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Definitions and Roles Attributed to Muslim Identity by Digital Salafi Preachers*

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Abstract

Since Salafi communities in Türkiye have begun to attract public attention, the necessity of research on Salafi groups has emerged. This study deeply analyzes the sermons given by digital Salafi preachers on YouTube in order to explore their definitions of Muslim identity and how they construct it. The research includes the sermons of six different Salafi preachers, and these sermons give an idea about the basic principles, beliefs and interpretations of Salafi thought in Türkiye. The research adopts a case study approach and categorizes the videos according to their thematic content, presenters and context. Then, content analysis is performed on these sermons. The results show that Salafi preachers construct Muslim identity with new definitions and roles and propose a new typology of Muslims in society. Muslim identity changes through sermons; while some definitions are inclusive, others can be exclusionary and marginalizing. The wide availability of these online sermons enables Salafi preachers to disseminate their views and beliefs to a wider audience, thereby influencing the construction of Muslim religious identity in line with the Salafi understanding. This research contributes to a certain extent to our understanding of the construction of Salafi ideology and its dissemination mechanisms through new media. It is also intended to serve as a resource for further research.

Keywords: Salafi Communities, Digital Preachers, Muslim Identity, Content Analysis, New Media.

Dijital Selefi Vaizlerin Müslüman Kimliğine Atfettikleri Tanım ve Roller

Öz

Türkiye'deki Selefi cemaatler kamuoyunun ilgisini çekmeye başlamaları nedeniyle Selefi gruplar hakkında bir araştırmanın gerekliliği ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma, dijital Selefi vaizlerin Müslüman kimliği hakkındaki tanımlamalarını ve nasıl inşa ettiklerini incelemek amacıyla YouTube'da verdikleri vaazları derinlemesine analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, altı farklı Selefi tebliğcinin vaazlarını içermekte ve bu vaazlar Türkiye'deki Selefi düşünceye dair temel ilkeler, inançlar ve yorumlar hakkında fikir vermektedir. Araştırma, vaka çalışması yaklaşımını benimsemekte ve videoları tematik içeriklerine, tebliğcilere ve bağlamlarına göre kategorilere ayırmaktadır. Ardından, bu vaazlar üzerinde içerik analizi yapılmaktadır. Sonuçlar, Selefi vaizlerin Müslüman kimliğini yeni tanımlar ve rollerle inşa ettiğini ve toplumda yeni bir Müslüman tipolojisi önerdiğini göstermektedir. Müslüman kimliği, vaazlar aracılığıyla değişiklik göstermektedir; bazı tanımlamalar kapsayıcı iken, diğerleri dışlayıcı ve ötekileştirici olabilmektedir. Bu çevrimiçi vaazların geniş erişilebilirliği, Selefi tebliğcilerin görüşlerini ve inançlarını daha geniş bir kitleye yaymalarını sağlamakta ve böylece Selefi anlayışa uygun Müslüman dini kimliğinin inşasını etkilemektedir. Bu araştırma, Selefi ideolojinin inşası ve yeni medya üzerinden yayılma mekanizmalarını anlamamıza belirli bir ölçüde katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, daha fazla araştırma için bir kaynak olarak hizmet etmesi hedeflenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Selefi Cemaatler, Dijital Vaizler, Müslüman Kimliği, İçerik Analizi, Yeni Medya

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of the digital age, the emergence of new media, especially digital and social forms of media, has brought about a significant shift in reshaping the fabric of our society. These platforms have not only revolutionized the way we communicate and interact, but have also played a central role in fundamentally reconstructing both social and religious practices. The impact of new media has not only changed the ways in which religious beliefs are perceived and practiced; it has also profoundly transformed the essence of religious meanings and ways of expression. For a significant segment of the world's population, especially Muslims, new media have become the primary source of information about their faith. Within the dynamic nature of the digital environment, the number and diversity of digital religious authorities has experienced a remarkable increase. This represents a marked shift in the way individuals access and interpret religious teachings. In this research, we focus on the complex relationship between new media and the reshaping of religious and social practices, specifically considering how the impact of new media has increased in facilitating access to Islamic beliefs and practices.

The fields of religion and the media were previously considered as independent and competing fields. Through their activities and actors, each tried to prevent the other from becoming a public actor. Recently, however, the relationship between media and religion has become closer and more complex. Both are now meeting in a common space, influencing, changing and transforming each other. Both fields try to exist and strengthen themselves through each other (Hoover & Clark, 2002, p. 2). The fact that religion reaches large audiences through the media and that the media has many followers and viewers through religious content can be given as examples of this new type of relationship.

The rise of new media through various factors has brought about radical changes in the world of communication, and these changes have made both the reshaping of power relations and the control of information and meaning an important issue to be investigated. Addressing this issue, Manuel Castells (2007) emphasizes that new media offer an important field of study in this respect. According to him, the continuous and permanent interactions occurring in this field reflect a state and process of interaction and transformation between traditional fields and the field of communication. Furthermore, Castells draws attention to the fact that new media offers a platform that is better equipped to intervene and resist existing power structures (Echchaibi, 2011, p. 28). Therefore, the field of new media is not only limited to communication and information transfer, but also requires in-depth analysis and understanding of power dynamics and how meaning is constructed. Because of this power of influence, the internet serves as an emerging interpretive space for understanding Islam. New media technologies have restricted the ability of states to control the flow of religious messages within their borders (Echchaibi, 2011, p. 37). Thus, the definition of what constitutes religiosity by new religious authorities such as the Salafis, who utilize the possibilities of the digital world, creates a struggle over an issue called 'boundary setting' by Eickelmann and Piscatori (1996). Boundary setting means defining the definitions and content of concepts and demarcating the spheres of influence. Each religious authority seeks to set the boundaries of Islamic concepts and make new adjustments to their theoretical and practical correspondences. This is because there is a never-ending debate between religious and political authorities on concepts such as public sphere, private sphere, religion-politics, individual-society, Muslim and non-Muslim. Digital preachers try to direct this debate within the framework of their own ideologies. Therefore, when Muslims seeking religious guidance go online, it is a direct challenge to the traditional channels of Islamic religious authority. Following this challenge, the leading religious authorities in the interpretation or dissemination of Islamic concepts such as Muslim, Kafir, Shariah, Jihad, Ummah, Sunnah, Hadith, Halal, Haram, etc. begin to change. Digital platforms have started to replace traditional Islamic authority figures, giving new meanings to religious concepts and practices.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of how digital Salafi preachers define and construct Muslim identity through videos published on the YouTube platform, one of the new media tools. This analysis aims to better understand the relationship between digital media and religious identity construction. In the following sections of the article, the themes that digital Salafi preachers use in their videos, the extent of the importance they attach to the Muslim identity, and how they construct this identity are analyzed in more detail. The aim of this study is to reveal how digital Salafi preachers' sermons on YouTube define and construct Muslim identity. For this purpose, the videos of digital preachers on this subject were analyzed in detail, which religious concepts they underlined, what kind of Islamic interpretation they explained, and what kind of Muslim identity they encouraged their followers to acquire. In accordance with the nature of the research, qualitative research method and case study were preferred in this study. The data obtained through content analysis of the videos provides an in-depth understanding and insight into how digital Salafi preachers construct Muslim identity. In the following sections of the article, the structure of Salafi thought and its presence in Türkiye are discussed, the content, themes and emphases of the YouTube videos of digital Salafi preachers are analyzed, and the kind of Muslim identity these videos propose to viewers is analyzed in detail. This analysis will provide an important understanding of how digital media influences religion and identity formation processes.

