INTANGIBLE HERITAGE'S UNCERTAIN POLITICAL OUTCOMES: NATIONALISM AND THE REMAKING OF MARGINALIZED CULTURAL PRACTICES IN TURKEY

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Abstract

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by

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The scope of cultural heritage management has been extended from tangible to intangible products in the few last decades. Debates surrounding the field of heritage raise fundamental questions about its inherent political character, calling particular attention to the ways in which heritage programs are dominated by nationalistic concerns. This study examines UNESCO-initiated intangible heritage making in Turkey. I focus on the complex relationship between heritage and nationalism, and the various levels of heritage making of marginalized cultural practices by national governments. This study shows that global heritage protection mechanisms have diverse and uncertain outcomes even in the same country. Yet when examined together, these outcomes reveal how heritage mechanisms nonetheless continue to be dominated by nationalist government interests. Drawing on interviews, ethnographic research, and content analysis of UNESCO documents, I offer three case studies of recent heritage management programs in Turkey launched by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government to safeguard marginalized cultural practices. These are the Mevlevi Sema ceremony, Nevruz

festival, and Alevi-Bektaşi Semah ritual. Radical differences in the Turkish government's methods of handling the heritagization processes of these three practices uncover a recent transformation in the official nationalist policy and discourse in Turkey, from secularist Turkish nationalism (of Kemalism) to Islamist Turkish nationalism (of the JDP). It is these shifting nationalist trends that make Turkey's intangible heritage practices not only an aspect of the politics of recognition (in the case of the Mevlevis), but also of nonrecognition (in the case of the Kurds), and misrecognition (in the case of the Alevi-Bektaşis) regarding the extent these marginalized ethnic and religious identities comply with the current government's nationalist agenda.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent concern over the loss of cultural diversity extends the scope of global cultural heritage management from the protection of tangible cultural products to the preservation of immaterial cultural expressions (oral traditions, social practices and performing arts) collectively conceived as "intangible cultural heritage" (ICH). The dominant framework of the protection of intangible heritage has been set by the recent UNESCO convention, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*[1] (ICH Convention) that calls upon member states to draw up national inventories of intangible heritage located in their territory, to submit proposals for their inscription on the UNESCO ICH listings,[2] and to take necessary measures for their safeguarding. As the only binding global instrument that involves the safeguarding of immaterial cultural expressions as intangible heritage (UNESCO 2008: 10), and widely ratified by 139 state-parties (as of November 2011), the ICH Convention has a substantial and widespread influence in shaping and guiding intangible heritage management policies and practices in the contemporary world.

[1] Article 2 of the ICH Convention states that intangible heritage is manifested in the domains of " (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship" (UNESCO 2008: 11). The same Article defines safeguarding as "measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage" (p.12).

[2] The ICH Convention has two listings. The principal list is called the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. This list includes cultural practices that are representative of the world's cultural diversity and are "testifying to human creativity", whose viability is at no direct risk of disappearance (UNESCO 2008: 36). The second list is called the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, which includes cultural practices that are "facing grave threats", and "cannot be expected to survive without immediate safeguarding" (p. 31). For UNESCO's selection criteria for the Representative and Urgent Safeguarding lists, see Appendix 2. All three cultural practices that I examine within the scope of this study are inscribed on the Representative List.

As much literature has shown, heritage making is a deeply political process that produces, legitimizes and sustains the structures of collective identity and difference; and it is through this aspect of heritage that the strong bond between nationalism and heritage management unfolds. As the following pages seek to demonstrate, allowing for a government-induced process of intangible heritage making, UNESCO contributes greatly to the over-representation of nationalist government interests in the intangible heritage management programs. This study scrutinizes UNESCO-initiated intangible heritage making in Turkey, focusing especially on the complex relationship between heritage and nationalism as it unfolds on various levels of the heritagization of marginalized traditions by national governments. Relying on interviews, ethnographic research and content analysis of UNESCO documents, I offer three case studies of recent intangible heritage management programs launched by the current Turkish government within the scope of the ICH Convention to safeguard marginalized cultural practices. These are the *Mevlevi Sema ceremony*, *Nevruz festival* and *Alevi-Bektaşi Semah ritual*. Examined together, these three cases uncover a recent transformation in Turkey's official nationalist discourse and policy, from *secularist Turkish* nationalism to *Islamist Turkish* nationalism.

The historical underpinnings of the ICH Convention were laid down about three decades before it went into force in 2006. One of the foremost efforts for the global protection of cultural heritage was initiated by the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (WH Convention) in 1972. Although the WH Convention has played a pivotal role in structuring cultural heritage management mechanisms at the global, national, and local levels,[3] its limited definition of cultural heritage as "monuments, group of buildings and sites"

was criticized for privileging Western perceptions and practices of material cultural heritage while ignoring non-monumental cultural expressions (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 1). Following the 1990s, UNESCO's approach to cultural heritage was broadened to cover intangible aspects of culture when the protection of cultural diversity, which was fueled by the widely shared fears that the process of globalization would erase the world's cultural differences and plurality, emerged as one of the key policy priorities of UNESCO (Logan 2007:36).

A first attempt towards the protection of intangible heritage by an international instrument was the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore*, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1989 (Blake 2002:37). The Recommendation, nevertheless, was not as influential as it was expected, and was only adopted by a few UNESCO member-states (Deacon et al. 2004:17). The ineffectiveness of the Recommendation initiated practices towards creating a more binding global instrument that would oblige state-parties to employ protective measures for ensuring the viability of their intangible heritage (Aikawa-Faure 2009: 21). In addition, with the appointment of Koiichiro Matsuura as the UNESCO's Director-General during the late 1990's, safeguarding intangible heritage became one of the eight priority programs of UNESCO, causing the organization to conduct various expert meetings, conferences and regional gatherings to develop a new standard-setting instrument for safeguarding intangible heritage (p. 22). In 1998, UNESCO also launched a program called the *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, which aimed to raise awareness for the protection of intangible heritage while the ICH Convention was being drafted (Matsuura 2006: 2).

[3] As of November 2011, the WH Convention has 725 listed cultural properties and has been ratified by 188 countries, which makes the convention the second most ratified international convention after the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Engelhardt 2002: 29).

The 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference adopted the ICH Convention in October 2003 "without a dissenting vote" (Aikawa-Faure 2009: 13). The ICH convention, requiring thirty signatories to become operative, entered into force in April 2006 when Romania signed the convention as the 30th state-party (Logan 2007: 33). Declaring intangible heritage as the "mainspring of cultural diversity," the preamble of the convention stated its raison d'être as safeguarding the world's cultural variety and complexity from the "grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction" caused by the "processes of globalization and social transformation" (UNESCO 2008: 9). Since then, much literature has welcomed the idea of including nonmaterial cultural elements to heritage management and supported the ICH Convention as an auspicious event to save these elements from disappearing (e.g., Bedjaoui 2004; Kono 2009; Yoshida 2004; Wendland 2004). My study, however, does not focus on the degree to which the cultural expressions managed within the scope of the convention are endangered (if ever), or whether their protection is necessary. I propose that recent attempts to safeguard selected cultural traditions as intangible heritage have wider socio-political effects beyond just guaranteeing their sustainability (if ever); given that, the selection of heritage to be protected has less to do with the degree of threat they are exposed to, than with the politics of what is to be considered and managed as heritage, by whom, for what reasons, and with what effects.

Many commentators already have observed that heritage is neither intrinsically nor authentically valuable; it is rather a socio-political construction that involves selecting and valorizing cultural references of the past for current purposes and interests (e.g., Anico and Peralta 2009; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000; Lowenthal 1998; Prats 2009; Smith 2006). Heritage, then, "is by no means a neutral category of self-definition nor an inherently positive thing" (Silverman and Ruggles 2007: 3) but an exclusive category that valorizes certain

objects and practices, while ignoring others (Byrne in Byrne 2009: 230). It is through this selective construction process that the socio-political function of heritage-making unfolds. Being "an inherently political act" (Kenny 2009: 152), heritage-making is a highly contested and intrinsically exclusionary process that always involves a complex negotiation process among a range of actors on the control over the identification, representation, and management of cultural objects and traditions as heritage. To quote Lowenthal,

> Heritage more and more addresses similar goals with similar strategies. But possessive passions largely fuel these goals and direct these strategies; heritage is normally cherished not as common but as private property. Ownership gives it essential worth: though heritage is now more convergent and like-mindedly cherished, it remains inherently exclusive. (1998: 227)

Heritage is exclusive in nature because it is invariably tied up with constructing, restructuring, and claiming collective identities. The process of identity formation is driven both by the politics of inclusion and exclusion: identity is a "meaning ascribed to similarity and difference", as Anico and Peralta remind us, "in order to identify with some, people also need to dis-identify with someone else" (2009: 1). The literature on cultural property and heritage[4] has long been addressing the exclusionary nature of heritage by viewing it as an aspect of identity formation and discussing how asserting ownership over cultural objects, places, and immaterial cultural expressions contributes to the objectification and legitimation of distinct form of

[4] As Blake points out, the relationship between "cultural property" and "cultural heritage" remains imprecise, and is used interchangeably in some cases, while in others cultural property appears as a subcategory of cultural heritage (2000: 66), or (we might add) vice-versa. It is also true, however, that with the extension of the scope of culture protection from material to immaterial elements, there has arisen a tendency (that is neither consistent nor complete) to replace the expression "cultural property" by "cultural heritage" in the international legal doctrine and related literature (Brown 2005: 41). In an article that supports this tendency, Prott and O'Keefe (1992) argues that while as a Western concept, property "implies control by the owner expressed by his ability to alienate, to exploit and to exclude others from the object or site in question" (p. 310), heritage, incorporating "concepts of duty to preserve and protect" (p. 307), produces "a perception of something handed down; something to be cared for and cherished" (p. 311). While cultural heritage comes to evoke a new global ethic for the protection and sustainment of culture as a common good, it is in fact a highly politicized and exclusive phenomenon that exposes culture to private ownership claims (Lowenthal 1998; Rowlands 2004). This study thus treats cultural heritage as an aspect of cultural property. Acknowledging the limitations of the term, however, I choose to use "intangible heritage" instead of "intangible property" in this discussion for the very reason that the term "intangible heritage" is now widely used in relation to the immaterial cultural products, and it is also UNESCO's term of choice in the ICH Convention.

collective identities (e.g., Brown 2005; Reddy 2006; Rowlands 2004; Smith 2007; Waterton and Smith 2010).

While property, in its general and historical sense, has always been about the validation of private ownership over things, the growth of global political economy extended the scope of property relations to manifold levels, when all sorts of tangible and immaterial things (i.e., technical know-how, information, cultural artifacts and expressions and even body parts) came to be exposed to ownership claims as "property objects" (Humphrey and Verdery 2004). The emergence of new property objects and relations has received increased attention in the related literature over the last two decades. Discussing what constitutes property beyond its conventional definition as "social relations among people mediated by things", this literature suggests more of a relational and situational understanding where neither things as properties nor the relations through them can be treated as neutral, given, or static (see Hann ed. 1998; Hirsh and Strathern ed. 2004; Verdery and Humphrey ed. 2004)

In the Introduction of the volume *Property in Question*, Humphrey and Verdery (2004: 1-25) provide one such critical account to the notion of property, in their attempt to call into question the basic assumptions inherent in the classical property theory with regard to "persons", "things" and "relations" (p. 6). Arguing that classical property theory assumes relationships among already-existing, distinctly separate, and internally uniform entities, they rather posit that the distinction between persons and things might not be absolute (p. 6) and that, things or persons might not be bounded units existing prior to property relations (p. 7-8). This approach enables us to situate the emergent cultural property claims in their political context. Providing an alternative view about property, Humphrey and Verdery state that the appearance of persons as bounded units might as well be a consequence of property relations; given that, "positing certain

things as unitary enables the appearance of unity for the persons to whom the things are linked" (p. 7).

The ownership claims over heritage, then, allows for the use of culture as a political resource to construct and validate collective identities, where the group difference is affirmed through "the possession of a distinct cultural property" (Rowlands 2004: 209). Anthropologist Annette Weiner (1992) has developed the concept of *inalienable possessions* to explain how the circulation of particular objects among generations play a vital role in the construction of collective group identities and their transformation though time, a process that makes these objects intrinsic to the identities of their possessors. In his essay *Identity as a Scarce Resource*, Simon Harrison (1999) extends Weiner's argument from material objects to symbolic practices (i.e., dress styles, music, songs, sacred sites, styles of discourse, religious expressions, festivals, and ceremonies). Harrison labels these symbolic practices as *identity symbols*, and discusses the significance of collective claims over their possession and control in the manifestation and maintenance of distinct group identities. This, for Harrison, reveals the exclusive, contested and politically charged nature of these identity symbols, as identities rest on "maintaining an exclusive association with a distinctive set of symbolic practices, and thus, crucially, on the power to prevent those defined as outsiders from reproducing these markers of identity" (p. 243).

Although Harrison does not specifically discuss cultural heritage as an identity symbol, the literature on heritage has long been claiming it as a vehicle for constructing shared identity, belongingness, and unity as well as for manifesting difference and particularity. The relationship between identity and heritage become more central especially in the last two decades when the scope of heritage management has been widened from tangible to intangible aspects of culture. As Blake puts it, heritage-making "has become a much more complex and political question than

it was when preservation institutions restricted their interest to monuments and artifacts," since intangible heritage is "embedded in the social and cultural lives of the cultural communities" (2009: 46). The fact that intangible heritage is rooted in people other than in material objects puts the issues related to the politics of identity construction directly at the heart of cultural heritage.

Contribution of cultural heritage in the legitimization and manifestation of a unifying national identity is well documented in the heritage literature (e.g., Graham et al. 2000; Hall 2005; Mason and Baveystock 2009; Smith 2006). Heritage serves to fulfill national interests by underwriting the construction of a shared national identity through the claims of a distinct and totalizing national history. As Graham et al. state, heritage has always been a critical tool for nation-states to promote a collective identity: "imagining of an internal national homogeneity… draws inevitably upon a particular representation of heritage and a mythology of the past for its coherence and legitimacy" (2000: 56). Yet, in the words of Silverman and Ruggles, "while heritage can unite, it can also divide" (2007: 3). Heritage is highly contested and dissonant in nature because diverse social groups tend to develop plural versions of the past, and conflicting interpretations and values often intersect in a single cultural heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). As Graham et al. suggest, "the meshing of heritage and identity is… implicated in the patterns and conflicts of privileging and exclusion, of marginalization and resistance that result from the fracturing of societies along the axes of class, gender, ethnicity and nationalism, which remain fundamental to the question, whose heritage?" (2000: 41). Hence, while claims to heritage can create and promote national unity and belonging, they can also evoke tension and conflict, by functioning as a vehicle for asserting alternative form of identities, often contradictory and challenging to the homogenizing national narrative. In this view, the identification of the actors who are involved in the making of heritage and examination of their

interests in doing so becomes critical when analyzing how the linkage between heritage and identity making unfolds in relation to state nationalism and marginalized populations.[5]

From the point of view of this study, Laurajane Smith's approach to heritage is the most useful. Extending Nancy Fraser's notion of *politics of recognition*[6] to heritage, Smith (2007) discusses how the claims to cultural heritage might have broader consequences for subordinated groups in achieving economic, political and social equality. "Heritage is both a resource in, and a process of, negotiation in the cultural politics of identity" (p. 159), as she reminds us, "conflicts over the control of cultural heritage must be understood as existing within the wider parameters of political negotiations between the state and a range of interests over the political and cultural legitimacy of claims to identity" (Smith in Smith 2007: 161). According to Smith, then, heritage is a "moment of negotiation" for the marginalized populations (p. 165): the acknowledgment of their ownership claims over heritage might open the possibility of the recognition of their distinct identity and cultural claims, as well as their access to and power over other financial and political resources (p. 160-161).

In many heritage making cases, however, the voice of marginalized populations is either silenced, or assigned to the voice of the dominant culture. Smith explains this through the

[5] I use the term marginalized populations to refer to collectivities such as indigenous, minority and immigrant groups or other ethnic and religious populations that are at odds with the central state authority, underrepresented in or excluded from the national imaginary and/or diverge in some way from the unifying national identity model.

[6] The shift in the world's social movements in the last decades from the *politics of distribution* (demanding the equal distribution of socioeconomic resources) to the *politics of recognition* (claiming the recognition of distinct collective identities) as a remedy for inequality and subordination, is well documented (Benhabib ed. 1996; Fraser 2000; Taylor 1994). Nancy Fraser's approach to politics of recognition is significant in that she argues against equating identity politics with politics of recognition. Fraser (2008) problematizes identity politics for its tendency to totalize and homogenize group identities by overlooking the individual differences within them, which result in the reification of group identities. In addition, treating "misrecognition as a free-standing cultural harm" (2008: 132), the identity model disguises the broader links of politics of recognition with economic disparities (maldistribution) and political inequalities (misrepresentation) (Fraser 2007). She instead suggests an alternative approach to the politics of recognition that she calls the *status model*, which refers to a politics that aims at "overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest" (2008:134).

concept of *Authorized Heritage Discourse* (AHD), referring to a "hegemonic discourse about heritage, which acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage" (2006: 11). Dominating the professional debates and practices about heritage, the AHD naturalizes heritage as "all that is 'good,' grand, monumental and, primarily, of national significance" (2009: 35). One aspect of AHD is the ways in which heritage-making unfolds in relation to nationalism. According to Smith, being both created by and constitutive of the ideology of nationalism, AHD plays a vital role not only in creating national identity (2006: 48) but also in obscuring, marginalizing or misrecognizing "those identities created using conceptualizations of heritage that sit outside of the authorized heritage discourse" (2007: 164).

Heritage-making, therefore, mostly remains at the national level and nationalist interests run deep in heritage related programs and policies (e.g., Hall 2005; Hafstein 2009; Kearney 2009; Marrie 2009; Mason and Baveystock 2009; Seeger 2009). This makes heritage a source in the creation, manifestation, and legitimization of a unifying national identity that frequently results in the negation, exclusion, and assimilation of marginalized identities. In other words, heritage-making becomes a tool for national governments to deny the distinctiveness of marginalized populations from the unified national whole. Drawing examples from Sweden, Germany, Denmark, and England, Buciek and Juul (2008) discuss how the heritage projects that are shielded by national narratives work towards rendering immigrant identity invisible. Citing Philp, Logan indicates the ways in which Myanmar's junta is engaging in Buddhist heritage conservation projects as a means of legitimizing and strengthening its own position and forcing the Karen and Mon minorities to assimilate into the majority culture (2007: 41).

Being one of the peak organizations that institutionalize the AHD through its global heritage management programs, UNESCO contributes greatly to the prevalence of nationalist

interests in heritage-making (Smith 2006: 87-88). As an intergovernmental organization, UNESCO derives its legitimacy from its member-states, which as a result allows the organization to refrain from directly challenging state-parties or openly intervening in their domestic affairs. In addition, while the UNESCO conventions operate on global, national, and local levels, since international law is made by the nation-states, the national (state) level is primary in enactmenting any UNESCO treaty (Blake 2009: 47). UNESCO heritage protection programs are no exception to this. Deciding which cultural products are to be designated for the heritage listings as well as which meanings they would embrace is made at a national level by state authorities. This makes UNESCO heritage programs vulnerable to nationalist interests and opens the possibility that national governments will use them as an instrument for the assertion and legitimization of a unified national identity. Bulger criticizes the dominant role state-parties play in UNESCO heritage programs, stating that, UNESCO "delegations are composed of legal representatives of national governments who are representing tradition bearers and often asserting state ownership over the traditional cultural expressions of the minority cultures and indigenous groups within their political borders" (2011: 331). Problematizing UNESCO's approach to heritage for ignoring its political aspects, Robert Shepherd discusses how UNESCO aids the efforts of the Chinese government to assimilate Tibetan culture into the unifying national Chinese culture by subscribing tangible aspects of Tibetan culture into the UNESCO WH list as the joint "achievements of the *peoples* of China" [emph. original] (2006: 250).

The ICH Convention has been acknowledged within some academic circles and professional practices for endeavoring to minimize the role of national governments in the making of heritage, for its attempt to come up with a community-based approach in defining the scope of intangible heritage, and in selecting cultural practices to the ICH lists. Indeed, the vital

role of the people (tradition-bearers as communities, groups and individuals) in the making of intangible heritage, and the centrality of intangible heritage for their sense of identity, self-definition and belonging, is clearly and vastly recognized in the texts and documents of the ICH Convention (Aikawa-Faure 2009; Blake 2009). Article 2 of the Convention, for instance, provides a community-based definition of intangible heritage:

> The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills… that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals *recognize as part of their cultural heritage*. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups… and *provides them with a sense of identity and continuity.…* [Emph. added] (UNESCO 2008: 11).

As the convention further states, the practices that do not comply with this definition cannot be inscribed on the ICH lists (p. 36). Adopting a bottom-to-top approach to intangible heritage, the ICH Convention aims to empower the role of communities, groups and individuals in the control over their cultural practices. The Convention's text clearly states this in Article 15, when it asks the state-parties "to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management" (2008: 17). The online description of intangible heritage featured on the UNESCO website of the ICH Convention rather puts it succinctly: "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" (UNESCO 2011a). Furthermore, to guarantee the satisfaction of this principle, the convention requires the nomination files submitted for the UNESCO ICH listing to provide the proof of the "free, prior and informed consent" of tradition-bearers in the identification and management of their cultural practices as intangible heritage (2008: 36).

Although the ICH Convention is built on the conviction of the need to transform the power over the identification, control and management of heritage from national to local level, the extent to which this goal could be achieved in practice remains highly problematic. The recognition of state-parties as the key actors in the implementation of the Convention contradicts its endeavor to come up with a bottom-to-top/community-based approach to intangible heritage. Equally important, UNESCO does not have direct contact with communities in any stage of the implementation of the Convention. As Kearney states, determination of what constitutes intangible heritage and how it will be managed remains under the complete control and authority of the state-parties; given that, the decision of what to include in the national inventory of intangible heritage, what to designate to the ICH list, and how to safeguard listed practices is the responsibility of national governments (2009: 217-220). In this respect, UNESCO's intangible heritage program does not differ from other UNESCO heritage schemes in serving nationalist government interests. Munjeri (2009) draws on an exhibition held by China's Ministry of Culture titled "Festival of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage" at UNESCO headquarters in 2007, to show that the central position of the Chinese government in defining the tradition to be recognized as intangible heritage constructs heritage-making as an effort to promote the unity of the country through demonstrating the integrity of its cultural practices (p. 144-145). As he further argues, safeguarding intangible heritage becomes the equivalent of "safeguarding the unity of the People's Republic of China"; given that, the cultural practices of fifty-six ethnic groups are represented as the joint heritage of the Chinese nation (p. 145). Cang makes a similar point when discussing the intangible heritage selection process in Japan: "Japan has created a system for selecting and identifying a tradition of heritage which it deems significant for its own patrimony and no less for its identity" (in Munjeri 2009: 147). Seeger also confirms the influence

of nationalism on intangible heritage, when evaluating the nominations to the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity listing:

> Many of the intangible heritage forms nominated by member states had some form of geopolitical and/or nationalist importance to the nominating country. Dominant groups within a nation often nominated their own traditions, not those of minority groups within their nations. (2009: 121)

My study, however, does not focus on the exclusion of the traditions of marginalized populations from the national heritage protection programs for the sake of nationalist government interests. In its aim to cast light on the complexity of the impact of nationalism on heritage-making, this study rather aims to answer the ways in which the linkage between nationalism and intangible heritage unfolds when the traditions of marginalized populations are *included* in the national heritage protection programs. I thus focus on three heritage management programs launched by the current Turkish government to safeguard the Sema ceremony, Nevruz festival, and Semah ritual within the scope of the UNESCO ICH Convention.[7] The designation of these practices as intangible heritage becomes notable when one considers their long history of strict state prohibition and restriction. This is largely due to the fact that the Kurdish, Alevi-

[7] The national intangible heritage protection schemes were largely absent in Turkey before it became a party to the ICH Convention on 27 March 2006. Turkey has been one of the most active members of the ICH Convention in its participation in the drafting stages and legislation of the Convention. In September 2002, Turkey hosted the *Third Roundtable on Intangible Heritage and Cultural Diversity* which brought together Ministers of Culture from seventy two countries (Deacon et al. 2004: 18). The roundtable adopted the *Istanbul Declaration* which was pivotal for the early drafting of the ICH Convention (Aikawa-Faure 2009: 35). Moreover, Turkey had a seat at the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* from 2006 to 2010. The committee operates as the executive organ of the ICH Convention, and it is responsible for the implementation of the Convention, preparation of its operational directives, evaluation of the international assistance requests by state-parties, examination of the reports submitted by state-parties, and decision of the elements to be inscribed on the ICH list (UNESCO 2008: 13-14). Turkey also hosted the third session of Intergovernmental Committee meeting in Istanbul in November 2008. As of December 2011, Turkey has nine cultural elements that are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Arts of the Meddah (Public Story-teller) and Mevlevi Sema Ceremony were inscribed on the UNESCO list of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage in 2003 and 2005, respectively, and then incorporated into the ICH list in 2008. The Karagöz Shadow Puppet Show, Anatolian Aşıklık (minstrelsy) tradition and Nevruz Festival were inscribed on the ICH list in 2009 and the Alevi-Bektaşi Semah ritual, Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Festival and Traditional Sohbet (conversation) Meetings were inscribed in 2010. The ceremonial Keşkek tradition (a dish prepared for wedding ceremonies) was inscribed on the Representative list in 2011.

Bektaşi, and Mevlevi populations identified with these cultural practices are officially denied the recognition of their distinct ethnic and religious identities by the Turkish state.

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the denial and suppression of distinct ethnic and religious identities for the construction of a homogeneous national identity has been a conventional state policy (e.g., Cagaptay 2006a; Dressler 2010; Kabasakal Arat 2007b; Oran 2007). Marginalization of these distinct identities is largely rooted in Turkey's Kemalist ideology (official state ideology outlined by the views and principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk), which aimed at creating a Turkish nation based on the secular Muslim-Turkish unity. Turkey's description of the notions of minority and minority rights are based on the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which marked the global recognition of the Turkish Republic as the successor of the Ottoman Empire (Oran 2007: 35).[8] The treaty defined all Muslim elements of the new Republic as Turks in terms of nationality and all Turkish elements as Muslim in terms of religion. The only exception to this definition was the Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish populations, recognized as non-Muslim minorities and considered "local foreigners with Turkish citizenship" (Cetin in Kilinc 2008: 271). While the Lausanne Treaty obliged the Turkish state to recognize the non-Muslim minorities and protect their cultural and religious rights, such a limited definition of minority also led to the denial of diversity in terms of language, ethnicity, or religious beliefs within Turkey's Muslim-Turkish citizenry (Kabasakal Arat 2007b: 280-281).

[8] The Lausanne treaty, which is still in force, was part of the League of Nations treaty series signed between the Allies of World War I (WWI) and the Turkish government. As Oran states, even though the League of Nations founded after WWI employed triple criteria to "define minorities in racial, linguistic and religious terms" and grant them equal rights with the majority population, the Turkish delegation refused the full criteria as applicable to Turkey in Lausanne (2007: 35). To Oran, the Lausanne Treaty might be perceived as a precedent for the Republic's future assimilation policies toward its distinct ethnic and religious communities; given that, the new Republic quickly adapted the principles of Lausanne as an official doctrine and, since then, insisted on invoking the criteria set by the treaty when defining the population of Turkey (p. 35-36).

Kemalist nationalism intended to erase religious and ethnic differences in an effort to construct "a sense of coherence and unity" (Dressler 2010: 121). Cagaptay states that the Kemalist regime viewed all the Muslim population of Anatolia as Turkish (regardless of their divergence in terms of ethnicity, language, or culture) and expected them to merge into a unifying national identity (2006a: 102). As he further explains, "not only ethnic Turks, but also other Muslims such as Kurds, Circassians, or Bosnians are regarded as Turks, while non-Muslims, especially Christians (including Armenians and Greeks) are not, even when they speak Turkish" (2006b: 61). The neglect of sectarian differences within Islam also led to the classification of various religious groups following distinct Islamic beliefs (such as the Alevi-Bektaşis, Caferis and Nusayris) within the broad Muslim category which eliminated the possibility for the official recognition of their difference from the Sunni Muslim majority (Tambar 2010: 654). Equally important, fearing that the recognition of ethnic and religious divergence from the national whole would lead to the disintegration of the Turkish state, claims of the existence of minorities (other than Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish populations) have been criminalized by the state as attempts to damage the "national unity and territorial integrity" of the nation (Oran 2007: 46).

