. Ha bana mantıklı gelir sorgulamaya başladıktan sonra. Kurban bayramından da mı üstün bir bayram? Tabi ki daha üstün bir bayram. Kurban bayramı 4 bin yıllık bir bayram. Hz. İbrahimle başlanan bir bayram. Bu çok daha yakın bir tarih. Benim inandığım peygamberin vekalet vermesi. Peygambere inanıyorsan vekalet vermesini ben en büyük bayram olarak görebilirim.

I said at different times we have sacrifices, in the name of different prophets [Solomon the Prophet], and we cook meal and we distribute it.⁶¹

At this point when we look closer to this everyday conversation between the elder Nusayri male and “other”, which passed in a friendly atmosphere, according to the Nusayri person, he revealed his religious secret to a non-Nusayri person. Therefore, he was not comfortable because he believes that he should not reveal their secret under any circumstances. Actually there is not a certain limit of secrecy that is on the secret belief system and festivals. As far as saw it depends on as “secret keeper” initiated Nusayri males’ loyal to their oaths.

Another works that are taken place in the scope of organizing a Nusayri festival are wooding, buying rice, and buying flour to make Nusayri traditional dish called *hurisi*. Last summer in 2009, I visited my close Nusayri friend’s house in Karaduvar. When we were eating breakfast, his mother mentioned her own festival, which is carried out every year on the 21st of August. She was about sixty years old with five children. Although, as far as I know, she is very conservative about their religious traditions, she requested of me that I help her son and husband to buy wood for cooking their traditional meal. The meal is distributed after the collective worship to the community. After her inviting me to help, I thanked her very much. Two weeks later, I asked my friend, that is, her son if I could stay at his house at the night of the festival. He said “*I should ask my parents, it is not my decision.*” In Nusayri festival tradition, the decision about who can participate in the festival is up to the host of the festival. On the following day he called me and said: “*My mother did not allow you to stay with us. But you can come early in the morning of the festival day. Also you can help me to distribute the stuffed aubergines.*” Therefore I could go to his house after the *sala*.

⁶¹ Ya bizim işte muhtelif zamanlarda muhtelif Peygamberler [Hz. Süleyman] adına adaklarımız, kurbanlarımız olur ve yemek yapıp dağıtırız.

One day before the last Ghadīr Khumm festival in Karaduvar, there were many calves and rams in front of the houses and in the gardens. They could easily be seen by “others”. If someone walks around on the street, he can see that where the festival is carried out, and who would do festival because the hosts of festival tether the calf and ram in front of the house or in the garden. For example, a married Nusayri woman about 40 years old stated “[...] for instance, you could not hide a ram in the house. When we tether it in front of the house, our non-Nusayri neighbors can see it. And then we have to explain this situation. According to our belief, we should not reveal our religious ceremonies and festivals.” One more example is that when I was perambulating in the district, I saw three rams in front of a house. There were also two big black cauldrons and some woodpile that would be burned to cook *hirisi*. In addition to preparing, there were women sitting in front of the house, and they were choosing foreign substances (*küçük taşlar*) such as very small stones. As a non-Nusayri I recognized that at this night there would be a religious ceremony and *sala*. When we look more closely into this case, it can be said that somehow, the secretive Nusayris in Karaduvar have revealed some secret stages of the festivals to non-Nusayris. As these examples and my observations have shown, many of the members of the community have similar ideas on this issue.

4.3.3 Private Houses as Assembly Rooms

According to Bok, secret groups or communities can create a space of assembly with in which they hide secrets, surrounded by aura of mysteries (1989: 13). In their secret rituals, Nusayri religious community also creates a mystic space. The ceremonies are carried out in their private houses. The purpose of being secretive is so that the ceremonies are not seen or heard by non-Nusayris. According to Nusayris, secretiveness also functions to cleanse the space where the religious ceremony is performed.

For Nusayris, cleanliness is an important part of the religious ceremonials and rituals. The festivals and ceremonies take place mostly at private houses and rarely in assembly houses (*cemevi*). Gatherings in places for the collective prayer are not open to the public. The hosts of festival mostly prefer to gather at their private houses. However, there are collective festivals called *Hasni*, which are mutual festivals to which all members of the community offer contribution. For example, a close time before my fieldwork, the community had organized a collective festival. At the festival many animals were sacrificed. The reason for this collective festival and animal sacrifice was consecutive young deaths in bike and car accidents. From this point of view, secretive Nusayris in Karaduvar practices are a means of appeasing of god.

“Not to be seen / Not to be heard”

In the Nusayri festivals there are different stages and corresponding responsibilities. If the festival is carried out in a private house, a couple of days before the festival, the host of the festival should prepare the place where the *sala* is carried out. The other duties are carried out in front of the houses, in the gardens of the private houses, and in the inner courts of the houses.

The biggest room of the house is cleaned from top to bottom mostly by young girls and married women. All materials and items are removed from the room. When a religious ceremony is carried out, everywhere of the house must be both physically and ritually clean. For instance, the house or space in which the religious ceremony is carried out must be very clean. During the cleaning, all materials and every corner of the house are cleaned with saying prayers such as al-Fatehah. Carpets that are only used in ceremonies are laid. These carpets are cleaned after the ceremony, and they are hidden up to the next religious ceremony.

Moreover the women say a prayer while cleaning all pots and pans that are used in cooking the *hırsi* or a festival meal. If the young girls and women do not pray, the Nusayris believe that the materials are not cleaned ritually.

The duties and services in the festivals such as cooking *hırsi*, baking flat bread (*açık ekmek pişirme*), and distributing meals are fulfilled in front of the house of benefactor (*hayır sahibi*). Other works such as collective worship are carried out in the private house of the benefactor.

During my fieldwork, I recognized that some materials were hidden after the festivals. At the festival time there were many big black cauldrons in front of the houses or people were carrying from one place to other. I think this is because if somebody sees these materials, it could be revealed what they do. A family who carries out a festival every year and with whom I stayed a few days during field research hides all materials that are used in festival. The door of the room was locked in order to hide the materials. I think the reason why they try to keep them secret is not to be realized. Furthermore, cushions that are also used only at performing worships are aligned with the walls of the room.

4.3.4 The Population at the Ghadīr Khumm Festival

In the evening of the festival of Ghadīr Khumm after the sunset, people do not work. The shops are closed. Although there is such a tradition, not all shops in the district were closed after the sunset. Also those who work at government agencies as public officers, and who work in a private company for instance in a bank have to go to work. One of the interviewees said to me that he had not sent his children to the school. But many of the children went to the school.

Nusayris who live outside the district and in other cities come to the district to to near their families and relatives during festivals. Some of them come to help their

family, some of them carry out the festival, and some of them just participate in the festival. For example, my close friend's brothers came from Konya, a city in the Central Anatolia. At these times, the population of the district increases. At the night of the festival, many people visit their close relatives and participate in collective worships. Most Nusayri people even children do not sleep at this night.

4.3.5 Social Secrecy and Preparation of the Traditional Meal “Hirisi”

Nusayris have a lot of traditional foods. In the festival of Ghadīr Khumm mostly the *hirisi* (*etli aşure*) is cooked. In addition to the *hirisi*, white bean stew with meat, bulgur pilaf, stuffed aubergines (*etli dolma*), *hamis* (a kind of meal made with liver), soup with meat and boiled meat are certainly cooked, which is up to the host of the festival. Although they have many different types of food, they mostly prefer cooking *hirisi* known as a sacred meal.

Nusayri women start to prepare the meals one day before the festival. Those who prepare *hirisi* and other the division of labour are determined the host of the feast. However, there are some strict rules about who can participate in preparing the *hirisi*. For example, women must not be divorced, be menstruating, fornicate, backslide, steal, or drink more than two chalices of alcohol. The meals are cooked in big saucepans and cauldrons. Not only all members of the Nusayri community are invited to these festivals, but all non-Nusayris are invited as well. The host of the festival sends meals to their relatives who live out of the district.

A few days before the festival of Ghadīr Khumm, preparations can be observed around in the district. For example, when I was interviewing a young Nusayri male, who is also a teacher, at his home, he said: “*They* [those who are working and preparing for the festival in front of the houses and in the street] *cannot keep their festival secret because if they want to really keep it secret and not to be known by others, for example, they do not wash cauldrons on open areas.*” As we see from the observations of this

young Nusayri, regarding the secrecy practices there is a relatively more relaxed atmosphere today. There are many people who come from outside the district and who are not Nusayri in Karaduvar. Fishers, university students, and public officials such as teachers can easily observe the festivals, which must be carried out secretly.

One day or more before the festival the benefactor (*hayır sahibi*) sacrifices an animal such as a calf or a ram. The animal is sacrificed by an initiated Nusayri male who must have strong religious characteristics, and who must be accepted by the community. The knife that is used to sacrifice the animal must be blessed with Fatiha surah by the sheik. After the animal has been sacrificed, it drained of blood. And then it is left in a big cauldron in order to facilitate complete exsanguination. I had a chance to observe this practice in a tomb at *Şih Mahmut Ziyareti* in Adanalıoğlu district of Tarsus. My friend's father invited me to go with them. There were also his sons and a butcher from the Karaduvar who was also a Nusayri. When a brother of my friend heard that I am going with them, he was surprised. As the host of the festival, the uncle had allowed me to go to the shrine with them. Also he said to his son in front of the house: "*After that Muharrem is considered one of us.*" Then, his son said "*Unless he takes my place, he can come with us.*" When we were travelling, the uncle also told me about their religious traditions, festivals, and places of their shrines. The trip took about 30 minutes. At the shrine there was a shrine keeper who was also Nusayri. The uncle sacrificed three ram at the shrine. After the animal was sacrificed, the butcher waited until all the blood of the scarified animal flow out. In the meantime, two of the four sons, the offering (*adak sahibi*), the uncle, and I visited the shrine. Before the visiting the shrine, they burn *buhur* or *bahur* (a kind of incense) near the entrance of the shrine.

In the morning of the day of the festival Ghadīr Khumm at around 4am the *hirisi* is prepared with meat that has been soaked in water. The women are not allowed to cook the *hirisi*. The cooking of the *hirisi* is the responsibility of the initiated Nusayri males. The place where the *hirisi* is cooked must not be seen by non-Nusayris and

Nusayri women, or non-initiated males. The control of the secretiveness of the place where the *hirisi* is cooked is the responsibility of the host of the festival.

The *hirisi* is made only from the meat and cracked wheat. The meat and the cracked wheat are cooked over a low heat in very big cauldrons that are used only during religious feasts. These are boiled over a wood fire until the two ingredients meld together. All of the bones of the meat are taken one by one. Lastly, the tail fat and spices are put in the *hirisi*.

In order to cook a delicious *hirisi*, it must be stirred very well. Therefore those who stir the *hirisi* must be strong. Those who are good at cooking the *hirisi* are called “*tbbah*.” I mean the more stirring the more delicious *hirisi*. At this night there was smoke many place of the district.

I had change to observe what is going on before the community (*ihvan*) who prays the *sala* in the house leaves a place in where carried out the collective worship secretly. The festival was carried out at the sheik’s house. The *hirisi* was cooked and distributed inner court of the house. There were 8 big cauldrons of *hirisi* in the court (according to the sheik, the cost of this festival was approximately 11,5 thousand Turkish Liras). The walls of the inner court were too high. The *hirisi* is distributed after the collective worship. Before the end of the collective worship, the *hirisi* is put in plastic pails to be distributed to the community who leave the collective worship. There were about two hundred *hirisi* in the plastic pails. And also there was large thin flat bread on all of them. One man and two women distributed the *hirisi* before the ending of the *sala*. There were many children and women waiting in the line. All of them, including me, had a plastic pail to take the *hirisi*. We could hear the voices coming from the second floor. The place was camouflaged with a large blue tent. While I was waiting to take the *hirisi* on the line, the sheik came to me. I interviewed him one day later. At that time he said to me: “*I wish those who say to us we have a deviant religion would come and see what we do in our festivals.*”

In addition to these preparations, the *hırsi* is distributed to everyone. According to the secretive Nusayris in Karaduvar, the religious or ethnic identity of people who come to take the *hırsi* is not important. They distribute it to all of the people in Karaduvar even those who come from the city centre of Mersin.

According to the sheik, the *hırsi* was cooked in about 20 places in Karaduvar. He was very happy with this situation. However, there is a negotiation between some members of the community and the sheik. Those who oppose the cooking of the *hırsi* in Karaduvar think that if they limit the amount of the *hırsi*, they can allocate the money, which is spent in the festivals on the sacrificed animal to the education of the children of the district. However, according to a middle-aged Nusayri male, at the present time it is not possible because there are many conservative elders who do not accept such a suggestion. Also he thinks that they will change their mind about this issue in time. He said to me:

As a ... I said that the money should be spent on education instead of *hırsi*. I want this. How many animals are [sacrificed in the *hırsi*]? That's between 50 and 100. I suggested sacrificing 10 animals. I have recommended it many times. But of course, here we have elders [including the sheiks]. Their thoughts and taboos are not broken. However, I think it could be solved in time.⁶²

As I have mentioned before, the place where the *hırsi* is cooked should not be seen by non-Nusayris by the rules. Therefore, if they cook the *hırsi* in front of the house or in a garden of house in the main street, the place must be concealed from non-Nusayris. I mean they try to camouflage the place where the *hırsi* is cooked. As a practice of concealing the place of the *hırsi* the camouflage is a method used to conceal. However, they covered the place where the *hırsi* was cooked using a big blue

⁶² Ben ... olarak şunu söyledim; oraya harcanacak para eğitime harcansın. Ben onu istedim. Kaç kurban kesecek? İşte 50-100 tane kurban. Ee 10 tane keselim. Ben bunu çok önerdim. Ama tabiki burada büyüklerimiz var burda. Onların düşüncelerini, tabularını yıkamazsınız. Süreç içinde çözülür ama.

tent. The place where the *hirisi* was cooking in front of the two houses near the main street where the dolmushes and many other vehicles were passing was visible to non-Nusayris. In addition to these, there were also many taxis and vehicles of the participants who participate in the *sala* in front of the house of the host of the festival. A Nusayri man who is shopkeeper in Karaduvar told an interesting event. He said to me “*As you know we have collective prayers (sala).*” He added that after the police station was opened in the district, the police were wondering why there were many taxis and vehicles in front of a house and a lot of people were walking towards a direction. This situation drew the attention of the police. They went to the front of the house, and asked: “*What are you doing here? What is going on here?*” *We replied “We are practicing the requirements of our belief.”* And then they left. Other inhabitants of the district had also experienced similar incidents.

It appears that in recent years Nusayris have become more comfortable about celebrating their religious festivals. If they are afraid of a slaughter, they will probably be more careful when they practice a “secret” religious practice or ceremony. But, as far as I can observe and see, they are still careful during the collective prayers.