Salafi Theology: Exploring its Fundamental Framework

In order to understand Salafism, which forms the basis of this study, it is necessary to start by exploring the origins of the concepts related to Salafism. Salaf originally means "to come first, to pass, to remain in the past" (Merçil, 1992, p. 399). Concept of Salafism is intended to refere the initial three generations of Muslims as reference. Salafism takes as a reference the three centuries/generations in which these three generations lived and defines this period as the golden generation, the golden age. In this way, Salafism is a philosophy that believes in progress through regression (Maher, 2016, p. 7). According to this understanding, the first three generations should be taken as a model for understanding, interpreting and living Islam. This model was removed from being a part of history and made a part of religion (Koca, 2018, p. 7). Islamic tradition and accumulation after the first three generations are rejected and considered as heresy or bid'ah. Because of this characteristic, Salafism is also called a movement that advocates a return to the essence. Olivier Roy (2003, p. 125) uses the term "militant rejectionist" accordingly. Salafism is based on three pillars and realizes its progress in this way. The "conservatives" focus on pure Islam and worship. On the other side, there are the "preacher militants" who oppose the dominant culture and society by basing their actions on invitation and preaching. The third group, which can be called "jihadists", constitutes the group that sometimes wages war against Islam and sometimes against the Western world (İşcan, 2017, p. 41).

There are structural and intellectual differences between Salafism, which emerged in different contexts in history, and today's Salafism. Although there are a number of disagreements, this difference can be overlooked due to the similarity in naming. Today, the evidence for this situation can be shown that instead of a single Salafi consensus, various Salafi groups are belonging to different thought groups. However, today Salafism is discussed as a political and violent ideological movement due to its actions and activities on a global scale. It has gained a place on the world agenda as a way of thinking that has adopted a radical and violent approach that excludes, takfir and even wants to destroy all other thoughts other than its own (Koca, 2018, p. 7).

Because Salafism has the dynamics and potential to both influence and be influenced by other Islamic movements, intellectual differentiations emerge within itself. These differentiations diversify Salafi thought with various interpretations and focuses. However, despite all this diversity, today the name Salafiyya refers to Salafi individuals and groups who generally approach religious beliefs and practices within the framework of a traditional paradigm, although they have some intellectual and ideological differences (Büyükkara, 2004, pp. 485-486). This situation reflects a kind

of unity united around the basic components of Salafi thought, creating a kind of imaginary Salafi community.

Salafism and Its Influence in the Turkish Context

Among the reasons for the grounding, spread and growth of Salafist thought today are the crises of thought and occupations that have been going on in the Islamic world since the 19th century. Salafism, feeding on this situation, has managed to export its intellectual and ideological stance to different Islamic countries and re-adapt itself according to the conditions there. Today, Türkiye is one of the countries where Salafist thought has managed to influence and hold on to a small part of the society. However, Salafism has not been able to gain a foothold in the Turkish Islamic intellectual and cultural tradition throughout history. The traditional religiosity of Anatolia has always been distant and cautious about religious extremism such as Salafism. Çaha (2004, pp. 488-489) explains the reason for this as the subordination of religion to the state in the Seljuk and Ottoman States, the fact that the social and political structure was not theocratic, the fact that the society did not show extreme reactions to events due to its interaction with different religions and ethnic cultures throughout history, and finally, the prevalence of Sufi understanding in the society.

Although its historical roots can be traced back to the influence of Turkish Islamism, translation movements, the Iranian Revolution and the Afghan Jihad on religious groups in Türkiye, the rise of Salafism, especially in today's Türkiye, seems to be directly linked to international and conjunctural initiatives and developments. Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, export religious mentality to other Islamic countries through Salafist groups. This initiative is especially realized through new media tools such as the internet. This religious mentality has managed to find a response in Türkiye by producing digital religious data. Salafist thought sees the gap caused by the negligence and inadequacies in the field of religious education and religious knowledge in Türkiye in terms of producing data in the digital environment as an opportunity and disseminates its religious knowledge in the digital environment. Today, as a result of the identity crisis and the search for an alternative religious interpretation to the existing religious understanding, Salafism has become an agenda among young people through the influence of such information, data and images that young people who spend time in the digital world encounter. Since it has a stance completely opposed to the established religious understanding, it is seen that Salafist thought has become very attractive among young people because it contains features such as opposition, protest, rebellion, conflict, and war that are compatible with youth ideology and culture.

Having started to spread from the virtual world to the real world, Salafism today tries to exist and spread in Türkiye through legal or illegal associations, centers and digital platforms such as social media. Since an important point of departure of Salafist thought is a return to the essence, it aims to target established religious beliefs and practices in Türkiye and replace them with a system of beliefs and religious practices that it claims to be the true Islam. After the struggle against the religious understanding of the society, there is a possibility that the political order in Türkiye will be next. As mentioned above, because new media technologies have helped to create new public religious authorities free from state control and restraint, Salafis today have begun to exist in this digital environment in order to continue communicating their intellectual and ideological views to others. The advantages of new media technologies, such as the ability to amplify the voice of the cause to a much wider audience, is also an important reason for their choice.

