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Performing Sufi Living in Contemporary Turkey

Çizmeci, Hasret Esra

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Performing Sufi Living in Contemporary Turkey

By

Hasret Esra Çizmeci, BA, MFA, MA

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Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance

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ABSTRACT

In 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, at the beginning of the Republican Era of Turkey, passed a series of decrees that prohibited the production and maintenance of Sufi lodges in Turkey and the practices of Sufi şeyhs and dervishes. This legal act was part of Atatürk’s social reforms that were designed to convert the newly found Republic of Turkey into a secular, modern state. Atatürk believed that Sufi dervish lodges should be closed immediately in order to transform the long-existing religious Ottoman culture into a rapidly evolving intellectual culture educated through Western scientific knowledge. This project examines how, despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi lodge production, devotees continue to create space for their devotional living in present-day Turkey. Through extensive field research in Sufi communities, this project investigates how Sufi religious practices are maintained, adapted, mobilized, and empowered through embodied acts of Sufi followers. Using Dwight Conquergood’s concept of “dialogic” performance, I analyze the ritual and everyday life experience of Sufi devotees in a variety of temporary and permanent sacred spaces through my coperformative witnessing. I argue in this study that the multifaceted urban Sufi devotional living in contemporary Turkey may be discerned most vividly by analysis of production of Sufi sacred spaces, the performance of Sufi rituals, and embodiment of Sufi beliefs and values in everyday life in a variety of urban commercial sites such as museums and cultural centers and private houses and apartment buildings converted to Sufi lodges. With their embodied acts, devotees revive, reformulate, expand, and mobilize Sufism as a way of living that is a synthesis of secular and religious values of the Turkish state.
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Chapter One

Introduction

This ethnographic research project examines the generation of Sufi living in a variety of private, semi-public, public, secular, and sacred urban spaces in present-day Turkey. Sufi devotees, through the organization of Sufi gatherings in private homes, museums, theaters, and cultural centers, mobilize Tasavvuf (Sufism) as a way of living that is a synthesis of the religious and secular values of the Turkish state. Using an ethnographic methodology and theories derived from performance studies, I examine the multiple ways in which the Sufi way of living is formed, such as through the authority of the spiritual teacher (şeyh);¹ the individual and collective performance of Sufi rituals; nefs (self or soul) training; and most importantly, the practice of Sufi doctrines in everyday life through the production of sacred spaces. In the urban landscapes of present-day Turkey, individuals from different cultural, religious, ethnic, national, and social backgrounds practice Tasavvuf in a variety of ways. Some devotees perceive the Sufi way of living as studying and/or practicing certain aspects of Tasavvuf, such as its rituals, religious poetry, and music, or attending religious talks. These devotees claim that by performing certain aspects, they increase the quality of

¹ Şeyh literally means elder and is the title given to the spiritual master and leader of a Sufi order. Since this study is about individuals in Turkey, I employ the religious terms that are common to Turkish, Persian, and Arabic in their Turkish versions and in italics. I use some of the terms interchangeably, such as order and tarikat (plural of turuq, meaning way or path); gathering and sohbet (referring to talk sessions); devotee, student, or mürit (also meaning student or pupil); and spiritual guide/master, şeyh and mürsît (also meaning spiritual teacher) as used by followers. While the şeyh of the secluded order calls his devotees dervishes, mürits or students, other spiritual teachers I conversed with only use the term students. I will explain the specific meaning and function of these terms in present-day Sufi living as they are used in different Sufi groups and orders as I analyze the practices of each individual.
their lives, which they perceive as moving away from the deteriorating effects of the materialistic everyday life. There are also devotees who practice *Tasavvuf* as their spiritual path in life or lifetime pilgrimage. Whether a devotee is initiated into a Sufi order to live *Tasavvuf* as the central path of life or not, in the urban landscapes of contemporary Turkey, there is space for everyone (including non-Muslims) to practice *Tasavvuf* despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi space production.

*Tasavvuf* in Turkey “is well known for its long and active role during the Ottoman Empire.”\(^2\) Some of the main Sufi orders in Turkey dating back as far as the eleventh and twelfth centuries “played significant social and political roles, ranging from artistic, educational, and architectural influences to offering healing spaces and social networks of support for the poor.”\(^3\) However, in 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, at the beginning of the Republican Era of Turkey, passed a series of decrees that prohibited the production and maintenance of Sufi lodges in Turkey and the practices of Sufi *şeyhs* and dervishes. This legal act was part of Atatürk’s social reforms (also referred to as “Kemalism”) that were designed to convert the newly formed Republic of Turkey into a secular, modern nation-state. Atatürk believed that Sufi dervish lodges should be closed immediately in order to transform the long-existing religious Ottoman culture into a rapidly evolving intellectual culture educated through secular knowledge. In a speech, Atatürk made it clear that “the whole nation must know, and know well, that the Republic of Turkey cannot be the land of *şeyhs*,

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\(^3\) Ibid.
dervishes, disciples, and lay brothers.”

According to Law 677, made effective on December 13, 1925, all the dervish lodges (tekkes and zaviyes) were closed. Mosques remained open. Using Sufi titles such as şeyh, dervish, and dede (senior dervish), serving individuals described with such names, and use of dervish costume, were prohibited. Anyone attempting to open the closed dervish lodges or the tombs, or produce new Sufi worship spaces, or people who are described with any of the Sufi titles or those who serve them, would be charged with at least three months in prison.

However, the government supported the opening of some of the tombs in the 1950s due to their historical value and allowed Sufi groups and individuals (that legalized

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5 Shems Friedlander translated the Law 677 that prohibits the production and maintenance of Sufi spaces in Turkey as “Clause 1. All the tekkes (dervish lodges) and zaviyes (central dervish lodges) in the Turkish Republic, either in the form of wakf (religious foundations) or under the personal property right of its sheikh or established in any other way, are closed. The right of property or possession of their owners continues. Those used as mosques and mescits (small mosques) may be retained as such. All of the orders using descriptions as sheikh, dervish, disciple, dedelik (a kind of sheikh of an order) [or senior dervishes who train dervishes], chelebilik (title of the leader of the Mevlevi order), seyyitlik (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), babalik (elder of a religious order, a kind of sheikh [meaning father, referring to a şeyh]), emirlik (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), nakiplik (warden of a religious order), halifelik (deputy sheikh), faldjilik (fortune teller), buyudjuluk (witch-craft), ufurukchuluk (a person who claims to cure by means of breath), divining, and giving written charms in order to make someone reach their desire: service to these titles, and the wearing of dervish costume, are prohibited. The tombs of sultans, the tombs of dervish orders are closed, and the profession of tomb-keeping is abolished. Those who open the closed tekkes (dervish lodges) or zaviyes (central dervish lodges), or the tombs, and those who re-establish them or those who give temporary places to the orders or people who are called by any of the mystical names mentioned above or those who serve them, will be sentenced to at least three months in prison and will be fined at least fifty Turkish liras.” Shems Friedlander, *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes* (New York: Parabola Books, 2003), 123.
themselves as secular foundations) to use some of the historical dervish lodges. The government also supported the organization of Sufi activities by providing space for the practice of rituals, music, and poetry as folk performances, tourist attractions, and educational events as long as the devotees did not act openly as *seyhs*, *dedes*, or dervishes, and groups as Sufi orders.

As a result of the legal restrictions imposed in 1925, in the years following, devotees moved underground and practiced their rituals, music, and poetry in their private homes. However, while Eric Jan Zürcher points out that in the eighty-nine years following, Sufi gatherings in Turkey have been clandestine, held in less populated urban neighborhoods for fear of drawing attention, that was not the case for some Sufi groups, who organized visible practices such as the commodified performances of Sufi rituals and music starting in the 1950s such as *Sema* ceremony (known as whirling dervish rituals in the West).

A set of social and political changes including the multi-party competition starting

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7 Multi-party competition is defined as such: “Turkey’s shift to a multi-party political system in 1946 when the Democratic Party was founded constituted a turning point in Turkey’s political history, including the role of Islam in the Turkish state. By this time, Islam was under the control of the state but remained an effective social and moral force in Turkey. The Democratic Party criticized the RPP’s [Republican People’s Party’s] total control over Islam. In order to pacify the DP the Prime Minister began to soften policies on Islam, including the addition of courses on Islam to the educational curriculum. When the DP party was elected to office in 1950, it maintained a similar approach to secularism even though it allowed a return to Arabic for the call to prayer, removed obstacles prohibiting religious practice and teaching, and built new mosques.” Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (London: Springer, 2010), 17. “During the transition from one-party politics to multi-party politics, the RPP based its strategy on struggling to hold on to power by adopting the policies the DP advocated... aware of the growing importance of religious cleavage and its contribution to the increasing
in the 1950s encouraging political leaders to become responsive to the public’s religious demands; commodification and secularization of Sufi rituals as folk performances and tourist attraction starting in the 1950s to improve the Turkish economy; the 1983 constitutional changes easing the restrictions on religious practice; and the designation of Sufi cultural beliefs and values as part of World Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO (in collaboration with the government) in 1973, 2005, and 2007 have shaped the life of Sufi şeyhs and dervishes in Turkey. As Ümit Çizre Sakallıoğlu writes, “Both military and political leaders after 1980 believed Islam could help create a socially disciplined and politically stable society ready to undergo the structural dislocations of the DP, the RPP tried to adopt a pro-Islam attitude.” Huri Türsan, *Democratisation in Turkey: The Role of Political Parties* (Bruxelles: PIE–Peter Lang, 2004), 49.

Şerif Mardin examines the public’s religious demands by stating that “Islam had an aspect which addressed itself to man’s being in this world, to his basic ontological insecurity, which enabled it to fasten itself on to psychological drives. Islam has become stronger in Turkey because social mobilization had not decreased but on the contrary increased the insecurity of the mean who have been projected out of their traditional setting.” Şerif Mardin, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey,” in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, ed. Ali Kazancıgil and Ergün Özbudun (London: Archon Books, 1991), 218.

According to the Turkish Constitution, Article 24, “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. Acts of worship, religious services, and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, provided that they do not violate the provisions of Article 14. No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious ceremonies and rites, to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions. Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under State supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual’s own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives. No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets.” The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, http://www.hri.org/docs/turkey/con2b.html.
caused by the transition to popular capitalism and global patterns of lifestyles.”

As a result of social and political changes in Turkey, devotees raised in the secular society of Turkey sought to find ways to fulfill their roles as religious and secular members of Turkish society and mobilized Sufism as way of living. As most of the devotees today explain, they embrace Atatürk’s idea of laïcité, explaining it as the separation of state and religious affairs, while also expressing themselves as religious individuals, perceiving Islam as a living tradition that can “change through engagement with the received.” In Turkey, “Secularism did not mean programmatic atheism, but constitutional reforms that placed the expressions of religion in the private realm with a certain emphasis on personal faith, instead of regarding religion as a dominating force in society as it used to be in Ottoman times.” Embracing both secular and religious values, some devotees sought ways to make space for their devotional living despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi lodge production. Devotees modified their systems of worship and produced public and private spaces to continue their devotional living, including the social roles (such as supporting the poor) that were significant to their religious practice during the Ottoman Empire. Sufi communities sought to shape and circulate publicly conceptions of religion, state, history, and culture by organizing educational activities and performances of their rituals as tourist attractions to connect with devotees and non-devotees from different social, economic, cultural, and religious

backgrounds who seek to practice or learn about Sufi teachings, poetry, and/or rituals.

In the last ten years, devotees have appeared in various public settings (theatres, cultural centers, museums, and hotels) as scholars, teachers, and *semazens* (whirling dervishes). During my fieldwork, some devotees explained that as long as they were not acting openly as Sufi orders and as long as they did not talk about their affiliation with a Sufi order, they were acceptable as faithful individuals living in secular urban Turkish society. Nicholas Birch states, “Many secular Turks used to respond to the word *tarikat* [Sufi order] with a grimace of distaste… however, since the 1990s, secular fears have increasingly centered on political Islam.” Today, many secular Turks, raised with Atatürk’s ideas, experience piety through Sufi teachings and rituals, perceiving *Tasavvuf* as an alternative to the strictly doctrinal practice of Islam.

When examining devotees’ everyday life and rituals, I use the term “Sufi living” to talk about every kind of expressive behavior, including rituals and interactions in everyday life, that followers perform, experience, modify, and convey as spiritual living in order to move closer to God. I prefer to adhere to devotees’ own language while examining their everyday life and use the phrase “Sufi living” as opposed to what scholars call “Sufi tradition.” More specifically, while devotees use phrases such as *Tasavvuf* along with the term “living” (focusing on the regenerative aspects of their religious practice) when talking to each other about their everyday life and worship

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13 M. Saffet Sarıkaya also identifies how devotees choose not to talk about their affiliation with a Sufi order in his article “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye’sinde Dini Tarikat ve Cemaatlerin Toplumdaki Yeri,” *SDÜ Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3 (1998), 93-102.


practices, in the rest of this thesis, I call their everyday life “Sufi living” both to respect the devotees’ idea of *Tasavvuf* as a “lived religion” and with regard to the English-speaking reader’s familiarity with the terms Sufism and Sufi rather than *Tasavvuf*. The terms “Sufi living” and “*Tasavvuf* living,” without overlooking *Tasavvuf*’s historical and theoretical context, give weight to devotees’ “performatic” practices. The term “performatic” allows me to bring the focus of this thesis to the changes, diversities, and doublings experienced in modern urban Sufi culture in Turkey today. While *Tasavvuf* refers to the Ottoman way of organizing and experiencing Sufi teachings, meaning its rules, principles, and the organization of Sufi tarikats (orders), with the term “living,” I point to how devotees see *Tasavvuf* as a “discursive tradition” that is open to changes and adaptations according to the socioeconomic needs of each individual living in the secular urban society of Turkey. The term “living” will allow the reader to focus on the corporeal, practical, varying, and experiential nature of *Tasavvuf* in present-day Turkey.

Building on the idea of Sufi living, I also seek to show how religious Sufi practice is not just a result of a set of strict doctrinal rules. I examine Sufi living as emotional, physically constituted, and beyond normative rules and choices, by employing Clifford Geertz’s idea of embodied inquiry of religious cultures and their social practices as dynamic entities. Drawing on embodied knowledge, I discuss the role of four different Sufi communities — the Cerrahi order; Saygin dede’s (a Mevlevi) group; another Mevlevi devotee, Narin dede’s group; and an underground order — in generating social

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16 A term Diana Taylor used to indicate the adjectival form of the nondiscursive realm of performance. *Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 6.

expressions of Islam by focusing on the practical aspects of Sufism as multifaceted living that flourishes with the idea of unity as diversity.\textsuperscript{18} More specifically, this research contributes to a general conceptualization of Islam in secular/public spaces by asking how the embodiment of the Sufi idea of divine love, peace, and unity shows an alternative side to the strictly doctrinal Islamic values dictated by şeriat (sharia) rules and principles and brings together individuals in the non-şeriatic (not dictated by şeriat rules and principles) environments of urban Sufi spaces, in which devotees and non-devotees share and discuss opinions about religion, social life, and politics freely and respectfully.

Today, devotees’ embodied performances of Sufi rituals (simultaneously as commodities, advertised as folk performances and tourist attractions, and worship) play a significant role in producing temporary sites for Sufi practices, while underground Sufi devotional living allows the production of permanent sacred spaces comparable to what existed in Ottoman times, in which devotees live and train regularly. Embodied acts of devotees also encourage multireligious and multicultural communities to come together and practice Sufi ideas of love, tolerance, peace, respect, and compassion, and convey a positive side of Islam to secular Turkish citizens and tourists visiting Turkey. What is common in today’s Sufi identities is that although there are multiple voices and practices in public and underground sacred spaces where Sufi religious/community gatherings are organized and rituals performed, devotees seek harmony in their everyday life by embodying the Sufi idea of unity of existence (\textit{Vahdat al Vucud}) as recognition of social and political changes in the modern world and appreciation of

diversity. As Willliam Chittick states, the concept does not regard every human being as identical. In contrast, as Chittick points out, *Vahdat al Vucud* is “manyness of reality.”\(^\text{19}\) This concept is very important in the practical everyday life of Sufi devotees because it teaches individuals to be aware of divine meaning,\(^\text{20}\) God’s unity of existence. Instead of taking unity and diversity as opposites, devotees practice the idea that each person is different and unique, but each person’s true self is non-existent in God.

**Performance as an Object and Methodology**

Considering the interdisciplinary nature of this project, it is necessary to define certain terms and concepts such as performance, modernity, secularism, urban, space, religiousness, and spirituality in relation to the idea of Sufi living in present-day Turkey. Sufism in Turkey, as well as its rituals, poetry, arts, and literature, has been studied by scholars such as Franklin D. Lewis, Tuğrul İnanc, Anders Hammarlund, Annemarie Schimmel, Metin And, Talat Sait Halman, and many others in the fields of history, religion, and anthropology. However, the existing scholarship mainly focuses on historical, structural, or textual analysis of Sufi living as a process of regularization.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibn-i Arabi developed “a conception of creation as a reflection of God’s perfect attributes (His Quranic names). Each of the manifold components and dimensions of the cosmos and the natural world mirrors His endless beauty, order, and creative capacity. The pinnacle and capstone of creation is mankind, the element that reflects God’s most essential attribute: His unity. Humans embody within their souls and character all the multiplicity of cosmos but are able to bring them into unified balance and proper proportion. A person who has achieved this state of enlightened balance not only embodies ‘the spirit of the cosmos,’ he or she also is the most perfect reflection of God’s perfection. This is ‘the perfect human being (al-insan al-kamil),’ who has purged him or herself of imperfections and grown closer and closer to God’s attributes until he dissolves into non-existence. For only God truly exists at all.” Jonathan A.C. Brown, ed., “The Function of Prophetic Traditions in Sufism,” in *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 193.
rather than the embodied acts of devotees’ everyday life and rituals changing in relation to the social and political life in present-day Turkey, which this project seeks to do.

Two ethnographic studies produced by Catharina Raudvere and Fulya Atacan moved beyond discussing Sufism as regularization and focused on Sufism as a lived practice in Turkey, with both Atacan and Raudvere studying the Cerrahi Sufi order, a group that legalized their religious activities as a research foundation. While Atacan focuses more on the organization of the Sufi order and the group dynamics, Raudvere focuses on how a group of female devotees, aside from their participation in their şeyh’s ritual gatherings in a historical Sufi lodge in Istanbul, also organize religious activities for women in a private flat to come together and practice Sufi rites as well as interact and support each other in other worldly matters. However, both of these projects also give emphasis to the idea that Sufism is a religious practice tied to doctrines and a set of rites rather than a multifaceted, embodied everyday living that is open to changes and adaptations according to each devotees’ cultural background and socioeconomic needs.

In order to analyze Sufism as a way of living, I take as my objects of analysis embodied acts of devotees in everyday life, including serving and cooking rituals (which are part of everyday Sufi training), whirling and zikir rituals (repetition of God’s Quranic names which are also regarded as His attributes — the word zikir is derived from the Arabic word dhikr, literally meaning remembrance), prayer gatherings, classes, workshops, performance of pilgrimages, and actions and interactions at home and work or in other public spaces. As Taylor states, “Embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate, and digital societies. Not everyone comes to ‘culture’ or modernity through
writing.” Taylor further explains that it is imperative to reexamine the relationships between performance and the generation of knowledge because “we [human beings] learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices.” Taylor’s idea opens a lens through which to examine how devotees seek to embody Sufi teachings and experience divine meaning in their rituals and prayers and carry the sensations they experienced in the rituals to their practice of everyday life. Devotees remember, learn, and communicate their teachings through embodied actions.

Drawing on the theory of “the performative,” I examine how Sufi living and spaces are created anew in the process of each devotee’s embodied action. Different theorists have employed the idea of the performative to mean different things. J.L. Austin explains that his term “performative” is derived “from ‘perform,’ the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicated that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action — it is not normally thought of as just saying something.” Jacques Derrida discusses the importance of the citationality and iterability and asks whether or not “a performative utterance [could] succeed if its formulation did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance.” For Derrida, “meaning is not singular, original, or locatable... all and every meaning is contingent, temporary — is created in the process through the

22 Ibid., xvi.
complex interaction of all speakers,” therefore a successful performative is necessarily an “impure” performative.\textsuperscript{26} Judith Butler’s use of the term “performativity” in relation to gender “as an act which has been rehearsed” directs the focus on how gender is “produced through regulating and citational practices.”\textsuperscript{27} Butler argues “that gender reality is created through sustained social performances... that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted.”\textsuperscript{28} As Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick point out that as “a common lexical item,” performative is used in different fields, it “has hardly come to mean the same thing for each.”\textsuperscript{29} In line with Parker and Sedgwick, Taylor states, “In Austin, performative points to language that acts, in Butler it goes in the opposite direction, subsuming subjectivity and cultural agency into normative discursive practice.”\textsuperscript{30} Taylor further evaluates that in Butler’s trajectory, “the performativity becomes less a quality (or adjective) of ‘performance’ than of discourse.”\textsuperscript{31} In order to reclaim the term performative for her analysis of performing cultural memory, Taylor borrows “a word from the contemporary Spanish usage of performance — performatico or performatic in English — to denote the adjectival form of the nondiscursive realm of performance.”\textsuperscript{32} Taylor finds this important to signal the performatic fields “as separate from, though


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 528.


\textsuperscript{30} Taylor, \textit{Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas}, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 6.
always embroiled with, the discursive one so privileged by Western logocentrism.”

Borrowing Taylor’s term, I take actions embodied by devotees and their production of Sufi space as “performatic.” The idea of performatic enables me to look at the intersections between spaces and embodied actions, the discursive and the non-discursive realms of Sufi living.

Taylor’s analysis of “performatic shift and doubling” is also valuable for the analysis of the embodiment of Sufi rituals as regeneration and mobilization of Sufi living. I employ Joseph Roach and Taylor’s analysis of cultural continuity to explore how devotees generate their beliefs and values. Roach states that “culture reproduces and recreates itself by a process that can be best described by the word surrogation.” However, Taylor states that “surrogation as a model for cultural continuity is rejected precisely because, as Roach notes, it allows for the collapse of vital historical links and political moves.” As Taylor further points out, “There are many examples in the

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33 Taylor, Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas, 6. Here Taylor uses the concept of logocentrism, which “entered the vocabulary of cultural studies courtesy of Derrida, who critiques its pre-eminence within Western philosophy. By logocentrism Derrida means the reliance on fixed a priori transcendent meanings. That is, universal meanings, concepts and forms of logic that exist within human reason before any other kinds of thinking can occur. This would include a universal conception of reason or beauty. The idea is closely tied to the notion of phonocentrism by which Derrida means the priority given to sounds and speech over writing in explaining the generation of meaning. This is so because it is in the directness of speech rather than in the metaphorical nature of writing that Western philosophy is said by Derrida to find transcendent meaning.” Chris Barker, The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies (London: Sage Publication, 2004), 111.

34 The ideas of “performatic shift and doubling” according to Taylor, are “the proliferations of the signified,” forms of multiplication and simultaneity rather than surrogation and absenting.


36 Taylor, Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas, 174-175.
colonial history of the Americas of colonizers and evangelists clinging to their belief of successful substitutions (their values and images supplanting ‘pagan’ ones) when in fact a performatic shift and doubling had occurred that preserved rather than erased, the antecedents.”\textsuperscript{37} Just like in Taylor’s analysis of how a pagan deity might continue to exist within the Catholic image, I discuss how the Sufi idea of peace and love continues to exist in folk and touristic adaptations of the whirling ceremony and that devotees experience and transmit their Sufi cultural beliefs and values within such shifts and doublings.

Throughout this thesis, I examine Sufi living as a process of change rather than a process of regularization. Performance studies scholar Margaret Drewal encourages her readers to understand ritual as a “transformational process, as improvisation, in contrast to the more standard approach as a process of regularization or reproduction in which ritual is viewed more or less as reproducing the past or the cosmos in stable fashion with relatively little, or gradual change.”\textsuperscript{38} Devotees perceive their practice of piety as a transformational process. For devotees, each moment, even when performing repetitive movements of zikir, the action of discovering the physical sensations happening in the body and moving closer to divine meaning, is about seeking self-transformation.

\textbf{Methodology}

Drawing on Dwight Conquergood’s concept of “dialogic”\textsuperscript{39} performance — a performance that endeavors to bring as many different voices as possible into the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Margaret Thompson Drewal, \textit{Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 11.
\textsuperscript{39} Conquergood proposes that through dialogical exchange, individuals pass beyond the borders between identity, difference, detachment, and commitment to speak
conversation, without any of them destroying the other — I analyze the practice of self-
transformation in rituals and everyday life experiences of Sufi devotees through my
coperformative witnessing. As Elaine Peña further examines, coperformative
witnessing is a research technique that privileges embodied action as an object as well
as a method for creating scholarship about a certain culture. I followed Peña’s points to
allow myself to pursue my aspiration to create more intimate relationships with
devotees in order to comprehend the sensations experienced inside and outside of
sacred spaces. In order to co-witness how Sufi devotees live in present-day Turkey, I
joined different Sufi communities and met devotees who were lawyers, teachers, bank
workers, and artists, for whom Sufi worship/community gatherings were a significant
part of their day-to-day life.

Conquergood, as an ethnographer, believed that interpreting lives is radically
different than analyzing books. I followed Conquergood’s framework of using the
method of coperformative witnessing to study how devotees generate Sufi living as a
multifaceted practice in different contexts and situations. Peña points out
Conquergood’s three significant ideas of using coperformative witnessing as a method
for field research. The first guiding point is that “the art of fieldwork is performance;”

with rather than speak about others. According to Conquergood, dialogic performance
“resists closure and totalizing domination of a single point, unitary system of thought.
The dialogical project counters the normative with the performative, the canonical with
the carnivalesque, Apollonian rationality with Dionysian disorder... Dialogicalism
strives to bring as many different voices as possible into the human conversation,
without any of them suppressing or silencing the other.” Dwight Conquergood,
“Between Experience and Meaning: Performance as a Paradigm for Meaningful
Action,” in Renewal and Revision: The Future of Interpretation, ed. Ted Colson

40 See Dwight Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions
41 Ibid., 2.
the second, the people with whom I meet and perform everyday life during fieldwork “are not fools;” and the third was that I need to imagine Sufi culture as a “matrix of boundaries, borders, intersections, turning points, and thresholds.” Peña explains, “this mode of research is a deeply politicized way of seeing and being in the field” and that the point of departure needs to be twofold. First, as Peña states, I worked with the idea that “the ethnographer and the ‘subject’ are always, and have always been, despite the insistence of more traditional ethnographic methods, engaged as interlocutors.” Second, I employed the idea that “coperformative witnessing does not rely solely on texts housed in archives, oral histories, maps, or statistics but also foregrounds sensual communication — the rich subtext and often deeply coded moments of bodied exchange — that produce knowledge, ideas, opinions, mores, and traditions.” Consistent with Conquergood’s methodology, Victor Turner states that “if anthropologists are going to take ethnodramatics seriously... we will have to become performers ourselves.” As Taylor points out, by situating myself as a researcher and student in the scenarios I co-witnessed and coperformed, I positioned “my personal and

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42 Ibid.
44 Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 101. Victor Turner and Edith Turner point out that “We also hold that in studies of human culture and behavior the tension between motivation and scientific objectivity can sometimes prove fruitful. When the deeper levels of the self, deeply tinctured by culture, are reflexively engaged, the knowledge brought back from the encounter between self as subject and self as object may be just as valid as knowledge acquired by ‘neutral’ observation of others.” Victor Turner and Edith Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), xxv. The Turners, in this analysis, while challenging their position as researchers to remember to stay objective while focusing on a personally cherished Christian pilgrimage, also allow us to see that as interpreters of the rituals, we should be aware of our active role in the process.
theoretical investment in the arguments.”

It was in the first month of my fieldwork in Turkey that I witnessed how each moment was an opportunity to interact with devotee and non-devotee individuals, who would guide my critical thinking about Sufism in the social and political context of the secular Turkish state. My thinking evolved with discussions held during lengthy gatherings on the Aegean Coast of Turkey, which proved to be invaluable in developing my understanding of Turkish people’s views of secularism and modernity and my politicized participation in Sufi living as a researcher raised in a secular family opinionated about the ideas and practices of religious groups and individuals. I grew up in a family and circle of friends that believed in God but perceived religious groups and individuals as threats to the democratic values of the secular Turkish state.

The Aegean Coast, especially Izmir (where I was born and raised), as scholars in the past have analyzed, houses families who follow Atatürk’s ideas devotedly and perceive Ottoman religious life as the opposite of progress, modernity, and civilization. Secular Turks in Izmir (who consider themselves followers of Atatürk) despise the practice of religion, especially the Sufi orders that were banned by Atatürk in 1925 and still discuss religious groups such as Sufi orders in relation to Atatürk’s secular ideologies.47 My day-to-day reality, growing up in the secular environment of Izmir,

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45 Taylor, Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas, xvi.
47 Gavin D. Brockett, “Collective Action and the Turkish Revolution: Towards a Framework for the Social History of the Atatürk Era 1923-1938,” Middle Eastern Studies 34 (1998), 44-66; For more on secularism in Turkey, see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, İslamcılık Akımı (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2003); Seçil Deren,
was that the act of worship was not about following Islamic doctrines. In my family, while belief in Allah was a comforting practice, following religious doctrines was regarded as irrational. It wasn’t until I read the Sufi religious poetry of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi (founder of the Mevlevi Sufi order) in middle school in 1996 that I recalled the first time I witnessed the performance of a Sufi ritual as a young audience member during a visit to Konya with my mother, who is a tourist guide, English teacher, and a dedicated follower of world history. Remembering the beauty of the dervishes in their white *tennures* flying with the fast-paced whirling, the emotional sounds of devotees’ recitation of Sufi hymns, and having read how the dervishes used to live, train, and worship together in the *dergahs* of Sufi mystic and şeyh Mevlana

48 As I grew up, some images stayed in my memory from the first time I witnessed the ceremony in Konya. The *tennure* (skirt) and the *sikke* (hat) that dervishes wear as their religious outfit during the whirling ceremony were very appealing to me and the image of the flying skirt and the long whirling hat continue to remind me of dervishes’ desire to fly out of the material world to experience sacred love, to move closer to God. As a young audience member, having asked my mother the meanings of these costume pieces, I knew that the white *tennure* represented the dervishes’ shroud (the burial garment) and the *sikke*, the dervishes’ gravestone, both signifying dervishes’ seeking death in life. With this information, years later, *dervishes*, in my imagination, were human beings that lived in their sacred spaces with their *şeyhs* (as their spiritual masters) to be free from the restrictions of the material world. As a researcher starting fieldwork, I was determined to find dervishes who continued the Ottoman communal living with their *şeyh* and spiritual siblings.
Celaleddin-i Rumi, I asked myself why I hadn’t thought or read about Sufism in all the years I lived in Turkey. The reason was that secular Turkish school curriculums rarely mentioned Sufi titles and words such as dervish, dede (senior dervish), or tarikat.

In the summer of 2009, during my first visit to Turkey as a research student, having breakfast with my aunt and her friends in a beautifully flowered garden of a beach house in Çeşme, I was perusing an article in Aktüel (a Turkish magazine) about whirling dervishes in Turkey. Aydan, an elderly friend of my aunt, having heard from my grandmother that I was researching Sufism, said, “how interesting it is that you are attempting to study such a ‘different’ topic.” I immediately knew what she meant by “different.” Aydan, as a passionate follower of Atatürk’s secular ideas against religion, was expressing her surprise at my desire to work on such a religious topic. Listening to her inquiring tone of voice, I was happy to have the chance to talk about my research topic and hear Aydan and the other guests’ opinions about Sufi living in Turkey. Aydan asked: “What are you studying exactly?” I answered, “I am researching Sufi devotees’ lives and religious/community spaces in contemporary Turkey.” Aydan, taking pride in her attachment to Atatürk’s secular ideas, said, “I thought dervishes [devotees who are initiated in a Sufi path] did not exist anymore. Atatürk closed all the tekkes [dervish lodges] and zaviyes [small dervish lodges] in Turkey, no?” I said, “Yes, that’s partially true. The Turkish government banned any sort of Sufi religious practices because Sufi tarikats were highly influential regarding social life and because şeyhs’, dedes’, and dervishes’ way of living, cultural beliefs, and values were reminiscent of their Ottoman values.” Noticing her naiveté, I said, “Although Atatürk’s reason was to reform the

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50 Conversation with my aunt’s friend on July 4, 2009.
country, we should also be aware that the politicians following him embodied non-democratic ideas and restricted the religious life of Sufi devotees in Turkey.” Another younger friend of my aunt, Elif, interrupted saying “We all should remember that anyone who talked, wrote, and/or acted against his secular ideas used to get persecuted in this country.”

Just as the breakfast conversation was becoming undesirably political, Ayşe, a doctor, shared her enchantment with the idea of peace, compassion, and love in Rumi’s religious poetry. Then, Elif delightfully shared Rumi’s most recognized proverb. She recited, “Come whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving (it doesn’t matter). Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, come even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, come yet again, come.” And when she finished her recitation, overcome with emotion, she took a deep breath, smiled, and continued to sip her tea.

An older lady friend of my aunt wanting to continue the conversation said, “I know very little about Rumi’s teachings but I read Şems-i Tebrizi’s [a wandering dervish, whom Rumi perceived as a master and friend] in Elif Şafak’s novel.” In writing The Forty Rules of Love, Şafak was criticized by scholars and critics for her interpretation of Sufi teachings. Secular Turks, who were not knowledgeable about Sufi cultural beliefs and values, took interest in Şafak’s interpretation of Sufi teachings. As I was sipping my tea, listening in delight to their fascination with Şafak’s novel, Ceylan, an older lady with a serious demeanor, cautioned me about how tarikats are fanatic religious groups with violent practices. Ceylan said, “Fake şeyhs and dedes deceive illiterate or

51 Conversation with my aunt’s friend on July 4, 2009.
unschooled people from low-income families, encouraging them to become part of a religious community and asking them to do things.” After saying that, she made a grimace and told me once again to be careful. To comfort her, I said I would.

That night, writing Ceylan’s idea that tarikats are religious groups with violent practices along with the other elderly lady friend’s idea about Sufi love and devotion learned from reading a novel, I thought of how due to secular education, Turks knew very little about their Ottoman past. Kemalist ideas in school and in family life convinced Turkish people that participating in religious meetings and events could bring oppression and violence to one’s life. My interactions with secular family members inspired me to ask how and why devotees generate Sufi living despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi space production and bias of Kemalist Turkish citizens.

After spending time with various individuals and Sufi communities, whose stories I will analyze in Chapter Three, I met a şeyh of an underground order, whose group I was able to join in performing Sufi living as a researcher and student of Sufi teachings. There, as a researcher and student, I decided to contribute to the scholarship produced about Sufi culture by answering what I see as the missing question: How do embodied practices of devotees, their production of space and practice of everyday life, generate, reformulate, mobilize, and empower Sufism as a synthesis of secular and religious values?

Pnina Werbner’s ethnographic research on Sufi cults, investigating the processes of Pakistani migration has become a model with its emphasis on multiple voices showing how a Sufi group operates within the tribal area of Pakistan and expands into the secular space of Britain. Werbner inspired me as a researcher to interact with devotees in Turkey and think critically about the multifaceted beliefs and values that generate present-day Sufi living in the Turkish state. As a research student, most days I attended classes, rituals, dinners, sohbets (talks), and other prayer/community meetings from morning to night in an apartment building and a wooden house converted into Sufi lodges, which gave me the opportunity to co-perform everyday life with devotees. This building along with another space, a wooden dergah (Sufi lodge), was to become my most visited site in the thirty months I conducted fieldwork in Turkey. There, I co-witnessed how participants in these ritual gatherings and performances (including Sufi devotees and guests as social actors) embody rapture,

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54 A year later, during my summer vacation, having conducted additional preliminary field research in Turkey, I had the chance to meet with a group of devotees in a Mesnevi class taught by a Sufi dede in the Yenikapi Mevlevi lodge, which is now functioning as a university and museum. Having the chance to talk to students in class about how devotees meet every week for sohbets (religious talks), I was now repeatedly asking another question: Would it be possible to find devotees who live and worship communally (as in the Ottoman living that was practiced before the founding of the Turkish Republic), while continuing their professional roles in everyday life who also participate in ritual gatherings? That year, as a research student in London, learning about theories of critical performance ethnography in the Performance, Culture and the Poetics of the Everyday: Field Methods in Performance Studies class taught by Ioana Szeman at Roehampton University, I was introduced to the ideas and practices conceptualized by a great number of ethnographers and their methods on using performance ethnography as a methodology to learn about cultural processes.

55 I choose not to announce their locations for worship or the names of the followers I met along the way to respect their privacy and choice to stay underground within the constantly changing political life of Turkey.
unity, and freedom through their movements and vocalizations in the zikir ritual, serve each other and their guests, clean, and cook to transform spaces in the urban environment to generate Sufi devotional living.

**Urban Sufi Living**

Production of urban Sufi space plays a significant role in the generation of Sufi living in Turkey. The urban Sufi living investigated in this thesis refers to a style of living and social organization, rather than a particular density or size of settlement. Rachida Chih’s argument shows how Sufi groups (or brotherhoods as in her statement) embraced urban living. Chih states, “The emergence of an educated urban middle class that embraced ideas of progress, individualism and democracy appeared to leave little space for the old fashioned brotherhoods [Sufi orders], which were believed to attract only marginalized segments of society with little education, low social status or ongoing rural connections.”

The urban Sufi community includes a high number of devotees who are academics, doctors, lawyers, and students, who work excessive hours and seek to escape from their material urban everyday life. Emphasizing the urban professionals’ need for escape from their everyday material activities, John Voll, referring to Celia Genn’s discussion on the development of modern Western Sufism, points out that “For many urban middle class professionals as well as those seeking alternative lifestyles, a major part of the appeal of Western Sufism is the provision of resources for spiritualist

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escape from materialist society.”  
In line with Voll’s point, in urban landscapes of modern Turkey, individuals come to Sufi religious/community gatherings for a variety of reasons, needs, questions, and help. Most common among these are monotony in their everyday material lives, loneliness, mental and physical health problems, family problems, and education, and, as many devotees explained in the shrine, the main reason is dissatisfaction with the material world. They come to converse with people like themselves who value the Sufi idea of unity. They blend their urban middle- or upper-class professional identities with their aim to move closer to God.

Along the lines of the above discussion, my ethnographic research shows that there are Sufi groups whose devotees are reflective of the social, cultural, religious, and economic diversities of urban Turkish society. In the secluded order there is a middle-class artist, who is an atheist studying Sufism; a middle-class academic, who is a Buddhist practicing the teachings of Rumi; middle-class Christians, who are teachers and dancers taking part in zikir rituals without practicing Islam; an upper-middle-class Jewish musician becoming a dervish practicing both Judaism and Islam; a middle-aged secular academic non-practicing Muslim; and a Muslim, who was a practicing imam (Muslim leader who leads prayers in a mosque). In their urban spaces, devotees bring together a variety of new seekers from different cultural and religious backgrounds to mobilize the Sufi idea of living with each participant’s social identities, education, capabilities, and hobbies embodied in urban life, who then become volunteers to help

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shape the socioeconomic lives of others in the group. Today, with the mobilization of Sufi living in urban life, Sufi devotees invite new members to their ritual/community gatherings. When a member of the group meets someone interested in learning about the Sufi devotion, s/he invites the non-Sufi individual, who may participate in and network with devotees by sharing their individual urban identities, life experiences, capabilities, hobbies, and education, and shape the attitudes and values of others in the group.

These devotees are connected to one another through their shared interest in and worship of Sufism. They come together to be part of a spiritual community in which they can define their identity in the secular/religious society of Turkey. Each individual and group gathering I experienced with Sufis offered living examples of the cultural processes of Sufi devotees in Turkey. Their coming together and performing worship and community gatherings shaped the generation of Sufi living in today’s Turkey.

Today, members of the Sufi community, while studying and working on material world matters, turn back to Sufi teachings to seek inner peace, rapture, and freedom; to move closer to divine meaning; and to become aware of what devotees identify as their true selves. As working-class individuals, some devotees, while seeking to adapt to the needs of the secular money-oriented everyday life, also seek to be less dependent on their desires relating to the material world. However, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains, “Sufism is not based on outer withdrawal from the world but on inner detachment.” In present-day Turkey, devotees seek inner detachment from worldly needs and desires, while continuing to perform their responsibilities in the world outside

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their shrines.

Guests attending these gatherings become participants/observers, witnessing the ideas and teachings of Sufi living and having the chance to communicate their everyday problems and ask questions about Sufi spiritual life. Devotees advise each other about job opportunities, education, health, and family in these sacred gatherings. Due to the importance of the idea of unity, devotees are persistent about practicing the Sufi teachings of compassion, love, and sharing, and seek to be generous in helping each other by offering free classes on music, foreign languages, and what they call other spiritual and social needs.

Making Space(s) for Sufi Living

Michel de Certeau’s claim that “space is a practiced place” provides the key idea through which I examine the embodied dynamics supporting Sufi sacred space production. Space, as de Certeau suggests, is always in the process of transformation. The development of urban Sufi spaces is contingent on the embodied acts of Sufi followers, who with their prayers, classes, workshops, and rituals change and make sense of the spaces they occupy. Due to the underground nature of some Sufi practitioners’ devotional living (in private homes and buildings), devotees’ buildings serve as places where Sufi knowledge is produced and Sufi living mobilized. Secular spaces such as cultural centers and hotels become sacred spaces only through devotees’ “embodied performances — their voices raised in ecstasy, their praying and dancing

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60 Ibid.
bodies in motion, the labor and care they offer to maintain the shrine.” Devotees today continue to practice their religious rites in a variety of urban public sites that are considered secular by the Turkish government and transform these spaces with the gatherings and rituals they organize and perform on a daily or weekly basis.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space, I examine devotees’ creative processes, how they make space for their religious practices through “forces of production” such as “labor and the organization of labor” in Sufi devotional living. As Lefebvre states, “Any ‘social existence’ aspiring or claiming to be ‘real,’ but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity... It would fall to the level of folklore and sooner or later disappear altogether.” Devotees preserve their beliefs, values, and practices by producing a variety of spaces for Sufi living. Carrying their devotional acts to spaces such as hotels and culture centers, followers of Sufi teachings and practices attract and encourage more individuals from different backgrounds to learn about urban Sufi living and become part of a spiritual community that has the potential to guide their life’s journey as a parent, factory worker, artist, or teacher. Drawing on Voll’s idea about provision of resources, I point out that by creating various urban Sufi spaces, devotees offer a variety of ways for experiencing, studying, practicing, sharing, and teaching Sufi living. In order to fight the difficulties experienced with busy work schedules in the urban material life in Turkey, there is significant commitment to Sufi sacred space production in cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. Ethel Sara Wolper, in her book Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space

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61 Peña, Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe, 737.
in Medieval Anatolia, discusses the life of Sufi dervishes and their lodges in the late thirteenth century and the late fourteenth century. Wolper’s discussion of how the Sufi spaces functioned as places for social activities identifies a viewpoint that is applicable to urban Sufi spaces in Turkey today. Wolper states that Sufi buildings, including hospices, tombs, and houses, shared important characteristics: “each housed dervishes and provided a center for communal activities, including prayer, study, discussion, conversation with visitors, accommodation of travellers, feeding the poor, and sometimes the performance of sama or dhikr.”

Similar to communal and social roles played by Sufi buildings in medieval Anatolia, today there are a variety of spaces created for temporary or permanent Sufi living that followers attend to read, study, dance, sing, and share ideas. Embodied acts of followers in these spaces, their “devotional labor,” transform private homes and buildings to function as schools, community centers, and Sufi lodges in which devotees guide each other about social and economic matters such as finding a job, doctor, school, or saving money.

The urban spaces I study consist of public and private spaces such as city apartment buildings and houses owned by şeyhs, cultural centers, hotels converted into Sufi lodges, and historical Sufi buildings converted into museums or foundation centers. The specific spaces I examine in Istanbul are: a private house renovated by a group of devotees to function as a dergah; an apartment building converted into a resident dergah; Dede Efendi, a historical house of a Sufi dede (senior dervish) converted into a

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64 Peña, Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe, 10.
culture center; Yenikapi Mevlevihanesi, a historical Sufi lodge converted into a museum and university; the private flat of a Sufi dede that is used by the dede for his organization of religious sohbets and classes; and the Four Seasons Hotel, where devotees perform touristic performances of Sufi rituals. In Konya, I examined a hotel converted into a worship hotel, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi ’s shrine, Şems-i Tebrizi Mosque, and a variety of other shrines visited during the underground order’s pilgrimages. Sufi communities in these spaces may be viewed as microcosms of the Sufi devotees’ different ways of living in modern Turkey, and thus a lens through which to engage the topics of democracy, religion, and secularism in relation to Sufism in Turkey, as well as social issues such as freedom of Sufi religious practice.

Development of Sufi space depends on the multiple layers of the social and economic history of the Turkish government, shifting political situations, and the living Sufi bodies who give meaning to the space. Even after the government forced religious organizations “into the private sphere of people’s lives,” Islamic beliefs and values “continued to have a vital and dynamic role” in Turkish society.\footnote{Sena Karasipahi “Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movements in Turkey and Iran,” \textit{Middle East Journal} 63, no. 1 (2009), 94.} Sufî devotees in Turkey resisted the secularization of Turkish society through the community/religious gatherings they organized in their private homes.

Peña’s study of Guadalupan sacred space production provides a lens through which to analyze how Sufi devotees create urban spaces through devotional labor. She extends Bourdieu’s idea of “symbolic capital”\footnote{“Symbolic capital” in Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis’ “is one for which economism has no name” and is “less easily measured.” Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{The Logic of Practice}, trans. by Richard Nice (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1980), 120-} and argues that Guadalupan devotees,
with their embodied acts or “devotional labor,” produce a symbolic “devotional capital” in terms of the “regenerative effects of the ineffable.”\textsuperscript{67} In the case of Sufi devotees, as in Peña’s analysis, it is the sacred beliefs and acts themselves that serve as mediums of devotees’ social and economic development, through which “adherents communicate ways of remembering, knowing, interpreting, and coping... that affect not only the quality of life for these religious communities but also the legacies they leave behind.”\textsuperscript{68} Sufi devotees produce their devotional capital by mobilizing Sufi living as a multifaceted practice through which devotees guide each other in social and economic matters, adapting their devotional living according to social and political circumstances in Turkish society. In my three years of conducting fieldwork in Turkey and coperformatively witnessing the everyday life of Sufi devotees while they witnessed mine, we cooked and cleaned together. We organized the *dergah* for gatherings. We shared our struggles with friends and family members who are critical of or against the practices of Sufi groups. We witnessed each other’s interactions with non-Sufi and non-Muslim guests and audiences. We shared food. We heard and created music together. We participated in the *seyh’s sohbets* with politicians visiting during pilgrimage to Konya. We woke up early in the morning to travel to shrines in Konya to pray. We shared dormitories when we were ill due to cold weather and a hectic schedule in

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121. Also as Nilüfer Gölé explains, Bourdieu talks about “different forms of capital that give strength, power and profit to their owner“ and these as Gölé explains are “economic capital” (convertible into money), “cultural capital” (conferred by edicational credentials and institutions), “social capital” (achieved social connections and group membership), “symbolic capital” (legitimated capital, source of prestige).” See Nilüfer Gölé, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites,” *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (1997): 46.
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Konya. We had discussions about life and death. We performed collective zikir rituals in private and public spaces. We supported each other regarding work and education. We sang hymns, socialized outside the dergah, visited each other’s living spaces, and listened to each other’s problems with coworkers and family members.

Having studied Sufi living with an underground Sufi order, I witnessed how devotees seek to construct any space they occupy in their practice of everyday life as sacred. In my analysis of Sufi living, I focus on Werbner’s idea that Sufism “beyond the transformation of the person” is “a movement in space that Islamicizes the universe and transforms it into the space of Allah.”

Taking Werbner’s idea even further, I show how devotees instead of Islamicizing the universe through the performance of religious doctrinal beliefs and values, sacralize the spaces they occupy by generating Sufi living as a synthesis of religious and secular beliefs, values, and actions. Devotees perform zikir with a desire to remember God in every moment of their everyday lives and seek to create spaces in which they practice both the material and spiritual aspects of their lives. Devotees carry the teachings and practices they embody in their sacred spaces to the spaces they occupy in their everyday lives. Devotees repeat God’s Quranic names silently in their everyday life and seek to embody Sufi ideas of unity and love in their day-to-day interactions with people at work, home, and at other social settings, merging their worldly and spiritual skills. Through embodiment of Sufi teachings and ideas in everyday life, devotees practice inner detachment from worldly desires and seek to experience urban settings as the space of divine meaning shaped with and through the

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69 Pnina Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikir and Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996), 323.
integration of material and spiritual actions and the needs of followers as members of the
ty.