Along with an attachment to Muslim-Turkishness, subscription to a secular identity has also been a crucial factor in determining "the legitimacy of particularist group identities and practices in public" (Dressler 2010: 121). The secularization of public life was a vital component of the Kemalist modern nation-building project. Rather than supporting a notion of secularism that is built upon the separation of the domains of state and religion, Kemalism defended the state's direct involvement in religious matters, in an effort to minimize the role of Islam in public life (e.g., Dressler 2010; Özdalga 1998; Shively 2008; Toprak 1981). This brought substantial

constraints on the public manifestation of Islam in Turkey. Islamic activities outside the state control were discouraged at best, while activities perceived to threaten the state authority were proscribed and criminalized. Accordingly, perceived by the Kemalist regime as reactionary and anti-secularist institutions against the modern Kemalist ideals, the Sufi orders were banned in Turkey in 1925. The law (that is still in force) criminalizes all religious activities and institutional practices of the Sufi orders, including those of the Mevlevi and Bektaşi order.

As the following chapters will discuss in detail, Turkey's Mevlevi, Kurdish, and Alevi-Bektaşi populations have remained marginalized to varying degrees due to their divergence from the dominant national identity model outlined by Kemalism in the early years of the Republic. These populations have not only been denied the official recognition of their distinct ethnic or religious identities by the Turkish state, they have also been facing significant prohibitions and restrictions against public manifestations of their deviations from the nation's homogeneous identity. While these populations as a means to overcome their social and political marginality have opposed state discrimination and demanded official recognition of their difference, these demands have been perceived as dangerous to Turkey's national unity and survival, and thus have largely been ignored or rejected by the Turkish government.

Turkey has been going through a significant economic, social, and political transformation since the Islamically rooted Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power in 2002. Since then, the JDP has been functioning as a one-party government for three consecutive terms; with each election there has been a dramatic increase in its popular vote, and the JDP has gradually emphasized its divergence from Turkey's Kemalist heritage.[9] Arguing

[9] The November 2002 general elections in Turkey resulted with a landslide electoral victory of the then recently established JDP, which received 34 percent of the votes and become the first one-party government since 1987 (Cınar 2008: 112). The single party government of the JDP, headed by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,

against the supervision and domination of religion and religious activities by the state, the JDP rejects the secular aspect of Kemalist nationalism as antidemocratic and restrictive. Instead of the control of religion by the state, the JDP supports the institutional separation of the state and religion, as a prerequisite for ensuring the freedom of distinct religious groups to demonstrate publicly and practice their faith. Turkey's Kurdish question[10] has long been one of the biggest challenges against the political and economic stability, domestic order and security of the country. The JDP came to power with a commitment to solve Turkey's Kurdish question and to provide an alternative to Turkey's conventional nationalist policies of assimilation of Kurdish identity into the "Turkish" national whole. In its first term and as part of Turkey's EU admission process, the government also demonstrated efforts to ease restrictions on Kurdish cultural rights.

Given these circumstances, this study examines recent government efforts to sustain and protect the Sema ceremony, Nevruz festival and Semah ritual as Turkey's intangible heritage. Is "heritagization" (Bendix 2009) of these marginalized cultural traditions a response from the JDP government to the demands of the Mevlevis, Kurds, and Alevi-Bektaşis for official recognition of their distinct ethnic and religious identities and collective rights in Turkey? What does the decision to add these marginalized practices into the UNESCO ICH list mean? What factors underlie the heritage designation of marginalized cultural practices in Turkey and what are the consequences of these designations on communities that practice them? Do these cases signal a shift from a "politics of assimilation" to a "politics of recognition" for marginalized identities in

was able to fortify its position by securing 47 percent of the votes in the 2007 general elections, and 50 percent of the votes in the 2011 general elections. The JDP gained yet another electoral victory when a package of constitutional amendments (recommended by the government) was approved by 58 percent of the population in a referendum held on 12 September 2010.

[10] There is a tendency in Turkey and in the literature on Kurdish political issues to conceptualize the problematic relationship between Turkey's Kurds and the Turkish state as 'Turkey's Kurdish question'. According to Mesut Yeğen, the term Kurdish question refers to "a set of disparate issues, which, in the last instance, suggest that there was a lack of integration of some sort between Kurds and the Turkish politics/economy" (2007: 143, footnote 2).

Turkey that allows for the elimination of political, social, and legal injustices against them? Drawing on the case of Turkey, I also seek to answer broader questions underlying the relationship between nationalism and heritage-making: how do we deal with the situations where the cultural traditions of marginalized populations are inscribed on the global heritage listings through the efforts of national governments? Can these government-initiated heritage programs be perceived as illustrative of the situations where nationalist concerns cease to dominate heritage practices?

What this study reveals at the outset is that the answers to these questions are neither straight-forward nor identical. As Reddy states, "one size may not fit all" even for the heritage protection mechanisms registered within the same county which shows the "surprising complexity" of heritage-making on the ground (2006: 164). This study suggests that while the global heritage protection mechanisms might have diverse and uncertain outcomes even in the same country, examined together these outcomes might reveal how heritage mechanisms continue to be dominated by nationalist government interests. What these three cases share, indeed, is how they unfold in various complex ways in response to the current transformation in the contours of state nationalism in Turkey. As the succeeding chapters demonstrate, radical differences in the JDP government's methods of handling the heritagization processes of these three practices uncover a change in Turkey's nationalist policy and discourse, from the *secularist Turkish nationalism* of Kemalism to the *Islamist Turkish nationalism* of the JDP. Preserving the Kemalist notion of Turkishness as a binding national ideal and yet also overtly emphasizing the common Sunni Islamic ties of the Turkish nation, the nationalism of the JDP rejects Kemalist secular principles and, blending Sunni Islam with Turkishness, proclaims the nation's unified Sunni-Turkish identity. This study shows that the intangible heritage making of marginalized

practices reflects this shifting nationalist trend in Turkey, which makes heritage-making not only an aspect of politics of recognition (in the case of Mevlevis) but also of nonrecognition (in the case of Kurds) and misrecognition (in the case of Alevi-Bektaşis) with respect to how these ethnic and religious identities comply with the alternative nationalist vision of the JDP government.

The following chapter examines the heritagization of the Sema ceremony as a process that reveals the JDP government's policy of recognition of the Mevlevi religious identity and rights that transforms the Sunni Mevlevi Sufi tradition from a marginalized subculture to a dominant culture. Due to Kemalist secularization reforms that outlawed the Mevlevi order and abolished its convents in 1925, the Sema performances were prohibited in Turkey for about thirty years. While the Sufi lodges and their activities have been illegal in Turkey since then, the Sema performances were permitted merely for touristic purposes from 1953 onwards, raising concerns among the Mevlevi groups over the performances' loss of traditional religious significance. Addressing these concerns, the JDP government successfully nominated Sema to the UNESCO listing in 2005. The Sema's nomination file highlighted how secularization policies and the subsequent touristization of the ceremony negatively affected performances and provided solid measures to safeguard Sema's religious meaning and content.

The heritage declaration of Sema indeed initiated a process, where the Turkish government came to acknowledge, encourage, and financially and technically sponsor the Mevlevi religious tradition as part of Turkey's Sunni Muslim culture. Despite the ban on Sufi orders, the unforeseen support the Mevlevis has received from the JDP government since the heritage declaration of Sema opened the possibility for a greater visibility and popularity of the Mevlevi activities (including the Sema ceremony) in Turkey's public sphere. While the JDP

government has yet been reluctant to lift the ban on Sufi orders (to avoid causing additional political tension between the government and the secular state establishment), the heritage declaration of Sema has allowed the government to sponsor and promote the Mevlevi religious tradition, without initiating fundamental legal changes in the status of Sufi orders in Turkey. The second chapter thus discusses the Sema's heritage declaration within the wider context of the recent changes in the relationship between the Turkish state and religion. It suggests that, the heritagization of Sema serves the JDP government's nationalist agenda by emphasizing Sunni Islam as a national identity marker and contributes to the government's efforts to ease restrictions on and strengthen the authority of Sunni Islam in Turkey.

Discussing how the UNESCO-initiated national heritage programs might allow national governments a means for pursuing a policy of *nonrecognition*, the third chapter shows that the heritagization of marginalized cultural practices is not always a "good" in itself. It thus puts forward a totally different narrative, by discussing the heritagization of the *Nevruz* festival by the JDP government to delegitimize and undermine the Kurdish claims on *Newroz*.[11] As Kymlicka suggests, the conventional Turkish nationalism is not based on "ethnic exclusion, but the forcible inclusion of a national minority into a larger national group" (1999: 134). Following the early Republican period, with the rise of organized and widespread Kurdish opposition to the Kemalist regime, the denial of the existence of Kurds as a distinct ethnic group and their enforced assimilation into the unifying Turkish identity has become a state policy in Turkey. The Newroz, a festival to welcome the spring season celebrated in various Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, has been resurrected among Turkey's Kurds following the 1970s, as a powerful symbol of

[11] The festival is known by different names depending on the country, region or sector of the population it is celebrated. In the case of Turkey, *Newroz* refers to the Kurdish name of the festival, while *Nevruz* refers to its official name employed by the Turkish state authorities and the mainstream media for emphasizing the Turkish origins of the festival.

Kurdish identity and struggle against the Turkish state. In order to prevent the association of Newroz with Kurds, the Turkish government "invented" Nevruz as a Turkish tradition in the 1990s and claimed the Turkish/Turkic origins of the festival (Yanık 2006). To Harrison, Turkey's Nevruz policy is yet another attempt to incorporate the Kurdish identity and its symbols into "the greater Turkish whole" (1999: 247).

Although the JDP came to power with a commitment to solve Turkey's Kurdish question, it has so far provided no alternative to Turkey's assimilation efforts against Kurds. The third chapter thus discusses the government's Nevruz policy in relation to its nationalist agenda, which promotes Turkishness as a national identity marker and aims at assimilating Kurds into the unifying Turkish national identity. It shows that, Kurdish claims on Newroz have been entirely suppressed and marginalized in the heritage making of Nevruz, in an effort to dissociate Newroz with Kurds, and to validate, legitimize, and promote its Turkish version as the "accurate" "original" and "transnational" version of the festival.

Drawing on the case of the heritagization of the Semah ritual, the fourth chapter shows that the nationalist motives that underline the recognition of the Mevlevi religious identity and rights also ground the JDP government's policy of misrecognition towards the Alevi-Bektaşis. The Alevi-Bektaşis constitute a heterodox Islamic community with distinct religious principles and practices that are fundamentally different from the two major forms of Islam, Sunnism and Shiaism. Traditionally, the Semah ritual constitutes a part of the Cem ceremony (the central religious practice of the Alevi-Bektaşis) and is performed as a sacred worship ritual. For many Alevi-Bektaşis, Semah is the equivalent of the five-time daily prayer Namaz, practiced by the Sunnis and Shias as one of the fundamental requirements of the Islamic faith. With the rise of political Islam in Turkey after the 1980s, Alevi-Bektaşis have increasingly been subjected to

state-enforced policies seeking their assimilation into the Sunni Muslim majority. Alevi-Bektaşis responded by forming voluntary organizations and collectively demanding the official recognition of their difference from Sunni Islam (Dressler 2010:126). The Turkish authorities, however, remain utterly unresponsive to their demands.

The JDP government successfully nominated the Semah ritual on the UNESCO ICH listing in 2010. Despite the nomination file that states the full-support of community to the process, the Semah's inscription on the ICH list is neither welcomed nor accepted by the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşi representatives, who claim it as part of the JDP government's recent efforts to (mis)recognize their faith as a subdivision of Sunni Islam. Indeed, claiming that the recognition of sectarian differences within Islam would damage Turkey's Muslim unity, the JDP government has hitherto rejected the demands raised by Alevi-Bektaşis to be recognized as a distinct Islamic group, and instead has insisted on their recognition within Sunni Islam. The fourth chapter thus discusses the JDP government's Semah policy as part of its nationalist agenda. It suggests that denying the compatibility of Semah and Namaz (that is legitimized as the shared worship practice of Turkey's Muslims) and defining Semah as a mystic Sufi ritual (rather than as a religious practice of a distinct Islamic sect), the heritage declaration of Semah contributes to the government's efforts to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşis into Sunni Islam.

The following chapters provide deep historical accounts to the ways in which the problematical relationship between these marginalized groups and the Turkish state has been unfolding from 1923 onwards. This discussion is necessary in understanding the factors underlying the marginalization of distinct ethnic and religious populations by the Turkish state, and how nationalist concerns motivate them. What this discussion reveals is that Turkey's marginalization policies has taken manifold forms changing through history and ranging from

attempts to deny, criminalize and suppress (sometimes by brutal force) these identities, to discourage them. The key in all these policies, however, has been to assimilate these groups into the homogeneous national identity. At the same time, these policies have served to redefine or transform these cultural traditions; from a religious ritual to a tourist activity (in the case of Sema), from a spring celebration into a resistance symbol (in the case of Newroz), or from a sacred religious ritual to a public folklore event (in the case of Semah). Last but not least, this historical account is significant to recognize the role these cultural traditions have been playing in the mobilization of Mevlevis, Kurds, and Alevi-Bektaşis to resist the enforced assimilation, and/or lack of recognition they have been facing in Turkey. Public display of these traditions, therefore, has functioned as tactics for negotiating with state authorities, when raising claims to recognition.

Method of Research

It is significant to highlight at the outset that this study is envisioned as an exploratory one, as no research had yet to examine the politics of intangible heritage-making in Turkey or its effects on the marginalized populations. In the initial stages of my research, I employed close readings of the reports and policy documents that the ICH Convention relies upon and examined the UNESCO documents on the implementation of the ICH convention (the reports of the statutory meetings, intergovernmental committee gatherings, and expert meetings) and the nomination files and management plans that Turkey had submitted to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Center in Paris. What this brief content analysis revealed immediately was the need for gathering first-hand information to understand better the politics of heritage-making in Turkey;

i.e., whose ideas are really represented and whose are excluded in the making of intangible heritage and for what reasons, goals, and outcomes. Indeed, there is an overwhelmingly homogenized and uniform cultural diversity discourse in the UNESCO documents with regards to which, why, and how cultural practices should be managed as part of the global and national heritage protection programs. Michael Brown explains how the process of making cultural products an aspect of global heritage management in the name of protecting world's cultural diversity contains an inherent paradox:

> To solve problems created or sharply intensified by globalization, advocates for indigenous rights demand global solutions, leading to a situation in which proposals to conserve the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples from the Arctic scarcely differ from those advanced in defense of Native Amazonians. Most of these plans, however well intentioned, have a powerful tendency to flatten difference in the interests of procedural uniformity. (2004: 59-60)

While working as standard setting mechanisms, the international legal instruments on heritage protection (including the ones initiated by UNESCO) might have unintended homogenizing effects at the legislative and administrative level, to what extent this standardization really occurs on the ground is an issue that needs to be further addressed. As this study seeks to show, the homogenizing UNESCO discourse on the loss of the world's cultural diversity might well function as a means for obscuring the actual political interests that ground the national heritage protection mechanisms and the conflicting and diverse political outcomes they might generate in practice. As the cases of Nevruz festival and Semah ritual will further detail, employed by national governments, such UNESCO discourse serves to disguise and/or justify nationalist aspirations and their manifold effects on the ground.

Equally important, UNESCO stipulates the commitment of national governments to the rights of tradition-bearers on the identification, management, and control of their heritage, as the

principal condition for inscribing cultural practices on the ICH listing. Consequently, the nomination files for the ICH listing claim the contribution and support of tradition-bearers to the nomination processes and to the proposed safeguarding measures. However, as UNESCO is in no direct contact with tradition-bearers at any stage of the intangible heritage-making process, the content analysis of UNESCO documents is not sufficient to understand whether the tradition bearers are really engaged in the decision-making process and involved in the management of their cultural practices as heritage and the extent that their voices are heard and the meanings they attribute to these cultural practices are represented in the process. These queries become especially significant when the cultural practices to be heritagized are those of the marginalized populations which constitute a baseline for discussing broader political questions, i.e. whether heritage making signals a process of recognition of marginalized identities or, as well, the lack of it. As secondary research is insufficient to answer the aforementioned queries, I chose to employ fieldwork as my primary method.

Current discussion, therefore, is largely based on 50 face-to-face, in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key actors who could supply information on the heritagization, management, promotion, organization and performance of the Sema ceremony, Nevruz/Newroz festival and Semah ritual in Turkey. In order to grasp the multi-lateral structure of the process, the interviews were conducted with key actors derived from two sampling categories. They were engaged in varying degrees in the management and conduct of these three cultural practices both before and after their ICH declaration. The first group includes the state officials and intangible heritage experts who are involved in the identification, selection, and management of these three cultural practices as Turkey's Intangible Cultural Heritage, and in their nomination on the UNESCO ICH listing. The second group involves the nonstate actors who engage in organizing,

promoting, and performing these cultural practices in Turkey. The interviews with these two sampling groups, often revealing conflicting interests and differing ideas, provided significant insights into the complexity of the politics of intangible heritage-making in Turkey.

Founded in 2006 shortly after Turkey ratified the ICH Convention, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department (ICH department) operates under the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TMCT) as the executive organ of the ICH convention in Turkey. The office works together with the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Expert Committee (ICH Expert Committee) to create Turkey's intangible heritage inventory, to choose the practices to be nominated for the UNESCO listing, to prepare their nomination files, and to implement the safeguarding measures in accordance with the action plans suggested in the nomination files. The first set of interviews was carried out with the ICH Department and the ICH Expert Committee members. I also carried out interviews with other relevant executives and personnel of the TMCT. I conducted an interview with a high-ranking TMCT official supervising Turkey's ICH related activities, and an interview with a TMCT European Union and International Cooperation Directorate official, who supervised the Sema ceremony's nomination process for the UNESCO listing, as the ICH Department was not established back then. I also conducted two interviews with the experts on the Mevlevi tradition hired by the TMCT for the preparation of the Sema ceremony's candidature file for its UNESCO inscription, and an interview with a program specialist in the Division of Cultural Objects and Intangible Heritage at UNESCO headquarters based in Paris. In total, 13 interviews were carried out in this category, two of which were follow up interviews with the aim of pursuing the issues that were previously discussed.

The second set of interviews was conducted with nonstate actors who engage in organizing, promoting, and performing the Sema ceremony, Nevruz/Newroz festival and Semah ritual in Turkey. As the dervish lodges were proscribed in Turkey, the Sema ceremony came to be organized by the Mevlevi voluntary organizations after the 1950s, mostly concentrated in the cities of Konya (located in central Anatolia) and Istanbul, where the Mevlevi tradition has been historically robust. Turkey has recently witnessed an upsurge in the number of these organizations, owing to the JDP government's support for the public display of Islam and Islamic cultural practices in Turkey. As part of this research, I conducted 6 interviews with the executive personnel of the Mevlevi organizations and institutes that have been engaging in Sema-related activities in Istanbul, Konya, and Ankara before the heritage declaration of the Sema ceremony. In addition, I carried out an interview with a prominent Turkish columnist who writes on Islamic and Mevlevi affairs in Turkey for a mainstream Islamist newspaper. The respondent also held executive positions in various Mevlevi organizations in the past. I also carried out 3 interviews with the members of the state-sponsored Sema performance group in Konya that has operated under the TMCT since 1991.

At present, there are two different public celebrations in Turkey concerning the Nevruz/Newroz festival. In addition to the interviews conducted with the TMCT officials and the ICH Committee members that take part in the organization and promotion of the official Nevruz celebrations, I also conducted an interview with an executive member of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), which has been assisting the Turkish government in organizing Nevruz celebrations since the mid-1990s. The large-scale Newroz celebrations, on the other hand, have been mostly organized and promoted at the national level by the pro-Kurdish parties and (legal and illegal) Kurdish voluntary organizations after the 1970s. I

interviewed with 7 respondents in Istanbul and Ankara who are/were affiliated with these institutions and are/were engaged in organizing the Newroz festivals from the 1970s/1980s onwards. These respondents were also selected for their special knowledge on the history of Kurdish politics in Turkey, and for their active participation in the organization of Kurdish political activities.

Especially after the 1990s, Turkey witnessed an upsurge in the number of Alevi-Bektaşi voluntary organizations, which are concentrated in the major cities of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, where the Alevi-Bektaşis now predominantly live. Similar to the case of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony, the promotion, organization, and performance of the Semah has been largely carried out by these organizations. Today, their numbers exceed hundreds and almost all offer free Semah courses, and regularly organize Cem ceremonies and other Semah related activities. I interviewed 15 executive personnel and members of the prominent Alevi-Bektaşi organizations based in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir that are involved in Semah related activities.[12] These organizations were also selected due to the active political role they have been playing in framing and expressing the political demands of Alevi-Bektaşis in Turkey. In addition, I interviewed with 2 members of the state-sponsored Semah performance group based in Hacı Bektaş town (central Anatolia), which has operated under the TMCT since 1997. I also conducted interviews with the Mayor of Hacı Bektaş town and the director of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Museum.

The names of the respondents and the titles of the Alevi-Bektaşi, Mevlevi, and Kurdish organizations that the respondents are affiliated with are withheld in this study. This approach is chosen for the respondents to somewhat openly express their opinions while responding to

[12] Among these 15 respondents two of them were Alevi Dedes (the religious leader of the Alevis) and two were Semah teachers.

questions on tricky subject matters. Turkey has a deeply troubled history when it comes to the freedom of expression and thought: criticisms against the state ideology as well as certain government policies and practices remain a criminal offense with jail time and/or massive fines.[13] While designing my research, I realized that several non-state actors had been charged with "thought-crimes" in the past. During my initial contacts with research participants either via telephone or email, I explained that their names and the exact title of their Mevlevi, Kurdish, and Alevi-Bektaşi voluntary organizations would be withheld, and the records of the interviews would be kept confidential, if they decided to participate in this study. Before the actual interview began, I provided them my contact information and the research permission documents obtained from the CUNY Graduate Center. Assuring the anonymity of the respondents contributed greatly to the high research participation rate: while some respondents hesitated at first to participate in the research for the aforementioned reasons, all the contacted persons agreed to be interviewed (all [but two] permitted the interviews to be taped) after I assure them that I would withhold their identifying characteristics. Except for two carried out in English, the interviews were conducted in Turkish. I transcribed all the interviews and field notes. I translated Turkish interview quotes into English for inclusion in this study. The interviews were carried out in the cities of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Konya, and Hacı Bektaş, as well as in Paris and New York. They varied in length from about forty-five minutes to three hours and were carried out between March 2009 and April 2011. The interviews are numbered from one to fifty in the order that they were conducted, while their overview and dates are listed as an Appendix.

[13] A highly controversial Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code stipulates that a person who publicly insults the Turkish nation, the Turkish state or its juridical institutions, the Turkish government, the Turkish parliament as well as the Turkish military and security forces shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 6 months to 2 years. According to the 2010 Media Monitoring Report published by the Independent Communication Network (BIA) "220 people, 104 of whom were journalists, stood trial in 2010 in the scope of freedom of thought and expression" in Turkey (Önderoğlu and Celik 2010).

As a Turkish citizen who has lived most of her life in Turkey, I had participated in these cultural events as a spectator several times before I decided to conduct this research. Thinking that reparticipation in these events as a researcher would add to my understanding on the subject matter, I also decided to employ participant-observation as part of this research. To this end, I participated in two performances conducted by a local Sema performance group in Istanbul in March 2010 and the state-sponsored Sema performance group as part of the Seb-i Arus commemorations in Konya in December 2011. I also participated in the official 2010 Nevruz celebration organized in Ankara and the 2011 Newroz celebration held in Izmir. In the case of the Semah Ritual, I participated in a Semah ceremony performed by the state-sponsored Semah group in the town of Hacı Bektaş in December 2010 and in two other Semah performances that were held as part of the Cem ceremonies in March 2011 in Istanbul. These experiences, where I also found the chance to engage in casual conversations with other event participants, turned out to be significant in providing further understanding of the cases. The insight gained from this research is discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The sema is the soul`s adornment that helps it to discover love, to feel the shudder of the encounter, to take off the veils and to be in the presence of God. (Mevlana in And 1977: 84)

FROM MARGINAL TO MAINSTREAM: THE CASE OF THE MEVLEVI SEMA CEREMONY

Introduction

The Sema ceremony, sacred ritual of the Mevlevi Sufi order, was proclaimed as intangible heritage by UNESCO in 2005 due to concerns over the loss of its original spiritual and religious meaning. Worldwide concerns in the course of the 1990s that pronounced globalization was "antithetical to the survival of cultural diversity" (Logan 2007: 36) led to the emergence of the UNESCO intangible heritage protection schemes. By highlighting the vulnerability of nonmaterial cultural elements against the processes of globalization and social transformation, UNESCO urged member states to take necessary measures for sustaining intangible heritage located within their borders. What makes the heritagization process of the Sema ceremony noticeable, however, is the widespread consensus among its practitioners that the sustainability of the ceremony had been threatened by domestic political pressures other than by global ones.

Much literature has so far discussed the loss of Mevlevi religious tradition in relation to Turkey's Kemalist policies, which placed Islam under the control of the secular state. Indeed, due to secularization reforms that outlawed the Mevlevi Sufi order and abolished its convents, there remained no organized Mevlevi order in Turkey following 1925. Sema performances were prohibited in Turkey for about thirty years. Although the ceremony developed into a widely

popular cultural event during the years following its revitalization, its performance as a tourist spectacle created concerns among Mevlevi groups over the sustainability of traditional Sema performances.

While the decree that bans Mevlevism and other Sufi orders is still preserved in the current constitution of Turkey, the pro-Islamic JDP government successfully nominated Sema to the UNESCO ICH list as Turkey's Islamic cultural heritage. Since then, the government has introduced substantial efforts to protect the religious significance of Sema from further deterioration and to revitalize its traditional institutional setting, knowledge, and expertise. This led to increased public manifestation of Mevlevi religious identity, and popularization of Mevlevi religious activities in Turkey. This chapter discusses the JDP's commitment to protect a devotional ritual of an Islamic tradition that is prohibited by law within the context of recent structural changes and tensions in the relationship between state and religion. Unlike Turkey's conventional Kemalist notion of nationalism that posits secularism as an aspect of national identity, the JDP favors an alternative form of nationalism that outlines Turkish national identity along Islamic lines (Duran 2008: 99). While the JDP government has been a vigorous advocate of an alternative notion of secularism that would provide freedom to all religion without privileging (Sunni) Islam over any other religious beliefs, in practice, it has followed an explicit Islamic nationalist agenda for strengthening the role of Sunni Islam in Turkish social and political life.

This chapter discusses the heritagization of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony within this context, as a process of *recognition* that reveals the transformation of previously marginalized Mevlevi religious tradition into a mainstream national culture that is favored, supported, and protected by pro-Islamic government policies. To do that, I begin by introducing the Mevlevi

order and the Sema ceremony, and discuss the impact of Kemalist secularization policies on the Mevlevi religious tradition and practices that were implemented in the early republican period. I then focus on the factors that conditioned the revitalization of the Sema ceremony in the early 1950s, as a tourist spectacle rather than as a religious ritual. Subsequently, I examine the JDP government's pro-Islamic policies and the recent debates surrounding the relationship between state and religion in Turkey. Finally, I conclude by discussing the JDP government's efforts to ease restrictions on public demonstrations of Sunni Islam and promote a shared Sunni Muslim identity and culture at the national level through the heritagization of the Sema ceremony.