Although Salafism appears to be theologically ultra-conservative, technologically it appears to be quite innovative and revolutionary. The possible reason is that online dawah events are considered by the Salafi movement as a different aspect of jihad, not only in the military, economic and political spheres. This is what is meant by digital jihad or e-jihad (Bunt, 2003), concepts that are currently the subject of new studies. The emergence of Salafism as a modern movement due to its willingness and ability to interact with information and communication technologies, the spread

and adoption of Salafist thought as a collective identity in Türkiye can be shown as the reason for the emergence of this study. This research will focus on the activities of different Salafi preachers on YouTube in order to answer the question of what discourses and practices Salafis engage in the digital world to promote and express their collective identity.

Virtual Spaces and the Evolution of Religious Authority

The relationship between religion and media in Turkey has become closer from time to time. There are political as well as technological reasons for this. The 2010s generally coincide with the period of developments in the internet and technology. For this reason, an increase in the number of new religious virtual authorities and their impact on public opinion has been observed in Turkey since the 2010s. According to Moghadam (2013, p. 8), "The Internet, and social networking media in particular, have come to be seen as important new mobilizing technologies that help create 'virtual communities' or connect diverse movements, networks and individuals for collective action framed by a collective identity". Rapid advances in technology, such as the development of smartphones, have made it possible for more people to access the internet and use new media tools. With increased access to technologies has come increased interest in them. People gravitated towards the internet and new media tools, seeing these technologies as a way to connect with others, access information and participate in online communities. These factors have changed the way people communicate and access information and have had a profound impact on many aspects of modern life, including religion.

In Türkiye in the 2010s, the above-mentioned possibilities and advantages of technology attracted the attention of religious groups and a relationship between new media technologies and religion emerged. The internet offers a kind of "cyber sanctuary" for marginalized communities left vulnerable away from their physical spaces due to concerns of discrimination, violence and persecution (McLean, 2014). New media technologies such as social media, podcasts and live streaming have opened up new avenues for religious expression, education and communication. New media technologies have transformed the ways in which individuals engage with their faith, learn about their religion and connect with others in their religious communities. One of the most significant effects of new media regarding religion is the way it changes religious expression. This shift presents the opportunity to replace traditional religious practices through the Internet, which means it can enrich and complicate one's offline religious experiences (Robinson-Neal, 2008).

Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have enabled individuals to share their religious beliefs and experiences with a wider audience. These platforms have given religious minorities a voice, allowing them to share their perspectives and connect with others who share their beliefs. In other words, social media has also allowed religious organizations to engage with their followers in new ways. The Internet has been revealed as supporting participation in contexts that encourage the construction of multiple identities simultaneously (Katz & Rice, 2002). Many religious leaders and religious communities have their own social media accounts where they share their thoughts and ideologies, offer spiritual guidance, and communicate with their followers. Thus, traditional barriers between religious leaders, communities and their followers have broken down and the religious views and thoughts of religious leaders and communities have become more accessible. The result is more accessible forms of religious leadership and community. This can be seen as a result of how information technology changes the way we interact with others and think about our own selves and identities (Hillier and Harrison, 2007).

Since every religious community is also seen as a religious authority, these newly formed religious virtual communities have also revealed a new form of religious authority. This new form of religious authority corresponds to online versions of traditional forms of religious authority and can easily be argued to have the same degree of influence on individuals' beliefs and practices. Thus, with its innovative aspect, the internet serves as a tool to redefine religious authority

structures (Selge et al., 2008, p. 465). It seems important to present religious groups as a virtual religious community and a new religious authority and to make them the object of analysis, as they are affected by new media technologies and influence their followers. Virtual religious communities refer to communities of individuals who share a common religious identity and come together using online platforms including social media, forums, and other digital environments (Campbell, 2003, p. 1027). The emergence, development and growth of these communities have attracted attention in recent years, and it has become important to understand the structure, function and impact of these communities. Online religious communities, by their nature, have a largely separate function from traditional religious institutions and structures and have transformed the understanding of classical religious communities (Campbell, 2013, p. 685).

Social identity, which defines the positions of individuals due to their belonging to a group, is another important concept that comes to the fore when researching virtual religious communities. Social identity, which turns into online identity in the virtual environment, turns into a performance in which individuals present themselves in the transition to the virtual world (Campbell, 2013, pp. 686-687). Virtual religious communities, like real-world communities, can provide individuals with belonging and identity while helping them connect with others who have similar beliefs and lifestyles. This new, inclusive sense of belonging and identity can be especially meaningful for those who are not fully accepted by their real-world community. For this reason, it has become important to analyze online identity formation as a social process through these virtual religious communities (Kendall, 2002). Because there are advantages and conveniences that these communities provide to their members. For example, the online environment may offer individuals greater privacy and confidentiality. This advantage seems quite critical and useful for individuals who are hesitant to express and practice their religious beliefs in the real world. Therefore, virtual religious communities can be analyzed and understood by making use of many important concepts and theories in sociology within the framework of social identity and the relationship between religion as a social institution.

Methodology of the Research

This study, which is about understanding social phenomena such as human experiences, behaviors, and attitudes in depth with a qualitative method aims to investigate how Salafi religious communities define and construct a Muslim religious identity, especially through their videos on YouTube.

In this study, the case study approach, which is one of the qualitative research method designs, was preferred in order to analyze Salafi religious communities in the context of Türkiye's experience. The case study approach is a qualitative research approach that focuses on in-depth analysis of a single case or a small number of cases. In this approach, a group of people, a business, a city and a community can be the object of the research in question (Baş and Akturan, 2017, p. 211). This type of qualitative approach involves the comprehensive and holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 2013, p. 46).