4.3.6 The Most Secret Religious Practices of the Secretive Nusayris and Reinvention of the Secrets: The *I-SALA*

Secrecy is theorized as a technique for the construction of social boundaries; it is a boundary without specific content marking reclusion from the public sphere (Johnson, 2002). As an esoteric Nusayri religious community Nusayris reconstruct their social boundary in collective worships to which non-initiated people are definitely not admitted. The basic worship of secretive Nusayri religious community is collective worships called *sala*. As a religious activity the *sala* is carried out in the biggest room of the private house or in sala places (assembly rooms). All people including non-Nusayris can participate in Nusayri festivals, but those who are not among initiated

Nusayri males are not allowed to participate in or listen to the *sala*. Because of the secretiveness, the collective worships are carried out in the private houses.

*During our religious festivals in the past, we were very careful and we were trying so hard not to be seen by anybody; however, this secrecy is disregarded today.*⁶³

The practice of collective worship requires the highest level of secrecy towards non-Nusayris and Nusayri women and non-initiated males. In addition to his, principle of secrecy divides the Nusayri males and females during the collective worship. In his article, William Murphy (1980: 193) writes that “*secrecy creates the separation and exclusion of female and male.*” The Nusayri women are not allowed to join in some stages of the festivals and religious education. The Nusayri women are initiated into ritual practices. When the initiated Nusayris pray, the women provide services outside and in a distant place from room where the collective worship is carried out. A married Nusayri woman said to me:

At the festivals as women we do not participate in the *salas*. However when our husbands pray in the *salas*, the first prayers are said for those who work at the services of the festival before the host of the festival.⁶⁴

The most important thing about the secrecy of the *sala* is that non-Nusayris are not allowed to participate in the secret religious ceremonies, because of historical security reasons. Apart from initiated Nusayri males nobody is allowed to join the *sala*, the most secret part of the festival of Ghadīr Khumm.

Before the fieldwork, last summer (in August 2009), I went to the district to stay with my Nusayri friend. At that time his mother said to me: “*If you want to help us,*

⁶³ Önceden olsa aman aman kimse görmesin diye uğraşırdık ama şimdi kalmadı.

⁶⁴ Biz bayramda gene namaza girmiyoruz. Ama eşlerimiz namazda dua akurken ilk duaları o günün hatırına yorulanlara okuyor ev sahibinden önce.

next week you can go with ... (her husband) and ... (he is also my close friend) to bring/buy wood to cook charity meals (hayır yemeği). Thus you do some good (hayır kazanmış olursun).” Although this woman proposed that I go with her husband and her son to bring wood, she did not allow me to stay at her house at the night of the festival. One week before the festival, I asked my friend whether I could participate in it or not. He said to me that it was not his responsibility, and that he should ask his parents. He also said: “If they let you come and stay with us, of course you can.” After asking his parents, he told me that his mother did not allow me to stay at their house at the night of the festival. In this respect, the reason why she did not allow me to be at her house during the festival, especially collective prayer is that if a non-Nusayri sees the religious practice or the good deed, the wishes will not come true. If a non-Nusayri stays at their house, he can see all practices which are secret. Therefore, the secrecy of their festivals is important for the host of the good deed. In this narrative, I recognized and understood that my participation in a religious festival is up to the collective worship.

As it has been mentioned before, the Nusayri women are not allowed to participate in the sala. The sala separates the women and transforms men into secret keepers. The situation of the Nusayri during the sala is service.

A Nusayri woman who works at her husband’s restaurant said to me that they have not been disturbed visually at their festivals at the present time. Her families, however, were exposed to various pressures and slanders. Also she said, in the past some non-Nusayri people wanted to participate in collective worships but they definitely did not give permission.

Conclusion

In the forth chapter of the study, I have shortly described Nusayri festivals, and I have specifically described a Nusayri festival, the festival of Ghadīr Khumm. There

are some important duties that must be carried out secretly from non-Nusayris before and during the festival of Ghadīr Khumm. In this chapter, I have mainly focused on how a Nusayri religious festival is conducted in terms of the concept of social secrecy. As I have mentioned before, according to Chilson (2010), “social secrets are created by people when two or more people hide something from others.” In this sense, Nusayris have intentionally concealed their collective worships carried out in the religious ceremonies and festivals from others, including Nusayri women, non-initiated Nusayri males, and non Nusayris.

Some members, including youth and elders of the community, state that everything is born out of the secrecy. Furthermore, they mentioned that they have to be open to all people. However, according to this group, it has not been possible so far. They think that because of the pressure on them by the others, Sunni Muslims, they were not able to publicize their religious practices. According to this event, the Nusayri religious community had to find a solution to this pressure on itself; therefore, as a social institution the custom of unclehood emerged, which can be defined as a social secrecy. Nusayris have intentionally kept their ritual of initiation and collective worship secretly. The tension between intentionally hide and open of secret ritual practices or social secrecy is lived among the Karaduvar Nusayris. Some of the members, as I have mentioned before, argued that the community could be less secretive about its religious festivals except the initiation and collective prayers and more open to non-Nusayris.

CHAPTER V

NEGOTIATION OF SECRECY IN NUSAYRISM IN TWO DIFFERENT VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

*Virtual communities will not replace organic communities,
but they may be able to strengthen them.*

Jan A.G.M. van Dijk (1997)

*The site [virtual community] is very good
but let's not forget secrecy and that everything is not revealed here.*

An initiated Nusayri male

Today's society is evolving so fast that individuals try to maintain some stability by incorporating both traditional practices from the past and more innovative advancements from the present (Glover, 2003: 1). At present, many traditional religious communities or their followers are using technology to enhance their already-existing community. Religious communities and individuals are aware of the influence of internet on individuals and the collective society. In his article, *Religion finds Technology*, Biersdorfer indicates that religious communities are "going online" (Biersdorfer, 2002). In this sense, the virtual communities seem to become more influential upon religious communities and their followers. Therefore, in addition to my fieldwork in Karaduvar, I began to wonder as to what was going on within the virtual communities consisting of Nusayri members and in particular concerning the secret knowledge within their religious belief. The following chapter will address how some members of a secret religious community present their secret knowledge and secret practices, and the reaction towards these revelations by the other members and non-members of the Nusayri belief within two online forums.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to present an ethnographic study of two virtual communities in which Nusayris are active participants, and to explore how

members perceive, react, and negotiate between each other and non-members of the belief in terms of the secrecy aspect within the Nusayri belief. Before progressing on to presenting the data from the two virtual communities which I studied, I would like to shortly examine the existing relevant literature on virtual communities and explore some definitions.

5.1 Concepts and Definitions

Community

I would touch briefly upon the term “community” before advancing on to virtual communities. The term of community, according to Rapport, “has been one of the widest and most frequently used in social sciences; its examination has been the focus of attention for at least the past 200 years” (Rapport, 2006: 116). Rapport mentions that Robert Redfield identified four key characteristics of communities:

(a) a smallness of social scale; (b) a homogeneity of activities and states of mind of members; (c) a consciousness of distinctiveness; and lastly (d) a self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time. (Rapport, 2006: 116 [Redfield, 1960:4])

In addition to these characteristics, traditionally, ‘community’ was bound by a geographic locality and was generally mediated through the face-to-face communication of its members (Grosberg, 1998: 38). However, according to Grosberg, with the development of information communication technologies these boundaries have been abolished (ibid.). So, the locality alone is no longer a distinguishing factor for the formation of a community.

Virtual community

Much of the existing literature focuses on virtual communities. The literature review is thematic and begins with a description of virtual communities. Next, it focuses on making a comparison between organic (material/physical) communities and virtual (online) communities.

The existing literature on virtual community or social sites starts with Howard Rheingold after the early 1990s. The term virtual community was put forward by him. He describes that virtual online communities are similar to real life groups and communities.

According to Rheingold, a virtual community is:

a group of people who may or may not meet one another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks. In cyberspace, we can chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and make games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. We do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind. Millions of us have already built communities where our identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location. The way a few of us live now might be the way a large population will live, decades hence. (Rheingold, 1993a: 58)

In addition to this explanation, Rheingold defines *virtual communities* as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (2001, [1993a]: 276). In this definition of virtual community:

Net means “an informal term for the loosely interconnected computer networks that use *computer-mediated communications* (CMC) technology to link people around the world into public discussions” (ibid.).

Cyberspace means that “(...) the name some people use for the conceptual space where words, human relationships, data, wealth, and power are manifested by people using CMC technology” (2001, [1993a]: 276).

According to Sonnenbichler, complementary, Lazar and Preece [Lazar & Preece, 1998] defined four attributes of a virtual community:

- 1) People, who interact socially to satisfy their needs and/or perform rules,
- 2) A shared purpose, such as an interest, need or service as a common goal,
- 3) Policies in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals or guides,
- 4) Computer systems, to support the tacit assumptions, rituals, rules, or guides. (Sonnenbichler, 2010:1)

One of the premises of the Internet and other large-scale computer networks, for van Dijk, is the creation of new public space and communities. “These new spaces and communities,” according to van Dijk, “are called *virtual* as they appear to be no longer tied to a particular place and time” (van Dijk, 1997: 39). In his book, *The Network Society*, he also defines virtual communities and organic communities as follows:

Virtual communities are associations of people not tied to time, place, and physical or material circumstances, other than those of the people and media enabling them. They are created in electronic environments with the aid of mediated communications. Organic [or physical] communities are bound to time, place, and natural environments because they depend on the physical contact of human organisms together shaping a ‘social body’ that is called community. (van Dijk, 2006:166)

In his article, *The Reality of Virtual Communities* (1997), van Dijk discusses “whether virtual communities can be replaced with so-called “lost community” in the modern society.” This debate is important to understand the shared purpose or common goal of virtual communities. He mentions two distinctions between traditional and modern communities and between mass and network society, which are too broad and superficial to be useful in the investigation of the virtual community. In this regard, he summarizes the general characteristics of organic and virtual communities as follows:

Table 5.1: Ideal types of organic and virtual community

Source: Jan van Dijk (1997), *The Reality of Virtual Communities*, p. 45.

CHARACTERISTIC	TYPE OF COMMUNITY	
	ORGANIC	VIRTUAL
COMPOSITION & ACTIVITY	tight group (age) several activities	loose affiliation special activities
SOCIAL ORGANIZATION	tied to place and time	not tied to place and time
LANGUAGE & INTERACTION	verbal and non-verbal	verbal and paralanguage
CULTURE & IDENTITY	total singular homogeneous	partial plural heterogeneous

van Dijk describes some characteristics of organic and virtual communities in the table 5.1 (van Dijk, 1997: 45). First of all, on the one hand, organic communities are tight (age) groups of families, neighborhoods, villages and other relatively small-scale social units. On the other hand, for van Dijk, virtual communities are loose

affiliations of special interest, targets and discussion groups and other groups (van Dijk, 1997: 46). Secondly, the social organization of organic communities is tied to a particular geographical place and a definite chronological and biological time, whereas, virtual communities are a social organization that appears to work without these physical ties. Thirdly, according to van Dijk, in organic communities the language and patterns of interaction are basically based on verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. But in the virtual communities, they are based on text, data, and graphics on screens. Lastly, the culture of and identity of organic communities are characterized as total singular and homogeneous. However, in virtual communities they are featured as partial plural and heterogeneous.

All communities, according to van Dijk, maintain some kind of boundary as a mark of membership (1997: 46). That means it must be clear as to who participates in the community. Also, he mentions that all communities have at least one common activity.

To sum up, there are some similarities and differences between organic (physical) communities and virtual (online) communities. People build virtual communities and participate in them for different or sometimes mutual aims. The numbers of virtual communities and their members are increasing every hour. However, van Dijk argues that virtual communities cannot compensate for the “lost community” (van Dijk, 1997: 59). He states that they are not a substitute for organic communities because they cannot exist without them, which means that virtual communities need organic communities before and during online communication.

As a matter of fact virtual communities are not pseudo communities. They have real members. They appear as a new type of community based on network communication. In this type of communities, new forms of language, interaction, reaction and identity are created. According to van Dijk, although virtual communities

cannot replace organic communities, they will be, in addition to them, built on them and will possibly strengthen them.

While I was conducting research on secrecy within the Nusayri religious community on the internet, I found many virtual communities such as Facebook groups and public and closed forums. I also benefited from many virtual communities in which Nusayris are active members.

5.1.1 Why People Participate in and Build Virtual Communities

People build virtual communities and participate in them for a variety of reasons. According to Donath (1998), they may be seeking information or companionship, advocating an operating system or a religion (1998: 1). Moreover, he states that as in the material world, these people's motivations may be complex: both a desire to be helpful and the desire to be noticed may prompt the writing of a lengthy exposition. A basic function is getting and sharing new information on various topics. But, for most participants, according to Rheingold (1993), "identity – both the establishment of their own reputation and the recognition by others – plays a virtual role."

"Individual congregational web sites are the growing edge of online religion" according to The Hartford Institute of Religion Research (2001) in the US (Glover, 2003: 22). In her thesis Glover argues that "(...) religious communities often referred to as congregations; exist in our physical society in which members of the community come together as a group for a common reason – their religious beliefs and practices" (ibid.). She also states that these religious communities are looking for more ways to enhance what they already have and do.

According to Stefanick and LeSage, participation in a virtual community can have beneficial outcomes for its members (2005: 233). For them, "communities tend to have three subgroups; a core group of "regulars," who make the majority of postings

(Rheingold, 1993); the periphery, who post less than the core group (Wild, 1999); and “lurkers,” (ibid.) who gain value from reading messages but do not post any themselves (Stefanick and LeSage, 2005: 233).

From the point of existing literature on virtual communities, it can be said that Nusayris build and participate in public forums and webs, closed forums and webs, Facebook groups such as “*Minnina*” that is a code used between Nusayris to recognize each other, for similar reasons. In addition to the reasons I have mentioned before, followers of Nusayri belief have built virtual communities to inform members of the community about Nusayri beliefs, customs, traditions, and religious practices and so on, and also to share and provide information and ideas. Individuals interact and receive personal feedback. This is a dialectic process; the beliefs are developing and altering, adapting and fluctuating in the direction the participants wish to take them.

5.1.2 Limitations and Delimitations of the Chapter

One of the limitations of this chapter is limited generalization of the qualitative research results to a wider population in the virtual communities. Another limitation is that virtual communities have very limited socio-demographic information on their participants. However, I could get socio-demographic information of most of members on the *AleviForum*, but not the closed virtual community, *aleviforum.info*. In addition to this, identities of members of the virtual communities are mostly deception. However, some active users may reveal their identities in the virtual community.