A Brief History of the Mevlevi Order

The Mevlevi order belongs to the Sufi Islamic tradition that focuses on mystical aspects of Islam. Rather than being a strictly defined religious movement, Sufism refers to an "interrelated network of ideas and practices, all aimed at a deeper understanding and faithful pursuit of the Qur'ānic message" (Michel 2005: 341). Following the 10th century, Sufism had been institutionalized into diverse orders of mystics called *tarikat*, which served significant cultural, political and social needs during the Ottoman Empire (Narli 1997). Kreiser estimates that there were one to two thousand Sufi lodges in the core provinces of the Balkans and Anatolia during the last century of the Ottoman Empire (in Silverstein 2007: 45). While their interpretation of Islam and the Quran showed divergences from that of Sunni orthodoxy represented by the Islamic religious scholars called *Ulema* (Narli 1997), almost all Ottoman Sufi brotherhoods (including the Mevlevis) subscribed to Sunni Islam. On the other hand, in contrast to Ulema that mostly focused on the public behavior of the Muslim community and "its

conformity with the body politic," Sufism emphasized "the spiritual life of the believer and the inner dimensions of faith" (Yavuz 2003: 11). As Narli (1997) suggests, Sufi orders were significant in preventing Islam from developing into "a cold and formal doctrine". Focusing on the moral and social wellbeing of the Ottoman public, they not only provided religious counseling and instruction but also delivered social welfare in the form of schools, food, and housing (ibid).

Among Sufi brotherhoods, the Mevlevi order was one of the oldest and enduring examples (Işın 2004: 16). The order was founded by the followers of the teachings of a famous Sufi philosopher and mystical poet, *Mevlana Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Mevlana) after his death in 1273 in the city of Konya. Mevlana's teachings were based on the principle of universal humanism that aims to cultivate the inner self by promoting unlimited love and tolerance for all beings that he considered manifestations of God.[14] After Mevlana's death, his doctrine was institutionalized by his son Sultan Veled as the Mevlevi Sufi order of dervishes (Işın 2004: 16). During the decades following its founding, the Mevlevi order was organized mostly in small villages of central Anatolia (Gökalp 2005: 284). From the 15th century onwards, however, Mevlevi doctrine came increasingly to the attention of the Ottoman governing elite and intellectuals (Ocak 1996a: 21), who transformed Mevlevism into an imperial institution and enabled the order's spread within the borders of the Ottoman Empire (Işın 2004:18).

[14] Mevlana Jalal al-din Rumi is known as Mevlana in Turkey, while in most parts of the world, as Rumi. For more information on Mevlana and his philosophy, see Halman 2007: 231-296; for the organization of the Mevlevi order after Mevlana, see Gölpınarlı 2006.

Figure 1. Konya Sema performance group conducting the Sema ceremony in the 2010 Seb-i Arus Celebrations (photo by author)

One of the major factors underlying the world-wide popularity of Mevlevis has no doubt been their conduct of the Sema ceremony (also known as the dance of whirling dervishes), a sacred, whirling performance accompanied by a particular mystic music (see figure 1). [15] Sema, which means "listening to music, singing and chanting to attain a state of religious emotion and ecstasy", is conducted by Mevlevis in the form of *zikr*[16] for the purpose of linking their mind to the Infinite (And 1977: 84). The whirling ritual has traditionally been performed together with *ayin* music, a distinctive form of art music that belongs to the Mevlevi musical tradition: Mevlevis use sacred instruments, such as the *ney* (reed flute), *halile* (cymbal) and a small double drum called *kudüm* at the forefront of the ayin music, which is composed to be accompanied by lyrics from Mevlana's poems (Feldman 2004: 49-54).

[15] Sema whirling is conducted by spinning counterclockwise on the left foot in short twists (UNESCO 2011b). The ceremony is believed to have been introduced by Mevlana himself in the 13th century and then institutionalized as a religious practice after the foundation of the Mevlevi order.

[16] And defines zikr as "the remembrance of God by the repeated enunciation of short invocations which, when recited in congregation, are regulated with breathing techniques and rhythmical physical movements for the attainment of spiritual effects" (1977: 84). Zikr is a major Sufi ritual performed in a collective manner (ibid) by almost all Sufi orders in varying forms to unite with God.

The Sema ceremony is not only choreographically distinctive in blending music with motion, it is also replete with metaphors that reveal the essential principles of the Mevlevi philosophy. In his essay *The Mevlana Ceremony [Turkey]*, Metin And (1977) interprets a 15th century manuscript that reveals the symbolic explanation of Sema:

> The room in which the dance was performed symbolized the year; the leader himself represented the sun, the life-giver of the earth, and dancers turned around him like the planets and the moon. The whirling itself symbolized the celestial motions –as the earth turns on its axis as well as revolving round the sun, so the dervishes pivot on their feet while making a revolution of the hall, which was considered the hall of celestial sound.…the whole cosmos is a dancing mystery and that mysticism recognizes dancing as a symbol of the cosmos. All the creatures carry out their function in the way fixed by and through the power of the leader…who represents God. A Mevlevi dervish's garments are symbolic: his hat represents his gravestone, his cloak his coffin, and his white shirt is his shroud…The *semazen*, or dancer, extends his arms full length and horizontally while spinning. Sometimes the right hand is raised with the palm turned upward and the left lowered with the palm turned downward. The symbolic explanation of this posture is that the influence from heaven received by the upturned palm is handed down to the world below by the other. (P. 93-94)

While traditionally the Sema ceremony was open to view by the public, it was merely performed in a whirling hall called *Semahane* located within the Mevlevi lodge. Moreover, only trained members of Mevlevi community were permitted to actively participate in its performance.[17] In addition to Sema instruction, Mevlevi dervishes had to go through a special form of training called "1001 days of penitence". During this period, the dervish-to-be resided in a Mevlevi convent to carry out a set of services including washing dishes, cleaning, serving food, waiting on tables, laundry service, and cleaning latrines (Tanrıkorur 2004a: 27). In addition, the

[17] Friedlander explains the daily Sema training that the Mevlevi initiates were required to go through: "A smooth-surfaced board, three feet square and one inch high, is placed on the floor. In the center of the board is a large, smooth round-headed nail…The initiate…steps onto the board, placing the nail between the big toe of his left foot and the toe next to it. His right foot crosses his left at the toes. While his arms are crossed, right over left, at the shoulders, he bows his head and says *'eyvallah'* (with the permission of the God). Once he has learned the Turn, which usually takes ninety days, the initiate…can actually participate in a sema." (2003: 116)

trainee was required to commit to an intense training process that includes learning the fundamentals of Mevlevi philosophy, behavior codes and ethics, as well as studying the works of Mevlana, Islamic theology, Persian and Turkish literature, and Mevlevi music (ibid). After the end of the training period, the trainee would be initiated as a *dede* and would choose between returning to his home or residing in the Mevlevi convent working as a teacher, whose expenses would be covered by the Ottoman government (Friedlander 2003:117).

The Mevlevi convents were administered from the central Mevlevi lodge in Konya by the lineal descendent of Mevlana, called the *Celebi* and considered as the leader of all Mevlevis. The Mevlevi order's centralized administration structure permitted the traditional Mevlevi practices, including the Sema ceremony, to be instituted in all the Mevlevi convents throughout the Ottoman Empire (Feldman 2004: 40). Furthermore, the close and unproblematic relationship of Mevlevis with the Ottoman governing elite and the Sultans themselves (many of whom were heavily influenced by Mevlevi philosophy), as well as the important financial support they received from the Ottoman administration (by means of regular payments, gifts and contributions for the renovation of the Mevlevi convents and religious tombs) allowed Mevlevism to grow into one of the most influential and prominent Sufi orders of the Ottoman Empire (Kılıç 2009: 18-20). Consequently, Mevlevi customs and traditions had been well-preserved for six centuries, until the ban of the Sufi orders in 1925 (Interview 10). In order to understand the factors underlying the prohibition of the Mevlevi order and its impact on the sustainability of the Mevlevi religious tradition and its practices, one needs to observe the relationship between the Turkish state and religion and particularly the secularization policies issued by the Kemalist regime during Turkey's one-party period (1923-1946).

Turkey's Secularization Policies in the Single-Party Period

Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the new administration of Mustafa Kemal initially took no measures against Islam and Islamic institutions. As Yavuz suggests, Islamic identity rather functioned as the "integrative glue" for the founding of the Republic: during the War of Independence (1919-1923), Mustafa Kemal's administration promoted a shared Islamic heritage in order to mobilize diverse ethno-linguistic groups to free their country and the Caliphate (the central Islamic institution that symbolized international unity of Muslim community) from the occupying European forces (2000: 21-22). It was also during this period that the first Turkish Constitution (1921) declared Islam as the religion of the Turkish state. Mustafa Kemal was in close contact with Sufi Sheikhs, many of whom supported his administration and the national struggle. Having substantial influence over the Ottoman populace, the Sufi Sheikhs were crucial in mobilizing extensive public support for the national struggle, some allowing their lodges to be used for accommodation and weapon storage (Kara 2005: 235). The Sufi Sheikhs were also well represented in the first Turkish parliament (the Grand National Assembly) from 1920 to 1923: the Sheikhs of the Konya Mevlevi lodge and Hacıbektaş Bektaşi lodge were even selected by Mustafa Kemal as the parliaments' vice-presidents (p. 236). As one of the respondents put it: "The Sufi orders played significant roles in the foundation of independent Turkey: looking at the photos of the first parliament, one would be shocked to see the abundance of parliament members with traditional Sufi vestments and headdresses" (interview 6).

The moderate approach of Mustafa Kemal's administration to Islam, however, changed drastically following the founding of the Turkish Republic. The War of Independence came to an end in July 1923 through the ratification of the Lausanne Treaty, which also led to the

international recognition of the new Turkish state as the successor of the Ottoman Empire. In September 1923, Mustafa Kemal founded the People's Party and one month later, on 29 October 1923, the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed, with Mustafa Kemal as its first president. During the early republican era, the People's Party (which was renamed as the Republican People's Party in 1924) instituted a "power monopoly" with almost no legal opposition, and Turkey remained a single-party regime until the end of the Second World War (Zürcher 2007: 176). [18] It was during this period that the new government under Mustafa Kemal embarked on a systematic program to modernize the nation. The new regime adopted Kemalism as its ideological framework and introduced secularism together with nationalism, Westernization and economic development, as fundamental principles of the modern Turkish Republic (Shively 2008: 684).

Although reforms concerning the modernization of Islamic institutions date back to the 19th century Ottoman era,[19] it was after the foundation of the Turkish Republic that these reforms began targeting Islam and Islamic institutions with the aim of excluding religion from Turkey's social, economic, and political life (see Toprak 1981; Yavuz 2000). The Kemalist regime encouraged the secularization of public life and supported the state's direct involvement in religious matters with an aim of putting Islam and Islamic institutions under state control. As Toprak suggests, from the initial years of the Republic onward, the regime came to employ a strict secularization program "to weaken both the institutional and the functional strength of Islam" and to substitute the Ottoman, Islamic cultural tradition of the nation with a Western one (Toprak 1981: 1). To this end, the Turkish parliament implemented a series of secularization

[18] During the single-party regime, two political parties, the Progressive Republican Party (1924) and the Free Republican Party (1930), were founded with the permission of Mustafa Kemal yet banned within couple of months of their establishment (see Zürcher 2007: 168-179).

[19] In a recent article, Brian Silverstein (2009) discusses a series of reforms initiated by the Ottoman government from the early 19th century onwards that aimed at modernizing and reorganizing the Sufi orders under the central Ottoman authority.

reforms over a quite short period of time. The institution of the Caliphate was abolished, and religious courts and schools were closed down in 1924. The abolition of these historically well-established, Ottoman religious institutions was a significant step towards reducing the supremacy of religion over state affairs. Instead, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was established in 1924 under the Prime Minister's Office to manage and regulate Islamic religious activities in Turkey. Since then, the Directorate has been in charge of "appointing local religious representatives (imams and muftis), administering mosques and Qur'ān schools, organizing pilgrimages, and issuing opinions on a variety of religious issues" (Adanali 2008:229). Furthermore, the Sufi orders were outlawed and the Islamic calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in 1925, the Islamic Civil code was substituted by the Swiss Civil code in 1926, and the Arabic script was replaced by Latin script in 1928. The article that stated Islam as the religion of the Turkish state was removed from the Turkish constitution in 1928, and secularism was included in the Constitution as an irrevocable principle of the Turkish Republic in 1937.

Among these reforms, the one that concerns the Mevlevis the most has no doubt been the ban on Sufi orders. In February 1925, the first large scale insurgence against the Kemalist regime, the rebellion of Sheikh Said (a prominent Nakşibendi Sufi Sheikh) broke out in the predominantly Kurdish regions of southeastern Turkey. Although the real motivation of the leading cadre of the revolt was to form an independent Kurdish state, its initiators used the destruction of religion and particularly the abolition of the Caliphate as the basis for mobilizing the masses against the Kemalist regime (White 2000: 73-74).[20] The rebellion was defeated in April 1925 by the Turkish military forces, and Sheikh Said and his associates was captured and executed. Having been mainly attributed to the Nakşibendi Sufi order, the revolt prepared the

[20] As the third chapter further details, existing literature on Kurdish political affairs often discusses the Sheikh Said Rebellion as the first large-scale nationalist rebellion organized by Turkey's Kurds.

ground for the closure of the Sufi orders (Kara 2005: 236), which the government deemed a potential danger to secular Turkey (Barnes 1992: 46). Soon after the suppression of the revolt, Mustafa Kemal in his infamous speech in September 1925 publicly announced for the first time that Sufi orders were not part of his vision of modern secular Turkey:

> Gentlemen and fellow countrymen, know that the Turkish Republic cannot be a nation of sheikhs, dervishes and mystics. The truest path is the path of civilization; it is necessary for one to be a man who does what civilization dictates. I could never admit to the civilized Turkish community a primitive people who seek happiness and prosperity by putting their faith in such and such a sheikh, a man opposed to the sparkling light of civilization, which encompasses all science and knowledge. In any case, the lodges must be closed. (Mustafa Kemal in Barnes 1992: 46)

Three months after this speech, on 13 December 1925, the government enacted the legal code 677. All Sufi convents were closed down under this constitutional injunction; involvement in a Sufi order either as a Sheikh or as a follower, attempts to re-establish the Sufi lodges, or wearing traditional dervish garments became punishable by at least three months in prison. The law that was implemented immediately, had profound effects on the institutional structure of the Mevlevi order and the sustainability of its religious practices: the titles of Celebi and Sheikh was prohibited, all the Mevlevi convents (except the ones that had already been converted into mosques) were closed down, and all the activities held within the Mevlevi convents (including the traditional training of the Mevlevi dervishes, as well as the training and the performance of the Sema ceremony) were proscribed. A member of a prominent Mevlevi family described situation back then as,

> The ban on Sufi orders marked the end of a more than six hundred years old Mevlevi tradition in Turkey. Following the ban, the Mevlevi Sheikhs and their families had to leave the Mevlevi convents in a very short period of time. Everybody was in a state of fear: nobody intended to contact each other, to continue the training of the Mevlevi dervishes or to perform the Sema ceremony. (Interview 10)

Despite that legal code 677 that is still preserved in the current constitution of Turkey, Mevlevism "have remained an above-ground presence" on Turkey's cultural scene (Lesser 2004: 179). To understand the factors that made such presence possible in secular Turkey, the next section focuses on the Kemalist regime's efforts to redefine Mevlevism as a profane-humanist doctrine in line with its secularist vision during the single-party period.

"Yes to Mevlana, No to Mevlevi Order"[21]: The Kemalist Version of Mevlevism

Many prominent Mevlevi Sheikhs supported the Kemalist secularization reforms before the ban on Sufi orders. One example might be the reaction of the Mevlevis to the abolition of the Caliphate. While the abolition raised strong opposition from the religious segments of the society, the majority of the Mevlevis responded to it with relative silence, some even openly supporting this decision. As Küçük indicates, the Sheikh of the central Mevlevi convent in Konya, Abdülhalim Celebi, sent a letter to congratulate Mustafa Kemal for ending the Caliphate and expelling the Caliph that he described as a pest; other Mevlevi Sheikhs sent similar messages to the Grand National Assembly highlighting that the Caliphate was not one of the main principles of Islam and it had served for personal interests (2007: 137-138). The majority of the Mevlevi Sheikhs also presented a similar attitude towards another controversial issue, the hat reform of 1925, by being among the first to obey the law and replacing their traditional Sufi headdress with a modern hat (Kılıç 2009: 94-109). [22]

[21] Sayar 2007: 177

[22] Also known as the "hat revolution", the law aimed at replacing the traditional Ottoman style hat called a *fez* with a Western-style one. Wearing a Western-style hat was a very controversial issue at the time, symbolizing one's acceptance of Western cultural values (Kılıç 2009: 89).

The Mevlevis also choose not to react overtly against the new regime following the ban on Sufi orders and many accepted the secularization reforms with relative "silence and compliance" (Kılıç 2009: 108). Right after the ban, the central Mevlevi convent was moved from Konya to Aleppo in Syria by the decision of Abdülhalim Celebi, where the Mevlevi activities outside of Turkey was administered from -until the Syrian government decided to ban the Mevlevi activities in the 1950s (Işın 2004: 25). When asked about the state of the Mevlevi order in Turkey after 1925, a member of a prominent Mevlevi family explained how the legal code 677 announced the end of an organized Mevlevi order in Turkey:

> In the years following 1925, Mevlevism was not driven underground like some other Sufi orders. Our ancestors were not against the secular Turkish state: they obeyed the laws and they chose not to involve in illegal activities. That's why they never tried to reestablish the Mevlevi convents or to clandestinely continue the order's activities in Turkey after the prohibition. As these activities are still illegal in Turkey, following our ancestor's footsteps, we also choose not to involve in illegal activities; instead, we seek legal ways to sustain our traditions. (Interview 10)

As Küçük suggests, the moderate attitude of Mevlevis toward Kemalist secularization reforms led to their partial legitimization in the eyes of the new regime (2007:141). Instead of discarding Mevlevism entirely after the ban on Sufi orders, the Kemalist governing elite chose to highlight its profane aspects that they found congruent with the secular ideology of the Republic. While the institutionalization of Mevlana's thought as a Sufi order was rejected on the basis of Kemalist secular principles, Mevlana came to be acknowledged for his universal humanist thought and as a "great Turkish philosopher and poet". This provided Mevlevis with unique concessions. While all other Sufi convents remained closed, the central Mevlevi convent in Konya was converted into the Museum of Historical Works (renamed as the Mevlana Museum in 1964) and reopened to the public after a direct demand from Mustafa Kemal two years after the

ban on Sufi orders. Mustafa Kemal neither concealed his sympathy for Mevlana nor considered his thought and philosophy as a challenge to his vision of modern secular Turkey. While he was openly against the institutionalization of Mevlana's thought into a Sufi order, he distinguished Mevlana from other Islamic scholars by his radical and innovative philosophy. Contrary to his overall distance from all other Sufi orders, Mustafa Kemal visited the city of Konya and the museumified Mevlevi convent several times. In one of his visits to the Mevlana museum, he wrote in the guestbook:

> Every visitor to Mevlana's Mausoleum is a refugee from reactionary dogma…The idea of soaring to God standing, whirling, in motion is a natural expression of the Turkish genius…Mevlana is a lover of transformation who transcends the ages…He upheld the principles of social revolution and the freedom of conscience." (Quoted in Önder, in Halman 2007: 283)

The ideas and activities of a Mevlevi devotee Hasan Ali Yücel, Turkey's Minister of Public Education from 1938 to 1946, also played an important role in the partial legitimization of Mevlevism in Turkey's single-party period. Yücel published various essays on Mevlevism and Mevlana and initiated first efforts to translate Mevlana's poems from Persian to Turkish language (Sayar 2007: 80-106). During Yücel's reign of eight years, the Ministry of Public Education published several works of Mevlana, including the first complete Turkish translation of *Mesnevi* (his masterpiece) and organized various panels on Mevlana's philosophy and teachings (p. 106-119). Sayar claims, however, that while Yücel was a pious Mevlevi, he was also an ardent defender of Kemalist secular principles and the eradication of religion from public life (p. 104-105). In an effort to reconcile his Mevlevism with Kemalist secular principles, Yücel defined Mevlevism as an inner journey on the way to reach Mevlana. This journey does not necessitate intermediary Sufi institutions and structure, but for Yücel, one should follow the path

of “Mevlana-ism” rather than Mevlevism (p. 164). Similar to the ideas of Mustafa Kemal, Yücel supported the ban on Sufi orders in his essay *Mevlana and Mevlevism*:

> Mevlevism is certainly a creation of Mevlana. But it is not an institution that he established… Essentially existed neither as a community nor as a clandestine Sufi order, Mevlevism retained its philosophy and foresight within the public precautions taken by the Republic…and find the opportunity to diffuse into the university circles and communities having a taste of art and poetry. (Yücel in Sayar 2007: 176-177)

After the founding of the Turkish Republic, highlighting Mevlevism as a secular-humanist philosophy and acknowledging Mevlana as a “great” Turkish thinker, the Kemalist regime authorized and sometimes even financed events for commemorating Mevlana, published his works, and allowed the central Mevlevi convent in Konya to reopen as a museum. The activities and rituals associated with the Mevlevi Sufi order, however, were strictly proscribed in this period: Mevlevi convents were kept closed, and their activities were prohibited. Hence, it can be said that while such government approach to Mevlevism provided some limited and quite distinctive opportunities for the conduct of Mevlevi activities in secular Turkey, the Mevlevi tradition came increasingly to be removed from its religious significance. As one of the respondents puts it,

> I have a catalogue prepared by the ministry of Hasan Ali Yücel in the late 1940s for an event to commemorate Mevlana. There is literally no mention of Islam or Sufism in it. It presents Mevlana strictly as a Turkish humanist, mentions the universal value of his doctrine… This is a good example of how the teachings of Mevlana were systematically removed from their religious significance… This made it possible to follow his path without committing to Islam and Islamic principles. (Interview 6)

The Revival of Sema as a Tourist Spectacle in the 1950s

Much literature on Turkish political history has discussed the late 1940s as a period of resurgence of Islam in Turkey. After the emergence of multi-party politics in 1946, the parliament members that broke off from the Republican People's Party (RPP) founded the conservative Democrat Party (DP) that was headed by Adnan Menderes (see Zürcher 2007: 206-215). Arguing for a more tolerant policy toward Islam, the DP came to receive widespread support from Turkey's conservative and anti-Kemalist segments. As Yavuz suggests, recognizing the failure of Kemalist secular policies in mobilizing the masses, and troubled with the increasing support the DP was receiving among the general public, the RPP introduced a series of reforms for the relaxation of secularist state policies from 1947 to 1950: elective religious courses were introduced in public schools, limited number of religious schools (called Imam-Hatip Schools) were opened for training prayer leaders and delivers of sermons, and yearly Muslim pilgrimage was permitted for the first time in the Turkish Republic in 1948 (2003: 60). These reforms, however, were inadequate in restoring the RPP's popularity, and in the 1950 general elections the DP bested the Kemalist RPP by winning about 53 percent of the votes and receiving 408 seats (out of 477) in the Turkish parliament (Zürcher 2007: 217). Instead of initiating fundamental changes in the secular state structure, the DP chose to pursue the RPP's timid reforms for easing the restrictions on the manifestation of Islamic values and practices in Turkey's public sphere (p. 233). To this end, the *Ezan* (the call to prayer) that used to be conducted in Turkish was reinstated in Arabic, the Quran was allowed to be recited on the state radio, and approximately 15,000 new mosques were built (Nereid in Jenkins 2003: 48).

The Mevlevi activities were slowly resumed under the relatively relaxed government attitude toward Islamic identity and practices. Mevlevi groups, whose activities had previously

been limited to unauthorized gatherings in private houses for performing Sema, playing ayin music and reading Mevlana's works, found new possibilities to practice their rituals publicly by the end of 1940s (Interview 5). Mevlevis finally managed in 1946 to receive authorization from the government to organize the *Seb-i Arus* (wedding night), the traditional, annual Mevlevi commemoration of Mevlana's death (17th of December), in Konya. In his internet article *Kronolojik Olarak Mevlana Ihtifalleri* (The Chronology of the Mevlana Commemorations), Mustafa Özcan examines the history of the Seb-i Arus festival in Turkey. As he points out, earlier festivals were modestly organized as one-day events that included visits to the Mevlana's tomb, Mevlevi music performances and panels on Mevlana's life and works. While these modest events generated local participation, to Özcan it was through the efforts of the DP government that the Seb-i Arus festival gradually developed into the city's principal tourist attraction, drawing a significant national and international crowd. The DP attributed considerable importance and provided some technical and financial assistance to the event. High ranking government officials, including ministers and deputies, came to participate in Seb-i Arus. As Özcan states, the scope of the festival was also broadened to include three/four-day-long events (and week-long events after 1959) such as various Mevlevi music concerts, the Quran recitals, art exhibitions, documentary film screenings, as well as several conferences and seminars that involved topics such as Mevlana's religious mysticism and philosophy.

The restrictions on the Mevlevi activities were further eased when public Sema performances came to be permitted within the festival schedule. As Özcan states, the first authorized Sema ceremony was performed on 17 December 1953 in Konya, following the request of the Seb-i Arus organizing committee. However, due to the ban on Sufi orders, permission was granted under the strict condition that the ceremony should be conducted as a

cultural event for "the celebration of one of the great Turkish poets," rather than as a religious ritual (Friedlander 2003: 119). In other words, in order for the ceremony to be performed publicly, it had to comply with Turkey's secular principles. Hence, while the Sema ceremony had been authorized by the Turkish government to be publicly performed following 1953 (first annually in the Konya Seb-i Arus festival, then later in other cities of Turkey and abroad), its enactment as a cultural event for tourists necessitated significant modifications in its spiritual content and structure. A researcher on Mevlevism and the Mevlevi convents stated that the ceremony has been considerably shortened after religious elements (such as the Quran and the Mesnevi readings as well as the Namaz performance), were either eliminated or minimized to make its public performance possible in secular Turkey (interview 5).

These earlier performances were also held under strict police surveillance to ensure the ceremony's performance as a tourist spectacle rather than as a religious ritual. Friedlander narrates that during one of the first Sema performances the police, observing that one of the performers were praying as he whirled, warned the organizer committee that Sema should be for tourists and not for the dervishes (2003: 119). On another occasion, the police disapproved of the practice of Sema by young boys, stating their concern that "they will grow and become dervishes" (p. 120). A respondent told me a similar anecdote, recalling that an audience member was taken away by the police in the 1960s, when he got carried away by the Sema performance and he himself began to whirl (Interview 6). Consequently, the prominent Mevlevi dervishes protested these incidents at Sema performances, and several Mevlevis broke from the Konya Sema group, claiming that Sema had turned into a tourist show (Friedlander 2003: 120). Their efforts, however, proved to be ineffective as Sema has gradually developed into a worldwide popular event.

The Sema ceremony is one of the major cultural features of Anatolia that is extensively known outside of Turkey. As one of the respondents puts it, "other than the famous imperial architectural monuments like the Topkapı Palace and the Blue Mosque, the Sema ceremony is the best known cultural feature of Turkey in the world; it is even known by a separate name in the English and French language" (Interview 8). In fact, the ceremony has been popular among international audiences as the dance of whirling dervishes, long before its 1950s revival. Barber points out that, while the whirling aspect of the ceremony attracted the attention of Western travelers as early as the beginning of the 17th century, it became extensively popular both in Europe and in the United States after the 1920s as an ecstatic and mystic dance form (1986: 328-329). As he further states, during the years the ceremony was forbidden in Turkey, four independent European choreographers created a dance based on their interpretation of the Mevlevi whirling, all of which received popular attention with performances in the renowned theaters of Europe and the United States until the 1950s (p. 331-350). This explains why the Sema ceremony (or rather its relatively profane version) has received not only national, but also international attention after its revitalization. As Friedlander (2003: 119-120) indicates, the ceremony that was initially performed as a simple event in Konya's local theatre (with three musicians and two performers whirling in their street clothes), drew such large crowds that it had to be moved to a large gymnasium in Konya as early as 1956. Mustafa Özcan states that, around thirty thousand people, one third of which were foreign tourists, observed the 1967 Seb-i Arus events (and various Sema performances conducted by seventy-five Sema performers and musicians during the festival week).