YouTube videos of popular Salafi preachers were used as a data source in this research. A purposive sampling technique was preferred when selecting the research group or the preachers as data sources. In this study, the criterion for purposive sampling was the number of videos on YouTube and their diversity in terms of subject matter. Six digital preachers with videos that would be appropriate for the purpose of the research in terms of subject and diversity were included in the study. Although the YouTube channels of some of the preachers had more followers than some of the preachers in the research group, it was seen that the number of videos and the variety of topics were not sufficient to answer the research aim and were excluded from the scope of the data source. Therefore, the following preachers were selected as the research group in this study.

Each of the Salafi groups corresponds to a situation (case) in this research. The table below provides a list of these cases.

Table 1. List of Salafist preachers used as data sources for the study

	List of the Cases (Salafi Preachers)	Name of the Channel	Opening date	Number of Subscribers	City	Number of Videos
1	Halis Bayancuk (Ebu Hanzala)	Ebu Hanzala Hoca	2016	318k	İstanbul	124
2	Abdullah Yolcu	Guraba Yayınları	2010	23,8k	İstanbul	65
3	Murat Gezenler	Şehadet Mektebi	2021	15,7k	Konya	40
4	Musa Olğaç (Musa Ebu Cafer)	Nakil Kürsüsü	2014	10k	Suriye	43
5	Musab Köylüoğlu	Musab Köylüoğlu	2012	7,54k	Nevşehir	40
6	Mehmet Balcıoğlu (Ebu Said Yarpuzlu)	Yarpuz İslami İlimler Araştırma Merkezi	2013	4,87k	Antalya	32

The analysis of the research was conducted through Qualitative Content Analysis Method. Qualitative Content Analysis is a very effective type of analysis in analyzing media content and focuses on the interpretative evaluation of data. The aim is both to develop a general understanding and interpretation of the text in line with the purpose and question of the research (Gökçe, 2019, p. 118) and to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016, p. 243). Qualitative content analysis involves a systematic and iterative process of reading, coding, categorizing and synthesizing data to identify patterns, themes and relationships. In the quotations from the participants' sermons, abbreviations where necessary are indicated with 4 dots (….). According to the 6th Edition of the APA Publication Guide (2013, pp. 172-173), four periods are used if expressions between two sentences are omitted. In this method, the first dot marks the end of the first quoted sentence, followed by the other three dots.

Findings of the Study

Individual typologies are a fundamental element of Salafi ideology and have an important impact and function in the internal dynamics of Salafi communities. These typologies guide us as to who is accepted and excluded by Salafi communities. Salafi groups determine the definition of Muslim identity according to whether they adhere to Salafi beliefs and practices. In this way, the main goal and ideology of Salafism, which is to create religious purity and homogeneity in society and create a collective identity, can be achieved.

Muslim Identity Formation: A Comprehensive Construction and Description

There are the views of Salafi preachers representing different Salafi communities about the definition, responsibilities and lifestyle of a Muslim below.

According to the following statements by Abdullah Yolcu, when calling a person a Muslim, the person's own declaration should be taken as basis, not external observers or decision makers. Accordingly, a person can be considered a Muslim even if he does not include religious worship and practices in his life.

> Even if he does not act, he is a Muslim. In other words, he is in heedlessness, we give him advice, he returns to his deeds…. So his name is Muslim, but he does not pray (Yolcu, 2019).

> You see someone, he is a Muslim, he prays, he goes to the mosque, he is a Muslim. You don't say, "Come, before I call you a Muslim, how do you believe in such and such a matter? (Yolcu, 2014)

According to Abdullah Yolcu, a Muslim should be careful with whom he communicates and interacts closely. From his point of view, it is an important issue in Islam that a Muslim should be careful with whom he makes friends and enemies. Muslims should be in an environment where only Muslims

are present. In addition, Muslim individuals must take part in organized structures called communities.

> The first condition is to emigrate from the land of infidels to be a friend of Muslims. To where? To the Muslim land. Second, a believer, a Muslim must join this Muslim community. He must be one with the Muslim communities. He should not be separated from them (Yolcu, 2018).

Ebu Hanzala, another Salafi preacher whose discourses were included in this study, claims that a person falls into one of two categories: Muslim or infidel. It then lists the criteria that a person must have in order to be classified as a Muslim.

> In the Shari'ah of Allah, there is no such concept as neither kafir nor Muslim. The people created by Allah are either infidels or Muslims. It is not possible for a person to be in the middle (Hanzala, 2020b).

> I said to you: When we say that sovereignty belongs to Allah, we mean four things. 1) Believing that absolute sovereignty belongs to Allah. 2) Ruling by what Allah has revealed as an obligation and a matter of faith. 3) That we, who are the ruled, give this right to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and Allah alone. 4) That people should only refer to Allah's laws in their problems and should not be judged by any law other than Allah's laws. A Muslim is a person who believes in these four principles and applies them to his life in practice. In other words, he is a believer who has believed and surrendered in this matter. Whether he has a problem with four of these or one of them, that is, whether he does not believe as such, or whether he claims to believe as such, but does not apply them to his life in practice and pursues different things, this person has no connection, no relationship with the Islamic nation (Hanzala, 2018).

The following criteria explained by Ebu Hanzala underline the rejection of democracy and acceptance of sharia as both a form of government and a way of life. The individual must not only reject democracy and trust in sharia, but also apply this in every aspect of his life. Otherwise, it is impossible for him to deserve to be called a Muslim. The following statements include the reasons why Democrat and Muslim identities cannot coexist in an individual.

> On the one hand, he says he is a democrat, this is what democracy says. On the other hand, he says he is a Muslim, and Islam also says so. What is this like? This is like a person trying to put two opposites together at the same time, which is impossible. In other words, just as something cannot be black and white at the same time, something cannot be good and bad at the same time, so two opposites cannot be brought together in one thing at the same time. Likewise, a person cannot be a democrat and a Muslim at the same time. A person is either a Muslim who gives sovereignty to Allah, believes and lives that way, or a polytheist democrat. Or a person is a polytheist democrat. He associates partners with Allah in sovereignty. He gives sovereignty to other than Allah as many as there are human beings (Hanzala, 2018).

After giving a detailed definition of a Muslim, Ebu Hanzala stated that the reference point in his communication and interaction with other individuals in his daily life is only the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad. He insists on the practices of the Prophet. According to him, norms and values that are the product of culture or human mind and experience cannot determine the way Muslims live and approach other individuals.