**Modernity and Secularism**

The ideas of modernity and secularism are central to the discussion of Sufi space production and generation of Sufi living in Turkey due to rapid social, economic, and
political reforms enforced after the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Building on Brian Silverstein’s idea that “Turks tend to locate the modality of their modernity in what they call secularism [laiklik],” I will show how urban Sufi devotees while embodying modernity move beyond locating their values in a Turkish secularism perceived as the opposite of religiousness. However, to discuss secularism in relation to Sufi devotees, first it is necessary to examine how scholars including Nilüfer Göle, Charles Taylor, Talad Asad, and Esra Özyürek have been critical about the universal claims concerning the issue of secularism and laicité.

Esra Özyürek notes that “The particular form of governance called secularism, Asad urges us to study, takes such radically different forms in different contexts that it is difficult to come up with a single working definition for it.” Likewise, as Özyürek


72 Esra Özyürek, “Christian and Turkish: Secularist Fears of a Converted Nation” in *Secular State and Religious Society: Two Forces in Play in Turkey*, 99; Joan
notes in her analysis of Joan Scott’s idea of secularism, “the difference between the two models [French laicite and Anglo-Saxon secularism] is simple but has serious social and political consequences.”\(^{73}\) Scott puts forward that “In France, the state protects individuals from religion; in America, religions are protected from the state and state from religion.”\(^{74}\) Although similar to France, the Turkish state seeks to protect individuals from religion and “Turkish secularism is often depicted as authoritarian derivative of French laicite, measured in terms of its gaps, inconsistencies, and deficiencies with regard to the ideal model of French secularism.”\(^{75}\) Göle uses Seyla Benhabib’s analysis of Jacques Derrida’s notion of iteration to highlight the need to go beyond such reductionism. Göle employs the idea that “[i]n the process of repeating a term or a concept, we never produce a replica of the original usage; every iteration transforms the original meaning and adds new meaning to it.”\(^{76}\) As such, Göle states that “the French notion of laicite becomes laiklik in Turkish” and that the idea of secularism has key modifications in different countries, societies, and practiced differently by different religious individuals and groups in Turkey. Although “Turkish secularism is inspired by the French ‘laicite,’ or the separation of church and state, religious affairs [including the practices in the mosques] in Turkey are regulated by the

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state.” According to Göle, it is only on the issue of taking religion out of the public sphere that French and Turkish secularisms are similar. Özyürek notes that “Just like in France, in Turkey as well, the state sees its role in protecting its citizens from religious influences, while comparing to France, Turkish state takes an active role in educating citizens according to a particular understanding of Islam [Sunni Islam].” However, in Turkey today there are different Islamic individuals and groups that create their own idea and practice of secularism that is free of the particular (Sunni) understanding of Islam forced by the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (The Presidency of Religious Affairs) in Turkey. For the devotees, secularism is not one-dimensional and should not be confined to the Turkish government’s understanding of laicite. I seek to take Göle’s question, “How does a Muslim experience of secularity transform and question our understanding of the secular age?” further by asking how different Sufi individuals experience secular values in Turkey and modify the one-dimensional understanding of Turkish laicite according to their devotional living. Moreover, Göle encourages scholars to bring “into the picture those voices, practices, and experiences that are classified as particularistic, religious, traditional, that are not in conformity with the universal norms of secular modernity.” This project seeks to follow Göle’s ideas on secularism in order to investigate how secular values are open to adaptation for each

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81 Ibid., 245-246-247.
religious individual’s and group’s needs and how different devotees embody modernity and secularism while generating their devotional living.

Henri Meschonnic defines modernity as “inventions of thinking, of feeling, of seeing, and of meaning, the invention of forms of life.” Devotees I will discuss also perceive modernity as moving forward, inventing new ideas, ways of life, technologies, and art with the idea that all changes and circumstances are God’s offer. In the underground order, it is possible to see devotees reading and discussing books about secularism, modernity, religion, and democracy, such as the *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* by Talal Asad and *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* by Joseph Ratzinger, to analyze and think critically about their religious teachings in search of synthesizing their beliefs and values with the secular values of Turkish society. To understand modernity in relation to Sufi living in urban landscapes of present-day Turkey, it is necessary to go against what Charles Taylor calls “acultural analysis of modernity.” Taylor, in his article “Two Theories of Modernity,” encourages his readers to call to mind “the plurality of human cultures, each of which has a language and a set of practices that define specific understandings of personhood, social relations, states of mind/soul, goods and bads, virtues and vices, and the like.” Modernity in Turkey is identified with Kemalism, Atatürk’s six principles (republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism or reformism), which were formulated to separate the new state of Turkey from its Islamic Ottoman past, so that citizens would swiftly learn Westernized

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ways of living. However, as in Diana Taylor’s analysis of “performatic shift and doubling,” devotees preserved the Sufi beliefs and values that flourished in the Ottoman Empire while embodying the secular values of the Turkish state.

One of the six principles of Kemalism, “secularism includes secularizing the state apparatus and organizing the society according to scientific principles and rules on which the modern civilizations are based, in the meaning of excluding the religious from the political area as a result of the concept of nation’s dominance.” Also, as I analyze further in Chapter Two, Şerif Mardin highlights a significant idea that illuminates how Ottoman Islam transformed after the foundation of the Turkish Republic as a secular state. Mardin states that in Turkey, secularism has had a tremendous influence on Islam so that the idea of Islam should be comprehended as a synthesis of secular and religious values. As in Mardin’s analysis, there are Sufi devotees who simultaneously embody religiousness and secularism, adapting their

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84 As Suna Kili states, “The immediate objective of the Kemalist reforms and the ideology of Kemalism was the realization of a modern Turkish state and society. Their ultimate objective was bringing Turkey to a level even above contemporary civilization.” Suna Kili, “Kemalism in Contemporary Turkey,” International Political Science Review 1, no. 3 (1980), 387. “Kemalism is set of principles (republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, revolutionism, or reformism) that were created for political, social, cultural, and religious reforms including the establishment of democracy, civil and political equality for women, and free education provided by the Turkish state.” Zurcher, Turkey: A Modern History, 181.


86 Şerif Mardin, Türkiye, İslam ve Sekülarizm: Makaleler 5 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 92. Specifically, Mardin gives the life of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the 1970s as an example of the idea of Turkish Islam and talks about Erdoğan’s life as a teenager simultaneously embodying both secular and religious values as he pursued a football career despite his father’s rejection and punishments (“which promotes the image of youth that was part of Turkish republican secular ideology”) and leadership in an Islamic youth organization (“which highlights the reverse, Islamic side of the coin in his life story”).
religious beliefs and values according to their needs as members of the modern Turkish state. They embrace the fact that they live in a country in which most religious group activities were either prohibited or strictly controlled to secure the state’s progression in the direction of modernity. Devotees analyzed in this thesis are products of an Islam, which as Mardin states, is a synthesis of secular and religious values so that while practicing Sufi teachings and rituals, they participate in secular life by studying and practicing European languages, music, and poetry, and by working in secular settings.

Secular education had a significant role in transforming the comprehension and practice of Islam and its relationship to religious knowledge in Turkey. Ernest Gellner’s concept of “didactic secularism” is central to my discussion of how Islam has become a synthesis of secular and religious values. Gellner states that didactic secularism teaches and imposes a modern way of life through free secular education. Therefore, growing up in Turkey, whether religious or non-religious, an individual had to study subjects that improved their understanding of secular ways of living. In 1926, under the authority of the Ministry of Education, the state prohibited religious education. In 1928, Arabic script was replaced by Latin script, which also strengthened secularism. In 1932, the Turkish language secured by the establishment of the Turkish Linguistic Society (Türk Dil Kurumu) created a radical break with the language, the script of the Quran, and the Ottoman culture. Republican elites, as the product of this new way of writing, reading, and speaking, studied and used the Latin script, spoke pure Turkish, and

mastered Western languages (most prominently English and French). These republican elites referred to Western sources in science and literature, aiming toward catching up with Western civilization. Language and script reforms empowered the new republican elites, characterizing them as progressive. These republican elites, such as academics, novelists, journalists, businessmen, government workers, and the political ruling elites recognized as *ilerici* (progressive Kemalist intellectuals), became the agents that transmitted the Kemalist idea of progress, while religious people were regarded as *gericiler* (regressive-looking individuals believing that Turkey should return to its Ottoman past). However, as sociologist Nilüfer Göle argues, contemporary Islamist movements emerged after the 1950s and grew during the post-1980 period when religious individuals and groups gained more access to secular education and to the opportunity for upward social mobility. As Göle states, “Islamist movements attempted to respond to the aspirations of these new groups and help them come to terms with modernity in general and with the secular elites in particular.”

Today, although there are religious groups that believe that the state should be governed with *şeriat* as in the Ottoman times, there are also religious groups and individuals that believe that the principles of *şeriat* as God’s law are misrepresented and misused by people. Sufi

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89 As sociologist Nilüfer Göle states: “The Turkish experience allows for an in-depth analysis of the conflict between secularists and Islamists. The reason is that Turkey has had a very long tradition of ruling elites which since the end of the 19th century, have been engaged in reforming, modernizing, and secularizing Turkish society while Islamists have challenged this essentially Western model of change. Since the establishment of an Islamist party, the *Milli Nizam Partisi* (National Order Party) in 1970, Turkish Islamism has been incorporated into the political system and legitimated by the parliamentary system.” Göle, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making Elites and Counter-Elites,” 52-53.

devotees I discuss in this thesis believe in reasoning and change and that şeriat should be about seeking harmony with the idea of diversity, progress, secular education, and respect for individual rights and choices. This also brings forth the contradiction of the secularization theory that continues to see religion as a threat to the process of modernization. It is necessary to recognize the modern revival of religion “that is more than simply a residual pre-modern resistance to modernization.”

Devotees with their practice of Sufi living seek to move beyond such dichotomies.

As Voll states, the development of technology since the eighteenth century influenced the lifestyle of individuals by increasing human beings’ ability to communicate beyond their living spaces such as neighborhoods, towns, and cities.”

As devotees experienced such changes, Turkish Sufi şeyhs sought new systems, concepts, and spaces that could allow them to continue their understanding of Islamic theology and the economic, social, and political circumstances inside and outside of Turkey. To improve their access to the modern world outside of the shrine, şeyhs and devotees also have sought to improve their understanding of the developing technological changes in the world, including the use of smartphones and computers, and have taught their elderly members how to use technology. Şeyhs, who prioritized the Sufi understanding of compassion, became open to reviving their understanding of doctrines according to the social needs of their devotees, encouraging them to be occupied with their material life outside the shrine, including their family and work, adapting their practice of prayers to the socioeconomic and political conditions in contemporary Turkey. The combination of access to social life inside and outside Turkey through the use of

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91 Voll, “Contemporary Sufism and Current Social Theory,” 298.
technology and their desire to share Sufi teachings has aroused a positive dialogue among Sufi şeyhs and individuals seeking spiritual enlightenment.

In present-day Turkey, devotees and non-devotees communicate and share ideas about their everyday life, and support each other in dealing with spiritual, social, and economic questions and needs through the organization of religious/community gatherings, classes, and Sufi ritual enactments such as dance workshops, tourist performances, and/or music concerts in a variety of spaces. Halil İnalcık, a Turkish historian, discusses tarikat as a group that translates social and economic needs and aims of Muslims into “a social organization or movement.” Through Sufi practice and discourse (including the use of music and movement in rituals), devotees engage in the public expression of their cultural and religious beliefs and socioeconomic needs and adapt Sufi teachings with the intention of powerfully impacting communal and individual understandings of religion in present-day Turkey.

In regard to devotees today, embodying modern values in Turkey is about appreciating scientific education, innovation, labor, and democracy. As Voll states, “there is a broad transition within Sufi movements from being the core of old fashioned popular Islam to being important vehicles for the expression of new styles of popular or mass Islam in the context of modern and modernizing societies.” Devotees study various disciplines and practices and work extra hours, while studying Sufi teachings, rituals, and attending community/religious gatherings. Despite the State Department of Religious Affairs imposing Sunni orthodox values onto other Islamic groups such as

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94 Voll, “Contemporary Sufism and Current Social Theory,” 298.
Alevis, Sufi devotees embrace and seek a way out of şeriat doctrines that cover “all aspects of the public and private, communal and personal lives of the Muslims... especially those relating to property, marriage, inheritance, and other matters of personal status.” Similar to Mardin’s discussion that contemporary Islam can only be examined as ambiguous and a changing series of layers, I examine the case studies discussed in this thesis as multilayered in the sense that each group and individual embody different sets of secular and religious values of Turkish society.

**Spirituality and Religion**

I conclude this introductory chapter with the analysis of the last two concepts, religion and spirituality, to highlight how and why devotees choose not to make a distinction between these ideas in their practice of Sufi living. Today, due to the rising force of “experiential religiosity [released of dogma] in the New Religious movements in the West,” there is a tendency to separate spirituality and religiousness. According to Robert C. Fuller, while the term “spiritual” refers to more of a private experience, the word “religious” is associated with membership in a religious institution and following doctrines. Although it is true that there are devotees who choose not to practice all the doctrines of Islam, they do not reject the fact that Islamic doctrine is the primary source of Sufi teachings. Although with the development of spirituality as a separate practice

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98 Zinnbauer states that “[D]efining religion and spirituality as bad and good processes, we obscure the full character of each. It is tempting to reach for such simple characterizations, or even to preserve the polarization by suggesting that it is the
and experience from religion, a tension has arisen between the two paradigms — spirituality and religion, devotees find it difficult to separate the concepts because even non-Muslim devotees understand the Quran and teachings and life of Prophet Muhammed as the most important aspects of their spiritual development.

Today, although it is not necessary to be a Muslim to be a true Sufi, I met non-Muslim devotees during fieldwork who did not see religious affiliation as an obstacle to studying the Quran. Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, while stating the Islamic origin of Sufism, also contests the view that devotees must be Muslim. Nasr gives examples from Rumi’s *Fih-i Mafih* (Discourses), stating that Rumi had Christian and Jewish disciples. Today, there are Sufi şeyhs in Turkey who do not require that their students change their religion and guide their students to study Islamic teachings without compelling them to follow the doctrines. The case studies (groups and individuals) discussed in this thesis show that Sufi living in urban Turkey offers individuals the resources to choose how much they embody the idea of spirituality as a private experience, membership in a religious institution, and/or doctrines without having to separate religiousness and spirituality.

“religious” part of spirituality that is responsible for the destructive consequences and that only the “spiritual” part of religion has true value. The cost of this conception, however, is watered down scholarship and poor science. Furthermore, this type of polarization leads us away from more interesting research questions. For example, why do some, in the search for the highest of goals, achieve the greatest of their potentials, while others end up destroying themselves and others? In what ways do some forms of organized religious life facilitate well-being while others prevent it?” Brian J. Zinnbauer, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Allie B. Scott, “The Emerging Meanings of Religiousness and Spirituality: Problems and Prospects,” *Journal of Personality, 67* (1999), 905. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.00077.

99 Ibid.
Since even devotees, who focus on the individual (non-institutional) aspect of Islamic practice, do not tend to separate the words religiousness and spirituality (despite their different meanings in Turkish with the former focusing on living according to Islamic doctrines and the latter giving emphasis to the inner dimensions of Islam), I do the same. Due to devotees’ varying motivations about practicing religious dogmas, throughout this thesis, while referring to a strict connection to religious law, I specify my point by using the phrase “strictly şeriat based” and/or “strictly doctrinal” Sufi practice. As stated in the first section of this chapter, devotees I encountered refer to their Sufi living (whether it is strictly doctrinal or not) as a way of practicing divine love or meaning in everyday life. Therefore, in this thesis, almost every action (relating to doctrine or not) performed by devotees in their practice of everyday life is referred to as Sufi living. Sufi living is practicing sohbet with a spiritual teacher. Sufi living is praying. Sufi living is training nefs. Sufi living is serving a spiritual master in sacred spaces such as private homes, cultural centers, and hotels that are converted into sites for sacred practice. Sufi living is working for the good of others in quasi-public spaces such as nursing homes. Sufi living is repeating God’s names in every moment of everyday life and thus serving the community with awareness of God. Sufi living is teaching and sharing Sufi cultural beliefs and values. Sufi living is organizing Sufi community/religious gatherings in a variety of secular spaces. Sufi living is searching for ways to practice Sufi Ottoman values that will be compatible with each individual’s socioeconomic life (or material life circumstances). Sufi living is communicating with coworkers with the awareness of the Sufi idea of unity and accepting differences. Sufi living is dealing with problems in life with the idea that every circumstance is an offer
from God. Sufi living is reminding oneself that to gain the awareness of God’s unity is the way to divine love.

**Conclusion**

Whether practiced in public, semi-public, or private spaces, Sufi living is multifaceted in the sense that devotees as religious and secular members of Turkish society practice their everyday lives by embodying both Sufi beliefs and values and secular values such as the ability to shift the religious codes and principles according to their non-religious professions and family lives. In present-day Turkey, devotees practice Sufism as a multisided way of living by adapting their religious beliefs to social and political systems in Turkey, while also adapting their secular values according to their religious beliefs and values. This sense of multicodedness, or ability to shift, allows devotees to generate Sufi living in a variety of public and semi-public spaces without threatening the non-religious citizens’ demand for democratic values. In the next four chapters, I will examine how and why Sufism is generated as a way of living that is a synthesis of the secular and religious values of Turkish society and how devotees make a variety of spaces to maintain and mobilize their devotional living despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi lodge production.

Chapter Two, “Comprehending the Practice of Sufi Living in Contemporary Turkey: Key Historical Outcomes,” is an overview of doctrinal developments, training systems, and ritual practices of *Tasavvuf* before the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the political, social, and religious transformations in Turkey that affect present-day Sufi living. Historical analysis will show how and why devotees modified Sufi living, including organization of spaces and adaptation of teachings, rituals, and everyday life
after Islamic groups and organizations were banned in 1925. I analyze socioeconomic and political situations in the Republic of Turkey to examine how and why Sufi living is more and more multifaceted, with some devotees continuing their practices underground and others organizing more accessible religious/community gatherings.

In Chapter Three, I examine Sufi groups and individuals that have made their practices legitimate and visible — as cultural organizations; clubs; Sufi music, whirling, and poetry classes and workshops; and performances of Sufi rituals as tourist attraction — by producing temporary and permanent spaces for their devotional living. Chapter Three examines my encounters with a variety of followers of Sufi teachings and practices who make Sufi devotion accessible to non-devotees by teaching and performing Sufi living in a variety of public spaces, where devotees generate and convey their secular and religious values.

In Chapter Four, I examine the practice of Sufi living in an underground Sufi order and discuss how devotees make permanent spaces by converting a private building and a private house into dergahs (Sufi lodges) comparable to the lodges in the Ottoman Empire to continue to practice what they call Sufi traditional beliefs and values. Some of the devotees in the underground order regularly live and train together in their dergahs, devoting most of their spare time to serving, praying, cooking, cleaning, giving classes, and organizing gatherings for their şeyh and spiritual siblings. These devotees search for ways to maintain a devotional living that is more in line with Sufi traditional values such as the practice of Mevlevi çile (trial), believing that it is their fate that God brought them to meet with the şeyh of the underground order and their spiritual siblings to live in a dergah. I also examine how the şeyh adapts Sufi
teachings and training systems to the social and political conditions in Turkey, making Sufi living suitable for each of his devotees’ social and spiritual needs. While analyzing the embodiment of Sufi religious teachings in everyday life and performance of individual and collective rituals, I seek to show how each devotee experiences, transforms, and defines Sufi living (including their use of space, practice of rituals and everyday life, and performance of community gatherings) with guidance from their şeyh.

Chapter Five examines the religious journey of the underground Sufi order to different cities to visit the tombs of various Sufi leaders in Turkey, and devotees’ transformation of secular sites such as a hotel into sacred sites to make space for their collective devotional acts in honor of Sufi mystics, primarily Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi. I compare my touristic pilgrimage to Rumi’s tomb and Şeb-i Aruz ceremonies in Konya (the city known as the birthplace of Mevlevi Sufi culture) as a researcher conducting preliminary fieldwork with my pilgrimage to Konya with the devotees of the underground Sufi order. This chapter addresses the regenerative effects of Sufi pilgrimage, focusing on the connection of the actions performed in the pilgrimage with the everyday social, political, and cultural processes. In this chapter, I show how the performance of Sufi pilgrimage and devotees’ level of commitment, joy, and exhaustion affect the devotees’ body and soul, guiding them to return to their everyday lives with more awareness of divine meaning.

In Chapter Six, I conclude the thesis by examining how Sufism is adapted to different social and political views and circumstances. Although many religious leaders

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I spoke to in Istanbul, Konya, and elsewhere would insist that the practice of Sufi living is only about religious experience, this chapter furthers the discussion on how Sufi living is created by individuals who take into consideration the secular as well as religious values and circumstances of modern life in Turkey. I further discuss that Sufi devotees seek to embrace social and religious transformations, doublings, and renewals and that their multicaodedness allows them to generate Sufism as a way of living in a variety of public, semi-public, and private spaces.
Chapter Two

Comprehending the Practice of Sufi Living in Turkey:

Key Theoretical Changes and Historical Indications

This chapter is an overview of *Tasavvuf*, including doctrinal developments and training systems that have impacted the evolution of Sufi orders until the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the historical, political, social, and religious transformations in the Republic of Turkey that affect present-day Sufi living. First, I evaluate *Tasavvuf*’s origins and the key theories, concepts, and practices that shaped Sufism’s organization within Islam. Then, I give an overview of how with the modernization processes in Turkey, individuals began to perceive Islam as a synthesis of religious values and the secular values of the Turkish state. Then, as a final point, I discuss how the Turkish government supported the public performances of Sufi rituals (including poetry and music) as tourist attractions, inspiring devotees to produce a variety of temporary and permanent urban spaces in which devotees organize a variety of Sufi gatherings, classes, and workshops to generate and mobilize the true form of *Tasavvuf* as a way of living.

*Tasavvuf*: Origins, Key Theories, Concepts, and Practices

Historical literature available about *Tasavvuf* in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey gives a detailed idea of *Tasavvuf*’s origins and function as an Islamic religious practice. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, scholars of Sufism such as Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, Ahmet Karamustafa, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have produced extensive studies about *Tasavvuf* and its formation through Islamic teachings.102 While informing

102 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972);
the reader about *Tasavvuf*, Ocak and Nasr revealed the inaccuracy of understanding
Sufism and Islam as separate subject matters and stated that many are now willing to
accept the Islamic origin of Sufism and the unbreakable link connecting Sufism to
Islam, rather than following the older practice of explaining Sufism away as some kind
of alien influence within Islam.\(^{103}\)

Current debate focuses on the fact that *Tasavvuf* is an extension of various
historical developments. Ocak in his edited volume *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*
provides a lens through which the origins of *Tasavvuf* can be examined. Ocak states that
“Sufism (*tasavvuf*, from which derives the word *mutasavvıf*, which describes its
adherents), which evolved from mystical theories, was born as a spontaneous synthesis,
beginning from the first century of the Abbasid era,\(^{104}\) as a result of contact with various
neighboring mystical cultures that predated Islam.”\(^{105}\) While Ocak disproves both the
orientalist historical approach that *Tasavvuf* is “a living copy of ancient Middle Eastern
and Asian mysticism, framed by Islamic precepts,” he also refutes the conservative
Muslim approach that *Tasavvuf* originated from the Quran and *Sunnah* (Muslim
orthodoxy). Ocak’s analysis shows that “Sufism was certainly closely related to the

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\(^{103}\) Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 12.

\(^{104}\) Created by the middle of the eighth century by the rise of the Abbasid
Caliphate (the rule of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed’s youngest uncle Al-
‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib), the third of the Islamic caliphates, the Abbasid era is
known as the Islamic Golden Age. During this period, the Muslim world became an
intellectual center for science, philosophy, medicine, and education.

\(^{105}\) Ocak, *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, XVIII.
zuhd and takva currents of the second century of the Islamic era.” However, Ocak also “clearly shows that these currents acquired a doctrinal and ritual aspect, and thus evolved into what we call ‘sufism’ [or tasavvuf], only when they came into contact with the mystical cultures of Asia and of the Middle East.” To discuss the evolution of Tasavvuf as a mixture of Quranic verses and theories, which were “transformed by the use of principles borrowed from mystical cultures,” Ocak states that even though based in Islam, Sufism was the result of a synthesis of the mystical religions of Zoroastrianism and Manicheism in Iran and Buddhism in India, of the Hellenistic Gnostic and neo-platonic philosophical schools and finally of the mystical cultures of Egypt and Syria, which had inherited ancient Jewish and Christian mystical traditions.

Ocak’s analysis shows that Tasavvuf is a formulation of a synthesis that can only be formulated “in the vast territorial expanse of the Omayyad Empire and later of the Abbasid Empire” and that the appearance of Tasavvuf with its first known mutasavvıfs — “Maruf-i Karkhi (d. 815), Dhu al-Nun-ı Mısri (d. 910), Halladj-i Mansur (d. 922)” — was not before the ninth century.

Another significant point discussed by Ocak is that the first mutasavvıfs were not from Hejaz, the birthplace of Islam. Tasavvuf emerged in the area called the “Fertile Crescent, made up of present day Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and Iran” and that first adherents were “from middle-class families, who were mostly small merchants or

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106 Ibid., XVI.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., XVIII.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
artisan” and were descendants of Christians, Zoroastrians, or Manicheists. Therefore, 
*Tasavvuf*’s “social basis was to be found in the *Mawali,*” which Ocak explains as “the 
inheritor of pre-Islamic mystical cultures” and also in “the new Arab population, who 
settled in cities founded after the Islamic conquest, in what had been known as 
Mesopotamia, like Basra and Kufa — later also Baghdad and who had come into 
contact with *Mawali* class.” Taking into consideration the above mentioned historical 
developments, Ocak states

> if we look at the phenomenon of Sufism — as it was until the end of the 11th 
> century — from the perspective of social history, we can state the following 
> fact... Sufism was actually formulated by the members of a settled, “superior” 
culture, who found the monotheism of Islam, imposed on their cultures by 
foreign war-like Arab conquerors, who in addition to all else, were from an 
“inferior civilization,” too simple and plain. Their efforts were directed towards 
ensuring the revival, survival, and preservation of this culture, within the 
religion of the conquerors, by using the templates and general principles of that 
religion. That’s why Sufism can be seen as a “parallel religion” within Islam. 
*Tasavvuf*, therefore, was the result of a synthesis of the mystical religions organized as 
an Islamic religious practice. However, until the eleventh century, long before the 
formation of the Ottoman Empire in 1299, Sufi groups and individuals struggled for 
acceptance due to conceptual differences between Islam and Sufi theology. I will 
discuss the differences and the transformation of the Sufi theology in the next section.

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111 Ocak, *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, XIX.  
112 Ibid.
God’s Unity

Orthodox rulers were aware that since the beginnings of Islam, some Muslim groups embodied different traditions to move closer to God (or to improve their knowledge of God). The most important difference is between the Islamic idea of tevhid (God’s unity), meaning disconnection of Allah from the rest of His creation, and the Sufi idea of Vahdat-al Vucud, meaning God’s unity of existence. The Islamic idea of tevhid presents that God created the world as other. However, in Sufi belief, all the creation was originally one with God. In other words, while Islam puts forward the principle of tevhid, disconnection of God from all the rest of the creation and His Unity, Tasavvuf disagrees with the division of God from the rest of the creation.

Sufi devotees perceived God’s creation as the manifestation of the Creator. Along the same line, Sufi devotees believed that as a human being transforms, s/he goes through spiritual stages to become insan-i kamil, which means the ideal person, “who is equipped with superior divine qualities.” However, the Sufi concept of human as semi-divine was also entirely contradictory with Islamic law due to the principle of tevhid. Although Sufi groups followed the teachings of the Quran and Hadiths (documentation of the proverbs and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), the true religious meaning of Sufi life continued to be under threat by the Ottoman Empire due to the conflicting ideas of conservative ulema (scholars of Islam), who perceived ideas of Sufi devotees to be in opposition to Islamic doctrines. However, in the eleventh

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113 Ocak, Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society, XX. This idea also informs velayet or in Arabic al-wallaya (walayet, sainthood) theory, through which an alternative to the Islamic institution of prophets is implied.

114 As stated by the şeyh of the secluded order in Turkey, orthodox ideology presents that Muslims seek to go heaven. In Tasavvuf, it is believed that human beings
century, Sufi dervishes started to improve their relations with orthodox Islam, transforming their cultural beliefs into a less conflicting form.

**Tarikat**

When the *tarikat* (plural of *turuq*, meaning path or way and also implying devotees following the way or order of a spiritual master; thus Sufi *tarikat* is used in English scholarship as Sufi order) began to appear from the eleventh century onwards, the epics narrating the miracles of the *şeyhs* inspired more seekers. As a result, “the great majority of Muslim public opinion began to consider Sufism as something inseparable from Islam and even to identify it with Islam.”

Different *tarikat* formed around the memories of Sufi *pirs* (spiritual leaders regarded as the founders of the *tarikat*). Sufi *tarikat* have been named after their founders and the authority of Sufi teachers has been based on that of the Prophet Muhammad who is viewed as the source of all Sufi lineages. The Sufi orders, led by different *şeyhs*, shared similar ideologies that originated directly from Quranic texts. Training different features of the inner self was the central point of this self-discipline toward the divine unity. Members of *tarikat* wanted to systematize their practices, believing that organization was necessary for the expansion of *Tasavvuf*. In the developed theory of Sufi knowledge, the first rule that a dervish must follow is obedience to the *şeriat* (referred to as Islamic law, or as an interpretation of Quranic teachings to rule the religious, political, social, domestic, and private life of adherents). It was this obedience to the *şeriat* that strengthened

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*Ocak, Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society, XXI.*
Tasavvuf’s relationship with Islamic orthodoxy. Recognized as the primary text of God’s revelation, the Quran has been accepted as the word of God, communicated through the mind and heart of Prophet Muhammed, with the Hadith as the second text of the revelation. Another principle that strengthened their association with orthodoxy is that the spiritual goal of most Sufis was not to declare that they are God, but to seek abolition of the self in God. As Ocak points out, Sufism acquired characteristics that made it more acceptable in the eyes of society and political authorities.

In the thirteenth century, Tasavvuf continued to evolve when the concept of Vahdat al-Vucud was structured by Muhyi al-Din Ibn al ‘Arabi (the Sufi mystic and philosopher). Although the theory of unity of existence was conceptually close to the idea of pantheism,$^{116}$ meaning all is God, which was again conflicting with tevhid, the Sufi idea of Vahdat al-Vucud was different than pantheism. While according to pantheism the universe is part of God or God’s mind, according to Al’ Arabi’s theory of Vahdat al-Vucud, God is still greater than his creation. The difference between the two allowed Vahdat al-Vucud to be welcomed in orthodox Islam. The Arabic word Vahdat al-Vucud emphasizes that there is just a single being in existence, this single being is God, and everything else is non-existent without Him.

Sufi orders of the Ottoman Empire also used Islamic education to its fullest. After studying the Quran, Hadith, and şeriat, students of Tasavvuf could continue learning Arabic, the universal language of Islam and other teachings of Sufi mystics in dergahs. Carl Ernst’s discussion on the Quran provides the key point about the way dervishes internalized the Islamic texts. He states, “to understand the importance of the

Quran for Sufism, it is important to grasp the way in which it was studied. As with other scriptures, the Quran was frequently memorized, and this complete internalization of the sacred text permitted an intimate acquaintance with it.\(^{117}\) Students memorized and recited Quranic texts and the divine names of God, which I will explain further in this chapter. After forming an intimate connection to the Quran and Hadiths by memorization and recitation, students could continue their studies, attempting to examine *tefsir* (the interpretation of the Quran), Hadiths, kelam (theology), akaid (dogma), or *fıkıh* (the sources from which the şeriat was formed). Through these sciences, which formed the curriculum of Ottoman colleges, a Sufi could choose to strengthen his/her knowledge of God. Today, Islamic education is still an important part of Sufi practice in Turkey. As with other scriptures, there are devotees who study and memorize the Quran, while others memorize sections to vocalize in rituals to enhance spiritual feeling and form an intimate connection with the path and the community.

Sufi *tarikat* as a synthesis of mystical religions and Islamic doctrines were created as a practical method to guide a seeker in his journey to move closer to God. The seeker would trace a way of thought, feeling, and action through a series of stages to experience divine meaning or reality (that is God).\(^{118}\) In Sufi training, the seeker was to arrive at the lodge and enter the training with a desire to pass beyond the material world, which meant to be free of material needs and desires. The seekers were expected to release their worldly passions to discover what they call the deeper identity by answering all the heart’s questions. Sufi mystic and *pir* (founder) of the Mevlevi *tarikat*,


Mevlana (Master) Celaleddin-i Rumi, explains his idea of how material needs, desires, and possessions are veils of divine meaning. Rumi states in his *Fih-i Mafih,*

All desires, affections, loves, and fondness people have for all sorts of things, such as fathers, mothers, friends, the heavens and the earth, gardens, pavilions, works, knowledge, food, and drink — one should realize that every desire is a desire for food, and such things are all veils. When one passes beyond this world and sees that King without these veils and coverings and that what they were seeking was in reality one thing. All problems will then be solved. All the heart’s questions and difficulties will be answered, and everything will become clear. Allah’s reply is not such that He must answer each and every problem individually. With one answer all problems are solved.\[119\]

In the *tarikat,* the seekers were expected to pursue the *seyr-i sülük* (mystical journey), to learn to be free from their worldly veils in order to seek to become part of the divine personality by training the inner self. Sufis believe that if the *nefs* is trained, “it is the means to salvation.”\[120\] On the Sufi spiritual journey, the devotees would focus on themselves, become aware of their behaviors, and work on purifying the self (*nefs* training) in order to learn how to stay in unity with all that is present in their life\[121\] and serve the community with such awareness. Since its formulation through the Islamic concept of *tevhid,* *tarikat* has been perceived as a path toward God. It is perceived as a way that can be travelled with the guidance of the Quran, Hadiths, and Sufi teachings. However, it is also agreed that without practical training of self through the guidance of

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121 Conversation with a devotee on December 10, 2011.
a seyh as a person who has experienced the spiritual path, the experience of the tarikat
as a process of self-transformation would not be possible.

**Spiritual Journey — Nefs Training**

Comprehending *Tasavvuf* as a way of living and *nefs* as a practical training is the
key to understanding the processual nature of a Sufi devotee’s life. Evaluations of
scholars of Islam in the late twentieth and twenty-first century such as Seyyed Hossein
Nasr, Annemarie Schimmel, and Arthur John Arberry, highlight the dynamic quality of
Sufi devotees’ way of living by discussing *Tasavvuf* as a search, path, quest, and
journey. Annemarie Schimmel expresses how *Tasavvuf* is a spiritual path to move
closer to God through the training of the mind and heart.\(^\text{122}\) Also, in the opinion of
Arthur John Arberry, *Tasavvuf* is the mystical movement within Islam, whereas a Sufi,
the one who associates him/herself with this movement, is an individual who is devoted
to an inner quest for mystical union with his/her Creator.\(^\text{123}\) Nasr shows that “to follow
Sufism is to die gradually to oneself and to become one-Self, to be born anew and to
become aware of what one has always been from eternity (azal) without one’s having
realized it until the necessary transformation has come about.”\(^\text{124}\) More specifically,
practicing *Tasavvuf* is training the mind and heart, comprehending oneself as a student,
seeker, and traveller, and understanding life as a pilgrimage to move closer to God.

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\(^{122}\) Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University

\(^{123}\) Arthur J. Arberry, “Introduction,” Farid al-Din Attar, *Muslim Saints and
Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya (Memorial of the Saints)* (London:
Routledge, 1979), 1-2.

\(^{124}\) Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 17.
While emphasizing the quality of *Tasavvuf* as a journey, it is important to point out that the Arabic word *Sufi* “refers only to one who has attained the goal.”¹²⁵ Devotees avoid identifying themselves as Sufis due to the nature of their beliefs and practices that highlight a devotee as a person travelling, training, studying, and practicing towards becoming a Sufi — one who embodies God’s unity. There are various opinions regarding the etymological sources of the word “Sufi” and all the definitions emphasize attributes of the expected spiritual state instead of the journey, which devotees claim to be experiencing. Tanvir Arjum summarizes them as the following: *safa* (purity), referring to the purity of their hearts; *saff* (rank), perceiving them as the first rank before God; *suffah* (the platform), due to Sufis’ resemblance to those of the *ashab-i suffa* (meaning People of the Platform, a group of Companions of the Prophet who had devoted their lives to worship and learning); *suf* (wool), as a consequence of their habit of wearing wool; and *safwah* (the chosen, the select), for their being the chosen ones.¹²⁶ Wearing wool, also explained by the *şeyh* of the underground order (the order that I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five), “suggests detachment from worldly needs and desires and all material things except a piece of wool to put on.”¹²⁷ Instead, devotees use terms such as *mürit*, student, initiate, *fakir* (meaning spiritually poor), and dervish (implying a devotee waiting at the threshold, seeking transformation)¹²⁸ — all terms

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¹²⁷ Conversation with a *şeyh* on March 4, 2012.
¹²⁸ In Sufism, the word “dervish” (the title given to a devotee who is initiated in the path) means one who sits in the doorway or on the threshold of something, ready to move on and transform him/herself in every moment of his/her everyday life.
implying that the seeker is in the process of studying toward the goal, or on the path of training the nefs to become a Sufi.

Although I discussed the idea of unity of existence above, I would also like to discuss the processual nature of the theory through self-transformation. In Sufi doctrine, the training of self or soul is referred to as nefs training and nefs is presented as having different stages and levels.\(^{129}\) William Chittick describes the idea of self or soul as nefs (noting that nefs is also translated as self, psyche, spirit, mind, life, and person) through the teaching of Sufi scholar Nur ad-Dīn Abd ar-Rahman Jami and points out that in “the context of Jami’s technical terminology [nefs] can probably best be rendered as ‘soul’ referring to the animating principle of the body, the intermediary between the bodily constitution and the spirit, or the immortal aspect of man’s being which can be perfected through the spiritual life.”\(^{130}\) Nasr also conceptualizes nefs as influential in the sense that theories on nefs guide the intellectual activities of the person to understand spiritual life even before the person experiences nefs training within Sufi practice. According to Nasr,

\(^{129}\) Scholars of Sufi doctrine suggest that nefs can be developed and refined if a devotee pursues a journey by going through seven stages; the first is the lower stage known as nefs-i ammara, explained as the commanding self or the unruly animal self; the second stage is nefs-i lavvama, the blaming self, the self of awakening conscience that takes its first step to return to God; the third stage is nefs-i mulhima, which is described as the inspired self that is aware of the difference between doing right or doing wrong; the fourth stage is nefs-i mutmainna and in that stage the self is secured and enjoys a relationship with the Divine; the fifth stage is nefs-i raddiya, the stage of the content self, in which the soul is in harmony with Reality; the sixth stage is nefs-i mardiyya, the gratified self, who is in total submission and pleasing to God; and the final stage, the seventh stage, is nefs-i safiyya or nefs-i kamiliye, the purified self or the mature self. People who attain this final stage are also called İnsan-i Kamil, translated as Mature Human.

As for the doctrinal aspect of Sufi psychology, the human soul is there presented as a substance that possesses different faculties and modes of existence, separated yet united by a single axis that traverses all the modes and planes. There is, moreover, a close link between this psychology and cosmology so that man comes to realize the cosmic dimension of his being, not in a quantitative but in a qualitative and symbolic sense. Moreover, this cosmic correspondence objectivizes the inner structure of the psyche, thereby releasing the soul from its own knots, illuminating its darkest aspects, and displaying to the traveller of the spiritual path the manifold traps lying in his way, in the inner journey of the soul towards its own Centre.\textsuperscript{131}

Sufi psychological doctrine, as Nasr points out, offers this method in both its “microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects,” before a devotee takes the actual practical training. Nasr believes that even “this theoretical presentation has the effect of integrating the mental and psychic plane of the person who is able fully to comprehend it.”\textsuperscript{132} Such theorizations are helpful for the seeker to identify with the cognitive aspects of self-transformation.

Chittick’s analysis of self-transformation through the stages of the \textit{nefs} will also highlight the idea of self-transformation to move closer to God. Chittick starts with describing the nature of \textit{nefs} and states “Man’s \textit{nafs} [\textit{nefs}] or soul possesses potentially a number of different stages to perfection” and “by traversing these stages it moves ever closer to God and farther from its own fallen nature.” First, he focuses on the soul “in its fallen state, or in its ordinary everyday reality far from its primordial nature” and

\textsuperscript{131} Nasr, \textit{Sufi Essays}, 47.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
refers to that state “as the ‘soul which incites’,” which is called \textit{nefs-i ammara}. Then, he highlights the fact that through training on the path of spiritual perfection, \textit{nefs} transforms and “becomes the ‘soul which blames’ (itself for its own shortcomings),” which is called \textit{nefs-i lavvamah}. Finally, Chittick says, journeying through the end of the path, the \textit{nefs} seeks to achieve “the station of the ‘soul at peace’” and that final stage is called \textit{nefs-i mutma’innah}.\footnote{Chittick, “The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jami,” 135-136.} Comprehension of the conceptualization of \textit{nefs} shows that to reach the final station, the soul at peace, as Lewis points out, “the seeker of God must die to the self before he can shine with the divine light.”\footnote{Franklin Lewis, \textit{Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings, and Poetry} and Jalal al-Din Rumi (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2000), 418.} Although Lewis uses the phrase “die to the self,” it is important to note that his phrase does not literally refer to the dying of self or soul. \textit{Nefs} is part of human nature and the seeker cannot get rid of the \textit{nefs} but only disable its opposing and diverging nature or more appropriately remove its duality through training. \textit{Mevlana} Celaleddin-i Rumi in his \textit{Discourses} provides a valuable discussion about \textit{nefs’} duality by emphasizing the fact that God also seeks to remove dualities to achieve union with His creation:

\begin{quote}
In His presence there is no room for two egos. You say “ego,” and He “ego”? Either you die in His presence, or He will die in your presence, so that no duality may remain. Yet it is impossible that He should die, either in the universe or in the mind, for “He is the living, who does not die.” He has grace in such measure that, were it possible, He would die for you to remove the duality. But since His death is impossible, you die so that He may become manifest in you and the
\end{quote}
Rumi emphasizes the most significant idea of Sufi living by explaining the fact that it is a spiritual human need to be with God. Rumi discusses God’s quality of unity and emphasizes the fact that He is aware that we are part of Him. This is the common knowledge about Sufi practice that has not changed since its formulation as *tarikat*.

The unity that can be achieved from the *nefs* training is the central aspect that guides the devotees’ actions and behaviors in everyday life. In the Mevlevi order, *nefs* training was formulated as a practical everyday training in the *dergah* so that devotees could learn Sufi beliefs and values through embodiment. The practice of *çile* (trial) training used in the Mevlevi *tarikat* (created through Rumi’s teachings and organized by His grandson Sultan Veled) will further our discussion of *Tasavvuf* as a practical and processual way of living. In the Mevlevi order, *çile* was a training that lasted for one thousand and one days, through which a dervish would train his *nefs* and comprehend his unity of existence. To experience the training, it was believed that first the seeker would search for a Sufi teacher with whose path he could unite mentally and spiritually. The mental and spiritual connection to the *şeyh* was perceived as central to the *nefs* training due to the idea and practice of submission to the *şeyh* as a spiritual father and teacher. A seeker, then, could only start training if such a connection is experienced. The training would start by performing service in the kitchen of the *şeyh’s dergah*. Service in the Mevlevi order would require that the devotee sit for three days in a state of meditation and watch the tasks performed in the kitchen.\(^{136}\) At the end of the three-

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\(^{135}\) Ibid.

day meditation, the seyh would give the seeker the opportunity to leave the dergah. But as Reinhertz explains, staying and choosing the life of a mürit would mean that the student would be brought before “kazancı dede (the master of service), who would send them into the kitchen to begin their training through service.”¹³⁷ As Reinhertz explains, this newly-accepted mürit [pupil] would stay in a small room with several other initiates and all would be given such menial tasks as sweeping the floors, washing dishes, and mending the dervishes’ shoes. During the first eighteen days, if at any time the mürit failed to live up to the standards of the dergah, their shoes would be placed facing the door and they would know this was a sign to leave at first light without protest, never to return again.¹³⁸

After the completion of the eighteen days, the mürit would perform any task, articulating the word Alhamdullillah — all thanks be to God. Reinhertz’s analysis shows that this service was designed to be rigorous in order to test the student’s ability to stay open to direction and at peace with their orders. The training included meditations in a cell, long retreats, service, and performance of rituals before the devotee fully becomes a dervish through a full ceremony. It is believed that through the çile, the mürits seek to release what Rumi calls the veils and pursue the inner journey (self-transformation) to become aware of their unity with God.

The practice of çile has not entirely disappeared from Turkish Sufi orders. Although Reinhertz asserts that the practice of çile has disappeared, today there are Sufi orders that produce temporary sacred spaces to practice a modified version of çile (as I will analyze in Chapter Four). There are also Sufi groups in Turkey that continue to

¹³⁷ Ibid., 29-30.
¹³⁸ Ibid.
practice Ottoman Sufi practices such as çile training in private apartment buildings and homes converted into dergahs.

**Rituals, Poetry, and Music**

Another significant aspect of spiritual training in the Sufi tarikat was the practice of rituals together with music and poetry to enhance divine meaning. Although I will analyze the study and practice of rituals, poetry, and music further in the next chapters (when I analyze Sufi groups, orders, and individuals that practice Sufi living), I would like to provide a brief discussion about how Sufi ritual practices played a central role in the spiritual life of Sufi tarikat during the Ottoman Empire in order to shed light on their banning in the Republican Era and resurgence starting in the 1950s. Since the formation of tarikat in the eleventh century, Islamic orthodoxy has been disapproving of the rituals and ceremonies such as Sema (literally meaning listening but as pointed out in Chapter One, the word is used to refer to whirling ritual) and certain forms of zikir due to their music and dance aspects. Although the Quranic texts do not include negative or condemning views about the practice of music and dancing, during the Ottoman Empire, orthodox ulema persistently rejected Sema and zikir rituals of Sufi orders. However, considering the importance of Quranic names that are used to define God and the auditory aspect of the Quran, vocalization of these names has had a critical importance for Sufi practitioners. Embodiment of divine names and Quranic verses through vocalizations and movements of zikir rituals (including Sema) have been regarded as the central aspect of Sufi living to enhance divine meaning. Sufi religious poetry recited and sung in gatherings, such as Quranic texts and divine names, has been perceived as divinely inspired (since devotees do not perceive poems as a product of
human effort). Sufi ritual gatherings have been regarded as inspirational in the sense that they stimulate Sufi memory. Various forms of zikir ritual required that devotees move, sing, pray, chant, and dance to achieve union with God and experience unity, love, joy, freedom, and energy. Rituals were also influential in the sense that they attracted young devotees and non-devotees to learn about Sufi beliefs and values. For all these aspects, the practice of Sufi zikir rituals with its poetry, music, and dance aspects have survived throughout centuries despite the criticism of orthodox ulema in the Ottoman period and despite the legal restrictions of the Turkish government in the Republican Era.

In the next section, I will discuss the social, political, and religious transformations in Turkey that shaped the comprehension and practice of Islam in Turkish society. First, I will explain the Turkish state’s reasons for the strict controlling of religious groups. Then, I will discuss how and why Islam continued to have a vital role in Turkish social and political life. Finally, I will examine how the secularization of Islamic practices such as Sufi rituals paradoxically encouraged Sufi devotees to generate and mobilize Sufism as a way living despite legal restrictions.

**Secularism and Islam in the Turkish State**

Although I have provided a reasonable overview of secularism in Chapter One, I would like to continue the discussion in detail about the historical circumstances that shaped the social and political life and the idea of faith as a synthesis of secular and religious values in present-day Turkey. In 1925, to express his views of tarikat, Atatürk said,

The aim of the revolution which we have been and are now accomplishing is to
bring the people of the Turkish Republic into a state of society entirely modern and completely civilized in spirit and form. This is the central pillar of our Revolution, and it is necessary utterly to defeat those mentalities incapable of accepting this truth.... I flatly refuse to believe that today, in the luminous presence of science, knowledge, and civilization in all its aspects, there exist, in the civilized community of Turkey, men so primitive as to seek their physical and mental well-being from the guidance of one or another şeyh. Gentlemen, you and the whole nation must know, and know well, that the Republic of Turkey cannot be the land of şeyhs, dervishes, disciples, and lay brothers. The straightest, truest Way [tarikat] is the way of civilization.\(^\text{139}\)

Atatürk believed that Sufi groups and individuals had to be eliminated from the social order for the development of Turkey as a modern nation-state. Atatürk had strong attachments to science, evolution, and modernity. His idea of modernity was committed to the idea that Turkish people had to free themselves of Islamic (Ottoman) cultural beliefs and values that limited them to what he believed to be a remote and undeveloped way of life.