Sema performance groups secured additional concessions from the Turkish government as the popularity of the ceremony has grown gradually. Following an invitation by UNESCO in

1964, the Turkish government permitted a Sema group to travel to Paris for the first public performance of the ceremony outside of Turkey (Friedlander 2003: 22). Equally important, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Turkish government, officially declared 1973 as the year of Mevlana, and Mevlevi groups had the opportunity to perform the Sema ceremony in various countries including France, England, and the United States (And 1977: 84). In addition to the performances in Konya, the Sema ceremony came to be conducted on a regular weekly basis in Istanbul from the mid-1970s onwards, when the Galata Mevlevi convent opened to the public after being renovated and converted into the Museum of Divan Literature (Interview 4).

Initial Sema performances were performed by a small group of Mevlevi dervishes who received classical Mevlevi training before the closure of the Mevlevi convents (Interview 5). Increased international and domestic demand for the Sema performances led to the founding of private Sema groups to perform the ceremony both in and outside of Turkey. Realizing the potential of the Sema ceremony in the international promotion of Turkey, the Turkish government also took the initiative to organize the Sema performances from the 1990s and established a Sema group (composed of 13 whirlers and 21 musicians) in Konya to perform Sema at the Seb-i Arus commemorations and fulfill official international invitations for promotional cultural purposes (Tanrıkorur 2004b: 74). The Konya Sema group still operates under the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TMCT), whose members are employed by the Turkish state with fixed salaries.

Although the majority of the Mevlevi groups in Turkey welcomed the ever-increasing presence of the Mevlevi activities in Turkey's cultural scene, they also raised concerns over the loss of the spiritual value and the quality of the ceremony. One of the respondents, who viewed

the Sema performance that took place in the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York in 1973, criticized the event for its commercialization as a tourist attraction:

> After the performance I was chatting with the musicians backstage while they were eating their sandwiches. There I learned that the organizers of the event actually booked two performances back to back. So, they simply thought that the place was too small for the demand; and they could make twice the money without paying the performer's hotel expenses for another night. Now, from the Mevlevi tradition's point of view, this was totally unheard of. It is unethical to the tradition…You can see how the Mevlevi performance had become a total commercial adventure. Whatever idea you might have for this being a special or a spiritual event is gone once you have a sandwich and repeat it an hour later. (Interview 8)

During the interviews, other respondents affiliated with the Mevlevi groups recounted similar anecdotes about the post-1950s degeneration of the traditional Sema ceremony. Another respondent described the reenacted version of Sema as a "touristic dance show, where dancers wearing Mevlevi clothes turn for the spectators" (interview 6). What often came out in the interviews was criticism of Turkey's secularization policies and the resultant commercialization, folklorization, and touristization of the ceremony. Respondents highlighted that commercial, esthetic and choreographic concerns usurped pious and ethical ones in the Sema performances after 1953 and the ceremony that used to be performed merely as a sacred devotional service to God has been reduced to a commercial and touristic show owing to the enforced absence of Mevlevism as a religious institution. More precisely, the respondents criticized its performance in unsuitable settings such as bars, restaurants, private parties, and hotel lobbies for commercial purposes. Traditionally, the performance of Sema for financial gain and outside the Mevlevi convents was not permitted. Some respondents also criticized the selection of performers according to their physical esthetics and show performances rather than their spiritual awareness (Interviews 4, 21 and 25). Several respondents raised further concerns about the performance of Sema by people uninformed and ignorant about Islamic values, Mevlevi ethics, and Mevlana's

works, and emphasized the absence of a regulatory institution with enforcement powers providing traditional Mevlevi training as the primary factor in this (Interviews 4, 7 and 27).

The heritage declaration of a Sufi cultural practice that the government still technically prohibits might appear as paradoxical at first glance. On the other hand, the above discussion shows that unlike the rituals of most other Sufi orders, the legitimization of the Sema ceremony as a tourist activity rather than as a religious ritual and its widespread popularity both in and outside Turkey, rendered its state-sponsored public performance possible in secular Turkey. A close look at the heritagization of the Sema ceremony, however, reveals the ways in which the intangible heritage declaration of the ceremony and the process that follows afterwards is influenced by broader political considerations. Before moving on to discuss the heritagization process of Sema, it is first necessary to lay out the recent, JDP government-initiated structural changes in the relationship between state and religion.

The JDP and the Changing Dynamics of State-Religion Relations in Turkey

Since the rise of the JDP to power, the role of Islam in Turkish politics has been one of the main discussions that dominate the debates over Turkey's future. The electoral triumph of the JDP in 2002 was interpreted by Turkey's anti-Islamist segments as the failure of secularism. Since then, these segments have been accusing the JDP of putting Turkey's Kemalist secular heritage in danger and of having a hidden agenda to establish a state based on Islam. These concerns came to the fore during the first half of 2007. The JDP's determination to nominate the then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Gül (known for his pro-Islamic stand), as Turkey's next President introduced substantial political instability and tension; the Turkish military threatened to intervene if the president-to-be would endanger Turkey's secular

principles (Kirişci 2008: 23). The presidential elections also initiated mass public protests called "Republic Demonstrations" across a number of big cities, where hundreds of thousands poured out into the streets to show their support for Turkey's Kemalist secular heritage. While right after the triumph of the JDP in 2007 Parliament elected Gül president, the Party survived a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court seeking its prohibition for anti-secular activities by just one vote in July 2008 (Hale and Özbudun 2010: 75).[23]

Although the current government's political agenda continues to alarm anti-Islamist segments of Turkish society, The JDP has adopted a tolerant and moderate discourse on Islam since it came to power, and pronounced itself as a conservative-democratic party (Özbudun and Gençkaya 2009: 24). While not denying its Islamic roots, the JDP seeks to distinguish itself from its predecessor pro-Islamic parties "as being much more democratic, pluralist, and an advocate of liberal market policies and pragmatic foreign policy" (Kirişci 2008: 24). In contrast to recurrent economic crises that Turkey experienced in 1994, 1999, and 2001, the Turkish economy has stabilized under the JDP government. From 2002 to 2007, Turkey had 7.5 percent average annual growth, and its foreign investment increased drastically from $ 1.2 billion to $20 billion (Yavuz and Özcan 2007: 130). At the same time, inflation fell from above 50 to below 10 percent between 2004 and 2006 (Carkoğlu and Toprak 2007: 13). Furthermore, Turkey's foreign policy entered into a new phrase with the JDP, when the government embarked on a program to improve Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. As Öztürk observes, Turkey's longstanding low-profile foreign policy with regard to Middle Eastern politics has come to

[23] Turkey has a long list of pro-Islamic Parties closed down by the Constitutional Court for their anti-secular stand and activities. Eligür (2010: 55, box 2.2) provides the list of these parties: the Nation Party (1948-1953), the National Order Party (1970-1971), the National Salvation Party (1972-1980) -banned after the 1980 Coup D'état, the Welfare Party (1983-1998), and the Virtue Party (1998-2001). Many politicians with pro-Islamic tendencies have been also banned from politics by the Constitutional Court so far. Following the ban of the Virtue Party by the Constitutional Court in 2001, the conservative Islamists founded the Felicity Party, while moderate Islamists came together under the JDP.

change substantially as the current government "seeks a higher regional profile for Turkey" (2008: 75). By setting democratization of the Islamic world as its primary foreign policy objective, the JDP government seeks to become a "regional bridge" between the Western world and the Middle East; coming from a democratic political party with Islamic roots, the policy meets with credibility from both sides (p.76-77). As Jenny White suggests, in addition to "playing its Muslim card by offering to mediate in Middle Eastern disputes", the JDP has also benefited from its position as a democratic moderate Muslim government to establish strong business ties with a number of neighboring countries (2007: 431).

Unlike its predecessors, the JDP has also pursued Turkey's long-term goal to become a European Union (EU) member.[24] Turkey's poor human rights record has been one of the key stated obstacles against EU membership (Falk 2007: xiii).[25] The Turkish government adopted over two hundred new laws as of 2004 (Yıldız 2007: 808) and nine "Harmonization Packages" (that included changes in various laws) in the short period between 2002 and 2004 (Hale and Özbudun 2010: 57) to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria set by the EU as the prerequisite for beginning accession negotiations with Turkey.[26] Among these nine harmonization packages that were adopted by the parliament, six of them were during the reign of the JDP government (Özbudun and Gençkaya 2009: 73). Satisfied by the JDP's efforts, the EU initiated the accession

[24] Turkey has a historically troubled relationship with the EU: while it formally applied to the EU in April 1987 for full membership (Kabasakal Arat 2007a: 7), it was not until the Helsinki Summit of 1999 that Turkey had been officially recognized as an EU candidate (Denli 2007: 97). Turkey's EU accession negotiations are largely suspended at present.

[25]For more information, see the European Commission's Progress Reports on Turkey from 1998 to 2008 at, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/key_documents_en.htm

[26] In order to join the EU, candidate states need to fulfill the political standards specified by the Copenhagen criteria, which "require that the candidate country have a consolidated democracy, rule of law, and a well-established human rights regime" (Denli 2007: 97). In particular, Turkey's Accession Partnership document stated that Turkey needs to ensure the freedom of expression and freedom of association, to remove restrictions on broadcasting in minority languages, to eliminate the death penalty, and to proscribe torture (Türkmen 2007: 257-258). For a detailed summary of the legislative reforms introduced by Turkey's harmonization packages, see Özbudun and Gençkaya 2009: 73-79.

negotiations at the end of 2005. The JDP's pro-EU policies were welcomed in the international political arena as proof of the compatibility of an Islamic government with a secular state. Some international literature on Turkish politics also praised the JDP's ability to reconcile democracy and Islam without allowing fundamental changes in the secular basis of the state and described present-day Turkey as a genuine model of Muslim democracy for the Islamic world (e.g., Fuller 2004; Ghanim 2009).

As Lesser observes, the JDP's leading figures frequently assert Islam as "a cultural backdrop for an essentially secular political agenda" (2004: 187). The JDP, in fact, often emphasizes its support for an interpretation of secularism different than Kemalism: instead of the control of state over religion and religious institutions, the JDP "defines secularism as a hands-off principle requiring government to keep an equal distance from all beliefs" (White 2007: 427). The JDP party program, indeed, discusses the relationship between religion and the state under the section of "Fundamental Rights and Freedoms", and claims that:

> Our party considers religion as one of the most important institutions of humanity, and secularism as a *pre-requisite of democracy*, and an assurance *of the freedom of religion and conscience*. It also rejects the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion. Basically, secularism is a principle which allows people of all religions, and beliefs to *comfortably practice their religions*, to be able to *express their religious convictions* and live accordingly, but which also allows people without beliefs to organize their lives along these lines. From this point of view, *secularism is a principle of freedom and social peace.* [Emp. added] (JDP 2011)

In his essay *Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey*, Ahmet T. Kuru (2006) reads the recent debates over secularism in Turkey as a shift from the "assertive secularism" of Kemalism to "passive secularism" of the JDP. To him, assertive secularism implies the secularization of public sphere and restriction of religion to private sphere, while passive secularism refers to a

model where the state is neutral toward all religions, allowing their public visibility (2006: 137). Many others, however, have interpreted the JDP's discursive shift to "passive secularism" as a strategic decision. "JDP leaders believe that the political tension generated by secular-Islamist polarization provides a pretext for the crackdown on Islamic identity and, as recent history has shown, for the closure of their political parties", as Cınar suggests ,"in this context, the founders of the new party realized that attaining and maintaining power required toning down the political polarization" (2008: 111). Yıldız further explains, in a political environment where the pro-Islamic JDP's "survival conditions are closely monitored by the secular establishment", a conservative, democratic identity serves the JDP as a tool for achieving political legitimacy (2008: 45).

While it is hard to claim that the JDP pursues a hidden agenda to convert Turkey into an Islamic state based on Sharia, it certainly employs (Sunni) Islam, instead of secularism, as a "source of Turkish identity" (Goldman 2011: 59). Indeed, in practice, the JDP's divergence from Turkey's Kemalist secular heritage has functioned to remove restrictions on and strengthen the authority of Sunni Islam in Turkey. The JDP's policies to increase government funding for the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) and other Sunni Islamic institutions, to strengthen the role and authority of the DRA in Turkish social and political life, to employ Sunni Islamists in state institutions, to provide concessions to Sunni Sufi organizations and to graduates of the Imam-Hatip Schools, to promote pro-Sunni media and businesses, to provide technical and financial support for Sunni Islamic activities and facilities, and to enlarge the scope of compulsory Sunni Islamic education can be cited as exemplary of the growing influence of Sunni Islam in Turkey. In addition, while the government promotes Sunni Islamic practices as aspects of Turkish national culture and their increased followers come to attain wider freedom to

manifest and practice their faith, (as the fourth chapter will further detail through the case of Alevi-Bektaşis) the JDP's Islamic nationalist agenda brings additional restrictions on those religious groups that do not subscribe to Sunni Islam.

Accordingly, the next section discusses the heritagization of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony as a process of *recognition* that transforms the Sunni Mevlevi Sufi tradition from a marginalized culture to a popular culture, congruent with the JDP government's policies on lifting restrictions on the public display of Sunni Islamic values and activities. Following the revitalization of the Sema ceremony in 1953, the Mevlevi groups raised concerns over the ways in which restrictions on the performance of Sema as a sacred ritual initiated by Turkey's secular policies, led to the loss of the ceremony's religious significance, traditional institutional setting, knowledge and expertise. The research I conducted indicates that the heritagization of the Sema ceremony can be considered as a formal response from the JDP government to these concerns raised by the Mevlevi groups.

The Heritagization Process of the Sema Ceremony

The Sema ceremony was declared a cultural heritage by the Turkish government in 2004 and subsequently proclaimed as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage by UNESCO in 2005. As UNESCO finalized the Masterpieces program when the ICH Convention came into force in 2006, together with eighty-nine other items in the Masterpieces Listing, the Sema ceremony was incorporated into the UNESCO ICH list in the third session of the Intergovernmental Committee Meeting for the Safeguarding of the ICH held in Istanbul from 4 to 8 November 2008.[27] The nomination of the ceremony to the UNESCO listing was a common

[27] The UNESCO Masterpieces program came into force in 2001 to be superseded by the ICH Convention in 2006. The nominations on the Masterpieces Listing were evaluated by an international jury composed of intangible

decision of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TMCT) and the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO Intangible Heritage Expert Committee (ICH expert committee) (interview 13). During the interviews, the TMCT officials involved in the nomination process of Sema also highlighted that the initial request to nominate Sema on the UNESCO listing came in fact from the Mevlevi groups who saw the process as an opportunity for the protection of traditional Sema ceremony from further deterioration (Interviews 15 and 19). As the ICH department had yet to be established, the nomination process was supervised by the TMCT European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate (interview 2). Following the approval of Turkey's "Declaration of Intent" for the ceremony's Masterpieces listing by UNESCO, the Directorate was asked to prepare a detailed nomination dossier that included a candidature file, archive photographs, a two-hour long documentary, and a ten-minute long introduction film (Interview 13). During the preparation of the nomination dossier, the Directorate worked together with the International Mevlana Foundation,[28] led by the "legal heirs of Mevlana," in order to incorporate their opinion into the candidature file and the action plan that details the necessary measures to be taken to safeguard Sema from further deterioration (interview 13). The government also employed a team of eleven experts and researchers suggested by the Mevlana Foundation for the preparation of the candidature file (interview 8). The finalized version of the file included approximately two hundred pages of documents, while

heritage experts and representatives from relevant NGOs selected by UNESCO. The Masterpieces nominations had to satisfy somewhat different criteria than the nominations on the ICH listing. Successful nominations had to "demonstrate that the proposed cultural expressions or cultural spaces (i) possess outstanding value as a Masterpiece of the human creative genius, (ii) are rooted in the cultural tradition or cultural history of the community concerned, (iii) play a role as a means of affirming the cultural identity of the community concerned, (iv) are distinguished by excellence in the application of skills and technical qualities displayed, (v) constitute a unique testimony of a living cultural tradition, and (vi) are threatened with disappearance due to insufficient means for safeguarding or to processes of rapid change." (UNESCO 2006: 4)

[28] The foundation was established in 1996 in Istanbul by the 22nd generation descendants of Mevlana to promote his philosophy and ethics in and outside Turkey (Interview 10).

its preparation cost around sixty thousand dollars largely met by the budget of the TMCT (interview 13). UNESCO also supported Sema's nomination by contributing fifteen thousand dollars to its preparation (interview 8).

Indeed, the content of the candidature file reveals the ways in which the views, concerns, and interests of the Mevlevi groups were largely addressed during the Sema ceremony's ICH nomination process.[29] The file discusses the ban on Sufi Orders as the primary reason for the eradication of the institutional training, religious significance, and sacred content of the Sema ceremony. It indicates that the factors suggested by UNESCO (such as "economic and technological developments", "urbanization", or "acculturation"), had indirect influences on the sustainability of the ceremony (Tanrıkorur 2004b: 71). The file rather argues that "historical constraints and outside pressures" led to the "legal ending of its organizational structure" and "the decrease in the size of its community" in Turkey (ibid). An online description of the ceremony featured on the UNESCO website of the ICH Convention further describes these "historical constraints" and "outside pressures":

> As a result of *secularisation policies*, all mevlevihane [Mevlevi convents] were closed in 1925…thirty years later, the Turkish government began to allow performances again, though only in public…During the thirty years of clandestiny, transmission focused rather on music and songs than on spiritual and religious traditions because the latter were forbidden. Today, the performances have been mostly deprived of their *religious significance*, with the consequence that they are no longer performed *in their traditional context* but in front of tourist audiences. The length of the Sema ceremony has been truncated to cater commercial requirements, and a number of musical styles related to the rituals are in danger of disappearing altogether. [Emph. added] (UNESCO 2011b)

The candidature file also discusses Turkey's secularization policies as the key factor in the eradication of the ceremony's initial religious meaning, and stresses the ways in which these

[29] The Sema ceremony's candidature file is not provided at the UNESCO ICH website. A copy of the nomination file was given to me by the Head of the ICH department during our interview.

policies threaten the sustainability of the ceremony by allowing the degeneration of its traditional context:

> The unusual legal status surrounding the historical origins of the ceremony itself has been the main reason underlying why no legal measures have been taken to protect the Mevlevi Sema ceremony against exploitation. For this reason…neither has it been possible to create any kind of legal or financial infrastructure to protect its practitioners and the technical skill or know-how of the tradition, which has been left open to misuse and disrespect (Sağbaş and Tanrıkorur 2004: 104)

More precisely, the candidature file describes the factors impacting the sustainability of the Sema ceremony: the gradual loss of the traditional meaning of the ceremony as a sacred worship caused by its commercial performance with an entrance fee (Tanrıkorur 2004a: 31), further eradication of the "intimacy and the mystical atmosphere" of the ceremony due to its practice by larger numbers of performers, for larger audiences and in unsuitable places (such as hotel lobbies, train stations, parties or backdrops for pop star singers) for economic and touristic gains, and inability of the Mevlevis to take countermeasures against these inappropriate performances due to the legal status of their tradition (Tanrıkorur 2004b: 74-75). The file also mentions the reduced quality of performances owing to the abolition of the traditional training of the musicians and performers after the closure of the Mevlevi convents (Sağbaş and Tanrıkorur 2004: 110) and failure of the Mevlevi groups to "form public living communities" similar to the historical examples due to the legal status of the Mevlevi tradition in Turkey (p. 109).

The ceremony's candidature file also provides a detailed five year action plan (2005-2010) to restore the religious significance of the Sema ceremony (Sağbaş and Tanrıkorur 2004: 104-128). The plan aims at doing this, without suggesting fundamental legal changes (such as the official recognition of the Mevlevis and the amendment or annulation of the law against the Sufi

orders) in Turkey's secular structure. When asked about the reasons for doing so, one of the experts involved in the preparation of the candidature file explained,

> We tried to see what could be done to preserve the integrity of the practice without reorganizing the situation of Mevlevi tradition in a fundamental way… We were not asked to get into the issue of the legal status of the Sufi orders. I think this was something the government authorities did not want to deal with. They did not want to raise further tension among Turkey's secularist segments. (Interview 8)

Instead, the action plan lists other measures to provide Mevlevi groups with relative control over defining the basic principles for legitimate Sema performances, i.e., the conditions of how, where, and by whom the ceremony could be conducted. It indicates that, following the heritage declaration of the ceremony, a permanent board that brings together custodians of the Mevlevi tradition would be created (p. 104). The board would be composed of four subsidiary committees (Sema, Music, Research-Archival Documentation-Publications, and Dissemination Boards) and would work with the TMCT in implementing the action plan (p. 105). This board would also be responsible for defining the details of the ethical and aesthetic codes as well as the conditions to perform the traditional ceremony, the selection of the Sema performance groups and their training according to the traditional Mevlevi methods, and the preparation of the annual calendar of activities (ibid). Furthermore, the action plan suggests a living museum to be established in Konya to provide traditional Mevlevi training and recreate a living Mevlevi community that would accommodate the custodians and the masters of the tradition (p. 109).

The action plan further details measures to be implemented by the Turkish government under three categories: conservation, preservation and dissemination (p. 114-128). The measures under the conservation category include the publication of Mevlana's works, music CDs, and books on Mevlana and Mevlevism by the TMCT, archival research and audio and visual

documentation of the traditional Sema ceremony and restoration of ruined Mevlevi convents. It lists further measures such as, the establishment of a Mevlevi Ceremony Research and Preservation Center in Istanbul (equipped with a library and archive, as well as Sema and music rooms), and publication of a journal on the Mevlevi culture. Measures discussed under the preservation of the ceremony consist of introducing classes on Mevlana and Mevlevi tradition in public school curricula, providing classes on Mevlevi music and culture in public Music schools, opening public courses (Sema training, Quran chanting and recitation, Mesnevi teaching, Persian language, and Sema costume manufacturing), and organizing competitions for composing new Mevlevi ayin music. Measures discussed under the dissemination of the Sema include, the preparation of pamphlets to explain the Sema ceremony, organization of Sema performances in the traditional Mevlevi convents throughout Turkey following their restoration, and preparation of documentary films on the Mevlevi convents, Mevlevi culture, and ethics.

When asked about their thoughts on the heritage declaration of the ceremony, both the TMCT officials and Mevlevi respondents emphasized it as a prestigious event that has increased the international value of the ceremony. They also highlighted the ways in which the ceremony's heritage declaration has initiated significant measures for its safeguarding. One of the TMCT officials, for instance, proudly indicated that the safeguarding process had been working effectively in accordance with the action plan because the government provides "all kinds of skills and funds concerning the safeguarding of Sema" (Interview 19). Indeed, the Mevlevi respondents often maintained that the ceremony's heritage declaration initiated a process in which their concerns were being heard and addressed by the Turkish government. During these interviews, I was often told about the positive impact of the measures taken by the JDP government on easing the restrictions on the public manifestation of Mevlevi identity and

Mevlevi religious practices, popularization of the Mevlevi tradition, and restoring the religious significance of the Sema ceremony in Turkey. Equally important, the measures implemented following the heritage declaration of the Sema ceremony were often discussed in relation to the current government's pro-Islamic policies and its support for Islamic practices. Respondents acknowledged the government policies that remove restrictions on Islam in Turkey's public sphere and indicated that they have come to experience more freedom in practicing their religion and expressing their religious identity during the reign of the JDP. After defining himself as a pious Muslim, one of the Mevlevi respondents, for instance, stated that "for the first time in my life, I feel that I have a government that represents me and stands for my religion and religious values" (interview 26).

Indeed, the JDP government has devoted considerable financial and technical assistance to the Mevlevi groups since the heritage declaration of the ceremony, which opened the possibility for a greater visibility of Mevlevi activities in Turkey's public sphere. While government authorities do not hesitate to condemn the ban on Sufi orders as anti-democratic and a violation of religious liberty in Turkey, the JDP has largely refrained from taking solid steps on lifting the ban on Sufi orders, to avoid antagonizing Kemalist segments. The heritage declaration of Sema, thus, has provided the possibility for the government to support and promote Mevlevi religious tradition and its practices without making fundamental changes in the legal status of Mevlevism and Sufi orders in Turkey. A government official, for instance, pointed out that the ceremony's heritage declaration has set the scene needed for implementing necessary measures to protect the ceremony's religious significance, without dealing with the complicated and tension-raising legal processes (Interview 13). Another respondent, an expert on Mevlevi music involved in preparing the nomination file, has further explained:

> What often happens in Turkey is that even if there is change, it is not announced as such. Since 1925, there have been a lot of changes in the relationship between religion and secularism in Turkey, but they were not announced as changes. The heritage declaration of Sema is no different… I think once the government accepted the responsibility for safeguarding this tradition, the rest is really a fine tuning to see how the best teachers are chosen, how the materials are collected and transmitted in the best way, and how the best studies of the materials are supported. (Interview 8)

The heritage declaration of the Sema ceremony initiated substantial projects for the restoration of the historical Mevlevi convents from ruins throughout Turkey. Opening these places to the public, the government contributed considerably to the creation of new community gathering places for the Mevlevis, where Sema training courses and performances by newly established local Sema groups, lectures on the specifics of the Mevlevi tradition, and other Mevlevism related activities come regularly to be held with mass attendance. The world's second largest Gelibolu Mevlevi Convent located in the Canakkale province of western Anatolia, had been renovated from ruins by the Directorate General of Foundations (DGF) that operates under the Prime Minister's Office and opened to the public in 2005 by the then-vice president of Turkey, Mehmet Ali Sahin. The Gelibolu Mevlevi convent hosts the annual *Seb-i Arus* commemorations and weekly Sema performances conducted by a local Mevlevi group, who were trained by the Gelibolu Public Educational Center that operates under the Turkish Ministry of Education. The website of the convent also provides videos and photos on Sema training, as well as the live streaming of the weekly held Sema performances in the convent. The GDF additionally undertook the project to reconstruct the Yenikapı Convent in Istanbul, which was completely burned down in 1997. The convent was officially opened to the public in May 2009 by the Prime Minister Erdoğan. In coordination with the International Mevlana Foundation, the TCMT organized weekly Sema performances and Mesnevi talks at the Yenikapı convent as part

of the 2010 Istanbul European Capital of Culture events. The JDP municipalities and the GDF also restored and opened to the public other Mevlevi convents (such as those located in the northwestern city of Bursa, the central Anatolian city of Eskişehir, and the southeastern city of Sanlıurfa), which came to host Sema and other Mevlevism related activities after their opening. The Afyon and Gaziantep Mevlevi convents were also renovated by the GDF and opened to the public as museums of Mevlevi history and tradition. The museum in Afyon received 100 thousand visitors in 2009 (Cihan News Agency 2010a).

Two months after the submission of the candidature file, the construction of the Konya Mevlana Cultural Center that began in 1992 was finally completed by the JDP government. Its construction, which was not even half finished by 2004, was accomplished in ninety days for about 9.4 million dollars (Haber7 News Portal 2004). In addition to the annual Seb-i Arus commemorations and the weekly Sema performances by the TMCT Konya Sema performance group (see figure 2), the center hosts panels, seminars, art exhibitions, and film screenings on the subjects of Islam and Mevlevism. Furthermore, Turkey's Council of Ministers finally approved to establish a state-sponsored organization called the Mevlana Research Institute in Konya in 2010, whose proposal was waiting for approval since 1953 (Milli Gazete Daily 2010). Working with academics as well as graduate students, the Institute aims to encourage research on Mevlana's works and Mevlevi tradition and provides financial support for such scholarly activities (Interview 24). During the interviews, I was also told that the JDP government has given priority in providing funds to the projects and events proposed by the Mevlevi groups since the heritage declaration of the Sema ceremony (Interviews 10, 13 and 21).