> The Muslim does not deal with what he has seen from his ancestors in the matter of women or in any other matter, but with what Allah's Messenger and the revelation have brought (Hanzala, 2019).

Sometimes the listener or audience directs the content of the sermons. This situation is exemplified below. In his question, the follower says that he left the group after realizing that he was not a Muslim due to his previous membership in a religious community, but that he has friends in that group with whom he wants to keep in touch, and asks whether there is a problem with this as a Muslim with a new religious identity.

> -I am a Muslim, alhamdulillah. I used to be a strict Mahmudian. My very dear friends are still Mahmudian. He means they belong to the Ismailaga congregation. Is there anything wrong with me meeting with them because I am a Muslim? Pray for me a lot.

> The relationship between a Muslim and a polytheist is always a relationship of necessity. A Muslim and a polytheist can never be two friends, two buddies - as we say today - they cannot establish a relationship between themselves

in this way. Allah (swt) has severed all ties between the polytheists and the Muslims, and has made the believers friends to each other and the polytheists friends to each other (Hanzala, 2020a).

In his answer to the audience's question, Ebu Hanzala states that a Muslim cannot communicate with a non-Muslim except in cases of necessity, in connection with the issue of friends and enemies. He emphasizes that Muslims are friends with each other and polytheists are friends with each other.

According to Ebu Hanzala, those who live in Turkey thinking they are Muslims may not actually be Muslims. Determining this situation depends on whether the person meets the criteria listed above or not. Once a person becomes a Muslim by meeting the above criteria, he should start paying attention to his behavior, starting with those closest to him. The practical equivalent of Muslim identity should be reflected in the communication and interaction with other individuals. The following answer to a follower's question about his parents explains this situation.

> Whatever the elderly people around you expected of you when you were not a Muslim, try to fulfill their expectations after you become a Muslim. Until they can say this to themselves: Our son has changed a lot after he became a Muslim. Before, he used to make us sad. He doesn't upset us anymore. Before, he used to get angry with us. Now he is not angry with us. Before, he did not contribute to the household. Now he contributes to the household. He didn't care when we were sick. Now he stays up all night with us, that is, if you can try to conquer people's hearts, hopefully Allah will be impressed by your morals and make them believe and become Muslims (Hanzala, 2021).

When we look at the criteria of being a Muslim, Ebu Said Yarbuzi, another Salafist preacher, seems to agree with Abdullah Yolcu. According to him, the person's statement on this issue is also essential. If a person claims to be a Muslim, he should not be accepted as such and no attempt should be made to prove it. Explaining this situation with a metaphor, he draws a circle and includes everyone who says they are Muslim. Those who remain outside the circle are outside the Muslim identity.

> We draw a big circle. If he says I am a Muslim, we see him inside this circle…. If someone greets you with the intention of showing you that he is a Muslim, do not push him in the chest because you are not a Muslim. Your good treatment, your kindness to him may be instrumental in winning him to Islam (Yarbuzi, 2020).

Murat Gezenler gets closer to Ebu Hanzala in his religious thought and defines the Turkish society as a non-Muslim society. He attributes this claim to the fact that the society does not behave in accordance with Islam in any area of daily life, and he details what he means by giving examples from these areas.

> We live in a society that is not Muslim. Even though the society we live in calls itself Muslim, there is no Islam in any part of their lives. Their customs are not in accordance with Islam. The way they dress is not in accordance with Islam. Trade is not in accordance with Islam. Earning is not in accordance with Islam. Marriage is not according to Islam. Divorce is not according to Islam (Gezenler, 2021).

According to Murat Gezenler in the statement below, if a person has a claim to be a Muslim, he must prove this by organizing his life according to the holy book Quran, researching what Islam demands from him and putting forward the necessary practices in his life. However, he argues that the opposite situation is observed in Turkish society and emphasizes that it is culture, not religion, that gives individuals Muslim identity.

> You live independently of the book of Allah, you do not pick up the book of Allah even once in your life and look at what kind of Muslim this book describes. You live completely away from the religion revealed by Allah. What does la ilahe illallah mean? When asked what this word wants from you, you don't know anything. You do not know the religion taught by Muhammad Mustafa sallallahu alayhi wa sallam, sent by Allah, but your name is Muslim. In our society, it is the custom that determines the name Muslim. It is not religion. The definition of a Muslim is clear in our society. If he is a Turk, he is a Muslim. If he was born to Muslim parents, he is a Muslim. If he says, Alhamdulillah, he is a Muslim. However, friends, as we explained last week, Islam is not such a frivolous religion (Gezenler, 2021).

According to Musa Ebu Cafer's approach, individuals in societies known to be Muslim are also considered Muslims accordingly. Even though there are individuals in the society who do not carry the Muslim identity, it should be assumed that the majority of the society is generally Muslim. In order to reject the Muslim identity of an individual, sufficient concrete evidence obtained by experts in this field must be presented. Otherwise, instead of immediately declaring a person an unbeliever and excluding him from Islam, various criteria must be met in order for that person to be excluded from the Islamic faith. These criteria are listed in detail below.

> There are polytheists and apostates in this ummah, the ummah of Rasulullah sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam. But the main thing is that they are Muslims. In other words, what is the origin of the peoples living in these states, that is, their roots, their coloring in general, let's say? It is Islam. We need to call them Muslims. After that, when we see their disbelief, what is done after that? The issue of takfir, this time it is started to be operated on the basis of science. Who has or has not committed kufr with which words? First of all, what act did he do and what word did he say? Has this act and word been clearly defined as kufr in a clear, clear way from Islam? Plus, has the invitation to Islam really reached the person who said it or even committed it in a sufficient way? Is he sane? Does he have a tawili (interpretation)? Is he under threat? And so on and so forth. The conditions of takfir are analyzed, and the implications are taken into consideration. After that, if the sharia orders it to be declared takfir, then it becomes takfir. But even if there is an obstacle, it is not considered takfir (Cafer, 2022).