Political scientist Güneş Murat Tezcür’s discussion of the Turkish Constitution also illuminates the idea of modernization for the Turkish Republic. Tezcür states that the “preamble of the Turkish Constitution defines the purpose of the Republic as ‘reaching the status of modern civilizations and the application of Atatürk’s principles and revolutions.’”\(^\text{140}\) The preamble also states that sacred religious beliefs are absolutely

\(^{139}\)Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 410–411.

excluded from state affairs and politics by reason of the laicism principle and that sovereignty belongs to the Turkish people. This process also involved the banishment of religion in education, the legal system, and public ceremonies — the destruction of independent religious organizations. The Caliphate was abolished in March 1924. Islam was given only a peripheral role in the new educational system. In 1928, the laicism principle was added to the constitution as one of the fundamental characteristics of the regime. Meanwhile, the legal system of the country was completely secularized during the 1920s and 1930s. In these years, the Turkish government was stubborn about assuring political loyalty in relation to secularization of the Turkish Republic. In one speech, Atatürk articulated his fear of anti-regime groups that mobilize people through the politicization of religious values increasing people’s longing for the old days. According to Atatürk, ambitious politicians or religious figures could challenge the republican project of modernity through the use of Islamic beliefs and the religious practices of the public. Islam had been the forerunner of the Ottoman order, and the rise against the old order required a complete estrangement from the past. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkish government had to deal with rebellions against its authority that combined religious and ethnic elements. In particular, the Şeyh Said Rebellion of 1925 intensified Atatürk’s and his supporters’ fear that oppositional

141 Ibid., 488.
144 Atatürk, Nutuk, 21-23.
145 The leader of the rebels was “Şeyh Said of Palu, the hereditary chief of the Nakşbendi order.” It was also identified as a Kurdish rebellion led by “dervish şeyhs,
forces would appeal to religious sentiments.\textsuperscript{146} This fear was one of the reasons for the state’s restrictive strategies towards religion.

There were various related social and political causes for Atatürk’s radical reforms, such as the prohibition of religious groups. On one level, between 1923 and 1932, right after the Turkish War of Independence, the Turkish state was still under the threat of opposing forces, such as different ethnic, religious, and national groups’ social, political, and economic demands. For this reason, Atatürk believed that the Turkish nation, despite its ethnic, religious, and national differences, needed to unite as a modern nation that could engage in the processes of renewal in order to compete with Europe’s social, political, and economic development. Although the nation was experiencing a rapid break from their Ottoman past with cultural, educational, religious, political, and economic reforms, including the change of the alphabet, clothing, and women’s rights, Atatürk believed that he had to realize his plan in an extremely short period of time, convincing the nation to strictly dedicate itself to carrying out his modern design for the Turkish Republic. Atatürk was also aware of the well-known hospitality of Sufi groups and the socially active and influential aspects of their spaces. Annemarie Schimmel also highlights the fact that Sufi tarikat’s “adaptability made the orders ideal vehicles for the spread of Islamic teachings.”\textsuperscript{147} For this reason, Atatürk believed that he had to take radical actions to stop any Islamic group from influencing Turkish people to oppose the government’s modernization plans.

\textsuperscript{146} Tezcür, “Constitutionalism, Judiciary, and Democracy in Islamic Societies,” 489.

\textsuperscript{147} Schimmel, \textit{Mystical Dimensions of Islam}, 240.
The state sought full control of religious groups and their activities; therefore, when the Caliphate was abolished in 1924, the parliament passed a law that created the Religious Affairs Directory (RAD), which was responsible for assigning imams (Muslim religious leaders) to mosques and regulating all public expressions of religion. RAD was created so that the state could regulate religious and social values of the nation and state elites. However, “given that it [RAD] promoted Sunni Islam,” RAD was undemocratic towards other Islamic groups and individuals. The public expressions of Islam were restricted through the use of RAD to promote a state-favored understanding of Islam. Religious practices were confined to RAD’s Sunni values as if every Muslim were a Sunni or as if every Sunni thinks, feels, speaks, and lives the same way. Tezcür’s discussion highlights this point further: “Turkish secularism is not only characterized by the marginalization of religion’s role in public life, but also the complete control of religious organizations by the state.” RAD controlled the mosques and imams by imposing Sunni Islamic values as the only way of Islam so that “Alevi minorities began to publicly criticize state policies for promoting Sunni-Islam as

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148 Tezcür, “Constitutionalism, Judiciary, and Democracy in Islamic Societies,” 488.
151 Tezcür, “Constitutionalism, Judiciary, and Democracy in Islamic Societies,” 488.
the official state religion, under the guise of secularism." As a result of RAD, not only the formation of Sufi orders, but also establishing any religious organization or group other than RAD and religious spaces other than mosques controlled by the RAD was prohibited by the state.

This leads the discussion to the strict control of spaces and religious activities until the 1950s and individuals’ and groups’ determination in organizing religious gatherings. In the Republic of Turkey General Directorate of State Archives in Ankara, there are a great number of correspondences between government representatives who investigated, enquired, and started legal proceedings against şeyhs, imams, and other devotees who continued their religious activities in private and public settings. I have come across correspondences evaluating the actions of religious Turkish citizens, including imams praying in Arabic in mosques, which was strictly prohibited at the time. Also, there are letters investigating the activities of mürits who visited their şeyhs regularly in their private homes or about individuals who were enquired after due to wearing religious garments. While one letter discussed how a şeyh’s activities and home were investigated to control possible tarikat activities, another letter stated how şeyhs and mürits were caught and delivered to courthouses for legal action. In these letters, such activities are considered as opposed to the secular regime of the Turkish Republic. It is clear from the letters in the archives that such rigid control lasted until the 1950s (until the end of the rule of Republican People’s Party). The letters I have come across

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153 Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA) The Republic of Turkey General Directorate of State Archives, 1935: 49; 1936: 12, 14; 1938: 11, 13; 1950, 41. In the archives, there are also letters about certain tarikat-related books’ sales prohibition.
after those years focus on replies written by government officers about their attendance at the celebration of Mevlana’s urs (literally meaning wedding, a word used for the death anniversary of a Sufi saint).

Sufi musician Kudsi Ergüner tells about his experience as a five-year-old boy attending secret religious ceremonies, where the Sufi community took precautions not to be disturbed by the police. He mentions that one of the Sufi lodges in Edirnekapi housed religious Sufi gatherings. During the meetings, members, says Ergüner, “stood at each end of the street as lookouts to give warning of any police intervention.”

There are many accounts of police intervention in those years. I also have listened to my mother’s aunt, who is now seventy years old, tell stories of her aunt, Hayriye, who was a dervish of a well-known şeyh, Kenan Rifai, in the 1940s and 1950s. My family members talk about Aunt Hayriye’s dedication to her secret tarikat and share Hayriye’s father’s concern for her safety. There are many accounts of struggles experienced by Sufi individuals and accounts of strict government control in the 1940s. However, it seems from the letters in the government archives and from oral historical accounts that despite the problems with the government and the police, devotees were nonetheless able to meet in private spaces to organize community/religious gatherings. Most of the groups, as explained by the şeyh of the underground order, continued to organize gatherings in their private homes to study Sufi texts despite legal restrictions. What allowed Turkish people, raised in the secular society of Turkey, to stay connected to their Islamic beliefs and values was the teachings of Sufi mystics such as Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi and Yunus Emre. As an elderly şeyh who grew up in a private home

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used as a *dergah* explains, the strict control of ceremonial activities until the 1950s forced Sufi groups and individuals to continue their religious practices through the study and performance of Sufi texts. Journalist and scholar Hakan Yavuz’s discussion also points to the importance of text-centric devotional living and states: “Government oppression during the 1920s and 1930s forced the Sufi orders to shift from a *tekke*-[Sufi lodge] centric to a text-centric understanding of Islam.”155 Devotees could not live and train together as they used to do in Ottoman Sufi lodges but found ways to convert their private homes to temporary study spaces for discussing and analyzing Sufi texts.

While the government forced Islamic organizations including Sufi groups and individuals into the private sphere of people’s lives, the secularization policies distanced the public from the state and strengthened people’s need to connect their memories through the practice of Islamic cultural beliefs and values.156 Sena Karasipahi illuminates the fact that given historical reasons, Islam continued to be part of Turkish culture even after religion became secondary to the state. Turkish people, according to Karasipahi, became frustrated with and mistrusted their state’s secularist policies. Moreover, in Turkey, as Karasipahi identifies, revolution for people of the Turkish Republic was also problematic because the government prevented individuals from freely practicing their Ottoman cultural beliefs and values.157 The government expected complete estrangement with the remainders of Ottoman life, including organized religion. However, as Tezcür identifies, “revolutionary regimes desperately seek

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156 Karasipahi, “Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movement in Turkey and Iran,” 94.
157 Ibid.
sacredness that is bestowed by transcendental norms and goals for purposes of political stability.” Hakan Yavuz gives attention to the fact that Islam was more effective in attracting and uniting people than “constructed ethnic nationalism or socialism.” The introduction of multiparty competition in 1950 forced the state to reconsider its efforts to secularize society. In order to gain votes, political parties running for office and elected governments professed religious affiliation and became more empathetic to the public’s religious demands.

With the government developing awareness of the public’s need for religion and tolerance for religious individuals and groups, Islamic activists started to work hard to accomplish their ideas of mobilizing Islam as a social force. This mobilization, according to Metin Heper, is explained as “the modern politicization of Islam.” Şerif Mardin says that in the 1990s, the Nakşibendi order was “an extraordinarily resilient revivalist movement, in which all of the successful elements of modern Turkish Islamic politics have originated.” More specifically, Mardin discusses how the Nakşibendi order supported the creation of the first Islamist party, the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi — founded by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970 and banned in the wake of the military coup in 1971). The party, reestablished under the name of the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi) — or NSP — in 1972, signified the first major

159 Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity in Turkey, 55.
162 Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes,” Turkish Studies 6, no. 2 (2005), 152; Mardin, Türkiye, İslam, ve Sekülarizm: Makaleler 5, 183-185.
occurrence of the institutionalization and politicization of provincial Islam. In the second half of the 1990s, the leaders of Sufi groups and the leading Muslim intellectuals became active in the Turkish state and there was an agreement between the leading religious groups, such as the Nakşibendis, Nurcus, and secularist political parties. Later, Sufi groups gradually took on a more activist role by acting as lobbies for the economic ventures established by Islamist groups in such sectors as textiles, construction, and banking. As Nilüfer Göle states, “democratization and the liberal environment fostered the emergence of a more pluralistic and open society, which paved the way for the spreading of civil society and non-governmental organizations.” Various individuals, including artists and businessmen, sociocultural Islamic organizations, and trade unions, thrived and began to affect and manipulate the political and economic life of the country. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, a Turkish Muslim thinker and famous poet, strongly denounced the radical secularism and emphasized the importance of indigenous cultural, religious, and national values. He sought to produce an Islamic system as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. In his struggle, he gave great importance to the younger generation, tried to mobilize them around his ideal, and has been very influential to the young Islamists who were raised with his

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163 Karasipahi, “Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movement in Turkey and Iran,” 96.
ideas. Nilüfer Göle’s analysis of Islamist movements and their access to modern life, especially secular education, also shows how during the appearance of contemporary Islamist movements in Turkey (emerging after the 1950s and growing during the post-1980 period), “peripheral groups were moving to urban centers and gaining access to secular education and to the opportunity of upward social mobility.”

According to Göle, Islamist movements sought to help religious groups and individuals identify with secular values of the Turkish state to reduce the disengagement of Islamic-Turkish identity from secular Western modernity.

Religious groups continued to increase their influence and secure their place in Turkey by considering the needs of the secular governments and secular citizens. The Sufi orders sought to influence center-right political parties, such as the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi). They supported center-right political parties’ view of secularism and stopped supporting the religiously-oriented political parties, believing that these parties endangered the establishment of democratic values in Turkey. It was clear for religious groups and individuals that religiously-oriented parties’ opposition to Atatürk’s ideologies could disrupt the social order and peace, provoking a military coup.

One prominent example of this was that early in his career, the leader of the Nurcu movement, Said Nursi, while simultaneously preaching peace and stability in society, made it his goal to save young individuals studying at secular schools from

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170 Ibid.
atheism, and the students attending religious schools from fanaticism.\textsuperscript{171} Nurcus presented themselves with a different analysis of Islam,\textsuperscript{172} perceiving the idea of science above faith, and were open to secularism.\textsuperscript{173} Nursi’s commentaries on the Quran, collected in his work \textit{Risale-i Nur} (Epistle of Light), provided a further understanding of Islam and its relationship to modern scientific knowledge. Nursi “developed the teachings of the Quran on the truths of belief that incorporates the traditional Islamic sciences and modern scientific knowledge.”\textsuperscript{174} Nursi’s teachings reached and influenced wide swaths of the population with the increase of mass media and improvements in communication technology. Like works of younger generations, Nursi’s ideas influenced the creation of a significant Islamic social movement known as the \textit{Nur} movement. The most recognized Nurcu group has been the \textit{Fethullahçis}.\textsuperscript{175} Its leader, Fethullah Gülen, a former civil servant, prayer leader, and preacher, expressed liberal views in a newspaper interview in 1995, explaining that he urged the individuals who came to pray in his mosque to vote in elections and encouraged them to be understanding of both practicing and non-practicing Muslims.\textsuperscript{176} Despite his dogmatic comments about religion and social life, the movement of Fethullah Gülen, which came

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Heper, “Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation,” \textit{Middle East Journal} 51, no. 1 (1997), 39.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Şerif Mardin, \textit{Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Saidi Nursi} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 228-229.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Heper, “Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation,” 39.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibrahim Abu Rabi, \textit{Islam at the Crossroads} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1. Also, see the evaluation of Karasipahi, “Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movement in Turkey and Iran,” 104 on the topic.
\item \textsuperscript{175} For a detailed analysis of Gülen, refer to Yavuz Çobanoğlu, “\textit{Altın Nesil}’ in \textit{Pesinde: Fethullah Gülen’de Toplum, Devlet, Ahlak, Otorite}.” Istanbul: İletişim, 2012.
\end{itemize}
into being during the late 1960s, first became a nationwide and then a transnational Islamic movement through the establishment of a wide network of educational institutions and media and business organizations both in Turkey and abroad.\textsuperscript{177} Karasipahi argues that Islamic revivalism “accelerated and entered a new phase after the 1980s as the Islamic groups began to take advantage of the benefits of modernity and contribute to further politicization and institutionalization of Islam.”\textsuperscript{178} The success of political Islam in Turkey was achieved by the Islamist Welfare Party (WP), which obtained 21.3 percent of the total vote and 158 seats in the 550-seat Parliament in 1996. The WP presented its ideas as Just Order (\textit{Adil Düzen}), seeking social and economic equity, honesty, the elimination of corruption, and the reestablishment of cultural authenticity and traditional religious beliefs. With WP politicians’ development of Just Order discourse and WP workers’ administrative capability, the political party attracted primarily the conservative and culturally alienated middle and upper-middle classes, as well as the economically disadvantaged lower classes.\textsuperscript{179} As discussed by Karasipahi and Heper, political Islam gained power in Turkey due to people’s dissatisfaction with the performance of the parties in power. The nationalist development project and social democratic parties did not satisfy the needs of the impoverished and marginalized classes. Economic imbalances, increasing unemployment, and corruption were some of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{177} Ahmet T. Kuru, “Globalization and Diversification of Islamic Movements: Three Turkish Cases,” \textit{Political Science Quarterly} 120, no. 2 (2005), 261.
\item \textsuperscript{178} The Welfare Party (WP–\textit{Refah Partisi}) was reestablished in 1983 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan and was followed, after its closure by the Constitutional Court in 1998, with the Virtue Party (\textit{Fazilet Partisi}, 1997-2001); the Felicity Party (\textit{Saadet Partisi}, 2001-present); and the Justice and Development Party (AKP–\textit{Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi}, 2001-present). Karasipahi, “Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movement in Turkey and Iran,” 97.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 96.
\end{itemize}
the main reasons for the success of the Islamic parties. People’s demand for a larger political and economic share in the system also played a large role in the success of the Islamist parties.\textsuperscript{180} Like the former WP, the insistence of AKP on social welfare reform together with its Islamic past appealed to a large portion of the population.\textsuperscript{181}

Today, religious groups and individuals, including Sufi groups, practice Islam as a synthesis of religious values and the secular values of the Turkish state. The devotees I discuss in this thesis show no sign of interest in following Islamic beliefs and values as a legal code. As Soner Cagaptay states, “Over the years Islamist parties moderated their discourse, and today even some of the most radical groups recognize that Turkey will remain somehow secular.”\textsuperscript{182} Islam continues to serve as a common language for expressing popular frustration, as well as an alternative way of solving people’s problems.\textsuperscript{183} However, even for the devotees, who submit their minds and bodies to pious living, Turkey should continue to improve its secularization process as a modern state and its citizens should improve themselves and their country through what Atatürk instructed as prioritizing scientific education. During my fieldwork, I have met with devotees, who instead of resenting Atatürk’s act of closing Sufi lodges, in the religious sense, believe that the closing of tekkes was God’s want, and in the secular sense, this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 96-97.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Soner Cagaptay, \textit{The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century’s First Muslim Power} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 33.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Şerif Mardin states, “Islam had an aspect which addressed itself to man’s being in this World, to his basic ontological insecurity, which enabled it to fasten itself on to psychological drives. Islam has become stronger in Turkey because social mobilization had not decreased but on the contrary increased the insecurity of the men who have been projected out of their traditional setting.” See Mardin, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey,” \textit{Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State}, ed. Ali Kazancigil and Ergün Özbudun (London: Archon Books, 1991), 218.
\end{itemize}
action was necessary for the progress of Turkish culture and the evolution of *Tasavvuf* in the material world. In the next section, I will discuss how the Turkish government’s secularization processes encouraged devotees to generate and mobilize Sufi living in Turkey.

**Secularization of Sufi Cultural Beliefs and Values as Cultural Heritage**

Paradoxically, the Turkish government’s decision to promote *Sema* ceremony as a tourist attraction (starting in the 1950s) encouraged devotees to move to the public sphere to practice and share the true form of their rituals simultaneously as worship and tourist attraction. Sufi cultural beliefs and values became visible in 1953 when ambassadors from the United States visited Konya (the Turkish city known as the birth place of the Mevlevi Sufi order) as part of the European Recovery Program. The mayor of Konya contacted Sufi musicians and asked them to organize a performance of *Sema* ceremony. Following the first performance in 1954, the mayor initiated a festival, known today as Şeb-i Aruz, to commemorate Rumi’s passing. The mayor invited the members of the former Mevlevi order, who were known to continue their practices in their private homes, including şeyhs and dervishes, to perform their *Sema* ceremony in the purely secular environment of a sports hall. Ergüner, who was a member of the Mevlevi order, reports, “The governor of the province told them that the festival was not meant to be anything more than a folklore performance. The governor warned them that they could get into serious trouble.”\(^{184}\) At the time, the government was completely ignoring the fact that *Sema* ceremony was an act of worship for Sufi devotees. For the government, the religious whirling ritual was folklore, which Barbara Kirshenblatt-

\(^{184}\) Ergüner, *Journeys of a Sufi Musician*, 47.
Gimblett explains as “survivals in a civilized society of behaviors that had their origins in earlier stages of cultural evolution.”\textsuperscript{185} Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that “The process of negating cultural practices reverses itself once it has succeeded in archaizing the ‘errors’; indeed through a process of archaizing, which is a mode of cultural production, the repudiated is transvalued as heritage.”\textsuperscript{186} Kirshenblatt-Gimblett further asserts that “The very term ‘folklore’ marks a transformation of errors into archaisms and their transvaluation once they are safe for collection, preservation, exhibition, study, and even nostalgia and revival.”\textsuperscript{187} The Turkish government rejected \textit{Sema} as a religious ceremony and transvalued it as heritage of Turkish culture. Perceiving Sufi rituals as relics of the past that are safe for collection, the Turkish government wanted to organize \textit{Sema} ceremony as folklore, ignoring the fact that Sufism is lived religious practice. This ignorance was so disturbing for Sufi devotees that at one of the performances in 1961, a Mevlevi \textit{şeyh} reacting to the use of the ceremony for political speeches, chased the television cameramen documenting political speeches out of the space, causing the government to ban the devotees of the Mevlevi community of Istanbul from the festival in Konya. As an alternative, the following year non-dervish performers were trained to enact the ceremony.\textsuperscript{188} From then on, devotees had to find other ways to perform and share the religious values of their rituals in public.

In 1973, Sufi cultural beliefs and values became the agents advertising Turkey as a tourist destination with spectacles to see when the Turkish government in

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Ergüner, \textit{Journeys of a Sufi Musician}, 47.
collaboration with UNESCO observed the seven-hundredth anniversary of Rumi’s passing, formally recognized as the Year of Rumi. With this designation, the Turkish government permitted devotees to travel to London, Paris, and across the United States to share Rumi’s Islamic teachings and Mevlevi rituals. For the government, the designation by UNESCO and visibility of Islamic rituals outside Turkey were the perfect opportunity to announce the strength of democracy and the serene position of Islam in Turkey. In 2005, with another UNESCO proclamation of Mevlevi Sema Ceremony as Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in collaboration with the Turkish government, the ceremony was used once again to promote Turkey. Two years later, in honor of Rumi’s eight-hundredth birthday, UNESCO also declared 2007 the Year of Mevleva Celaleddin-i Rumi and Tolerance. The designation of Sema as

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189 According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage is “Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time: intangible cultural heritage does not only represent inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part.” Intangible heritage is “inclusive: we may share expressions of intangible cultural heritage that are similar to those practiced by others. Whether they are from the neighboring village, from a city on the opposite side of the world, or have been adapted by peoples who have migrated and settled in a different region, they all are intangible cultural heritage: they have been passed from one generation to another, have evolved in response to their environments and they contribute to give us a sense of identity and continuity, providing a link from our past, through the present, and into our future. Intangible cultural heritage does not give rise to questions of whether or not certain practices are specific to a culture. It contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large.” It is also “representative: Intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills, and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities.” And it is “community-based: intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it — without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.” See, UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage. “What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?” Accessed July 19, 2011. http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?pg=00003.
cultural heritage and the popularity of Rumi increased the visibility of Sufism and Sufi rituals as commodities of Turkish culture once again, while Turkey gained recognition.

However, despite UNESCO’s attempts to protect Sema ceremony and Mevlana as inheritances of Sufi culture in Turkey, the designation could not go beyond representing Sufism as an immobilized spiritual culture of Turkey. The representation of Sema ceremony on the UNESCO website lacks the connection of the ceremony to Sufism and Islam. UNESCO disregarded the significance of Islamic doctrines as the foundation of Sema ceremony. The information on the website fails to inform the reader about the fact that Sema was performed as a zikir, involving both vocal and instrumental compositions; readings from the Quran; recitation of verses from Mesnevi (the spiritual teachings of Rumi); singing of the “Naat-i Serif” (the poem of Mevlana praising Muhammed); meditative walking and saluting positions; and whirling as an inspirational spiritual force.190 David Smith’s discussion furthers the idea that UNESCO’s promotion of cultural knowledge lacks careful analysis and essential information. Smith argues UNESCO’s aim to promote survival of “traditional folklore, knowledge, and artistic expressions throughout the world, including oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship” did not go far enough: “The problem lies, perhaps, in the ways in which we have attempted to understand and classify knowledge. The Western philosophical tradition has largely marginalized and discounted knowledge, which cannot be represented in propositional

form (and, preferably, written down).” In regard to the position of Sufism as a spiritual lifestyle in Turkey, UNESCO’s advertising of Sema through imprecisely written and recorded publicity, corresponding to the Turkish government’s commodification of Sufism, was inadequate in terms of providing detailed information about the ceremony’s role in Islamic Sufism. The government, just like UNESCO, continued to misinform the Turkish people about the religious Sufi character (including the philosophical and theological teachings of Quran and Sufi mystics), and promoted the aesthetic quality of Sufi rituals and the teachings of Sufi mystics. However, even though this action taken by UNESCO and the Turkish government discounted religious aspects of Sufi rituals, such commodified performances inspired more and more devotees to organize, adapt, teach, and perform the whirling ritual in a variety of spaces. Instead of practicing what Michael Brown calls “cultural closure,” devotees had to share their beliefs and values with non-devotees to create space for their devotional living. Sufi devotees, due to the Turkish government’s secularization and commodification of Sema in 1960s, could not prevent outsiders from witnessing and using certain aspects of their cultural practices, such as the whirling ritual. As in Nasr’s discussion about the case of Coleman Bryan Barks, who starting in 1930s, minimized the spiritual quality of Rumi’s writing in order to attract the attention of

191 More on this discussion can be found in David Smith’s online article, “Networking real-world knowledge,” AI & Society 21 (2007), 421-28.
192 Brown gives an example of cultural closure, offering his discussion of native groups rejecting non-native employees from learning their local language. These groups, according to Brown, are trying to keep certain aspects of their culture unknown with an aim to prevent their beliefs and values from being appropriated. These behaviors, as Brown points out, are the opposite of “UNESCO’s policy of publicizing heritage in order to save it.” Michael F. Brown. “Safeguarding the Intangible.” Accessed September 20, 2013. scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/mar/article/view/3167/2998.
American society, devotees are also aware of the fact that there are individuals who take too much liberty in their adaptation of Sufi poetry distorting Sufi meaning. Nasr suggests,

Today Rumi has become very famous in America, but the cost of this fame has often been the dilution of the meaning of his words and the severance of his message from the Islamic tradition to which he belonged with his whole being. It is as if Dante were to be translated very approximately into Arabic and presented as a “universal poet,” which he of course is, but without any reference to Christianity, without which Dante would not be.\footnote{Nasr, “Preface,” in \textit{Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes}, ed. Shems Friedlander, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Annemarie Schimmel and Nezih Uzel (Sandpoint: Morning Light Press, 2003) 21.}

Such distortions encouraged devotees to organize gatherings in a variety of urban spaces to prevent non-devotees from diminishing the complexity of Sufi cultural beliefs and values.

However, there are also Sufi devotees who practice cultural closure by creating underground spaces and by keeping their \textit{zikir} and \textit{sohbet} gatherings secret. Like the native groups in Brown’s discussion who demand that the records of their beliefs and practices be publicly inaccessible, devotees of underground groups chose to be careful about sharing their spaces, ritual gatherings, and Sufi affiliations with non-devotees. They want to protect their underground spaces so that they can continue to perform the collective way of living and training in private spaces converted into \textit{dergahs}. For the devotees of the underground Sufi orders, it is important to have a space where they can practice everyday life with people whom they share common beliefs and values. This,
for them, is a release from and preparation to continue living in the material world. Therefore, although certain aspects of Sufi living are open to public, some are still secret.

Today, there are all kinds of Sufi orders, groups, and individuals in Turkey practicing and teaching Sufism by converting a variety of private and public spaces into temporary sacred sites. Devotees form different classes and workshops for secular and non-Muslims people’s need to practice and witness Sufi teachings, and/or embodied practices despite religious, legal, political, social, and economic boundaries and rules imposed whether by the government or the secular and religious public. In large Turkish cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, I came across a variety of Sufi groups and Sufi spaces formed by devotees from different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Because Sufi devotees in present-day Turkey form and practice different value systems in relation to Islam and Tasavvuf, it is necessary to distinguish how they present themselves to the secular public. Some define themselves through the principles of and their commitment to Islamic law, such as the prohibition of alcohol. For such devotees, Islamic doctrine is the most important aspect of Sufi practice and living. Some prefer to introduce themselves in regard to how Islamic law should be in harmony with human rights. Some focus only on Sufi teachings, music, and rituals. Some stay fully connected to their şeyhs and ihvan (members of the tarikat) as in the Sufi tarikat system in the Ottoman Empire. However, what is common among them is that all seek to find a balance between the religious and secular values of Turkish society.

What is important is that there is constant circulation and exchange between different Sufi orders, groups, and their practitioners in various spaces and such activities
continue to mobilize Sufi living. On one level, some discover their longing to study Sufi teachings by performing Sufi whirling or poetry in a Sufi class, while others become aware of their desire to learn by witnessing a Sufi ritual or poetry performed on stage. On a second level, Sufi classes function as introductory Sufi courses and spaces of networking for practitioners who seek to study Sufi beliefs and values and meet with devotees affiliated with Sufi orders. On a third level, some individuals attend a variety of religious/community gatherings (of Sufi orders) and interact with şeyhs and dervishes of different Sufi orders through which they continue to seek their şeyh and spiritual path. A devotee I met in the underground Sufi order (the order I will analyze in Chapter Four) explained how she had participated in classes and meetings in various locations (cultural centers and a dance studio) for months before fully dedicating herself to training with a şeyh. The opportunity to perform Sufi whirling in a Sufi class awakened her desire to study the teachings of Sufism and Islam, and encouraged her to search for a spiritual leader. Then, she attended a Sufi order’s gatherings through which she met a dervish, who introduced her to the şeyh, whose path she follows with dedication.

**Conclusion**

Although Sufi tarikat were officially closed in 1925, Sufi living ensued nonetheless first through textual, then through textual and spatial practices, through which devotees continued to share their cultural beliefs and values in a variety of private and public sites. A room, spiritual master, and students are all that is needed for devotees to make space for Sufi living. Due to the formation of various urban spaces in Istanbul in the last ten years, individuals from different cultural, religious, national, and ethnic backgrounds participated in Sufi living through studying and practicing Sufi
rituals, poetry, and music, which also increased the number of devotees who practice the true form of Sufi living.

As I examine the current condition of Sufi living, including everyday life and rituals in the following chapters, I will refer back to the historical accounts and doctrines discussed in this chapter. As devotees perform their rituals as tourist attraction, their devotional acts double the meaning of the performance. With their embodied acts, devotees make space for their devotional living and generate Sufism as a way of living that is a synthesis of Islamic religious values and the secular values of the Turkish state.
Chapter Three

Making Space for Sufi Devotional Living

With this chapter, I examine how due to the legal code that has outlawed Sufi space production since 1925 and the commodification of *sema* ceremony since the 1960s, some devotees followed the government’s secularization and commodification plan to create public and semi-public spaces to practice their devotional living. To establish how devotees in Turkey continue to generate Sufi living by following the government’s plans today, I will analyze three case studies. First, I will discuss the devotional living of followers in the historical Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, focusing on how with their embodied acts, devotees of the Cerrahi order organize religious events and maintain the lodge built in İstanbul in the eighteenth century simultaneously as a secular, touristic, and sacred site. Then, I will examine the generation of Sufi living by a Mevlevi dede (whom I refer to as Saygün to respect his privacy) to focus on how he and his devotees use a historical lodge for religious gatherings by performing their rituals as part of the Istanbul-European Capital of Culture 2010 organized events on certain days of each month and use the Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi (Mevlevi lodge) as a temporary dervish school. The third case study discusses another Mevlevi dede (whom I refer to as Narin, also to respect his privacy) who commodifies *sema* ceremony and journeys between various sites, including Dede Efendi House (a historical house of a Sufi dede that the government converted into a museum), The Four Seasons Hotel in İstanbul, and Narin dede’s home office, to make educational and homelike spaces for his and other devotees’ Sufi living. Although all the case studies focus on the performance of *sema* ceremony simultaneously as worship and tourist attraction, each group and individual
has a different way of organizing, producing, and experiencing Sufi living. The individuals in these performances have three things in common: they create “Sufi associated civil organizations”194 to legalize their public practices; their performances are seen by audiences in various spaces and these locations, whether they are religious or secular, gain new spiritual and aesthetic meanings with the transmission of Sufi devotional acts (including poetry, music, whirling, and prayers); and, finally, they are in constant need to seek, produce, and maintain spaces for Sufi living within the social and political conditions of Turkey.

In the years following the closure of Sufi lodges in 1925 and banning of the Sufi community from the performance of *sema* ceremony in Konya in the 1960s as discussed in Chapter Two, devotees (as musicians and *semazens*) started to seek public spaces to organize Sufi ritual gatherings. In the 1960s, when a Mevlevi şeyh voiced his discomfort about the presence of photographers and TV cameramen during the performance of *sema* ceremony in Rumi’s urs festival of Konya, the following year the Department of Tourism banned the participation of the Mevlevi devotees from the event. Kudsi Ergüner (the Sufi musician I discussed in Chapter Two) points out that due to this action taken by the government, “the following year, there was an outcry in İstanbul.”195 Devotee musicians were meeting in private homes, discussing whether or not they should participate in the festival in Konya to perform their religious music without the presence of Sufi şeyhs and dervishes performing their rituals. As Ergüner explains, “many decisions regarding the situation were made in meetings at my father’s

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house.” Ergüner says that devotees were discussing whether or not they should participate in what they agreed was a parody of their religious ritual. In the end, devotee musicians decided to take part in the ceremony “in order to have at least some control over what was happening in Konya.” Devotee musicians participated in the ceremony to perform the true form of their religious music and to inform trained dancers about their Sufi beliefs and values.

Today, Sufi devotees take two specific actions to practice Sufi living in public: first, they legalize their presence in the country as civil society organizations, some as foundations (vakıfsh) and some as associations (derneks); second, they use and if

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196 Ibid., 48.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
199 Gonca Bayraktar Durgun and Emrah Beriş note that “The civil society associations in Turkey operate mainly in two different legal statuses, accordingly to which they are called either ‘associations’ or ‘foundations.’ The state plays a significant role in regulating the proliferation of these organizations and the nature of their activities. To begin with, the groups must carry out certain obligatory legal procedures in order to earn official recognition. The state also has the authority to close down associations or foundations on the charge of operating illegally; this authority may give it the upper hand in its relations with civil society organizations, as in such cases the administrators can face legal punishment.” Gonca Bayraktar Durgin and Emrah Beriş, “Civil Society and Perspectives on Turkish-American Relations” in *Turkish-US Relations: Perspectives From Ankara*, ed. Ralph Salmi and Gonca Bayraktar Durgun (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2005), 32-33. As Daniella Kuzmanovic notes, “associations and foundations are prohibited from engaging directly in any kind of ‘political activity.’” Daniella Kuzmanovic, *Refractions of Civil Society in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 8. The majority are associations “because it is easier to set up an association than a foundation. To establish an association only seven founding members are needed to complete the legal procedure to satisfy the legal requirements for official recognition by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The conditions for becoming a foundation are more stringent, as they require the founding members to dedicate a certain amount of funds and property to the aims of the foundation. Thus, foundations require a greater amount of financial and social support.” Gonca Bayraktar Durgun and Emrah Beriş, “Civil Society and Perspectives on Turkish-American Relations” in *Turkish-US Relations: Perspectives From Ankara*, ed. Ralph Salmi and Gonca Bayraktar Durgun (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2005), 32-33.
necessary commodify their religious rituals as cultural, educational, and/or touristic activities to get permission to use public spaces such as cultural centers and museums (controlled by different government offices, including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Education Department and Directorate General of Foundations) to generate Sufi living. As I will analyze in Chapter Four, while some Sufi devotees, including şeyhs and dervishes, created spaces for Sufi living by converting their private buildings and houses into Sufi lodges in order to regularly live and train together as in Ottoman Sufi living, some appropriated temporary public and semi-public spaces (that is, with strict rules and principles such as entrance fees, dress code, ID checks, appointments, etc.) to practice their rituals and teachings.200

Saayan Chattopadhyay argues, “for religious traditions to continue through history, they must be translated or better transmediated — put in a new form.”201 Writing about the public performances of Purja in India, Chattopadhyay states that “the emergence of theme-based public worship... offers a new space in the making of modern social imaginaries, a space in which spectatorial, performative, and ambivalent spatial aspects erect a translucent facade over religion, devotion, faith, and

200 The closing of tekkes and commodification of sema ceremony led some devotees to study and practice Sufism without fully dedicating themselves to all the practices associated with a Sufi order. What connects all the devotees is their need for an environment, a space, where they can practice Sufism to find answers to their ontological problems, whether these challenges are associated with money, power, culture, education, etc.

Although not specifically about Sufi culture, Chattopadhyay’s idea of public space and worship informs my examination of how Sufi devotees through the organization of Sufi gatherings offer a new space for non-devotees to experience Sufism as a synthesis of the secular and religious values of Turkey. To analyze the performatic shift and doubling in the practice of Sufi rituals, I follow Diana Taylor’s idea that performed acts “generate, record, and transmit knowledge... they change over time... but their meaning might very well remain the same.”

Drawing on Taylor’s idea of performatic shift and doubling and Nancy Fraser’s conceptualization of “public spheres” as “arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities,” I will discuss how devotees practice, adapt, and use Sufi embodied acts to generate Sufi living according to the social and political circumstances in present-day urban Turkey.

**An Office Converted into a Worship Space**

It was in the third week of my fieldwork in 2010, at a social gathering, that I met a businessman, Önder, who offered to help me locate Sufi ritual spaces in Istanbul. Önder, in his forties, born and raised in Istanbul, was known to be sociable and knew many people from different cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds. I immediately took him up on his offer. Although I was not expecting to hear from him for a week, he called the next day and gave me a phone number of another businessman, Cengiz, whom Önder knew to be a member of various Sufi communities. Upon calling

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204 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 125.
Cengiz and hearing his way of speaking, I was convinced that he was going to be a
challenging person to communicate with. He was using Allah’s name in every sentence
as if talking was zikremek (speaking of and remembering God in each moment). He
was using words like “Allah isterse” (“if God wants”) when planning our meeting in his
office. Also, when I thanked him at the end of our phone call, he said to me that he is
not doing anything for me and that he only acts in the service of God. Although for me
thanking a person was a usual way of delivering my gratitude in social life, I later found
out that for Cengiz it was a lack of acknowledging God’s unity and that Cengiz was
seeking to remind himself of his devotion to God in every moment of his day-to-day
interactions. Meeting Cengiz in his private office, then witnessing other devotees’ need
to merge their religious values in their everyday life, I have come to understand how
devotees seek to experience their day-to-day interactions to act and behave with God in
mind and as a result consecrate the places they occupy throughout the day as sites of
their spiritual training.

The next day, I woke up and travelled to Cengiz’s office as planned in the phone
call. I dressed as I always do, but made sure it was modestly and with minimal skin
exposed. And I did remember to put a shawl to use as a headscarf in my bag, just in
case I arrived in a place full of veiled women. A friend, Efe, drove me to the address.
Kindly, two men at the entrance welcomed me in. I informed one of the gentlemen that
I had an appointment with Cengiz Bey (meaning mister) and he accompanied me to the
sixth floor to Cengiz Bey’s office.

I arrived at an office that looked like a combination of a dergah room, library,
and museum. It was clear from the objects and books in the office that Sufism was an
important part of Cengiz Bey’s life. The secretary informed me that Cengiz Bey was performing his namaz (salat or Muslim prayer)\(^{205}\) and offered me a seat at a comfortable chair by Cengiz Bey’s collection of Sufi books placed on six large, white, clean, and organized bookcases. He had about five hundred colorful books about Islam and Sufism in there, organized by subject. Then, I looked around, observing the necklaces, rings, dervish and semazen statuettes and sculptures, and Sufi marble artworks placed in glass cases on his desk, in cabinets, and on the coffee table. The walls of the office were also filled with framed Quranic texts. After a while, a door opened right behind his desk and Cengiz Bey walked in wearing khaki pants and a polo shirt and approached me to shake my hand. I later found out that the room he walked out of was a private space in his office to practice namaz.

Cengiz defines himself as a member of the Sufi community in Istanbul, a businessman who attends religious/community gatherings of various Sufi groups. Although he never articulated this, it was clear from his conversations with other devotees in a variety of meetings we attended together in 2010 that he formed social and economic networks as well as spiritual bonds with devotees of various Sufi orders. For Cengiz, there were different kinds of Sufi groups and individuals in Turkey. Some of them were functioning as Sufi orders, continuing the rules and principles embodied in Ottoman Sufi lodges, such as regularly training with a spiritual leader. Some were only gathering to study Sufi texts, music, and rituals. He also explained that he

\(^{205}\) Namaz is the form of worship that is a five-times-daily obligation as one of the five pillars of Islam. Aside from the spiritual benefits, Namaz, with its repeated standing, bending, bowings, and preceding sitting or standing up positions, is regarded by Muslims as a healthy form of exercise.
participates in a variety of Sufi gatherings and classes but only trains with one spiritual leader as a student of Sufism in search of Sufi attitudes of love and compassion.

Cengiz also explained to me in detail how he has been studying Sufism for ten years and how in the last two years, he has been transforming his living spaces with Sufi books, objects, religious hymns, and prayers hung on the walls of his office and his home. Cengiz was interested in consecrating his private spaces to remember God as he worked in his office and spent time at his home. Meeting with Cengiz played an important role during the first months of my field research, when I knew very little about Sufi living in Turkey. His office and the meetings I attended with him were thresholds leading me into the multifaceted Sufi living of Turkey. As a member of the Sufi community, Cengiz took and directed me to several Sufi gatherings at the Yenikапı Mevlevi Lodge, Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, and private homes. As he helped me get in touch with Sufi groups and individuals, he was also the first devotee who informed me about how devotees are in constant need to seek and produce spaces for their collective practices, such as sohbets and performance of rituals.

In the case studies, I will refer to a variety of individuals who practice specific aspects of Sufi living as devotees, dervishes, Mevlevis, Sufi followers, students, Sufi dancers, and semazens. Although they all have different ways of studying and practicing Sufi teachings and rituals, the common thread among them is their desire to create space for their devotional living and to share Sufi beliefs and values with the secular public. Although they express their search for God in different ways and although they are from different cultural and social backgrounds, all seek to study Sufi teachings and practices.

Here, it is necessary to point out that in the second half of the twentieth century,
with the changes that took place in the realms of education, labor market structure, urbanization and rural-to-urban migration, Turkey’s class structure has changed. There are ongoing demographical changes in urban Turkey that cause diversity within the middle-class. The “newly migrated urban population bringing in their traditional values to the cities” contributes to the process of Islamisation in Turkey. Today, it is possible to see highly educated and less educated middle class Islamists and seculars living side by side in Istanbul. They connect to one another and interact at banks, schools, hospitals, and mosques and communicate with one another at work or in apartment buildings. It is possible to encounter highly educated middle class Turks seeking to define their identity by connecting to their history, beliefs and values by participating in classes, seminars, and workshops on Islamic music, art, and poetry, and less educated middle class Turks seeking ways to provide their children opportunities to receive secular education in order for them to adapt to modern urban life in Turkey. The devotees I met in the gatherings and the ones I analyze in this chapter are middle-class Turkish citizens coming from a variety of educational and family backgrounds. Some are highly educated individuals (holding graduate and doctoral degrees received in Turkey or abroad or self-educated by reading and taking a variety of classes) while others are not as well educated (holding high-school or undergraduate degrees, less interested in reading), either raised in rural areas far or near big cities like Istanbul,


Ankara, and Izmir. Some come from religious families, while others were raised in non-religious environments including households, neighborhoods, and schools. Some devotees work freelance and some for private businesses or for the government as teachers, artists, doctors, lawyers, administrators, managers, assistants, or clerks. Some of the followers I met own small businesses such as gift stores, bookstores, food stores, coffee houses, and small restaurants. However, what is common about them is that they are middle-class citizens that seek to practice their faith and are ready and able to carve out time to generate Sufi living by transforming urban spaces, either by converting their living spaces for their Sufi practices, or by getting the government’s permission to use historical Sufi buildings, and/or by performing their rituals as tourist attraction in culture centers and hotels.

**Witnessing the Devotion at a Historical Lodge**

As stated by Raymond Lifchez, Sufi buildings “are referred to by a variety of names: *tekke, hanekah, asitane, zaviye, dergah.*”\(^{208}\) *Tekke* (or *hanekah*) is the generic term used for any dervish facility; *asitane* (grand lodge) is the major *tarikat* facility; *zaviye* is a dervish hostel or residence belonging to no particular order; and *dergah* is the *tekke* with a tomb attached to it.\(^{209}\) *Dergahs* have a critical importance in Sufi devotional living, since the saint’s tomb in it “acts as a permanent focus for devotion toward the spiritual manifestation of the saints (and to their visualization after death), a devotion parallel to the respect and homage paid them during their lifetime.”\(^{210}\)

\(^{208}\) Lifchez, “The Lodges of Istanbul,” in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, 73.

\(^{209}\) Ibid.

\(^{210}\) Ibid.
tombs are the “spiritual kernel of mystical [Sufi] orders,” consecrating dergahs converted into museums as still the most valuable sites for Sufi devotion.

The first case study I analyze will show how the devotees of the Cerrahi Sufi order (founded by Nurettin Muhammed El-Cerrahi, whose tomb is placed in the courtyard of the historical lodge) use a historical Sufi dergah for devotional living despite the legal code restricting the use of Sufi spaces for religious purposes. The devotees of the Cerrahi order constructed the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke (a historical Sufi lodge built in 1710-20 — located in the Fatih district of Istanbul) simultaneously as a touristic and sacred site to adapt to the secular values of Turkish society. When Cengiz informed me that he would bring me to the Cerrahi order’s gathering at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, I knew from Catharina Raudvere’s and Fulya Atacan’s studies that the group was a Sufi order that have continued their religious activities in the lodge since the 1980s. Although Law 677 concerned the closure of Sufi spaces, due to their historical and artistic importance, in the 1950s and again in 1990s, the government allowed the opening of some of the Sufi shrines to the public. Raudvere points out that “It appears to have been common knowledge during the whole Kemalistic era that Sufi gatherings took place, and many right-wing and/or nationalist politicians were (and still are) affiliated with tarikats.” Moreover, “All this was tolerated as long as the

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211 Ibid.
orders did not act openly as organizations [religious orders]."\(^{215}\) Having participated in the ritual gatherings of the Cerrahi order, I witnessed how devotees transform the historical lodge into a living sacred site and how they act openly as a cultural foundation rather than a religious organization to generate Sufi devotional living.

It was not a coincidence that the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke and the activities of the Halveti Cerrahi order were my first witnessing of Sufi gatherings in Turkey. This space and the Cerrahi order’s activities are one of the most accessible and public due to the political affiliations of the religious order that functions as a cultural foundation. The devotees of the order, as allowed by the Turkish government, use the lodge for worship gatherings, functioning legally as *Türk Tasavvuf Musikisi ve Folklorunu Araştırma ve Yaşatma Vakfı* (The Foundation for the Research and Sustenance of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore). This, as I explained earlier in the chapter, was a way for devotees to legalize their practices. Also, as Cengiz explained, the gathering was open to guests interested in learning about Sufism and tourists, which also proved to the government that the gatherings had cultural elements as well as a religious quality. Embodied actions of devotees in the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, as I will analyze throughout, are twofold: generating and conveying both Islamic religious values and secular values of the Turkish state, which allows them to use the historical lodge simultaneously as a foundation and worship center.

As discussed above, performing Sufi living, specifically the rituals in the presence of the tombs of Sufi mystics, is of critical importance to devotees. It is a common feature of *tarikat* mausoleums that they “consequently undergo continuous

\(^{215}\) Ibid.
evolution, being enlarged and restructured several times over the years.”

However, one feature that does not change is that the mausoleums of most orders are “equipped with a salutation window... providing face-to-face contact with the spiritual presence of the saints and allowing those visiting the tomb to offer prayer... and beg their spiritual guidance.”

Devotees believe that şeyhs’ and other evliyas’ (saints’) spirits continue to guide devotees in their spiritual journey. Therefore, although the lodges and mausoleums were locked up for a long time in the Republican period, their spiritual significance continued to persist with pilgrims coming to pray in the presence of Nurettin Cerrahi’s tomb, located in the walls of a concrete structure with forty-four other tombs for his family and successors.

When devotees arrived at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke that night, they first stopped and prayed in front of the salutation window. In the presence of the tomb, devotees performed devotion with a sense of focus, conveying obedience and submission to their pir’s spiritual presence. As M. Baha Tanman points out, “A dervish would arrive at the threshold of the tomb and adopt there an attitude of humility, taking care not to step on the threshold, which he regarded with great reverence as the point of transition between the manifest and esoteric worlds.”

Before entering the tomb, a devotee first conveys his respect at the threshold, often lowering his body according to the entrance, bowing and then kissing the door lintel to the right of the entrance. If s/he enters, s/he “would recite the besmele [basmala] or exclaim ‘Destur [permission],’ requesting permission from the deceased to enter the

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217 Ibid.
tomb. He might express respectful greetings to the saint: ‘Esselamu aleykum ya veliyullah!’ (‘Hail to you, oh friend of God!’).”

It is also important for the devotee to step over the threshold with his right foot first. Then, the devotee enters the chamber and approaches the shrine, “performing a number of reverential acts, pausing at set intervals as he crossed the floor to take up an attitude of supplication (*niyaz*), feet pressed together, toes crossed, head bowed” and “after completing devotions there, the pilgrim would retreat from this window with the same motions of respect.”

In the presence of the tomb, devotees perform devotion by locating themselves at the foot section of the tomb as it is considered disrespectful to stand at the head of the tomb.