The government also took additional measures to "increase the promotion and publicity of the Mevlevi tradition" (interview 15). Since the heritage declaration of Sema, the TMCT gave

priority to publish studies on Mevlevi philosophy and tradition, works of Mevlana, booklets introducing the Sema ceremony, and music CDs of the Mevlevi ayin (interview 19). Equally important, following the government's official request, UNESCO declared the year 2007 as the "International Mevlana Year", which remarkably increased the number of Sema performances and Mevlevi cultural activities conducted in and outside Turkey (interview 15). The Konya Sema performance group held twenty four performances in nineteen different countries as part of the Mevlana year activities[30] (TMCT 2008a: 89-90). The group also receives considerable financial and technical support from the JDP government: the number of Sema performances that the group has conducted both in and out of Turkey has increased substantially, reaching over three hundred performances (one third of which is outside Turkey) each year (Interview 26).

Figure 2. Sema Performance in the 2010 Seb-i Arus celebrations at the Konya Mevlana Cultural Center (photo by author)

[30] These countries were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mexico, Egypt, Belgium, Italy, the USA, Australia, Japan, France, Tajikistan, the UK, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Chile, Switzerland, Spain, Syria and Germany.

Furthermore, Konya's Seb-i Arus commemoration festival has been given increased amount of financial, technical and physical support from the JDP government. After the JDP came to power in 2002, the festival (that was previously funded only by the Konya Municipality) began to receive considerable funds from the Office of the Prime Minister (Interview 26). As a result, the scope of the festival was widened to cover more than week-long cultural events on the subjects of Islam and Mevlevism, including the Sema performances, mystic music concerts, exhibitions, film and theatre shows, conferences, and talks. The festival is currently one of the leading Islamic events in Turkey, where hundreds of thousands of pious Muslims from all over the country gather in Konya each December. In 2007, approximately 85 thousand people participated in the Seb-i Arus (that was extended to be celebrated for seventeen days from 2007 onwards), where thirty-three Sema performances and various other activities (exhibitions, theatre performances, symposiums, conferences, prize-giving ceremonies, and an International mystic music festival) were organized as part of the festival (Cihan News Agency 2007). Moreover, several high-ranking state officials (including the president and the prime minister), regularly participate in the celebrations. The 2007 commemoration was also significant in that it was conducted with the participation of the newly elected president of Turkey, Abdullah Gül (together with the prime minister, ministers and the JDP deputies), in contrast to the preceding president of Turkey Ahmet Necdet Sezer (known for his firm defense for Kemalist secular principles), who never attended the events during his term in office (Cihan News Agency 2007). Seb-i Arus celebrations with narrower content also began to be organized throughout Turkey.

There has also been a significant increase in the participation in the Mevlevi activities, as Mevlevism has become more and more popular in Turkey. During the interviews with the representatives of the Mevlevi organizations, I was often told that the demand for the Sema

training and Mevlevi music lessons has increased considerably in Turkey in the last few years. The state-sponsored Mevlevi event, which covers Sema performances and lectures on Mevlevism that is organized weekly in the Konya Mevlana Cultural Center draws a crowd of approximately two thousand people each week (Cihan News Agency 2010b). The Konya Mevlana Museum became Turkey's third most visited museum in 2010 (after the Topkapı Palace and Ayasofya museums in Istanbul) with over one million six hundred thousand visitors (TMCT 2011). The heritage declaration of Sema has also increased the popularity of Mevlevism and the demand for Sema performances outside of Turkey. A TMCT official indicated that there has been an upsurge in the number of tourists seeking information on Sema performances at the TMCT's tourism offices located in Turkey's international airports in the years following the heritage declaration of the ceremony (Interview 13). In addition, the respondents involved in organizing and performing Sema mentioned that the number of Sema performances they organized in and outside Turkey has increased after the heritage declaration of Sema.

While the majority of Mevlevi respondents emphasized that the increased interest in the Mevlevi tradition and Sema performances has had a positive impact on the revitalization of the Mevlevi culture, they also raised complaints about the lack of sanctions against the inappropriate representations of the Mevlevi tradition. One of the respondents summed up the views of those who believe that the increased freedom of Islamic expression might lead to further commercialization of the Mevlevi tradition:

> Today, in Turkey's relatively favorable environment for Islamic experience, anybody could establish a Mevlevi group, open a website and organize Mevlevi activities. There is enough demand for all these groups to survive, no matter how amateur or commercial-minded their conduct might be; but no higher authority to control them. The government authorities should take urgent measures on this matter. (Interview 5)

A short walk to Sultanahmet, the leading tourist area of Istanbul, would justify these concerns.[31] The advertisements of "Whirling Dervishes Ceremony" organized and conducted by numerous Sema groups embellishes the streets, hotel entrances, and windows of travel agencies in Sultanahmet. The cost of these Sema performances ranges from 15 to 50 Euros. It is also interesting to note that among six different Sema performance advertisements that I came across within a single day in the neighborhood, five had a UNESCO Intangible Heritage logo printed on them, while only one performance was being held in an actual Mevlevi convent and four advertisements did not even mention the name of the performing group. Equally important, one could watch a single Sema performer whirling on a small stage to the accompaniment of Mevlevi music from a portable CD player in most of the tourist coffeehouses in Sultanahmet, while drinking a Turkish coffee or smoking hookah. One of the respondents affiliated with a Mevlevi organization based in Istanbul, provides another anecdote:

> It was the winter of 2009. I was walking in Gülhane Park [Istanbul], when I came across a Sema performance enacted by a Sema group, whose name I have never heard of before. I could not believe my eyes; here were some people whirling in the middle of the park in an area temporarily closed with glass windows. It was a cold day. The seats inside the glass area were for 35 Euros, while the outside ones were for 20 Euros. There is a big authority gap that needs to be fulfilled to prevent similar incidences from happening. (Interview 6)

In fact, the government has recently initiated some measures to encourage the conduct of Sema according to its traditional religious meaning and context. The TMCT Minister Ertuğrul Günay issued a first-of-its-kind notice concerning Mevlevism and Sema in 2008, which was distributed to the governorships and Mevlevi organizations throughout Turkey to inform them about the conditions under which the Sema ceremony should be performed (TMCT 2008b). The

[31] These observations rely on a fieldwork that I conducted on 4 September 2010 in Sultanahmet area of Istanbul.

notice begins by stating that Mevlevism was listed as cultural heritage by UNESCO as a tradition to be protected from further deterioration, and moves on to define Sema as a religious ceremony "that symbolizes the steps of the part to Allah, contains religious-mystic elements and themes, and thus embodies detailed regulation and unique practices". The notice then lists several rules and principles that the Sema performance groups need to obey to perform Sema according to its religious significance. It states that, the ceremony should not be performed in settings unsuitable to the traditional context of the ceremony, where the spectators are present for another objective than just viewing Sema and might not contemplate or perceive the spiritual meaning of the performance. The notice further explains that the ceremony should only be enacted by people with sufficient technique and musical abilities and who are conscious of performing a mystical practice. It also states that Sema should only be held along with the traditional Mevlevi music that is performed live by a Mevlevi music group. Finally, indicating that Sema is composed of various parts with different mystic meanings, the notice states that after its meaning and symbolization is explained to the audience it should be performed in its entirety.

The TMCT also organized some meetings in 2010 with Turkey's prominent Mevlevi representatives to establish a permanent board operating under the TMCT, as an official Mevlevi institution that would set the standards for the Mevlevi activities and supervise the Sema groups (interviews 19). While such permanent board has not yet come into existence (as of December 2011), the government embarked on yet another project to safeguard the traditional Sema ceremony, and established the first public Sema School in Konya in 2011. The project is sponsored by the Mevlana Development Agency, which operates under the Ministry of Development, together with the Konya Municipality, Karatay Public Education Center operating under the Ministry of National Education, and Konya Social Research and Solidary Foundation.

The Sema School aims at training Sema performers according to the traditional understanding and criteria of Mevlevism that includes year-long courses on the theory and practice of Sema, Mevlevism and the works of Mevlana. The school began training eighty students in its first year, who will receive official Semazen (whirler) certificates approved by the Ministry of National Education after the completion of the Sema training (Haber3 News Portal 2011).

Legal predicaments surrounding the status of the Sufi orders have recently reappeared as a matter for discussion in political and media circles, as Turkey currently seeks to draft a new constitution. As the pro-Kemalist secular state establishment came to lose its authority under the well-supported JDP government, it is not unexpected that the new constitution may introduce some amendments in the legal status of Sufi orders -if the ban is not totally lifted. When asked about the future of the legal status of the Mevlevi tradition in Turkey, one of the TMCT officials further explained the government's approach to the issue:

> There is no doubt that the government has been providing all means of support to safeguard the Mevlevi tradition. Yet there still exists some predicaments surrounding its safeguarding. These predicaments, however, are not caused by any financial problems or authority conflict… Sema is a religious practice from its A to Z, and it belongs to a Sufi order that is banned by law. This limits the government's ability to become an active agent in Sema related issues in its fullest sense…The current government is sensitive about Turkey's Islamic past and heritage, but you cannot expect these delicate issues to be answered overnight. I believe the government will solve these issues gradually and step by step. (Interview 13)

Conclusion

The heritagization process of the Sema ceremony indicates the ways in which the JDP government pursues a policy of recognition of Mevlevi religious identity and rights which transforms Mevlevism from a marginalized subculture to a dominant culture in Turkey. The Mevlevi groups have long been highlighting the negative impact of Turkey's secular policies on

the sustainability of Mevlevi religious tradition and its practices. The heritagization process of the Sema ceremony has hitherto addressed these concerns. The JDP government has allocated substantial funds and efforts to restore the significance of the Sema ceremony as a devotional practice since the heritage declaration of Sema, and has taken measures to ease the restrictions on the public display of Mevlevi religious activities in Turkey. While the government has so far refrained from implementing measures to remove the ban on Sufi orders, the heritage declaration of Sema provides the possibility for the government to legitimize, support and promote the Mevlevi tradition without getting into the complicated and tense political issues surrounding legal recognition of Mevlevism as a religious order.

This chapter discussed the process initiated by the heritage declaration of the Sema ceremony within the context of the recent changes in the relationship between state and religion in Turkey. It showed how the heritagization of Sema contributes to the current government's attempts to lessen the restrictions imposed by Turkey's Kemalist secular policies on the public display of Sunni Islamic values and practices. In this respect, the JDP government's decision to safeguard the initial religious significance of the Sema ceremony is consistent with its policies on strengthening the role of Sunni Islam in Turkish social and political life. This aspect of the JDP's nationalist agenda is further detailed in the fourth chapter, which provides insight into the JDP's assimilatory policies towards non-Sunni Alevi-Bektaşi religious identity and culture. It shows that emphasizing Turkey's Sunni Muslim unity, the government, in fact, actively favors a policy of misrecognition of Alevi-Bektaşism that aims at redefining it as a subdivision of Sunni Islam other than a distinct Islamic sect.

KURDISH MARGINALIZATION THROUGH NONRECOGNITION: THE CASE OF THE NEVRUZ FESTIVAL

Introduction

Nevruz/Newroz is a festival to welcome the spring season, usually held around the time of the vernal equinox, 21st of March, and celebrated as the beginning of the New Year in several Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. Although there are many accounts as to the origins of the festival, a widely accepted version claims it to be a more than 3,000 year old tradition, originated as the New Year festival of the Zoroastrian belief system in Ancient Persia before Islam (Prince 2000). The festival continued to be celebrated in Iran after the arrival of Islam and adopted by other countries in the region (Levy 1987: 888). While the festival is celebrated in various forms, the preparation of special dishes and clothes, picnics in open areas, visits to family graveyards, the elderly and neighbors, and gatherings in public places (for jumping over bonfires and water streams, and for performing other traditional rituals, dances and music) are activities traditionally held during the festival.

The festival's history in Turkey, however, shows how even such modest traditions might incorporate strong political meanings and affects over time. Hirschler suggests that a myth is of functional value instead of "truth-value," defined "by the meaning it signifies for author and audience" (2001: 151). Especially after the 1970s, Newroz came to be celebrated widely among Turkey's Kurds more than just as a spring festival, when it was resurrected as a "Kurdish myth of resistance" (p. 154) against tyranny and injustice. The attempts to give Newroz a Kurdish national character turned it into a powerful symbol of Kurdish identity and struggle against the

assimilatory policies of the Turkish state. Such political overtones of the festival, however, made Newroz a very controversial public celebration in Turkey.

One of the most problematic relationships of the Turkish Republic has no doubt been with its Kurdish population.[32] While Turkey has the largest Kurdish populace in the world estimated at between 12 and 15 million (Bozarslan 2008: 334), the Kurds are not recognized by the Turkish state as a separate ethnic or minority group (see Oran 2004). Kymlicka observes that: "the problem is not that Turkey refuses to accept Kurds as Turkish citizens. The problem is precisely its attempt to force Kurds to see themselves as Turks." (1999:134) Assimilationist policies of the Kemalist one-party regime that were institutionalized in the initial years of the Republic, led to the denial and suppression of Kurdish identity and provoked constant opposition among Turkey's Kurds in return. The Kurdish struggle took a new dimension in the course of the 1980s, when the Kurdish nationalist organization, the PKK (*Partiya Karkaren Kürdistan*-Workers Party of Kurdistan), launched an ongoing guerrilla war attacking both state and civilian targets in Turkey: the struggle between the PKK and the Turkish military forces has cost around

[32] There is no consensus in the literature regarding the origin of the Kurds. In fact, arguing towards one exclusive and homogeneous Kurdish identity proves difficult due to the great variety within the population in terms of language, religion and geography (Bozarslan 2008: 334). Kurds are Kurmanji, Surani, Zaza or Gurani speakers, and the majority of Kurds (approximately 75%) subscribe to Sunni Islam, while Alevi, Shia and Yazidi Kurds are distinctive minorities (McDowall 2004: 9-11). Historically, Kurdish society was tribally structured as "local tightly knit communities" under a traditional leader known as *Ağa* or *Bey* (Nisan 1991: 27-28). Until the early 20th century, many Kurds lived in the mountain villages that fall on the border of the Ottoman and Persian Empire. While a significant number of Kurds have moved to big cities (or those seeking asylum migrated to Europe), the majority still live in the area that today corresponds to the border territories of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, while there are also some enclaves of Kurds living in Armenia and Azerbaijan (Gunter 2004: 197). Although no precise figures for the Kurdish population exist, their overall numbers are estimated approximately as 25 to 28 million, which makes Kurds the world's largest population devoid of an independent nation state (ibid). The majority of Turkey's Kurds are Kurmanji speaking Sunni Kurds, while Zaza speaking Alevis constitutes a significant minority. Most of Turkey's Sunni Kurds have traditionally resided in the mountainous area in eastern Turkey, while many now reside in big cities due to forced or voluntary migration. In addition, substantial enclaves of Alevi Kurds live in Central Anatolia. Diyarbakır, the main city of the south east region with a population of about 1.5 million, referred in some literature as the Kurdish capital of Turkey.

40,000 lives so far (Larrabee and Tol 2011: 143). It was during this period that Newroz came to have a widespread appeal among Turkey's Kurds as a symbol of Kurdish identity and struggle. Since then, Newroz celebrations have played a salient role in mobilizing hundreds of thousands of Kurds each year, who pour out into the streets throughout Turkey and Europe to protest against the Kurdish policy of the Turkish state.

At first, the Turkish state responded by banning the celebration of Newroz throughout Turkey. The clashes between the security forces and the participants during the illegal Newroz celebrations resulted in the death, arrest, and conviction of many Kurds. Not being able to suppress the Kurdish demands over the festival, the Turkish state changed tactics following the 1990s, and embarked on a program to institutionalize Nevruz as a Turkish tradition to disassociate Newroz from Kurdsish claims (Yanık 2006). To this end, official Nevruz celebrations came to be organized throughout Turkey to popularize the Nevruz tradition among Turkey's populace, and particularly among Kurds. While this attempt has largely been unsuccessful so far, it has been interpreted by many Kurds as well as the scholars of Kurdish studies as the "Turkification of Newroz" and the persistence of Turkey's long-term policy on the denial and assimilation of Kurdish identity.

In 2009, together with six other countries, Turkey successfully nominated the Nevruz festival for the UNESCO ICH list.[33] While the JDP came to power in 2002 with a promise of solving Turkey's Kurdish question through democratic means, it has so far failed to develop an alternative to the Kemalist nationalist policies that grounds the conventional Kurdish policy of Turkey. Emphasizing the unifying national identity based on Turkishness and collaborating with the Kemalist military and the state structure, the JDP government has resisted Kurdish demands

[33] These countries are Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan.

for official recognition of their separate identity and their legal, political and cultural rights. This chapter discusses the heritage declaration of Nevruz by UNESCO within this context as an attempt of the JDP government to justify its policies of Kurdish marginalization through nonrecognition. Examining the ways in which Kurdish traditions, interests, and concerns have been left out in the intangible heritage making of Nevruz (in an effort to legitimize and promote the festival as a genuine Turkish tradition), I discuss the JDP government's Nevruz policy as part of Turkey's long-term efforts to assimilate Kurdish identity into the Turkish national mainstream.

This chapter examines the making of Nevruz/Newroz tradition within the context of Turkey's Kurdish question. The traditions relating to the festival practiced less widely throughout Turkey by Alevi-Bektaşis, Turkmens or other regional or local groups are outside the scope of this study. Moreover, as this study focuses on the case of Turkey in its aim to compare and contrast the heritagization processes of marginalized cultural practices, the Newroz traditions of Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Syria as well as the heritagization processes of the festival in other countries, lie beyond the limits of this study.

This chapter initially provides a historical background to Turkey's Kurdish question by engaging in a discussion of the Kemalist Kurdish policy implemented in the early republican period, which set the tone for Turkey's future governmental policies and practices of denying and assimilating Kurdish identity. Then, I move on to discuss the factors that had contributed to the revitalization of Newroz in the 1970s as a symbol of Kurdish resistance to oppression and its transition into a widespread mass event by the 1980s. Subsequently, I focus on Turkey's efforts to institutionalize Nevruz as a Turkish tradition in the 1990s and move on to examine the recent policies of the JDP government regarding Turkey's Kurdish question. This section is followed by

a discussion of the ways in which Kurdish interests, concerns, and traditions are explicitly left out from the heritagization process of Nevruz. Then, drawing on the JDP government's policies to disseminate Nevruz tradition in Turkey, I conclude by discussing how the ICH declaration of the festival is in line with Turkey's conventional Kurdish policy.

The Emergence of Turkey's Kurdish Question

Historically, Kurds maintained a relatively harmonious relationship with the Ottoman authorities. Ottoman citizenship was based on the *millet* system, in which diverse religious populations were allowed to rule themselves under their own religio-legal system. Regardless of being Arab, Kurd, or Turk, Muslims of any ethnic background were part of the privileged Muslim millet with shared rights and responsibilities. While ethnic awareness remained among Kurds during the Ottoman times, their privileged position in the millet system and their piety for the Ottoman Emperor as the Caliph, the spiritual leader of the Muslim world, prevented Kurds from raising claims for independence (Cornell 2001: 121). This situation, however, began to change in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, marked by the rise of nationalist movements within the Empire's borders that led to the resolution of the multicultural/ethnic structure of the Empire.

The Turkish nationalist movement, which had shown a gradual upsurge at the end of the 19th century, finally had the possibility of dominating Ottoman politics after the nationalist Committee of Union and Progress Party (CUP) came to power in 1908 (Yeğen 2007: 122). Equally important, the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) in which the Empire lost four million of its inhabitants as well as almost all of its European territories (that is, over 60,000 square miles of

land including the most developed provinces such as Macedonia, Albania and Thrace), made ethnic Turks a majority population for the first time in the history of the Empire (Zürcher 2007: 108-109). Claiming Turks as the dominant nation of the Ottoman Empire, the CUP intensified its nationalist policies especially after the Balkan wars and embarked on a systematic political program to assemble the Muslim population of the Empire on the basis of Turkish identity.[34] It was in this period that Kurdish nationalism emerged as an educated Kurdish elite movement (in response to the upsurge of Turkish nationalist ideas and policies in the Ottoman Empire) and the first Kurdish organizations and publications aimed at enlivening Kurdish national awareness appeared, especially in big cities (Oran 2002: 874-875).

The outbreak of World War I (WWI) led to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and ended the CUP administration. It also created new possibilities for the emerging Kurdish nationalist movement. The Treaty of Sèrves (signed in the aftermath of the war between the Allies of WWI and the Ottoman Empire in 1920) was the first international document that encouraged the Kurds to seek an independent Kurdish state[35] (Nisan 1991: 31). Unexpectedly, however, the majority of Kurdish tribes chose to support the Mustafa Kemal's administration and the War of Independence, regardless of the Sèrves Treaty that offered the possibility of Kurdish independence.

[34] For a detailed examination of the CUP's Turkification policies, see Zürcher 2007: 85-132; Yeğen 2007: 121-124. For its impact on the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, see McDowall 2004: 87-113.

[35] Article 62 of the Sèrves Treaty stipulated a scheme to be prepared by a commission composed of appointed members of the British, French and Italian governments, to grant local autonomy to Kurdish predominant areas lying east of the Euphrates River, south of Armenia and north of the Turkish frontier with Syria. The same article also required that this scheme would contain the full protection of Assyro-Chaldeans and other minorities in the area, while the following article required the Turkish government to accept and execute this decision. Furthermore, the Sèrves Treaty recognized the right of Kurds to address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations for an independent Kurdistan in Article 64, which would be granted on the condition that the majority of the population desired independence from Turkey and that the Council considered Kurds capable of such independence. The Sèrves treaty, however, was never put into force and was replaced by the definitive Treaty of Lausanne (1923) in the course of the Turkish War of Independence. For the full text of the treaty, see Brigham Young University's World War I Document Archive at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I,_Articles_1_-_260.

In his essay *Atatürk and the Kurds*, Andrew Mango (2000) examines the widespread political campaign that Mustafa Kemal and his associates conducted among Anatolia's Kurdish population to get their support for the War of Independence and halt the British promotion of an independent Kurdish state. As Mango observes, Mustafa Kemal and his associates were in close contact with Kurdish tribal leaders from 1919 by means of telegrams, letters and direct encounters, promoting the unity of Kurds and Turks as Muslim brothers, and calling Kurds to save the homeland and the Caliphate from the occupation of external forces (p. 4-14). Many Kurdish tribes, as a result, were allied with Mustafa Kemal; Kurdish troops contributed greatly to the national victory, and Kurdish notables were widely represented in the first Turkish parliament (by seventy five deputies), established during the War of Independence (Gunter 1997: 5).

The Kemalist regime had actually recognized the Kurds as a separate ethnicity during the War of Independence (Cagaptay 2006a: 105). In a telegram that Mustafa Kemal sent to a Diyarbakır notable in June 1919, for instance, he declared that he was "in favour of granting all manner of rights and privileges in order to ensure the attachment and the prosperity and progress of our Kurdish brothers, on condition that the Ottoman state is not split up" (in Mango 2000: 6-7). In another instance, when negotiations with the Allies of WWI for the establishment of the Turkish Republic were in process in 1923, Mustafa Kemal stated in a briefing that he was not against the idea of Kurdish autonomy in the emergent Republic (p. 15):

> There can be no question of a Kurdish problem, as far as we, i.e. Turkey, are concerned… wherever the *population of a district is Kurdish,* it will *govern itself autonomously*. Aside from this, *whenever one speaks of the people of Turkey,* they [i.e. the Kurds] should also be included… Now, the Turkish Grand National Assembly is made up of empowered representatives both of Turks and of Kurds, and the two elements have

> joined their interests and destinies…To try and draw a separate frontier would not be right. [Emph. added] (in Mango 2000: 15-16)

Unexpectedly, however, the Lausanne Treaty (1923) that was signed about six months after this briefing neither included a model of an autonomous Kurdish government nor recognized Kurds as a distinct group. In fact, the relation of Kurds with Mustafa Kemal's administration had been considerably weakened after the founding of the Republic: the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 as part of the new Republic's extensive secularization program drew reaction from many pious Kurds who supported Mustafa Kemal's administration during the Independence War for saving the Caliphate from the occupation of external forces (Zürcher 2007: 170). Equally important, with an aim of disseminating Turkish national consciousness among the Kurdish populace, the government embarked on a systematic program to eradicate Kurdish identity by assimilating it into the Turkish national identity, and quickly launched policies that prohibited the public use as well as the teaching of the Kurdish language (p. 170-171). Additionally, it enforced the resettlement of notable Kurdish landowners and Kurdish tribal leaders in western Turkey (p. 171). These policies were met with harsh criticism among Turkey's Kurds and three organized and widespread Kurdish revolts (Sheikh Said, Ararat, and Dersim), broke out in the early years of the Republic.

While there had previously been small-scale Kurdish insurgencies in the emergent Republic, the first severe and widespread Kurdish uprising occurred in February 1925 under the Naqshbandi Kurdish leader Sheikh Said,[36] who mobilized roughly 15,000 fighters (Olson 1992: 264). The Turkish government responded with extensive countermeasures by mobilizing some

[36] There has been no consensus among Turkish historians on whether the rebellion was predominantly nationalist or religious in character (see Olson 2000: 69-72). The movement, however, clearly had both components. As Zürcher observes, "while the leadership was undoubtedly motivated by the desire for an autonomous or even independent Kurdistan, the rank and file acted from religious motives, demanding the restoration of the holy law and the caliphate" (2007: 171).

50,000 soldiers and expending almost a third of its annual budget (Bozarslan 2008: 339). The rebellion ended in April 1925 when the Turkish security forces crushed the uprising. Sheikh Said and his associates were captured and executed.

The rebellion marked the beginning of an authoritarian Kemalist one-party regime; in the name of protecting national security and order, the regime used the rebellion as a pretext to silence all its opponents (Zürcher 2007: 176). The government, consistent with its nationalist agenda, chose to frame the rebellion as a reactionary Islamist incident to bring back the caliphate, rather than as a Kurdish uprising (Barkey 2000: 91). As noted in the preceding chapter, fearing opposition that would come from religious segments of society, the regime outlawed all the Sufi orders and prohibited their titles and activities in December 1925. In March 1925, the parliament had passed a highly controversial law on the "Maintenance of Order" that gave absolute authority to the government to penalize any oppositional political activity, organization, and the media, and the government established two Independence Tribunals for the trying and sentencing regime opponents (Zürcher 2007: 171). It is estimated that 7,500 people were tried by the tribunals for putting national security in jeopardy, resulting in the execution of 660 people (Howard 2001: 95). In addition to banning private media, the regime also closed down the opposition Progressive Republican Party, which was founded in November 1924, for their suspected support of the Sheikh Said rebellion and for exploiting religion for political ends (Zürcher 2007:172). With the exception of a short-lived experiment with another opposition party in 1930, there was no active legal opposition to the Kemalist regime until the 1950s (p. 176).

The regime dealt even more harshly with the Kurds. In fact, the way the Kurdish question was handled in the aftermath of the rebellion set the tone for Turkey's future governmental

policies and practices denying of the existence of Kurds as a separate ethnic group and their absorption into a homogeneous Turkish identity. As Yeğen argues, rejecting the ethnic component of the Sheikh Said revolt, the government strictly framed the incident in accordance with its modernization and national progress discourse: "As the Kurds 'did not exist' any more, those who resisted the new regime could not be the Kurds with an ethno-political cause, but only the tribes and bandits threatened by the dissemination of modern state power into the region" (2007: 129). The speech made by the chairman of the Independence Court during the trial of Sheikh Said and his associates, provides a good example of this understanding:

> Everybody must know that as the young Republican government will definitely not condone any cursed action like incitement and political reaction, it will prevent this sort of banditry by means of its precise precautions. The poor people of this region who have been exploited and oppressed under the domination of sheikhs and feudal landlords will be freed from your incitements and evil and they will follow the efficient paths of our Republic which promises progress and prosperity. (Aybars in Yeğen 2007: 128)

In addition to the many Kurdish nationalists that were executed, banished, or imprisoned by the Independence Tribunals, in 1925, the government also banned the public use of the terms "Kurdish" and "Kurdistan" by a Ministry of Education decree (Boinodiris 2009: 172). From then on, expressions such as "tribal populations that do not speak Turkish" or "people who do not share the Turkish culture" (or later in the 1930s, the "Mountain Turks") began to be used by state authorities and in the Turkish law when referring to Kurds (Cagaptay 2006b: 70).