A delimitation of the chapter is its scope. The chapter is limited to two virtual communities: “*aleviforum.info*” (titled as Arab Alevis Meeting Point) and *AleviForum*. The reason why I decided to monitor the first virtual community is that it is a closed membership community, which means that in general only Nusayris are allowed to participate in the community. The reason for monitoring the second one is that in that virtual community there are many topics that focus on Nusayris, Nusayrism, or Arab

Alevis, and there is also a critical discussion and negotiation of secrecy between Nusayri and other members of the virtual community. Thus, the study was conducted in two virtual communities. In addition to this, some specific topics that were directly related to my research question were studied, and the analysis was based on only these topics and subtopics. Another delimitation of monitoring of the virtual communities is that some messages may be deleted by the contributors or administrators. Therefore, some discussions and negotiations on secrecy among the contributors may have been ended because of the contents of the messages.

5.2 The Reducing of the Nusayri Secrecy

Like other traditional religious communities, Nusayris are finding new hope for the strengthening of their community by creating their own virtual existence such as in Facebook groups, specifically using belief-related web sites, virtual communities, and social sites to strengthen ties. Members of the Nusayri society have built and participate in these sites and communities. Before my fieldwork, I monitored many virtual communities or social web sites⁶⁵ with active members of Nusayri religious community. During this time, I recognized that the Nusayris had also built many virtual communities and they have participated in other virtual communities related with their religion, tradition, custom, identity, and so on.

As I have mentioned before, I monitored different virtual communities which included active Nusayri members. However, here I present two virtual communities; a closed virtual community, *nusayriforum.info* titled “*Arap Alevilerin Buluşma Noktası /*

⁶⁵ <http://www.facebook.com/Nusayri>; Alevi Islam: (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361&v=wall#!/group.php?gid=119543900361&v=info>); Adanalı Fellahlar: (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=8133380819>); Arap Aleviler (Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Tarsus) Birlikten Kuvvet Dogar (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=166976090370>); Minnina (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119543900361#!/group.php?gid=6054456739&ref=ts>).

Arab Alevis Meeting Point” and a public virtual community, “*AleviForum.*” These virtual communities are based on an online message board that is a forum where people can share thoughts and ideas and they can discuss various topics.

5.2.1 The First Case of Nusayri Virtual Communities: nusayriforum.info “Arab Alevis’ [Nusayris’] Meeting Point”

This virtual community, *aleviforum.info*, was built in 2008 by the Nusayri youth. The community is also supported by USBAT (The Alevi Youth Unity). On account of sensibilities of the community, it accepts only Nusayris or Arab Alevi members; other applications are not accepted. Up to today, August 2010, there has been no cancelled membership. One of the aims of sensibility of the community, according to *aleviforum.info* rules, is that the members of the forum cannot be asked questions by non-Nusayris. Messages that are sent by members are controlled. If the message does not include anything negative, it is published on the forum. There was no unconfirmed topic or message on the forum. This control has provided the virtual community a discussion platform exclusively for Nusayris.

The aim of the virtual community is described by the administrators who are Nusayri as follows: “*Our forum has been established to share and provide information and ideas for members of Nusayri belief. Our main role is to be independent and to protect, organize, and develop Nusayris’ religious and cultural life.*” There were 560 members including girls and women in the virtual community. But not all of them were active participants. There were a total 2950 messages and 686 topics from the beginning to 22 August 2010.

The topics in the forum mainly consisted of the history and the belief of Nusayris, other topics such as Arabic, Festivals, Nusayri tombs, culture and traditions of Arab Alevis, and where Nusayris live, and general topics such as literature, music and videos, TV and cinema, op-ed pages and so on.

After three e-mails: becoming a virtual member of a Nusayri religious community

In order to be a member of the community you must be a member of the Nusayri religious community. I was able to be a member of the virtual community after three e-mails with one of the moderators. After I had sent a request to the forum, he asked me some questions about why I want to be member of a closed-community, my aim, my belief, where I live, where I study, and so on. Although the community definitely does not accept non-Nusayris, after I stated that I had conducted an academic research on Nusayris, and I am also an Alevi, finally I was accepted into the virtual community to carry out my research. I was not an actively participating member of the community. I just studied and researched especially some topics mainly related with secrecy in the Nusayri belief and religious tradition.

Target group of the *aleviform.info*

The target group of *aleviform.info* is members of the Nusayri belief. The further goal of the community is to share information and ideas with members of the community. Although in the organic community women are not initiated into the religion and are not allowed to participate in secret religious ceremonies, in virtual communities they can contribute to the community and can ask all types of questions about the doctrine and religious practices. However, on account of secrecy, not all questions are responded by the moderators.

The weakening of secrecy in the Nusayri belief system and rituals

In the virtual community, administrators and members were using Arab Alevi and Nusayri as terms for the religious community or belief. As I have mentioned earlier, the administrators and members contribute information and participate in discussions on belief, religious practices, exogamy, sacred persons and days, current events related with the community and beliefs. My research on the Nusayri virtual

community aimed at finding out how secrecy and secret religious knowledge and practices were negotiated and discussed by members of the Nusayri religious community. According to my research and study of the virtual community, almost all members of the group were loyal to the secrecy. Although the group was a community with secrets, they do not reveal their secret knowledge and religious practices.

In the virtual community women were active members of the community, but the number of women was smaller than the male members. As far as I could see female members were charged with a lack of knowledge but they were not excluded. As an example, a Nusayri asked a question as follows:

Amongst the Nusayri why do the males conduct their collective worship in secret and why is it held in and kept a secret from the women.⁶⁶

A Nusayri male responded to this question by stating that according to him, firstly, Nusayri males pray secretly from Nusayri women because Nusayris believe that the act of praying must be secret; that the prayer is between God and the believer. Secondly, women cannot understand some things that are esoteric, and they cannot conceal them and they may reveal them to non-Nusayris.

Written works and secrecy

In the virtual community, one of the most common debates among members of the forum was on concealment and weakening of secrecy in Nusayri religious community. Some members contributed to the forum as to what they think on the principle of secrecy within the Nusayri belief, and some of them also asked why they have to conceal their religious knowledge and some ritual practices from non-Nusayris. As far as I was able to see, those who started a new topic or who asked a question about

⁶⁶ Nusayrilerde erkeklerin namazı neden gizlidir ve neden kadınlardan gizli yapılır?

secrecy were accused of having a lack of information about the belief. In 2008, one of such discussions was about a book, *Nusayrilik - Arap Alevileri* (2005), written by İnan Keser, who is not a Nusayri. Especially after the early 2000s, many studies on Nusayris have been published. Keser is the most famous of these publications. A member of the virtual community stated that when walking through a bookstore, s/he saw a book about the Nusayri doctrine containing their secret knowledge and ritual practices. Then, s/he opened a topic like this “Do you think it is good to be open that much?” Almost all members of the group claimed that the book reveals too much according to their belief. An administrator contributed another name, Suleiman el-Adani, a person who was initiated into the Nusayri religious belief, and who revealed all the secrets of the Nusayri belief system to a British missionary. According to him, İnan Keser has revealed their secret knowledge in his book; religious doctrine, collective worship, culture, and so on. In addition to this, the administrator published a rumor about İnan Keser: “*After publishing the book, it is said that Keser’s life is unknown (Someone had upset him vice versa (!)).*” Indeed, this rumor was not real. Another member expressed that such people who revealed secrets are ignoble. After the first day of the discussion, another member of the virtual community (who was as far as I could tell a woman) stated that secrecy is a taboo that must be broken. After that, she asked why they conceal a secret. She thought that today there is no threat as in the time of Yavuz Sultan Selim. She also added that after the establishing of Ataturk’s republic, there has been a more comfortable atmosphere for Nusayris. This woman was accused of lacking historical and doctrinal knowledge about the secrecy by three members because according to them the secrecy started before the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim. This discussion was stopped by an administrator because of her attitude of accepting her ideas as real. As I have realized in the fieldwork, Nusayris do not reveal their esoteric secrecy under any circumstances. However, as far as I saw in the fieldwork and the virtual community, except for social secrecy they do not disclose their esoteric secrecy to those who are non-initiated and non-Nusayri.

Not Everything Goes Virtual

In the organic community (Karaduvar Nusayris) and the virtual community (aleviforum.info), the sensibility of secrecy was high between members of the religious community in Karaduvar. In both communities, they give general information about the beliefs, traditions, customs, and ritual practices. In terms of social secrecy, in the virtual community, members shared some religious responsibilities and religious practices. However, when it comes to esoteric or secret knowledge and ritual practices, a few members revealed such a sharing. Then, discussion starts about how far revelations and relax of the secrecy can go. For instance, after looking into the forum, an initiated Nusayri male stated that “(...) the site [virtual community] is very good but let’s not forgets secrecy and that everything should not be revealed here.” That means that the Nusayris’ secrecy principle is an important sacred responsibility for many members of the virtual community.

5.2.2 Second Case of the Nusayri Virtual Communities “*AleviForum*”: The Representation of an Esoteric Belief System in a Virtual Community

The second virtual community that I studied was *AleviForum*, founded in 2004. The community is known as one of the best known Alevi social web sites, according to its administrator. He has revealed his identity on the forum. He is 27 years old and lives in Switzerland. The forum is moderated from there. The aim of the virtual community, according to the administrator, is to present ideas and thoughts and to report current news about Alevis.

In this section of the chapter, firstly, I will present some basic information about the virtual community; member system; and its target group. Secondly, I will look at who created the topic; which topics have been revealed on the forum; which reactions have been shown to be revealing some secret knowledge and inner teachings; which

topics are most discussed and negotiated; roles and activities of female members, and discussions between Nusayri female and male members.

Becoming member of the community

All people can participate in this virtual community; there is no restriction to becoming a member of the virtual community except the registration fee. Since 27 January 2007, new members need to pay 1.50€ for being registered. As in *aleviform.info* I was also a passive member of the community. The total number of members in the group was 29869 when I completed the study.

Target group of the community

The main target group of AleviForum is Alevis. However, everybody who wanted to participate in the community could do so; membership was not restricted to any specific group. In essence, this community was a public forum. All people could contribute new topics to the forum, but its content was controlled by the administrator or moderators. If they realize a negative content, it was cancelled.

Some basic information on topics and its virtual members

In this virtual community, there were approximately five main topics and twenty four subtopics, which have been increased every day. Because there were many topics and subtopics, I restricted my study to only one topic and its related subtopics, which was at first entitled “Nusayrism (Arab Alevism),” on the 28th February 2007; the title of the topic was changed by a moderator of the topic to “*Alevilik ve Aleviler hakkında / Alevism and about Alevis.*” The topic was created on the 8th February 2006 and it is continued up to the present. I started studying the forum in June 2009 and I analyzed postings on the topic up to the 5th May 2010. During this period, 1037 messages were sent to the forum. In table 5.2, the number of postings over the observed period of time was shown. Almost all of the messages were related to the topic.

To refer to this discussion group under the topic of “*Alevilik ve Aleviler hakkında / Alevism and about Alevi*” I will use the virtual community.

Table 5.3: *AleviForum* - Count of Instant Messages

COUNT OF INSTANT MESSAGES	
DATE RANGE	COUNT OF INSTANT MESSAGES
08.02.2006 – 2007	599
2007 – 2008	106
2008 – 2009	93
2009 – 2010	146
2010 – 05.05.2010	93
Total	1037

The contributors of the virtual community differed in terms of age, sex, education, belief, hometown, and place of residence. 95 persons contributed information or have joined in the discussions on Nusayri beliefs and its secret knowledge, inner teachings, belief system, and ritual of practices. The contributors reported to which belief they belonged to on the forum. According to the statistics, 55% of the contributors stated that they were Nusayri or Arab Alevi, followed by Alevi (34%), those who were outside of these religious beliefs (9%), and Caferi/Shii (2%). 77% of the participants were male and 33% were female, which was a remarkable female participation for a secretive religious community that does not permit women to be initiated into the belief. The ages of the participants, according to 56% of contributors, vary between 21 and 64, but most of them were between 25 and 35. When we look at the contributors’ hometown, 51% of them come from three cities where Nusayris or Arab Alevi mostly live; Hatay (80%), Adana (12%), and Mersin (8%); 49% of contributors were from other cities in Turkey. Moreover, 32% of the

participants reported that they live in Hatay (66%), Adana (22%), and Mersin (12). 68% of them reported that they live outside these three cities.

On the forum, some members were called by their real names. Most of the contributors were also active on other topics of the forum. The contributors' total messages on the forum vary between 1 and 8268, which means they were very active. In addition to total messages, the members of the forum gain scores, have counts of thanks, and have scores for experience, which illustrates their accomplishment and popularity.

The topic I studied was created by an initiated Nusayri male, 1NP, who was 27 years old and who registered with the virtual community in 2005. His education level was university graduate. 1NP was also a moderator of the topic. He was the grandson of a sheik, and lives in Hatay. In Hatay, approximately half of its population consists of members of the Nusayri belief. 1NP was the highest contributing person, contributing most with 6273 messages, and his messages or discussions received thanks 3587 times. As far as I was able to study he was very respectful and he also gave answers to all questions. When he wrote something else about Nusayris and Nusayri belief system as a member of the Nusayri belief, he considered the sensibilities of the religious community. He wrote that he expected some reactions from some male members of the community. Two active members of the community criticized him for his revelation from Nusayri belief. Despite these negative reactions, he continued to contribute to the forum about the Nusayri belief system. When he did not know the answer to a question, he asks his grandfather who is a sheikh. That means his grandfather also knows this revelation of the belief system.

The topic, Nusayrism (Arab Alevism), according to 1NP, was created to respond to slanders towards Nusayris and Nusayrism, and to inform those who are members of the virtual community in 2006. The creator of the topic, 1NP, stated that his aim is as follows:

As a member of the Nusayri belief from Hatay, as far as I am able to, I will try to contribute the true beliefs of Nusayrism under this topic. On account of it being a lengthy subject; I will convey gradual additions from the subject to the forum. Whilst attempting to convey to you the truths within Nusayrism, I am also going to reveal here the false accusations made towards Nusayrism. In Nusayrism, there is taqiyya in order to conceal secrets. I will not conduct but instead, I will state what I cannot reveal. If I might make a mistake, please warn me. In this way, we can create an archive in Nusayrism.⁶⁷

For this purpose, INP starts to convey the history of the Nusayri belief, its ethnic origin, its sacred persons, the belief system, the esoteric and external side of the belief, *Ayn-Mim-Sin*, Ali in Nusayrism, the propaganda towards Nusayris in Syria, important Nusayri written works, reincarnation in Nusayrism, Nusayris' worship places, worship, the place of women in the belief, the institution of unclehood, rituals of initiation, festivals, the hosting of festival etc. As he mentions at the beginning of the topic, he does not do taqiyya. For instance, he clearly explains the meaning and place of Ali in Nusayrism. According to him, the meaning of Ali is guardian (*vâsi*) and imam in the external, and that he is the manifestation of Allah in the esoteric (*bâtın*), which is the most debated issue towards Nusayris. He is not human; he is divine light (*nur*). In Nusayrism, INP proceeds, Ali is very important and the Nusayri belief system was constructed on him.