According to the following statements by Musa Ebu Cafer, when a decision is made about Muslims, it should first be accepted that the individuals are Muslims. They should be treated according to their Muslim identity. That's why children of Muslim parents should be treated as Muslims. Similarly, in the dilemma of Muslim and infidel, children should be decided according to the religion of their parents.

> But the main thing is that when we deal with a person, if we see these Islamic signs in him, what do we do? We go back to the basics. We will judge him as a Muslim. We may be wrong. But this will not harm us (Cafer, 2022).

> The children of Muslim parents are also considered Muslims according to Islam. When these children die at a young age, they are washed, shrouded, buried in a Muslim cemetery and their funeral prayers are performed. Their madmen are also like this. Just as we treat the children of infidels as infidels, what do we do with the children of Muslims? We treat them as Muslims (Cafer, 2022).

After giving detailed explanations and examples of who is considered Muslim, Musa Ebu Cafer turns to the Turkish society to concretize this situation. It emphasizes that in order to make a decision about a person's religious beliefs in this society, clear and concrete behaviors in a person's life must be observed. An individual is considered a Muslim if he exhibits the behaviors prescribed by Islam towards his environment.

> A question arises. Then are Turkish people all Muslims? The answer is not that Turkish people are all Muslims. Of course, Turkish people are Muslims, but there are infidels and apostates among Turkish people. There are those who do not accept religion. There are secularists, Alevis, democrats, these are separate. When we see people whose kufr is clear and obvious, of course we will declare takfir of them, but what do we do with people whose kufr we do not see clearly, but whose signs of Islam we see? We will give the verdict of Islam on the face of it (Cafer, 2022).

Musab Köylüoğlu sets criteria for being a Muslim and states that a Muslim should never embrace secularism. For example, a Muslim individual should not accept the separation of religion and state, on the contrary, religion should be a decision-maker and policy maker in all areas of life.

> Dear brothers and sisters, it is not possible for a Muslim to be both secular and Muslim (Köylüoğlu, 2021).

Köylüoğlu states that Islam gives the individual a Muslim identity that covers all kinds of identities. Such claims often emphasize the opposition to commemorating other identities alongside the Muslim identity, as he exemplifies above.

> The identity of the religion of Islam is Muslim and there is no other identity. Other statements are not true (Köylüoğlu, 2012).

Musab Köylüoğlu is among the inclusive Salafi preachers who generally accept the Turkish society as Muslim.

"This land is inhabited by people, the majority of whom are Muslims." (Köylüoğlu, 2016)

As can be seen from the video sermons of Salafi preachers, today's Salafi communities have different views on this issue. While some adopt a rigid and pure interpretation that includes a limited group of people, others expand the boundaries by adopting a more flexible perspective. Muslim identity practically demands from individuals to establish a form of relationship and interaction in the form of brotherhood. Brotherhood or camaraderie across religions and ideologies promises to bring about deeper relationship and solidarity between individuals than citizen-based solidarities. Brotherhood in Islam brings various rights and responsibilities to individuals. On the other hand, those who are outside this religious brotherhood are deprived of various rights and may face various sanctions when necessary.

Conclusion and Discussion

Today, with the influence of new media tools, the teachings of Islam and the religious groups that adopt these teachings have reached the capacity to reach individuals around the world without obstacles such as geographical limitations. Thus, Muslim individuals began to meet and interact with an Islam different from their own social and cultural structures and the different forms of Muslim identity required by this Islam. This development creates new and alternative public spaces for Muslim communities, allowing individuals to express their political and religious identities (Echchaibi, 2011, p. 28). Another consequence of the use of digital environments is that new concepts such as e-sermons and e-jihad have emerged among religious groups and transformed the way religious groups interact, adding a digital dimension to traditional religious practices (Bunt, 2003, p. 26). In this way, religious communities begin to shape both internal dynamics and relations with the outside world not only in face-to-face interactions but also in digital spaces. This process offers us an important understanding and insight into how Islam is progressing and evolving today in a modern context.

In the digital age, there is now a new form of dawah and jihad for religious groups and movements. Interestingly, it is the radical and Salafist religious groups, which advocate the purification of religion, that seem to have embraced this new way of dawah the most and the best. Salafist groups that reject traditional ways of living and spreading Islam have become virtual communities and their leaders have become social media phenomena. Social media has become a new front of jihad. Religious elites who make religious invitations on social media have also become cyber mujahideen, active participants in cyber jihad. The effort to spread Islam through videos on digital media also spreads other messages in the video. The dress and appearance of the preachers, the presence or absence of music in the video, the background, the tone and emphasis of the preacher's voice, and the way he or she communicates with the audience all feed, support and reinforce the religious message. All but one of the Salafi preachers discussed in this study have beards. Their dress and appearance are modest. This shows that they want to spread religion not only in content but also in form. This leads us to Mcluhan's (1994, p. 7) famous statement that 'the medium is the message'. This statement implies that the form of a medium influences how a message is perceived. This creates a symbiotic relationship and reveals that the medium itself is embedded in the message.

In the expression "the medium is the message", the medium is no longer an ordinary medium for individuals who want to access religious knowledge, but a medium that is always accessible. Since being able to communicate with the tool at all times actually means being able to communicate with the people who convey the message through the tool, individuals are in constant communication with the source of the message. Therefore, the impact, change and transformation desired to be created in individuals in accordance with the purpose of the message

can be much stronger than conventional tools. This is because Salafis have now become religious authorities due to the opportunities offered by digital platforms. Powerful religious authorities have a much higher level of reaching and influencing individuals. Since it is possible to encounter and be exposed to videos, images, posts, and content circulated by these religious authorities in digital environments at any time, these communities can constantly be on the agenda of the public and individuals. As a result, it is a fact that this brings positive returns and gains to virtual religious communities both indirectly and directly.

Analysis of Salafi communities in Turkey has revealed the different views of these groups on issues related to an important aspect, namely the construction and manifestation of Muslim identity. This finding shows that the beliefs and perspectives of Salafi communities are not monolithic. Instead, it shows that although they are referred to by the common name of predecessor, they can have different perspectives and approaches from each other. Therefore, the diversity of Salafi communities' thoughts on issues related to Muslim identity means that they can similarly differ on many other issues. This emphasizes that it is important to avoid generalizations about religious groups that are not based on evidence. Moreover, this diversity challenges superficial prejudices that Salafi communities have a single, unified way of thinking or action.