These harsh measures, however, proved to be insufficient in halting Kurdish unrest. Another Kurdish insurgence, the Ararat revolt broke out in the east of Turkey as early as 1927. The Kurdish forces under the command of İhsan Nuri seized control of the region surrounding Mount Ararat, now called Mount Ağrı (Izady 1992: 62). The Turkish government took even

firmer countermeasures this time. With the support of Iran and the Soviet Union, the government suppressed the rebellion in 1930 (Bozarslan 2008: 340) after many villages and their populations were destroyed in a massive military campaign (Inonu in Bozarslan 2008: 340) that included months of extensive aerial bombing (Olson 2000: 80-89).

In 1934, the government enacted Law No. 2510 for solving Turkey's Kurdish problem through a nation-wide project for resettling the Kurdish populations in the western provinces of Turkey. The law divided Turkey into three zones: regions reserved for the habitation of localities possessing Turkish culture, regions for the relocation of populations to be assimilated into the Turkish language and culture, and regions to be closed to habitation (McDowall 2004: 207). Although the law by no means mentioned the "Kurd", the main intention was to extinguish Kurdish identity by resettling Kurds in the regions where they constitute less than five percent of the population[37] (ibid). The final revolt in the one-party period broke out in the central Anatolian region of Dersim (now called Tunceli) as guerilla warfare in 1935 when the Turkish government decided to relocate the Kurdish Alevi population of Dersim under the cover of the Resettlement Law. While the region was besieged by the Turkish military forces and exposed to massive use of poisonous gas, artillery barrages, and aerial bombing, the warfare continued for over two years until the Turkish forces finally managed to suppress the revolt in October 1938 -after tens of thousands of people either perished or were deported from the region (McDowall 2004: 208-209).

[37] As McDowall further explains, while the resettlement law was only partially implemented mainly due to the impossibility of relocating all the Kurdish population of Turkey (it was approaching three million at the time), complaints made by Kurdish refugees from the eastern provinces suggested that "massacres, deportations and forced assimilation were proceeding apace" (2004: 207).

The defeat of the Kurds in Dersim marked to a large extent the suspension of Kurdish nationalist activities for about three decades in Turkey.[38] Following the early Republican period, with the rise of organized and widespread Kurdish opposition to the government, the denial of the existence of a distinct Kurdish identity and forced assimilation into "Turkish" identity became a state policy in Turkey. In 1930, for instance, the Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inönü stated that "only the Turkish nation is entitled to claim ethnic and national rights in this country. No other element has any such right" (in Kendal 1993: 56). In the 1930s, the Turkish state officially sponsored pseudoscientific theories called the "Sun Language Theory" and "Turkish History Thesis," which claimed that all human languages and civilization derived from ethnic Turks, and that Kurds are actually of Turkish origin but have forgotten their language and culture due to their geographical isolation (Kirişci and Winrow 1997:102). While Kurds came to be viewed as the "mountain Turks" in the eyes of the Turkish state and nationalist elite from the 1930s onwards, anything that relates to this imaginary Kurdish ethnicity was banned. As Barkey suggests, "the word Kurd disappeared from the lexicon and the Kurdish language was banned, names of Kurdish villages and towns were changed into Turkish names and parents were denied the right to give Kurdish names to their children" (2000:93). During the interviews with the Kurdish respondents, I was often told about the ways in which such systematic state oppression led many Kurds to refrain from the public display and assertion of their identity until the late 1960s. One respondent, for instance, described the situation in Diyarbakır, the predominantly Kurdish city of southeastern Turkey, in the early 1960s:

[38] Bozarslan mentions three main factors initiating this "period of silence": the withdrawal of the Kurdish armed resistance as a result of state coercion, weakening of Kurdish nationalist movement in the Middle East due to the outbreak of World War II, the defeat of Kurdish resistance in Iraq and Iran, and the emergence of multi-party politics in Turkey after 1946 that opened the possibility of Kurds to exert electoral power and the Kurdish notables to be represented in the parliament- on the condition that they show some degree of loyalty to Kemalism (2008: 343).

> The Kurdish patriots were so few even in Diyarbakır back then that you could assemble everyone in a small coffee shop or a restaurant. There were no Kurdish associations; they would meet in bookstores or coffeehouses to exchange ideas and to talk about the books they read. Others were extremely afraid of expressing their identity as any public manifestation of Kurdishness would result in their imprisonment. Many were trying to hide their being Kurdish, some assimilated ones were not even aware of their Kurdishness… I was assigned as a government officer for the 1965 population census. My post was at the shanty towns of Diyarbakır. Among the census inquiries, there was the infamous question of mother tongue and Kurdish was one of the choices. I remember many people who had just migrated from the isolated mountain villages and who did not know more than three words in Turkish literally begging me to inscribe their mother tongue as Turkish. They were in an amazing state of fear. They believed that the government was asking their mother tongue to determine the Kurds who would be deported from Turkey (interview 38)

The Revival of Newroz as a Kurdish Resistance Symbol

The late 1960s were marked by the renaissance of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. The rise of the Mustafa Barzani led movement in Iraq after the 1958 military coup was significant in encouraging Turkey's Kurds (Bozarslan 2008: 345). The first Kurdish publications, events and organizations, as well as small-scale demonstrations since the Dersim revolt began to appear in this period (McDowall 2004: 405). The 1960 military coup in Turkey, however, set the stage for the nascent Kurdish movement to take hold and prosper. On the 27th of May 1960, the Democrat Party government was toppled by a military coup d'état and DP members were arrested for propagandizing Islamism and jeopardizing Kemalist principles of the Republic (Zürcher 2007: 247-248). Shortly after seizing power, the military regime called for civilian authorities to prepare a new Turkish constitution. The military reign ended in 1961 after the new constitution was ratified by a national referendum in June 1961 with about 62 percent of the population voting in favor (p. 246). Hailed as the most democratic constitution in Turkish history, it guaranteed civil liberties including the freedom of education, religious belief, and the press,

and provided political rights such as the right to strike and collective bargaining (Eligür 2010: 60), though without mentioning any specific rights for Turkey's Kurds. On the contrary, disturbed by the inspiration that Turkey's Kurds got from the Kurdish insurgence in Iraq, the regime chose to pursue Kemalist policies of Kurdish denial and assimilation by establishing regional boarding schools in the predominantly Kurdish regions[39] and by officially supporting and circulating the view that Kurdishness is a pseudo-identity and Kurds were actually of Turkish origin (McDowall 2004: 406). It was also during this period that many Kurds, who were increasingly organized around small-scale associations, were arrested and sentenced by the military government for threatening national security and attempting to achieve Kurdish independence (Gunter 1988: 391).

At the same time, however, the liberal environment initiated by the new constitution (accompanied by the growth of international left-wing dissent) paved the way for the development of a strong radical left-wing movement in Turkey. Among intellectuals, students, and the newly emerging working class, the movement appealed to many Kurds. Bozarslan mentions the movement's open critique of the nationalist policies of the Turkish state and the incorporation of Kurdish demands in its political agenda (such as the demands for social justice and equality for all the citizens of Turkey and the economic development in the predominantly Kurdish areas) as the factors that made the left-wing politics attractive to many urban Kurds (2008: 345). The radical left-wing Turkish Workers Party, which won fifteen seats in the 1965 parliamentary elections, was the first political party to recognize the existence of the Kurdish people (Gunter 1988: 392), when it passed a resolution that stated: "There is a Kurdish people in

[39] As Yeğen indicates, with the goal of assimilating Kurdish youth into the Turkish identity (by educating them away from their cultural environment and according to the Turkish nationalist principles), state-sponsored boarding schools remain in operation today: of 299 boarding schools, 155 are located in the predominantly Kurdish regions of Turkey (2011: 73-74).

the East of Turkey…The fascist authorities representing the ruling classes have subjected the Kurdish people to a policy of assimilation and intimidation which has often become a bloody repression" (Kendal in Gunter 1988: 392).

The late 1960s witnessed a dramatic increase in both the number and influence of left-wing organizations in Turkey. At the same time, some radical left-wing Kurdish intellectuals and students began organized associations promoting a separate Kurdish nationalist movement (Bozarslan 2008: 347). In 1969, the Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (RCSE) was established as the first legitimate Kurdish organization in Turkey, the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan, and the PKK (*Partiya Karkaren Kürdistan*- Workers Party of Kürdistan) followed five years later.[40] These organizations redefined the Kurdish nationalist movement within the framework of radical leftist discourse. Following the Turkish left, the movement declared Kurds as a nation oppressed by the colonialist Turkish state and worked on bringing to life Kurdish history and culture to unify Turkey's Kurds against the state (Aydın 2005: 70). Through the efforts of these leftist Kurdish organizations, Newroz celebrations with political-national content gradually gained support among the Kurdish masses as a protest against state oppression.

Although there had been failed attempts made by Turkish[41] and Kurdish nationalists[42] in the last period of the Ottoman Empire to claim the Turkish or Kurdish origins of the festival, its

[40] For more information on associations promoting Kurdish nationalism at the time, see Gunter 1988: 393-395.

[41] While Nevruz had been regularly celebrated by the Ottomans as a public holiday (Behrens 2011: 8), it had hardly been identified with any ethnic group or a nationalist ideology, until the early 20th century. The first attempts to claim Nevruz as a Turkish national festival can be traced back to the late Ottoman era, when the CUP administration initiated efforts to connect Nevruz to the Turkish nationalist myth of *Ergenekon*, which refers to the legendary homeland of pre-Islamic Turks in the isolated mountains of Central Asia. As the legend is told, the very few Turkish families that survived a massacre, took shelter for centuries in Ergenekon until they grew in number and with the help of a blacksmith returned to their homeland after melting the mountains (Oğuz 2005: 14). According to the legend, the day Turks left the Ergenekon region is Nevruz day (ibid). Under the cover of its political agenda for strengthening Turkish nationalist awareness among the Ottoman populace, the CUP administration claimed the festival as a genuine Turkish invention that was originally celebrated among the pre-Islamic Central Asian Turkic

real emergence in Turkey as a political symbol occurred following the revival of Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1970s. While there are no comprehensive studies available on how extensive the practice of Newroz was among Turkey's Kurds until the 1970s, during interviews, elderly and middle-aged Kurdish respondents often recalled participating in the Newroz celebrations in their childhood. Younger respondents mentioned similar celebrations held by their elders in the provinces where Kurdish cultural traditions had to a large extend been sustained.[43] These celebrations, however, were characterized as "minor cultural events" (i.e., neither motivated by nationalist ideas nor widespread in nature) similar to the celebrations held in various Middle Eastern and Turkish regions, where families or village communities gathered for lighting massive bonfires and jumping over them, having picnics in the countryside, preparing special dishes, playing games, dancing, and singing songs. In effect, Kurdish respondents often indicated that while Newroz tradition persisted among Kurds for centuries, its

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tribes as a resurrection myth. Official Nevruz celebrations were held as "Ergenekon day" by the CUP administration with the participation of high-ranking officials in the years of 1914 and 1915 (Karaman 2008: 132). There are also some records of Nevruz celebrations after the end of the CUP rule that were held in various cities organized by the nationalist associations during the Independence War (ibid.), but they were neither widespread nor continuous. While traditional celebrations for welcoming the spring season (called by different names) endured throughout Turkey among various populations (see Kafkasyalı 2005; Karaman 2008; Oğuz 2005; Uca 2007), the Nevruz festival ceased to be carried out at the national level, as it was not adapted by the state as a national holiday after the foundation of the Turkish Republic (Yanık 2006: 286-7). As to be discussed in the later section, these claims of the Turkish origins of Nevruz as the Ergenekon Day were resurrected by state authorities following the 1990s, when Nevruz was officially adopted as a Turkish tradition with an aim of suppressing the Kurdish claims over the festival.

[42] The first attempts to give Newroz a Kurdish national character also emerged in the early 20th century, through the efforts of the KTC (Kurdistan Teali Cemiyeti- Society for the Elevation of Kurdistan). Having been greatly influenced by the dominant modern nationalist discourses of the time, the KTC gave utmost importance to the production of a common national history as a guarantee of an independent Kurdish nation (Bozarslan 2002: 847). Indeed, efforts to identify the historical roots of the Kurds, construction of Kurdish legends, and the formation of a common Kurdish language and script were first introduced by the writers of the journal *Jin*, the publishing organ of the KTC (Oran 2002: 875). For more information on the identification of Newroz as a Kurdish national day during this period, see Aydın (2005: 59-64), who in her unpublished work, discusses the ways in which the writers for *Jin* undertook the task of introducing Newroz as a Kurdish invention in an effort to discover and highlight distinctive characteristics of Kurds and to prove the existence of Kurds as a separate nation. It was not, however, until the 1970s that Newroz came to resonate as a unifying resistance symbol among the Kurdish masses.

[43] The respondents mentioned Newroz celebrations held in the predominantly Kurdish provinces located in the east and southeast of Turkey, such as Sırnak, Kars, Bitlis, Malatya, Diyarbakir, Cizre and Hakkari.

meaning has changed drastically after the 1970s, when it developed into a "political event" that symbolizes Kurdish resistance against the Turkish state repression.[44] As a middle-aged Kurdish respondent further explains:

> Traditional Newroz celebrations among Turkey's Kurds persisted until the late 1960s. I remember my elders lighting a great fire on a top of a hill, which could be seen from ten villages behind. I was around 6-8 years old. They would tell me it was Newroz, but I could not understand its meaning. But then, I grew up seeing how these huge fires of the past got smaller over time, how the soldiers raided our villages on Newroz days… After the 1970s, with the revival of the Kurdish movement in Turkey, Newroz has gradually transformed into a political symbol, a day identified with the Kurdish resistance to injustice. It has become a means of self-expression, a day for Kurds to express their political demands collectively. (Interview 12)

A brief content analysis of the major daily *Milliyet*[45] during the period of 15-25 March from 1950 to 1980 serves to track the dramatic change in the public mainstream discourse on the meaning of the festival in Turkey. Until the second half of the 1970s, the festival was merely cited as an Iranian tradition and Nevruz made the news only for its celebration by Iranians in Turkey. Its association with Kurds, Turks or any other locality within Turkey was totally unpronounced in the newspaper's pages. A short article dated 20.03.1953, for instance, described Nevruz as the "national and traditional festival of Iranians", when announcing the Nevruz

[44] Similar to the efforts of the KTC in the early 20th century, the Kurdish nationalist movement of the 1970s pronounced Newroz a Kurdish tradition, though this time by incorporating the festival into the legend of the Kurdish hero *Kawa* the blacksmith who was believed to have defeated the oppressive King *Dehak* who had been keeping the Kurdish people under his tyranny for centuries. As this widely accepted version of the legend narrates, Kawa in fact defeated *Dehak* on a Newroz day, which brought the spring season to Kurdistan after centuries. Newroz, in this respect, was resurrected as a symbol of Kurdish desire for freedom, as the day Kurds celebrate their emancipation from tyranny. Moreover, by drawing a parallel between the despotism of *Dehak* and that of the Turkish state, the Kurdish nationalist movement came to employ Newroz as a means to mobilize the Kurdish masses to manifest against the state repression on Newroz days. Aydın (2005: 68-84) examines the efforts of the Kurdish radical leftwing press of the time to reformulate Newroz as a symbol of Kurdish resistance to oppression. An article appeared in the *Rızgari* journal on 21 March 1976, for instance, stated the meaning of Newroz for Kurds as: "For many reasons, Newroz has provided guidance for the rebellion against barbarism and tyranny. Newroz is a mythological symbol having deep traces in social life… the Kurds remember in Newroz a cruel despotic ruler. This ruler is Dahak…no tyrant is capable of putting people in eternal chains. There appears a Kawe, Kawe the Smith, destroys the rule of Dahaks." (in Aydin, 2005: 73-74).

[45] Founded in 1950, Milliyet has been one of the major mainstream national daily newspapers in Turkey, with a high daily circulation.

celebration to be held in the Iranian embassy a day later (Milliyet Daily 1953). Nevruz celebrations of Iranians in Turkey, telegrams send by state authorities to Iranian consuls, and series of descriptive articles on the history and customs of Nevruz in Iran made the news in *Milliyet* for more than two decades. At the end of the 1970s, however, the festival came to be associated with Kurdish identity, when celebrations organized by the radical left-wing Kurdish organizations began to make the news. During the week of Nevruz in 1977, *Milliyet* briefly mentioned the Kurdish demonstrations that were held against the Turkish state in Italy (Milliyet Daily 1977). A year later, the newspaper wrote about the demonstrations held on university campuses on Newroz day, and mentioned that slogans in Kurdish language (such as "Long live Kurdistan", "death to slavery, long live freedom" and some "phrases related to the Nevruz festival") were written on the buildings of Ankara University under the pseudonym *Kawa* (Milliyet Daily 1978).

Indeed, these emergent Newroz celebrations were marginalized local events held in big cities, mostly organized by the radical left-wing Kurdish organizations and attended by Kurdish university students and intellectuals. During the interviews with Kurdish respondents, these celebrations were often mentioned as "premature events" held with the participation of relatively few people. A respondent related the story of his participation in a Newroz celebration in 1978, which was organized by the RCSE in Diyarbakir in a small meeting hall with the participation of the RCSE members (Interview 12). There, speeches relevant to the Kurdish cause were made, slogans were chanted, and Kurdish songs were sung. Others mentioned Newroz celebrations with similar content in the university campuses (interview 9) or in the meeting halls of left-wing Kurdish organizations (Interview 17). The actual revival of Newroz as a widespread mass phenomenon, however, took place in the 1980s in Turkey, following the transformation of

Kurdish nationalism from an elite movement into a popular upheaval that appealed to the Kurdish masses.

Turkey suffered from an exponential growth in political violence from urban guerilla warfare between the radical left and rightwing groups in the course of the 1970s.[46] The Turkish armed forces retook power in September 1980 and immediately implemented severe measures to stop the political violence. During its reign of three years, the regime declared martial law throughout Turkey, abolished the parliament, ratified a new constitution in 1982 that restricted civil and political liberties to a great extent, proscribed all political parties and organizations, and banned many journals, books, and newspapers. Zürcher mentions that 11,500 people (most of whom were leftists) were arrested in the first six weeks following the coup d'état (2007: 279). The number increased to 122,600 arrests after a year; most arrestees were imprisoned, stripped of Turkish citizenship, or sentenced to death by the military tribunals (ibid).

The military regime was particularly harsh on Kurds. During three years of military rule, any reference to Kurdish identity had been stamped as a crime against the national unity and security of the Turkish state. As McDowall indicates, although the official figures indicate that approximately 4,500 Kurds were arrested between 1980 and 1982, according to the records of the International League for Human Rights the actual number is more than 81,000 (2004: 416). The regime took additional punitive juridical measures; Law 2932 on "the Use of Languages Other than Turkish" was enacted in 1983. It prohibited the use of the Kurdish language without

[46] As Zürcher indicates, fueled by severe economic crises and weak political governance due to frequent changes in the coalition governments, political extremism in Turkey quickly turned into open violence between the left and right-wing radicals: the number of people who died in assassinations, executions and mass killings from both sides increased from around 230 in 1977 to between 1200 and 1500 in 1979 (2007: 263) For more information on the growth of political radicalism in Turkey at the time, see Zürcher 2007: 253-277.

directly referring to it.[47] Many Kurds were prosecuted for speaking, publishing, or even singing in Kurdish until the law was amended in 1991 (Aslan 2009: 6). The government also banned Kurdish first names and place names: Law 1587, proclaiming that it contradicted Turkish national culture, prohibited giving children Kurdish first names, and by 1986 around three thousand villages were renamed in the southeast of Turkey (McDowall 2004: 427). Although multi-party politics were allowed to be restored in 1983, restrictions on the political, civil and cultural rights of Kurds were not lifted.

Despite these restrictions, however, Kurdish nationalist activities took hold and prospered following the 1980s. One factor in the upsurge was the impact of massive Kurdish immigration to Europe: many left-wing Kurdish intellectuals and students took refuge in Europe following the 1980s to escape the punitive measures implemented by the Turkish state. Enjoying the liberal political and cultural environment of Europe, these immigrants carried on Kurdish political activities. Equally important, the armed struggle waged by the PKK against the Turkish state in 1979 took off after the end of the military coup and resulted in thirty thousand casualties in the following fifteen years (Yeğen 2007: 135). It was when both the Kurdish nationalist movement in Europe and the PKK resumed the Newroz tradition of the 1970s that Newroz celebrations emerged as a widespread mass phenomenon. From the late 1980s, Newroz became a major protest event associated with Kurdish identity both in Turkey and in Europe. It was the day when Kurds publicly demonstrated their existence and protested the repressive Kurdish policy of the Turkish state.

[47] The law prohibited "the use of Kurdish language in public and private" by stating in Article 2 that "no language can be used for the explication, dissemination, and publication of ideas other than the first official language of countries, recognized by the Turkish state (Aslan 2009: 6).

The early 1980s witnessed the emergence of a robust Kurdish nationalist movement in Europe, headed by Turkey's Kurds. As one of the Kurdish respondents who had been living in France since the end of the 1960s indicated, the Kurdish population of Europe substantively increased after the 1980s; given that, many Kurdish students and intellectuals took refuge in Europe when Khomeini "declared jihad against the Kurds" after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, while many others followed from Iraq when the Iran-Iraq War began in 1980 (interview 38). However, as he claims, the arrival of a vast number of immigrants from Turkey after the 1980 military coup played a much more crucial role in the upsurge in Kurdish activism in Europe:

> Many Kurds that migrated from Turkey to Europe were educated intellectuals and students. May-be they were physically here, but mentally and emotionally they were still in Turkey. They wanted to continue the Kurdish struggle. In Europe, they found the chance to express their identity without any restrictions and to sustain and disseminate their culture without any state repression. (Interview 38)

Van Bruinessen (2000) in his study *Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question*, describes the ways in which the massive Kurdish migration from Turkey was significant in the dissemination of Kurdish culture and political activities among the Kurdish immigrants of Europe. As he argues, due to the migration of many artists, intellectuals, and politicians from Turkey after the 1980 military coup, Europe witnessed a swift increase in Kurdish publishing (p. 10). In addition, given that the Kurdish language was banned in Turkey, many immigrant Kurds learned how to read and write in Kurdish for the first time by attending the Kurdish literacy courses organized in various European cities (ibid). Van Bruinessen also discusses the influence of Kurdish immigrants on both the politicization and popularization of the Newroz celebrations in Europe. As he argues, while Newroz came to be celebrated in Europe among Kurdish immigrants (especially among those from Iraq) as a Kurdish national tradition after its adaptation as a

festival by the Kurds of Iraq in the 1950s, these celebrations were "just occasions for listening to music and song, dancing and dining together," attended by few people (p. 9). To him, the politicization of Newroz instead occurred following the arrival of immigrants from Turkey in the 1980s:

> In the 1980s, the *Newroz* parties came to be dominated by Kurds from Turkey, because ever more migrant workers were mobilized and many educated people fled from Turkey to Europe. Among the refugees there were, moreover, Kurdish singers, musicians and actors, who made a significant impact. *Newroz* became more and more politicized, however. Each political party or organisation held its own *Newroz* celebrations, which assumed the character of political rallies… *Newroz* celebrations became the major social events where Kurdish communities visibly manifested themselves. Whereas in the 1970s a typical Newroz party might be attended by several hundred people, those of the 1990s drew up to several tens of thousands of participants of all ages. (P. 9)

Parallel to this, involved in the organization of Newroz celebrations in France from the 1970s onwards, the above-mentioned respondent stated the significant role that the Kurdish immigrants from Turkey played in the popularization of Newroz as a Kurdish resistance symbol, not only among the Europe's Kurds but also among the Kurds in Turkey. His vivid description of the issue deserves to be quoted in full:

> It is necessary to highlight the impact of Kurdish activism in Europe, when discussing the popularization of Newroz among Turkey's Kurds… We organized the first Newroz celebration in France in 1970. We neither had an association nor enough money to rent a place back then. A friend of mine from Québec helped us to use a room in the House of Canadian Students in Paris. We invited our friends and had a modest celebration with around 100 people…After the 1980s, however, both the scope and the nature of celebrations have changed considerably. Everywhere in Europe, even in a German village with 200 Kurds, Newroz celebrations were being organized. In 1983, over 5,000 people participated in the Newroz celebration that we organized. These celebrations quickly became events where the motivation for the Kurdish struggle was at the highest level. We hosted main Kurdish icons like Yılmaz Güney,[48] who were raising demands for Kurdish rights.

[48] Yılmaz Güney (1937-1984) is a famous Kurdish actor/director and novelist in Turkey.

> These widespread Newroz celebrations had a significant impact on the popularization of Newroz in Turkey. The immigrants would talk about the Newroz festivals that they celebrated in Europe, when they went to Turkey for holidays. We would distribute Newroz videos into the Middle East through Beirut: they would be in Syria and Turkey within 10 days. (Interview 38)

There was, however, one further dimension to the issue. Whilst the Kurdish movement was gaining strength in Europe, Turkey was dealing with a large-scale Kurdish insurgence led by the PKK.[49] Founded by Abdullah Öcalan in November 1978 as a small-scale, radical left-wing university movement, the PKK officially began its armed struggle in 1979 to establish an independent state of Kürdistan. Although various Kurds seemed to disfavor its violent campaigns (Gunter 1988: 395), the PKK managed to establish extensive organizational structure and was successful to a great extent in mobilizing Kurds in Turkey and in Europe (Hirschler 2001: 146). The organization was seriously shaken after the 1980 military coup, when many of its members were captured, while its key leaders, including Öcalan, took a refuge in Syria. The PKK was mostly silent during Turkey's military regime. Following 1984, however, it resumed its attacks in southern Turkey targeting the Turkish military forces as well as Kurds allied with the state. By August 1985, around 200 people were killed in about seventy armed incidents. The government took countermeasures by launching the voluntary "village guards system" and arming allied villagers against the PKK, which responded by concentrating its attacks on those village guards. The conditions in the region deteriorated when the conflict deepened: the lives of the villagers were threatened from both sides for helping the enemy. The number of troops that were allocated by the state reached 200,000 by the early 1990s. The frequent security operations organized by the Turkish military forces in the area resulted in the evacuation and destruction of thousands of

[49] The following analysis on the PKK is largely based on McDowall 2004: 420-450.

Kurdish villages, and the arrest, detention, and torture of many who were suspected of assisting the PKK.

The PKK adopted the Newroz tradition especially after the second half of the 1985, when the organization began to choose Newroz days for its attacks to attain "maximum publicity for its cause" (Yanık 2006: 287). In 1986, the organization declared to conduct "violent attacks" in Turkey during the "Nevruz" week: thirty-four soldiers and civilians, as well as twelve PKK members died in clashes between the PKK and Turkish military forces in the southeastern provinces of Turkey (Milliyet Daily 1986). Henceforth, Newroz celebrations became the center of attention in Turkey. A national emergency was declared on "critical Nevruz days" and predominantly Kurdish south and southeast provinces were on "Nevruz alarm" every March, a time in which detailed search warrants and random security checks were executed by Turkey's security forces. Moreover, additional troops were allocated in the region, especially in Turkey's border with Iraq (the access point of the PKK to Turkey), and the media and the Turkish authorities warned against possible attacks to be held on Newroz days.