INP also mentions that there is taqiyya in Nusayrism, which compels secrecy. In addition to life safety, which is the first reason and foremost reason for Nusayri secretiveness, the importance of concealing its secrets, is the second reason for secretiveness, secrets are concealed by doing taqiyya. The Nusayri belief system is

⁶⁷ Ben Hataylı bir Arap Alevisi (Nusayri) olarak, Nusayriliğin gerçeklerini elimden geldiğince aktarmaya çalışacağım. Uzun bir konu olduğu için parça parça ekleyeceğim. Nusayriliğin içinde olan gerçekleri aktarmaya çalışıp iftiraları burda açıklayacağım. Nusayrilikte takiyye vardır. sırları perdelemek amaçlı. ben takiyye yapmayacağım. bunun yerine söyleyemeceğim yerleri belirteceğim. Bu kısımları aktaramayacağımı belirteceğim. Hatalarım mutlaka olur, affola. Hatalı yerleri düzeltirseniz Aleviforum'da Nusayrilikle ilgili güzel bir arşiv bulundurmuş oluruz.

esoteric. In an esoteric belief, according to 1NP, taqiyya could be done. Although, many Nusayri members of the virtual community do taqiyya, as far as I could see, 1NP has not performed taqiyya.

1NP explains many symbols and meanings of the belief system. For instance, he has revealed a secret symbol, *Ayn (meaning, Ali)-Mim (name, Muhammad)-Sin (gate/bab, Selman) (AMS)*, which is transmitted in the second stage of the ritual of initiation. According to these symbols, *Ayn* means a meaning which must be understood. It also means eyes, seeing a manifestation of Allah, and understanding. *Ayn* is to be the known secret, Ali. *Mim* tells the meaning. *Mim* is Muhammad. He teaches the secrets of meaning. He informs of the need-to-know, *mâna*, Ali. *Sin* is *gate*, Selman-ı Farisi. *Gate* is put into words by name, Muhammad. It is the *gate* that is opened to secret science. Nusayris call him as *Seyyidi Selman*. *Seyyid* means superior leader and a descentent of a prophet.

5.2.3 Reactions to the Reducing of Secrecy in Nusayri Belief in the Virtual Community

From the beginning of the topic, many people including Nusayris / Arab Alevis, Alevis, Caferis, and non-members of these beliefs have been interested in the topic. To present the positive and negative reactions of members of the virtual community to the revelations of the Nusayri belief system and secrecy on an Internet forum, I would like to benefit from a categorization of them. According to this categorization, the reactions of members of the Nusayri belief, the Alevis, the Caferi/Shies and those who are not part of these beliefs towards the revelation of an esoteric and syncretic belief system on a virtual community are described by the help of the table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Reactions to Partial Revelation from the Nusayri Secret Belief System within the Virtual Community

		REACTIONS TO PARTIAL REVELATION FROM THE NUSAYRI SECRET BELIEF SYSTEM WITHIN THE VIRTUAL COMMUNITY		
BELIEF or RELIGIOUS BELONGING	% OF CONTRIBUTOR	POSITIVE (P)	NEGATIVE (N)	Total
NUSAYRI (N)	55%	NP 35%	NN 65%	100
ALEVI (A)	33%	AP 100%	AN 0%	100
CAFERI / SHII (C)	3%	CP 67%	CN 33%	100
OTHERS (O)	9%	OP 100%	ON 0%	100
Total	100%			

n= 98

NP: Nusayri - Positive Reaction NN: Nusayri - Negative Reaction
 AP: Alevi - Positive Reaction AN: Alevi - Negative Reaction
 CP: Caferi/Shii - Positive Reaction CN: Caferi/Shii - Negative Reaction
 OP: Other- Positive Reaction ON: Other - Negative Reaction

Table 5.3 indicates the reactions of members of the virtual community towards the revelations from the Nusayri belief system. 1NP's aim was to provide first hand correct information to people about the religious system of Nusayris. Due to the fact that the initial reactions came from members of the Alevi belief, I would like to start to present reactions of Alevi towards the revelation from the Nusayri belief system from an initiated male member. Then I will continue with the Nusayri or Arab Alevi members, the Caferi/Shii, and finally those outside of these beliefs.

5.2.3.1 Reactions of Alevi Members in the Virtual Community

Positive reactions

In Table 5.3, AP means those who are Alevi and who reacted positively towards the partial revelation from the Nusayri belief in a virtual community. The first reaction to the partial revelation from the Nusayri belief system on a virtual community came from a male Alevi member, 2AP, who was 27 years old, who lives in Istanbul, and was a Nusayri. 2AP firstly extended his thanks to 1NP for his valuable efforts. 2AP stated that before reading those which had been written by 1NP, he had known Nusayris as Shii. The second reaction was similar to the first one; 3AP stated that they are also waiting for the next ones (information about the Nusayri belief). Then, the Alevi members of the virtual community started to ask more secrecy questions concerning the Nusayri belief system; why do you conceal something else as secret; if you reveal them, this (secrecy) could be disadvantageous or dangerous; why it is a secret etc. As a response to these critical questions, concerning the Nusayri beliefs, 1NP wrote responses to all of the questions one by one. However, in his first reaction, he stated that he had been wondering about the reactions of some Nusayri members of the forum. In addition, he mentioned that he continued to contribute to the forum about the “real” Nusayri belief system not doing taqiyya. 1NP also stated that he will not write about those which are “not written.” He also hoped that this “not written” might be written after him. He manifests his respect to those who would not see the positive aspect of his efforts, and here he gives his real name: *“I respect you [those who are Nusayri and opposing this weakening of secrecy], but I believe that it’s time for revealing secrets. It is my responsibility.”*

Another male Alevi member of the virtual community, 34AP, defended brother 1NP because he thought that 1NP has done a right thing for the Nusayri belief and Nusayris. He continued to support 1NP as follows:

I find the reactions of our siblings, our brother 1NP as immensely correct. I defend his actions for the reason that there cannot be a more thing for our people to learn about Nusayrism from a Nusayri. If 1NP had not written this piece of writing would it have been better for people who wanted to learn about the Nusayri to learn about them from those unknown web sites which denigrate the Alevi and the Nusayri?⁶⁸

Negative reactions

In the table 5.3, AN means those who are Alevi and who reacted negatively to the reducing of secrecy in the Nusayri belief system. During my monitoring of the discussions and reactions in the virtual community, almost nobody who reported himself as Alevi reacted negatively to this partial revelation from the Nusayri belief system to a virtual community.

5.2.3.2 Reactions of Nusayri Members in the Virtual Community

Positive reactions

The second religious belief group in the virtual community is the Nusayris or Arab Alevis who comprised 55% of the total members of the virtual community. In the table 5.3, NP means those who are Nusayri or Arab Alevi and who reacted positively towards the reducing of secrecy in the social and esoteric Nusayri belief system in a virtual community. The first positive reaction from secretive Nusayri religious community came from a Nusayri male, 5NP, who was born in Antakya/Hatay, and who works in Saudi Arabia. His first reaction was that he paid his respect to 1NP and he wants the topic to be continued. 5NP also wrote on the forum as follows:

⁶⁸ 1NP kardeşimizin, abimizin yaptığı son derece doğru olduğunu savunuyorum şu nedenle savunuyorum milletimiz Nusayriliği bir Nusayriden öğrenmesi kadar doğru birşey olabilir mi? Bu yazıyı 1NP yazmasaydı Nusayrilik hakkında birşey öğrenmeye kalksa ne olduğu belli olmayan sitelerdeki Alevi Nusayriler hakkındaki karalamaları okusa daha mı iyi olacak tı?

The time has come to break down the taboos, for how much longer are we going to remain behind closed doors and continue to be mere onlookers at others who interrogate us? There are bound to be people who are not pleased with the information that you have provided but I hope that you respond to this situation with common sense. To share information in relation to Nusayrism carries the connotation of defining Nusayrism, we exist and we are here, similar to how we feel respect towards everyone else then everyone else feeling respect towards us is our right and not a kindness towards us (...) it is our right to benefit from the possibilities presented to us in our day and age and like everyone else.⁶⁹

A Nusayri female contributor, 12NP, of the virtual community was a sheik's grandchild. She was born in Hatay and she has lived there. She reported that she was an undergraduate student. Her first reaction was positive to such an event. She wrote her ideas about weakening secrecy in the Nusayri belief system on the virtual community as follows:

(...) no matter what we do we cannot demolish this hatred which has come into existence and accumulated over hundreds of centuries. But it is necessary for us to express ourselves within the framework of set boundaries. This not done with the aim of getting others to look upon us favorably but we have to do this for our new generations to be able to understand us. This is because our new generation does not have any knowledge in relation to their religion. As the grandchild of a sheik I am in support of conveying our religion within the framework of set boundaries to people, as we withdraw into our shells some use the opportunity to attack us fearlessly but if we express ourselves this will not allow them with such opportunities. You can explain Nusayrism to someone who is not a Nusayri as much as you want they still cannot understand it fully. By continuing to say we should not let others know what we practice we have not been able to convey the

⁶⁹ (...) Tabuların yıkılmasının zamanı gelmiştir artık, ne zamana kadar kapalı kapılar ardında kalıp başkaların(nın) bizi sorgulamalarına seyirci kalacağız? Bu verdiğin bilgiler konusunda hoşnut olmayacak kişiler olabilir bu duruma sağduyu ile karsilamani dilerim. Nuseyrilikle ilgili bilgilerin paylaşılması Nuseyriyinin tanimi anlami tasiyor, biz variz ve burdayiz, herkese saygi duyduğumuz gibi herkesin bize saygi duymasi bir lutuf deyil hakkimizdir (...). Cagin olanaklarindan yaralanmak hakkimizdir bu hakki sonuna kadar kulanip herkes gibi kimliyimizle allanen yasama hakkimizdir. (...)

necessary knowledge to new generations this has resulted in our adults not being able to express themselves clearly. (...).⁷⁰

In another contribution, 12NP wrote as follows:

(...) whilst saying that we should keep our religion a secret and should not allow others to understand it we have come to the stage that we cannot even convey our religious knowledge to our children, our children do not have any other source from which they can learn their religion. Obscurity and lack of sources of information is resulting in the deterioration of our culture. The existing sources of information are full of lies. I am not saying that we should reveal the secret suras taught to our male children, what I am saying is that we should express ourselves within the framework of set boundaries. (...) I repeat that I do not claim that the secret knowledge that is taught by our religion uncles (*ğam-mu seyyid*) should be revealed, but that within limits we should defend ourselves.⁷¹

As a sheikh's granddaughter 12NP also responded to other questions asked of 1NP, and to those who were anxious Nusayris on account of the partial revelation. She thought in line with 1NP on the subject of the partial revelation of Nusayri belief system on cyberspace or an open virtual community. One of the questions asked of 1NP by an initiated Nusayri male was responded to by her as follows:

(...) All that was described by 1NP were things that were already known by everyone. (...) the things written by 1NP are

⁷⁰ (...) Yüzyıllardan beri birikerek gelmiş olan bu nefreti biz ne yaparsak yapalım yıkamayız. Ama belirli bir sınır çerçevesinde kendimizi ifade edebilmemiz gerekiyor. Bunu başkaları bizi hoş görsün diye değil yetişen neslin dinimizi anlayabilmesi için yapmalıyız. Çünkü yeni yetişen nesil diniyle ilgili hiçbirşey bilmiyor. Ben bir şeyh torunu olarak dinimizi belirli sınırlar çerçevesinde insanlara anlatılmasından yanayım biz kapağımıza çekildikçe bazıları pervasızca saldırıyorlar ama kendimizi ifade edersek bunu yapmak gibi bir fırsat geçmeyecek ellerine ki nusayriliği nusayri olmayan birine istediğin kadar anlat yinede tam manasıyla anlayamazlar biz aman kimse bizim ne yaptığımızı bilmesin diye diye yeni yeni yesillere gereken bilgileri veremedik çünkü yetişkinler kendilerini ifade edemiyorlar. (...)

⁷¹ (...) biz dini gizli turalım kimselerin anlamasına izin vermeyelim derken kendi çocuklarımıza bile dinimizi anlatamaz olduk. Çocukların dinlerini öğreneceği herhangi bir kaynak yok. kapalılık ve kaynak eksikliği kültürümüzün yozlaşmasına neden oluyor. Var olan kaynaklar yalanlarla dolu. Ben erkek çocuklarına öğretilen gizli sureleri açıklayalım demiyorum, belirli sınırlar çerçevesinde kendimizi ifade edelim diyorum.

not likely to exceed 15 pages. (...) let us jump to the next subject. The reason our elders taught us to conceal our Alevism was because during their time you either practiced taqiyyah or paid for it with your life. Nowadays no such threatening situation exists and in fact many of our sheiks are in pursuits of how they can set up institutions to be able to promote Nusayrism better. In my view there is no longer any disadvantage in expressing ourselves within the framework of set boundaries. We remained quiet and they (*Sunni Muslims*) denigrated us, we remained quiet and they twisted the truth and tried to convince people of their lies, now is the time to put a stop to this.⁷²

According to an Arab Alevi male, 74NP, who was born in Hatay and who lives in Izmir, 1NP has done the right thing. He as an undergraduate student defends him on the issue of partial revelation of Nusayri beliefs on a virtual community. He wrote his reaction to this partial revelation like that: “I want to endlessly thank our friend (1NP) who informed us.”

A Nusayri male, 66NP, who was born in Tarsus, Mersin, who was 32 years old, and who lives in Germany supported 1NP’s efforts towards the virtual community. He expressed that he thinks in the same terms as 1NP about partial revelation on Nusayri secret beliefs. However, he warned 1NP of his claims that people are not ready yet to learn truths: “You can understand what I mean. I’m tired of listening to lies like yours. But, please be patient, its time will come.”