This study aimed to uncover the categories by which Salafi communities categorize society into individual and social categories and to analyze how they interact within these categories. Through content analysis of Salafi discourse, different categories such as infidel, polytheist, democrat, sofi, Muslim and Salafis were identified. The findings show how these classifications shape the perceptions, behavior and social interactions of Salafi communities. Salafis primarily associate with those they consider to be religiously correct or like-minded, while maintaining varying degrees of separation from those outside their defined categories. These categorizations and interactions contribute to the construction of Salafi social identity and influence intergroup dynamics, social cohesion and inclusiveness within Turkish society. Moreover, these classifications seem to be in line with the categorization of self and others in social identity theory. Social groups divide themselves and others into categories to create a social identity. While categorizing oneself is done with positive and accepted expressions, negative and deviant expressions are preferred in categorizing others.

Finally, through the data of this study, the important impact of digital media on religious identity formation is revealed. Additionally, the relationship of religious groups with new media tools is analyzed specifically. The findings highlight how religious groups effectively use the new media tool YouTube to disseminate religious content through digital preachers, create virtual religious communities, encourage religious participation, and strengthen collective religious identities. Due to this aspect, digital platforms have now become 'identity spaces' (Morley et al., 2011). All kinds of identities, such as ethnic, religious and sexual, can find a place and opportunity to express themselves on digital platforms, which have become identity spaces. Thus, they can freely reveal and express their identities by going beyond the areas where they are prohibited or restricted. For this reason, identity groups that do not have the opportunity to display their identities through various activities in real life can come together, institutionalize and organize in digital environments without any obstacles. In this respect, the relationship between new media and identity formation seems to be an inviting area for new research.

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Dijital Selefi Vaizlerin Müslüman Kimliğine Atfettikleri Tanım ve Roller

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Türkiye'de Selefi dini gruplar, kamuoyunun dikkatini çeken ve zaman zaman toplumsal düzen için bir tehdit olarak algılanan figürler haline gelen dini gruplar olarak ön plana çıkmıştır. Türkiye'de dini hayat üzerinde artan etkileri, inançlarının, düşüncelerinin, pratiklerinin ve Müslüman kimliğinin Türk toplumu bağlamı içindeki yapısının derinlemesine araştırılmasına yönelik bir ihtiyaç yaratmıştır. Bu nedenle bu araştırma, dijital Selefi vaizlerin Müslüman kimliğini şekillendirmede kullandıkları tanımların ve metodolojilerin kapsamlı bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda son derece etkili ve yaygın bir yeni medya platformu olan YouTube aracılığıyla yayılan çok sayıda video vaazın kapsamlı bir analizine özellikle vurgu yapılmaktadır.

Bu araştırmanın öncelikli odak noktası, Türkiye'de Selefilik düşüncesinin Müslüman kimliğini tanımlaması ve bu kimliğe atfettiği rolleri anlamaktır. Bunu başarmak için, nitel araştırma metodolojisi ve desen olarak vaka çalışması yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Bu çerçevede analiz için Selefi vaiz ve vaazların seçimine özellikle dikkat edilmiştir. Seçilen örneklemin Selefi topluluğu içindeki farklı bakış açılarını etkili bir şekilde temsil etmesini sağlayacak şekilde amaçlı örnekleme tekniği uygulanmıştır. Bu örnekleme stratejisi, Türkiye'deki Selefi düşüncesinin çok yönlü yapısının detaylı ve bütünsel bir şekilde anlaşılmasına hizmet etmektedir. Çalışmaya dahil edilen altı tane Selefi vaize ait seçilmiş vaazlar, Selefi dini kimlik inşasını derinlemesine detaylandırmaktadır. Bu vaazlar, Selefi inançlarının nasıl ifade edildiği, teşvik edildiği ve Müslüman kimliğini nasıl inşa ettiğine dair önemli bilgiler sunmaktadır. Bu vaazlara ilişkin yürütülen tematik tanımlama ve sınıflandırma süreci, altta yatan içeriği, bu vaazları veren vaizleri ve vaazları etkileyen daha geniş bağlamsal faktörleri daha da açığa kavuşturmaktadır.

YouTube videolarının içerik analizine tabi tutulması sonucu elde edilen veriler, Müslüman kimliği kavramının çok yönlü ve dinamik yapısını ortaya koymakta ve bu kimliğinin inşasının Selefi vaizlere göre nasıl değişebildiğini göstermektedir. Bir diğer deyişle, Müslüman kimliği bağlamında farklı Selefi vaizlere göre değişebilen farklı bakış açıları gözlemlenebilmektedir. Bazı Selefi gruplar Müslüman kimliğini dışlayıcı bir anlayışla kavrayarak onu daha dar ve katı bir şekilde tanımlama ve sınırlama eğiliminde olabilmektedirler. Bu görüşe göre Müslüman olmak, genellikle belirli inançlar, dini pratikler ve belirli bir Selefi yorumla yakından ilişkili görünmektedir. Bu dışlayıcı bakış açısına bağlı olanlar, kendi dini duruşlarıyla aynı çizgide olan bireyleri Müslüman kimliğinin gerçek ve yetkili temsilcileri olarak görebilirken, bu spesifik yoruma bağlı kalmayan diğerleri ise "gerçek" İslam'ın dışında kalanlar olarak değerlendirilebilmektedir. Diğer taraftan, daha kapsayıcı bir Müslüman kimliği anlayışını sahiplenen Selefi dini düşünceye de rastlanmaktadır. Bu görüşe göre Müslüman

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olmak, Selefiliğin çeşitli ekolleri de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli inanç, pratik ve yorumları içerisinde barındırabilen daha geniş ve daha kapsayıcı bir kimlik olarak görülmektedir.