That night, some of the devotees in the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* performed their devotion without actually entering the chamber and prayed in front of the salutation window available for this purpose. Some of the tourists were observing the devotees praying and kissing the frame of the window as a sign of love for their saints. Devotees’ embodied acts were conveying the sense of sacredness in the space as another group of around twenty-five English-speaking men and women (also tourists) were talking about Sufi music and asking questions about the Sufi whirling ritual. The tourists, as Cengiz explained, were audience members who were waiting to be invited into the *semahane* to watch the ritual performances. Cengiz also informed me later that there were members of the order who made arrangements with tourist agencies to invite tourist audiences. Side by side, devotees and tourists were creating a space where pious and secular acts were in harmony.

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220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
There were different buildings with more than one entrance in the courtyard. Men and women were using separate entrances to enter the same large building at the back of the courtyard. I was able to see through a window of the building on the right side of the courtyard where male devotees were performing namaz. Then, as the male devotees completed their namaz, they came out and walked to the entrance of another building that, as Cengiz explained, was the ritual space (meydan-ı şerif or semahane). Female devotees, mostly veiled, were walking in groups and entering the same building from a different entrance with stairs going to the second floor of the ritual space. Then Cengiz directed me towards the door through which male devotees entered. A male devotee standing inside asked me to take off my shoes, welcomed us in, and placed our shoes in a specific place (a large closet), where other shoes were located. We passed through a hall covered with carpets and rugs filled with male devotees performing certain tasks, such as selling dervish mests (ankle-high leather slippers that cover the feet), serving tea, answering another group of English-speaking guests’ questions (as Cengiz explained, these were invited guests, either from other Sufi groups abroad or individuals who had come to meet the şeyh), and helping others with their coats. Inside, Cengiz explained, there were male devotees, their children, and devotee and non-devotee guests. While one devotee was sitting and meditating, conveying a sense of devotion giving the space a sacred feeling, another devotee was selling dervish objects, giving the space a touristic feeling.

Just on the left side of the room, Cengiz stopped by the male devotee selling mests who greeted my entrepreneur friend. Cengiz offered to buy me a pair of mests as a gift and knowing the Sufi custom that the offer should not be refused, I agreed. As I
sat on the rug to put on my mests, the hall felt like a small touristic bazaar with tourists purchasing different Sufi items. There was also a devotee selling tesbihs across the hall, who was talking to an English-speaking male tourist. The tourist asked the devotee his favorite color of the tesbih and in a humble tone, the male devotee said it is the quality of the devotional act that counts, trying to explain to the guest that the color of the tesbih does not matter. This conversation was specifically conveying how devotees were embodying mixed codes in the space, sharing their religious values as they sold their worship items to the tourists. As soon as I put my mests on, another devotee wearing a dervish headgear and a hurka (a woolen shirt-like garment or cloak with long sleeves) \(^{222}\) guided us into the ritual space, a large room filled with mystical objects and pleasant scents. This was a large rectangle-shaped room with its floors covered with Islamic carpets and rugs, walls covered with framed Quranic passages (calligraphies), and kandil lights hanging from the ceiling. The devotee asked me kindly to sit behind a rope that was placed in the corner of the large room to separate the audience from the worship space.

As I sat behind the rope on the floor and began to wait for the ceremony, I realized that I was the only woman in the space (thinking that the female tourists were still outside the building waiting to be guided in) and that I was not going to be able to

\(^{222}\) The hurka and/or the headgear are signs that the devotee is a dervish. It is considered a diploma for the devotee and showed his/her standing. As Annemarie Schimmel points out, “For to bless someone by placing headgear on his head means to honor him, and... is a highly important occasion in the dervish orders.” Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, 39. Some of the Sufi mystics such as Yunus Emre criticized the use of these garments, pointing out the fact that some people wear them too early in their spiritual elevation. However, Cengiz informed me later that all the devotees assisting the guests are dervishes, the ones who are closest to the şeyh.
participate in the ritual or communicate with the devotees. Sitting behind the rope by myself, I noticed Cengiz sitting on the floor by the door near a group of male devotees on the other side of the long room. Male devotees were taking their places, with their backs to the rope. As I was sitting and watching the male devotees sitting and meditating by counting the beads on their tesbihs, I was witnessing the sense of concentration and calmness in their part of the room.

After a while, a male devotee brought in the group of tourists that were waiting in the courtyard. As the tourists walked down the hall, the devotee guiding them was kind and gentle as he listened to one of the tourists and continued to answer his questions as he directed them towards their seats. His body was conveying a sense of devotion as he seated the tourists, greeting them with a slight bow, showing his respect to the tourists as his guests. With the tourist audience members coming in and taking their place next to me behind the rope, I was no longer the only female present in the male section of the ritual space. There were ten other women behind the rope.

Then, I noticed additional women upstairs, sitting in the mezzanine, and realized that the separate entrance with the stairs was their way to climb to the upper section of the semahane, for female devotees only. As audience members, the female tourists and I were able to share the men’s ritual space, while female devotees were in a separate section, on the mezzanine facing the audience section of the room. Women were visible to the audience behind the latticework wooden windows, but not to male devotees, who were placed under the mezzanine.

I sat behind the rope and watched the male devotees of the group greet each other by placing their right hands on their hearts, slightly moving their heads forward,
and taking their seats on the floor. After a while, the ceremony began with extensive Quran readings, *Salavatı Şerifs* (chants that praise Prophet Muhammed), and then the *zikir* ritual. The *zikir* started with devotees seeking God’s forgiveness and continued with devotees repeating “la ilaha illallah” (“there is no deity but God”) in a rhythmic manner. Having researched the rituals of the Cerrahi order before attending their gathering, I was expecting to see a different form of *zikir* ritual called the *devran-ı zikir,*\(^{223}\) in which male devotees stand in a circle and rotate together as a group. Instead, devotees performed *zikir* in a seated position. As they chanted the phrase, they regularly moved their heads down and to the left, directing the energy into their hearts and back, then vocalized the phrase again. The space was very crowded with around one hundred men, young and old, sitting on their knees, delivering the phrase “la ilaha illallah.”

Then, the *semazens* entered in their ritual garments — the black cloaks, white *tennures,* and *sikkes*\(^{224}\) — and filled the empty rectangular space between the male devotees performing *zikir* and audience members sitting behind the rope. I also was not expecting to witness *sema* in the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* because as analyzed by Tuğrul İnancer, *sema* ceremony was a specific form of *zikir* that was practiced only in the Mevlevi

\(^{223}\) Tuğrul İnancer states, “The rites of religious orders fall into one of three categories (according to Al-i İmran sura at the beginning of the 191\(^{st}\) verse of the Holy Quran): Quudi (sitting), Qiyami (standing) and Dawrani (in a step by step movement). All rites begin with the sitting position, but in quudi rites people maintain this position throughout the ritual. In qiyami rites people get up after the initial quud. Dawrani rites include sitting, standing and also movement.” For different forms of *zikir* practiced by different Sufi orders, refer to Ö. Tuğrul İnancer, “Rituals and Main Principles of Sufism,” in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society,* 123-182.

\(^{224}\) The black cloak represents tomb or worldly attachments; the white *tennure* represents the dervishes’ shroud (the burial garment); and the *sikke* (long hat), dervishes’ gravestone, both signifying dervishes’ seeking death in life. Costumes were designed to signify the dervish as a human being who has given up the desires of the material world.
order. However, devotees of the Cerrahi order were also performing *sema* ceremony because “the Mevlevi derviṣes... have become the emblematic image of Sufi rituals.”

When I asked a devotee from the Cerrahi order about their *sema* ceremony, he said they usually organize Thursday night gatherings for the guests, making sure that they witness the whirling ceremony. The presence of the tourist audience encouraged devotees to organize their ritual gatherings as a religious and theatrical event to make sure that they provided their guests the performance of the whirling dervish ritual, what was familiar to them as a tourist attraction, while simultaneously performing their *devran-ı zikir* on the other side of the room. The spectatorial aspects of devotees’ ritual gatherings brought forth the theatrical value of their devotional living, which allowed them to create a distance between male devotees’ worship experience and the audience.

When *semazens* started whirling in front of us, a tourist sitting next to me said to her friend in a low tone that she was glad that the whirling dervishes were close to the audience, making it clear that she came to the lodge to witness the performance of Mevlevi *sema*. While the rope and the whirling ritual separated us completely from the worshippers sitting and repeating God’s names on the other side of the room, some of the tourists like me changed their position to be able to see the devotees sitting and chanting on the other side of the room. We were able to hear the deep and low voices of male devotees, their repetitive sounds groaning and chanting, and their heads moving swiftly in between the whirling dervishes’ white *tennures*. It was as if there were four different groups in the room: men sitting and performing *zikir* on one side; an audience (comprised of women and men) sitting and watching behind a rope on the same floor.

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with men performing zikir; women sitting and performing zikir upstairs; and semazens performing the whirling ritual in the middle. Sitting behind the rope, we were now able to watch the male devotees’ rapturous movements as they performed zikir, the semazens whirling in a state of peace with their eyes closed, women moving their heads to the rhythm of the zikir behind the latticework windows in the upper room, and other guests sitting and watching by the entrance of the semahane. Some tourists were staring at the women’s section, others were watching the feet of semazens, while others were constantly changing their positions to see the dervishes throw their heads side to side and chant in a state of joy. The whirling ritual performed as tourist attraction in between male devotees sitting and performing zikir and audience members allowed male devotees a level of privacy in performing their worship as if they were actors performing behind an invisible fourth-wall on a proscenium arch in a theater.

Throughout the gathering, there was performatic shift and doubling occurring in every corner of the lodge with devotees performing their touristic acts, fulfilling their position as a foundation to preserve the space for their devotional practices. With the sign presenting the space as a foundation for research at the entrance, devotees praying in front of the tomb, the devotee selling mests for tourists, devotees guiding guests, the audience sitting behind the rope, and semazens blocking devotees sitting and performing zikir, throughout the evening, devotees were embodying and transmitting both their religious values and the secular values of the Turkish state. First, as audience members, it was clear that the devotees welcomed female guests in the male section of the semahane and placed me and the female tourists next to male tourists, taking into consideration the secular values of the Turkish state, which approved the use of the
lodge as a Foundation for the Research and Sustenance of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore. While female devotees did not have access to the male section of the semahane, which was clearly in line with the religious values of a doctrinal (şeriat-based) Sufi order, we sat in the same room with male devotees, who chanted and whirled. Through the doubling of touristic and religious acts, it was clear that the devotees created ways, such as the use of the rope and performance of the whirling ritual, to stay in harmony with the secular values and demands of the Turkish state while also practicing their strictly religious codes (in accord with the mainstream Islamic doctrine), such as the division of male and female worship spaces.

The religious gathering at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, while providing the opportunity for tourists to witness the whirling ceremony performed simultaneously as worship and tourist attraction, also allowed the tourists to witness the sense of commitment and devotion practiced by male devotees performing collective zikir. These devotees performed the touristic and religious acts in the historical lodge to maintain and use their spaces by changing certain rules and principles. As in Taylor’s analysis, “the performatic shift and doubling... preserved rather than erased the antecedents.”

Devotees, by doubling their performance of ritual gathering as a religious event and tourist attraction, secured their access to the historical lodge. This was an opportunity for the devotees to perform their devotion in the presence of Sufi saints’ tombs. Devotees played the government’s secularization game and took the performance of their rituals as tourist attraction as an opportunity to generate the true form of their beliefs and values. The performatic shift allowed them to preserve their

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226 Taylor, The Archive and The Repertoire, 46.
rights as a religious Sufi order, practicing devotion in a *dergah* converted into a foundation center, and protect their rights as a secular Foundation for the Research and Sustenance of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore, thus mobilizing Sufi cultural beliefs and values.

**Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi (Mevlevi Lodge)**

The use of the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* as a space for the Foundation for the Research and Sustenance of Turkish Sufi Music and Folklore does not mean that all historical Sufi buildings function as permanent spaces for the practice of Sufi rituals. Most of the devotees struggle to find and produce a permanent sacred space for their religious/community gatherings. Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge, recognized as the second and largest dervish lodge the Mevlevi order brought into existence after the Galata *Mevlevihanesi* in Istanbul, was built in 1598 and remained in use for 328 years until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.\(^{227}\) It was destroyed more than once (in 1961, and again in 1997, both due to fire), and in 2005, the Directorate General of Foundations supported the renovation of the complex believing that the lodge, as in the past, would become a cultural center and museum in which culture is lived and taught. After the closure of Sufi lodges, for a long time, in the Republican period, Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge functioned as student housing. Today, the space is used as the campus of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Wakf University, Alliance of Civilizations Institute. The information about the Mevlevi Lodge on the university’s website informs the public about the fact

\(^{227}\) Honoring the restoration of Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi, Republic of Turkey Ministry Directorate General of Foundation published a book about the Mevlevi Lodge, which has been very helpful considering the lack of information about its history and cultural life. The book can be obtained from the Mevlevihane. Nezih Üzel, *Aşıkların Dünyası: Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi* [World of Lover: Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge] (Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry Directorate General of Foundation, 2010).
that “Today, the Mevlevihane is ready, with the multifaceted activities that the Alliance of Civilizations Institute carries out in its grounds, to function as an important academy, a cultural center and a museum where the heartbeat of the country’s scientific, artistic and cultural life can be felt.”

It was made clear that the Mevlevi Lodge was renovated as a center for educational and cultural development.

In 2010, on my first visit to the lodge, I was not allowed entry due to the ongoing renovations. Then, I found out that with the completion of the renovations of certain sections, the government allowed activities organized as part of **Tourism and Promotion Projects of Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Program**:

The project titled “Introduction of the Mawlawi [Mevlevi] Culture and Sema Ceremony” covers all three main elements (literature, music and visuality) of the Mawlawi culture. In the project scope, the following activities will be realized:

- A total of 59 *sema* ceremonies will be held every week through 2010 and also on holy days. Two separate exhibitions will be opened, where photographs, illustrations, and other artworks related to the Mawlawi culture will be displayed. 12 roundtables (once in every month) will be held. These meetings will be attended by local and foreign speakers. Again, 12 classical Turkish music and Sufi music concerts will be held on a monthly basis. Information on the relevant music will be provided.

Around the same time, a journalist, James Bedding, presented a guide for sights and attractions organized for Istanbul-European Capital of Culture 2010 and pointed out: “A

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228 “Yenikapi Mevlevihanesi; From Past to Present,” [http://medit.fsm.edu.tr/About-Us-Medit--Mevlevihane_en](http://medit.fsm.edu.tr/About-Us-Medit--Mevlevihane_en)

229 [Istanbul 2010 European Capital Of Culture Program](http://www.logictours.com/logicozel/2010.pdf)
good place to learn about Sufi culture is at the *Introduction to Mevlevi culture*, to be held every Sunday throughout the year at the Yenikapi Mevlevi Lodge.” During the events organized for Istanbul European Capital of Culture of 2010, I met with Saygin dede, who at the time was teaching Rumi’s *Mesevi* and whirling ritual to a group of devotees, and organizing *sema* ceremony enactments performed simultaneously as worship and tourist attraction. Having met with Saygin dede, I found out that the government supports the participation of devotees under a secular organization created by the dede. The designation of *sema* ceremony as part of World Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO encouraged the Turkish government in 2009 to support projects that would include the direct participation of dervishes to enact the complete form of *sema* ceremony for tourists.

For Saygin dede, who is a Mevlevi, the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge is one of the most sacred spaces in Turkey due to the presence of tombs of old Mevlevi şeyhs in the lodge. Although Saygin dede expressed his contentment with taking part in the events, his voice got very emotional when he talked about the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge as a space of divine love. He liked to talk about the lives of the dedes, who lived and trained in the dervish rooms of the lodge during the Ottoman Empire when the lodge was functioning as lodging for devotees.

The day I entered the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge for the first time in October 2010, my mind was full of imaginings about the everyday life of the dervishes when the lodge was built in 1598. I stopped at the gate and waited for the gatekeeper to finish his

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conversation with his co-worker. When he looked at me, I greeted him with an Arabic greeting (having heard the phrase over and over again in the Sufi gatherings I had been attending): “Selamun Aleyküm” (“God’s peace be with you”) and he answered me back: “Ve Aleykum Selam” (“God’s peace be with you too”). I informed him that I was invited for sema lessons, which were also organized as part of Istanbul European Capital of Culture 2010 organized events, another threshold leading me as a researcher into Sufi living. He welcomed me inside and directed me to a large building in the complex. The courtyard seemed extremely quiet, as if all the dervishes were in their rooms meditating like when the space was an active lodging for devotees during the Ottoman Empire.

As I entered the building, where the classes are held, inside, I heard ladies talking in a room, walked by the entrance, and peeked my head in to ask for the classes. As soon as they saw me, I was welcomed with a Sufi greeting gesture and without talking, as if rehearsed, they placed their hands on their hearts and nodded their heads forward. Their gesture was enough for me to take off my shoes, enter the room, and take a seat near them. Listening to their intimate conversations about family and health, watching them sitting in comfort and peace in the room, I thought how these devotees belong to the space, embodying and transmitting the beliefs and values that flourished in the rooms of the historical lodge. I sat in the room with the devotees for fifteen minutes before the class. Two were reading Mesnevi; one was meditating, performing zikir as she moved the beads on her tesbih; one was bringing in some pastries and water while another was serving tea. Another devotee walked into the class and began to pour water to serve everyone in the room. When she approached me with a tray full of
glasses of water, first she lowered her body down to serve, smiled, and said “welcome.” Younger devotees were conveying a sense of precision, care, and love as they walked around the room, preparing food and serving the devotees sitting on the cushions on the floor.

Having visited various religious spaces such as Mevlevi lodges and Syrian monasteries in Turkish cities located in the Aegean, Marmara, Black Sea, Central Anatolia, and Southeastern Anatolia regions of Turkey to converse with religious leaders, staff, and people in the area, I have come to understand the significance of sacred space production and maintenance for any religious group to live and train with people who share common beliefs and values. In 2014, when I visited Syriac Orthodox Monasteries in Southeastern Anatolia, I witnessed how and why devotees kept their sacred spaces active as lodgings in the sense that religious leaders and devotees regularly lived and practiced their devotional living and owned their spaces as the source of their spiritual wealth and peace. When a devotee in the Deyrul Zafaran Monastery showed me and other devotees the rooms in which they worshipped, he emphasized more than once the religious meaning and significance of their monastery in their religious practice. He said they regularly train here as they interact with each other, share ideas, worship, and educate young devotees. I have come to understand the isolation experienced by Sufi devotees due to their inability to use the Sufi lodges for communal activities and their commitment to consecrating the places they occupy temporarily.

As Saygin dede explained, he tried to get permission to use the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge regularly for their classes and ritual performances, but he couldn’t. He
said that his apartment is too small to organize large gatherings for his devotees. He tries to participate in as many cultural activities as possible, especially the ones organized in sacred Sufi sites. For the next two days, I participated in Quran, Mesnevi, and sema lessons with Saygin dede’s devotees who call themselves Mevlevis and witnessed how they used their time effectively and struggled with the fact that they could use the space only for the duration of the cultural event. For Saygin dede, the lodge was like a Sufi academy or a conservatory as it used to be during the Ottoman Empire, in which devotees worshipped by creating music and poetry.

Having to communicate with the members of the order in the classes, I was invited by Saygin dede to watch a performance of the ceremony at the Yenikapi Mevlevi Lodge, performed in the mystical atmosphere of the restored semahane in the presence of the tombs of old Mevlevi spiritual leaders. The sema ceremony performed by the dede and the devotees was more like a religious ceremony open to the public than an event organized for the promotion of tourism in Istanbul, with an audience consisting of families, lawyers, doctors, and businesspeople visiting from Europe and the United States. Aside from the presence of the tombs, what made the space mystical and the performance more like a religious ceremony was the presence of a Mevlevi dede and devotees and their bodies conveying piety as they conversed with each other. Throughout the ritual gathering, devotees worked hard to maintain the space as a temporary sacred home. As Saygin dede explained, although the lodge was open as a culture center, for them it was a temporary dergah, a sacred space that they had to leave at the end of the day.
The day of the performance of *sema* ceremony, I arrived at the lodge early to write in my journal and to have the opportunity to talk to devotees of the group, whom I had met in Quran, *Mesnevi* (teachings of Rumi), and *sema* lessons. Some of the devotees were performing *namaz*, while others were serving tea and water, hosting each other as if this was their home. Even though I was there as a researcher, the devotees referred to me as a friend and had me spend time with them before, during, and after the ceremony. Together we ate the pastries they baked in their homes the night before and talked about cooking, marriage, children, work, and education. For devotees, this was more than a worship gathering. This was a time for them to listen to each other’s needs and offer advice.

After serving food and dining together, devotees gathered in front of the *semahane* and greeted other devotees from their group (arriving to participate in the ceremony) using physical gestures specific to *Mevlevis*. They held and kissed each other’s right hands and saluted with their right hands on their hearts. The sense of simplicity and peace in their actions created an intimate atmosphere for an audience consisting of a group of tourists acting like a congregation (having seen the event in the brochure of *Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Program*), guests (people who either attended Saygın dede’s classes or devotees’ friends), and devotees of the group. They were very respectful and loving to each other and behaved the same way to all audience members. When compared to the devotees at the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke*, the devotees at the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge appeared more enthusiastic, energetic, and affectionate as they conversed with their guests. I heard different devotees voicing their excitement for the opportunity to share their beliefs and values with non-devotees in the
historical lodge, one of the most sacred Sufi sites during the Ottoman Empire with its *semahane* designed specifically for the whirling ceremony. As one of the devotees explained, he perceived the historical lodge as a temporary home of divine love and sharing, while another devotee pointed out that the audience members were their guests and she wanted to make sure that they were comfortable and peaceful during their time with the devotees in the lodge.

As we started to take our shoes off to enter the *semahane*, the devotees welcomed us at the door. They were communicating with the guests as they entered the *semahane* one by one, with a calm voice, smiling and answering quick questions in Turkish and English. Everyone was also given a booklet that provided a brief historical overview of Rumi as the *pir* of the Mevlevi order, his work, and Mevlevi culture. The information in the booklet stated the fact that *sema* was a religious *zikir* ceremony where the dervishes use whirling to achieve a union with God. We were also asked to be respectful and stay quiet during the ritual. Clapping during or after the ceremony, leaving our seats, or taking flash photographs was not allowed. In this government-sponsored event at the lodge, the application of rules to peacefully perform the ritual was the affirmation of the respect granted to devotees. Despite the legal restrictions, the Turkish government’s publicizing of Sufi rituals exposed the religious Sufi culture to a public that included individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds. In this case, unlike the exclusion of Mevlevi devotees from Rumi’s *urs* festival in Konya in 1961, the Turkish government today was at least trying to use the true form of Sufi cultural practices as Turkey’s cultural heritage by allowing Saygin dede and his devotees to perform their devotional acts in the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge.
When *sema* was enacted at the lodge by the Mevlevi devotees, who followed the full structure of the ceremony as organized by Sultan Veled’s son Pir Adel Çelebi, the ceremony, including the whirling of the *semazens* and the sounds of instruments, was loaded with cultural and spiritual meaning. The performance of the whirling ceremony at the Yenikapi Mevlevi lodge when compared to the *sema* performed at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke was more fluent and focused on worship. It was clear that the act of whirling, unlike for the Cerrahi devotees, was the primary ritual for these Mevlevi devotees as it was in the Mevlevi orders during the Ottoman Empire. The actions of the Mevlevi *semazens* when compared to the Cerrahi *semazens* were smoother, less controlled, and distanced. The sense of worship served as a form of communicable effect, arising from the way the devotees saluted each other and walked around the space in silence, their eyes loosely focused on their actions. The devotees’ performance of each gesture was specific in reflecting their desire to overcome egotism. Their whirling with their heads slightly bent and their arms raised and open, suggestive of their naïveté, represented “an act and drama of faith.”

Although the event was organized to share Sufi cultural beliefs and values, it was an act of worship for the devotees, who gathered in the lodge to perform their religious rituals in the historical *semahane*. The ceremony started with the members of the orchestra taking their places quietly. Then, a *semazen* walked in to bring the red-dyed sheepskin mat called the *post*, where the leader of the order sits, and slowly and gently placed it on the floor. His actions were conveying a sense of ownership as he

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232 The color of red, as And explains, is the color of union and ceremony. Metin And, “The Mevlana Ceremony,” *TDR* 21, no. 3 (1977): 86-87.
walked down the *semahane* holding the *post* that represents the seat passed to the spiritual leader by his spiritual guide. Then, the *semazens* in their white *tennures* started to enter the *semahane* one by one, also walking slowly and gently. First, they took a bow in the direction of the red *post*, and then walked to their sheepskins that were placed on the floor of the *semahane* before the ritual, one next to the other. As And explains, devotees believe that there is an imaginary line called *hatt-i istiva* (the equator) that divides the floor space into two symmetrical sections, starting from the *post* and extending to the entrance. Throughout the ceremony, *semazens* carefully stepped over this line as they walked, due to its signification as the shortest path to reality and unity with God. Then, *Saygin dede* entered and very slowly walked to his *post*, conveying a sense of seriousness. After he took his place standing in front of the red *post*, *semazens* took another bow altogether, and followed the *dede*’s lead to sit down on their sheepskins and kiss the floor of the *semahane*. In the first sections of the ritual, devotees recited verses from the *Mesnevi* and prayers from the *Quran*. In this section, *semazens* remained calm and quiet in meditation.

Staying in the state of meditation, *semazens*’ concentration and discipline conveyed a sense of care, loyalty, and commitment. There was complete silence in the *semahane* and most of the *semazens* kept their eyes closed. After the *Naat-i Sharif* (lines that praise Prophet Muhammed recited as a hymn without rhythm), the chief double-drum player played four notes as a sign, then the reed piper played a *taksim*, a kind of improvised piece, which was followed by another instrumental piece (*peşrev*.

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233 And, “The Mevlana Ceremony,” 86.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid., 86-87.
236 Ibid., 88.
meaning prelude). While the peşrev was being played, the semazens stood up and placed their hırkas (cloaks) on the floor, folding them three times. Devotees performed the act of folding with precision and care with the belief that each fold has a specific meaning: love, beauty, and unity. Then, headed by the dede, semazens began to walk slowly around the hall. As they walked, their bodies conveyed a sense of obedience to the dede and the tombs present in the ritual space. They saluted each other in front of the post and slowly and deliberately encircled the hall three times. After the third rotation, the dede took his place on the post, and the music ended. The first part of the ceremony ended with the final encircling, but what actually concluded the first section was an emotional improvisation performed by the reed piper. The space vibrated with the crying sound of the ney (reed flute), communicating a sense of loss, longing, and yearning. The use of the ritual props and gestural interactions between devotees

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237 Ibid.
238 Ibid., 86-87.
239 When I asked Saygin dede about the reed flute, he showed me Rumi’s lines from the Mesnevi and explained that the reed flute captures the meaning of the ceremony, the sense of divine meaning or longing experienced by the semazens:

“Listen to the story told by the reed, of being separated.
Since I was cut from the reedbed, I have made this crying sound.
Anyone apart from someone he loves understands what I say.
Anyone pulled from a source longs to go back.
At any gathering I am there, mingling in the laughing and grieving, a friend to each, but few will hear the secrets hidden within the notes. No ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit, spirit up from body: no concealing
established a sense of occupation or becoming one with the space. Compared to the
distancing I detected in the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, here devotees’ actions were directly
showing their connection to the space, Saygin dede as their spiritual teacher, and with
each other as their spiritual siblings.

When the second part of the ceremony, called Four Selams (Greetings) started,
Saygin dede walked back to his post. The chief semazen walked toward the dede, kissed
his hand with a sense of respect and care, and the dede in turn kissed his head. This
action performed by the dede indicates the authorization and blessing given to the

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distancing. But it’s not given us
to see the soul. The reed flute is fire,
not wind. Be that empty.
Hear the love fire tangled in the reed notes, as bewilderment
melts into wine. The reed is a friend
to all who want the fabric torn
and drawn away. The reed is hurt
and salve combining. Intimacy
and longing for intimacy, one
song. A disastrous surrender
and a fine love, together. The one
who secretly hears this is senseless.
A tongue has one customer, the ear.
A sugarcane flute has such effect
because it was able to make sugar
in the reedbed. The sound it makes
is for everyone. Days full of wanting,
let them go by without worrying
that they do. Stay where you are
inside such a pure, hollow note.
Every thirst gets satisfied except
that of these fish, the mystics,
who swim a vast ocean of grace
still somehow longing for it!
No one lives in that without
being nourished every day.
But if someone doesn’t want to hear
the song of the reed flute, it’s best to cut conversation
short, say good-bye, and leave.” Coleman Barks, Rumi: The Big Red Book (New York:
semazenbaşı (chief semazen) to begin the *sema* ceremony. After each walk, the *semazens* started to whirl, bending their heads slightly toward one shoulder. Bending their heads, *semazens’* bodies reflected a sense of innocence and trust towards *Saygin dede* as their spiritual guide. As the speed of their turning increased, they kept their arms with the right palm turned to the sky, receiving divine light, and the left lowered with the palm turned downward, giving the divine energy to the earth through the thumb of the left hand, continuously whirling to the left towards their heart. *Semazens’* left feet also never left the ground throughout the whirling, fixing their body and the energy received into the earth. It was as if with each high speed whirling, *semazens’* bodies, with *tennures*’ and *sikkes*’ colors mixing with the light colors of the walls and floors of the *semahane*, were becoming one with the space.

In the fourth part, the *dede* himself slowly whirled to the center, both of the equator and the hall performing what Mevlevis call *post sema’i* (the place of *Mevlana* and his followers by succession). As And says, “In this section with the yearning sound of the *ney*, the sound of the feet of the dancers and the rustle coming from their skirts make a unique harmony.”240 The solo sound of the *ney* transformed the room into a quieter and calmer environment, allowing the audience to hear the subtle footsteps of the *semazens* coming across as a breath moving across the floor. In these last whirling moments, *semazens* turned slower, conveying a sense of peace. The strength of the mind of the *semazens*, their physical and mental presence, and the sense of discipline that they revealed inspired affection, kindness, and openness. When the *şeyh* turned back to the post, the *ney*’s improvisation and the whole *sema* stopped abruptly. Then,

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one of the singers recited from the Quran, reminding everyone once again that *semazens* whirled for devotion. The ceremony ended with *semazens* returning to their *posts*, putting on their outer garments, and moving into a state of meditation with the chief *semazen*’s recitation of a prayer called *Dua-gu duası*, which is performed for their *pir* (Mevlana Celalleddin-i Rumi) and all the Sufi saints, including the ones whose tombs were present in the *semahane.*

The performance ended with the prayer. The *şeyh* and dervishes left the space quietly and no one clapped, following the requests of the devotees who welcomed the audience at the door before the ceremony and as a result of the sensations conveyed by the devotees.

The experience of commitment and joy conveyed in the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge did not occur only during the witnessing of the embodied actions of *semazens* in the ceremony, but also in the aftermath, when the audience extended the sensations experienced while witnessing the ceremony by sharing their feelings and observations. By the end of the ceremony, some audience members were chatting about Sufi retreat centers. A group of elderly audience members, who were a British family, shared their

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241 As explained by one of the *semazens*, Mevlevis believe that the first whirling is enacted as the dervish’s birth to truth; the second is the witnessing of the magnificence of creation; the third is the transformation of joy into love and, by this means, the sacrifice of mind to love; and the fourth whirling is performed to return to their mission in everyday life. During these sections, they gradually achieved a rhythmic whirling that was accomplished through physical and mental release, and when they complete the sequence and return back to their mats, they believe that they become impartial to worldly passions and desires. For more information on the spiritual journey that dervishes experience in *sema* ceremony, see Tugrul Inancer’s chapter “Rituals and Main Principles of Sufism During The Ottoman Empire,” in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, doctrine, rituals, Turuq, architecture, literature and fine arts, modernism*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Atatürk Supreme Council for Culture, Language and History, 2005).
knowledge of Rumi’s teachings about divine love while others observed the lodge itself, staring at the windows and doors searching for signs of the dervishes’ everyday lives.

Some of the audience members were also conveying their perception of the space as a sacred Sufi lodge. One of the tourists asked me whether or not the dervishes lived in the lodge and I replied that the lodge functions as a museum and a cultural center and that the dervishes only use the lodge for Sufi classes and ritual performances. There were also audience members, who were standing in different sections of the courtyard of the lodge, waiting to chat with male and female devotees, who were standing by the entrance of the semahane planning their meetings and gatherings. A Turkish audience member, a female graduate student, who knew one of the devotees, continued to wait to speak to Saygin dede. Selen, one of the devotees, introduced her to Saygin dede, who after chatting with the lady for a while, invited her to his Thursday night class. For this audience member, the historical Sufi lodge converted into a museum was a sacred home and the event was more than an introduction to Mevlevi culture. It was an act of remembering divine meaning. She was occupying the space as a seeker waiting to speak to Saygin dede, to witness his and his devotees’ devotional acts and ask his permission to attend his upcoming classes and gatherings.

In our conversations, although Saygin dede several times expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to worship in the historical semahane with his devotees and share the experience with non-devotees, with a humble smile on his face, he once admitted his longing for the old days, the times before the closure of Sufi lodges when all the dervishes lived and trained together. He said if he was a dervish living with his şeyh in this lodge, he would spend most of the day awake, serving, walking in the courtyard,
meditating in his cell (meaning the small room for dervishes), and writing religious poetry and composing music for his şeyh. He said although he does not resist the social and political changes (the closure of Sufi lodges) that have affected Sufi living, he longs for a devotional living experience in a permanent Sufi space, where he would be surrounded by other dedes and dervishes.

It was clear from the beginning of the gathering that while the lodge was a sacred space for devotees and the ritual performed was an act of worship, it was also a cultural center. The ritual gathering at the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge was reflective of both secular values of the Turkish government and religious values of devotees. On the one hand, the secular feeling in the space was less visible when compared to the event at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke because there were not individuals selling touristic items. Also, there was no need to position the audience behind a rope since Mevlevi semahanes are constructed in a way to allow the devotees living in the lodge (who are not semazens) to sit around the whirling space and worship by performing silent zikir as they witnessed the sounds, prayers, and the semazens’ whirling. Throughout the ceremony male and female audience members were occupying a worship space sitting in the historical seats of the Mevlevi semahane as if they were members of Saygin dede’s group, occupying the same seats of deceased devotees and bringing back the idea of sharing that dervishes experienced in the historical semahane during the Ottoman Empire.

The secular meaning in the space came forth with male and female audience members witnessing the ceremony and sitting side by side. When I asked Deniz (one of the female devotees) about mixed seating, she explained that her teacher (implying
Saygin dede) thinks it is necessary to move beyond certain religious rules to embody the secular values they currently practiced in Turkish society. Saygin dede was a secular devotee who believed that Islamic rules and principles (referring to Islamic law) should change according to the modern values of Turkish society. He said he seeks to create an egalitarian environment to embody Sufi ideas of unity and diversity. Later, having watched female devotees practice whirling with Saygin dede, I asked Deniz why only male dervishes performed the ritual. She explained that there are some rules and principles that Saygin dede preserves in public to avoid any conflict with strictly doctrinal Muslim groups and individuals. Saygin dede and his devotees believe that it is necessary to embrace diversity in Turkey and stay open to changes and doublings in their practice of religious beliefs and values. To embody the Sufi idea of unity, these devotees as educated middle-class members of Turkish society believe that it is necessary to embody the secular values of Turkish society in order to adapt to social and political changes. Devotees believe that performing their rituals simultaneously as worship and tourist attraction does not distort their devotional living. On the contrary, such transformations allow them to use Sufi sacred sites and generate a Sufi way of living that agrees with their roles as secular individuals living in modern Turkish society. Saygin dede and his devotees received access to use the space only for one year as part of the events organized for Istanbul-European Capital of Culture 2010.

When the event ended, the devotees’ emotions were twofold. They were happy to have had the chance to worship in the lodge, but they were sad that they had to leave. As Deniz explained, she felt overjoyed coming to the lodge in the morning, and felt heartbroken by the fact that she had to leave in the afternoon with the closing hour of
the museum. She said it was not only the fact that she had to leave the space, but also the fact that she had to return to spaces that require another set of actions and interactions that had nothing to do with her devotional living.

*Narin dede: Making Space for Practicing and Teaching Sufi Living*

In 2010, attending a variety of Sufi gatherings in private homes, cultural centers, Sufi lodges converted into museum, hotels, and theatres, I conversed with a number of spiritual teachers and devotees to hear their ideas and experiences about the closure of Sufi spaces. During my conversations with devotees, the shared view was that although they longed for communal living and training as reflected in Ottoman Sufi history (or what they refer to as the traditional form of Sufi living), such as regularly training with their spiritual leaders and dedes in a Sufi tekke, devotees explained that they perceive the changes and adaptations in Sufi living in a progressive manner. Due to their idea of unity, believing that all changes are offers from God, most of the devotees considered and trusted the adaptation and use of their teachings and practices in cultural centers and museums due to the closure of Sufi lodges. Through the guidance of the idea of unity, şeyhs and dervishes continued to perceive every change as God’s desire, including the changes that came after the closure of Ottoman Sufi lodges. Sufi şeyhs and dervishes acknowledged that it is necessary to adapt new ways of practicing Sufi living.

In response to a question about the closing of Sufi lodges in Turkey, Kenan Rifai (1918-1950),\(^\text{242}\) a well-known Sufi master, writer, and translator recognized for his

\(^{242}\) Kenan Rifai (the last name given to him when he became a şeyh of the Rifai order in İstanbul) served as a şeyh until 1925, when all Sufi orders were made illegal and the lodges were closed. He continued to teach the Mesnevi to his students for many years and trained many students on his path to move closer to God, teaching in various secular schools of the Republican Era.
liberal views (most prominently for his support for the education of women in Turkey in the early twentieth century) and embodiment of unity, explained in his Sohbets, “Do not say they closed the tekkes, they did this or that... it is God that did it... You stop your child from getting close to fire, but does s/he appreciate this? S/he would get angry and cry. Every doing of Hak [one of Allah’s ninety-nine names, meaning one whose existence stands invariable] has a reason. To see this is tevhid [unity].” Rıfai advised seekers to see every circumstance, event, and action in life as an offer from God, whether it is positive or negative, even if we do not understand why. Instead of resenting God’s offer, Rıfai advises his devotees to take every change as a lesson to move closer to divine love. His ideas continue to serve as a significant guidebook for devotees who seek ways to incorporate Sufi teachings and practices into their hectic urban lives.

A Mevlevi dede I met in 2010 was a Sufi dervish, musician, and poet who believed that if the Turkish government commodifies Sufi rituals and allows the practice of Sufi teachings and rituals as tourist attractions and classes, he would follow their strategies to make space for his devotional living. However, as Narıncı dede also explained, getting permission to use Sufi spaces was not an easy task. First of all, it was not easy to convince the government officers about organizing a ritual performance when there are not enough audience members. Without numbers, the event would not be more than a private ritual gathering, which would be illegal. Due to such struggles regarding the use of semahanes in Mevlevi lodges, for Narıncı dede, creating ritual

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243 Kenan Rıfai, Sohbetler (İstanbul: Hulbe, 2012), 214.
244 I met Narıncı dede through my mother’s colleague who owns a tourist agency that organizes cultural events for tourists and businesspeople visiting Turkey.
gatherings in public spaces was an emotional, social, religious, and political act due to the restrictions imposed on Sufi living in Turkey.

_Narin dede_ is the grandson of a dervish who sought to continue Sufi living by teaching and performing _sema_ ceremony as tourist attraction in public spaces. He created a secular organization to legalize his activities and used the gatherings, classes, and workshops he organized as his association’s income. For _Narin dede_, producing commodified performances and workshops of _sema_ ceremony was a way to continue practicing and sharing Sufi living.

_Narin dede_ invited me to his private home office several times to introduce me to other students studying Sufi rituals and poetry. As he believed that education was the most significant aspect of Ottoman Sufism, he was interested in creating networks for people who study Sufi teachings, arts, rituals, and everyday life. His office was a small room that included two comfortable sofas and a large desk with an old computer placed on it. The walls were covered with Islamic writings and poems and marble artworks that _Narin dede_ created. He also had a library, where he displayed and protected his Sufi books. The space was friendly and _Narin dede_ and his wife as always were hospitable and kind. That day, _Narin dede_ organized a gathering to introduce me to another student researching Sufism to have us talk about our research plans and shared some of his religious music compositions to celebrate our efforts to preserve Sufi cultural beliefs and values. _Narin dede_’s wife served me and the other research student tea as we discussed Sufism and our projects. _Narin dede_’s private home was not a _dergah_ but a friendly space for people interested in learning about Sufi cultural beliefs and values. Every time I visited him and his wife at this sacred space, there would be another
student or a devotee also visiting either to organize events, schedule classes, or share their artwork. His private home/office was simultaneously a space produced as a sacred school in which people from different professions came together to practice Sufi living and also constructed as a public relations workplace in which he organized his Sufi events and gatherings.

_Narin dede_ believes that through performing and teaching _sema_ ceremony, he creates a space for himself and for beginner devotees to practice Sufi living. When I visited _Narin dede_ in his home, he explained to me that non-Sufi individuals create projects and apply for financial support from the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, for performances of whirling, Sufi music, and poetry; however _Narin dede_, in our conversations, more than once stated that it is important to him that devotees, who practice their rituals for divine meaning, organize the performances of _sema_ for the public to open up space for their devotional acts and to share the true form of Sufi beliefs and values with beginner devotees and non-Sufi audiences. More specifically, he seeks to create spaces for his devotional living and for others to learn about Sufi cultural beliefs and values. He says that it is important to create spaces for Sufi living in which open-minded devotees train secular and religious people in Sufi teachings and practices, where students who are interested in Sufi spirituality witness another dimension of religious experience that does not go against the democratic values of Turkey.

_Narin dede_ believed that due to the government’s closure of Sufi lodges and commodification of Sufi cultural beliefs and values, he had to organize Sufi events in cultural centers and museums to live Sufi spirituality and mobilize Sufism as a religious
practice in Turkey. *Narin dede* also explained that what was primary for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, aside from the purpose of economic growth, was to bring forth the idea of peace in Sufism and show to the public that the government of Turkey embraces democratic values. However, *Narin dede* believes that the government disregards the fact that Sufism is a religious practice while promoting Sufi beliefs and values. The government, to show that they have adopted a more liberal attitude, actively promoted Sufi mystics’ message of love, peace, and tolerance without focusing on their religious meaning. On the official website of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Sufi mystics and rituals are presented under the heading “Folk Cultures” to avoid publicizing the religious value of Sufi cultural beliefs and values. An analysis of the information about Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli on the website (which I find necessary to cover here in detail) demonstrates the government’s lack of acknowledgement of Sufism as a religious practice:

Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli... improved his philosophy and began to educate students. His system of thought based on tolerance and love of human being had spread shortly to masses of great people in Cappadocia which had been a great center of Christianity and adopted by the people. His philosophic thought has been based on existence of human being and love of human being. This thought has been reflecting the same understanding with 1948 Human Rights Universal Declaration. Thoughts of “Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli” have been taken into consideration in 1923 by M. Kemal Atatürk approximately after 600 years, and a
republic, which is secular, democratic, respectful to human rights has been established.\(^{245}\)

While bringing forth Bektaş-ı Veli’s ideas as based on love of human being, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism chose not to mention the religious role of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli and did not mention him as the founder of the Bektaşi Sufi order or his importance to Sufi devotees in Turkey. The article written for the website seeks to be convincing about the position of the Republic of Turkey as a government that supports human rights, concerns for people, and beliefs in human-based morality without positioning Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli as a şeyh. The article also mentions a quote from Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli’s work *Velayatname* — “In fact all religions are intended to establish peace and brotherhood in the World.”\(^{246}\) — in order to establish the fact that the Turkish government supports egalitarian values. What is important for *Narin dede* in discussions about Turkey’s use of Sufi beliefs and values is to adapt their commodification plans to produce spaces to live and share the religious meaning of Sufism. To do this, *Narin dede* seeks to produce temporary sacred sites in which while he practices Sufi living with other devotees, secular Turks and non-Muslim devotees also learn and practice Sufism as a devotional living.

*Narin dede* believed that teaching Sufi arts and rituals to beginner devotees was an effective way of maintaining Sufi cultural beliefs and values in secular urban Turkey. In our meetings, *Narin dede* extensively voiced his opinions about how with the closing of Sufi lodges by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1925, Sufi communities practiced their


\(^{246}\) Ibid.
beliefs in their private homes and did not share their cultural beliefs and values, including Sufi rituals and religious music, with the public until the 1980s. He explained that devotee artists, raised by devotee family members, practiced Sufi teachings in private gatherings while growing up and then started to move to public spaces to share their Sufi cultural beliefs and values. With modernization and the promotion of Sufi arts, music, and rituals as folk performance by the Turkish government, some of these artists trained in the private Sufi gatherings, like Narin dede, formed new Sufi identities with the desire to adapt secular society and state restrictions, and to bring their spiritual practices to public spaces to live and share Sufi spirituality through classes on Sufi arts and music. More specifically, Narin dede has been carrying his Sufi living to secular spaces and creating gatherings out of Sufi worship practices to make Sufism part of his and others’ everyday life. Narin dede believes that devotees can create sacred spaces to practice Sufi living for themselves when they practice Sufi beliefs and values. He said to me once his Sufi living consists of teaching his students at home, reading Rumi’s poetry in his room, singing liturgical songs after breakfast with his wife, praying as part of a sema performance in a hotel conference room, and creating Ebru sanatı (marbling art) with his students in the office. Narin dede explained, although he was old, he needed to learn how to use the computer and write emails in order to network with tourist agencies and officials in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, forming good relationships with people working for such organizations to get their permission to use cultural centers and museums for the practice of his Sufi living. Narin dede, while using his private, domestic Sufi worship to improve his generation of Sufi living in temporary
public spaces, also seeks to merge the interactions achieved in public spaces with his devotion in domestic spaces for a more regular practice.

Bringing together devotees, secular Turks, and/or non-Muslims to practice Sufi rituals, *Narin dede* does not expect to understand everybody’s beliefs and values, while not expecting his students to understand his position as both a secular (in the sense that he believes that government institutions and their representatives should be separate from religious institutions) and religious Sufi dede. As Diana Taylor states, “[T]he problem of untranslatability, as I see it, is actually a positive one, a necessary stumbling block that reminds us that ‘we’ — whether in our [religious convictions or political affiliations]... — do not simply or problematically understand each other.”247 When *Narin dede* invited me to various meetings and introduced me to his students, comprised of individuals from different religions, I witnessed his aim as he sang, conversed with his wife and students, and read poetry. Embodying Sufi beliefs and values, *Narin dede* was seeking to produce temporary Sufi sites in which there would be a welcoming and peaceful environment for people interested in learning about Sufi devotional living. Sharing the teachings of Rumi and his message about divine love and teaching Sufism through Sufi rituals, music, poetry, and art, *Narin dede* continued to live and share Sufi ideas of love, tolerance, and peace with his devotee students and created a community in which he can continue practicing Sufi living as a spiritual teacher. *Narin dede*’s focus was more pragmatic and aimed at maintaining Sufism as a living and spreading practice rather than a temporary reclamation under governmental auspices of the sites of the past.

Although his idea of gathering devotees from different religious backgrounds sounds like he carries New Age tendencies,\(^{248}\) that is not the case. Most of his devotees believe in the practice of submission to one şeyh as a spiritual guide. Narin dede is aware of what Julia Day Howell and Martin Van Bruinessen point out as “extra-ecclesial and non-denominational New Age ‘spiritualities’ that have emerged in Western societies and become popular in the last decades of the twentieth century.”\(^{249}\)

Also, he is not critical of individuals who are interested in ideas that flourished with New Age Sufism, such as “consciousness transformation and the possibility of experiencing the immanent presence of the Divine.”\(^{250}\) In Narin dede’s gatherings, I have met with a variety of devotees, seekers, and students who seek to follow Ottoman Sufi beliefs and values such as studying the Quran with a şeyh as a spiritual teacher and the practice of collective zikir forms, while also practicing ideas that flourished with New Age Sufism, such as focusing on the inner dimension of Islam rather than following the doctrines, such as performing namaz five times a day. In his gatherings, it is possible to meet with devotees who seek to practice the requirements of Islam, such as: \(^ {248}\) Hugh Talat Salman writes “Many practitioners and consumers of New-Age Sufism approach only the inner (batin) dimension of Islam. The one exception is the Bawa Muhayeddin Fellowship: in 1976, Bawa’s followers began performing ablution and reciting dhikr, then in 1981 they began to perform Salat and continued to adapt the Shari’a. As we observed, even though Inayat Khan did not explicitly practice Shari’a, he expressed it as a ‘law needed to harmonize with one’s surroundings and with one’s self within.’ Furthermore, he went on to say that Qur’an and Hadith warrant that the Shari’a is ‘meant to be subject to change, in order to suit the time.’” Hugh Talat Halman, “Sufism in the West: Islam in an Interspiritual Age,” in Voice of Islam: Voices of Change (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 191. The Quran also says “Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you.” Quran, 2:185, http://perfectquran.com/surah/al-baqarah/ayah/185.\(^ {249}\) Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, Sufism and the ‘Modern’ in Islam, 6.\(^ {250}\) Ibid.
as performing namaz or zikir regularly, as well as seekers, who, as in New Age Sufism, were interested in studying the inner dimension of Islam and chose not to practice namaz or zikir.