A Nusayri woman, 73NP, who was born in Hatay, and who lives in Istanbul, expressed her reaction on the virtual community positively. She thought that all those that were written on the forum were a good work. She mentioned that as a Nusayri

⁷² (...) 1NP’nin anlattıkları herkes tarafından bilinen şeyler. (...) 1NP’nin yazdıkları taş çatlasa 15 sayfayı geçmez. (...) Gelelim diyer mevzuya büyüklerimiz bize aleviliğimizi saklamamızı öğretiler neden çünkü onların zamanında takiye yapmak zorunluluğu vardı ya takiye yapacaktın ya da canından olacaktın. şimdi öyle bir durum yok hatta pek çok şeyhimiz dernek kurup nusayriliği nasıl daha iyi tanıtabiliriz diye arayışa geçmişlerdir. bence belirli sınırlar çerçevesinde kendimizi ifade etmenin hiçbir sakıncası yok biz sustuk onlar karaladılar biz sustuk onlar gerçeyi çamura bulayıp insanlara gerçek diye yutturmaya kalktırlar artık dur deme zamanı gelmiştir.

person they can no longer live by concealing their beliefs. According to her, unless they express their religious system and beliefs, they cannot get rid of slander.

Another young Nusayri male, 55NP, who was 25 years old, who was born in Hatay, and who lives in Istanbul, stated that this partial revelation on a virtual community might not be negative for Nusayris and the Nusayri belief. However, he drawn attention to an important point in that these kinds of explanations about the Nusayri belief are not conveyed by many initiated Nusayri males because of a fear of doing wrong towards his religious uncle who conveyed the secret knowledge and secret prayers and towards the community in which he lives. She proceeded with in rituals of initiation, *telmizes* repeat hundreds of times on oath that they will not reveal the secrets that are to be transmitted to him. On this critical issue 55NP noted that:

Dear friends I am not of the view that this is going to turn out badly. I also cannot know whether it befalls upon him to reveal these secrets, I for instance could not reveal them because I do not clearly know the meanings of the secrets that were passed onto to me. In other words as I was not fully aware of the meanings of my secrets I could not explain them to others. But I am in support of my friend Serkan. Even if they are going to make unfavorable comments about us they should do so upon this information. Let us not deal with false allegations anymore. Apart from this I also congratulate Serkan on his courage.⁷³

1NP was supported and congratulated not only by young but also by the elders on the virtual community. For instance, according to a 56 years old Arab Alevi, 83NP, who was born and lives in Adana, 1NP has done a right thing. He thanked 1NP and those who had supported him wholeheartedly and who had held discussions on the virtual community. 83NP who had read all the written writings on the virtual

⁷³ Ben kötü olacağımı düşünmüyorum arkadaşlar. Bu sırları vermek ona düşer mi ben de bilemem, ben veremezdim mesela çünkü bana verilen sırların anlamlarını dahi doğru dürüst bilmiyorum. Yani sırlarıma vakıf bile değilken bunları başkalarına anlatamazdım. Ama ben destekliyorum Serkan arkadaşım. Bizim hakkımızda kötü yorum yapacaklarsa bile bu bilgilerden yapsınlar, iftiralarla uğraşmıyalım artık. Ayrıca da Serkan'ı cesaretinden dolayı kutluyorum.

community reported that on account of these writings, he could consolidate what he had already known and the new things that he had not known. He also drew attention to an important point as follows:

“I am a member of a Nusayri family who have Nusayri beliefs and culture and who live in Adana, and naturally I have lived in a Nusayri environment. As a member of a Nusayri community my observations on Nusayri religious practices, applications, and performing are similar with 1NP’s observations and knowledge.”

Furthermore, 83NP also drew attention to another point on the community. He stated that if 1NP was not active on the forum, the quality of information and discussion decreased. 1NP had not written anything else from the 12th March 2007 to this date, the 19th November 2008. Until 1NP was passive, whether wine (Nusayris called *Nakfi*) is drunk in Nusayri religious ceremonies that are called a congregational or assembly meetings (*cem* or *ayini cem*) was not definitely known. Although mostly those who had opposed to the partial revelation of Nusayri beliefs on a virtual community opposed that in Nusayri religious ceremonies wine or alcohol is not drunk, but those who support this partial revelation stated that wine or *nakfi* is drunk in religious ceremonies. 1NP reported that in Alevism, alcohol is not forbidden. Grape juice, *nakfi*, is not made to wait ten minutes; it is made to wait one day. He added that, in the past, in the religious ceremonies wine was drunk. Moreover, if grape juice is not found, wine is used in ceremonies. However, it does not mean that it is an alcohol table. A swig is taken as a secret symbol. This contribution was the last one until he returns on 3 may 2010, approximately three years later.

During the absence of 1NP, the discussions were continued by Nusayris and non-Nusayris. In this period between 12 March 2007 and 3 May 2010 another sheikh’s child started to be active and to respond to questions on the virtual community on 5 January 2010. However, this time it was not a male, but a sheikh’s daughter, 92NP. She defined herself as an Arab Alevi. She was born in Hatay and she lives in England. On account of her and her father’s sensibilities, she concealed her identity on the virtual

community. She stated that she was writing the first time to the forum. Besides, because of this reason, she also wrote that if she makes a mistake, at the beginning of the contribution she apologized already. After she had read all the writings on the forum, she needed to write her ideas about the disclosure of Nusayri beliefs. On 5th January 2010, she wrote as follows:

I am an Alevi; furthermore, I am a sheikh's daughter. I am stating these to you because in Arab Alevism, there is no fasting,⁷⁴ there is no prayer (Sunni Muslim), pilgrimage, and going to a mosque. If someone says these exist in Arab Alevism, I am willing to give a sheikh's name to those who do not believe me. In this way, I can ensure that correct information is obtained from the sheikh. Please after that let us write the truth or let's not write anything so that we do not have information pollution.⁷⁵

On the next contribution 92NP gave a sheikh's name and address. After that she added that as such "I think that informing non-Nusayris is our sheikhs' responsibilities. We are living in what century? Is that reticence and secretiveness are not enough? (...)"

Another Nusayri female, 69NP, who was born in Hatay, who lives in Mersin, and who was an English teacher, expressed her reaction to partial revelation of Nusayri beliefs like this "God bless your hands. As an Arab Alevi, I began to be ashamed of myself. I know only sundries when I go to Hatay during summers. Again thank you very much."

⁷⁴ The fasting is prescribed to abstain from eating and drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset, while spiritual fasting is, in addition, to protect all the senses and thoughts from all that is unlawful. However, according to many Nusayris I have interviewed, they have no fasting as in the Sunni Muslim. They also stated that they fast all the year around.

⁷⁵ (...) ben aleviyim ustelik bir seyh kiziyim. Niyemi bunlari sizlere belirtiyorum sundan, arap alevilikte oruc, namaz,haca gitmek ve camiye gitmek yoktur. eger arap alevilikte kimki bunlar vardir diyorsa, o arkadaslara seyh ismini verebilir dogru bilgiyi almalarini saglayabilirim. Lutfen artik arap aleviler gerceyi yazalim yada hic yazmayalim ki bilgi kirliliyi olusmasin.

After a long break, approximately three years, 1NP returned to the virtual community. He continued to respond to eight questions asked of him. He responded to a question related to the fasting. Although he explained and responded many times, he again informed on the virtual community: In Nusayri belief system there is no fasting and five times prayer. He added that the prayer in Nusayri belief is accepted as ostensible. Nusayris and Shiites are not the same beliefs, but there are little similarities between them; Ali and Ehlibeyt. However, two beliefs meanings in these beliefs are different.

Negative reactions

However, as I have mentioned, those who were members of the virtual community and who were also members of the organic community, have reacted differently towards the revelation of their esoteric or secret religious knowledge and ritual practices being revealed on a virtual community or on Internet. According to the table 5.3, NN means people who define themselves as Nusayri or Arab Alevis, and whose reaction to partial disclosure of the Nusayri belief system was negative. The first negative reaction to this partial revealing of Nusayri beliefs and secret knowledge came from a Nusayri male, 6NN, who became a member of the virtual community in 2005. 6NN was born in Hatay and he lives there. He firstly asked a question calling 1NP's real name. Up to this message, 1NP was not called by his real name. The question was "Dear 1NP, what is your further aim in this study?" Then he expressed that most of Nusayris are annoyed on account of 1NP's study on a virtual community that is open to all people. He also stated that most of the Nusayris think as X brother, whose reactions and ideas on therevelation of the Nusayri belief system on Internet were important for 1NP. He finally stated like this: "If there is a thing that must be explained, there are our religious leaders who are well educated. They will reveal our secrets when the time comes. In all your writings, there are many fouts." As a response to the question and 6NN's claims, 1NP firstly stated that he respects 6NN who carries out his religious

responsibilities. However, on the issue of the revelation from the Nusayri beliefs by the sheikhs, 1NP does not think similarly to 6NN. 1NP added as follows:

As you know they are not going to reveal our religious beliefs. For me, if nothing is known about us, that is not important, but there are many slanders about us, which disturbs me. I have not revealed all the inner teachings. I have revealed what should be disclosed. This amount of secrecy is too much. The truths and realities of Nusayrism should be known by the world. Let's uncover the lies and slander towards us. Let us put an end to the misunderstandings. (...) I have tried to open a gate. I hope there is more to follow.⁷⁶

A similar negative reaction was written by a Nusayri male, 13NN, who was born in the Harbiye district of Hatay and lives there. 13NN, who was 31 years old, firstly thanked 1NP for his efforts on informing about Nusayri beliefs and Nusayris. 13NN wrote his ideas as follows:

I thank you for your efforts to promote us and I am aware of your good intentions in your writings, but I do not think that there is a need for our secrets to be revealed no matter what. I do not care that people think wrong things about us. We already know our philosophy. For the sake of promoting ourselves we should not take steps that are contrary to our culture and religion. I was especially surprised to see that you as a sheik's grandchildren have revealed our culture to non-Nusayris.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ (...) açıklamayacaklarını sende bilirsin. Hakkımızda hiç bir şey bilinmemesi önemli olmazdı benim için. Ama hakkımızda bilinen yalan yanlış şeylerden rahatsız oluyorum. ben her şeyi açıklamıyorum. ama açıklanması gereken şeyleri açıklıyorum. artık bu kadar gizlilik fazla. dünya nusayriliğin gerçeklerini bilsin. yalanları ve iftiraları ortaya çıkaralım. yanlış anlaşılmalara bitsin. (...) ben kapı açmaya çalışıyorum. işallah arkası gelir.

⁷⁷ (...) bizleri tanıtmaya gayretine teşekkür ederim. gerçekte son derece iyi niyetle yazılan yazılar ama bize ait bazı sırları ilde anlatılması gerektiğini düşünmüyorum. bizi yanlış tanıyan tanıyan bizim umurumuzda da değil. (...)kendimizi tanıtmaya adına kültürümüze ve geleneklerimize ters düşen hareketleri kesinlikle yapmamalıyız. özellikle bir şeyh torunu olarak sizin bunu yapmanızı garipsedim açıkçası.

In 13NN's next contribution, he stated that those which were written by 1NP had been published in books. Despite these revelations, he suggested to 1NP that he should not continue this revelation of Nusayri inner teachings that are taught by the *ğam-mu seyyid*. He wrote his suggestion as follows:

Brother 1NP I do not want to go further into the points that you ought not to have revealed, this is because these are the basis of our teachings in our religion and before prayers. For this reason I am not on the side of probing any further because I do not want to break my oath. I support what you had said on previous occasions and these have even been published in books but in any event we should not continue on with these wrongdoings. We need to advance the teachings of our new generations to new levels as far as we are able to.⁷⁸

After this sharing, 13NN wrote a last response to 1NP. After that he did not contributed anything. However, when we look closer to his two contributions, one point should be regarded that he was born and he lives there, he thinks about what people say or write about themselves and their beliefs. If, for instance, there is a slander towards Nusayris or Nusayrism, reaction to this slander is the religious leaders' or the sheiks' (who control secrecy) responsibilities, according to 13NN. That means out of this group should not speak or write anything else.

The secret knowledge was disclosed to Nusayris not published on the Internet sites

Another member, 17NN, on the virtual community is from Hatay. 17NN reported that he was born in Hatay and he is an undergraduate student. He thought that 1NP had gone a wrong way because no matter how much they tell their beliefs and religious culture to those who are not Nusayri do not want to understand and respect

⁷⁸ 1NP kardeşim benim keşke açıklamasaydın dediğim noktaları daha fazla irdelemek istemiyorum.çünkü bunlar zaten bizim dinimizin temeli ve namazdan önce ki öğretilerdir.o yüzden ben daha fazla kucalama taraftarı değilim.çünkü yeminimide bozmak istemiyorum.dediklerine katılıyorum daha önce malesef bunlar kitaplara bile döküldü.ama olsun biz yinede bu yapılan yanlışlığın arkasından gitmeyelim. Yeni kuşakları elimizden geldiğince daha da ileri düzeye eriştirelim.

these beliefs and cultures. This stance has continued towards them for centuries, according to 17NN. In addition to this, he stated that while this secret knowledge was being revealed to Nusayris, it was not disclosed to be published on the Internet sites. In contrast to this, it was disclosed to Nusayris to conceal its rightful owner. This idea was supported by some NNs. As 17NN mentioned that he wouldn't like to be in 1NP's shoes, he wrote his ideas on the partial revelation of Nusayri belief on a virtual community and informing of non-Nusayris on the Nusayri belief system as follows:

My writings will be very short. Maybe this writing might be the last one. 1NP (calling his real name) complains about the misunderstandings and slanders towards us. He also states that after that people should know our real beliefs and truths of our religion. If people know our real belief wrongly, it is not important for us. The importance is that we should know our own beliefs. Please understand me people know our religious beliefs and doctrines. Those who know us malevolently do not want to understand what we have done. Our 12 Imams could not tell them what truth is because they did not want to see the truth. There is an inter-belief dialog and tolerance in Hatay, which is Nusayris' and Alevis' tolerance. This is known by them as far as we know, but they have not accepted this truth.⁷⁹

As a response to 17NN's ideas and criticism, 1NP accepted his lack of information on some issues. However, he stated that he was not afraid of lack of information or some negative reactions. He also asked 17NN a question and he criticized him "We were wrong diagnosis is not enough anymore? I will try my hardest. Doing taqiyya is an easy way for you. For fear that people do not say to you 'You are not Muslim.' You can continue informing of your religious belief as Shii." At this point, 12NN, who was a sheikh's granddaughter, joined in the discussion between

⁷⁹ (...) Yazılarımda çok sınırlı olacak.belki bu yazı son yazım olabilir. 1NP insnaların bizi yanlış tanımasından yakınmışsın insanların artık bizim ne olduğumuzu tanıma zamanı geldiğinden bahsettin.varsın insanlar bizi yanlış tanısin çok mu önemli önemli olan bizim kendimizi tanımamız.inan insanlar bizi aleviliği yanlış tanımıyor.yanlış tanıyanlar art niyetli olan insanlardır ve onlara ne kadar yazarsan yaz boş.12 imamlarımız onlara gerçeği anlatamadıysa senin işin zordur derim.