Gündelik hayatın birçok yönünü ve detayını kapsayan ve hatta siyasi katılım alanına kadar uzanan geniş kapsamlı etkisi ile Selefi dini düşünce, Türkiye gibi çok çeşitliliğe sahip bir toplumu önemli ölçüde etkileyebilme ihtimali ve riski barındırmaktadır. Bu dini yaklaşımın en önemli sonuçlarından biri, Türk toplumunun bazı kesimlerinin Selefilerin tanımladığı "gerçek" Müslüman kavramının dışında kalma potansiyeli olarak görünmektedir. Kendini Müslüman olarak tanımlayıp İslam dinine ait olarak gören bireyler bile kendilerini Selefi vaizlerin desteklediği inançlar, pratikler ve yorumlarla çelişki içinde bulabilirler. Bu durum, Selefilerin dini saflık konusundaki güçlü ısrarları ve İslami ilkelerin belirli bir yorumuna ciddi bağlılıklarının aksine İslam'a daha çoğulcu veya Selefi düşünceyle uyumsuz bir yaklaşımı benimseyen kişiler için zorluklar yaratabilir. Zira bazı Selefi vaizlerin Müslüman kimliğinin inşasında hem alternatif yorumlara hem de kendi yerleşik normlarından sapan uygulamalara tahammül eşikleri oldukça düşük olabilmektedir. Bu düşük esneklik, bu katı kriterlere uymayan bireyler ve toplulukları kendilerini Müslüman olarak görüyor dahi olsalar dışlanmışlık ve izolasyon ile karşı karşıya bırakabilmektedir. Üstelik bu tür ayrışmalar, farklı birey ve grupların Selefi düşünce ile çelişen İslami yaşam tarzını benimsemelerinden ötürü Türkiye'de yer alan Müslüman topluluğu içinde potansiyel olarak kırılmalara yol açabilme ihtimali barındırmaktadır. Bu nedenle, Selefi dijital vaizlerin etkisi toplumun kişisel inanç alanı da dahil olmak üzere toplumsal ve politik alana da uzanma ihtimali bulunmakta ve bu tür bir yaklaşım, Türk toplumunun yerleşik inanç ve uygulamalarına meydan okuyabilmektedir. Zira Türkiye gibi dini ve kültürel çeşitliliğe sahip bir toplumda, Müslüman kimliğinin ve inanç sistemlerinin çeşitli yönleri arasındaki etkileşimler Selefi ideoloji nedeniyle gerilimlere ve çok yönlü bir sorun alanına dönüşebilir.

Çalışmanın bir diğer yönü, bizzat YouTube platformunun Selefilik düşüncesinin yayılmasında oynadığı önemli rolü ortaya çıkarmasıdır. YouTube'un günümüzdeki yaygın erişilebilirliği, Selefi vaizlere geniş ve çeşitli bir kitleyle etkileşime geçmek ve onları etkilemek için güçlü bir imkan ve araç sağlamaktadır. Bu platform, teşvik edilen dini yorumların ve pratiklerin aktarımı için bir araç görevi üstlenerek Selefiyye dini kimliğinin daha geniş bir şekilde inşasına önemli ölçüde katkı sunmaktadır. Ek olarak bu araştırma, Selefiyye düşüncesinin ve kimliğinin çok yönlü yapısını Türk toplumu bağlamında analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır. Bulgular, dini yorumların, pratiklerin ve bunların farklı dini gruplara göre farklılaşmasını vurgulayarak Selefi inançlarının karmaşık yapısını gün yüzüne çıkarmaktadır. Bu yöntem, basit ve klasik stereotipleri aşmakta, Selefi dini kimliğinin sahip olabileceği derinliği ve çeşitliliği ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Ayrıca bu araştırma, Selefi dini ideolojinin ve onun çevrimiçi yayılma mekanizmalarının anlaşılmasına önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır. Dijital çağda dini düşüncenin inşa edilişi ve yayılımına ilişkin çeşitli bilgiler sunarak dini araştırmalar, sosyal bilimler ve çağdaş dini hareketler alanındaki akademik literatürü ve söylemi zenginleştirmeye katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, toplumun Selefi dini topluluklara göre teolojik olarak sınıflandırılmasında Müslümanların ilk nesillerinin (Selef) uygulama ve inançlarının referans olarak alındığı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Selefi dini topluluklar içinde Müslüman kimliğinin inşasının temel dini metinler olan Kuran ve Hadislere sıkı sıkıya bağlılığında, İslam'ın püriten yorum ve uygulamalarını teşvik etmeye yönelik artan bir vurgu görülmektedir. Selefiler çağdaş toplumda Müslüman kimliğini temel dini metinlere göre yeniden biçimlendirmeye çalışırken, bu girişimleri ritüellere ve gündelik kişisel davranışlara kadar uzanan dini kimliğin günlük yaşamdaki önemine atfettikleri anlamın altını çizmektedir. Böyle yaparak, kimlikleri tanımlamanın ve işlevler yüklemenin öneminin farkında oldukları ortaya çıkmaktadır. Zira kimlik tanımları hem bireysel hem de kolektif olarak yaşam tarzını derinden etkilemektedir. Bununla birlikte, her kimliğin öncelik verdiği inançlar bulunmakta ve bu da ister istemez bazı kimlikleri dışlayabilmekte ve kendi tanımının kabul edilmesini dayatabilmektedir. Bu araştırmada görüldüğü üzere bazı dini kimlikler kapsayıcı görünmektedir ancak kapsayıcı tanım ve inşa süreçlerinin bile öngörülemeyen sonuçlara yol açabileceği bilinmelidir. Ne kadar kapsayıcı

olursa olsun birincil ve üst kimlik, her zaman doğası gereği az miktarda bile olsa dışlayıcı olabilmekte ve diğer kimlikleri kendi varlığı için bir tehdit olarak görebilmektedir.

Bu araştırmanın bulguları, Selefi dini toplulukları, onların dini ideolojilerini, dini kimliği tanımlama biçimlerini ve yeni medya araçlarıyla bağlantılarını anlamamıza katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemekte ve onların Türk toplumunun dindarlık biçimlerine ilişkin görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Böylece bu çalışma, din, dijital medya ve sosyal kimlik oluşumu arasındaki ilişki üzerine gelecekteki çalışmalar için bir temel çalışma görevi görerek, dijital çağda dini toplulukların var olma aktiviteleri hakkında daha fazla araştırma yapılmasına yönelik bir teşvik olması beklenmektedir.