Narin dede seeks to organize and perform sema classes, enactments, and workshops to discharge a duty, to practice the religious codes of Sufi ritual behavior, and to show his behaviors and actions to non-devotee individuals, including tourists witnessing, observing, or participating in the performance of the ceremony in a space where boundaries between religiosity and secularity are minimized. Narin dede explains that he needs to make use of various secular spaces to create temporary sacred sites with the performance of sema ceremony and points out that in these events, devotees seek to serve each other and non-devotee participants by having discussions about faith and the meaning of life. They converse about books and recommend to each other secular and sacred books with a desire to help each other answer ontological questions. Narin dede explains how the desire to learn about Rumi’s poetry or whirling brings individuals together and guides the process of building Sufi communities.

Narin dede also explained that although he longs for the old days when devotees lived and trained together in a dergah, he believes that to create space for individuals to study Sufism, he needs to stay open to changes and adaptations and continue to organize gatherings and events to generate Sufi living by teaching and sharing his beliefs and values in more accessible sites. Although he did not explain how, he also said maybe one day he will find a way to produce a permanent space for devotees to train together night and day maintaining accessibility of individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds.
Dede Efendi House

Every year in the summer, Narin dede organizes Sufi gatherings at the Dede Efendi House (the house of Master Dede or the house of Hammamizade Ismail Dede Efendi), a historical house that functions as a museum and is located in the old, historical city of Istanbul. Since his gatherings are educational and touristic, and organized under a cultural non-profit organization, he is able to get permission to use the Dede Efendi House. In Narin dede’s workshops and gatherings, it is possible to meet devotees, seekers of Sufi knowledge, and students from different cultural, religious, and national backgrounds who are interested in studying Sufi music, poetry, and the whirling ritual. In 2011, I attended a gathering at the Dede Efendi House as an invited scholar.

I arrived at the space very early but Narin dede and his wife were present to greet me at the door and expressed their excitement about bringing together devotees and students interested in Sufi cultural beliefs and values. Narin dede’s wife said they have been organizing these gatherings for four to five years, but they still get very excited about gathering with devotees and non-devotees to share Sufi beliefs and values. Narin dede explained to me that he organized the gathering to bring together his students visiting from France, devotees and beginner devotees in Turkey, researchers, and music students studying Sufi music. Having concluded a 15-day summer whirling workshop designed for his French students, Narin dede also gathered his semazens to perform sema ceremony for his French students and beginner Turkish devotees. His aim was to create an intimate space for participants to practice and experience Sufi living in
a historical dervish house in a small room in which participants could see and hear each person in the group.

_Narin dede_ and his wife, looking fresh in their clean, modest, light-colored pants and shirts, also welcomed the guests arriving on time at the door of the historical house. Most of the guests were Turkish or French middle-class professionals in their thirties. Some were teaching dance, some were working as dancers, some were managing art schools, some were journalists. One person was a music teacher; six participants were musicians; three, including me, were researchers: and six of the male participants were _semazens_. I knew from my conversations with _Narin dede_ that there were French students participating in the summer workshop, having spent their own money to buy their plane tickets and secure accommodation in Turkey. Although I do not know the exact price, I was sure from the conversations I had with the individuals that students paid for the _sema_ workshop. As I pointed out earlier, _Narin dede_ explained to me in our discussions in his private home, the money he makes from workshops and tourist attractions covers the expenses of the group through which he provides income for his _semazens_ and maintains a home office.

The French students and some of the Turkish devotees arriving at the historical house, having recently studied Sufi music and _sema_ ceremony with _Narin dede_, lined up at the entrance patiently waiting for the _dede_ to greet them at the door by holding and kissing each other’s right hands. After everyone greeted each other, the keeper of the house along with _Narin dede_ was ready to take the group of twenty men and women on a tour of the two-floor intimate historical space of the _Dede Efendi_ House. As they walked into the space, observing the dervish objects in the house, they listened to _Narin
dede quietly, who explained how the house used to function as a tekke, in which Dede Efendi read the Quran and composed liturgical songs with other devotees of his time. Students asked questions about İsmail Dede Efendi and his training as a dervish. Narin dede talked about the Mevlevi çile training practiced in the Mevlevi Lodges during the Ottoman Empire before the lodges were locked up. He talked about dervishes’ relationship with their spiritual leaders and how İsmail dede composed music for his şeyh. Narin dede gave examples from İsmail Dede Efendi’s ilahis (Sufi liturgical songs) and explained how he trained as a Mevlevi dervish, studying Rumi’s idea of love and unity in his compositions. When students asked questions about Rumi, he positioned them on the floor and started to talk about Rumi’s spiritual journey.

For Narin dede, each moment in the house, talking about the dervish objects, listening to liturgical songs, reading Rumi’s poetry, and discussing Rumi’s life was an act of worship. This act of sharing was similar to the sohbet ritual practiced in Sufi orders, in which the spiritual teacher would talk about a Quranic verse or teachings of a Sufi mystic and would answer devotees’ questions about how to apply Rumi’s teachings to their everyday lives. Narin dede as a Mevlevi dervish was adamant about teaching Rumi’s spiritual journey to educate his students about Sufi living. He liked to talk about Rumi’s role as a Sufi şeyh rather than a poet to make his students understand the divine quality of Rumi’s works. He believed that his students visiting from Europe were familiar with Rumi’s teachings and needed to know more about his idea of devotional living. He explained how and why Turkish dervishes referred to Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi (also known as Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, or in the English-
speaking world, as Rumi) as *Mevlana* (master), explaining Rumi’s role as spiritual guide and leader.

For *Narin dede*, it was also important to explain in detail that Rumi “did not come to his theology of tolerance and inclusive spirituality by turning away from traditional Islam,” instead he produced his religious teachings “through an immersion in it [Islamic teachings]; his spiritual yearning stemmed from a radical desire to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammed and actualize his potential as a perfect Muslim (or *insan-i kamil*, meaning perfect human).”\(^{251}\) *Narin dede* explained how Rumi created his beliefs and his religious poetry through his knowledge of the Quran, the *Hadiths*, Islamic theology, and the works of Sufi mystics. As discussed in Chapter Two, he also tried to explain the fact that in Sufi culture, Rumi’s writings are not considered a product of human effort.\(^ {252}\) For *Narin dede*, it was important that his practice of poetry, music, and whirling were regarded as divinely inspired. He explained how Rumi’s words carry a heightened sense of love, peace, and compassion and the description of his idea of Himself are loaded with inspirational messages about diversity and unity.

*Narin dede*, while providing facts about Rumi’s life, also expressed his idea of annihilation in a spiritual guide as a step towards the idea of annihilation in God. He talked about Rumi and Şems, the wandering dervish Rumi met in Konya.\(^ {253}\) Students familiar with the wandering dervish knew that studying with him was the turning point in Rumi’s life and that Şems, according to Sufi sources, was recognized as eccentric and


unorthodox, filled with intense devotion for God.\textsuperscript{254} Narin dede explained how after studying with Şems, Rumi moved to a place beyond the doctrines and rules of religion and experienced a spiritual transformation so that he “became more ecstatic in his worship, expressing his love for God not only in a careful attitude in self-renunciation and control, but also through the joy of poetry, music, and meditative dance.”\textsuperscript{255} He shared Rumi’s words, saying “In my hand there was always the Koran — Now I seized the lute out of love! In my mouth there were always words of laud — Now it is poetry and quatrains, and songs {Divan 2351}.”\textsuperscript{256} For Narin dede, the sohbet in the house was an opportunity for him to experience and share Rumi’s idea of divine love and unity coming out of his relationship with Islamic knowledge and mystical practices. Narin dede talked about Rumi’s sohbets, whirling, and poetry and explained how and why since Rumi’s time dervishes always sought to move closer to God through religious rituals such as sohbets and different forms of zikir, including whirling. Performance of rites for a dervish, as Narin dede explained, is to guide the soul in its search for God.

After the sohbet, the keeper of the house took us downstairs and seated us to watch the ceremony as Narin dede and his semazens left us to prepare for sema in a private room. The whirling ritual (not the whole ceremony as in the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge), performed at the entrance of the house, an empty room filled with chairs, started with musicians taking their place on one side of the room filled with musicians’

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 163.
instruments. Then, as soon as they took their seats, semazens walked in and placed their sheepskin posts on the floor to take their seats.

During the ceremony, there was a French student, Chris, next to me who I found out was a professional dancer who lives in Paris. Wanting to talk to her after the performance, I extended my hand to introduce myself. She reached forward, introduced herself, and asked whether or not I was one of Narin dede’s students. I explained that although I was invited as a researcher, I would like to consider myself a student of him. Then, she started telling me that she had been a devotee affiliated with a spiritual teacher in Paris for three years and that she has been visiting Turkey every year with a group of students who were interested in traveling to Turkey to study Sufi teachings and the whirling ritual with Narin dede. Chris explained that for two years, she has been practicing whirling with a group of students in her studio and organized sema workshops to bring her students from France to Istanbul for Narin dede’s workshop.

Talking to Chris, I became aware of the fact that individuals who travelled to Turkey to train with Narin dede were dance students interested in exploring the meditative qualities of whirling as a dance performance. As stated by Theodore Barber, “whirling was another extraordinary way of moving, meant to induce a unique state of consciousness.” 257

Chris explained that similar to the dance teacher and mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, who studied in various Sufi tekkes and trained his dance students, she was interested in attending Sufi gatherings in Turkey and practicing whirling “to

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achieve new states of sensation or perception.”

She explained that she meditates as she whirls to Sufi liturgical songs. For Narin dede, Sufi hymns were another significant part of Sufi worship. In his workshops, he talked about Sufi music and provided examples from doctors who use Sufi music for healing their patients. As an example, he talked about cardiac surgeon Bingür Sönmez (whom he knew as a non-devotee doctor), who plays Sufi songs on the reed flute to decrease his patients’ stress. Sönmez, in an article published on Public Radio International’s website, states that “What we are doing in intensive care, we are playing Sufi music to our patients to calm them down, to make them feel much better.”

Psychotherapist Jeffrey B. Rubin explains meditation as a sanctuary from the frenetic pace of everyday life and a path towards a sense of clarity and focus about who we are and our feelings. The French dancer Chris was a non-Muslim who started to study Sufism, searching for a sense of peace through her experience with Sufi music and whirling. For Chris, aside from the meditative qualities of the whirling, it was important to study with Narin dede and to study the Quran as the source of Sufi teachings. She explained her journey with Islam, stating that she began studying whirling after she met with Narin dede at a workshop in Paris and had the desire to learn the Quran as the source of Sufi teachings. It was clear from my conversations with Chris that it was Narin dede’s ability and desire to create

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259 Conversation with a French dancer on August 4, 2011.
intimate community spaces for Sufi living that differed his idea of devotion from the Cerrahi devotees, who worked to reclaim the historical site as a dergah.

As students were sharing their thoughts and feelings, the musicians and semazens, having taken off their religious garments, including sikkes (hats representing the tombstone of their ego), tennures (white skirts), and black cloaks, came back into the room in their everyday outfits. After eating some cookies, the students one by one started to converse with Narin dede, and dede’s wife introduced me to Mert, a young devotee, who was generous in expressing his experience with Sufism. When I asked Mert about his relationship with Sufi ritual, he explained himself, saying, “I am not a dervish but I am a student of Sufism.” Most of the devotees were identifying themselves with the word student rather than dervish to stay in harmony with the law restricting the use of Sufi titles. Mert was a student who was practicing Sufism by attending sohbets and classes in different Sufi groups. He did not consider himself a dervish; however, he was content with being involved in the spiritual journey and valued his study of Sufi religious beliefs and values. Although he was a student of Sufism who was not initiated in a specific Sufi order, as he later explained, he had been attending a variety of Sufi gatherings and studying with various religious teachers before he submitted to the path of one spiritual master.

Then, Mert introduced me to another Sufi musician, Cenk, whom I knew from my conversations with the dede. Cenk was openly sharing the fact that he was a devotee training with a spiritual guide (also known to be a dede) and for him performing here with Narin dede, the musicians, semazens, and students was part of his Sufi practice.

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262 Conversation with a performer at the Dede Efendi House on August 4, 2012.
Like *Narin dede*, Cenk believed that he should support projects that mobilize Sufism in public and semi-public urban spaces in Turkey.

I have also met with *Narin dede’s semazens*, comprised of seekers and devotees who study Sufi poetry, music, and rituals while working in other professions. There were *semazens* in the ensemble who were teachers and lawyers who have made Sufi gatherings part of their modern urban living by performing and sharing *sema* ceremony. One of *Narin dede’s semazens*, Yiğit, expressed, “he comes from a very Kemalist family, who regard Sufi tarikats as Islamic extremists. If it wasn’t for studying Sufi music and whirling with *Narin dede*, I might have never learned about Sufism as an Islamic devotion.” Then, he said he attended gatherings and trained with another spiritual leader while he continued to train with *Narin dede*. Yiğit explained that after studying *sema* with *Narin dede*, he started to look for Sufi groups in which he could regularly attend *sohbets*. He found a spiritual leader who organized *sohbets* every week, in which devotees study Sufi teachings and talk about how to embody Islamic teachings and Sufi beliefs and values while continuing their social obligations in everyday life. Then, Yiğit continued to meet with him regularly for spiritual guidance. Yiğit explained, while studying *sema* with *Narin dede*, he experienced an inspiration to practice religion as a secular individual.

The gathering lasted for four hours. *Narin dede*, devotees, and students like the devotees at the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge used the historical house much like they would their own homes. Throughout the gathering, devotees served each other and the students by carrying food from the kitchen, and serving tea, fruit juice, and water. Participants

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263 Conversation with Yiğit at the *Dede Efendi* House.
took each other’s contact information to share details about Sufi events and gatherings in Turkey and France. What brought these individuals together was the space produced for the devotees and non-devotees to experience and generate Sufi living in a culture center, once the house of a Mevlevi dede. Although Narin dede commodifies sema ceremony by organizing and performing these events, his gatherings carry spiritual meaning for performers and participants and allow Narin dede and devotees to produce temporary community spaces to practice Sufi living.

**Narin dede at the Four Seasons Hotel**

Aside from the educational gatherings that Narin dede organizes at the Dede Efendi, he also organizes sema performances for non-devotee tourists. Publicizing sema ceremony, he gets invitations from formal gatherings and organized events to perform for tourists. In 2011, I attended a large business meeting/conference at one of the most exclusive hotels in Istanbul — The Four Seasons. My mother, who works in the tourism industry, informed her co-workers about my research so that some of them started to ask whether or not I would give a small presentation before and after the performances of sema ceremony for entrepreneurs and their family members visiting Turkey for business conferences. This was a great opportunity for me. I was going to meet more Sufi performance groups, tourist guides, and tourists. I said “yes” and attended quite a few meetings in 2011. In one of the presentations, Narin dede and his semazens were present to perform sema ceremony. The tourist organization that gathered Narin dede, his group, and me to serve at this conference arranged a private room for the semazens to get ready for the performance of the ceremony. While waiting for the semazens to get ready, I conversed with the coordinator, Ayşe, about the organization of sema
performances and the groups that they work with. Ayşe informed me that they “work with Narin dede and his group to share a more religious version of the ceremony.”  

It was true that Narin dede, even when he needed to create a shorter version of the ceremony for specific events such as business meetings, was making sure that he either vocalizes Quranic verses himself or uses recorded ilahis and prayers to preserve the religious value of the ceremony. In our conversations at his house, dede explained he was “attending to a variety of events with his group, such as a music program on an Italian TV channel, conferences, and business meetings” that require the adaptation of the ceremony according to the needs of the events. These adaptations, according to dede, include performing a shorter version of the ceremony by cutting musical compositions. While Narin dede expressed the fact that he did not like cutting ilahis, he found it necessary to be flexible about changing and transforming the structure of the ceremony for the organizing tourist agencies that promote sema performance groups. Narin dede did not want to go against such adaptations because he did not want non-devotee trained dancers occupying cultural centers, museums, and hotels to reenact sema. Narin dede stated that even when enacted as a modified or shortened version, the ritual still carries spiritual meaning. He said that Rumi practiced whirling individually on the streets and in private homes without any structure or form. It is true that although Mevlevi sema was stylized by Rumi’s son Sultan Veled and took its final form with the organization of Sultan Veled’s grandson, pir Adel Chelebi, the whirling, during Rumi’s time, according to Turkish historian Metin And, was performed “anytime and any

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264 Conversation with the coordinator of the business meeting on June 4, 2011.
265 Conversation with Narin dede on July 25, 2012.
place” to connect the dervish’s mind to the infinite, initiating an emotional relationship between human being and god. Walter Feldman states that during the Ottoman Empire, *sema* was performed in public spaces and “was conceived of both as a ritual which would benefit the participants and as a spiritual concert which would spread spiritual benefit among the audience as well.” For Mevlevi devotees, the experience of *sema* ceremony, with its rigid and aesthetic structure, was not about the shape and the beauty of their movements. Devotees were interested in the meditative state and spiritual progress they were able to experience through whirling.

In *Narin dede*’s modified version performed at the business meeting at the hotel, the discipline, commitment, and devotedness were visible in *semazens*’ movements in relation to the presence of their spiritual leader. Although the ceremony was reduced in length and prayers were eliminated, for *Narin dede* and the devotee *semazens*, it was a religious ceremony adapted for a secular space. The ceremony was performed in a large dining room of the hotel. Members of the audience were sitting at large round tables. The waiters were serving them food and drinks. The audience was comprised of well-off individuals who worked for a luxury car company. After listening to my presentation about the ceremony, in which I discussed how and why each movement is performed to experience divine meaning, they watched the ceremony sitting at the tables, but did not eat or drink during the performance. It was as if they were in church listening respectfully to a priest as they watched the *semazens* patiently from beginning

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266 Halman, *Mevlana and the Whirling Dervishes*, 34.
to end. The ceremony ended. Narin dede and the semazens left the dining room. The audience members had quite a few questions for me as the presenter. Most of them, having read about Turkey, were curious about legal restrictions imposed on Sufi groups and devotees’ current way of living. I informed them that there are a variety of individuals who practice Sufism in Turkey today. However, due to legal restrictions, most groups discontinued their way of living and worshipping together in a dergah.

Two of the female audience members were genuinely interested in discussing issues such as democracy and freedom of religious groups in Turkey. One of the female entrepreneurs wanted to converse personally after the question and answer session. Unfortunately, she said, “we hear the negative side of Islam on U.S. TV channels, ignoring the fact that as in every religion, in Islam, there are devotees who practice love as their dogma.”

We exchanged email addresses and I promised to advise her about Sufi books. Sema ceremony inspired the audience members to ask questions about Islam, Sufism, and Turkey. For the audience, the space they occupied remained probably no more than a dining room, but for Narin dede, it was a temporary semahane.

In the Dede Efendi House and The Four Seasons Hotel, as I examine the embodied dynamics supporting Sufi space production, I have come to witness how any space Narin dede and his devotees and guests occupy is what De Certeau identifies as “practiced place.” For Narin dede any space is in the process of transformation when his semazens start to whirl or when he and his students discuss Sufi teachings. With their intimate prayers, classes, workshops, and rituals, devotees have the ability to...

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268 Conversation with an entrepreneur on June 4, 2011.
change and make sense of the spaces they occupy. As in Lefebvre’s analysis on the production of space, through labor, devotees make their beliefs tangible. Although *Narin dede* could not yet fully create what Wolper identifies as Sufi hospices that were active in the late thirteenth century and the late fourteenth century, in which dervishes lived and trained together and provided accommodation for their visitors and fed the poor, *dede* works hard to make sure he provides temporary centers “for communal activities, including prayer, study, discussion, conversation with visitors, and sometimes the performance of sama.”

*Narin dede’s* case shows us that although the government forced religious organizations, “into the private sphere of people’s lives,” devotees with their embodied acts create environments in which they practice and share their Islamic beliefs and values and produce what Pena calls their symbolic “devotional capital.”

These religious actors (individuals who devise, organize, create, and/or perform Sufi beliefs and values in secular and religious spaces for public), with their embodied acts, including the everyday actions, rituals, and events, mobilize and empower modern urban Sufi living in a variety of spaces in Turkey. For *Narin dede*, the most important aspect of this mobilization is the translation of religious values through performance for the secular and non-devotee public. This brings us to Jürgen Habermas’ discussion of religion in the public sphere, which questions religious arguments claiming space in the public sphere due to their potential to weaken democratic values such as social egalitarianism. Although Habermas does not talk about the Turkish context, his ideas

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open a lens through which I examine the social process and public life in Turkey. Habermas later modified his early views, reconsidering the public articulation of a religious voice, stating that religious argument must enter the public sphere “in translation.” By translation, he means that the public articulation and expression of religious beliefs and values should not be about imposing a set of doctrinal beliefs and values on non-religious citizens or people from other religions. The idea of religion entering the public sphere in translation informs how and why *Narin dede* seeks to bring Sufi religious teachings and practices to the public in translation as performance.

Religious ideas, according to Habermas, should be offered to the public in a reasonable and accessible language. Habermas no longer insists on the idea that presumes western cultures grow increasingly secular and engages with “the question of how religions can constructively participate in political processes within democratic nation states.”

*Narin dede* believes that embodiment of Rumi’s beliefs and values as well as their performance of poetry and whirling alter the strictly doctrinal and confrontational recognition of Sufi orders and fanatical Islam. Considering the fear of religious groups limiting secular Turks’ freedom of choice and speech in Turkey, Sufi religious events organized simultaneously as worship and educational activity make accessible the

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egalitarian aspects of Sufi cultural beliefs and values such as the ideas of love, unity, peace, freedom, and rapture.

Comparing my ongoing conversations with dedes, şeyhs, and Sufi artists I met along the way (who practice sema as tourist attraction), I understand that some devotees make space for their Sufi living through the practice of Sufi arts and rituals in public and that Narin dede is one of them. As a Sufi scholar, artist, and semazen, Narin dede stated that he chose to live his religious role as a teacher and artist devoted to sharing Sufi cultural beliefs and values. Training with his grandfather and his devotee friends who were Sufi religious musicians and artists, Narin dede studied to be a devotee and a religious artist who trains secular devotees in religious music, poetry, and arts in his private home, while organizing religious/community gatherings, classes, and performances in public spaces. Narin dede embodied mystical, artistic, and scholarly roles to create community spaces for his and other followers’ devotional activities.

Conclusion

The case studies discussed in this chapter showed how devotees create spaces for Sufi living, despite the legal act prohibiting Sufi space production. While the devotees at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke legalize their activities as a foundation and secularize Sema ceremony as tourist attraction to use the historical tekke as a space for worship, the devotees in the Yenikapı Mevlevi Lodge participate in and organize temporary events that introduce the Mevlevi culture to individuals interested in cultural events about Sufism. Narin dede, on the other hand, commodifies Sufi practices as classes, tourist attraction, and workshops to make space for his devotional living and to share Sufi beliefs and values with devotees and non-devotees. For these individuals,
performing *sema* ceremony has become a social act as well as a devotional act in the public urban life of Turkey because by performing *sema* in public, they generate and transmit their religious beliefs and values.

These gatherings and events also play a significant role in communicating an alternative, perhaps more positive, aspect of Islam to secular Turks like the *semazen* Yiğit. As Nicholas Birch states, “Many secular Turks used to respond to the word *tarikat* with a grimace of distaste… however, since the 1990s, secular fears have increasingly centered on political Islam.” With the increase of the popular enactments of *Mevlevi* rituals, devotees seek to show Sufism as a moderate alternative for secular-minded Turks. These spaces and events make Sufi teaching and way of living accessible to secular individuals who might not get the chance to meet a *Mevlevi* mentor (*şeyh*).

From my experience, it is not easy to search for and find a *Mevlevi* mentor due to legal restrictions in Turkey. However, the gatherings and events discussed in this chapter open up a space for individuals to learn about Sufi beliefs and values and meet devotees affiliated with Sufi spiritual teachers.

Embodying secular and religious values, devotees in the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* secure a legal site for themselves to practice Sufi living. Devotees use the *tekke* as a worship space by allowing tourists to witness their devotional acts. However, when compared to Saygün dede’s and Narin dede’s gatherings, the devotees in the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* are more formal and less about sharing Sufi beliefs and values with non-devotees. While the organization of the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* distances tourists from the ritual acts, the *semahane* at the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge and the actions and

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interactions of devotees allow audience members to become part of the event. The gathering at the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge is more educational when compared to the gathering at the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke. Devotees of Saygin dede gathered to introduce the Mevlevi culture to the audience as part of Istanbul European Capital of Culture 2010 organized events but also used the space as their temporary home, acting as if the audience members were their guests. Narin dede’s gathering offered even more intimacy and sharing when compared to the use of space and organization of the gatherings in the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke and the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge by making sure that he created a space in which people from different religions learned about Sufi culture and conversed with devotees, creating networks that enable the mobilization of Sufi living. As I discussed in each case study, while the use of various public or semi-public spaces informs how devotees perform Sufi living and audiences experience Sufi beliefs and values, the embodied acts of devotees and audience members also inform the generation of Sufi living as a synthesis of secular and religious values. As a result of religious, educational, and touristic acts, Sufi living continues to transform, becoming more and more multifaceted and open to change. Devotees continue to seek legal spaces and ways to generate Sufi living, while longing for a permanent space in which they can regularly live and train together.
Chapter Four

A Sufi Master and His Devotees:

Converting an Apartment Building and a Wooden House into Dergahs

This chapter focuses on the practice of Sufi living in an underground Sufi order in Istanbul. I discuss how devotees maintain a permanent space to live and train together with their şeyh as in Ottoman Sufi orders and generate Sufi living as a lifetime path designed for each individual’s social and religious needs. I examine how devotees embody Sufi teachings by adapting and modifying Sufi practices of Ottoman Sufi dergahs, such as serving a şeyh and performing zikir. With devotees’ embodied acts, Sufi living is constantly shifting as they perform their everyday rituals and ceremonies, and as they blend their actions in the dergah with their actions outside of the dergah. While individuals discussed in Chapter Three mobilize Sufi living by creating temporary spaces and generating and transmitting Sufi knowledge for the secular public by performing and teaching Mevlevi Sema ceremony, devotees of the underground order discussed in this chapter mobilize Sufi living by producing a permanent space in which they adapt, modify, and/or shift Ottoman Sufi practices to the way of life in contemporary Turkey. With this case study, I claim that each devotee’s labor or “devotional labor”275 — including maintenance and use of various spaces, practice of rituals and everyday life, organization of community/religious gatherings and rituals, and the embodiment of God’s attributes through silent and collective zikir — mobilize Sufism as a way of living that is in agreement with Ottoman Sufi beliefs and values and in harmony with the secular values of the Turkish state.

275 Peña, Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe, 10, 149-150.
Underground Sufi Living

As I continued to attend gatherings throughout 2011, searching for a Sufi order that continues Ottoman Sufi practices, I was keen on going beyond the scholarship that deemed Sufism an old-fashioned Islamic practice suitable for rural life yet unsuitable for educated urban individuals who embody ideas such as free will, critical thinking, and rational choice. Throughout my fieldwork, I sought to find a private Sufi lodge in Istanbul in which devotees lived and trained together with a şeyh whose way of living undermined such generalizations. In July 2011, Canan Hanım, a publicist I met through my father’s business, offered to introduce me to Kerim Bey, another businessman, whom she believed could help me get in touch with devotees of Sufi orders whose activities were not as accessible and open to the public as the groups discussed in Chapter Three. When I explained to Kerim Bey that I had attended a variety of gatherings looking to meet with a mürşit recognized as continuing the Ottoman Sufi way of living in a dergah, devoted to God’s unity, dedicated to human rights, and in support of both religious and secular education, he said I should meet Efendi (meaning master, or, as his devotees refer to him, Efendim, meaning my master).

Efendi’s devotees consistently live and train together in an apartment building converted into a dergah while regularly participating in work activities in secular environments and the capitalist social life experience in Istanbul. Although they are not completely secretive, I refer to the group as an underground Sufi order because the şeyh,

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dedes, dervishes, and devotees choose not to reveal their place of worship or their way of living and training in a dergah to their co-workers and in certain cases family members and friends. It is also important to make clear once again that the government is aware of the practices of underground Sufi orders and congregations but does not interfere with their activities as long as they do not act openly as Sufi orders. Also, although I have come across newspaper articles and TV programs about a variety of Sufi orders and congregations in Turkey such as the Halveti Cerrahi order (whose şeyh has become a public figure), I have not come across any articles produced about Efendi, his Sufi order, or their ritual practices. Although the government is aware of the perpetuation of Sufi religious practices and even though the underground order has also legalized itself as a civil society organization, the legal code has not changed; thus, there is still pressure on Sufi devotees to keep their collective living and training hidden. As discussed above, the şeyh and devotees prefer not to announce their place of worship (private house and apartment building converted into dergahs) or their way of living (including the revelation of their titles).277 Most of the devotees specifically choose not to inform their parents, co-workers, or friends that they are affiliated with a şeyh; however, their embodiment of Sufi teachings and practices in their dergah spaces keeps them connected to their Sufi identity when they participate in secular work and family activities and interact with non-devotees in everyday life.

Their seclusion does not imply that the devotees are withdrawn from the activities of the material world. Instead, the şeyh guides his devotees to find a balance

277 As I did in the previous chapter, in order to respect their necessity of remaining secluded, I will not reveal the identities of the devotees while analyzing their everyday lives. Instead, I will give alternative names for the members and even for the private locations where I gathered with them.
between their way of living (training) in the *dergah* and their way of living outside of the *dergah* (at work, home, or other social settings) in the urban environment of Istanbul. Compared to the Halveti Cerrahi order that uses the historical *tekke* for worship practices, *Saygin dede* taking part in government-sponsored events to practice their rituals in the Mevlevi lodge, and *Narin dede* using *Dede Efendi* House for Sufi gatherings, classes, and workshops, *Efendi*’s group choose to stay away from government-related spaces and events to create a permanent space for Sufi living. To maintain a permanent space for living, senior dervishes of the group, who work at banks, hospitals, schools, or own small food stores and pharmacies, provide financial support to their *dergahs* and make sure that low-income devotees receive the basic necessities, such as food and medicine.

Despite economic differences, *Efendi* seeks to create an egalitarian environment in the *dergah* by making sure that each devotee serves their spiritual siblings. Whether a devotee is a highly educated upper-middle-class businessmen owning factories or a low-income clerk who only makes 800 Turkish liras (around 200 pounds) a month, both are responsible for a variety of tasks, such as serving tea to their *Efendi* and each other or carrying chairs in the gatherings. The *şeyh*, while regarding each devotee as a unique character affected by different personal, cultural, social, religious, and economic backgrounds, is also adamant about reminding each devotee about the idea of unity as manyness of one reality. *Efendi* believes that each human being is different, yet united in God. His respect for difference is visible since his devotees come from different religions, sects, and groups (including Sunnis, Shiis, Alevis, Jews, and Christians) and different national and cultural backgrounds (including Turkish, British, Italian, Arab,
American, and Bulgarian). Efendi once said that each person is very different as it is in life and added: “Here we experience the manyness of one reality [God]. Our interactions with each other in the dergah are part of the training we pursue to respect each other’s differences in life.”278 Efendi was guiding his devotees to perceive the dergah as their life school in which devotees practice nefs training, experience divine meaning, and prepare for the challenges of living in the material world (meaning devotees’ practice of everyday life, actions, and interactions outside of the dergah spaces). The dergah spaces, according to Efendi, are the life schools in which devotees train to experience the material world as the space of divine meaning.

The resident building and the wooden house transform with devotees’ embodied acts. With devotees’ actions, the resident dergah becomes a Sufi hospice and the wooden house turns into a Sufi tekke, both open and active as they used to be during the Ottoman Empire. The building and the house are devotees’ “practiced places” open to transformation.279 They constantly transform their spaces to live and train together. Devotees perceive the building and the house (although both lack the architectural design and the religious symbols of the historical Sufi tekke buildings) as sacred as non-Sufi Muslims, Jews, or Christians perceive their mosques, churches, and synagogues. Devotees’ commitment to produce permanent sacred spaces shows how they perceive their practiced places vital to continuing to live and train together.

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278 Conversation with a devotee on November 5, 2012.
279 De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 117.
Lefebvre’s critical views about the vitality of the sacred space moved my analysis on Sufi living further by providing the necessary enquiries about the relationship between space as the material and the sacred beliefs and values as spiritual.

What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? What would remain of a religious ideology—the Judeo-Christian one, say—if it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle?²⁸⁰

Devotees value and maintain their materials such as a building or an old house to preserve their devotional living in Turkey. Just like Christians relate to their churches and Muslims to their mosques to make their beliefs and values tangible, devotees regard their resident building and wooden house as places where they are able to shape their devotional living. However, while non-Sufi Muslims, Jews, and Christians who visit their sacred sites regularly to pray and meditate, do not spend much time in their mosques unless they are imams, priests, or rabbis, devotees believe that their spaces are more than a sacred site for praying and meditating. They preserve their material spaces to generate a Sufi life school, in which they live and train together. Therefore, their material space is more than an embodiment of a religious ideology or a sacred site that is open for prayers and ceremonial visits. Devotees in the case of the underground order value their resident dergah as a “practiced place” that is in constant transformation with devotees’ labor, who organize the rooms for accommodation, ceremonies, classes,

²⁸⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 44.
sohbets, meditation, and prayers. For devotees, their sacred space functions simultaneously as a house, school, community center, as well as a sanctuary. Therefore, it requires constant workforce. It is this idea of sacred space production that illuminates how Sufi living is generated and shaped through “performative actions” of the devotees who seek to “produce a culturally meaningful environment”\textsuperscript{281} that help devotees believe that with their embodied acts, using their labor, they have the ability to use their spaces in a variety of ways and preserve their way of living without the government’s financial support.

The idea of producing and experiencing the dergah as life school allows female devotees to perceive Islam as a discursive tradition that is open to change and interpretation. While most of the female devotees are not veiled, there are small number of veiled female devotees as well. Although they all study the Quran, most of them focus on the inner dimension of Islam. Not veiled and veiled female devotees live side by side and discuss their ideas about the rules and principles in Islam without anyone criticizing the other. The idea of the dergah as a school encourages female devotees to study, read, and do research about their beliefs and values. Also, there are great number of female devotees, who are either graduate students or Ph.D.s, who spend time in the dergah to share their knowledge with less educated female siblings by tutoring them on various subjects such as foreign languages, grammar, history, music, and poetry. In the following sections, I will further explain how female devotees experience the dergah as a space where they can practice Sufi teachings and rituals freely without having to confront male oppression.

**Dergah as a “Practiced Place:” Home, School, and Community and Worship Center**

In her study of Guadalupan devotion, Peña says that “individual acts combined with collective efforts such as singing and praying make space sacred.”

Individual acts “forge ties among devotees, create networks that persist long after the devotional act is completed.”

Individuals pursue “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.”

The dergahs, as the şeyh explains, are life schools as well as sacred houses and community centers in which devotees train to embody divine meaning and maintain their spaces to continue to generate Sufi living. Dergah spaces, while providing the devotees a level of seclusion within the material world and allowing them to practice their Sufi living with their şeyh and spiritual siblings, also prepare their minds and bodies for the actions and interactions in the secular social life of Turkey.

Şeyhs and devotees work hard to establish dergahs to function as sacred houses, schools, and community centers. The group maintains spaces in different cities and countries and calls their spaces by the neighborhoods and cities in which they are located. In my analysis, I call the first urban dergah space (where I spent most of my time) the “resident dergah” due to its location and function as a city apartment building (where devotees live) in a more developed urban neighborhood, and the second urban space as the “wooden dergah” due to its construction as an old wooden house and location in a neglected urban neighborhood (where devotees organize collective and

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283 Ibid.

The şeyh has a private room in both spaces, where he receives his devotees for private or group sohbets from morning to late at night.

Both spaces are very small. Due to legal restrictions and the absence of financial support from the government, devotees have developed ways of living, walking, serving, praying, studying, organizing gatherings, and performing rituals in the small dergah spaces. The şeyh organizes the use of the dergahs according to the needs of his devotees (including students, dervishes, and dedes, meaning senior dervishes). If a devotee were to stay in the resident dergah, as invited by the şeyh, s/he would reside in a room shared with other devotees. Certain rooms are designed to accommodate three to six devotees, while other rooms are designed to accommodate only one devotee; however, none of these arrangements are designed to be permanent. According to the spiritual training and social needs of each student, the conditions of everyday living may change. Some continue to stay in multiple-bed dorms, while others live in a room with a single bed. The living conditions change for the needs of the devotees’ practice, such as when the şeyh asks a devotee to perform meditation retreats, when a devotee is writing his/her thesis, or when devotees from other cities and countries come to stay as guests in the resident dergah. There is constant transformation in the living spaces to meet devotees’ and guests’ needs. Although male and female devotees share flats, bathrooms, kitchens, and living rooms, they sleep in separate rooms.

In the resident dergah, devotees perform service as part of their training; interact with each other from morning to night; perform rituals; make music; read religious poetry; arrange community gatherings to advise each other on various religious and societal issues (taking both the role of performer and audience); organize sohbets to
discuss Sufi teachings; and as mentioned above create classes to help each other on different topics such as studying foreign languages, using the computer, playing musical instruments, etc. Devotees continuously guide one another through which they improve their religious and social knowledge and experience. In the resident dergah, the devotional and material activities occur simultaneously in one room. While one devotee reads the Quran, another devotee deals with searching for a job online. There were times, when Ayşe, one of the devotees, meditated; Ceren, another devotee, a journalist, wrote articles. The şeyh believes that to create a way of living that is a synthesis of religious and material values, devotees should use the resident dergah as their home in which they can study and practice their material life responsibilities aside from the time they pray and meditate.

The wooden dergah (the wooden house), on the other hand, is used for collective zikir gatherings and has very small rooms sized five to eleven square meters (the semahane and şeyh’s room being the only large rooms), covered with rugs and with every corner filled with devotees’ religious property, such as Sufi music instruments, prayers written on framed papers, and tespihs (rosaries or prayer beads) hanging on walls. Also, the four-floor wooden house is renovated, designed, and organized by the devotees according to the needs of the night of the zikir gatherings to accommodate the large number of participants. The first floor, the entrance, is where the devotees walk in and hand their shoes to a male devotee, who welcomes the devotees and organizes the shoes in a small room equipped with shoe racks right by the front door. The second floor has two doors. As you walk up the stairs, you see a door on the right side that opens to a ten-foot corridor that connects the kitchen to another small room in which
female devotees eat meals, chat, pray, and perform zikir. This small room has a large window that connects the room to the main section of the semahane. On the other side of the stairs, there is the main room of the semahane in which male devotees perform the collective zikir ceremony. Male and female devotees have separate sections for the practice of zikir as in the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke; however, unlike the Cerrahi female devotees participating in zikir silently and without movement, Efendi’s female devotees have spaces where they can perform the movements of zikir and vocalize God’s names along with male devotees.

On the third floor, there is a four-square-meter hall. On the right side of the hall, there is a door opening to the room of the şeyh, and on the left, another small kitchen-like space where male devotees serve tea. This small tearoom connects the female devotees to the small upper balcony section of the semahane, also created for female devotees’ zikir practices. The fourth floor is also a very small hall in which male devotees sit, eat, chat, and pray. Both the male and female devotees occupy each other’s spaces when necessary, to serve, or when there is sohbet or meşk after the performance of zikir. Performing service, devotees move around the space with caution, especially when sitting, standing, moving their arms, walking, and serving tea, to avoid causing any accidents in such a small space. Some nights the wooden dergah holds around one hundred people, especially when the şeyh has devotees and devotee guests visiting from other Turkish cities and other countries.
Efendi as Poet, Composer, Father, and Teacher Sacralizing the Spaces and Mobilizing Sufi Living

Efendi is the leader and mürşit (teacher) of the group. His background plays an important role in creating Sufi living that is a synthesis of secular and religious values. The şeyh, raised in a Sufi family that valued and practiced poetry and music, pursued his education at a liberal arts college in Turkey. As a young devotee, he studied western and eastern scientific knowledge as part of his education. After completing his degree, he traveled to Egypt, Iran, and India to receive religious education. Training in a Sufi order and receiving his şeyh’s permission to initiate a Sufi order, he began to train students in his private home in Turkey. In the 1990s, Efendi and his initial group of students organized a Sufi order that believed in practicing Sufism as a discursive tradition that brings people together to live under the discipline of a Sufi master and his way of life. Devotees of the secluded order follow the guidance of their şeyh by living together with him and organizing a variety of religious/community gatherings, such as sohbets, meşks (classes), zikir gatherings, and courses on Sufi religious teachings and other religious texts. Since Sufi orders are named after their founder (pir) and the authority of Sufi teachers is based on their ability to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad as the source of all Sufi lineages, the devotees of the secluded order seek to carry on the classical Sufi tradition of the silsile (or silsila, an Arabic word for chain or genealogy) from Ahmed-Al Rifai, a well-known religious leader, recognized as the fifteenth descendant of Hüseyin Bin Ali (a member of the household of Prophet Muhammad). Sheikh Ahmed-Al Rifai’s lineage claims its relation to the Prophet both
through his father and mother’s families. When şeyh Ahmad Al-Rifai was twenty years old, his şeyh granted him an authorization to initiate a Sufi order. The devotees recognize Efendi as the highest living spiritual teacher in the hierarchal order of the silsile, although he is not the only şeyh inside and outside of Turkey continuing Ahmad Al-Rifai’s teachings. To explain the significance of the silsile, it is important to point out that as explained in the Encyclopedia of Islam, “the silsila reaches back from one’s own teacher up to the Prophet, with whom all tarikat [paths or orders] claim to have originated. A Sufi’s silsile is his badge of identity and source of legitimation.” With an initiation promising obedience to the şeyh, some devotees receive permission to practice the path as a dervish, while others train in the dergah as his students (mürits). The şeyh may also appoint his devotees as his halifes, which means authorizing his disciples as successors of Prophet Muhammed to teach others.

As discussed in Chapter Two, devotees perceive their relationship to the şeyh as the key to practicing Sufi living. As discussed by Pnina Werbner, “The path is a complex and dangerous one, in which the spiritual guidance of an exemplary Sufi teacher who has undergone this journey is essential.” Devotees believe that their şeyh had gone through nefs training and reached the level of insan-ı kamil (the mature person who is equipped with divine qualities). Devotees study with Efendi as their master believing that he has divine qualities and that he is constantly observing them whether

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287 Pnina Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” Cultural Anthropology 11, no. 3 (1996), 321.
he is physically there or not. He is aware of how the duties are performed inside and outside the *dergah* and continues to give his devotees other duties as part of their training. Devotees perform what is offered by their *şeyh* as God offers it. Ian Richard Netton describes that “while the truly humble Sufi Shaykh [*şeyh*] would never, under any circumstances, compare himself to the Deity, nonetheless his presence in the Order or house is a sign of a greater Authority. Obedience to the Shaykh or Master is obedience to God.” Netton states that “because of the difficulties and temptations of the Sufi path, a master is absolutely essential for the Sufi.” Devotees train with *Efendi*, perceiving his physical and spiritual presence as the main component of Sufi devotion. In the everyday life of the students in the secluded order, the master guides the seekers through the understanding and awareness of the levels of their *nefs*.

Devotees also perceive their *şeyh* as a father in the sense that he guides his devotees in their personal health, work, and family matters as they train in the *dergah*. If a devotee is sick, *Efendi* makes sure that s/he gets the necessary treatment and informs other devotees to take care of their spiritual siblings by finding a doctor, cooking for him/her, or keeping tabs on his/her well being. If a devotee needs a job or wants to go on to study in graduate school, *Efendi* is there to encourage the devotee to work and make sure that s/he gets the necessary guidance from another devotee who has connections with applicable businesses or has already completed his/her education. Because of the wisdom, depth, and the impact of *Efendi*’s words and actions, devotees submit their hearts to him as their spiritual *baba* (father) and teacher.

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289 Ibid.
For devotees, Efendi is also a poet and composer because he composes music and writes religious poetry to share his spiritual journey with his devotees. The şeyh guides his devotees to study liturgical songs that are created by various Sufi mystics. These songs are perceived as divinely inspired, informing devotees about various mystics’ ideas and experiences about Sufi living. Religious poetry and music is believed to enhance divine meaning; therefore, devotees study their şeyh’s compositions, along with other Sufi masters’ work, in meşks (meaning classes), which we will discuss further in this chapter.

Despite legal restrictions imposed on Sufi orders, Efendi’s presence inspires devotees to come together to “develop, preserve, sanctify, and connect not only spaces but also histories and traditions.”

Devotees, as guided by their Efendi, seek to connect to beliefs and values that were developed in Ottoman Sufi orders, perceiving tradition as practical, processual, and developmental that is open to the changes and adaptations for each individual devotee’s needs as lower-class and middle-class urban individuals who work in a variety of jobs and professions as doctors, pharmacists, teachers, academics, artists, businessmen, and clerks. Efendi offers each devotee training models that suit their needs as Turkish professionals to deal with the rhythms of contemporary capitalist urban social experience that challenge the physical, social, and psychological state of human beings. As guided by their şeyh, devotees modify Sufi teachings and practices to cope with legal, social, and economic restrictions and mobilize Sufi living within the confines of what they call material, secular, and religious biases of Turkish society. Coperforming everyday life and rituals with the devotees of the secluded Sufi group on

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and off in 2011, 2012, and 2013, I examine how the şeyh guides his devotees to create Sufi living through the idea of nefs (self or soul) training in which he teaches his devotees to embrace God’s unity and respect and support each other’s ideas and needs inside and outside of their sacred spaces.

The members of the secluded order consist of a large number of devotees who have been searching for their spiritual path and role in the material world. Each practitioner has a different reason or motive for submitting their heart to their şeyh. Some devotees arrive in need of love, togetherness, guidance about family problems, or to learn Sufi poetry and music, but the most common drive is to find answers to ontological questions to become aware of who they are and how to live in peace. Nur, a dervish of Efendi, has said devotees come with one or two motives and stay because they discover higher purposes. Nur says she experienced more peace than she expected and she learned more from her şeyh and spiritual siblings about human interaction than she learned in her material everyday life. Some devotees say they are more active in regard to arts, reading, traveling, dancing, and singing. They say they learn to respect each individual’s ideas and needs and create healthier relationships with their family, friends, and coworkers. They learn how to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Most importantly, as Nur said, she learned how and why to love humanity by training with her Efendi and spiritual siblings in the dergah.

The students arrive in the world of Sufi living from the individualistic lifestyles of modern social life. Because teslimiyet (submission) to the şeyh is a challenging practice, the students believe that one is able to continue the path by only truly believing in a şeyh’s sincere devoutness to God. As discussed in Chapter Three, it is common for
practitioners of Sufi living to visit different orders and attend a number of meetings, classes, and workshops before finding a şeyh to whom they will dedicate themselves. They all believe in kader (fate) or God’s fortune and do not initiate in a şeyh’s path until they find a master that they admire, trust, and can follow with ultimate love and devotion. Devotees like to share with one another their stories about finding their şeyh, which they perceive as their fortune in discovering their path in life.

I would like to give a brief account of the events that led me to meeting with the şeyh of the secluded order that I shared with the devotees, who perceived my story as an important aspect of Sufi journey. I explained to them (as discussed in Chapter Three) that one day Selin, a friend, who is a historian in Turkey, contacted me to inform me that someone she met at a Sufi music concert took her to a Sufi lodge, where she witnessed the performance of a zikir ceremony. Selin explained to me that the female and male dervishes lived in the same building with their şeyh. When Selin informed me that she met dervishes who lived together with their şeyh, I was excited to return to Turkey for more field research. However, it took months before I had the opportunity to meet the şeyh because Selin lost the contact details of the devotee she met at the concert and had no recollection of the location of the dergah. Later, a co-worker of my father’s offered to introduce me to a businessman she knew well who had contacts with various Sufi groups in Turkey. In the meetings with the businessman, after articulating names of şeyhs I had already met, the businessman decided to introduce me to a şeyh recognized for his embodiment of the Sufi idea of unity, application of nefs training, and devotional zikir gatherings in his private dergah. In the evening of the day I met

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291 The businessman grew up in a religious neighborhood and attended private religious gatherings of a Sufi group with his father.
with the şeyh and had a two-hour discussion on Sufism and my research, I also met with my historian friend, Selin, who coincidentally called to invite me to dinner. I told her that I finally had the chance to meet with a şeyh who informed me that his devotees live with him in his lodge. After Selin and I exchanged information about the şeyh she met months ago and the şeyh I met on that day, we realized that we had both met the same person. The şeyh I met before coming to meet Selin was the same person that she had met months ago when I was in New York. When I finished telling this story to the devotees, Nur said this was not a rastlanti (coincidence), but kismet (God’s fortune) coming directly from God. Nur informed me that the idea of God’s unity meant that all comes from God. Defne, another dervish, explained that according to Sufi belief, there are no rastlants. Devotees believe that all circumstances in life are to be dealt with as offers from God. According to devotees, we come together to practice Sufi living under the guidance of the same şeyh because this is God’s giving. After this sharing, a sense of bonding occurred between me and the devotees who listened to my journey.