17NN and 1NP. She supported 1NP, and she stated that they should not be silent, they should demand justice towards our beliefs. She also requested from 12NN a thing that he should not prevent those who have demanded justice on this space. After this 12NN wrote that he has not done taqiyya, but they should conceal their secret up to Imam Mehdi, who is the rightful owner of our belief, he will appear when the world has fallen. What he meant that the revelation of Nusayri secret religious belief is not 1NN's duty, it's Mehdi's duty.

Another negative reaction was written by a Nusayri male, 21NN, who was born in Hatay and lives in Iskenderun. As a young Nusayri, 24 years old, he expressed his ideas as follows:

I am also a Nusayri. My religion is esoteric, which means it is secret. On this forum or another place, writing or discussing of secrets that belongs to my religion and our people made me sad. (...) And also all Nusayris were upset by this revelation.⁸⁰

Similarly, in 2007, another Nusayri male, 70NN, who was born in Hatay, and lives there, and who was 36 years old, expressed his regrets on account of the revealing of the Nusayri inner teachings on a virtual community. He accepted that general things on Nusayrism such as history of belief, source of belief can be revealed, informed, and discussed but secrets is not to be disclosed on Internet forum. In this respect, he noted that:

I am very sad that I am too late to participate in the forum... What a pity... I am Arab Alevi... I regret to say that a friend has started to reveal many things that must not be disclosed on here... What a pity... A secret is not revealed to be disclosed... If there is something that must be revealed, it is revealed at an opportune time and place... If this duty was not given a

⁸⁰ Ben de bir Nusayriyim. Benim dinim batındır yani gizlidir. Burda ya da başka yerde dinime insanlarıma ait sırların yazılması tartışılması beni üzdüğü gibi tüm Nusayriyileri üzmektedir.

definite someone, nobody should take on a task... (...) I do not like that my belief has been revealed someone who does not know it very well. I do not approve this effort... (...) I am very sad...⁸¹

Exceeding the limits of secrecy on the virtual community

On the issue of the limits of secrecy this was mostly debated in secret religious groups and also on this virtual forum. In the secret groups and communities some leaders control secrecy and define the limits of secrecy. On the virtual community some members of Nusayri belief have stated that 1NN exceeded the limits of Nusayri secrecy. One of the more active contributors, 35NN, who was male, 22 years old, and who lives in Hatay, asked a question to 1NP calling his real name on the virtual community: “Do you think that revealing in detail Nusayrism is a correct behavior? I wonder what you have learnt from your elders like this. If you give answer I will be happy.” He also in his next contribution added that 1NP had exceeded the limits of Nusayri secrecy. On the same day, 1NP responds to his question and his critics: “I do not see any wrong in my efforts.”

In addition to a sheik’s grandson and other followers of the Nusayri belief, another negative reaction on partial revelation of Nusayri secret belief system by was expressed by a 28 years Nusayri male, 54NN. He was born in Adana and he lives there. He reported that he is a computer graphics designer in Adana. For him, that’s enough information in order to introduce us on this forum by non-Nusayris. He stated as follows:

⁸¹ Ne kadar üzgünüm bu kadar geç katıldığım için bu foruma... Ne yazık... Ben de arap alevisiyim... Üzülerek görüyorum ki açıklanmaması gereken bir sürü şeyi oturup bir arkadaşım anlatmaya çalışıyor... Ne yazık... Çok üzüldüm... (...) Sır bir yerlerde anlatılsın diye verilmez... Anlatılacak bişey varsa uygun bir zeminde uygun bir zamanda anlatılır... Bu görev kimseye verilmemişse kimse üstlenmesin bunu... Benim inancımı birinin kalkıp kendi bilgisi sınırında anlatması hiç hoşuma gitmedi... Ben bunu tasvip etmiyorum... (...) Çok üzüldüm...

Dear brother 1NP (calling his nickname and real name), this information is enough to represent us. However, I wish *ayn mim sin* had not been explained. On account of this reason, as a Nusayri I was worried.

In addition to Nusayri males, some Nusayri women also criticized weakening of the Nusayri secrecy and belief by 1NP. One of the female members of the community, 42NN, who was born in Mersin and she lives there, the secret knowledge, must be kept secret until they transmit to rightful owner, Imam Mehdi. She also expressed her regret. She did not mind that whether some people are informed or not informed about Nusayris or Nusayri belief. She added that if they (NPs) want to do something, they should exert effort to educate new generations or adults. In addition, she suggested that those who want to do something towards the Nusayri religion, they might inform their fathers, religion uncles, and Nusayri elders to inform their daughters on their beliefs and religious practices.

In the virtual community, because of polemics some members of the community suggested that the topic to be closed. This counter group thought that if these polemics are continued, there would be more discussions and polemics between members of the virtual community. Actually, active members of the community compromised on some issues by negotiating. For instance, Nusayris can inform those who want to wonder on Nusayris and the Nusayri belief system. However, on the one hand, if some inner teachings, symbols or secret ritual of practices are revealed, some members of the community oppose this disclosing. On the other hand, other innovative group claimed that they have not revealed secret knowledge, inner teachings, and secret prayers on the Internet. But according to this innovative group, some people should try to inform of those who are not Nusayri about the realities and truths of Nusayrism and Nusayris.

On the limits of secrecy on the virtual community there was an important discussion among Nusayri members. They (44NN, 70NN, 71NN, 72NN, 67NP, 73NP, 74NP, and 5NP) discussed between each other whether 1NP passed the limits of

Nusayri secrecy or not. According to 72NN, 1NP had already passed the limits of Nusayri secrecy on the forum because there is too much information that explains the Nusayri belief system. In this negotiation, 73NN who was a woman suggested that the topic should be closed. According to her, if there is someone who wants to get information about Nusayrism, they can recommend written sources on Nusayrism. Thus, those who wonder Nusayrism and Nusayris can learn what they wonder. Then, she suggested closing the topic. 70NN, 44NN, and 71NN supported 73NN's suggestion. However, 67NP and 5NN opposed this suggestion because he stated that 1NP did not pass the boundary of secrecy. He meant that 1NP informed top level. As a response to 67NN, another Nusayri, 5NN stated that 1NP almost passes the top level of secrecy, but he passed in some explanations. Despite this critical discussion, the topic was still open and members of the forum have contributed and monitored the topic.

5.2.3.3 Reactions of Caferi/Shii Members of the Virtual Community

Positive reactions

The symbol CP, on the table 5.3, means those who are Caferi/Shii and whose reaction about partial revelation of Nusayri beliefs system is positive. On the table 5.3, the symbol CN means those who are Caferi/Shii and whose reaction about the partial revelation of Nusayri beliefs system is negative. On the virtual community there were two active Caferi/Shii members between 8 February 2006 and 5 May 2010. Compared to the other followers of the beliefs, Caferi/Shii were less interested in the virtual community. One of them, 15NP, who was born in Kars and who lives there, was wondering about the Nusayri belief system. He asked questions of 1NP. He asked that "Do you believe imamate? Do you fast Muharrem? If you do, how do you perform it? Do you believe that Imam Mehdi will appear? Do you believe rabbit meat is illicit or not in your belief system?" On the same day, 1NP responded to the questions one by

one. Ha stated that in the Nusayri belief system there is imamate belief, there is no feasting, the appearing of Imam Mehdi is believed, and lastly rabbit meat is not eaten.

Allah's curse is upon those who want to reveal this secret

In 2010, another Caferi/Shii member of the virtual community, 90NN, participated in the discussion on partial revelation of a secret belief on the Internet. He was born in Adana and lives in Izmir. He stated that disclosing of a secret belief might cause negative results for members of the Nusayri belief. At the beginning of his writing; he started with a curse: "God's curse is on those who want to reveal this secret." Then, he asked questions of 1NP, but they were not responded, as follows:

On the day of Ghadir Khumm, all truths were revealed. Those who wanted to believe beleived and those who did not want to believe did not believe. (...) The truths were understood by some people (Nusayris) but others did not want to understand them. (...) You (1NP) went on Noah's ark, why did you debark from it? Why do you feel responsible towards those who did not want to believe? Why do you break your oath? (...)⁸²

5.2.3.4 Reactions of Others in the Virtual Community

Positive reactions

On the table 5.3 OP means those who are outside of the other three beliefs and whose reaction about partial revelation of Nusayri believes system is positive. The symbol ON, on the table, means those who are outside of the other three beliefs and whose reaction about partial revelation of Nusayri believes system is negative. On the virtual community there were eight members on this category. The first reaction was written by a 34 years old male, 1OP, in 2006. He lives in Giresun. He asked some questions about secrecy in Nusayri religious community, but they were not responded:

⁸² Bu zamanında (Ghadir Khumm günü) tüm aleme açıkça bildirildi inanan inandı inanmayan yüzünü döndü gitti. (...) gerçeği gören gördü,,duyan duydu,,sen nuhun gemisine binmişsin bu inmek niye? Gemiye binmeyenlerden sorumlu hissetmek niye?.. Verdiğin yeminlerden dönmek niye?

- What is secret?
- Why do you conceal this secret?
- Seeing that this secret is important, why it is not shared with other people?
- In other words, you think we will survive, but others will not! I do not understand this.
- Why in order to learn the secret one must be a definite level?
- That isn't fair! (...)

A similar question was asked to INP by a 28 years old male, 14OP. He was born and lives in Kastamonu. His question was as follows:

Dear INP (calling his real name), I read writings that you wrote on the forum. Well, what is your reason to conceal something else? If they are disclosed, what kinds of inconvenience might result from this? Best.

These two cases are important because many non-Nusayri people asked similar questions to the followers of the Nusayri belief. In the virtual community, INP, who created the topic, stated that his aim was not to reveal the inner teachings of the belief. However, although his aim was not to disclose secret knowledge, 1OP asked to the Nusayri members in the forum: "What is your secret?" Therefore, as they ask questions about secrecy NNs react to the disclosing of the Nusayri belief system.

A 29 years old male, 29OP, shared information about Nusayrism and Nusayris. As far as I saw, he knew was knowledgeable about Nusayrism. According to him, Nusayrism is a belief system that has been spread among Arab Alevis. He stated that Nusayrism actually lost its soul, Alevism. He added that "as a matter of fact that Nusayris believe that Ali is Allah, and even they believe that Ali comprises Prophet Muhammad's essence." As a general opinion most people know or perceive that Nusayris accept Ali as Allah. On the virtual community, this issue was informed and discussed extensively.

In 2007, a non-Nusayri lawyer, 63OP, congratulated 1NP for his effort to inform Nusayrism on the virtual community. He reported that he was 36 years old, was born in Bursa, and lives in Istanbul. He thought that those written in the forum were not enough but he expressed the writings on the forum as a summary of a summary on the Nusayri belief system. He also drew attention to a point that if they do not explain their belief system, those who see you from a distance slander towards you. Therefore, according to him, instead of annoying each other, they should inform people about their belief system. On account of participating in their religious culture and traditions, those who see them from a distance feel jealous. Lastly, he called to 1NP and to other Nusayris in the forum to be informed of Nusayrism on this way that had been started by 1NP. As response to 63OP's ideas and suggestions, a Nusayri female, 44ON wrote like this: "Despite the fact that we had great difficulties in the past, and we were exposed to many pressures and slanders; therefore, in order to survive we had to conceal ourselves and conceal our religious beliefs for centuries." This case illustrates that why Nusayris intentionally conceal themselves. Consequently, they have created a secrecy culture in order to survive and maintain their religious beliefs and ritual practices.

Negative reactions

None of this group, others, has reacted negatively to this partial revelation of the Nusayri secret belief system on the Internet. They stated that in this way they could be informed of the Nusayri belief system. However, as a matter of fact that, as 63OP mentioned, some of OPs envied the Nusayris' secret knowledge.

To sum up, those who are not one of the three belief categories on the virtual community responded positively towards the disclosure of Nusayri secret belief system from a member of the community. However, Nusayris' keeping of secret religious knowledge has not been reacted to positively.

5.3 Virtual Nusayri Women in the Two Virtual Communities

Virtual communities are important because they provide the possibilities for all people from all over the world. Both virtual communities I studied were an important data source for Nusayri women to learn their knowledge and opinions about the religious belief system and ritual of practices. In the organic community, they are excluded from the initiation into the belief system. In the first virtual community, *AleviForum*, which is a closed community, most of the female virtual members are members of the community of called “lurkers” (Wild 1999), who gain value from reading messages but they do not contribute to the virtual community as well as males. In addition, there was no female moderator among the moderators. However, in the second virtual community there were more female members in the virtual community where some of female virtual members are a core group of “regulars” (Rheingold 1993a) who were administrators and moderators.

In the second virtual community, I witnessed much more discussions about the initiation of Nusayri males, ritual practices, and women and secret knowledge between male and female Nusayris than the first one, *aleviforum.info*. In 2006, one of the discussions on the five pillars of Islam and whether Nusayris are Caferi or not was between a Nusayri female and a Nusayri male. The woman, 12NP, was undergraduate student and she lives in Hatay. The man, 17NN, was born in Hatay and lives in there. 17NN claims that Nusayris are Caferi and they are performed five pillars of Islam. However, according to 12NP, Nusayris neither Caferi nor they have five pillars of Islam as in Sunni Muslim. He also criticized her because he had written that she has a lack of knowledge about the Nusayri belief system. As a response this criticism, she reacted to him as follows:

You recognized that you could not cope with me; you started to accuse me of a lack of knowledge. Because I am a girl, I do not know the religion, which is very normal – but if you say I

do not understand this issue (...). It is the third time I am saying to you if you do not send a response; I will never talk with you. Or give your MSN address, we should discuss these issues. (...)⁸³

Although 1NP's further goal was not to inform those who are Nusayri, many of them especially Nusayri women who do not have enough knowledge about their belief reacted positively. This case can be illustrated by the following examples:

A Nusayri female, 41NP, who was born in Adana and who lives in there:

Thank you very much my friend. I am called as Alevi, but because I was not taught, I have tried to learn (the Nusayri belief) on Internet. According to commends that have been made your (1NP) writings on here; you have informed correct knowledge (about the Nusayri belief). If I have a question, I will ask you.⁸⁴

Another Nusayri female, who was born in Hatay and who lives in Ankara:

Hello. I am from Antakya (Hatay). I am an Alevi. I heard the first time that we are called Nusayri. When people ask what your belief is, we say as Arab Alevis. Nusayri?⁸⁵

In 2007, a Nusayri female, 69NP, who was born in Hatay and lives in Mersin, expressed her reaction and ideas to the forum. She, who is an English teacher, firstly thanks to those who contribute to the forum. Then, she expressed her feelings and asked as question as follows:

⁸³ Sen baktın benimle başedemiyorsun beni bilgisizlikle suçlamaya çalışıyorsun kız olduğum için dini bilmiyorum buda son derece doğal. ama yok ben bunuda anlamıyorum dersin senden bu da beklenir} bu üçüncü söyleyişim ve bu seferde yazmazsan seni artık kaideye almıcam msn adresini ver tartışalım bu konuları ve de kim bu şeyhler isimlerini ver atıp tutan biri varsa oda sensin resmen saçmalıyorsun.