While Newroz celebrations were banned in Turkey until 1992, Kurds have continued to celebrate it extensively.[50] The PKK's call for Kurds to publicly protest against the Turkish state on Newroz days led to widespread "illegal" Newroz celebrations. These celebrations took the form of PKK rallies, where tens of thousands of Kurdish men and women from every background, age, and social class poured out into the streets wearing yellow, green, and red (the

[50] Organizing public celebrations and gatherings became a very difficult task in Turkey after the 1980s, when Turkish Law 2911 on "Meetings and Demonstrations" enacted in 1983 banned all organizations, associations, and trade-unions in Turkey from organizing meetings or demonstrations "beyond their subject matter and objective" until it was annulled in 2002. Moreover, article 4 of the law (that is still in force) stipulates that public meetings, ceremonies, carnivals and receptions, and private meetings to be held by the political parties, trade unions, foundations, and voluntary and professional associations are subject to being granted permission from the related governorship. Permission required that gatherings are lawful in the Turkish constitution. State authorities have frequently used Law 2911 to justify prohibitions on the celebration of Newroz.

traditional Kurdish colors). They celebrated Newroz by jumping over bonfires, dancing, shouting pro-Kurdish and pro-PKK slogans and carrying Öcalan posters and Kurdish flags. In 1991, approximately 150,000 people illegally gathered in Cizre (a small town in eastern Turkey) to celebrate Newroz with Kurdish flags and Öcalan posters (Milliyet Daily 1991a). Clashes between the security forces and Newroz participants increased drastically as the Turkish police and the military forces attempted to disperse the crowds. Thousands of people celebrating Newroz were taken into custody, tortured, or convicted of being a PKK member or of making separatist propaganda. At times, Kurdish organizations came out with interesting tactics to organize undercover Newroz celebrations. A prominent Kurdish activist based in Istanbul recalled a Newroz celebration they organized in Diyarbakir in 1991:

> Back then, it was forbidden to celebrate Newroz in Turkey. Our applications for Newroz celebrations were constantly rejected. But we always found other ways. We sometimes held weddings to celebrate Newroz. They were real marriages, but people also got together to celebrate Newroz. In 1991, we printed Newroz invitations clandestinely organized by a Kurdish organization pretending to be the marriage invitation of Nevin and Yılmaz [common male and female first names in Turkey]. Famous singers from both in and out of Turkey participated in the event. At the very end of the event, the police raided the celebration claiming that this was a fake marriage ceremony and took around thirty of our friends into custody. All the people who participated in the celebrations with the name of Nevin and Yılmaz were arrested. They even arrested a brother and sister! These people stayed in prison around 3 to 5 months (Interview 12).

The 1990s brought some relaxation in the repressive Kurdish policies of the Turkish state. The rising discontent among Turkey's Kurds as well as the increased clashes between the PKK and Turkish military forces made it harder for the Turkish state to deny the Kurdish question (Yeğen 2011: 74). The 1991 elections opened up the possibility for the Kurds to be represented in parliament. The newly established pro-Kurdish People's Labor Party (HEP) won

twenty-two seats in the parliament after establishing an electoral alliance with the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) (Yıldız and Breau 2010: 233).[51]

The then president Turgut Özal played a major role in the initiation of reforms for a nonmilitary solution to Turkey's Kurdish question (Aslan 2009:7). Indeed, his methods diverged from the long-dominant Kemalist policies of denying and suppressing Kurdish identity. Identifying himself as partly Kurdish, Özal addressed Turkey's Kurdish question in its reality and launched new policies for solving it through reform and dialogue instead of mere suppression (Barkey and Fuller 1998: 135). During his four years as president, he partially amended the infamous Law 2932 on "the Use of Languages other than Turkish" to allow speaking Kurdish in public and Kurdish music recordings (while teaching and publishing in Kurdish was still a crime) and opened diplomatic dialogue with Iraqi Kurdish leaders, Barzani and Talabani, and utilized this dialogue for indirect negotiations with the PKK (Gunter 2011: 88-92). As a result, Öcalan declared ceasefire before the 1993 Newroz, which signaled the possibility of an end to armed struggle and a transformation of the PKK into a political party which it predicated on the condition that Turkey accept their proposal for dialogue and peace (Ballı 1993). This process, however, ended with the sudden death of Özal from heart-attack on

[51] In her article *Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey*, Nicole F. Watts (2006) argues that the participation of pro-Kurdish parties in the Turkish electoral politics from the 1990s onwards, provided the Kurdish national movement with the possibility to express itself through non-violent means. The Kurdish participation to the Turkish political system, however, has not been without restrictions. The pro-Kurdish party members have experienced violent opposition: from 1991 to 2000 over one hundred members of the pro-Kurdish parties were murdered, while many others were imprisoned (p. 128-129). Three successive pro-Kurdish parties were also closed down by the constitutional court from 1990 to 2005 for conducting separatist propaganda, promoting Kurdish nationalism or due to their connection to the PKK: these are the People's Labor Party (HEP) (1990-1993), the Democracy Party (DEP) (1993-1994), and the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) (1994-2003) (p.134). The Democratic Society Party (DTP) (2005-2009) was also closed down by the constitutional court, and currently, Turkey's major pro-Kurdish party is called the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) that succeeded the DTP in 2009.

the 17th of April 1993, and Öcalan declared the end of the ceasefire by stating "Özal is gone, peace has ended" (Yurtsever 1993).

These Özal era reforms resonated in mainstream public discourse. Somer (2005) provides a content analysis of another mainstream daily, *Hürriyet*, to demonstrate how articles using the word "Kurd" increased drastically after the 1990s. From 1984 to 1990, only 18 percent of articles used the word "Kurd" when referring to Kurds (the remaining articles employed terms such as "they, traitors, or separatists") (p. 599). "Kurd" was increasingly adopted after the 1990s; from 1993 to 1998 more than one in every four articles employed the term "Kurd" when referring to the group (ibid). As Yeğen suggested, however, while Kurdish existence was increasingly recognized in Turkey following the 1990s, this physical existence of Kurds had hardly been translated into the language of law, and Turkey continued to deny Kurdish cultural rights (2007: 137). The next section discusses Turkey's official Newroz policy after the 1990s as an illustrative of this situation.

Turkish Nationalism Rediscovers Nevruz

Unable to prevent the celebration of Newroz as a protest event by simply banning it, the Turkish government adopted a different strategy after 1990s to dissociate Newroz celebrations from Kurdish identity and political struggle (Yanık 2006: 286). Similar to the efforts of the CUP in the early 20th century to adopt Nevruz as a Turkish national day, the government officially declared Nevruz as "the day the Turks left their Central Asian homeland, Ergenekon" (Hirschler 2001: 154). Following the adoptation, Turkish authorities embarked on proving Nevruz's

Turkishness as a systematic program to suppress Kurdish claims over the festival.[52] Accordingly, the then minister of culture Namık Kemal Özbek issued a notice on the 21st of March 1991 that was sent to the provincial directorates for Nevruz to be henceforth celebrated through official festivities organized throughout the country (Milliyet Daily 1991b). Turkish authorities justified this decision by claiming that the origins of the Nevruz festival were rooted in ancient Turkish traditions (ibid).

As Yanık suggests, the adoption of Nevruz as a public holiday by the Turkic Republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 also played a significant role in the legitimization of Nevruz as a Turkish tradition in Turkey; widespread Nevruz celebrations in these countries were often recalled as an additional proof for the Nevruz being a genuinely Turkish tradition (2006: 285-286). At the same time, the adaptation of Nevruz by the Turkish state employed as a means to establish closer ties with the Turkic Republics (p. 286). On the 21st of March 1993, for instance, the government organized an International Convention called "Friendship, Fraternity and Collaboration among Turkish World", with the participation of President Özal, Prime Minister Demirel, various Turkish ministers, and over eight hundred representatives from the Turkic Republics, Asia, and the Balkans (Yinanç and Yıldız 1993). In his speech during the occasion, Prime Minister Demirel emphasized Nevruz as the celebration of the Ergenekon myth inherited from one "Turkish" generation to the next (ibid). After watching a movie on the exodus of Turks from the Ergenekon region, event participants forged iron on an anvil as a symbol of Turks freeing themselves from Ergenekon (ibid). Two years later, the Turkish government organized the first "Nevruz feast" in Ankara with the participation of the culture ministers of

[52] It is interesting to note that the Syrian government has employed a similar tactic from the 1980s onwards, in an attempt to suppress "the popularity of the Newroz festival among the Kurds by making it a national celebration and integrating it into the official Syrian calendar" (Tejel 2009: 136).

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Republic of Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan (Milliyet Daily 1995). The celebrations involved official parades, concerts and shows of folklore groups from the Turkic Republics (ibid). The organization of Nevruz feasts with the participation of Turkic Republics became a tradition in Turkey after 1995. On a similar occasion, in 1996, when the then President Demirel received the culture ministers, ambassadors, and artists from the Turkic Republics he summarized Turkey's international policy on Nevruz as:

> Most of the communities that celebrate Nevruz are of Turkish origin…If the cultural features of different communities are rooted in the same source and they share a common history, this means brotherhood and solidarity among them. It is not important that these people were distanced from each other in the past. It is rather necessary to look ahead. (Milliyet Daily 1996)

It was during this period that one-sided scholarly works supporting the official state view on Nevruz escalated drastically in Turkey. A short essay entitled *Nevruz in Turkish Culture* that appeared in the *Turkish Review Quarterly Digest*, stated as early as 1992 that,

> The history of Nevruz is as old as Turkish history… The beginning of Nevruz goes back to the Legend of Ergenekon, according to which the Turks went to Ergenekon, and after living there for about 400 years, on 21 March returned,… conquered mountains of iron and regained their motherland. For this reason, 21 March, the day when winter ends and spring starts, and the Turks announced their independence is celebrated, as a festival… We can say that Nevruz is a truly unique Turkish tradition. (P. 51-52)

Similar arguments have since then been made with an aim of publicizing the validity of Nevruz as a Turkish festival in a plethora of publications. A typical publication of this sort begins by defining Nevruz as a common traditional cultural value among Turks and goes on to prove this by evoking the Ergenekon myth and citing various historical texts on Turks. Many such publications also claim Turkish origins of Nevruz, arguing that Iranians adopted the tradition from the Turkish tribes who migrated from Central Asia (e.g., Bayat 2008; Kafkasyalı 2005). This discussion is usually followed by a list of Nevruz practices in various Turkic Republics and

their similarities with the Nevruz tradition in Turkey. Different names and practices attributed to the Nevruz celebrations in various regions of Turkey are also cited at length and in detail, not unexpectedly, without mentioning the Kurdish ones. The practices and symbols attributed to the Kurdish identity and culture are often highlighted as genuinely Turkish: jumping over a bonfire is declared as an old Turkish tradition signifying the purification of the body and mind, and "yellow, green and red" are claimed as Turkish traditional colors (Özdemir 2006; Rayman 2002). The fact that the celebration of the festival was forbidden for a long time in Turkey is hardly ever mentioned in these articles; if only implicitly, such as "the celebrations in Turkey were interrupted from time to time" (Bayat 2008: 148). In fact, the Kurdish version of the festival is only mentioned at times as a distortion from the original Turkish tradition –and, again, without mentioning the words "Kurd" or "Newroz". Özdemir, for instance, argues that "Nevruz will be purified from all sorts of political and ideological distortions that we call cultural pollution and will continue to be celebrated in its original meaning" (2006: 18).

These attempts to redefine and legitimize Nevruz as a Turkish tradition have often been seen in the literature on Kurdish studies as an evidence for the assimilatory policies of the Turkish state against Kurdish identity and culture (see Gunter 2010: 230-231; Harrison 2007; Hirschler 2001). Harrison, for instance, discusses the Turkification of Nevruz as an attempt of the Turkish state to suppress Kurdish identity by appropriating the symbols of Kurdish nationalism as its own:

> …this type of appropriation occurs when one group tries to assimilate or subordinate another, but is unable to suppress or eradicate the other's identity; the resort is to appropriate the symbolic practices of the other, and so redefine its own identity in such a way as to incorporate these practices. The Turkish majority, or the state representing it, sought to assimilate the Kurds, not by altering the Kurds' identity, but by altering and redefining Turkishness in such a way as to incorporate Kurdish identity and its

> symbols: unable to make the minority resemble itself, it had to make itself resemble the minority. (2007: 131)

During the interviews with Kurdish respondents, I was also told about the ways in which the "Turkification of Newroz" is an unpersuasive strategy that has resulted from Turkey's nationalist concerns. A respondent, for instance, asked "if it was a Turkish tradition why, then, have they forbidden the celebration of their own tradition for decades?" (Interview 12) Others highlighted "monist ideology" (interview 36) or "one religion, one language, one nation" policy (interview 17) as ways in which the invention of Nevruz tradition reflects the long-existing assimilation policies of the Turkish state.

Not unexpectedly, the declaration of Nevruz as a Turkish tradition brought no loosening of restrictions on Newroz celebrations in Turkey. Unlike prior state practices that prohibited the celebration of the festival, Turkish authorities announced in 1992 that Nevruz could be celebrated all over the country, only under the condition that the celebrations be organized to comply with the law (Erkiner and Eliş 1992). The PKK replied by stating that Newroz was the historical day for Kurdish solidarity and called for an uprising (ibid). The celebrations turned into bloodshed when more than sixty people died in the clashes between the security forces and Newroz participants in the southeastern cities of Sırnak, Cizre, and Nusaybin (1992 Newroz Olayları 1992). Prime Minister Demirel interpreted the events as a PKK campaign against the Turkish state and declared that while most of the victims were PKK members, civil casualties were unavoidable when, provoked by the PKK, thousands of people rebelled against the security forces (in Bila 1992). The message was clear: Kurds could celebrate Nevruz; yet not Newroz.

Following the deadly Newroz events of 1992, state authorities adopted somewhat less brutal tactics. In an effort to disseminate the Nevruz tradition among Turkey's Kurds, sumptuous

official Nevruz celebrations came to be organized in various provinces with sizable Kurdish populations. A typical official celebration would be two or three hours long. It would be attended by high-ranking state officials (including military personnel) who often gave messages of solidarity and peace in their long speeches and symbolically performed old "Turkish traditions" in front of a limited crowd by jumping over bonfires, cracking eggs, and forging iron on anvils. Compared to the past when high-ranking state officials hardly ever visited southeastern Turkey (except may-be during election times) these events became occasions where the state displayed its presence in the region. State authorities employed different tactics to encourage Kurds to participate in these state-sponsored festivals. Occasionally, the Turkish government chose to organize big-budget festivities with the participation of high-ranking state authorities to attract Kurdish crowds. These celebrations were widely publicized through fliers, the mass media, and billboards. Free gifts were often given away in an attempt to increase participation. Two years after the bloody Newroz, the people of Cizre were invited by the Turkish security forces to official Nevruz celebrations. A two hour event was held with few participants, but in which the police made speeches to warn the public against the PKK, assisted the participants in lighting the Nevruz fire, and distributed Turkish flags and chocolate to children (Gürel and Sardan 1994). This celebration made a top level army officer state, "we celebrate Nevruz too, but under the Turkish flag" (ibid). In the 1996 Nevruz, the celebration that was organized in Iğdır (a small provincial town on Turkey's eastern border) with the participation of the then prime minister, Mesut Yılmaz, involved concerts by famous pop singers, fireworks, and folk dance shows, and the celebration was streamed live on various TV channels (Sıktaş 1996). In 1997, the notice issued by the Ministry of Interior Affairs asked the governorships to organize "vibrant spectacles" on Nevruz days (Milliyet Daily 1997).

Despite these efforts, however, the Kurdish public mostly rejected the official state celebrations. One of the Kurdish respondents explained why the state policy to popularize the Nevruz tradition among Kurds was indeed found to be ineffective:

> Newroz has been perceived by the Kurds as an event to demonstrate against state repression: expecting Kurds to celebrate Nevruz in the presence of state authorities was really absurd. Kurds have kept their distance from any activity sponsored by the Turkish state. Due to its repressive policies, the state has long since alienated itself from Kurds and their demands. (Interview 38)

Opposing the state policy of Turkification of Newroz, many Kurds chose to gather in alternative Newroz celebrations organized by the pro-Kurdish parties. In 1993, three thousand people celebrated Newroz in front of the HEP party building in Diyarbakır with the participation of HEP deputies and party members (Milliyet Daily 1993). Especially since the mid-1990s, pro-Kurdish parties have played a significant role in the systematic and widespread organization of Newroz celebrations in Turkey. While semi-spontaneous local Newroz celebrations were previously organized by party branches in predominantly Kurdish provinces, pro-Kurdish parties undertook the task of organizing Newroz celebrations at the national level after the foundation of the DEP in 1993 (interview 35). To this end, the DEP asked each province to form a "Newroz Organization Committee" that would be responsible for the preparation of the authorization applications to the governorships, determining the necessary security measures for the celebrations to be held peacefully, and deciding on the program schedule and activities to be held (interview 35). Not unexpectedly, however, these committees have experienced substantial restrictions against the organization of Newroz celebrations. The applications made by the Newroz Organization Committees were constantly rejected by the governorships due to

incomplete information delivered in the application files (Interview 35). [53] In addition, the governorships often shared personal information provided in the nomination files with the security forces which resulted in a Committee members being taken into custody, interrogated, or convicted for being a PKK member or making separatist propaganda (Interview 9). A respondent who was a member of the Newroz organization committee in Kars, a small city in the north east of Turkey, recalled his sentencing to four months of prison for making separatist propaganda when he wrote "Newroz" instead of "Nevruz" in the festival's 1995 application file (Interview 35). Although his conviction was suspended, he recalled other committee members who were sentenced for up to a year of prison for similar offenses.

The celebrations in some Kurdish provinces were occasionally banned for security reasons, or cancelled at the last minute by state authorities (interview 12). In fact, security precautions continued to be at the highest level in the month of March, especially in the southeast of Turkey, where clashes between the Turkish military forces and the PKK were at their usual high level. Turkey was on "Newroz alarm," just like every March for the last several decades: the military and special task forces were assigned to predominantly Kurdish areas, security checkpoints were established at city access points, and the number of interrogations and arrests would increase in the region as Newroz approached. At the same time, the state took exceptional measures for the authorized Newroz celebrations to be held under tight restrictions. Any symbols or actions that could be identified with Kurdish identity and struggle or the PKK were banned during the celebrations. The security forces interfered when crowds shouted slogans in Kurdish, in favor of the PKK and Öcalan, or against the Turkish state. Arrests, detention and

[53] Article 10 of Turkish Law 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations stipulates that in order to obtain permission for a gathering, a statement, which includes the purpose, exact date and place, as well as the beginning and end times of the concerned event, should be submitted to the relevant governorship at least 48 hours before the event. The application file should also include the documents that validate the credentials, occupations, residence permits, and work addresses of the president and members of the committee organizing the event.

the conviction of many Kurds resulted. Newroz participants had to go through ID and background checks, full-body and personal possession searches before entering celebration areas, which were closed down by barricades and surrounded by security forces. Kurdish and the PKK flags, Öcalan's posters, placards with Kurdish slogans, and even items with yellow, green, and red colors were prohibited in the festival areas and were seized by the police. In the 1998 Newroz celebrations in Istanbul, ten thousand participants were required to pass through ten different security check points before entering the festival area, during which the police seized illegal journals, flags and accessories with yellow, red, and green (Milliyet Daily 1998).

The popularity of Newroz, however, endured among Turkey's Kurds. Masses that were gathered in festival areas continued to shout Kurdish and pro-PKK slogans, carry placards in Kurdish, open PKK flags, and deliver speeches against the repressive policies of the Turkish state (sometimes in Kurdish) during the celebrations. When state authorities did not issue a permit for the celebrations, thousands gathered in unauthorized ones. The security forces often dispersed the crowds: although few people died, many were injured and thousands were taken into custody during the Newroz celebrations after 1992. Even in 1999, among the 11,000 people who participated in the unauthorized Newroz celebrations throughout Turkey, 2,400 were taken into custody (Milliyet Daily 1999). Moreover, especially after the 1992 Newroz events, these celebrations caught the attention of the European left and international press. Many journalists, trade-union members and left-wing politicians who flew from Europe to celebrate Newroz and to show their support for the Kurdish cause, were occasionally taken into custody or deported from the country for participating in Newroz.

Acceleration of Turkey's EU admission process in the early 2000s, together with the current government's relatively moderate discursive stance in relation to Turkey's Kurdish

question, introduced some timid reforms regarding Kurdish cultural rights. These efforts, however, were not followed by major policy changes, and thus proved to be insufficient in providing a solution to Turkey's Kurdish question. For an insightful analysis into the factors underlying the intangible heritage declaration of Nevruz, the following section discusses the stance of the JDP government in relation to Kurdish identity and rights. It examines the ways in which the JDP fails to depart from the Kemalist notion of Turkish nationalism that outlines Turkey's conventional Kurdish policy.

The JDP and the Kurdish Question

One of the most interesting results of the 2002 general elections in Turkey was the substantial support the JDP gained among Kurdish voters. For the first time since the active involvement of pro-Kurdish parties in politics following the 1990s, a mainstream party won a majority of the vote in predominantly Kurdish areas, by defeating the long-existing dominance of Pro-Kurdish parties in the region. The JDP won about 32 percent of the votes in the eastern and 28 percent in the southeastern regions of Turkey; the pro-Kurdish party DEHAP won approximately 21 and 27 percent of the votes, respectively (Bahar 2007: 69). The JDP came to power in 2002 with a commitment to solve Turkey's Kurdish question through democratic means. Instead of increasing security and military measures, the JDP argued for further steps in granting Kurdish cultural rights and recognizing Kurdish culture and cultural activities. The JDP party program, for instance, discusses Turkey's Kurdish Question under the section of "the East and the Southeast" and claims that:

> The event, which some of us call the Southeastern, others call the Kurdish or the Terror problem, is unfortunately a reality in Turkey…The *cultural diversity in this region is considered richness by our Party*. On condition that Turkish remains the official and instruction language, our Party regards the cultural activities in languages other than Turkish, including

> broadcasting, as an asset which reinforces and *supports the unity and integrity of our country, rather than weakens it*….Since solutions based on a perception of a *bureaucratic and authoritarian State* rely solely on the concept of security, in the long term they exacerbate the *problems even further*. On the other hand, approaches based on the perceptions of a *democratic State* end up in reinforcing the unity and integrity of our nation in the long term, although they may be met with concern initially. Thus it is a necessary step in the solution of the problem to realize that the problems in the region cannot be fully solved with just economic development policies, and that above all, approaches, *which recognize cultural diversities within the framework of the democratic State of law should prevail.* [Emph. added] (JDP 2011)

Although the PKK and the pro-Kurdish parties have been the major actors in representing Kurdish interest since the 1980s, the Islamically-rooted JDP has attracted many conservative Kurds who attach more importance to their religious than ethnic identity (Yavuz and Özcan 2006: 106-107). The JDP's critique of Kemalist secular principles was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the Mevlevi Sema ceremony. During the election campaign in the predominantly Kurdish regions, the JDP often highlighted its disapproval of Turkey's Kemalist policies as well as the dominant role that the military plays over Turkey's political scene; by stating "we suffered from this Kemalist ideological state and its military as much as you Kurds did," the JDP managed to attract many Kurds who objected to the Kemalist state structure and ideology (Yavuz and Özcan 2006: 108-109).

Since then, however, much scholarship has criticized the current government for not offering a long-term and solid strategy in relation to the solution of Turkey's Kurdish question and for not departing from the conventional nationalist discourse rooted in Turkey's Kemalist heritage on the denial of Kurdish identity (e.g., Duran 2008; Hale and Özbudun 2010; Larrabee and Tol 2011**;** Öktem 2008a; Yavuz and Özcan 2006). Although the JDP came to power with a promise "to redefine the state and deconstruct its Kemalist ideology" by incorporating Kurdish

demands, the party's main policy until 2005 had been to deny publicly the existence of the Kurdish problem (Yavuz and Özcan 2006: 109-110). In contrast to the above-mentioned party program that comments on the Kurdish question as a reality, in December 2002 Erdoğan boldly declared that "there is no Kurdish problem in Turkey: you create the problem by believing that it exists. If you deny it, the problem disappears" (in Sarıoğlu 2005).

At the same time, however, in the first years following the JDP's rise to power, the government, deeply endorsing the EU objective, quickly passed timid reforms permitting limited Kurdish cultural expression in Turkey. The previous government had already taken steps toward easing cultural restrictions on Kurds by amending Law 2932 on "the use of languages other than Turkish" to allow publications in the Kurdish language (Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 106). The JDP pursued "democratization reforms". The learning of different languages and dialects by Turkish citizens that has been allowed in Turkey from 2002, has enabled the founding of private institutions that teach Kurdish. In 2004, regulations on the language of Radio and Television broadcasts were amended to allow private radio and television broadcasting in the Kurdish language. Moreover, the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) began broadcasting in Kurdish for 45 minutes each day until in 2009 TRT 6 began 24 hour broadcasting in the Kurdish language. The JDP government also finalized the lifting of the state of emergency that the previous government initiated, which since 1987 kept the predominantly Kurdish areas under the complete control of the Turkish security forces (Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 106).

These reforms led to the gradual flourishing of Kurdish cultural activities in Turkey. A respondent who own a Kurdish publishing house in Istanbul mentioned that the restrictions on publications in Kurdish language have eased in the recent years (interview 11). He further stated

that while there have been court cases against them, they have not been convicted for publishing in the Kurdish language since the Turkish authorities neither have time nor enough finances to examine the content of all Kurdish publications. Similarly, another respondent who is a director of a Kurdish association in Ankara that provides free Kurdish lessons indicated that they face relatively fewer restrictions from the current government regarding their activities in the association. He also added that the demands for Kurdish language lessons are in constant increase, and they currently have over three hundred students (interview 36). Nevertheless, as Kurdish respondents often highlighted, these timid reforms were not followed by major policy changes, and the JDP remained mostly reluctant in taking further concrete steps on solving Turkey's Kurdish problem.[54] As one of the respondents indicates,

> While my existence used to be denied in Turkey by any means, it came to be accepted as a reality. For instance, there is a TV channel founded by the state that broadcasts in my language. These are of course significant steps. Yet, if they tell us to be satisfied with this much, they should know that these reforms are not sufficient enough to solve the Kurdish problem. The Kurdish existence in Turkey should be secured by law and not be taken away. (Interview 12)

[54] As Özbudun and Gençkaya states, Kurdish demands historically vary between "relatively modest ones such as the recognition of their separate cultural identity and the cultural rights… to the other extreme of regional autonomy, federation and even secession from Turkey" (2009: 25). Over the last years, however, the common demands raised by the Kurdish political and cultural elite, the pro-Kurdish parties, as well as the leader cadre of the PKK have greatly shifted to the moderate side. As Larrabee and Tol suggest, "the Kurdish struggle is increasingly being played out in the political rather than the military domain": the PKK renounced its conventional rhetoric and came rather to emphasize the cultural and identity dimension of the Kurdish cause, calling for a degree of autonomy rather than an independent Kurdish state (2011: 147-148). They further argue that the majority of Turkey's Kurds abandoned the idea of secession, not only because an independent Kurdish state has no international or regional support but also because Kurds are now geographically spread throughout Turkey, mostly living in large cities; Istanbul, with its two to five million Kurdish inhabitants, is the largest Kurdish city in Turkey (p. 148). Today, the major Kurdish demands include: redefinition of Turkish national identity in such a way as to allow the official recognition of Kurdish existence, identity and rights in Turkey, the complete removal of the restrictions on Kurdish cultural and political activities, introduction of public education in Kurdish, and the right to use the Kurdish alphabet -especially when giving Kurdish names to children-, the annulation of the 10 percent barrier for the parliamentary elections (that highly restricts the representation of pro-Kurdish parties in the parliament), general amnesty for the PKK members, and the cooperation of state authorities with pro-Kurdish parties and Öcalan for solving the Kurdish question.