**Owning and Transforming the Space into a Dergah: Devotees Train Through Service**

Students participate in Sufi living after articulating to the şeyh their desire to study Sufi teachings and practices and asking for permission to attend gatherings. These students participate in Sufi living by attending gatherings and helping the service of dervishes, who generate Sufi living with their embodiment of divine meaning. Some students receive additional recognition when they receive a tespih (rosary or prayer bead) that is sanctified with şeyhs’ prayers. The şeyh gives tespihs to the students he thinks are ready to start their meditation on God by performing silent zikir — repeating
God’s names as they count the beads on their rosary (referred to as *tespih çekmek*). Therefore, the practice of *tespih çekmek* is a significant part of a Sufi devotee’s life through which s/he performs individual meditation on God’s names. These students receive agency by obtaining texts to study individually and to discuss with the *şeyh*. Then there are other individuals who upon the completion of their theoretical and practical training receive initiation through a promise of alliance to the *şeyh*, in which the *şeyh* bonds the student to his path (*tarikat*). Devotees recognize these individuals as dervishes in the sense that either they lived with the *şeyh* or devoted their non-work time to their *şeyh*.292 Dervishes are not only distinguishable through their intimate relationship with the *şeyh*, but from the dervish *hırkas* (cloaks), the necklaces they wear (as offered by the *şeyh*), and more importantly through their actions and interactions inside and outside the *dergah*.

In Sufism, the word *dervish* means one who waits in the doorway or on the threshold of something, ready to move on and transform him/herself in every moment of his/her everyday life. Devotees learn from their *şeyh* that every moment, every action, and every interaction is an opportunity to move on, to experience God. Dervish Şale says, keeping in mind that she seeks self-transformation to move closer to God, that she reminds herself as she speaks, acts, and moves that staying away from Him is not her true nature. She explains that she searches for her true nature to feel complete, which is only possible by becoming aware of divine meaning through embodiment of God’s attributes and teachings as she trains with her *şeyh* and senior dervishes, and other spiritual siblings in the *dergah* and interacts with coworkers, family members, and

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292 Unless I talk about a person specifically as a dervish, a senior dervish, or student, I generally refer to individuals as devotees.
other individuals in other spaces.

My first six months with the devotees were very productive since the şeyh welcomed me as his student (without any further recognition, promise of alliance, or initiation) and as a researcher studying Sufi living in Turkey. For Efendi, it wasn’t unusual that I sought to be in his presence as a student, seeking to experience Sufi practice, while also as a researcher investigating how urban Sufi living continues as a religious and social practice in the modern everyday life of Turkey. The first thing I learned from the şeyh and practiced in my everyday life was the idea that devotees should see the dergah as a life school and should seek to carry the training in the dergah into their actions and behaviors in everyday life.293

In the first two weeks, while attending gatherings with the devotees in the dergahs, I needed to decide the kind of collaboration I was comfortable performing. As Drewal states, some researchers find it difficult to perform the actions and behaviors that come with the ceremony and “That would be true of highly formalized practices that require apprenticeships with years of training in order to master the techniques of drumming or carving.”294 However, as Drewal also points out, “Because most performance in Africa is participatory, there are many diverse kinds of roles researchers can take in addition to more technical kinds of performance.”295 This was also true in regard to Sufi living. Activities performed in the dergahs were participatory. As a researcher seeking to examine devotees’ everyday lives and a student of the şeyh, I first

293 Efendi also says that devotees should perform work and family activities in a peaceful manner without getting too attached to ambitions and desires at work or in relationships with family and friends.
295 Ibid.
served in the kitchen, helping devotees clean up after meals. Aside from washing dishes, I was more comfortable with dancing and singing since those were part of my training as an actor; thus, I participated in meşk (classes in which devotees practice and recite Sufi hymns) and zikir gathering (in which devotees chant, sing, and move with the rhythm of the drums). While acknowledging that general descriptions and theoretical analysis of Sufi rituals in Turkey have tremendous value in creating this project, my performance ethnography and practicing of everyday life and rituals with the devotees provide a multifaceted look into underground Sufi living.

The şeyh and dedes (male senior dervishes) of the order modify certain training and worship styles of Ottoman Sufi tradition to guide the devotees in their self-transformation. As described in Chapter Two, the çile (trial) tradition of the Ottoman Mevlevi order has not vanished. It is still used as adapted by the şeyh of the secluded order to suit the different socioeconomic needs of each devotee and each devotee’s relationship to the spiritual path. In the secluded order, the devotees practice çile in what the şeyh calls a preparation class (hazırlık dersi) to train their nefs.

In the preparation class, devotees serve and attend classes, sohbets, and ceremonies regularly. Although during the Mevlevi çile the devotees would only perform service in the dergah in the preparation class, the şeyh observes devotees’ work and family obligations as part of their çile in the dergah. Like a mürit in the Ottoman Mevlevi çile, devotees perform meditation and work in the kitchen. Some devotees perform tasks such as sweeping the floors and washing dishes. Some help the community as drivers, teachers, cooks, and tourist guides for guests visiting from other

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countries.

The service is rigorous in order to test the student’s ability to stay open to direction and at peace with their orders. The practice of çile, according to a senior dervish, is even more challenging in present-day Turkey because devotees have no financial support. Devotees have to work full-time and serve in the dergah all night long — cleaning, cooking, giving and taking classes, organizing gatherings, assisting guests, and performing collective rituals. They work at banks, hospitals, schools, pharmacies, and markets, as well as study for their exams. Since the Turkish government does not support or provide income for the devotees’ activities, devotees, while providing income for the dergah, also maintain their spaces themselves by building extensions of water pipes, electricity, and sewage; doing other construction; and repairing their furniture — all as part of their preparation class to train their nefs.

Devotees participate in, exercise, and learn Sufi living through lived experience, serving in the dergah in the presence of their spiritual siblings and şeyh. Performing service, devotees seek to train their nefs and seek to become aware of their nefs-i ammara — their self or soul “in its fallen state, or in its ordinary everyday reality far from its primordial nature”297 — as they interact with each other in the dergah. As in the analysis by Robin Tierney, a scholar of comparative literature, of the journal entries of Annie Ernaux (a French writer) between 1993 and 2000, which are filled with insights gained from Ernaux’s observing the world beyond her personal life, devotees observe their şeyh’s and spiritual siblings’ actions and behaviors. According to Tierney, “Ernaux’s attention to the physicality of herself and those around her, and to the role of

the body in creating memory, allows for charged experiences of personal alteration, regardless of the surrounding aesthetic environment.”

Through bodily experience, devotees activate the memory of who they are and how they act and behave first in the dergah in the physical presence of their şeyh and spiritual siblings, then in their everyday life in other settings outside of the dergah.

Through witnessing the actions of their şeyh and their interactions with their şeyh and spiritual siblings, devotees seek to become aware of their nefs-i lavvamah, which is the soul that alerts itself for its own shortcomings. Journeying on the path, devotees witness how their şeyh, dedes, and female senior dervishes embody God’s attributes as they are expressed in His Quranic names. There are ninety-nine names of God in the Quran that reflect His attributes. While some of the names reflect the forgiving God, others remind the devotees of His leading power.

Devotees, repeating God’s names, such as al-ahad (meaning unity), al-wadud (meaning loving), al-hakim (meaning wise), as-salam (meaning peace), and al-kuddus (meaning the pure), seek to glorify Him, celebrate their remembrance, know Him, and recall and practice His attributes in their everyday interactions. Remembering the actions and behaviors of their şeyh in the dergah, devotees train themselves with their şeyh’s memory in practicing their everyday life.

Devotees do not perceive the actions performed in the dergah as obligatory. As Nur says, one time a guest curious about Sufi living came to meet with the şeyh and

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asked questions about Sufi devotion. Nur pointed out that the guest asked the şeyh why all the devotees had to serve and obey a spiritual master. The şeyh answered politely that they don’t have to serve or obey the master. He said it is not a matter of obligation. If it is a matter of obligation, then there is no path. It is a matter of love.

There is constant desire for devotees to move from one service ritual to another. However, it is important to remind oneself to not perform the task for the sake of looking responsible and good, but for the sake of love of God. Even when the students are in the kitchen performing the task of washing dishes, as Ece once explained, it is necessary to be aware at all times that as devotees, we perform service for God by serving our Efendi, not to look good or responsible. In the performance of washing dishes, the task is divided among three devotees. One performs the task of washing dirty dishes in a leğen (large pan), while a second student rinses and hands the clean dish to the third student for drying. The act of washing dishes is performed in the same order and students replace each other by touching each other’s shoulder and asking for permission to perform hizmet (service) to God.

The şeyh’s and dervishes practice edep (Sufi manners that emphasize the embodiment of unity, love, compassion, and peace), which guides the devotees’ embodied practice (training) in the dergah. Edep is perceived as “a consequence and application of faith and may be described as orientation, right comportment, and proper attitude; it is faith concretized in day-to-day activities, strictly religious or otherwise.”  

If a devotee acts with edep, that means s/he is aware of how to speak, walk, serve, sit,

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and interact with his/her şeyh, dedes, dervishes, students, guests, family, friends, and co-workers. One who performs edep can also be explained as seeking to act and behave with God in mind wherever s/he is. The şeyh’s actions convey such devotion. As senior dervish Esen says, her şeyh is polite, generous, and loving with his devotees and non-devotees visiting his dergah.

One night, Deniz, a young beginner devotee, had tea with me at one in the morning after all the dishes were dried. She said that at the dergah in the presence of her şeyh, she feels peaceful and that she releases her mind of her material ambitions and desires. In the dergah, under the same roof with her şeyh, Deniz said, her memory is filled with his smiling eyes and his gentle voice. Deniz works at her bookstore during the day and arrives at the lodge in the evening not only to attend sohbets and serve ihvan but also to experience an environment where she is with people who also seek to embody their şeyh’s edep. At work, Deniz said, she encounters people whose central purpose in life is power, success, and money in the material world. She said although she has a peaceful workspace, she has to interact with a variety of people during the day when shopping in the market, mailing a letter at the post office, or even when walking on the street. In the dergah, she said she is with people who know edep, who seek to stay compassionate with one another. As Emile Durkheim has argued, individuals look to others to find comfort when they do not understand a given situation and seek “the company of those who feel and think as [they] do.”

Deniz explained that in performing her duties in the lodge with individuals who seek to be closer to God as she

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does, she feels peaceful and content and does not get too involved in her material problems. She shifts her focus from the material to the spiritual aspects of life. Performing her training in the lodge and transforming her desires into serving for the love of God, she seeks to leave the lodge with a stabilized nefs, less controlled by worldly desires such as making money and less focused on material problems with customers and her family. In the dergah, she is able to control her thoughts and focus on reading a book in the kitchen, an activity she is unable to do at work or in her family home. Deniz said sleeping under her şeyh’s roof every day, her mind and body are recharged like a battery to live outside of the dergah.

In the dergah, certain gatherings tend to be very busy and challenging for devotees. They work for five to ten hours on such evenings. In such demanding gatherings, dervishes focus on their affection for the şeyh, articulating their love for his devotion, purity, and dedication. They say that their master or father is always ready to receive them and guide them. The şeyh sleeps very little and spends most of his time praying. Remembering and articulating his devoutness, kindness, and generosity, dervishes are the ones who seek to act and behave like their şeyh in every moment of their everyday life.

There is tremendous support within the community. More and more mürits as soon as they fulfill their work and family duties arrive at the dergah and join the service to help Esen and other dervishes who live in the dergah. Their actions are truly a reflection of divine love. Following each other’s actions and directions, devotees (students and dervishes) prepare the eating areas with love and care. They use large pots in order to cook for their spiritual siblings and guests — about fifty people on a quiet
day and one hundred on a busy day. The kitchen is organized in a way so that they can serve efficiently and quickly to feed everyone before the ceremony begins.

During these busy days, devotees stay alert and work with efficiency. They watch and listen to one another’s requests as they work. They respond to each other with interest and respect. They rush around the space, making sure everything is in order. The service in the dergah, especially for dervishes who live with the şeyh, results in complete exhaustion through which the devotee has no time to think about their material needs and desires. Devotees meditate through focusing on various tasks. Their bodies are so shaken with exhaustion that they say they are free of undesirable thoughts and emotions.

Ziya, a beginning student, explains that in performing service in the dergah, he is mindful of Esen’s (a senior dervish) pace and the tone of her voice — and he senses how her body moves. Performing service in the presence of his şeyh and dervishes, Ziya says he learns to be alert while performing his actions. He is detailed in his actions and seeks to be mindful of his spiritual siblings who work around him. Ziya says he has a memory of how he moves along with his spiritual siblings in the dergah and remembers his bodily experience when he is at home helping his wife serve dinner or at the university teaching his students. Ziya says training in the dergah, he learns how to act and liberate his mind from any thought other than God. Arriving at the dergah tired and serving for hours, then performing rituals, although exhausting, is also a fulfilling experience, especially at the Thursday night zikir gatherings, with devotees starting to arrive around five in the evening with the night ending at one or two in the morning. Devotees serve, sing, dance, and pray all night long.
Esen, a dervish in her late thirties, has been living in the derghah for almost nine years. Aspiring müriṣs like Esen, who undergo a period of intense training in self-discipline, learn to control their instincts and desires, guided by the Sufi master. When a devotee gains a higher level of awareness in humanity as a dervish, s/he is more responsible for his/her actions and interactions than a non-dervish devotee, who has not sought the full knowledge of the Sufi spiritual path. It is the master who will eventually decide if the student is ready to be initiated in the order. The initiation requires a sincere need by the student to follow the master in all spiritual and moral matters. The master instructs, teaches, and guides the student along the Sufi path. The initiation symbolizes that the devotee is ready to understand the innermost of spiritual truths. According to Sufi cultural beliefs and values, when a devotee is initiated in the path as a dervish, his/her everyday actions and behaviors inspire admiration and spiritual feelings in other devotees (who spend most of their time with them) and non-devotees (who interact with dervishes inside and outside the derghahs without knowing that they are dervishes). Senior dervishes’ actions and behaviors especially transmit certain beliefs and values such as love, peace, kindness, and generosity. A dervish like Esen continues her spiritual journey through the end of the path to reach the level of nefs-i mutma’inah, which is the soul at peace, \(^{303}\) and prays to stay in this final path to live as a mature human being.

Esen said she passed the preparation class and got initiated in the şeyh’s path as a dervish after years of training. Her submission to the şeyh is visible in her embodied actions. She sleeps and eats very little, barely sits, and is always in the process of

cooking, cleaning, making religious music, and serving her spiritual siblings. There is not one day that Esen is absent from the dergah, except for times when a family member is sick or in need of her help. With the aim to serve God through serving the dergah, Esen said she believes that the service she performs is a vehicle for experiencing and sharing her spiritual self.\textsuperscript{304} She works as a music teacher during the day. She leaves the resident dergah every morning to teach in a middle school and returns to the dergah to serve her şeyh. There are six other female and ten other male dervishes like Esen who have devoted their lives to the şeyh. Some of them never married or had children. Instead, as Esen explains, they perceived the ihvan as their family.

The secluded dergah space is used and transformed to develop, express, and live a new identity through a distinct spatial practice. As Turner states, it is true that the “inversion of prescribed everyday social roles is made possible by the out-of-the-ordinary ritual time/space” characterized by the notion of communitas or “anti-structure.”\textsuperscript{305} In a metropolis such as Istanbul, we are now confronted with Sufi religious social actors who are creating and occupying their own spiritual spaces within secular urban spaces. As Nur explained, people are looking for therapeutic ways to deal with the damaging rhythms of modern urban everyday life, which threaten the physical, social, and psychological endurance of human beings. For Nur, reconsideration of

\textsuperscript{304} Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” 320.

spiritual teachings and practices is among the solutions to overcome the sense of loneliness in the twenty-first century. Anıl, a devotee who works at a supermarket, explained that he performs service to experience peace, energy, joy, togetherness, and freedom from concerns about material life. Anıl spends most of his free time in the dergah studying with one of the devotees to learn to read music and play the ney. Anıl explains, “I live in a house full of people, who volunteer to teach me and help me practice music to experience divine meaning.”

A priest of the Yoruba people, Ositola Kolawole, in his article on ritual performance, states that through ritual, people “gain the sense of thought and reflection.” Through collective living and training in the dergah, participants seek thought, sharing, and reflection by becoming part of a spiritual community. Performing everyday rituals such as cleaning and cooking in their sacred spaces, devotees seek to overcome “the pressures of the modern age that reduce people to an extremely individualistic level, in which modern individuals continuously fulfill their hearts through material needs.” Devotees say that the experience of the spiritual harmony and peace in the dergah affects their appearance, behaviors, and actions outside of the time they spend in the lodge. It is common for dervishes in the group to hear from co-workers and friends outside the lodge who make such statements as “You look healthier,” “You look younger,” or “You look more beautiful.” As dervish Ceren said once, since she started to train with her spiritual siblings in the dergah, she sleeps better and wakes up with a clear purpose, in which she seeks to be closer to God. For Ceren,

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306 Conversation with a devotee on November 18, 2012.
308 Conversation with the şeyh on December 16, 2013.
309 Conversation with dervishes on December 14, 2012.
who is a journalist, all the things she has to do regarding her work are part of her responsibilities in life. She is aware that she needs to produce good work, but she also knows that her work or other material responsibilities of her everyday life are not her main goal to be happy. Her happiness is beyond the responsibilities and necessities of her material life. It is the awareness of divine meaning that she gained in her spiritual living with her seyh that allowed her to distance herself from her reliance on material matters such as writing a successful article. She said she trusts that she will do her best and if her work goes well, it will. If it does not go well, it won’t. Material success has nothing to do with her true nature’s (spiritual) happiness. This awareness allows Ceren’s mind to be free of worries and her body of tension. As a result of this awareness, which she started to gain after months of training in the dergah, she feels more energetic, driven, and content in her everyday material life. These religious actors occupy the dergah as their own living space within the modern urban space, where they define the regulations of everyday life and their understanding of divine love.

Through the training in the dergah, devotees resist the confines of the material world. In resisting, devotees seek to maintain their spirits and mental and physical health. Resisting the needs and desires of their nefs, devotees seek to discover their potential for change. While enhancing spiritual feeling, improving social skills, and maintaining their spaces through devotional labor, devotees build their strength, confidence, abilities, and subjectivities. Through the release and joy experienced through the gatherings in the dergah, as Rüya explained, she resists the confines of the

material world and feels charged with divine meaning.

It is important to point out that I have witnessed students who either chose not to or could not engage in the way of living in the *dergahs*. For instance, due to the high number of middle-class educated devotees, the training can be intimidating for uneducated devotees, who either cannot participate in conversations or create intimate relationships with more educated members of the *ihvan*. This was a challenge for Ahmet, a devotee who completed his high-school education and experienced severe family and health problems due to drug addiction prior to starting his training in the *dergah*. Ahmet was usually very quiet in the gatherings and did not seem to have intimate relationships with other devotees. It was usually Esen and Samiha making sure that Ahmet stayed close to the *şeyh* by serving him and his guests. However, a year later, Ahmet started to experience problems regarding his addiction and stopped coming to the *dergah* and attending gatherings. In an intimate conversation with Ahmet’s wife, Pınar, who is also a student of the *şeyh*, I came to understand that Ahmet decided not to come back to the *dergah*. Pınar explained how Efendi and dedes contacted Ahmet several times to make sure he was okay, but could not convince him to come back.

Aside from his drug addiction, Ahmet could not connect with other devotees’ desire for studying and learning. As I participated in devotees’ discussions, it has become clear to me that what brings together the devotees from different cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds was their interest in creating this permanent space of learning and sharing. Most of the devotees, despite their differences, are individuals who seek to study, learn, and teach. In the last two years, there are more and more young low-income individuals, especially women, who have become students of the
What is common among these female devotees is that most of them are highly educated. However, there are two low-income female devotees who have only completed their high school education. One of these female devotees lives with her family and helps her mother at home; the other one works as a waitress at a cafe near the dergah. Aside from their economic and educational statuses, what is common about their time in the dergah is that both are very open to reading, studying, and learning religious as well as secular subjects. As Fatma, a devotee who is studying the Quran once explained, Islam attaches great importance to knowledge. The Quran asks Muslims to study the earth. We should be aware of God’s message and find the desire within us to study natural sciences as well as religious subjects.

Efendi is critical of people who are not open to learning and studying. He believes that lack of education confines people to a way of living that rejects change. Efendi believes that devotees need to be open to learning and studying in order to open their minds to experience divine meaning in changing conditions and lifestyles. Efendi guides the devotees to embody the idea of selflessness, unity, love, generosity, and compassion as they interact in the dergah and seek to apply their mental and bodily transformation to their everyday life outside of the dergah. To enhance their physical experience of divine meaning, Efendi also guides his devotees to perform zikir individually everyday and collectively every Thursday evening in the wooden dergah.

The Embodiment of Divine Energy: Collective Zikir

Devotees perceive the collective zikir rituals as part of their practical nefs training. They gather every week and perform zikir to remember that they belong to divine love, a feeling and meaning that is beyond the temporary needs and desires of the
material world. By repeating God’s Quranic names, devotees seek to stay on the threshold, to remain on the journey to God. As Werbner states, “in Sufism the human being is a model for the universe, a microcosm of the macrocosm, and the journey toward God is a journey within the person.” Devotees seek “self-purification” which is “perceived as a move toward the transformation of the self, the nafs [nafs], through a transcendence of bodily desires and needs. By totally denying the self, the nafs is purified... with the saint, the Prophet, and ultimately God.” Performing zikir, devotees seek to deny their material selves and remind themselves of their spiritual purpose. They remember their journey to God. They remember the sense of energy, joy, and dedication they experience in their performance of zikir.

Zikir ceremonies vary in their precise details and change from one Sufi order to another. These varying rituals are often derived from the practice of the founder of the order, and may be personalized for different disciples who find themselves at different points along their spiritual paths. Depending on the practice of the founder of the Sufi order, the actions performed in zikir can change as standing, sitting, or dancing, with or without music, vocal or silent. For instance, the zikir ritual of the Mevlevi order includes the act of sitting, standing, bowing, and whirling performed with music. Devotees of the Nakşibendi order perform zikir silently by sitting in front of their şeyh. Efendi and his devotees practice the zikir of the Rifa'i order, zikir-i kiyam (meaning the standing zikir) and devran-i zikir, both including a variety of standing movements, chanting, and recitations performed aloud with music. Their form of zikir, according to Efendi, is physically demanding compared to other forms of zikir rituals, including the

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311 Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” 321.
whirling ritual, due to the pace and the act of jumping while reciting God’s names aloud.

Devotees gather on Thursday evenings in the semahane (the space where zikir rituals are performed) of the wooden dergah to participate in the zikir ritual gatherings. Followers of the Thursday zikir gatherings include the şeyh, dedes, devotees, and sometimes invited guests. Thursday zikir gatherings begin with a group of devotees arriving at the wooden dergah to prepare the space for the evening. This group tends to include the dede’s wife, female and male dervishes, and some of the students. These devotees prepare the wooden dergah by cleaning the space and preparing meals (usually soup, rice, potatoes with meat, and helva), which are cooked in very large pans to serve sometimes around fifty, sometimes around one hundred participants. Senior dervishes also distribute food to low-income devotees who are in need of food assistance.

After the preparation of the food, they begin to prepare the rooms for what they call lokma yapma (literally meaning performance of bite or having a meal) around 6:30 p.m. to make sure everyone is fed, until 8:30 p.m. when the ceremonial zikir starts. During the mealtime, dervishes and students who leave work later than others who come earlier tend to arrive in groups. Due to the lack of public transportation in the neighborhood where the wooden dergah is located and because the area tends to be deserted, devotees who own cars collect the ones who live or work near them to drive together to the wooden dergah. Also, devotees who live in the same area tend to come to the dergah as a group by taxi. Having travelled with them throughout my field research, I have witnessed devotees’ dedication to the zikir gatherings, which is visible as they prepare for the gathering while traveling. In the cars and taxis, they make sure
that they are appropriately dressed for the ceremony. Because most of them arrive
directly from work, they carry their long dervish coats and shawls in their bags and put
them on over their everyday clothes before arriving at the dergah. Walking down the
narrow street of the wooden dergah, devotees move with a sense of energy and joy as if
they are going to a festival or a wedding. In quick steps, they approach the door of their
dergah. As devotee Canan once said, she wants to make sure that her hair looks tidy.
Devotee Günay says that she can feel the energy and love of her beloved şeyh. She said
that once she touches the door of the dergah, she knows she is where she belongs. She
feels as if the dergah is the home of her spirit. Devotees perceive their dergah as a
sacred home in which they experience their spiritual selves.

From the moment devotees arrive at the wooden dergah, their actions convey
their devotion to the space. Every week, the first act devotees perform when they arrive
is to stop at the entrance to kiss and touch their foreheads to the wooden door before
stepping in. This, as the şeyh explains, is the act of love and respect that devotees offer
to their dergah. The şeyh explains the value of material things such as buildings and
clothes in Sufi belief, pointing out that every material thing in the world is God’s
creation, including the pillow we sleep on and the clothes we wear. All the objects we
use and the places we occupy, despite their differences, unite in God. He explains
further by saying just as we should take care of our material body as an offer from God,
we should learn to take care of other material givings in the same manner, remembering
God’s unity. With their idea of material space as God’s giving, devotees sacralize the
wooden house as the house of God. As Canan explains, the doors, walls, and floors of
the house and the objects in it, including the utensils, chairs, and tables, are sacred
because God created these materials. She also explained further that Efendi and the dedes use these materials to move back to divine meaning, to God’s unity, thus consecrating the space and the objects in it with their prayers.

Devotees enter the dergah and greet the devotee who opens the door, welcomes them, and takes their shoes to place in the small room located near the entrance. Devotees greet the gatekeeper devotee by placing their right hands on their hearts and bowing slightly forward, conveying a sense of respect for his labor. Then, they walk up the stairs to greet other devotees who have already started serving the meal. Female devotees enter the room on the second floor, where the kitchen is located, and male devotees walk to the third and fourth floor to participate in the meal. Female devotees prepare and distribute the meal from a window in the kitchen to the male devotees, who carry trays of food upstairs, while female devotees have their meal in their own room located across the hall. Although they have their meals in different spaces, they interact with one another throughout the evening when after the meal, female devotees move upstairs to perform zikir.

Some devotees perform ablution and namaz before the zikir ceremony. However, namaz is not obligatory and most of the dervishes and students do not perform namaz. As Efendi explains, he would like all his devotees to perform namaz; however, he also believes that the devotees should perform namaz not because they must perform the activity, but to fulfill their desire to be with God. As dervish Ceylin explains, she performed namaz for a year, but than stopped because she felt like it had become more about the activity than the worship. She said in the last ten months, she has been practicing silent zikir to experience divine meaning. She explained how
meditating in her room, counting her beads, and repeating God’s names allows her to focus on God rather than the activity. Also as Kerem explained, there are other beginner devotees, who experience a sense of distance with this sacred activity, perceiving that it requires a higher level of connection to doctrine and the indisputable and fixed belief in Islamic rules and principles. Participating in ceremonial *zikir* is also not obligatory; however, due to the sense of divine unity, love, energy, and freedom experienced in the performance of *zikir* ceremonies, devotees regularly participate in their ceremonial *zikir* to enhance divine meaning. Devotees, whether their hearts are fixed in doctrine or the inner dimension of Islam, perceive their *zikir* as a prominent part of their spiritual journey to move closer to God.

In *zikir* gatherings, the *şeyh* gets the chance to see and converse with all of the *dedes*, dervishes, and his students. Sometimes, the *şeyh* leads the *zikir* ceremony; at other times, one or two of the *dedes* lead the ceremony and the *şeyh* makes time for his devotees and guests, who ask for spiritual guidance. The *şeyh*’s room becomes like a therapist’s office in which individuals talk about their personal problems and ask for Efendi’s opinions. He makes jokes and gives examples from the Sufi teachings of Abdülkadir Geylani and Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, whose words, as Melih *dede* expresses have a soothing effect on devotees’ hearts. At times, he recites a liturgical song to pray for his devotees, or a poem to a guest. He may also invite his male and female musician dervishes, Melek, Esma, and Bora, to the room for Melek to play the reed flute, Esma to sing, and Bora to play *qanun*.

As the volume and intensity of the ceremony increases, *Efendi* lets his devotees and guests leave his room to participate in *zikir*. It is possible to hear male devotees
reciting God’s names aloud in every corner of the house. Devotees participate in zikir in the corridors and other rooms along with the devotees performing in the semahane, increasing the sense of devotion in the house. Sometimes, a group of female and male dervishes ask Efendi’s permission to perform zikir together silently, sitting in the şeyh’s room. Every corner of the house—the rooms and corridors—is filled with devotees participating in zikir ceremony silently or quietly. The staircases and walls vibrate with the sounds of the ritual—devotees moving their feet and vocalizing God’s names. In such moments, the space transforms into a historical temple outside of time and space in which people celebrate their love for God.

As different devotees explained, their zikir ceremony is recognized by their guests as joyous, loud, energetic, musical, powerful, intense, and physically rigorous. Devotees chant God’s names; sing hymns about God, the Prophet Muhammed, the founders of the order, other prophets, and deceased Sufi şeyhs; and move to the rhythm or dance for hours without a break. By continually repeating the names of God, dervishes say that they experience a dreamlike event in which they bring into their awareness God’s loving and compassionate attributes. Devotees believe that as they experience these natures mentally and physically, their hearts were introduced to divine love. By embodying the same movements, words, chants, and intentions that other devotees have done in the past, dervishes believe that they experience the wooden dergah as a path to journey to a place out of the material world. In this place, they believe that they find all the Sufi şeyhs and teachers, who manifest themselves with their embodiment of divine meaning. Zikir, for devotees, unites brothers and sisters of all the Sufi silsile beginning with the Prophet Muhammed. Zikir, according to dervish
Levent, is opening a place in the heart for experiencing God’s unity.

During the night of the zikir ceremony, devotees practice the notion of listening spiritually (sema) to the sounds of the universe. It is common practice in Sufism for devotees to regularly listen to repetitive tunes as support for meditation and as a means of access to the state of selflessness. For dervishes, music is the food of the soul tired of the regulations of the material world. In Sufism, sema symbolizes the action of listening to Sufi hymns of various forms with heart and soul in spiritual fashion. The meaning of the word sema suggests that it is the act of listening that is spiritual. Moreover, performance of listening can refer to any sound, whether natural, artificial, or artistic, as well as to the sounds of the cosmos. The word sema is also synonymous with the word understanding. For Sufis, that is an understanding and acceptance of the call from God, which can lead to rapture and the revelation of mysteries. The meanings contained within the Quran are perceived as “infinite and ever-new, because there is no repetition in the [divine] self-disclosure... of which the cosmos, the human, and the Quran are three manifestations.”312 The receptiveness “to the infinitude of meanings is only possible when one opens oneself to divine mercy by learning the edep [manners] of listening.”313 The edep of listening guides devotees to pay full attention to the divine discourse, the words, thoughts, and sounds, and therefore “need not be distracted by the points of view learned from elsewhere. Rather one should be in a state of ‘illiterate infancy.’”314

Therefore, sema gives a clue to the understanding of the Sufi zikir ritual.

313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
Although the word *sema* is used in the West while referring to the Mevlevi *zikir* and *sema* ceremony of the whirling dervishes, the word has a deeper religious meaning for all kinds of Sufi *zikir* rituals. Muslim mystics’ concern in creating and listening was to give the music true meaning. Sufi hymns, as the *şeyh* explains, articulate the devotees’ desire and need to submit to the beloved God. As Yiğit *dede* points out, Sufi music is the lively expression of the divine meaning, sacred harmonies, and sounds from the cosmos. Certain *şeyhs* only make moderate use of music, whereas others are passionate about the act of *sema* together with the act of dance. In Sufism in the debates about music and dance and its legitimate status and proper use in Islam, the emphasis is always much more on the act of listening than on making the music and whirling.

Throughout the centuries, Sufi mystics have written mystical poetry for devotional purposes and other mystics or musicians have composed music inspired by the poems of Sufi mystics. These compositions are regularly performed with percussion and harmonium. The *şeyh* of the secluded order considers such activities as encouraging mystical feeling. In the secluded order, certain rituals such as *sema* ceremony (the act of listening with the heart and whirling) are performed during the pilgrimage to Konya for the *Şeb-i Aruz* ceremony (wedding day — the time when Mevlana Celaeddin-i Rumi passed away and joined his beloved God) to honor Rumi’s Mevlevi *zikir*. I will discuss the *Şeb-i Aruz* ceremony and performance of whirling and *bürhan* (proof) ritual in Chapter Five when discussing the pilgrimage of Efendi’s order to Konya.

The ceremony in the wooden *dergah* begins with some of the male and female devotees moving to their own sections of the *semahane* to perform *namaz*, while others serve or meditate. The leader of the ritual (usually one of the *dedes*) organizes the
participants’ locations in the room, making sure that all the male devotees get a place in the zikir circle. Then, the ceremony starts with the dede and the rest of the participants moving to a sitting position, either legs crossed or with feet curled under the hips. After the dede recites Quranic passages and other Sufi texts, he begins the repetition of the phrase “la ilaha illallah,” and continues with the repetition of the Quranic names and attributes of God such as Allah (The Exalted), Hayy (Ever Living), Ahad (Unity), and Kayyum (The Sustaining), all repeated for five to ten minutes in different rhythms accompanied by percussive instruments. As the names and rhythm of the ceremony change as guided by the dede, devotees also change their movements. In the first part of the repetition, they accompany the recitation by moving their heads from the right to the left shoulder toward the heart. When the dede feeds new lines, devotees move their heads forward and back in a rhythmic manner. Then when the dede feeds another line, devotees stand up and move their shoulders with their heads. When the energy of the ceremony increases, devotees continue their recitation as they bend their knees slightly and move their upper body down and up as if they are bowing. While continuing the same movement, devotees lock their arms and hold each other’s hands as they continue chanting the names. As the names are chanted, the rhythm and the volume change with the dede’s feeding the lines and offering a different pitch and melody. Because most of the participants in the room have been practicing zikir for years, the group moves and chants in unison. The dedes in the group increase the energy and commitment of the rest of the group. Therefore, unless the leader of the ritual directs the dedes and dervishes in the first circle by slowing or quieting down, the energy, pace, and rapture continues to grow.
Although I will analyze the devotees’ physical experience in zikir ceremony in Chapter Five, in order to discuss how devotees create sacred space by embodying divine meaning and remember the sensations experienced in the zikir ceremony in their everyday life, I would like to point out that the zikir ceremony practiced in the secluded order is highly demanding, both mentally and physically. Devotees also perceive zikir as a demanding activity because the dede increases the volume and pace of the movements as devotees chant, recite, and move. Such demanding moments occur two or three times throughout the ceremony, each lasting approximately fifteen minutes. However, although such moments require a lot of energy, as dervish Kerem says, without the experience of those moments, the embodiment of divine energy and joy would not be possible. When I asked Kerem, a runner, how his experience and energy in athletic activities is different from the performance of zikir, he said he feels more driven and energetic when he performs zikir because he comes to zikir to recall God’s attributes and to create a tie with Him, His meaning. The sense of devotion inspires and motivates him to move faster and to chant louder. It is a moment of celebration and rapture because there are a hundred people in the room repeating God’s names together. Kerem said after zikir, he experiences a sense of unity and peace that is different than feeling healthier, relaxed, and happier when he completes his athletic exercise.

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In sharing their experiences of performing zikir, devotees avoid the word “trance” because the şeyh believes that even in the rapturous state, a devotee should seek to be aware of his/her actions and behaviors. The moment of rapture seems ecstatic because the devotees’ heads start moving very fast, almost uncontrolled, and their eyes seem unaware of their motions and behaviors. However, even though that might be the case for some practitioners, trance is not advised by the şeyh or dedes (senior dervishes) in the secluded order. Practitioners of the secluded order believe that a devotee needs to be awake and aware of Allah at all times, in all environments, without the experience of trance.
Zikir is marked by its use of repetition. Margaret Thompson Drewal discusses in her essay, “The State of Research on Performance in Africa,” that there is a fundamental problem with the study of performance and of our understanding of the nature of repetition in performance. Repetition is generally seen as structurally restrictive. However, Drewal argues, “our failure to reckon with the temporality of performance is in large part due to objectivist epistemology that turns temporally constituted, and constituting, subjects into static objects.”

Analyzing the idea of repetition, Drewal pays close attention to the notion of “representation” and separates her idea of “representation as mimesis (the exteriority or visualization of an inner idea or feeling)” from “representation as kinesis (temporal, unfolding in the situated flow of human interactions).”

Drewal, while analyzing Yoruba ritual, comes to the conclusion that representation “embodies creativity, for representation itself is a form of creativity.”

Devotees believe that through the physical sensations experienced in performing zikir, they improve their spiritual awareness. As devotees interact with each other, they embody creativity. Joseph Roach employs the concept of “kinesthetic imagination” to discuss the “idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves,” including “patterned movements made by bodies,” “residual movements retained implicitly in images or words,” and “imaginary movements dreamed in minds.”

Kinesthetic imagination activates all these forms through which the performance of zikir creates a memory of divine energy and sense. Thus, the sensations experienced

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317 Ibid., 38.
318 Ibid., 1-64.
320 Ibid.
in performing collective zikir inform devotees’ physical awareness in everyday life and allow them to generate peace, joy, and energy as they interreact with individuals in non-zikir time and non-dergah spaces.

The experience of movement and sounds in the collective zikir does not begin or end with repetitive moments of the collective ceremony. The sensations affect the actions and behaviors of the devotee even after the collective ceremony is over. The sense of breathing, energy, and joy experienced during the performance of the collective ceremony inspire the devotee to remember his/her experience and apply such sensations to his/her everyday life. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze zikir not as a structurally restrictive act separate from everyday social life. Instead, zikir is about kinesthetic experience and the sense of liberation, creation, transformation, joy, and energy.

Performing zikir, devotees say they become aware of their existence, spacial presence, and survival in the world. As Bruce Kapferer states, “ritual is an organization of practice... in which the participants confront the existential conditions of their existence.” On certain nights, singing and dancing for four hours without a break, Esen says when she continues to move and chant His names in exhaustion, she can sense joy and freedom. She laughs. She celebrates. She cries. She screams.

Performing zikir with the secluded order for a year in the wooden dergah, I had the chance to experience how the desires and needs of the material world such as physical love for another person and career ambitions become less important and less powerful when standing and performing rigorous movements and vocalization of the zikir ceremony. During the performance of audible zikir, the devotees are hand in hand,

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staying awake, transporting their hearts from the material world to a spiritual reality, where they are with God and all they care about is the love and freedom they experience by moving closer to God. Devotees seek spiritual transformation by performing the chants and movements and by observing and touching others in the group.

Examining Sufi ritual as embodiment highlights the strong emotional identification made possible through devotees’ practice, enactment, and dramatization. Devotees’ repetitive movements move beyond ritualization. Their actions bring their focus to the experience of sensations. The experience of the divine takes over the meaning of the divine. Devotees’ movements, sounds, and energy affect each devotee’s journey as they seek to move to a place where they are alone with God. The physical space, the wooden house, transforms into the house of God. As devotee Yasemin explains, the movements, chants, and feeling of energy inspire a sense of freedom, allowing her to release undesirable thoughts: “I am there in the semahane with others. I hear them and I see them until I stop hearing and seeing them. At that moment, I only seek to experience the beloved.”

Seeking to remember the sensations discovered through the practice of rituals, devotees, when they are outside the lodge taking care of duties at work or home, also remind themselves of the experience of freedom and joy that comes from the performance of collective zikir. A devotee explains:

Especially when I am outside the lodge, I continuously remind myself to not let go of the sense of joy and freedom I experience performing zikir ceremony. And as I remember, I feel on the path as a devotee. Dervish means one who waits at

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322 Conversation with a dervish on November 5, 2012.
the threshold to move to a place where the awareness of God overcomes material desires and attachments. When I remind myself that I am at the threshold seeking a way to move closer to God, my needs and desires about the material world become less indulging and I find myself at a place of peace. Performing zikir, I stay positive and less competitive with others during work and leisure time. Singing, chanting, and dancing during zikir ceremonies also have an entertainment aspect. Devotees chanting and dancing in the semahane connect with God’s memory and the problems of everyday life disappear.

Performing zikir, I feel mental and physical freedom and joy.\textsuperscript{323} Devotees in the dergah emphasize the fact that through spiritual practice of zikir, whether collective, aloud, practical, or silent, they heal their mind, body, and soul.

As analyzed by Oscar Salemink, “Ritual always refers to boundaries, categories, and groups and therefore is a social phenomenon that concerns questions of identity and identification — giving a partial answer to the question ‘who are we?’”\textsuperscript{324} Devotees perceive zikir as a social practice through which they discover a balance between their religious and material selves. Devotees perform zikir to recall the sense of peace, joy, and energy they achieve while serving their şeyh in the dergah. Through performance of zikir, the şeyh says that a devotee can activate their memory, remember their Sufi values, and interact with others with such awareness. Through the ritualization of behavior, practices, or processes in the performance of zikir, devotees question their existence in relation to spiritual teachings and the community in which they participate.

\textsuperscript{323} Conversation with a dervish on June 17, 2012.
\textsuperscript{324} Salemink, “Embodying the Nation: Mediumship Ritual and the National Imagination,” 267.
to experience Sufi living.

With the energy experienced in chanting and moving with and through God’s names, devotees believe that they connect to a higher self that they should continue to remember in their everyday lives. Such discoveries lead the devotees, as Nur explains, away from their material attachments and their ideas, actions, and relationships to start to change. Therefore, the practice of zikir may inspire self-transformation and transformation of devotees’ lives. Rüya, a senior dervish, describes her experience performing silent zikir during work and says, “Performing zikir, I remember what I learned from training in the dergah. I experience a change. It is physical and mental. My muscles release, I breath deeper, and I feel more sensitive, calm, and compassionate with myself and others.”

As Turner explains, “performances of ritual are distinctive phases in the social process, whereby groups and individuals adjust to internal changes and adapt to their external environment.” The experience of divine meaning as joy, energy, and unity allows devotees to adapt to their urban environment. Rüya says she seeks to carry the experience that she gains through the performance of zikir to her everyday life to detach herself from her material attachments. Rüya uses her memory when she seeks to “move close to her şeyh” and to act and behave with her lived experience of spiritual feeling. Silently repeating God’s names, she concentrates, remembers her experience performing service in the lodge, and interacts with individuals with the memory of how she experiences her nefs in the dergah.

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325 Conversation with a dervish on March 25, 2011.
Although due to legal restrictions and secular bias devotees do not reveal their affiliations with Sufi living as students of a şeyh or a dervish in public, their embodied actions convey their spiritual state. Devotees recognize one another in non-Sufi settings from each other’s embodiment of love and compassion. As a beginner devotee, Elif, who had been participating in another Sufi group’s meetings for a month, said she learned about Efendi’s group after meeting with Rüya, one of Efendi’s dervishes, who is a pharmacist, during visits to her store. Relating how they met, Rüya joked, Elif was keeping her busy, distracting her from her work in the pharmacy. It was clear that Rüya was a bit disturbed by Elif’s curiosity, who was visiting the pharmacy often, asking many questions, and keeping Rüya from her work, sometimes bringing pastries she cooked and staying over thirty minutes, preventing Rüya from serving her customers. According to Elif, Rüya’s calm and peaceful presence inspired her to converse with her each time she visited the pharmacy. As they were sharing the story, Elif teased Rüya, saying that her pharmacy felt more like a place that she wanted to purchase spiritual guidance. After a stressful day, Elif said she would feel like she was visiting a childhood friend. In Rüya’s pharmacy, she would feel at home. Elif said she found comfort in Rüya’s presence. She says she liked her calm voice and the sincere look in her eyes. As Yiğit dede explained to me, it was Rüya’s constant practice of service in the presence of her şeyh and her practice of zikir inside and outside the dergahs that was causing her to stay calm and peaceful throughout the day. Rüya’s embodiment of divine meaning was inspiring her to act and behave with a memory of how she acted in the presence of her şeyh. Rüya’s transportation (sense of generosity achieved through the silent performance of zikir) inspired Elif to learn about Sufi living. Elif and Rüya
conversed on news, politics, religion, and meditation and one day Rüya invited Elif to meet with her şeyh. Today, Elif practices Sufi living and shapes Sufi living through her efforts in teaching English to devotees on the weekends. Last year, her efforts enabled a young devotee to pass the English exam to continue her graduate education. According to Efendi, Rüya perceives the world as the space of Allah.

The şeyh seeks to guide his devotees to combine the training in the dergah and practice of everyday material life by guiding his devotees to carry and apply their experiences as well as what they learn in their practical training in the dergah to their interactions in their everyday workspaces and homes. As anthropologist Erving Goffman states, “interaction (that is face-to-face interaction) may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence.” While the şeyh with his continuous presence in the dergah influences his devotees’ actions, devotees influence one another’s actions when they are in one another’s immediate presence. Their spatial practice in the dergahs ensures “the continuity and some degree of cohesion” regarding their Sufi training. Devotees’ regular training in the dergah “implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance” that inspires devotees to embody Sufi ideas of love, unity, compassion, and peace. By embodying Sufi teachings and practices consistently in the dergahs, devotees train their nefs and witness their şeyh’s interactions (who is regarded as insan-i kamil, meaning a spiritually mature person who has journeyed through the levels of his nefs) and actions of senior dervishes’ who convey a sense of

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328 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.
329 Ibid.
unity, love, compassion, and peace in their interactions with their şeyh and spiritual siblings. The sense of continuity and cohesion in practicing Sufi living in the dergah inspires devotees to apply the actions and behaviors they embody in the dergah to their interactions in other urban spaces, such as at work or home, thus experiencing the places they occupy as the space of Allah.

**Performing Meşk for Divine Inspiration**

Another embodied practice dedes and dervishes organize in the dergah are meşk gatherings, which are also part of devotees’ training to experience divine meaning. Devotees perceive the time they spend in the dergah as central to their spiritual training; therefore, they organize these gatherings to enhance spiritual meaning, study Sufi teachings, spend time with their spiritual siblings, and see their şeyh. Meşks are classes that are organized for the purposes discussed above for devotees to study Sufi ilahis (liturgical songs) in the resident dergah on Sundays and Tuesdays. Female devotees gather in the third-floor flat of the dergah to study with a devotee, Nazan, who holds a Ph.D. in Sufi music, and Esen, also a music teacher focusing on Sufi musical instruments. With guidance from the şeyh, Nazan and Esen teach a variety of compositions created by Sufi mystics, including the compositions of their own şeyh. Male devotees gather on the fourth floor to study with Yiğit dede, who is a Sufi musician trained in a Sufi family. Although female and male devotees attend classes separately, both Nazan and Yiğit dede structure the classes in a similar fashion and bring their students together in the worship room on the fifth floor to share their liturgical songs with each other in the presence of their şeyh.

Dervishes and students attend meşk gatherings for different purposes. In these
gatherings, the primary goal is to enhance spiritual meaning by studying the liturgical songs. The secondary goal is to spend time with the $\text{seyh}$ and spiritual siblings, share problems and needs, and schedule meetings with their $\text{seyh}$ and senior dervishes for further guidance about personal matters. Similar to the zikir gatherings, some of the devotees cook and serve light meals such as soup, pastries, and desserts during these gatherings, while others rehearse songs as an ensemble comprised of teachers/leaders, Nazan and Esen, an orchestra, and a chorus.

Liturgical songs practiced in these gatherings are poems written and composed by different Sufi mystics and performance of the songs plays a significant role in transmitting divine meaning. The lyrics of the songs are about divine love, longing, relationship with one’s $\text{seyh}$, mystics’ thoughts and feelings in pursuing the spiritual journey, and dervishes’ lives in dergahs. Therefore, as discussed in Rumi’s poetry, the liturgical songs are studied as divine texts. The lyrics as in the case of Rumi are not considered products of human effort. Rather, they convey divine essence. Thus, the classes are regarded as acts of worship, and with this idea devotees study these songs and recite them with a sense of devotion as if praying to God.