⁸⁴ Çok teşekkür ederim arakadaşım. Ben Alevi olarak tanımlanıyorum ama bize eğitim verilmediği için Nusayrilik hakkında internette birşeyler öğrenmeye çalışıyorum. Yapılan yorumlara göre senin burada anlattıkların doğru şeyler. Sen doğru bir şekilde bilgilendirme yapıyorsun. Bir sorum olursa ilerde sorarım.

⁸⁵ Merhaba.Ben Antakyalıyım. Aleviyim.Ve bize nusayri dendiğini yeni öğrendim. Arap Alevisiyim diyoruz soranlara. Nusayri.?

As an Arab Alevi, I started to be embarrassed on account of lack of knowledge about the religion. I did not know anything. (...) I have a question as to what is the reason why women are not allowed to learn the secret. Or is there a form of prayer for women?⁸⁶

As the woman expressed above, many Nusayri women wonder why they are not allowed into rituals of initiation and collective worships. However, although Nusayri women asked this question in the two forums, they have not responded clearly. I was also wondering about this issue. During my fieldwork in Karaduvar, I could not get enough knowledge about this issue. In Karaduvar, an elder Nusayri told me why Nusayri women are not allowed to initiate and that it was on account that they have no souls, they are not to be let in. Therefore, I especially searched this issue in the two virtual communities. However, there was not enough information about this issue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Rheingold (1993a) states, virtual communities are social aggregations on the Internet. The aims of virtual communities that I have studied within the scope of my research question are different. The goal of the first virtual community, *aleviforum.info*, was built to strengthen ties (van Dijk, 1997) between members of the Nusayri belief. In addition, the virtual community was built on the organic community in order to strengthen the organic community. All communities maintain some kinds of boundary to protect the beliefs and members of the community (van Dijk, 1997). In this sense, as a kind of boundary the first virtual community is closed to non-members of the Nusayri beliefs. Therefore, discussions between members of this virtual community are lower. There is a core group of “regulars” (Rheingold, 1993a) who are administrators and moderators, and who make the majority of postings. And also, there

⁸⁶ Ben bir Arap Alevisi olarak kendimden utanmaya başlamıştm. çünkü hiçbirşey bilmiyorum. sadece yazları hataya gittiğimde öğrendiğim ufak tefek şeyler vardı.tekrar tşk ederm emeğinize sağlık. ben birşey sormak istiyorum izninizle.. bu sırrı bayanların öğrenememe nedeni nedir? yada bayanların bir ibadet şekli yokmudur?

is another group of members called “lurkers” (Wild, 1999), who gain value from reading messages but they do not contribute to the virtual community.

In contrast to the first virtual community, the second virtual community, *AleviForum*, is very active and it has much more active followers. In this virtual community, because there are many active discussion topics, I had to limit my research. Therefore, I monitored a “sub-virtual community” titled “*Nusayrism (Arab Alevism)* in the forum.” This sub-virtual community was built by an initiated Nusayri male, 1NP. The further aim of this virtual community is to inform those who are not members of the Nusayri belief, and who think wrongly about Nusayris or Nusayrism. However, 65% of active members of the sub-virtual community do not support this partial revelation of the Nusayri religious secret on the Internet or a discussion forum. These people opposing to the revelation of the Nusayri belief system mostly live in Hatay where approximately one-half of population structure is Nusayri. In addition, their level of education is lower than those who support partial revelation of the Nusayri belief system on the Internet. 35% of other active Nusayri users and Alevis (100%), others (100%), and Caferis/Shies (67%) have reacted positively.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have tried to present an ethnographic study of the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar district of Mersin to find out and describe how it transmits its secret/esoteric teachings and rituals of religious practices to new generations, how it intentionally conceals its secret knowledge and rituals of initiation from others, and also what kind of tensions exist and negotiations take place between members of the community. In addition to conducting fieldwork among Nusayris, I also studied two different virtual communities in which Nusayris are active participants. In this last chapter of the study, I present an overall analysis of the transformation of secrecy within the Nusayri community and the way in which secrecy is negotiated between followers of the Nusayri belief and outsiders.

In order to discuss secrecy, I have used two different approaches. The first one is Georg Simmel's (1906) conceptualization of secrecy, which employs the term secrecy as a sociological phenomenon. The second conceptualization of secrecy used in this study is Clark Chilson's approach to secrecy (2010). Chilson distinguishes between esoteric secrecy and social secrecy. With the help of these two approaches to secrecy, I classify the secrecy of Karaduvar Nusayris as a sociological phenomenon and as a form of social secrecy. My operational definition of secrecy is the intentional concealing of religious knowledge and practice from non-initiates and outsiders.

In light of these approaches to secrecy, I would like to discuss negotiation of reducing level of secrecy among Karaduvar Nusayris and among the members of two virtual communities in which Nusayris are active. In the long history of the Nusayri belief, as I was told in my fieldwork in Karaduvar, followers of the belief were victims

of massacres, slavery, and religious oppression for centuries. In response to these pressures, followers of the Nusayri belief have chosen to live as a secretive religious community. Since the Karbala event in 608, Nusayris have experienced what can be called as the “secrecy process” (Tefft 1980). They have tried to survive and to maintain their esoteric beliefs. Indeed, even today they can not carry out their religious beliefs freely. In the long history of this secrecy process, they created a religious training system, called the institution of unclehood. However, although in the past strengthening of the secrecy was very important for the community to feel safe, today they need to reduce level of secrecy not to be stigmatized by other members of beliefs or religions. Secrecy historically was applied as a weapon of self-defense; today it becomes disputable among members of Karaduvar Nusayris. The Nusayri community practices secrecy as a weapon to self-defense from members of mainstream religion, Sunni Muslim in Turkey. They also claim that they practice “real Islam” because they believe that in the Koran there are internal meanings that are understood correctly by them. However, they state that because of fear of misunderstandings or slanders, they can not make their secret knowledge, content of the worships or the ritual practices public. Therefore, they argue if they had made their religious belief system public, they would lose unity of the community, which bound them together. At present, secrecy is their best weapon to combat public misunderstandings.

In this problematic process, the community has transformed some applications in the social secrecy and religious training. Thanks to the institution of unclehood, the Nusayris have transmitted their secret knowledge and secret rituals of practice to new generations for centuries. The institution of unclehood has gone through some transformations in terms of form and duration, but in essence its institutional relevance is still in place. One of the transformations in the institution of unclehood is the appointing of *ğam-mu seyyid*. In Karaduvar, up until 15 years ago, *ğam-mu seyyid* used to be appointed by each male child. However, today *ğam-mu seyyid* is mostly

appointed by the parents. The reason of this transformation is that the new generations seem to be less interested in initiation rituals and religious training.

Another transformation of the institution of unclehood is the age to start rituals of initiation and religious education. The age at which the *telmizes* started initiation and religious education has decreased in Karaduvar. For instance, in the past, the *telmizes* were initiated at the ages between 15 and 18, but today the age range decreased to 13-15 years. Some families even send their children once they are 11 years old. One of the reasons of this change is that parents think that their children can be more effectively initiated at an earlier age. Therefore, families encourage their male children from early on to undergo religious training. Mothers are particularly interested in encouraging their sons to receive religious education from a *ğam-mu seyyid*. They even apply psychological pressure to their male children to follow a *ğam-mu seyyid*. For instance, if a boy does not want to start religious training, his mother would say to him that his father and grandfather successfully completed this initiation and religious training, and that if he wants to be like them he should also follow a *ğam-mu seyyid*. Although most of the Nusayri mothers apply psychological pressure to their sons who do not want to receive religious education, there are also those who do not apply pressure. In Karaduvar, after all, not all families send their children to initiation and religious education. In the past, there used to be much more pressure to male children who did not want to take religious education. However, today there is less family pressure. Although, there is pressure towards male children, *muhips* who passed initiation are not under any pressure to participate in collective worships or religious ceremonies. During my fieldwork, many families and elders complained that young males do not participate in the collective worships or religious meetings.

The duration of the religious training at the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house after the rituals of initiation is another transformation of the institution of unclehood. In the past, after the third stage of the initiation ritual, the *telmiz* used to go to *ğam-mu seyyid*'s

house, but today this tradition is gradually disappearing. Most *telmizes* do not stay at their *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home. This situation actually varies from one *ğam-mu seyyid* to another. Although some *ğam-mu seyyids* accept this kind of transformation, those who are conservative about religion resist it. Therefore, when families appoint a *ğam-mu seyyid* to their male children, they pay attention to the different attitudes of *ğam-mu seyyids*.

The duration that *telmizes* remain at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home has also changed. The duration of staying at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home in the past used to be about a year. However, today this duration is significantly shorter, between one week and one month, and the *telmizes* only stay at *ğam-mu seyyid*'s house during the evenings. Therefore, as many Nusayris stress, the quality of religious training is negatively affected. The *muhip* just learns the prayers that are told in the collective worships and prayers, but details of the belief are not taught in this short period. Moreover, diminishing of the duration of one's stay at the *ğam-mu seyyid*'s home has also led to the decrease of respect to the institution of unclehood and *ğam-mu seyyid*. Consequently, young Nusayri males cannot receive proper religious training, and the respect for the institution of unclehood has decreased significantly.

The festival tradition is important in Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar. By the help of these religious performances, the community reinvents its secret and non-secret ritual practices. As a syncretic religious community, Nusayris celebrate many memorial and festival days with different religious origins: Islamic, Arabian, Persian, and Christian. During my fieldwork I tried to understand how they are able to keep some stages of important festivals secret and which practices have been transformed in terms of the secret and the secretiveness. As a secretive religious community, Nusayris have faced a dilemma that involves two conflicting strategies: partial revelation or absolute concealment of the religious community. There are people who try to negotiate between these two conflicting strategies. In general, almost

everyone agrees that there is a more comfortable atmosphere in contemporary Turkey. Moreover, Nusayris have gained high level of education for approximately thirty years. With the increase in the number of university graduates, the number of those who support the relax of social secrecy in Nusayri religious tradition is increasing. According to these men and women with university degrees, a certain level of change is required to be able to maintain Nusayri religious practices at present. Although they might be relatively few in number, they are actively involved in such debates. According to this group, if they open their religious festivals and collective prayers to non-Nusayris, prejudices and slanders against Nusayris would gradually disappear. In addition to this, they claim that they do not need to maintain social secrecy anymore. In this sense, social secrecy over long periods can inhibit a religious community's ability to survive. This, they argue, is what is happening with the Nusayri religious community in Karaduvar. Today, the religious community manages to maintain its religious festivals, holy days, and secret religious rituals only by negotiating the level and practice of social secrecy.

Another transformation among the Nusayris is the use of mother tongue. First or the most important issue Nusayris cope with is the decreasing of rate of speaking Arabic among the new generations. This issue is on the agenda of Karaduvar District Mutual Assistance and Solidarity Association. They prepared a project that aims to increase Arabic writing and speaking among young Nusayris. I was also invited to be a part of the project that was to be started at the end of 2010. While Nusayris in Karaduvar speak Arabic and Turkish in their everyday life, they speak Arabic in their religious rituals and ceremonies. In addition, the prayers and religious training provided by the uncle is carried out in Arabic. Therefore, a Nusayri male child should be able to speak Arabic before his religious training; otherwise, religious education becomes a challenge for those who do not speak Arabic. In Karaduvar, the rate of speaking Arabic among the new generation is on the decrease. This important issue is also on the agenda of virtual Nusayri communities.

Another dimension of the transformation is marriage with non-Nusayris. Before mid-1990s, there were fewer marriages between Nusayris and Non-Nusayris in Karaduvar. However, especially after 1995, exogamy started to become more widespread. I do not have statistics concerning exogamy but I asked my interviewees what they think about the practice of exogamy. For instance, according to the sheikh whose wife is Nusayri, he does not approve exogamy, but he also mentioned that if a Nusayri young woman or man wanted to marry a non-Nusayri, he would not oppose it. He also told me about why they are intentionally maintaining their religious practices secret as follows:

Despite revealing our beliefs, they [Sunni Muslims] do not believe us. Therefore, we do not reveal and explain our beliefs and worships outside the community. Even today, they claim that we put corpse water into our soup (hırsi). However, I have never heard such a thing. Neither my grandfather and my father nor I have seen this personally. Consequently, why do we give a girl away in marriage to such a community [Sunni Muslims]? If we give her away in a marriage, she would suffer torment. We have seen those who gave their girls away. We assume an attitude that the girls are not given outside the community. Nevertheless, we do not oppose those who give their girls to a non-Nusayri. We do not want to see our daughters' exposure to such things.⁸⁷

Various members of the community oppose exogamy on account of similar reasons. One of the reasons is to maintain and keep their secret religious practices secret. Another reason is to maintain the homogeneity of the neighborhood. However, a group of people in the community, including elders, well educated persons, and head of

⁸⁷ Ne kadar anlatsak da inanmıyorlar. Biz de bu yüzden topluluk dışına bizim inancımızı, ibadetlerimizi anlatmıyoruz, açıklamıyoruz. Bugün bile yaptığımız şu çorbanın içine ölü suyunu koyduğumuzu iddia ediyorlar. Halbuki öyle bir şeyi ben ne dedemden, ne babamdan duydum ne de ben şahsen gördüm. Dolayısıyla böylesi bir durumda böylesi bir topluluğa (Sünni) biz neden kız verelim? Verip de kendisi için azap mı çektirelim. Verenleri de gördük. Biz tavır olarak verilmemesinden yanayız. Ama verenler olunca karşı mı çıkacağız? Hayır. Biz kızlarımızın böyle şeylere maruz kalmasını istemiyoruz.

the neighborhood, claim that today there is not an important pressure on the community. Therefore, they think that the religious practices or festivals could be more open to those who are not Nusayri. This means that some of the religious performances and practices can be opened to non-Nusayris, and also some knowledge about the beliefs of the community can be revealed to outsiders. Thus, non-Nusayris, especially Sunni Muslims, could learn direct and accurate information about the Nusayri religious practices.