In the classes, devotees gather in a small living room and sit in a circle — some on the floor, some on the sofas. Due to the size of the room and the large number of devotees, chorus members sit side by side, close to each other, and similar to the feeling in the wooden dergah, are aware of each other’s movements and sounds even if they do not look at each other. Sitting in the circle, they witness each other’s dedication and devotion, absorb each other’s voices, and witness the emotional changes in each other’s vocalizations. It is important to point out that as explained by Nazan, some of the
musical notes are put together to convey celebratory feelings while others create melancholy according to the experience discussed by the mystics. Nazan says that music drives the devotees to relate to and feel the spiritual experiences of the mystics, who wrote the poems and composed the music. They relate to the sense of longing experienced by the mystic and identify their practices through the words of the mystics.

In the rehearsals, everyone is given a booklet comprised of all the liturgical songs to be studied until the yearly pilgrimage to Konya, where female devotees perform the liturgical songs as part of their honoring the spirits of their past masters. Although I will discuss the experience of zikir as part of the pilgrimage experience in Konya in Chapter Five, I would like to point out that all these days of practice in the resident dergah also serve as a preparation for a heightened way of understanding the importance of mystics, whose spirits, according to Sufi belief, continue to enlighten devotees as they speak through their songs and as they relate to their spiritual experiences. Throughout the year, in meşk gatherings, students discover how divine meaning is articulated and embodied by various Sufi mystics and comprehend how their spirits should be honored and celebrated.

**Conclusion**

Devotees, with their embodied acts, produce permanent Sufi spaces for collective living and training within the secular urban environment of Turkey. As they perform their activities and rituals, devotees transform their spaces and experience their dergahs as home, school, and community center in which they practice how to modify their everyday actions and behaviors according to Sufi teachings. In their dergahs, devotees find spaces for spiritual training while living in the capitalist social order of
Istanbul. Devotees explore the *dergah* as a life school where they can search for answers to their spiritual needs and ontological problems.

Oscar Salemink states that the “ritual form of identification is especially effective because of the partly nonverbal, practical, and performative character of ritual events.”

In the secluded group, through the embodiment of Sufi religious teachings in everyday life and performance of individual and collective rituals, each devotee experiences, transforms, and defines their identity and their relationship to Sufi living and to their spiritual siblings, including their use of space, practice of rituals and everyday life, and performance of community gatherings, with guidance from the *şeyh*. While devotees follow a structure for practicing their rituals and everyday life in their shrines and lodges, Sufi living continues to transform with the needs and desires of the group and with each individual devotee’s religious and social experience and labor. In the *dergah*, devotees seek to experience their spiritual selves and to serve their communities with such awareness.

The role of embodied practices in creating sacred spaces will be more apparent in the next chapter, in which I examine the pilgrimage of the group to visit the tombs of Sufi mystics, including Rumi, whose shrine devotees and non-devotees from all around the world travel to see in Konya every year during the *Şeb-i Aruz* ceremony (Wedding Night — the night Rumi passed away).

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Chapter Five

Sanctifying the Touristic Konya: Inscribing Sufi Values on Shrines Converted into Museums, Cultural Centers, Mosques, Streets, and Hotels

Pilgrimage to the tombs of old Sufi masters is a significant form of worship in Sufi orders. Devotees of various Sufi orders regularly visit Sufi shrines in a number of Turkish cities and every year in December travel to Konya (the city known as the birthplace of Mevlevi Sufi culture) to honor Rumi’s urs (meaning wedding and used to refer to the death anniversary of a Sufi saint) or Şeb-i Arus (meaning wedding night and referring to the night Rumi passed away and the whirling dervish performances organized for Rumi in the city of Konya). While tourists visit Konya to attend the Şeb-i Arus celebrations, devotees travel to Konya to honor Rumi and other Sufi mystics, whose tombs are in and near Konya, sacralizing the touristic city with their embodied acts. With this chapter, I assert that during pilgrimage devotees, as they travel within and between shrines and perform zikir, experience divine meaning, sacralize the spaces they occupy, and improve their awareness of the world as the space of Allah. I also argue that the mental and physical transformations experienced during pilgrimage and the awareness of the world as a sacred space have a significant effect on devotees’ perception of everyday life as part of their spiritual journey. Their pilgrimage experience inspires devotees to practice devotion anytime and anyplace upon their return to non-pilgrimage, ordinary life.

As Kenneth Lymer argues, “Orthodox forms of Islam are directly related to mosques and classrooms, but... this is not the only vehicle of expression of religious beliefs; spirituality can also be demonstrated through the practice of domestic rites and
pilgrimages to saints’ shrines.” Moreover, as Peña points out, what constitutes the sacred cannot be limited to the work of “reductionist” scholars who argue that “religion is best understood by going outside of religion...[and] belief in God, or an act of ritual — [owing] its existence to nonreligious causes,” or the work of “irreductionist” thinkers, such as Rudolf Otto. Otto argues, “Religion is not exclusively contained and exhaustively comprised in any series of ‘rational’ assertions.” According to Peña, it is necessary to take into consideration elements from both debates to “understand how the sacred is a dynamic, organic, and complex impression of one’s spiritual world.”

Through the acknowledgement of both irreductionist and reductionist debates on religion, it is possible to show how Sufi devotees perform pilgrimage to improve their perception of the material world as a sacred space. The physical sensations experienced in a variety of spaces during pilgrimage inspire devotees to pursue their practice of everyday life in the material world as part of their spiritual training.

I have been journeying to Konya every year since 2010. My first visit came out of a preliminary research plan to experience Konya and Şeb-i Arus ceremonies as a tourist; my second (2011), third (2012), and fourth (2013) journeys were with Efendi and his devotees. Journeying to Konya under numerous circumstances, I had various encounters with native and foreign tourists, non-devotee and devotee shop workers, semazens, scholars, and students from different countries. During my journeys, I

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witnessed how devotees embody Sufi spirituality (including the sense of rapture, unity, love, longing, and freedom) through their actions and behaviors. As they pray, walk, perform zikir, sing, whirl, and interact with each other, they make present the hidden and invisible dimensions of Sufi existence and experience even the non-sacred spaces in Konya, such as a hotel or a bus, as sacred sites.

Carl Ernst discusses how the spiritual strength of the Sufi masters who lived in the space where their shrines are located inspires devotees’ embodiment of divine meaning. Devotees believe that the spiritual presence of their Sufi master has an influence on their hearts. Contact with the earthly remains, such as the tomb of the saint, is believed to increase devotees’ spiritual focus. In December, different Sufi groups gather in private spaces in Konya to visit Sufi masters’ shrines and celebrate Rumi’s urs by organizing religious/community gatherings and performing religious zikir and whirling rituals. Devotees of the underground Sufi group travel to Konya every year during the time of Şeb-i Arus ceremonies in December and reserve the same hotel, converting it into a dergah for devotees’ accommodation and performance of rituals. The devotees’ four-day journey reflects various modes of performance and spectatorship that are key to understanding the practice of Sufi pilgrimage in different urban spaces of Konya. While my traveling to Konya in the first year was not a demanding experience since I was visiting the sites during the day as a tourist and resting at my hotel in the evening, the trips to Konya with Efendi and his devotees were mentally and physically demanding exercises as I performed rituals without a break for four days with the devotees, who during their pilgrimage perform zikir, pray, meditate,

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sing liturgical songs, and attend Efendi’s sohbets all day long. In the case of Efendi’s Sufi order, pilgrimage is more than journeying to a sacred space such as the tomb of Rumi. For each devotee, pilgrimage is a journey within oneself and the ability to transfer divine awareness and meaning to everyday life through the emotional, spiritual, and physical effects experienced during pilgrimage. Although, like Hajj, pilgrimage to Rumi’s urs is a “remarkable synthesis of sacred and secular” that combines “extreme piety... with unadorned commercialism,” perhaps “the greatest synthesis of all is the shared experience” of devotees — the mutual support and desire to perform collectively the physically demanding ritual acts.336 Robert R. Bianchi points out that “The hajj works because of good sense and mutual support of the pilgrims, not because of the staggering resources their governments marshal to assist and control them”337 and pilgrims, as discussed by Razaq Raj, seek to experience “purification, repentance, and spiritual renewal during the journey of hajj.”338 During their pilgrimage, devotees, through shared experience in their rituals, move beyond the idea of the touristic Konya as a commercial city and experience the places they reside and visit as the space of divinity. Before I begin my analysis of Efendi and his devotees’ pilgrimage to Konya, I will examine the social context of the city during Rumi’s urs. More specifically, I will analyze Konya’s recognition as a touristic/sacred city by showing how during the month of Rumi’s urs festival, devotees travel to Konya to experience Sufi beliefs and values in

a shrine converted into a museum and witness Rumi’s *sema* ceremony in a cultural
center rather than a historical Mevlevi lodge.

**Konya: The City of Rumi’s *Urs***

Konya, one the most religious and industrial cities in Turkey, is the birthplace of
Mevlevi Sufi culture. The city has become a popular tourist destination with the Turkish
government launching projects on religious tourism beginning in the 1990s. Coleman
Barks, who translated, adapted, and performed Rumi’s religious poetry in 1997 with
*The Illuminated Rumi*, also had a great effect on Rumi’s and Konya’s name recognition
for English-speaking people. In 2010, Kevin Gould from *The Guardian* wrote about
Konya, calling readers’ attention to Rumi as a poet and Sufi saint: “Rumi is one of the
world’s most read poets... Today, Rumi’s tomb is Turkey’s second most-visited tourist
attraction... Rumi was... a Sufi saint who loved all religions, and whose own religion
was love.” As Konya Museum Manager Yusuf Benli said, different tourists from
different countries visit the *Mevlana* Museum depending on the time of year. 
*Hürriyet Daily News* reported in July 2013 that “The Mevlana Museum of Konya
attracted 900,000 visitors during the first half of 2013.” Metin And states that the
*Mevlana* annual festival (Şeb-i Arus or Rumi’s *urs* festival) “attracts vast crowds of

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[^339]: Ahmet Aktaş and Yakin Ekin, “Case Study 5: The Importance and the Role of
Faith (Religious) Tourism in the Alternative Tourism Resources in Turkey,” in
*Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International
Perspective*, ed. Razaq Raj and Nigel D. Morpeth (Reading: Biddles Ltd. King’s Lynn
2007), 170-184.


[^341]: “Tourists rush to Konya’s famous Museum,” *Hürriyet Daily News*. Accessed on

[^342]: Ibid.
every race, color, and creed from all around the world.” Thousands of tourists come to Konya to see Rumi’s lodge and the whirling ceremony; however, they get to see a lodge converted into a museum and witness *sema* performed as a tourist attraction in the *Mevlana* Cultural Center.

Rumi’s shrine dates back to Selçuk times (thirteenth century); however, the mosque and the rooms surrounding the shrine were built by Ottoman sultans. Formerly used as lodgings, there are human-sized figures dressed in period costumes in the small rooms to depict the Mevlevi dervishes. There are tombs in the shrine that belong to the family members of Rumi, as well as people who reached high ranks in the Mevlevi order. The shrine, established as a museum in 1927, also exhibits texts of Rumi (*Mesnevi* and *Divan–ı Kebir*) and many of Rumi’s and other *evliyas’* (saints) personal belongings.

Visiting the museum as a tourist in 2010, I entered the gate of the shrine and remembered my first visit to the shrine with my family as a high school student in 1996. Back then, the unrenovated shrine was not functioning as a modern museum. There were no signs for tourists, security guards, or display of Rumi’s books and objects, and there were only about twenty visitors, mostly Turkish families and some elderly Turks. Since becoming a museum in the last ten years, it has become a well-organized touristic site. More tourists from different ages and nationalities visit and spend more time in the museum to observe and chat about figures depicting dervishes’ lives, examine the rooms, relax at the museum’s café, and read and purchase literature in English, Spanish, French, and other languages about Rumi and Mevlevi culture.

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Despite the function of Rumi’s lodge and shrine as a museum, security guards do not get in the way of devotees who are dressed in their everyday non-religious outfits and recognizable through their embodied actions, most specifically through their silent performance of *zikir* and teary eyes. Devotees desire to stay and perform devotion in the shrine. Their presence and devotion is allowed in the public space of the shrine as long as they perform *zikir* in silence. Also, as I will analyze further in the chapter, only the devotees of the underground order perform *zikir* collectively in the courtyard of the shrine (standing in front of a large window facing Rumi’s tomb) in an inaudible tone.

The tombs are organized in a way that allows visitors to constantly move in a queue by the tombs, ensuring that there is constant flow of visitors facing the tombs and praying. Entering the room with the tombs, visitors first walk shoulder to shoulder, facing the tombs of Rumi’s family members in the north part of the room where Rumi’s tomb is placed. The museum, not only with the presence of the static objects such as scriptures and *kandil* (oil) lamps, but also with the devotee pilgrims’ embodied actions, transforms into a sacred performative site in the sense that it is “constructed in the process of its expression.”[^344] It is a space in flux, in which every moment transforms with each devotee’s actions. Devotees come to the shrine to worship in the presence of Rumi’s tomb. Devotees open their hands to pray, kiss the silver-plated step beside Rumi’s tomb, and sit on the floor to meditate.[^345] Devotees convey devotion as they close their eyes and move their lips, repeating God’s Quranic names. Some of them


[^345]: Since 2013, devotees perform silent *zikir*, meditate, and pray in small sections renovated for devotees who seek to perform *namaz* and pray in the presence of Rumi’s tomb.
have earphones to listen to a recorded zikir ceremony and they repeat God’s names quietly with the sound of the recording.

In 2010, visiting the shrine as a tourist, I met a young devotee, Jale, sitting on the floor and praying, with her back against the wall. Back then, there were not sections specifically designated for devotion. After she completed her prayer, she looked up and offered me a place next to her on the floor. There was a peaceful smile on Jale’s face and her eyes were teary out of the joy of feeling what she later said was “Hazret’s [a word used to refer to Sufi mystics as Holiness] spiritual presence.”346 As Jale said, devotees believe that in the presence of Sufi mystics’ tombs, they can pray for connection and bond with the masters’ spirits, who may pass their divine meaning to the devotees. This way, a devotee matures and experiences ilham (sensing and inspiration) from the masters’ spirits. Through the embodied actions of devotees, tourists experience the museum as a shrine and connect to its sacredness.

Konya residents who are devotees also embody Rumi’s divine power by telling mythical stories about his tomb to tourists. Mevlana Türbesi (the tomb of Rumi), his coffin covered with a large velvet cloth decorated in gold, is placed next to Rumi’s father’s, Baha al-Din Valed, whose coffin stands upright. Residents of Konya explain the elevation of the coffin through a supernatural story. I first heard the story when I visited Konya as a young girl, then again during my visit in 2010. Sufi devotees claim that when Rumi was buried, “his father’s tomb rose and bowed in respect and devotion.”347 This story, according to a devotee shopkeeper, shows the spiritual power of Sufi saints. Hearing the story from a shopkeeper in a gift shop near the museum, Ece,

346 Conversation with a devotee on December 17, 2013.
347 Conversation with a shopkeeper on December 16, 2012.
a traveler I met during my visit, came to the hotel lobby with a desire to share the story. She expressed to me that although she did not believe the story to be more than a legend, she felt curious standing in front of the elevated coffin and observing the devotees sitting on the floor, their eyes closed, moving their upper bodies back and forth, which inspired her to share the story and her experience with me and her friends in the lobby of our hotel. Ece said, “There was a heavy energy in the room. The coffins. Whispering sounds of devotees... Their lamentation.” Ece said she believed Konya to be a mystical place. A graduate student, Ece was not a devotee or a practicing Muslim. She was simply a traveler who came to Konya to see the whirling dervish ceremonies. In Konya, Ece, hearing the story of the upright coffin from the devotee shopkeeper and witnessing devotees’ embodied acts in Rumi’s shrine, experienced the museum as a shrine and was transported as a storyteller who relates Sufi miracles and is a seeker of Sufi knowledge. While the modern-looking museum offers a friendly, stress-free, and leisurely experience for the tourists, and provides floor space for devotees to perform silent zikir, it does not offer a space for devotees to practice sema ceremony or collective aloud zikir.

The next day, I went to see the Şeb-i Arus ceremonies with Ece and her mother to have the chance to hear their opinions about the Mevlana Cultural Center and the semazens’ performances. The Turkish government opened the Mevlana Cultural Center for the Şeb-i Arus in 2004 to meet the increasing demand of Turkish and foreign tourists. The cultural center has a three-thousand-seat semahane and during Rumi’s urs festival (between December 7th and 17th), the tickets to the evening performances of

\(^{348}\) Conversation with a visitor on December 16, 2010.
the ceremony sell out weeks in advance.\textsuperscript{349} Travel agencies provide service in regard to tickets and also offer information for English-speaking tourists. Agencies offer native and foreign tourists a variety of tour options for different budgets. The travel websites designed for foreign tourists tend to advertise the ceremony as \textit{Rumi Commemoration Tours}\textsuperscript{350} to make the festival more familiar to non-devotees who might not recognize the name, Şeb-i Arus. In 2013, Tom Brosnahan wrote on the \textit{Turkey Travel Planner} website that “Every year the commemoration ceremonies reaffirm that we are all one people, and that we can and should live together in harmony no matter what our background or beliefs.”\textsuperscript{351} Such a sales pitch emphasizing Rumi’s beliefs and values is common due to Rumi’s recognition as a Sufi master, writing about the Sufi idea of unity, love, and peace. However, the \textit{Turkey Travel Planner} website advertises Konya’s Mevlana Cultural Center as “the world’s grandest and most modern whirling dervish tekke,”\textsuperscript{352} while the space is actually more like a sports arena than a dervish lodge. The colorful lighting used during the performance of \textit{sema} ceremony feels out of place, making it hard to focus on the devotional act of the ceremony and sacred purpose of the event. The arena, whose architecture lacks any connection to a Sufi dervish lodge, does not function as a house or school for dervishes. The cultural center is also a significant political arena for Turkish politicians and their speeches, further diminishing the

\textsuperscript{349} Since 2012, Şeb-i Arus tickets are only sold online due to the high demand. Before that, tourist agencies were the only places people could purchase tickets.\textsuperscript{350} “9 Days Rumi Commemoration Tours.” Accessed March 15, 2014. http://www.travelshopturkey.com/rumi_tours_konya/9_days_rumi_commemoration_tours_konya.asp.\textsuperscript{351} Tom Brosnahan. “Cultural Center, Konya.” \textit{Turkey Travel Planner}, accessed April 4, 2013. http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/go/CentralAnatolia/Konya/sights/kultur_merkezi.html.\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.
religious meaning of the space. Many politicians attend Şeb-i Arus ceremonies in order to make an appearance in the honoring of Rumi, who is recognized by Turkish people as the believer of peace, love, and unity. In 2009, for instance, in his speech at the ceremony to commemorate the 736th anniversary of the death of Rumi, former Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal voiced his disapproval of the government’s initiative, which aims to put an end to the Kurdish question and the longstanding terror in his country by granting more rights and freedom to the country’s Kurds. His speech was about politics rather than Sufism in Turkey and ignored the fact that Sufi lodges were prohibited in this country and that the ritual was performed in the cultural center that night because the Turkish government reduced the sacred meaning of the Mevlevi tekkes by converting Rumi’s dervish lodge into a museum.

Visiting Konya by myself as a tourist in 2010, I attended the ceremony for three nights, including the night of union on December 17th with Ece and her mother. The Konya Turkish Sufi Music Ensemble, a group created by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1989, performs the whirling ceremony. Although some of the ensemble members are not devotees, as trained semazens they are well aware of the religious significance of the whirling ritual and perform their actions with care. The ensemble follows the original structure of the ceremony as discussed in Chapter Three and the whirling of semazens as well as their use of space, instruments, and garments convey discipline and dedication. On the night of the 17th, semazens whirled with their heads slightly bent (reflecting naiveté), their eyes closed (sharing their embodiment of

peace), and their arms open (conveying a sense of joy and agreement with the world). A member of the audience, Canan, a lady attending the ceremony from Paris, explained to Ece’s mother that although she first was uncomfortable sitting in her chair, listening to the politicians, and observing the detached and impersonal design of the cultural center, later she concentrated on the semazens’ whirling and forgot about her discomfort and dislikes. Ece, who was sitting next to me, was in high spirits when I asked her how she liked the ceremony. She said, “I was not expecting to see such an emotional ceremony in this massive hall.”

Ece said she watched the semazens’ whirling with a sense of focus, enjoyed the religious music, and felt inspired by the semazens’ naiveté and calmness. Although Ece’s mother was upset that the government did not allow the performance of the ceremony in the Mevlevi tekke in the presence of Rumi’s tomb, she admitted that while watching the ceremony she forgot about the lack of intimacy in the cultural center. What sacralized the cultural center as a ritual space was the embodied actions of the semazens. As in the case studies discussed in Chapter Three, semazens temporarily sacralized the cultural center with their devotional acts.

**Pilgrimage to Konya with the Underground Sufi Group**

Devotees of the underground order organize a four-day physically demanding pilgrimage to Konya every year in December and with their embodied acts transform the spaces they occupy, including their hotel, buses, and the shrines in Konya. I participated in the pilgrimage with the underground Sufi group after voicing my desire to the şeyh, who in return welcomed me to travel with them in 2011, 2012, and 2013. As a graduate student conducting research in the field of performance studies, şeyh

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354 Conversation with a devotee on December 17, 2012.
welcomed me to stay at what some devotees call the dergah hotel and share a room with other female devotees. Sharing a small room with six devotees in 2011 and 2012 and seven devotees in 2013, I was able to experience and be involved in every moment of the pilgrimage. Moment-to-moment interactions traveling together for many hours in the buses, walking to shrines, living in a small hotel room, sleeping, dining, and worshipping together, we witnessed each other’s sicknesses, discomforts, worries, exhaustions, and injuries. As expressed by Nur, we were spiritual siblings, the children of the şeyh, learning and seeking to be caring with each other.

In 2011, 2012, and 2013 on the three occasions I was in Konya as a pilgrim with the underground group, I had no desire or time to see the ceremony at the Mevlana Cultural Center or attend other tourist attractions. None of the devotees had time or desire to attend any other attractions either other than the ones scheduled and performed by the şeyh and dedes. Each person was busy with a set of tasks and rituals inside and outside the hotel with only spare time to rest, shower, eat, or meditate. Devotees were hungry for spiritual feelings, such as compassion, unity, and love, that they gain from performing physically demanding zikir rituals.

Every year, preparations to travel to Konya start months before December. To travel to Konya, devotees charter buses depending on the number of participants to travel to Konya to visit Sufi shrines. With their şeyh, devotees reside for four nights in a hotel located near Rumi’s tomb, traveling in and out of the hotel to journey to other shrines in and near Konya. During the four-day pilgrimage, devotees worship night and day in the shrines, buses, and in their hotel that has been converted into a dergah.

Due to legal restrictions and social judgment, devotees do not announce their
involvement with a Sufi group, and as a consequence experience difficulties in organizing their work schedules and family obligations. Most of the devotees do not share their pilgrimage plans with co-workers or family members. As a devotee, Tuba, who works at a bank, once said,

We need to be creative in regard to finding ways to escape our ordinary lives. My husband knows that I am a devotee in a Sufi group. However, I never revealed my involvement with a Sufi group to my parents. Especially my mother, although religious, is very judgmental towards tarikats. She believes that tarikats are fanatic Islamic organizations. However, my husband is very supportive of my Sufi living. He takes care of our son when I need to attend meetings and rituals in the dergah and he takes time off from work when I travel to Konya.\(^{355}\)

Tuba’s husband also has to plan his job and other duties (including parenting) according to Tuba’s pilgrimage plans. For the past two years, explains Tuba, “we come up with the same plan. We tell our bosses and families that we will visit our friends outside of the city. We say that they come from Los Angeles every year. When I am in Konya, my husband travels to a nearby village with my son for four days.”\(^ {356}\) This year Tuba’s son and husband will also be traveling to Konya with the underground group.

The Konya pilgrimage brings together individuals who are devotees of the same şeyh. Although I will not reveal their geographical locations, I think it is necessary to point out that the şeyh leads and guides groups of devotees in different parts of Turkey and different parts of the world, including Eastern and Western Europe, the United

\(^{355}\) Conversation with a devotee on November 4, 2012.  
\(^{356}\) Conversation with a devotee on October 15, 2012.
States, and India. During my fieldwork, Efendi travelled to groups of his devotees living in other Turkish cities and abroad at least once a year and usually stayed around two weeks. I had the chance to meet with some of those senior devotees who visited the main shrine in Turkey, and others I got to meet and talk with during my first pilgrimage with the secluded order to Konya in 2011. There are also guests (devotees from other Sufi orders and non-devotee guests coming to meet the şeyh) visiting from abroad and other places in Turkey. It is either the şeyh or the devotees who invite guests to participate in the pilgrimage. During the final months of preparations, senior dervishes make sure that there is one devotee assisting each guest before their arrival and during the journey. Devotees are responsible for their guest’s transportation, accommodation, guidance about rituals, and other needs throughout the journey. Devotees pick their guests up at the airport, place them in a room with other guests as organized by a senior dervish, and travel with them throughout the journey, making sure that they receive necessary information, including basic theoretical guidance, such as the meaning of prayers, God’s Quranic names, and information on the teachings of Sufi mystics whose shrines devotees visit during their pilgrimage to Konya. Devotees also assist their guests in more practical matters, such as medical needs when they get sick (which is very common due to hectic schedule and cold weather), clothing, and questions related to Turkish food.

Co-performatively witnessing the four-day journey with the secluded group in 2011, 2012, and 2013, I had the chance to gain a deeper understanding of how devotees feel more committed, dedicated, and passionate in their beliefs after their visits to the shrines. Throughout the journey, they perform a variety of rituals to exhaust and liberate
their minds and bodies and improve their mental and bodily sensations of divine meaning. In exhaustion, devotees claim to rescue their souls from undesirable thoughts and needs. In performing collective zikir in the evening after visiting the shrines, devotees experience “great inner power and enthusiasm.”

Devotees seek to perform zikir (remembrance of God) in every moment; they repeat God’s names while walking on the street, bathing, at work, eating, cleaning, etc. In the hotel, as we interact, there is a sense of release from the outside world and our material needs and desires, but all is performed to return to ordinary life with more physical and mental awareness. The physical sensations experienced while preparing for the pilgrimage, arranging work and family matters, organizing the hotel rooms, walking in and out of the shrines, praying in the shrines, performing zikir, decorating the spaces they occupy, the exhaustions or sicknesses experienced on the return, adapting to ordinary life, and applying their pilgrimage experiences to everyday life are all part of their spiritual journey.

Converting a City Hotel into a Dergah

Every year, the group travels to the same hotel in Konya and converts the entire hotel into a dergah. There is also one other hotel that is also organized every year to accommodate the large number of guests and devotees assisting the guests. However, all the worship activities are performed in the main hotel (dergah hotel). Guests and devotees staying at the other hotel leave the dergah hotel only during nighttime after the ceremony. The owner of the dergah hotel, raised in a Sufi family, has emotional connections to Sufi culture through his family and supports Sufi religious activities of

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the underground group by welcoming the devotees to convert the hotel into a dergah for four days including December 17th, Rumi’s urs. Most of the devotees stay in the dergah hotel with their şeyh and receive help from hotel workers in organizing their rooms to accommodate up to upto seven devotees. Because there are only three or four beds in each room, hotel workers help devotees by providing mattresses for them to place on floors in between regular beds and in the corridors of each floor. Hotel workers also help devotees by carrying furniture around or out of the rooms so that when the hotel is out of mattresses, devotees can use their sleeping bags.

The other aspect that makes the hotel feel like the resident dergah is that the hotel workers do not occupy devotees’ spaces unless it is absolutely necessary. In the four days the devotees reside at the hotel, there are only five hotel workers on site, which allows devotees to feel as if they are in their own resident dergah. These hotel workers try to stay out of the way, keeping their presence, including serving and cleaning activities, limited. They are aware that devotees are responsible for serving tea and light food during ritual gatherings. Hotel workers are practically invisible with devotees rarely seeing them, except during breakfast hours.

The only meal that devotees have in the hotel is breakfast because they convert the entire dining room of the worship hotel into a semahane (space where sema — the act of listening spiritually — is performed) in the evening. They prepare the semahane by taking out all the tables and most of the chairs, except for the ones placed in one section of the room for female chorus members. Devotees also cover the entire floor of the dining room with large cloths and fill the air with incense. In addition, devotees place a variety of instruments that are used during the zikir ritual gathering in one
section of the dining room.

Another aspect that makes the hotel feel like a dergah is the embodiment of edep (manners), the sense of morality and generosity conveyed by devotees in sharing their spaces as if they were in the resident or wooden dergah. In sharing rooms, for instance, devotees constantly seek to be caring about each other’s comfort. In organizing their living areas, considering that beds are warmer than floor mattresses, devotees draw lots to decide on sleeping conditions. Devotees number the beds and floor mattresses and write the numbers on small pieces of papers, putting them in a bag for each individual to pick their beds and mattresses. Even then, devotees who draw beds offer the devotees who draw floor mattresses turns to sleep on the beds.

The performance of edep is significant in every moment of the pilgrimage when getting dressed, taking baths, and talking in the rooms. Rooms are very small and crowded so that devotees practice respect for each other’s special needs. Each person is careful about giving enough space to the other person, in using the bathroom or preparing his/her clothes. In the 2013 pilgrimage, as mentioned above, we were seven people in the room with mattresses and bags occupying the entire floor. In every moment of the day, even after exhausting evening zikir gatherings, devotees sought to stay aware of each other’s spaces, trying not to step on each other’s things as they moved from one point of the room to another. To make sure that each person is comfortable, every morning devotees got up five minutes apart from each other so that each person could use the bathroom and have enough space to get ready while others stayed warm in their beds. Aside from their desire to make sure that each person was comfortable, what made devotees sensitive about their use of the dergah hotel was the
presence of their şeyh in the space. As Aylin explained, “any space we occupy in the dergah, including our beds, is sacralized with the şeyh’s prayers and our zikir. Since we are here in a hotel with our şeyh praying and performing zikir, we should be aware that even the floor we step on is sacred.”

As in the resident dergah, although female and male devotees do not share rooms, they share other living spaces and interact with each other from morning to night. They serve together, perform zikir together, travel together in the buses, and attend sohbets together. Also, it is important to note that although women line up behind men in zikir ceremonies, as discussed in Chapter Four, in the underground order that is only done so that there is no controversy with more conservative guests such as şeyhs visiting the dergah hotel from other countries to participate in the underground group’s zikir. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Efendi seeks equality between his male and female disciples. As in the resident dergah, both male and female devotees serve tea, water, and desserts to one another throughout their journey.

In the dergah hotel, as if they were in their resident or wooden dergah, devotees organize their eating, sleeping, bathing, praying, dancing, walking, chanting, and talking times together. They observe each other’s actions and behaviors. Their actions are guided through each moment of the pilgrimage experience. As Peña states, “backstage and front stage ideological, symbolic, and material motives shape dimensions of the tradition; both ‘formal’ motives, which are ‘structured around the clergy, the sacraments and the individual’s relationship with God,’ and ‘popular’ religious motives, which devotees hide from official surveillance, also inform the sacred

358 Conversation with a devotee on December 1, 2011.
While Islamic doctrine inspires individuals to act within doctrinal codes of behavior, according to certain sacraments, our interactions with each other and the actions and behaviors in between the performance of more structured rituals inform what devotees experience as divine meaning. During the four days of retreat, collective living, and worshipping with spiritual siblings from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, devotees witness and guide each other’s spiritual journeys as they journey to and within the spaces.

Devotees have a hectic and strict schedule in the four days they reside in Konya. Devotees only sleep three to five hours each night, perceiving each moment as an opportunity to embody divine meaning. Although it is not obligatory, most of the devotees wake up with the morning ezan (call to prayer) around 5 in the morning and perform abdest (ritual washing or ablution) in the room, through which devotees pray, cleanse, and prepare their body and mind for the namaz. After the abdest, they get dressed and walk to the tomb and mosque of Sufi mystic Şems-i Tebrizi to perform morning namaz. Then, devotees come back to the hotel for breakfast. After breakfast, devotees leave the dergah hotel early either to visit shrines or participate in the şeyh’s sohbets in the dining room. In the evening, upon arrival at the hotel, female devotees rehearse for the evening recitation of liturgical songs, while male devotees prepare the dining room for the evening zikir gathering. Devotees eat dinner at a small restaurant right by the hotel reserved only for the group. Then they return to their rooms to get dressed for the evening zikir gathering, perform liturgical songs, prayers, zikir, sema, and bürhan along with other rituals all night long. Most devotees stay in the semahane

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after the zikir gathering to listen to the șeyh’s sohbet and more liturgical songs vocalized by senior dervishes, and then go to bed around 1 or 2 a.m. in the morning.

**Şems-i Tebriz’s Mosque**

As stated above, each day starts with devotees waking up around 5 in the morning to perform namaz and meditation in Şems-i Tebrizi’s Mosque that houses the Sufi master Şems’ tomb in the main praying area. Şems, as we discussed in Chapter Three, was a wandering dervish recognized for his tremendous influence on Rumi’s spiritual teachings and practice. Although the burial place of the master is unknown and his grave is empty, devotees believe that in the presence of his tomb, they are close to His spirit. The tomb is located in the mosque in the same space as the praying area. Devotees perceive praying in the Şems-i Tebrizi Mosque as a highly emotional activity. Arriving in Şems’ spiritual presence, the devotees say they feel as if they are surrounded by His power, which allows them to renew their connection to God.

Although devotion to a mystic’s spirit is perceived as contradictory with orthodox Sunni Islamic values, devotees’ actions and their bowing to the tomb transform the Sunni space of the mosque into a Sufi dergah space.

Despite the lack of sleep and exhaustion, as soon as they leave their beds, devotees’ actions convey dedication and discipline. The room tends to be cold, thus devotees prepare their daily outfits, pants, wool socks, sweaters, dervish cloaks, shawls, and tespihs (wooden prayer beads) ahead of time. The night before, devotees arrive at the room in exhaustion following the day’s activities and before going to bed, they place their clothes on top of their bags to make sure that at 5 in the morning, they can quickly get dressed to be on time for the morning namaz. As soon as a devotee gets up,
s/he leaves their bed or mattress and quickly walks into the bathroom, jumping from one empty spot to another to avoid stepping on floor mattresses and each other’s bags. Then, each devotee performs the *abdest* ritual, cleansing for God’s mercy. By the time everyone is ready to travel to the mosques, it tends to be still dark so female devotees wait for one another to make sure that no one is left behind by themselves. Once everyone is ready, devotees walk down the stairs and as they do, doors open and other devotees step out of their rooms to walk to the mosque. By the time devotees reach the lobby, there are around ten to fifteen male and female devotees walking out together. Most of the devotees are sleepy, tired, and cold, yet filled with the desire to walk to the mosque as a group.

The mosque is the first space devotees perform their Sufi beliefs and values publicly in Konya. When devotees arrive, the mosque tends to be packed with their spiritual siblings and other individuals (devotees affiliated with other Sufi groups and non-Sufi Muslims). There are around thirty female and forty male devotees from the underground group who receive a lot of attention as they arrive and take their seats in large groups, some wearing their black cloaks and large wooden *tespihs*. Devotees enter the mosque, bow forward in the direction of the tomb, and find seats on the floor. Then, devotees start performing *zikir* by moving the beads of their *tespihs* as they wait for the *imam* (Muslim religious leader in a mosque) to start the prayer.

While most of the people in the mosque arrive to perform their morning *namaz*, Sufi devotees after performing the *namaz* with everyone else continue their Sufi devotion by praying and performing *zikir* in the presence of Şems’ tomb. Although performance of *namaz* has a valuable role in devotees’ living, performing *zikir* in the
presence of a Sufi tomb is perceived as the central worship activity in most of the Sufi orders. Devotees begin their morning worship by praying in the mosque with everyone when the imam starts the collective namaz with a prayer. Everyone in the mosque (approximately two hundred people, most of them devotees from Efendi’s group and other Sufi groups as well as non-devotee Muslims) stands up to pray and perform the prescribed actions along with the imam. At the beginning, everyone in the mosque stands in a row with their hands at their sides and silently recites their niyet (intention), in which they state the name of the namaz and the number of rekats (units of prayer). Then, performing tekbir getirmek (meaning the pronouncement of “Allahu Akbar” — “God is Great”), they raise their hands to the level of their shoulders to begin the first rekat. Everyone stays in kiam (the standing position), keeping their hands folded below the navel, in which position practitioners silently recite verses from the Quran. They then move to rükü, bowing forward and placing their hands on their knees. After rükü, they go to secde, placing their knees on the floor, bringing their foreheads to the ground, and completing the first rekat. The morning namaz is two rekats so that practitioners repeat these actions again and end the namaz with everyone offering selam (greeting) by turning their heads to the right and left. There, in the mosque, as I turn my head to the left to conclude my namaz cycle, I see devotees continuing their devotion, concentration, and meditation, performing silent zikir with their tespihs in their hands while other individuals prepare to leave. After the collective namaz, some devotees stay in their final position to pray or perform silent zikir, while others leave their seats to stand before Şems’ tomb to pray on foot and to kiss the wooden fence-like piece behind which the tomb is placed. Devotees’ actions, as they pray in front of the tomb, bow
towards the tomb, and kiss the wooden fence in front of the tomb, convey their Sufi beliefs and values. Considering that such devotion is in opposition of Sunni Islamic values that denote the consideration of Sufi master’s divinity, when devotees perform their devotion to the tomb by bowing, kissing the wooden screen of the tomb, and walking backwards to the door of the mosque without turning their back to the tomb, they convey an alternative Islamic devotion.

Presence of female devotees and their embodied actions in the mosque is especially regenerative of Sufi living considering how each one of them walks in confidence towards Şems’ tomb (which is located in the male praying area) to pray and perform zikir. As Sheemem Burney Abbas states,

> In the Islamic world, the mosque is primarily an arena for male activity, with little visible participation of women in the rituals... Thus, the important spheres of religious and spiritual participation for women are the Sufi shrines. There, women’s input is visible and they are significant participants in the events.\(^{360}\)

In 2012, the *imam* of the Şems-i Tebrizı mosque as anticipated, despite the lack of space in female sections, followed the rules and did not allow female devotees to perform in the same space with male devotees. However, in 2013, because the majority of devotees coming to pray in the mosque were female, the *imam* allowed female devotees to pray in the same space with men, asking male participants to move closer to the front section to give enough space for female devotees. Female devotees prayed right next to the tomb of Şems and their presence conveyed the Sufi idea of unity and importance of Sufi living for female Muslims, who cannot usually perform *namaz* in the same space as the

men. The female devotees’ presence and their devotion to the tomb with male devotees also transformed the male-dominated Sunni space of the mosque into a *dergah* space in which male and female devotees live and train together. Devotees, with their devotional actions, generated Sufi beliefs and values and inscribed the Sufi idea of devotion onto the mosque.

**Traveling to, Within, and Between Sufi Masters’ Tombs: Embodying the Divine Meaning in the Buses and Making Shrines Alive with Sufi Devotion**

After visiting Şems’ tomb, devotees return to their hotel to rest, have breakfast, and prepare for the worship activities planned for each day. The morning rituals, performing *abdest*, walking to the mosque, and performing *namaz* are just ninety minutes of the devotees’ pilgrimage day in Konya and perhaps the least rigorous of all. Devotees return to the hotel around 6:30 in the morning. Some rest in their rooms, some perform meditation, and some attend the breakfast at 7 a.m. There are usually two free hours in which devotees can shower, rest, and get breakfast. Around 9 a.m., two buses and a number of cars wait for devotees in front of the hotel for devotees to travel to shrines in and near Konya.

Collective worship and sacralization of spaces continues in the buses. In bus number one (which is the *şeyh*’s bus), devotees continue worshipping by performing *sohbet* and *zikir* with the *şeyh*, while the group in bus number two performs prayers and *zikir* with one of the *dedes*. Sometimes the buses stop and the *şeyh* moves to the other bus to perform *sohbet* there as well. The devotional acts in the buses are not planned. Sometimes they last for an hour and stop when the group gets to the shrine. Sometimes they continue on and off along the way. Rituals performed in the bus begin
spontaneously, when someone asks a question or when the šeyh meditating quietly feels the urge to speak or sing. Most of the devotees stay quiet in the bus, meditate, and listen to their group’s recorded zikir ceremonies. Sometimes a group of devotees worship by playing their percussive instruments and vocalizing liturgical songs in the back seats of the bus. Some devotees vocalize along, while others continue to quietly perform zikir. Also, some of the devotees read and share religious poems, while others discuss Sufi teachings in groups of four or five.

In the sohbets, devotees listen to the šeyh speak about divine love, unity, and the Sufi idea of nefs. He also discusses problems in the material world and answers devotees’ questions. At times, while answering a question, he recites a religious poem or sings a liturgical song. Topics change each day with the events in the world, such as war, the economy, and sickness. The šeyh uses a microphone, which allows him to converse with the devotees in his soft tones. He speaks slowly, compassionately, and kindly, allowing the sounds of each word to travel in the bus. As he talks about a topic, such as poverty or war, he hides his lament and makes jokes about humanity’s need for material power. After his talk, he prays for his devotees and humanity and may start to perform zikir. As the devotees participate in his zikir, the bus feels like a traveling sacred space full of devotees who with their voices convey a sense of devotion, contentment, and togetherness.

Devotion continues with the performance of collective zikir in the shrines, which tends to be physically demanding due to the cold weather in and around Konya. Some tombs are located outdoors, while others are positioned in small stone structures. Zikir is performed louder and longer when a shrine is in an enclosed space and quieter when
in a shrine located in a residential area. Devotees visit shrines of Sufi mystics, including Şeyh Sadrettin Konevi, Ateşbaz Veli, Nasrettin Hoca, Tavus Baba, and Seyit Mahmut Hayrani in the first three days, leaving Rumi’s shrine for the final day, the 17th. However, many devotees gather also in small groups on the first and second days to visit Rumi’s shrine, which is only a ten-minute walk from the dergah hotel.

The shrines visited in the first three days are not as crowded as Rumi’s shrine. Rather, most of them are empty or have approximately five or so visitors when devotees arrive to perform their zikir as a group. When devotees arrive at the shrines, the courtyard of the isolated buildings convey a sense of detachment from the celebratory feeling that is sensed in and near Rumi’s shrine. But when hundreds of devotees’ recite God’s names and pray together, isolated shrines come alive. Arriving at a shrine, devotees first surround the tombs, located in a small structure in an iron cage or behind a fence. The şeyh and the dedes create the first circle around the tomb, male devotees surround the dedes, then the rest of the devotees surround the first and second circles, with female devotees usually forming the fourth circle. During pilgrimage, women freely perform the rituals in the same space with men; however, they stand behind male devotees. This, according to some of the devotees, does not reflect the gender dynamics in Efendi’s practice of Sufism. According to a devotee names Melda, Efendi follows such Islamic rules and principles to avoid conflict with strictly doctrinal groups and individuals who witness their ritual performances in public or as guests in their private spaces. Melda explains further that although there are a small number of both male and female devotees in the group who perceive “women and femaleness... constructed as sexual, carnal, and often by extension emotional and irrational, engendering chaos,”
Efendi constantly seeks to create a balance with the ideas of strictly doctrinal individuals that see women as “oppositional to spirituality, intellect, and rationality” and individuals who believe that Sufi practice is about “gender-equalitarian impulses.”

The zikir begins with the şeyh feeding the lines to the devotees, through which the whole group of around one hundred people begins to recite God’s names in unison. As they repeat God’s names with their hands on their hearts, devotees seek to honor the mystic and connect to his spirit. After repetition of God’s names, the şeyh and dedes lead prayers for the Prophet Muhammed’s spirit, the spirit of the mystic, other mystics, the silsila of şeyhs that come before their own şeyh, and for their şeyh, dedes, and devotees.

By the time devotees leave each shrine, their faces have turned red and purple due to the cold weather, yet they have tremendous motivation and excitement to continue their journey. Especially on the second day, devotees walk on foot from one shrine to another in the village. The weather gets exceedingly cold after 2 in the afternoon so that by the time we walk to the shrine to perform zikir, every part of our body is freezing. When I performed zikir at the shrine in the village with the devotees, I felt my body, including my face, hands, and feet, hurting due to the cold weather. It was as if the breeze was scratching my skin. Despite the cold weather, devotees performed their zikir with dedication as if they were not disturbed by the cold. As Nur says, in the shrines, at first, she experiences her aching hands and feet. Then as she connects to the spirit of the mystic, she feels motivated and connected to her devotion so that she forgets about the minus degree weather. Yiğit also points out that he feels devotion in

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his aching body. He explains what he feels is not bad pain — it is a therapeutic pain. As Seyran says, first she cannot focus on her devotion but by the time zikir begins she forgets her pain. She does not know when or how her pain ends but she feels fine. Seyran says, “I just want to be there. Nothing else is important.” Other devotees like Seyran as they travel to shrines and perform their zikir transmit a sense of motivation, confidence, and dedication for their devotion because as Şale has explained, as we perform zikir, the cold and deserted feeling in the shrine transforms. It does not get warm, but it feels warmer.

**Performing Zikir Outside the Walls of Rumi’s Shrine**

Visiting and performing zikir in Rumi’s overcrowded shrine (located in the *Mevlana Museum*) is a different experience than visiting other mystics’ isolated shrines. When devotees visit Rumi’s shrine individually or in small groups on the first and/or second day of the pilgrimage (two or three days before Rumi’s urs), they enter and pray inside the lodge along with other visitors. However, on Rumi’s urs, an interesting “doubling” occurs in the *Mevlana Museum* with a group of devotees performing a ceremony inside the shrine for visitors coming to attend Rumi’s urs and with Efendi’s group of one hundred devotees staying outside the walls of the shrine to perform collective zikir in the courtyard of the *dergah*, standing in lines in front of large windows through which they see the room in which Rumi’s tomb is located. In the underground order, there is a dervish known to be an evliya (saint) from Rumi’s bloodline who gets permission from the mayor of Konya to use a section of the courtyard for their collective zikir gathering. Due to the recognition of the space as a museum, devotees modify their worship in Rumi’s shrine. The dede shortens the
collective zikir and does not allow it to last more than fifteen minutes, in which devotees repeat the Quranic names of God in a low tone as guided by the şeyh. While devotees perform collective zikir in the courtyard, inside the shrine, visitors attend the praying sessions organized every year by the mayor of Konya to honor Rumi’s urs. As devotees perform in the courtyard, most of the visitors are already inside the building, participating in the worship ceremony organized by the government for Konya residents and tourists. While visitors witness the vocalization of liturgical songs and performance of prayers inside the shrine building, devotees get the chance to perform their zikir in a bit of privacy outside. Although some of the visitors pass by the devotees performing zikir and stop to watch and listen to them, witnessing their sense of privacy, they do not interfere with the performance.

Performing zikir, devotees’ bodies express a sense of privacy as they stand very close to one another chanting God’s names in unison facing the building with their backs turned to visitors passing behind them. As Şale says, she is so fully focused on her zikir that she does not sense anyone passing behind her. Also as Aylin expresses, she feels a sense of privacy because she has an incredible desire to focus on her worship to God. Devotees keep their focus during their worship in the courtyard even when they know that there are people watching them. Aylin explains further that it is the sense of love and joy that guides her to keep her focus on her devotion:

By the time we complete the zikir in Rumi’s shrine, having visited a variety of shrines for four days and worshipping mentally and physically day and night, I feel more motivation, commitment, joy, and energy that connects me to my devotion. I say “Thank you, Hazret [referring to Rumi as Holiness], thank you
for having me in your presence.” Then, I pray for a permanent experience of divine meaning.\(^{362}\)

Devotees experience the museum as a sacred space and with their sense of concentration and devotion give the shrine converted into a tourist site the sacred meaning it deserves. To them, every moment, every thought, and every action are journeys to experience and sacralize the museum into the space of Rumi’s spirit. Tourists or the tourist attractions were not distracting to the devotees who were able to improve their focus through the actions they performed as part of their \textit{zikir} ceremony.

\textbf{Shaking the Dining Room with the Embodiment of Divine Energy on Rumi’s \textit{Urs} (December 17\textsuperscript{th})}

In the evenings, devotees arrive at the \textit{dergah} hotel to prepare for the \textit{zikir} gatherings. The evening gatherings, although the most physically demanding part of the pilgrimage day, are perceived as the most spiritually liberating moments of the devotees’ journey. The gathering starts around 7:30 in the evening right after the devotees have completed their rehearsals for the practice of liturgical songs, dinner, tidying of rooms, and ablution, and runs until 1 or 2 in the morning. Upon arrival at the \textit{dergah} hotel, devotees change their outfits to warm their bodies after being outside in the cold. Female chorus members and the orchestra (comprised of male and female devotees) meet in one of the rooms to rehearse their liturgical songs, while other devotees prepare the dining room for the \textit{zikir} gathering. As mentioned earlier, all the tables and chairs are taken out of the dining room and placed in the corridors of the hotel. The entire floor of the dining room is covered with large cloths so that devotees

\(^{362}\) Conversation with a devotee on December 12, 2011.
can comfortably sit as if they were in their semahane in the wooden dergah. Then, devotees attend dinner in the restaurant reserved only for the devotees and their guests, return to their rooms for final preparations to perform ablution and namaz (not obligatory), and get dressed for the evening.