As I have mentined before, as an outsider to secrets of the community, I experienced an interrelated set of tensions between concealment and downgrade of social secrecy or limits of secrecy in Karaduvar. In addition to the field research, in two virtual communities, Nusayri members who frequent have negotiated reducing the social secrecy and partisl revelitation of the esoteric secrecy in Nusayri belief. Esoteric secrecy in the Nusayri religious belief and community, however, is still one of the most important sacred responsibilities for most members of the community. The initiation rituals and collective worship, which is the most important ritual practices in the community, are on a large scale maintained secretly. However, on account of the secrecy in the Nusayri belief and ritual practices, the community is informed or presented wrongly in terms of religious beliefs, ritual practices, and esoteric secrets by non-Nusayris including researchers and writers. Moreover, most of these publications on Nusayri belief have been written by non-Nusayris. Therefore, a group of Nusayris including both males and females claim that if they reveal their social secrecy partially and they inform of those who are not Nusayri, most of the slanders towards Nusayris and Nusayrism might disappear. This group composes of especially graduate students, sheikh's grandchildren, educated people; those Nusayris who were born in cities of Hatay, Adana, and Mersin, and who live outside of their hometown think that the weakening of the religious secrecy would be positive for the followers of the belief. For instance, percentage thirty-five of Nusayri participants supports the weakening of the social secrecy in the second virtual community. In addition to this virtual community,

nearly one third of the members of the first virtual community also support the downgrade of the social secrecy on the internet and in real life. Besides, I found out that those Nusayris in Karaduvar also currently support the weakening of the social secrecy. Those who support this weakening of the religious secrecy claim that most of their secret knowledge and secret ritual of practices have already revealed on the books and on internet. They, furthermore, claim that Nusayrism and Nusayris are not presented and identified correctly on many platforms. Thus, the truths and realities of the belief have been distorted by mostly non-Nusayri. In addition to non-Nusayri researchers or writers, Nusayri researchers, religious leaders or intelligentsia also present and describe Nusayrism and Nusayri esoteric belief system as in real life. As far as I was able to understand from the indebt-interviews and the discussions among Nusayris in the virtual communities, Nusayri origin researchers and religious leaders do taqiyya in their writings in order to not to be excluded by other religious sects and beliefs. The taqiyya is discussed and negotiated among the Nusayris today. It is claimed that at present there is no a vital reason to hide religious beliefs and ritual practices in Turkey. Therefore, some of Nusayris who have influence on the community claim that they can define and present themselves and their religious beliefs and ritual practices freely.

The limit of secrecy is not perceived and applied at a particular level by members of the Nusayri community. In other words, not all of Nusayris perceive at a standard level of secrecy. This is varying from a young girl to a married woman, from a young male (*muhip*) to an elder male, from one ceremony to another ceremony, or from those who participate in religious ceremonies to those who do not participate in religious ceremonies. To make this point much clear, I would like to give two examples from the fieldwork. First example is that the sheikh has the most secret knowledge, books, and texts in the community, which means who mostly controls collective secrecy and secret. Thus, that means his religious knowledge and secret knowledge is more than other members including *nakib*. In order to learn more information about the

doctrine, secret knowledge, religious practices and so on, members of the community go to near the sheikh's house. If someone who is curious wants to learn much more knowledge about the inner teachings, he should go more often to near the sheikh. Another example is the festival of Ghadir Khumm that is accepted as the most important day for Nusayris. In Karaduvar, all members of the community celebrate this festival. They cook *hirisi* at the earlier hours of the festival day. In the past, they stated that they were more worried and cautious during cooking *hirisi*. However, the level of secrecy, according to some members of the community, has been decreased for approximately 20 years. Today Nusayris are more comfortable during their religious rituals and festivals. In addition, in my fieldwork, although I was not accepted to observe cooking *hirisi*, a Nusayri man told me if I had said to him I want to observe a cooking of *hirisi*. These examples illustrate that the limit of social secrecy can be different from one member to another.

Moreover, the reactions of virtual members of the online forums are different to relaxation of the social secrecy. There have been tensions and negotiations among the participants of the forums. In the first case of virtual community, *aleviform.info*, the tensions in negotiations of partial revelation of secrecy were not lively discussion among members. As the moderators of this closed virtual community control content of the instant messaging, there has not been occurred heated debate between active members of the virtual community. When one of the members of this community asks a question about secrecy or contributes an idea on secrecy, discussion or contribution is not maintained because moderators do not permit such a discussion. However, in the second case, *AleviForum*, I followed many lively discussions on reducing of the secrecy. Although, some of those Nusayris who do not support the partial revelation of the secret knowledge on the internet by a sheikh's grandson or by other Nusayri members demand to be closed the topic on Nusayrism and Nusayris by the moderators, this demand has not been accepted. When we look inside to those Nusayris who do not support such a revelation of the secret knowledge are from mostly Hatay. Those

Nusayris who were born and who live there strictly oppose such a partial revelation of Nusayri belief system and secret ritual practices both on the internet and in real life. They claim that this kind of revelation might cause negative effects on Nusayris, which can be called as organic community. This claim and anxious can be described that dissuasions and revelations in virtual community might cause negative effect on organic community. These tensions in negotiation of partial secrecy have continued at present both in organic community and in virtual communities among Nusayris.

Except from Nusayris in the two virtual communities, all of other members of this virtual community, who define themselves as Alevi and as other beliefs, also support this informing of as a secretive religious community Nusayris on the internet by a member of Nusayri belief. Most of Alevis state that they used to know Nusayris differently or not know anything else. They have also tried to learn esoteric Nusayri religious system and ritual practices, and they compare both beliefs in terms of secrecy. Some Alevi members of the second virtual community suggest that Nusayris do not need to keep their religious practices and rituals secret.

In terms of religious knowledge and secrecy, the situation of Nusayri women in organic community and virtual communities are different. In addition to Nusayri males, Nusayri women also go to near the sheikh in order to learn their beliefs and religious practices. During my field research, I could observe that few Nusayri women go to ask something to the sheikh's house. Moreover, they can ask question on Nusayri belief system to their fathers and husbands. Although they are not allowed to ask question about the content of the esoteric secrecy, most of them know what secret knowledge is or what Nusayri males do in the collective prayers. Nusayri women, despite the fact that, are excluded from the Nusayri initiations and collective worships, married women know about the content of them.

The Nusayris and Alevis have historically lived as a secretive religious minority in Turkey. As a religious minority community, Nusayris have made an endeavor to

keep their inner teachings and rituals secret up to today. Alevis living in Turkey have revealed their allegoric understandings of Islam, religious practices and rituals, their perception of the religion, and religious worship places, called *cemevi*, in the late 1980s and 1990s (Şahin 2005:465). Despite Alevis and Nusayris historical and social contexts differences, those who are Nusayris or non-Nusayris also have publicized Nusayris' religious doctrines, beliefs, customs, religious festivals, and life styles since early 1990s with the written sources (Üzüm 2000:176). However, especially in the last twenty years Nusayris have started to reveal and explain some customs, festivals, religious practices and rituals of the community. For example, some officials were invited to participate in the festival of Ghadīr Khumm for eleven years by Ali Yeral, who is head of Ehl-i Beyt Culture and Solidarity Foundation / Ehlibeyt Kültür ve Dayanışma Vakfı (EHDAV) in Hatay. Despite the fact that they just participate in festival and eat traditional meal, *hurisi*, they were not allowed to participate in collective worship, the *sala*.

Every year the festival of Ghadīr Khumm is going more public in Karaduvar and in Turkey, except ritual of initiation and collective worship. Regarding this, on the day of the festival, it could be possible to see or heard about the festival of Ghadīr Khumm on the news and local newspapers. One reason why the festival is seen on the news a few days before the day of the festival is on the account of Nusayris' demands from the government. They demand that according to their belief, they should not work because if they work at the day of the festival, they believe that they do not shirk their religious duties towards holly persons or days.

Why Continues the Secrecy among the Nusayris?

Today I do not see there are security problems. Actually there is no such problem since Republic. Well then why we have continued [keeping secret]? We again say that this is just a habit, and it is a believing to this kind of living. People cannot give up those things that are believed by. If they abandon from

their beliefs [type of living], their world would be shock. ...
Maybe secrecy is a responsibility towards their ancestors.⁸⁸

There could be two responses to this question. As it is seen from the citation above, one of them is protection from Sunni Muslims. There are historical and religious reasons why they need to hide and so feel safe. According to Türk, although Nusayris in Turkey have lived more comfortable atmosphere with the proclamation of the republic, they have not taken from traces of the past (2005:280). As I have mentioned before because of pressure and slaughter they had to hide themselves and so they have conducted their religious ceremonies secretly. However, I claim that with the urbanization, increasing of education level, exogamy, increasing of heterogeneity of inhabitants in the future of Karaduvar Nusayris more open its social secrecy includes religious festivals and some non-secret practices. An important part of the community thinks that in the near future they will more open than today. They are right because when we compare 20 years ago in Karaduvar with today, they are more open. From this point of view, Nusayri religious community reconstructs its boundaries within the new socio-political conditions in Karaduvar and Turkey. For instance, 20 years ago they were very careful during their religious festival, but today they are more comfortable while they are carrying out religious festivals and ritual practices.

Future Research

Lastly, I would like to suggest two research topics. First of all, it would be beneficial to conduct a comparative study on Nusayri religious secrecy within a large scale. There are various sites such as Kazanlı, Adanalıođlu, Karacailyas, and Tarsus where Nusayris mostly live in Mersin. I believe that future studies on Nusayri religious secrecy should be carried out in a broader and various sites.

⁸⁸ Ben Őanda gvenlik sorunları olduđunu grmyorum. Aslında cumhuriyetten beri yok. Peki neden hala devam ediyoruz? Yine sylyoruz sadece alışkanlık ve buna inanma. İnsanlar inandıkları Őeylerden vazgeçemiyorlar. Vazgeçtiđi zaman btn dnyasını sarsarsınız. O (*sır saklama*) bir sorumluluk belki atalarına.

Secondly, it would be beneficial to conduct a sociological or anthropological research on virtual communities. Religion on the Internet is expected to continue (Rheingold, 2001; van Dijk, 1997; Wild, 1999), especially traditional religious communities creating their own virtual existence. The fifth chapter of this study shows that individuals are using the Internet as a new avenue for religious knowledge and involvement, but virtual communities will remain with their already-existing religious communities. Future research on virtual communities should concern more specific topics. Moreover, future studies should include larger sample sizes. As more traditional religious communities continue to create virtual communities or to go online, this might encourage more individuals to be member of a virtual community for religious purposes.

“Just leave us alone...” A Nusayri male, 27 years old, Hatay.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES A

KARADUVAR NUSAYRIS' FESTIVAL NAMES AND THEIR DATES

Important Days celebrated in the Karaduvar District Between 1 January 2010 – 31 December 2010		
Date	Names of the day	Explanation
1/6/2010	LEYLI MİLED HZ. İSA (JESUS)	APPEARANCE OF JESUS
1/14/2010	ĞID RASISSENİ	
1/19/2010	ĞID KIDDES	
2/20/2010	FIRST DECREASING OF WARMTH IN THE AIR	
	SECOND AND THIRD DECREASING OF WARMTH IN THE AIR AND ON THE WATER (EVERY OTHER WEEK)	
2/21/2010	ĞID TESEĞ	SWEARING OF ADAM
3/21/2010	EQUINOX	THE DAY OF NEWROZ
3/30/2010	ĞID SABATAĞŞ	
4/14/2010	ĞID EVVEL NİİSAN	
4/17/2010	ĞID RABEĞ NİİSAN	
4/29/2010	ĞID HAMES NİİSAN	
5/6/2010	OLD-TURKISH CELEBRATION OF SPRING (HIDIRELLEZ GÜNÜ)	THE COMING OF SPRING
6/11/2010	EVVEL RECEB	BEGINS WITH HOLLY MONTHS
4/14/2010	ĞID EVVEL NİİSAN	
4/17/2010	ĞID RABEĞ NİİSAN	
4/29/2010	ĞID HAMES NİİSAN	
5/6/2010	OLD-TURKISH CELEBRATION OF SPRING (HIDIRELLEZ GÜNÜ)	THE COMING OF SPRING
6/11/2010	EVVEL RECEB	BEGINS WITH HOLLY MONTHS
6/14/2010	ĞID EVVEL HAZIRAN	NEBİİ HAZKİL
6/21/2010	THE LAST DAY OF EQUINOX	
7/24/2010	LEYLİ NIS ŞİĞBEN	
8/9/2010	LEYLİ EVVEL RAMADAN	
8/19/2010	ĞID TICILLE	JESUS' ACCEPTING OF THE DEITY
8/21/2010	ĞID NEBİ SILMEN IBIN DAVUT	

APPENDICES A cont'd

Date	Names of the day	Explanation
8/23/2010	NIS RAMADAN	MİLET HASAN EL MÜÇTEBA
8/25/2010	LEYLİ SABATAĞS	FIRST DAY OF RAMADAN
8/27/2010	LEYLİ TISITAGSH	
8/28/2010	GID SSEYDE	NECET MUSA
8/29/2010	LEYLİ VAHEDUVĞİŞRİN	
9/1/2010	LEYLİ TLEDAVĞİŞRİN	
9/3/2010	LEYLETİLKADİR	ALIGHT OF KORAN
9/8/2010	GIDIL FATİR	
9/13/2010	GID ZIHURĞALE IRRADA	
9/15/2010	GID ŞEMĞUN ISSAFA	SPOKEN OF A STONE AS GOD
9/27/2010	ĞID ISSALİB	JESUS' ASCENSION
10/14/2010	GID EVVELTISRİN	APPEARANCE OF ADAM
10/15/2010	GIDIL KURBAN	
10/17/2010	GID RABEĞ TISRİN	NECET ESHABELKEYH
10/18/2010	GID HAMES TISRİN	MİLET MERYEM
10/29/2010	GIDIL MEHRİCAN	HAPPINES DAY - FESTIVAL
11/19/2010	LEYLİ CUMĞA	
11/23/2010	GID GADİRHOM	
11/23/2010	GID YUHANNA ERRUHUM	APPEARANCE OF PROPHET PSALMIST
11/25/2010	GID ISSEFİNİ	PROPHET NOAH'S FLOOD
11/26/2010	GID EL MUBAHLİ	PROPHAT MOHAMMAD'S DAY OF DISCIPLINE
12/3/2010	GID NIHAR ABYAD	
12/4/2010	GID EL FIRAŞ	HEJIRA DAY
12/6/2010	HIJRI NEW YEAR (1432)	FIRST DAY OF THE MUHARREM
12/15/2010	GIDIL ĞAŞUR	THE DAY WHEN PROPHET HUSAYN'S MARTYRIZE
12/17/2010	FIRST CANCELLATION OF <i>ILBIRBARA</i>	
	AFTER ONE WEEK SECOND AND THIRD CANCELLATION (OF <i>ILBIRBARA</i>)	
12/21/2010	THE LONGEST NIGHT	SOLSTICE