Preparation for the evening is a special occasion for female devotees. Most of them prepare by wearing clean clothes and putting on their mests after ablution. Then they wear their dervish cloaks, colorful shawls on their heads, and some put on earrings that match their shawls as well as makeup. As soon as they are ready, they walk down the stairs to the dining room to take their positions.

Minutes before the gathering begins, there is a sense of a celebratory feeling in the rooms, corridors, and the semahane of the hotel. Groups of people staying in the other hotel reserved for devotees and their guests start to arrive at the dergah hotel to participate in the gathering. There are groups from the United States, United Kingdom, India, Italy, and one devotee from Egypt. On the 17th, a Russian Sufi group participates in the gatherings and performs zikir with the devotees of Efendi's order. There are also individuals who are the family members and friends of the şeyh and the devotees as well as devotees who chose to stay with their family or friends in the other hotel. Aside from groups and individuals coming from the other hotel, there are also guests of the şeyh’s and devotees who live in and near Konya as well as guests who were invited to meet with the şeyh. By the time the semahane is filled with the devotees and guests, the space turns into an international religious festival site with devotees and guests speaking in different languages. As Cemal says, the diversity of God is visible in the room with everyone waiting for the şeyh’s arrival.
The evening zikir gatherings begin with devotees’ performance of liturgical songs, in which female devotees recite religious hymns for their şeyh, dedes, devotees, and their guests. This is usually the time when the şeyh arrives and sings along with the female devotees. With his arrival, everyone gets up, bows to the şeyh, and returns to their sitting position on the floor when the şeyh takes his seat. The şeyh closes his eyes and listens to the songs (some composed and written by him) that are about God, Prophet Muhammed, Sufi mystics, and the idea of divine love and longing. At times, the şeyh makes a loud, deep sound, emphasizing and extending the vowel sounds of the word “Allah,” performing his sorrow and yearning to be with God, or joyously howls “Allah,” communicating his love and excitement to experience divine love with everyone else quietly repeating after him. In those moments, the şeyh and devotees convey their desire for zikir, to be with God. The şeyh continues to hum the songs with the devotees while everyone in the room moves into a meditative state, either vocalizing the hymns quietly along with female devotees or at times exhaling with the sound “Hu” (an Arabic suffix meaning He used to refer to God — also recognized as the last sound of the word Allah). When female chorus members say “Allah,” “Muhammed,” or the names of one of the mystics as part of the lyrics of the song, the sense of energy in the room increases. Everyone in the room places their right hands on their hearts for a brief second and again says “Hu.” Devotees perform these actions in their own time. Such actions are not directed by the şeyh or performed in unison. By the time the songs are over, everyone in the room seems to convey a sense of readiness and longing to start zikir. This is visible in each devotee’s act of helping each other quickly to reorganize
the space. The chairs used by some of the orchestra and chorus members are quickly taken out of the *semahane*.

As soon as the chairs are removed, all the devotees position themselves in circles and lines around the first circle that surrounds the şeyh. In the dining room converted into the *semahane*, not everyone is positioned in circles due to the recessed shape of the spaces and the columns that cut the space into two or three sections. However, despite the recessed shape of the space, the şeyh is visible from every part of the dining room. Male and female devotees sit in lines filling the rest of the space. Then there is a brief moment of silence before *Sakin dede* (senior dervish) begins the collective *zikir* ceremony with extensive readings of Quranic passages and *Salavatı Şerifs* (chants that praise Prophet Muhammed). Along with the dede, devotees in unison seek God’s forgiveness and the şeyh continues the ceremony by feeding the first phrase “*la ilaha illa Allah.*” As in the *zikir* ceremony performed in the wooden *dergah*, the cycle of names and the rhythm changes with the şeyh’s notifications. Keeping up with the sounds of the drums and chanting of God’s names, the repetitive sometimes fast-paced movements are at times a demanding physical and mental task. At the end of the first hour, the rapture increases in climatic moments and devotees leave their seats, stand up, and start moving with more energy. It is impossible not to see the sweat trickling down devotees’ backs. Around this time, *Sakin dede* starts reciting liturgical songs along with devotees performing aloud *zikir*. Two devotees accompany *Sakin dede’s* vocalization by playing their drums to keep the beat and rhythm going. As Kerem dede explained, with the songs, chants, sounds of drums, and devotees’
movements, every look, sound, movement, heartbeat, and breath is performing zikir. Devotees’ body language, their heads, eyes, hands, and feet perform zikir.

The length of the zikir ceremonies changes with the şeyh’s and dedes’ guidance, but the ceremony on the night of the 17th lasts approximately three to four hours. About one hundred men and women, young and old, facing the kible (the direction of the Ka’aba in Mecca), deliver God’s names with loud cries and forceful movements of the body. Also, as mentioned above, a Sufi group (around fifty men and women) that travels to Konya from Russia every year to honor Rumi’s urs comes to the dergah hotel around 9:30 p.m. as the secluded group continues to perform zikir. When the group arrives, the devotees who are responsible for the entrance of the dergah hotel bring the group into the semahane and senior dervishes position them in the space.

With their arrival, the semahane gets very crowded with around one hundred and fifty people reciting God’s names in unison. Occasionally, the şeyh slows the devotees down as a group for a few seconds of rest and continues the recitations and movements. In the moments of slowing down and rest, suddenly the şeyh screams new lines in a forceful tone so that the devotees’ rhythm grows faster. At this time, something stormy occurs in the room. Devotees and guests filled with rapture continue zikir by bending their knees and leaning forward and back. Having moved to the rhythm for hours without a break, it feels as if the room is moving. Soon, when the dede changes the movement in the circle by turning the devotees right and left with their feet and shoulders, the devotees start to move along with him hand in hand. Then, after a while, movements change again with the dede jumping in the circle as devotees hold each other’s hands and jump in unison, moving their held hands up and down quickly,
and continue jumping at such a pace with liveliness and happiness. The high level of energy embodied on Rumi’s urs every year is exclusive to the night of Rumi’s urs, the 17th being the last day of the pilgrimage in which devotees convey a high state of rapture. It is possible to see devotees sweating, smiling, and holding each other’s hands tightly. With each jump, they are more committed and joyful.

Although devotees repeat the same movements, each moment seems different, instinctive, and spontaneous as the energy of the group and each individual grows. Each moment, each jump, as devotee Ceren explains, is discovered in the moment. The vocal intonations are very strong and are often accompanied by the most singular gestures, such as laughs and cries. As a participant performing the changing tones and cries, my heartbeat starts to change and I ask myself the level of commitment that we put into performing the actions. At times, devotees beat their breasts and hearts with their fists, reminding me of scenes such as a mother longing for her absent child.

As Reynold Nicholson points out, “the name of Allah inscribed in the rhythms of the heart and breath is God, or divine knowledge.”

Similar to Nicholson’s analysis, devotees’ physiological analysis shows that they experience God in their heartbeat and breath. As Ceylin says, as she jumps, she can feel her breath moving. It is as if she witnesses the divine meaning in her breath and heartbeat. She says that she inhales thinking God and exhales vocalizing His name and in that moment she can sense a growing power and energy in her body. She says in those climatic moments that her mind is released of any thought or idea apart from God. The exhaustion and togetherness experienced in the pilgrimage and the sensations she felt during the day in

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the presence of the Sufi mystics’ tombs motivate her to worship with more power and energy and her breath reminds her of her non-existence in God. She senses the mortality of her body and immortality of her spiritual self. This, she explains, is causing excessive liberation from the world as a material space. It is as if in the semahane devotees are beyond the space they see, touch, and smell.

This experience is also explained in detail by a young halife in Werbner’s study. He explains that there are seven points of energy in our body through which the spiritual power of Allah enters the body. If you do the zikir correctly, and in my case it didn’t take long, then your heart starts doing the zikir all the time, every moment of the day and night, even when a person is doing other things. Like now, when I’m talking to you.

As Werbner asserts, the devotees perform zikir to unite their body with the cosmos and that is the means of purifying and transcending the spiritual self. The constant and continuous practice of zikir, as Werbner discusses in her analysis of Sufi devotees, “purifies, or ‘opens,’ the seven hidden lata’if, the light (or subtle) spots in a person’s chest and body, to receive the light of Allah.” Performance of zikir helps the devotee to “open the curtains in front of the eyes and [move] on a journey toward an ultimate illumination, first of the shadows and reflections of the attributes of Allah, then of the attributes themselves, and finally of God’s very being or essence (zat).”

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364 Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” 322.

365 Ibid., 322.

Whirling Ritual

The zikir ceremony gets richer in religious meaning when one or more semazens perform whirling ritual in the middle of other devotees who perform zikir. Efendi’s devotees perform whirling ritual to honor Rumi’s urs and also for guests who expect to witness the act of devotion through whirling. Whirling performed during the zikir gatherings in Konya does not follow the full structure of the sema ceremony as discussed in Chapter Three, but allows guests to witness dervishes whirling in their traditional tennures (white dervish dresses sanctified by the şeyh’s prayers). One adult male, two adult female, and one eight-year-old male devotee of Efendi perform the whirling ritual in the middle of the devotees’ zikir circle to honor Rumi’s urs. Their participation in the ceremony transmits a physical and aesthetic diversity in the space. Performing in the middle of devotees who continue to repeat God’s names at full volume in the zikir circle, semazens start turning faster and faster, conveying the kinesthetic imagery of the whirling dervish through energetic movements. Their body transmits the dervish’s joy and peace in achieving a spiritual state while other devotees convey the energy and power with their rigorous and fast-paced movements and vocalizations.

Elif, one of the female semazens, explained, sema is a form of zikir that can be practiced individually or in ceremonial form. She explained that as she whirls, she repeats God’s names silently. As her spiritual siblings continue to zikir through different body movements, such as bending their knees, leaning forward and back, or by jumping, she performs zikir through whirling. In that moment, she pointed out we all seek to be with God, whichever Sufi ritual act we perform. All is performed to
remember God, to experience divine meaning, and to feel a sense of liberation. Elif said we seek to move to a space beyond space and, as Rumi says, “to embrace all” and “be part of all.” Through different sounds and movements, Elif explains, we seek to unite with God.  

As Tuğrul İnançer, the şeyh of the Cerrahi order, explains, aside from worship Sufi devotees also perform their rites “to exhibit their music, dances, costumes, and thus to entice young people to join them.” In performing whirling ritual along with their form of collective zikir ceremony, devotees share different ways of worshipping God. Their embodied acts of semazens, as Melih dede explained, inspire the devotees and guests witnessing the whirling dervishes’ joy, energy, and unity. While every movement and sound is performed as a journey within oneself and to God, devotees’ actions also create a space in which devotion is lived and shared.

Semazens, after completing the fourth whirling part, bow to their şeyh and leave the semahane to change their outfits and return to the zikir circle to continue their worship. When they leave the room, the devotees performing zikir do not stop or slow down. The energy in the room continues to grow with the dedes’ recitation of a joyful liturgical song. Burcu stated, every time she listens to Mehmet dede, she feels as if his heart is burning, as if he is a volcano waiting to incinerate his burning heart.

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367 Conversation with a devotee on December 12, 2011.
Bürhan

The music and chanting continues to stay strong and emotional so that the energy, desire, commitment, and rapture in the room continues to grow as devotees start to perform another ritual, bürhan (meaning proof), to show the incontrovertible truth, a ritual performed in the dergah hotel and wooden dergah as ordered by the Efendi. In the secluded order, the showing of bürhan is performed with the şeyh inserting skewers into different parts of dervishes’ bodies, who stand in the first two circles (comprised of male senior dervishes and dervishes) to prove that the natural laws of the world may sometimes not be valid. Tuğrul İnançer relates the story of the Bürhan ritual with the following:

Seyyid Ahmet er-Rifai, who studied at the Ümmü ‘Ubayda tekke near Basra, went to Hadjdj pilgrimage in 1160. During his visit to Medina he saw the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad (Rawda-I Mutahhara) from afar and descending from his camel he entered it. As if he wanted to show that he was a Seyyid (descendant of Prophet Muhammad) he said, ‘I greet you o Grandfather’ (al-Selamu ‘Aleyke Ya Djaddi). At that moment a voice was heard — and this was confirmed by witness — saying, ‘I greet you o son’ (Aleyk al Selam Ya Walladi). Upon which the founding saint knelt and declaimed a poem, which said, ‘When afar I sent my spirit here so that he could kiss your earth. Now the same privilege has become possible also for my worldly body. Extend your hand so that I may kiss it with the lips of both my spirit and body.’ And — a hand of light [fire] extended from the tomb and the saint kissed it.369

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369 İnançer, “Rituals and Main Principles of Sufism,” 140.
The showing of būrhan in other orders consists of inserting instruments such as swords, skewers, or knobs into the cheeks, stomach, or throat, as well as licking white-hot metal or putting it on a dervish’s naked body. Efendi, however, only uses skewers.

Būrhan begins with a devotee passing through devotees who continue performing zikir. He comes with a vessel filled with skewers, bows in the direction of the şeyh, and leaves the vessel on the floor in the middle of the zikir circle. Then, the sound of the percussion starts to grow and a devotee hands a skewer to the şeyh, who also continues to move to the rhythm, performing zikir. In that moment, devotees keep their eyes open as they move and chant to see the şeyh and to witness the insertion. The dede brings the zikir to a forceful but low pitch tone through which devotees continue to repeat another Quranic name, “Hay,” meaning God is the Living. The şeyh takes his time dancing in the zikir circle. Then after a while, he looks into the eyes of the senior dervish, holds the skin on his throat with one hand, and inserts the first skewer through the skin. In this moment, zikir starts to become louder and faster again. As Kerem says, this is a moment of celebration. Then, devotees start to move and repeat God’s names so fast that as we jump it is hard to see others in the room. Nothing seems planned. Every action happens spontaneously in the moment. It is as if with the actions performed, the devotees feel more emotional because their faces are wet with sweat, their eyes are full of tears, and some of them can barely keep their eyes open. The devotees’ bodies in motion convey a strong sense of commitment, passion, and

370 There are two vessels: one for skewers that are prepared and disinfected for the ritual; the other empty vessel for the skewers that come out of devotees’ body parts. As the ritual goes on, the şeyh first inserts four or five skewers into different devotees and continues by taking some out and inserting new ones into other devotees in the circles.
freedom. Their dancing bodies and facial expressions demonstrate a sense of pride, respect, and devotion to the proof conveyed by their şeyh. The senior devotee shows no sign of pain when the şeyh inserts the skewer and he continues to move and perform zikir with the skewer in his throat. As I watched the moment of insertion, I could not stop wondering how the şeyh inserts the skewers into devotees’ body parts without hurting them. The şeyh continues to dance until he picks the next dervish to whom and on whom he will show the proof of divinity. In this moment, I can clearly see as I stand right behind the dervish in the second circle, with whom the şeyh is having eye contact. Then, after a brief second, the şeyh inserts another skewer through the skin of the stomach of the dervish. I clearly see his skin. There is no blood, no stain, and he continues to perform his zikir as well. There is no visible bodily damage. His face shows no sign of pain. Devotees continue to move and perform zikir, keeping their eyes open to witness the rest of this miraculous process of showing proof.

By this time, having performed zikir at high speed for hours, as Burcu later explains, it was as if every part of her body was dancing involuntarily. On the other hand, the rapture, energy, and commitment increased with the execution of bürhan, due to its increasing speed. Although Burcu was feeling tired, almost breathless, and disturbed by the sweat on her body, she explains that it was as if there was another source of energy that liberated her despite the exhaustion. Like Burcu, my throat was hurting, my arms, knees, and feet were aching, but I had no need to take a break. As Burcu explains further, it was a moment of renewal when she sensed the exhaustion for a brief moment, which then turned to energy as she continued to jump and sing. Burcu says in such moments of exhaustion she feels something else that she cannot define
working through her. This moment of witnessing proof is so intense and in my opinion overwhelming, but witnessing devotees’ joy and celebration I could indeed keep my eyes open. *Bürhan* brings a sense of conviction and confidence to devotees’ actions. Everyone is assured that there is no pain involved. As Mehmet, a dervish, later explains, in such rapturous moments, “[they] witness God’s power and [their] şeyh’s relationship to the divine. It is not shocking. It is what [they] know, what [they] assert, and what [they] live for.” Mehmet promises me that it is not painful and encourages me further to perceive it as delightful.

*Bürhan*, for devotees, is a moment of celebration. It is more than a devotional act. It is devotees’ celebration of proof. It is their confidence. It shapes who they are by inspiring them to believe in their spiritual self beyond this world. *Bürhan* convinces devotees that everything in this world is transitory. Devotees witness God’s proof, His unity, and while witnessing the proof, their idea of life and their idea of themselves change. Material belongings, needs, and social titles become less central to their identity. As Peña examines, “Public or private, collective or individual, the devotional acts have regenerative effects that transcend the moment of execution.”\(^{371}\) As Efendi explains, devotees experience a meaning beyond their material selves. It is not a trance-like state. Devotees seek to stay alert by keeping their eyes open. What devotees experience is similar to Gilbert Rouget’s analysis of trance as “trancendence of one’s normal self, as a liberation resulting from the intensification of a mental or physical

In Sufism, as Efendi explains, performing būrhan, devotees experience freedom from their material selves and experience their “real or spiritual selves.” Performing būrhan, dervishes experience a moment of clarification about God’s power. Their belief is justified and reformed. As Melih dede explains, there is no need to analyze the meaning of būrhan because, as devotees, they know why and how instinctively.

In the three years in which I pilgrimaged with Efendi’s order to Konya, Mehmet was the only dervish who shared his experience with būrhan with me in detail. One night, I was in the kitchen washing dishes with two other dervishes and Mehmet walked in to nibble on cookies after the ritual ended. One senior dervish patted his shoulder and asked him jokingly how he was feeling after his first būrhan. In reply, Mehmet said: “Ohhhh... I want it again.” Then sounding joyous with his first experience, he said that feeling the skewers in his body is miraculous. He only felt as if a mosquito had bitten him. He continued to move and speak with the skewers in his body. He said, “it is out of this world.” Then he said, “Now when I think about it, I say yes, of course, certainly. This is His power and I was very lucky.” Like Mehmet, other devotees who have felt the skewers in their skin look content as the şeyh inserts the skewers into their body parts. The skewers stay in each devotee around five to ten minutes. When taking the skewers out, the şeyh’s eyes also transmit a sense of confidence. He looks serious, showing not one bit of concern in his eyes.


Conversation with a devotee on January 10, 2013
Performance of *bürhan* also contributes to the sanctification of the space. The devotees and guests stand hand in hand, alert, keeping their eyes open, to witness *bürhan* while repeating “Kayyum,” another Quranic name of God, referring to His attribute of managing all His creations’ qualities, functions, and actions. Repeating specifically this name, devotees are aware that God has the power to change the functions and qualities of objects and spaces, as well as human beings. As the şeyh says, God gives the knife the ability to cut and the skewer the ability to pierce. If God wants, the quality and function of each material changes. As Ceren says, *bürhan* is perceived as a miraculous event that reminds us not to question the divine power.

By the time the şeyh pulls out the last skewer, everyone in the room, whether a devotee or not, is filled with the urge to stand up, dance, and sing. Turner believed that when participants of a religious or secular event experience “liberation of their human capacities of cognition, affect, volition and creativity,” they are able to experience spontaneous *communitas* — “we are all in this together.” As I wrote in my journal back in the hotel,

As the group moves and recites together, I feel the increase of energy in the room. More than half of the guests are already standing and performing with the devotees, but with the increase of energy during the performance of *bürhan*, the vibrations grow so incredibly strong that after a while even the ones who initially resist leave their seats and start to move with the devotees. With each repetition, it was as if the devotees are moving their head the first time, with

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more desire and commitment for a spiritual journey.\textsuperscript{376}

The experience of spontaneous \textit{communitas} transports the entire audience (including the guests watching) to another realm, in which participants are moved and touched by the space, sounds, and movements of the ceremony. As the devotees’ bodily energy transforms with the movements, the kinesthetic sense in the space inspires guests to move and chant in the same rhythm with the devotees. The dining room turns into a space of religious action in which guests also experience a sense of joy and energy not due to the symbols in the space, such as the smell of the incense. What made the space sacred were the actions guests embodied along with the devotees. Guests, inspired by the energy in the space, started to move like the devotees and with the devotees.

Attending the collective \textit{zikir} gatherings of the secluded order in 2013, as Esin, a guest, said, “when I was there watching the devotees move their heads and vocalize ‘la ilaha ilallah,’ I stopped thinking about why and how they were performing these movements. I wanted to be part of it.”\textsuperscript{377} Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the spectator’s physical reactions as a direct result of their perception of performer’s actions.\textsuperscript{378} Guests are the spectators who first arrive to observe; then, after observing closely the facial expression and body movements of the devotees and after hearing the liturgical songs and repetition of God’s names performed together when the rapture in the ceremony increases, they physically reach either by repeating the same sounds and/or by moving with the devotees. Esin’s physical reaction was a direct result of her witnessing the energy and joy in the room. Esin was not forced to participate in the ritual. Devotees’

\textsuperscript{376} Journal entry written on December 15, 2011.
\textsuperscript{377} Conversation with a devotee on December 20, 2012.
movements, vocalizations, and rapture transformed Esin (who arrived at the sacred space as a spectator) into a performer, through which she experienced “a sense of energy” (described in Sufism as divine energy) and freedom from the needs and burdens of the material world. Moving beyond finding meanings for Sufi devotees’ performance and use of space, the guests witness, perform (move and recite), and become part of the kinesthetic realm in the dining room space of the hotel. Guests arrive at a hotel, but leave from a dergah.

Without the devotees’ embodied actions, the space is just a hotel dining room. Early in the morning, before the breakfast hours, the empty dining room still conveys some religious meaning with the smell of incense and memories of the zikir gatherings; however, without the devotees’ embodied actions, the sacralization of the space is incomplete. For the devotees, with the performance of the zikir, the city, the hotel, and the dining room move beyond their everyday functions and meanings.

**Conclusion: From Pilgrimage to Everyday**

During the pilgrimage, devotees chant, dance, pray, and meditate until they experience intense physical and mental exhaustion. Devotees constantly worship and reevaluate their relationship to the material world and to divine meaning at all times of their journey. When the ritual ends, devotees seem to reenter ordinary life “just about where they went in” and follow the routines of their everyday life: phone calls, family arrangements, and work obligations. However, as Nur explains, we return to ordinary life having embodied the divine meaning from moment to moment and from space to space. The pilgrimage experience becomes part of their ordinary life because

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devotees carry their bodily memories and their physical and mental transformations to their practice of everyday life.

As discussed in the previous chapter, zikir is the most significant form of worship in the secluded order. In their view, Sufi living, whether practiced in the form of prayer or fasting, including sema, bürhan, and sohbet, are aimed at performing zikir (repeating God’s Quranic names). The şeyh advises his devotees to remember God in every moment of their everyday life, reminding them that zikir serves as a further remembrance of the goal toward which all spiritual practice is directed. As Werbner also examines, devotees “perform the zikir at all times of the day and night. Even as they work they perform the zikir.”

Dwight Conquergood asks about the “conceptual consequences of thinking about culture as a verb instead of a noun, process instead of a product... as an unfolding performative invention instead of a reified system, structure, or variable.” Perceiving Sufi living as a performative invention, it is possible to describe how each devotee creates his/her own processual experience during and after the pilgrimage in the practice of everyday life. Each devotee perceives his/her pilgrimage experience as part of his/her life journey within oneself and to God. As Meriç, one of the devotees, explained, when she performs zikir silently at work, the sounds and rhythms that she experienced in evening zikir gatherings pop right back into her head. She immediately remembered the movements of her body and the sensations she experienced, such as energy and joy.

380 Pnina Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims,” 311.
Remembering that experience of energy and unity, she felt content and free from the burdens of the material world. Devotees explained that they experience a move away from the material aspects of their specific work or home space. Sitting at her desk, Ceren remembered the exhaustion and liberation she experienced in the collective zikir and then she recalled the sense of energy and power. In such moments, Meriç said, her workspace transforms and she starts to perceive the world as a sacred space.

Remembering the sensations experienced in the performance of zikir in Konya, with kinesthetic imagination, the individual continues to recall and embody contentment, joy, and energy in day-to-day interactions. The physicality of zikir in Konya, due to its pace, allows a deeper sensation. As Esen expresses, she can recall the sensations clearly in her everyday life, which makes her feel liberated, happy, and confident. What happens during pilgrimage serves as a rehearsal for devotees to live in the material world with more awareness of divine meaning.

Having the chance to perform collective zikir every night in Konya, devotees return to their ordinary lives with a heightened awareness of their spiritual presence. As Ruya says, she “stays positive and less competitive with others during work and leisure time.” Devotees believe that through spiritual practice of zikir whether collective, aloud, practical, or silent, they heal their mind, body, and soul and sacralize the urban spaces as sacred sites to experience Sufi living. The hotel was a space of physical, mental, and spiritual sensations, such as feeling one’s heartbeat, sweat, aching muscles, sore throats, humidity, heat, and vibrations as well as smelling incense, hearing changing sounds, tones, tinkles, screams, soft and harsh melodies, and witnessing the

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382 Conversation with a devotee on May 12, 2011.
383 Conversation with a devotee on June 17, 2012.
shaking floor from devotees’ jumps. During pilgrimage devotees experience Konya as a place outside of space. The experience of zikir in the dergah hotel inspires devotees to perceive and organize their everyday life, including their job and family tasks, according to the community/religious gatherings in the shrine. With their rituals, devotees seek to move closer to God and exercise their perception of the world as a sacred space. Devotees return to their lives with the memory of the physical sensations experienced during their ritual acts from morning to night in the dergah hotel, the buses, and the shrines during pilgrimage.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

Making space for Sufi living in Turkey is a multifaceted story that shows how devotees continue to experience and mobilize their beliefs and values despite legal restrictions prohibiting Sufi space production. Sufi living is in constant transformation, resisting any conclusive definition due to each devotee’s or group’s experience with producing temporary and permanent lodges, ritual spaces, community gathering spaces, and educational spaces, performance of Sufi rites including zikir, and practice of everyday life inside and outside of dergahs. Devotees formulate, revive, and transmit their beliefs and values by converting various urban spaces, including museums, shrines, dervish lodges, cultural centers, hotels, offices, and private homes into sacred sites for devotional living through face-to-face interaction, sharing, teaching, and performing rituals. To research Sufi living in Turkey, this project focused on a site-specific analysis, “one that simultaneously privileges the production of space and the production of the sacred,”\(^\text{384}\) to show how Sufi living is a synthesis of religious and secular values. Following Elaine Peña’s idea “that space is not absolute, that the process of sacred space production embraces both religious and secular elements, often in unison,”\(^\text{385}\) devotional actions discussed in this thesis show how devotees seek to

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transform the places they live, work, and sleep with their embodiment of divine
meaning and the secular values of the modern Turkish state as they create their
religious/community gatherings. More specifically, devotees seek to consecrate both
Sufi and non-Sufi spaces to generate Sufi devotional living. Focusing on Pnina
Werbner’s analysis that Sufi Islam is simultaneously a journey within the body and
person, a journey toward God, and a journey in space, I have shown how devotees
seek to change the sites they occupy with their embodied acts while practicing self-
transformation, perceiving the places in which they practice everyday life as the space
of Allah.

The case studies showed that devotees’ embodied actions, or “devotional labor,”
as Peña states, “is all that is needed to consecrate a place.” As in the case discussed in
Chapter Three, devotees’ actions are twofold, conveying both their religious values and
the Turkish state’s secular values in order to generate Sufi living in the urban public
sphere. At the Nurettin Cerrahi tekke, devotees work as tourist guides and souvenir
sellers, serve as doormen welcoming and placing shoes at the entrance of the semahane,
pray, and perform zikir, making their space sacred, public, and legal as a Sufi lodge and
foundation center. With their devotional labor, while the Cerrahi devotees produce the

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*Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); David
Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Yi-Fu Tuan,
*Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2001); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995);
and *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha Low and Denise

386 Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah,” *Making Muslim
Space in North America and Europe*, 176.

387 Ibid.

388 Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe*,
150.
Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke* simultaneously as a worship and touristic site, *Saygın dede* and his devotees produce the Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge as a temporary school of Mevlevi knowledge and their temporary home. *Narin dede,* on the other hand, creates semi-public networking spaces as he works and worships as a teacher and performer of Sufi rituals, sharing his knowledge of Sufism. These case studies showed devotees’ labor is all that is needed to produce a variety of temporary spaces to practice Sufi rituals in the public or semi-public sphere of Turkey.

Examining the production of Sufi spaces in Turkey, this thesis also focused on the discussion of Sufism as devotional living that is beyond strictly doctrinal religious values. The case studies showed how Sufi living is a performative intervention that is beyond the rules, principles, structures, and systems of religion inside and outside *dergahs.*[389] The devotees I have discussed are multicoded individuals in the sense that they simultaneously embody modern, secular, and religious values, continuously wanting to learn, discuss, and become part of social progress through the embodiment of secular and religious knowledge. Devotees generate what I call Sufi living as a modern way of a Sufi devotional lifestyle that is a synthesis of secular and religious values in Turkey. Devotees’ embodied acts made clear that Sufism in present-day Turkey, as Joshua Edelman states in his discussion of performing religion in the public sphere, is “a dynamic, lived, and fluidly embodied set of actions, practices, gestures,

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Taking Edelman’s idea further that religions exist because devotees perform their beliefs and values through ritual, liturgy, prayer, and meditation, I examined how Sufi living is not only about the study of theological texts and the performance of rituals and prayers in sacred spaces, but also about the use of divine meaning in everyday secular interactions in the urban, social, and political context of Turkey.

The way devotees produce their beliefs and values in various spaces conveys how Sufi living is becoming more and more about commitment to secular as well as religious knowledge. As John Voll points out, “Sufi saints and their devotional paths (tariqas [tarikat]) with their popular followings have frequently been identified with rural, village, and tribal societies, in contrast to the religious mode of the literate scholars of the cities.” However, as we have seen in the case of Narin dede’s group and the underground order, devotees are working professionals, academics, doctors, lawyers, bank workers, entrepreneurs, and artists who participate in everyday Sufi living in a variety of ways. Even the devotees who devote almost all their spare time to their şeyh are able to make choices regarding their personal, professional, and even religious lives. As in Nilüfer Göle’s discussion about how secularism has had a positive effect on Islamists in the 1990s, secular education in Turkey also allowed Sufi devotees as members of Turkish society to study Western as well as Eastern history, theory, and practice. As in the case of the devotees in the underground Sufi order, secular education and the ability to think critically about their actions and behaviours is a significant

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component of their devotional living.

In each case study, but primarily in the underground order, I discussed how the secular values of the Turkish state have shaped the practice of Sufi living in Turkey. Examining the everyday life in the underground order, I discussed why and how devotees value modern ways of communication and reasoning and how devotees are also afraid of what Jürgen Habermas calls “the fundamentalist refusal to communicate.”

Claire Marie Chambers, Simon Du Toit, and Joshua Edelman examine Habermas’ ideas and point out that “the root of the desire to exclude religion from the public sphere is the fear of its return as a proto governmental voice, one that is unresponsive to the demand of enlightened rationality that all human beings must be equal in dignity under the law.”

Chambers, Du Toit, and Edelman highlight Habermas’ view further, stating that “The demand for equality is framed as a rational principle, and therefore, there is a terrifying prospect that religiously based forms of authority and government may not recognize it.” Further, Habermas says, “Each side must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge from its own perspective, which enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner.”

Habermas’ ideas illuminate how, like non-religious secular Turks who fear the dominance of religion and the fundamentalist refusal to communicate, the religious Sufi individuals, like Narin dede’s student Yiğit, also feel threatened by individuals who are

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394 Ibid., 13.
unresponsive to the rational and democratic demands of Turkish society. Devotees of the underground order, as educated working professionals with their own ideas about divine unity, have formed alternative religious orders in Turkey and called their practices in these orders Sufi living, a phrase that is more acceptable in the eyes of secular Turkish society.

In Turkey, while şeyhs, dedes, and devotees in Sufi orders continue to influence, guide, and challenge each other regarding their educational needs, they also continue to challenge any overarching analysis of what constitutes Sufi tradition. Devotees study foreign languages, receive access to online databases, and discuss Islam in what Talal Asad argues is “a discursive tradition.”396 When Asad wrote an article about Islam as a discursive tradition in 1986, as Brian Silverstein points out, he was focusing on the notion of tradition elaborated by Alasdair MacIntyre in his controversial 1984 work, *After Virtue*. Influenced by MacIntyre’s philosophical analysis, Asad analyzed tradition as “an ongoing set of discussions (a ‘discourse’) and practices that are closely interlinked and have been so continuous and over time.”397 He discussed the idea of correct practice, which is what devotees call the true form of their beliefs and values. As Silverstein points out, “To belong to a tradition involves sincere commitment to the value and normatively binding character of past precedent and to the validity of the discussions and debates received from the past.”398 Devotees, as I discussed throughout, value deeply the examples, discussions, and ideas of their past saints and take their

397 Brian Silverstein “Sufism and Modernity in Turkey: From the authenticity of experience to the practice of discipline,” 40.
398 Ibid.
words and way of living as a model for their spiritual elevation. However, devotees are also aware of the fact that the “discussions about correct practice are always evolving, and the judgments reached are constantly changing.” Devotees influence each other to think about their beliefs and values as continuously expanding or changing. Devotees discussed in this thesis convey how “Stasis is not a characteristic of tradition.”

Drawing on Asad’s analysis, Silverstein points out that “to say that traditions are always changing does not amount to saying they... do not exist. Living traditions change through engagement with the received, ongoing sets of discussions; doing otherwise is by definition abandonment of the tradition.” Similar to Silverstein’s analysis, devotees actually seek to preserve their beliefs and values as a living tradition by embodying the idea of tradition as change.

With şeyhs’ and dervishes’ understanding of tradition as change, Sufi practice of everyday life is becoming more and more multifaceted. With the participation of new devotees from various cultural, religious, and national backgrounds, Sufism transforms and becomes more diverse and active. Participating in Sufi living, devotees learn and seek to embody the idea that all human beings are different, yet united in God. Devotees’ embodiment of Sufi beliefs and values transmits the knowledge that there is an alternative way of practicing the Islamic faith that is in line with the secular and democratic values of the modern Turkish state.

In present-day Turkey, Sufism has different ways of operating. Devotees experience “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within dominant cultural

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399 Ibid.
400 Ibid.
401 Ibid.
economy in order to adapt it to their other interests and their own rules.\footnote{Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 35.} Seyhs experience transformations within the dominant socioeconomic Turkish culture and adapt such changes to their devotional living. The seyh of the underground order, for instance, constantly modifies the practice of teachings, classes, and community/ritual gatherings and the resident dergah spaces according to the work, schooling, and health needs of the group and society. In the underground order, Sufi living is about embodying a set of beliefs and values with each teaching and practice adapted uniquely to each individual devotee’s relationship to the dominant secular culture of Turkey.

In the case studies discussed, specifically the underground Sufi order, for the seyh, it was important to create an egalitarian environment in which his male and female devotees lived and trained together. For the female devotees I encountered in the underground order, the free environment of Sufi spaces was an opportunity for them to practice all aspects of Sufism, including the movements of zikir, which is not possible in strictly doctrinal orders such as the Cerrahi order discussed in Chapter Three. The private building and house converted into a dergah, for Ceren, Burcu, and Ayşe, were spaces where they could make music, sing, dance, and discuss beliefs and values freely with their seyh and male spiritual siblings. Examining the practice of everyday life of these female devotees inside and outside of the dergah spaces, I came to understand how a religious seyh generates spaces in which male and female devotees live beyond the şeriat-based values of Islam. In the underground order, female devotees from different ages and educational backgrounds were continuously seeking to find a balance between their family lives with their husbands and children and their devotional living.
in the *dergah*. Although their husbands and children were not interested in becoming devotees, female devotees, as guided by their *seyh*, found ways to plan their family lives regarding the long hours they spend in the *dergahs*. Each female devotee had different ways of operating according to their family living, job, and number of children. These female devotees’ practice of everyday life requires extensive research to show how women, while becoming active participants in Sufi living as devotees practicing music and poetry as part of their *nefs* training, carry the religious values that they embody during their training with their *seyh* to their actions as mothers and wives interacting with family members in their homes and with their co-workers at work spaces.

Considering life within the Sufi orders, there is still limited research about gender and sexuality. The scope and character of women’s participation in the ritual, social, and intellectual dimensions of Sufism requires broader research by comparing specific case studies because gender dynamics change from order to order. There is also no discussion to date about Sufism and gays and lesbians in Turkish Sufi orders. I did not encounter any male or female devotee sharing ideas about homosexuality in the underground order or the Nurettin Cerrahi *tekke*, but in my private discussions with female devotees who have become close friends along the way, I have been told that there were individuals who lived as gays and lesbians outside of the *dergahs* while participating in devotional living in Sufi sacred spaces. In the third year of my ethnographic research, I openly encountered two gay men in non-religious social settings who were initiated in Sufi groups as devotees; however, only their spiritual guides were aware of their sexuality. What seems to be common about most of the female and gay and lesbian devotees I have encountered is that they seek to change their
perception of Islam as a strictly doctrinal religious practice by studying with Sufi şeyhs, who perceive Islam as a discursive tradition. Female and gay and lesbian devotees express that their spiritual leaders are not like the old Kemalist image of a traditional şeyh or Islamic leader with a beard and gown imposing a set of doctrinal codes or relegating female devotees into inactive participants in Sufi rituals. They seek to challenge the modernist image that presents Sufi dervishes as strictly doctrinal individuals.

Women perceive Sufi living as a safer form of religion as opposed to fundamentalist movements that threaten the secular order of society. It would also be a significant contribution to the study of Sufism and gender to compare the embodied acts of female devotees in strictly doctrinal Sufi groups with Sufi groups that perceive that Islamic law, like tradition, needs reviving according to the needs of modern Turkish society. Also, it would be an important contribution to the study of Sufi living in the urban Turkish context to examine Cemalnur Sargut, a female mürşit, who practices Sufi living by collaborating with her devotees in writing Sufi books, giving seminars, and organizing sohbets. She plays a significant role in the mobilization of Sufism as a way of living that is a synthesis of religious and secular values.

Aside from gender dynamics, another aspect excluded from the scope of this thesis that should be covered extensively with additional research is the political affiliations of Sufi orders in Turkey. Although, as discussed in Chapter Two, the Nakşibendi order was very active in Turkish politics, and as mentioned briefly in Chapter Three, there are politician devotees in the Cerrahi order, it is also necessary to produce research through extensive fieldwork on how devotees continue to build
connections with leaders of the state to legalize Sufi spaces in Turkey. In November 2012, Habertürk, one of the major TV channels in Turkey, broadcast Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ’s speech about Sufi living during the fast-breaking dinner (iftar) of the World Ehl-i Beyt Foundation, an Alevi foundation,\(^{403}\) pointing out that the practices of Sufi orders, including zikir rituals, did not end with the closure of Sufi lodges, calling attention to the fact that it should be the government’s priority to meet the needs of Sufi citizens.\(^{404}\) Bozdağ, as mentioned in Chapter One, said the government is aware of the Sufi lodges functioning underground. As part of the government's policy to grant more rights and freedoms to Alevis in Turkey, state officials were regularly attending the fast-breaking dinners hosted by the Alevis. When journalists asked him to discuss his comments later, Bozdağ “told reporters that his remarks were aimed at launching a debate on the matter and that there is no government-sponsored work under way to lift the ban on Sufi lodges and convents.”\(^{405}\) It seems clear from Bozdağ’s speech that to legalize Sufi lodges as worship spaces is part of the government’s agenda; however, the assertive questioning of the media and citizens reminded the

\(^{403}\) Ehl-i Beyt means “the household of the last Prophet Muhammad (S.A.V.), the lord of the universe” and includes “Ali, Fatima, Hussein and Hassan and their bloodline” as well as “prominent persons who are their descendants.” The foundation “defends the freedom of opinion and belief to the utmost and rejects the separation of belief. We perceive the politicization of belief and its ideologization as the greatest hazard for humanity. No one has the right to determine the form and preference of the belief of another. Everyone has the right to believe and serve as they wish and select their sanctuary. Impositions are opposing the Allah.” The World Ehl-i Beyt Foundation, http://www.ehlibeyt.org.tr/eng/oku.asp?gd=19.


government to reconsider their decision before any public announcement. Following Bozdağ’s speech, in December 2012, journalists Birol Biçer and Hasan Hüseyin Kemal, supportive of the government’s agenda to keep the dialogue about the opening of Sufi lodges alive, wrote an article for Aktüel magazine about the practices in five different tekkes in Istanbul, showing each group as modern and educated members of Turkish society. There is growing awareness in the Turkish society about the needs of minority religious groups, most importantly Alevis. However, AKP’s agenda is still not clear. Whether Erdoğan’s leaning towards the opening of cemevis (Alevi worship spaces) is part of the democratization process in Turkey or an opportunity to legalize and use Sufi tekkes as religious/community spaces for the Islamification of Turkish society is not clear. The latter is a serious worry for secular devotee and non-devotee Turks.

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407 Turkish government continues to be in a suspicious place in regard to the democratization and secularization processes in Turkey. Examining the democratization process of AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi — The Justice and Development Party) as the ruling party of the Turkish state since 2002, Jocelyne Cesari states although “[t]he goal of the party is not explicitly defined in Islamic terms,” Erdoğan’s actions reflect a hidden Islamist agenda. Jocelyne Cesari, The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 184. Also, see, Gamze Çavdar, “Islamist New Thinking in Turkey: A Model for Political Learning?” Political Science Quarterly 121, no. 3 (2006): 481. While AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, inspired Turkish people with ideas that introduced the new Islamist trend as “a response to domestic and international developments through the lens of Islamic values,” Erdoğan also started to reveal his hidden Islamist agenda when he began to weaken the secularist influence of the Turkish Army, challenged the work produced by secular journalists, regulated alcohol use (passing a bill prohibiting the sale of alcohol in shops after 10pm), voiced his opinion of abortion as murder, expressed his desire to ban coeducational student housings, and recently banned the use of Twitter and YouTube in March, 2014. As discussed by a great number of journalists, the AKP government has increased restrictions on the citizens’ right to freedom to assembly,
I would like to close this thesis by pointing out that the discussions in each chapter are examples of the idea that the most effective way to engage in and comprehend Sufi culture in present-day Turkey is to follow the analytical directions provided in performance theory and methodology. The study of religion through performance, as Catherine Bell explains, has been “indispensable for the articulation of specifically cultural dynamics involved in religious activity, thereby recognizing religious life as more than a functional expression of conceptual beliefs.”

Performance theory guides the scholar to focus on what Peña states are “the places and times where power wordlessly changes hands — interactions that often define a community. Recognizing the contingency of boundaries and connections is what the study of everyday and extraordinary performances renders.”

One must take the embodied acts of devotees as an object in which to evaluate the struggles, conflicts, and needs of each individual from one space or time to another.

Following performance as a methodology compelled me as a researcher into an embodied engagement with the complexity of Sufi cultures. Such an engagement requires “an understanding of the knowledge of the body in the culture, a clear sense of what has been embodied in the corporeality of the people who participate in religious practice, what their tongues, skin, ears, ‘know.’” Learning with and through action “is not a task that we can accomplish by reading textbooks, merely observing ritual

practices, or participating sometimes. It is vital for a researcher to place his/her body in a given setting and copperformatively witness the practice of everyday life. Sharing rooms, cooking, cleaning, praying, and sleeping alongside devotees in *dergahs* as opposed to simply conducting interviews with them allowed me as a researcher to share the individual and group struggles, thirsts, exhaustions, and needs that shape Sufi living in contemporary Turkey.

Practicing everyday life and performing their rituals regularly with the devotees in the underground order, I also witnessed how each seeker perceives the idea of action and performance as a process of learning and self-transformation. Devotees in the underground order perceive their everyday actions, such as performing *zikir*, serving tea, washing dishes, or interacting someone at work, as part of their devotional training. Therefore, for Sufi devotees, to perform, to do, or simply to take care of any task is to worship and to become aware of God’s unity, which for them is about increasing awareness and knowledge of one’s actions. Performance, when analyzed in relation to Sufi living, is best defined as a conscious regeneration of action to experience self-transformation, to move closer to God.

As a female researcher raised in a secular family, especially with a grandmother

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411 As Margaret Thompson Drewal suggests in her critical evaluation of research in Africa, “Performance participants can self-reflexively monitor their behavior in the process of doing. Therefore, more than simply observing that performance is emergent, it is crucial to examine the rhetoric of performers situated in time and place. For performance as a mode of activity is often tactical and improvisational.” Margaret Thompson Drewal, “The State of Research on Performance in Africa,” 2-3, 19. As Peña notes, “Thompson Drewal’s intervention advocates for a relationship based on reciprocity, one that is focused on the performer’s agency, how these communities continually theorize their traditions, the temporal and spatial components of their performances, and on the researcher’s role as co-actor and interpreter.” Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Gaudalupe*, 190.
and aunt who criticized the activities of Sufi tarikats in Turkey, I have encountered devotees who showed me that although based on Islamic teachings, Sufi living is not only about the study of theological texts and the performance of rituals and prayers in sacred spaces. Sufi living is about acting for change and renewal and learning to adapt to the given circumstances of hectic urban everyday life. It is coming together to practice divine meaning through education, networking, music, dance, praying, meditating, cleaning, cooking, and inventing ways to blend their embodiment of divine meaning in the Sufi spaces with their practice of everyday life in the non-Sufi places. It is for this idea of practicing everyday life as training for self-transformation in any space they occupy that Sufi devotional living is about embodying, experiencing, and sharing social, political, and economic shifts, doublings, and fluctuations as members of Turkish society.
Appendices

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DTP 11/006 in the Department of Drama, Theatre, and Performance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton’s Ethics Committee on October 4, 2011.
ETHICS BOARD

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM PRO FORMA

Title of Research Project: The Sema Ceremony of the Whirling Dervishes: Contemporary Performances of World Intangible Cultural Heritage

Brief Description of Research Project:

Thank you for taking part in my PhD thesis project. For this project, I will conduct interviews with Mevlevi dervishes, sheiks, hocas, semazens, artists and scholars as well as non-Mevlevi performers, journalists, scholars, and artists in Turkey. In addition to conducting the interviews, I ask for your authorization in using a sound recorder or a notebook and a pen for the interview. I aim to use the recorder when necessary to gather exact data for my project, but if you decide that it is more appropriate to work without a sound recorder, or if you want me to stop using the recorder at any time during the interview, please let me know and I will turn the recorder off and continue without it.

Investigator Contact Details:

Hasret Esra Cizmeci
Drama, Theatre, and Performance
Roehampton University
Erasmus House
Roehampton Lane
London.
SW15 5PU
cizmecih@roehampton.ac.uk
00 44 774 754-6029 (UK)
00 90 531-653-9554 (TURKEY)

In order to offer me your fully informed consent, you need to be aware of the following information:

1) Your participation to this project is voluntary and you may discontinue participation from the project at anytime. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty.

2) In order to prevent unauthorized access to the data, I will keep my recorder, notebook, and the external hard drive with the recorded conversations (only used for this project) in a locked space in my room. I will be the only person who has access to the key. The data will only be used for my thesis project and when I don’t use the information for my thesis, it will remain in the safe at all times. The recorder, my notebook, and my hard drive will not be shared with any other subject.
3) There is no anticipated risk or harm to you as a subject in this research project. I intend to have conversations with you asking questions about your experience with the Mevlevi cultural values and beliefs and your understanding of Sema ceremony as worship and as a tourist attraction. If you choose to not answer any one of the questions, we will skip the question and I will not try to convince you to answer those questions. You also will not be identified within the thesis.

4) This thesis, when published as a book, in English and Turkish, will be a significant resource for anthropologists, historians and performance studies scholars and students in Turkey, Europe and the United States to expand their understanding of Sufism, Mevlevi culture and the Sema ceremony as a cultural and religious performance embodying alternative ideas about Islam. Through this research project, scholars in Turkey, Europe and the United States will identify how Mevlevi culture and their ritual practices in Turkey alter the negative images of Islam in today’s society. As a result of this research, I hope to reach Turkish intellectuals such as Fatih Altayli and Murat Bardakci and business people such as Guler Sabanci and Mustafa Koc to get their support on informing cultures that the practice of Sema should not be orientalized as a romantic phenomenon with general descriptions.

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name ………………………………………

Signature …………………………………

Date ………………………………………

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.)

**Director of Studies Contact Details:**

Susanne Greenhalgh  
Roehampton University  
Erasmus House  
Roehampton Lane  
S.Greenhalgh@roehampton.ac.uk  
+44 (0)20 8392 3334

**Head of Department Contact Details:**

Joe Kelleher  
Roehampton University  
Erasmus House  
Roehampton Lane  
j.kelleher@roehampton.ac.uk  
+44 (0)20 8392 3232
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