Although it came to power with a promise of solving Turkey's Kurdish question by democratic means, similar to the preceding Turkish governments, the JDP, ignoring Kurdish demands and largely incorporating itself into the Turkish military and the state, has thus far brought no major policy changes that would contribute to the solution of the issue. The EU induced process of reforms on Kurdish cultural rights was severely interrupted following the mid-2000s, when Europe's support for Turkey's EU membership had declined remarkably (Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 110). Simultaneously, finding the government's efforts insufficient in fulfilling Kurdish demands, the PKK ended the ceasefire, which had been effective since Öcalan's arrest in 1999, and resumed its attacks on state and civilian targets in Turkey (p. 108). In 2006, the PKK was responsible for over six hundred deaths (p. 109). Revival of PKK attacks, together with the interruption of Turkey's EU accession process, directed the JDP towards taking a conventional Turkish nationalist stance. In 2008, for instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan famously stated that: "We said one nation, one flag, one country, one state. They objected to this. Those opposing this have no place in Turkey. They are free to leave." (Milliyet Daily 2008) As the PKK is known to conduct its attacks from its bases in the Quandil Mountains in northern Iraq, the JDP government swiftly authorized Turkish military operations in Iraq (Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 109). The government also enacted a highly controversial anti-terror law in June 2006, which enlarged the definition of terrorism, criminalized any act of support for the PKK and the Kurdish cause as an endangerment to the unity of the nation, and tightened security measures throughout Turkey and especially in the east and southeast regions (Duran 2008: 99).[55] Many pro-Kurdish party members, as well as journalists and scholars who are openly

[55] The law provides imprisonment for up to three years for making "propaganda" in terms of shouting slogans and carrying banners in support of terror groups, covering one's face during demonstrations, and wearing symbols or uniforms of outlawed groups (Turkish Daily News in Duran 2008: 103, footnote 13). Broadcasting the statements of terrorist organizations, or publishing the identities of public officials or informants involved in antiterrorist operations and activities also became punishable by one to three years of imprisonment (ibid).

sympathetic to Kurdish demands have been convicted or imprisoned under the anti-terror law. In addition, adopting the traditional "no negotiation with terrorist" discourse often utilized by the previous Turkish governments, the JDP largely ignored the call from the pro-Kurdish parties and the PKK for cooperation. In fact, as Öktem (2008a) states, the JDP has actively been supporting a politics of disengagement with the pro-Kurdish parties in its aim to replace their dominance in the predominantly Kurdish regions: the pro-Kurdish party municipalities have had to face with increased economic and political marginalization, and the pro-Kurdish party deputies and members have had to go through constant investigations (which often end up with their imprisonment) for collaborating with the PKK. Similarly, during an interview, vice co-president of the pro-Kurdish party, that is now called the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), indicated that both the political and economic marginalization of the BDP and the imprisonment of the party members for terrorism-related crimes increased drastically during the reign of the JDP government:

> The government's policies on Kurdish issue are nothing but Janus-faced. While the government authorities often highlight the importance of democracy and human rights at the international arena, they are constantly bringing more restrictions on Kurds to express themselves through democratic means. They have not only rejected all our calls to collaborate for the solution of the Kurdish problem, but also brought all kinds of economic and political restrictions on us. Every day, there is another investigation or a court case launched on one of our party members; we have never faced this much persecution and imprisonment since the 1980 Coup d'état… There are also economic restraints. Despite our representation in the parliament from 2007 onwards, our party cannot get any treasury grants from the state. Even the parties represented in the parliament with just three deputies had previously received enormous amounts of treasury grants. Realizing that we would be represented in the parliament, the JDP brought a seven percent barrier as a condition for any party to receive treasury grants in 2007. (Interview 35)

The JDP's unwillingness to provide an alternative to Turkey's conventional policies of denying, repressing and assimilating Kurdish identity, deepened the discontent among Kurds

against the JDP's policy. Prime Minister Erdoğan was faced with a massive Kurdish boycott during his visit to Diyarbakir before the 2009 municipal elections, and the city's public transportation and ninety percent of its shops were closed for the day to protest Erdoğan's visit (Larrabee and Tol 2011: 146-147). Indeed, the government's loss of Kurdish support came into view in the 2009 municipal elections, and the JDP was severely defeated by the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in the predominantly Kurdish regions (p. 147).

Overall, while the JDP government initiated some timid efforts for easing the restrictions against public manifestations of Kurdish culture, it has so far failed to develop an alternative to the Kemalist nationalist policies in promoting Turkishness as a unifying national identity marker. Instead, collaborating with the Kemalist military and the state structure, the government has quickly adopted the conventional nationalist discourse on the monolithic Turkish national identity (Duran 2008: 99), while any attempt of divergence from it came once again to be pronounced as a threat to the national integrity and security of the country. Scrutinizing the heritagization process of Nevruz, the next section provides further insight into the JDP's policy of nonrecognition towards Kurdish identity and culture by showing how Kurdish claims on Newroz have been totally suppressed and marginalized in an effort to promote and disseminate its Turkish version as the "accurate", "original" and "transnational" version of the festival both at a national and global level.

Heritagization of Nevruz as a "Genuine" Turkish Tradition

Similar to the Mevlevi Sema ceremony, Nevruz was declared as cultural heritage by the Turkish government in 2004 as part of the application for the UNESCO Masterpieces listing (interview 2). This time, however, the initial incentive for Nevruz's ICH nomination came from

the government of Iran, when the Iranian Culture Ministry got in touch with the TMCT's Research and Education Office for nominating the festival as the common heritage of the countries in the region. Subsequently, the government of Iran organized a "Coordinating Meeting of Countries Celebrating Nowrouz" in Tehran from 7-10 August 2004, in which the governments of Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan agreed to prepare a collective nomination file (Samadi Rendi 2008: 110). While a common dossier was submitted for the festival's inscription on the Masterpieces listing in 2005, it was rejected by UNESCO due to incomplete data, and Nevruz was ineligible for the UNESCO Masterpieces list (interview 2).

When the ICH Convention entered into force in 2006, the nominating state-parties decided to complete the candidature file and renominate the festival to be inscribed on the Representative List of ICH (Samadi Rendi 2008: 111). This time, the nomination process in Turkey was supervised by the ICH Department that was established in 2006 under the TMCT as the executive body of the ICH Convention in Turkey. The second "Coordinating Meeting of the Countries celebrating Nowrouz" was organized in Tehran from 25-27 August 2008, and a common nomination file was drafted by the representatives from nominating state-parties (Samadi Rendi 2008: 111). Accordingly, Nevruz was subscribed onto the ICH listing in the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee meeting for the Safeguarding of the ICH held in Abu Dhabi from the 28th of September to the 2nd October 2009.

Although the fourteen-paged nomination file is neither as comprehensive nor as descriptive as the candidature file of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony, it provides substantial information on the ways in which Kurdish customs, interests and values were explicitly left out

in the representation of the festival (UNESCO 2009). The nomination file describes the festival as,

> Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, Nevruz is celebrated on 21st of March, which is considered as New Year holiday and the beginning of Spring. There are various ceremonies, rituals, and cultural events held within every family and community. It enjoys traditional games, special cuisines, respect for nature, performances in music and dances, oral expressions and literature, handicrafts and painting masterpieces (in particular miniature arts). Values of peace and solidarity, reconciliation and neighbourhood, cultural diversity and tolerance, healthy life-style and renewal of living environment are promoted and transmitted from generation to generation during this cultural event. (P. 1)

The Kurdish name of the festival, Newroz, was not mentioned in the above description; while it was also not cited among the names attributed to the festival in Turkey, –i.e. the Ergenekon festival, New Day, Egg festival and Sultan Nevruz etc. (p. 2). The fact that Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey celebrate the festival extensively and that Newroz has been declared as the national holiday in Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, was also not stated in the nomination file. The file also remarks various myths attributed to the festival in the Indian, Iranian and Central Asian mythologies, and mentions the "famous 'Bozkurt' myth" (another name given to the Ergenekon myth) from Turkey (p. 2), yet nowhere in the document the Kurdish Kawa myth mentioned. Moreover, when the nomination file described the rituals performed during the Nevruz celebrations in Turkey, practices such as jumping over bonfire, and folkloric performances (p. 3), even the participation of high ranking officials in the public celebrations (p. 7), were cited among Turkey's Nevruz traditions, again without mentioning the Newroz traditions of Kurds. In fact, the file actually mentions the word "Kurd" only once when it describes the fire rituals in Iran: "There are some fire rituals at the Eve of Nowrouz/…among some groups such as Kurds and Zoroastrians." (p. 3). Overall, the Kurdish Newroz tradition is marginalized from the representation of the festival to such a level that someone who had no

prior knowledge of the festival would never have guessed the festival is celebrated extensively among Kurds. While such marginalization of the Newroz tradition is highly inconsistent with the community-based approach the ICH Convention has sought to introduce to the field of heritage management, it has gone surprisingly unnoticed by UNESCO.

In fact, Nevruz's nomination file clearly fails to satisfy the UNESCO criteria for inscribing cultural practices on the ICH list. The ICH Convention stipulates that "consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals" (UNESCO 2008: 11). While UNESCO decided to subscribe Nevruz onto the ICH list by claiming that such an inscription contributes to "mutual respect among cultures" (Decision 4.Com 13.03), it is hard to imagine that such an effect would occur when it is noticeably rejecting Kurdish Newroz tradition. Even though the festival's nomination file states "values of peace and solidarity, reconciliation…cultural diversity and tolerance" (UNESCO 2009:1) as identifying characteristics of the festival, it is also interesting to note that UNESCO did not take into consideration thousands of Kurds who have died, been tortured and/or imprisoned in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey during the Newroz celebrations, when inscribing the festival on the ICH list.

Equally important, UNESCO concluded that Nevruz's nomination satisfies the community-participation criteria for the ICH listing by stating that: "the nomination has been greeted with the enthusiastic support of local communities, cultural groups, academic institutions, practitioners and individuals concerned with the safeguarding of the element, and their consent has been obtained for the elaboration of the nomination" (Decision 4.Com 13.03).

The nomination file, however, includes letters of support signed by the ICH Expert Commission Members of the nominating countries. The nomination dossier explains this breach in protocol as a result of the difficulty of "obtaining consent on the part of the bearers" in a multinational territory, but assures that "the documentation campaigns…conducted to prepare the present Nomination File were based, primarily, upon the prior consent on the part of the bearers, in all of the nominating countries" (UNESCO 2009:9). The research I conducted, however, indicates that contrary to the Sema ceremony's ICH nomination process, where the opinions of the Mevlevi groups were largely incorporated into the overall proposal, the ICH Expert Commission and the TMCT neither contacted, nor sought the assent of any communities, organizations, or individual practitioners during the preparation of the nomination file of Nevruz. This includes respondents who are actively involved in organizing and celebrating Newroz, who mentioned that they were informed about this process from the media after the UNESCO declaration had actually happened. Under these circumstances, the question thus arises: how has the marginalization of the Kurdish Newroz tradition been justified during the festival's heritagization process in Turkey?

Denying Kurdish claims over the festival, the heritage-making of Nevruz provides no alternative to the official Nevruz policy that Turkey has been following from the 1990s onwards. During the interviews, stressing the national character of the festival and emphasizing its widespread practice by "all the people of Turkey", TMCT officers and ICH Expert Commission members strictly rejected the identification of the festival with Kurdish identity and culture- and, occasionally, without mentioning the words "Newroz" and "Kurd". A member of the ICH Expert Commission, for instance, explained the factors underlying the decision to approve Iran's proposal and contribute to the nomination process: "there is a deep-rooted Nevruz tradition in

Turkey; we thought it was significant to nominate a practice that reflects Turkey's whole national profile" (interview 3). When asked about the reasons behind attaining the consent of ICH expert commission members instead of practicing-communities during the nomination process, the respondent further explained:

> Nevruz is a practice that does *not belong to any locality* or *specific community* in Turkey. *All the people of Turkey are part of this tradition*. There over 40 thousand villages who organize various activities to welcome Nevruz. If you prioritize a *locality*, it would be neither real nor scientifically true... We discussed this problem of community representation in the UNESCO conference. It had been decided that if the tradition is being practiced by everyone in a given country, then all the country becomes the community. Since it is impossible to get the consent of the entire nation, we decided that in certain cases like this one, the ICH expert committee might represent the community. [Emph. added]

There was a mutual understanding between us as to what this emphasis on "locality" and "specific community" referred. When asked about their thoughts on the heritage declaration of the Nevruz festival, the Kurdish respondents, however, criticized the way the Turkish government employed such declaration to exclude Kurds from the process, and to claim the festival as its own. One of the respondents criticized the exclusionary nature of the declaration by stating that:

> I am not against the idea of heritage declaration of Newroz by UNESCO. What I am against is the exclusion of Kurds from the process, while registering the festival under the name of certain groups and nations. Before they declared Newroz as a Turkish festival, now they call it a Turkish cultural heritage… Both the government, who nominated the festival as a Turkish tradition and UNESCO that accepted it, are currently involved in the cultural genocide against the Kurdish civilization…How could Kurds participate in this process through myths, practices and meanings that does not belong to them? (Interview 12)

Another respondent reacted to the heritage declaration of Nevruz as a Turkish tradition by asking, "How could one turn his back to millions of people celebrating Newroz every year, and focus on marginalized celebrations practiced by fewer people in some villages? If you ask the

people of Turkey what they associate the festival with, I wonder how many will recall those practices." (Interview 36)

The research I conducted, however, indicates that, instead of the "quantity" of the participants, the "quality" of the celebrations was taken into the consideration during the heritagization process of Nevruz. When asked explicitly about the reasons for excluding Newroz tradition from the representation of the festival, the experts and relevant TMCT officials emphasized the "purely cultural" nature behind such reasoning. They further explained the Kurdish version as a distortion from the festival's initial meaning and highlighted the ways in which Newroz celebrations "do not follow the original tradition," "does not have the proper format," or else Kurds "ascribe inaccurate meanings" to the festival (Interviews 23, 15 and 20). When asked whether the ICH declaration of Nevruz would have an effect on easing the restrictions on the manifestation of Kurdish identity and culture, one of the TCMT officials replied furiously: "you should ask these questions to the politicians: our office deals firmly with cultural tasks and not with political projects!" (Interview 15) Hence, holding to a highly problematic and stark separation of culture and politics, the Newroz festivities were mentioned as "fake" and "ideological" celebrations for political ends that damage the initial meaning and purely cultural experience of the festival. While it goes without saying that the denial of Kurdish Newroz tradition is a political decision per se, the official version of the festival adopted by the Turkish state after the 1990s is specified as confirming to the "initial meaning of the tradition," hence to its "unpoliticized" and "appropriate" version. In this respect, the ICH declaration of Nevruz by UNESCO, adds to the validity of the official Turkish version of the festival. In short, the Kurds are once more invited to celebrate Nevruz in its "original" Turkish meaning, but this time as approved by UNESCO. In the words of a high-ranking TMCT official,

> I am not at liberty to express my thoughts due to my position, but let me say that we are not claiming Nevruz merely as the cultural heritage of Turks. It is the cultural heritage of all the Middle Eastern and the Central Asian people. It symbolizes the arrival of the spring season; its symbolic meaning is unity, solidarity and fertility. The UNESCO declaration proves this. We do not say that the Kurds should not celebrate Nevruz, but they should respect its tradition. This process shows that fake ideological meanings assigned to the festival for political ends are meant to fade away. (Interview 19)

As discussed in the previous chapters, the ICH Convention does not serve only as the acknowledgement of the universal value of certain cultural practices by a prestigious global institution. By assigning cultural practices to the UNESCO list, national governments also commit to their management and sustenance. While the Mevlevi Sema ceremony's candidature file for the UNESCO listing provided page-long descriptions of the negative impacts of Turkey's Kemalist secular policies on the loss of the Sema ceremony's religious significance, the Nevruz's nomination file did not provide any such information regarding the troubled history of the practice in Turkey. Moreover, contrary to the detailed action plan that aims to restore the religious significance of the Sema ceremony in line with community concerns, the Nevruz nomination file only mentions vague measures, most of which are not directly related to the safeguarding of the festival but to the ICH in general.[56]

As Yanık suggests, the TMCT "had and still has a very instrumental role in the 'invention' of the Nevruz tradition" in Turkey (2006: 296). Accordingly, when asked about why specific safeguarding measures were not cited in Nevruz's nomination file, one of the TMCT officials stated that the Turkish government has been taking necessary measures for the

[56] These measures include, creating inventories of the practices concerning the festival, launching a regional network among the ICH related research institutes and centers, establishing community learning centers for the preservation of living traditions, creating training manuals for students and teachers on the protection of the ICH and its integration to the school curricula, developing projects on capacity building among experts, and opening graduate programs on the management of the ICH (UNESCO 2009: 8).

safeguarding of Turkey's Nevruz tradition since the early 1990s (interview 15). At the same time, however, recognizing that official Nevruz celebrations have not achieved mass participation, respondents who were involved in the nomination process of Nevruz often mentioned the necessity to disseminate the tradition among the Turkish populace. Not unexpectedly, neither the prohibition of the festival for decades due to Turkey's nationalist policies, nor the recent advent of official Nevruz celebrations was mentioned as factors when discussing Nevruz's lack of popularity in Turkey. In fact, by adopting recent UNESCO discourse on the loss of the world's cultural diversity, Nevruz is represented as a practice forgotten among the Turkish populace due to the "inevitable" processes of modernization and social transformation. A high-ranking TMCT official further explains:

> Historically, Turks were one of the civilizations that celebrated Nevruz most vividly. It is one of the traditional Turkish values that fell into oblivion due to the process of *modernization*. This was not *a conscious politics*. [Emph. added] (Interview 19)

It is significant to see how this discursive shift towards safeguarding Nevruz as intangible heritage actually serves for disguising nationalist political motives behind the policies on the popularization of Nevruz tradition in Turkey; given that, such policies are justified as efforts to sustain an ancient Turkish tradition, other than as endeavors to deny the Kurdish claims over the festival. During interviews with TMCT officials and ICH Expert Commission members, dissemination of Nevruz traditions among the Turkish masses was hailed as fundamental in safeguarding the festival. One of the ICH Expert Commission members explained the measures to be taken on the safeguarding of Nevruz: "culture is a dynamic phenomenon: of course in today's conditions you cannot ask people to go to the countryside and do picnics; the important thing is to disseminate the Nevruz tradition through formal and informal education and awareness-raising projects" (interview 23). Another Commission Member highlighted the urgent

need to document Turkey's Nevruz customs in order to sustain the "genuine" features of the festival for future generations (interview 3). In addition to this, a TMCT official explained their long-term aim to withdraw the governments' provision from the celebrations, after ensuring that "the masses could celebrate Nevruz without government support" (interview 15).

TMCT officials further highlighted that the heritage declaration of Nevruz generated additional interest in the government's sustaining the festival. A high-ranking TMCT official mentioned that the government currently sponsors week-long activities as a package-program in all cities and towns that involve various events "for explaining and transmitting Nevruz tradition in its original manner and themes" (interview 19). These include academic seminars and panels on Turkey's Nevruz tradition, annual Nevruz marathons, concerts, receptions, exhibitions, and other social events. Nevruz souvenirs are prepared by the TMCT to be distributed in these nation-wide events. There are additional activities to disseminate the Nevruz tradition among the younger generations. Turkish customs on Nevruz are currently being taught as part of Turkey's public school curriculum, and the 21st of March is celebrated with various activities in public schools. Furthermore, the Ministry of National Education organizes nation-wide painting, essay, and poetry competitions among primary and secondary school children with a theme of "Nevruz in Turkish culture" and sends an annual notice to all public schools to encourage the widespread participation of students in these competitions.

Equally important, during interviews with the TMCT officers and ICH Expert Committee members, I was told that the ICH declaration of Nevruz paved the way for an ever-increasing dialogue between Turkey and the Turkic Republics. An ICH Expert Commission member, for instance, highlights the instrumental role the Nevruz's ICH declaration plays in strengthening the

relationships with the Turkic Republics, which he believes would eventually help erasing the domestic tensions over the festival in Turkey:

> UNESCO's decision proves that Nevruz is a very strong tradition, reaching a wide geography. We could do a lot of things on behalf of Nevruz: we can, for instance, eat a dinner just talking about different Nevruz practices with people from Turkic Republics. Hence, instead of focusing just on Turkey, we should consider Nevruz within a larger geography. I think this will help us to eliminate the domestic conflicts over the festival, and strengthen our relationship with the Turkic republics (interview 20).

It is significant to mention the role of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) in this process. Established in 1993 with an aim of providing co-operation among "Turkish-speaking countries," TURKSOY has been working together with the Turkish government in organizing the Nevruz celebrations in Turkey since 1995 (interview 22).[57] Not unexpectedly, Kurdish customs and activities relating to Newroz have been excluded from the event schedule. Deputy General Director of TURKSOY explains:

> We never got in touch with Kurdish groups of any kind during this process. As TURKSOY, we are not interested in the political aspect of Nevruz but we rather aim to highlight the cultural significance of the festival. Our aim is to transform Nevruz to a festivity celebrated by everyone in Turkey with joy and happiness; to welcome the spring season, the increase of sunlight and the end of difficult winter conditions. (Interview 22)

TURKSOY did not contribute directly to the subscription of Nevruz to the UNESCO ICH list. Deputy General Director of TURKSOY, however, indicated that the organization has raised special interest in safeguarding Turkic intangible heritage following the ICH declaration of Nevruz. TURKSOY has had three meetings with member states since 2008 to identify their shared cultural features and to prepare joint nominations on the UNESCO ICH list. He further

[57] TURKSOY's headquarters is located in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Its member states are the Republic Of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Uzbekistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, Altai Republic, Republic of Bashkortostan, Gagauzia (Moldova), Republic of Khakassia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Republic of Tatarstan, and Tyva Republic.

stated that following the ICH listing of Nevruz, TURKSOY organized several events in France and in the USA with the participation of various artists from Turkey and Turkic Republics to promote and popularize Nevruz at the international arena.[58] Turkey hosts the annual Nevruz celebrations jointly held by the TURKSOY member states on the week of 21st of March in Ankara. TURKSOY contributes greatly to the organization of these celebrations by planning the activities to be held, and the selection of folklore, dance, music, and theatre groups to be invited from Turkey and Turkic Republics to participate in the Nevruz celebrations (interview 22). These events are broadcast live on the Turkish state television channel TRT and are mentioned in the mainstream media as lively events with a mass audience. The research I conducted in the 2010 Nevruz celebrations, however, demonstrates the ways in which one-sided media can be deceptive.

On 21 March 2010, armed with my digital recorder and camera, I was in Ankara to partake in the official Nevruz celebrations organized by TURKSOY in collaboration with the Greater Municipality of Ankara, the TMCT, and the Governorship of Ankara at *Gençlik Park*. TRT Channel 1 was broadcasting an all-day long program called "Nevruz 2010". I was watching in my hotel room one of the ICH Expert Commission Members, whom I had interviewed a couple of days ago, live on TV explaining the significance of the ICH declaration of Nevruz by UNESCO "in proving how the festival does not belong to any locality." "This is the first time that the festival has been inherited by the whole world", as he further claimed, "three billion people on earth today celebrate Nevruz." It was Sunday, the weather was pleasant, and Gençlik Park, with its central location, was a popular destination for middle- and lower-middle class

[58] These events were held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and the Council of Europe's headquarters in Strasbourg in 2010; and at the UN General Assembly Hall in New York, New York City's Town Hall and Lincoln Theatre in Washington DC in 2011.

families of Ankara. In addition, the event would be broadcast live on TRT and extensive advertising had been done to inform the people of Ankara about the Nevruz festivity at Gençlik Park. Thinking that it might be difficult to find a suitable place within the expected crowd to view the spectacle, I left early to arrive at the park before 10.00 am, the official event starting time.

After being searched by police officers, I arrived at the festival site bedecked with Nevruz posters, balloons and Turkish flags to find that my concerns about the crowd were actually unfounded. The festival ground was separated by a stage on one side and a designated protocol area seating on the other. There was a crowd of people in the protocol area reserved for Turkish state officials as well as representatives from the Turkic Republics. Apart from hundreds of police officers, however, there was only a modest crowd of some three hundred surrounding the stage, mostly journalists and cameramen, as well as dance and music groups participating in the celebrations. There was also a crowd of children and their families in front of a building overlooking the festival area, waiting to receive free Nevruz gift-packs that included t-shirts and balloons (with "happy Nevruz" printed on them), Turkish flags, Nevruz coloring books, and dolls.

The program began around 11:00 am with the Turkish national anthem followed by protocol speeches. Prime Minister Erdoğan's Nevruz message that wished peace and solidarity among the nations celebrating Nevruz was read. The General Director of the TMCT's Research and Education Directorate, Mahmut Evkuran, gave a speech to report on the inscription of the festival on the UNESCO ICH listing: "Today Nevruz is a shared cultural value among twenty-two different countries", he said, "UNESCO accepted this reality, and officially declared Nevruz as the shared cultural heritage of humanity". His speech was followed by that of the State

Minister of Turkey, Faruk Celik, who offered a succinct summary of Turkey's official Nevruz policy:

> Being a significant part of our history and culture, Nevruz is celebrated with enthusiasm not only in our country, but all over the "Turkish" world, in the Balkans and in the Middle East. Nevruz is a strong and deep-seated bond that connects us with the millions of our relatives. Therefore, it should be the duty of each Turkish citizen to see the Nevruz festival as an opportunity for our society to unite, to celebrate it in its authentic form, and not to permit its abuse by some exploiters. Endeavor to transform a festival of joy and happiness into a separation element, into a political tool, is the greatest mistake that could be made against our country and nation.

Following the speeches, the event presenter invited the protocol members to carry out "traditional Turkish Nevruz customs". It took approximately ten minutes for the state officials to jump over a bonfire, work iron on anvil, and knock eggs together. The primary and secondary public school children who won nationwide essay and poetry contests on the theme of Nevruz received their awards from the protocol members. The number of spectators further decreased as the event progressed. Many chose to enjoy other park facilities rather than viewing the spectacle. The celebration ended with the performances by dance and music groups from the guest countries,[59] and I left the festival area with journalists, thinking that despite the government's substantial efforts, the masses still disfavor official Nevruz celebrations. In contrast to these official events, where the number of state officials, police officers, and journalists far exceeds the members of the audience, a typical Newroz festivity, however, still attracts thousands. The Newroz celebration that I participated in on 20 March 2011 in İzmir, the third largest city in Turkey, clearly indicates how these two celebrations differ substantially not only in their scale, but also in their meaning, content, and purpose.

[59] These countries were Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Republic of Bashkortostan, Gagauzia (Moldavia), Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Bulgaria

On a Sunday morning around 10.30 am, I arrived at İzmir's *Gündoğdu* Square, where Newroz celebrations were allowed to be held. Although permission for the event was given by the governorship just a day before, security measures had already been set up. The whole district, in fact, looked like a war zone. The square was encircled by police barricades and access to the festival ground was limited to a series of small gates surrounded by police officers doing body and personal possession searches (see figure 3). Turkish military forces with long-range rifles were situated on apartment rooftops overlooking the festival area. Surrounding streets were closed to traffic to accommodate the panzers and thousands of police officers waiting in the buses to intervene in case of conflict. About four thousand police officers were on duty to provide security during the Newroz celebrations in Izmir (Milliyet Ege Daily 2011). Despite these security measures, the festival area was packed with thousands of men, women and children of all ages, dressed with yellow, green, and red and wearing traditional Kurdish costumes. The square was full of clusters of people who were chanting slogans and making peace signs, dancing and singing songs in Kurdish language (see figure 4, 5 and 6). Many were waving flags with yellow, green and red colors and carrying placards that read "We will strengthen the fire of Kawa against all Dahaks", "Peace and Equality for the Kurdish Nation" or "Long-live the Fraternity of the Kurdish Nations."

Figure 3. Newroz 2011 in Izmir-1 (photo by author)

Figure 4. Newroz 2011 in Izmir-2 (photo by author)

Figure 5. Newroz 2011in Izmir-3 (photo by author)

Figure 6. Newroz 2011in Izmir-4 (photo by author)

Soon, loud Kurdish protest music -mostly revolutionary and nationalist anthems- came to fill the Square. As I do not know Kurdish, I could only pick up certain words like “PKK”, “Öcalan,” and “guerilla” among the lyrics. Everybody, including the elderly women and even the children, were participating in the songs. There were small groups of people lighting bonfires and jumping over them. Seeing that I was taking notes, a middle-aged man approached me. Without asking who I was or what I was doing there, he said: “One can neither choose their parents nor their nationality: we were born Kurdish, but we are not against Turks, we are just against the system.” Our talk was interrupted by the crowd protesting the passing police

helicopter by whistles and slogans. A young man standing next to me received applauses when he cried out furiously: “This is our day, leave us alone! Get out of here!” The event continued with a one-minute homage for the “Kurdish martyrs”. The audience then listened with silence to the voice recording that Rahşan Demirel left before she burned herself to death on a Newroz day in 1992 in İzmir to protest Kurdish repression in Turkey. Applauses, whistles, and slogans followed. When the crowd began shouting pro-Öcalan slogans, the event presenter warned the crowd not to “go beyond the suggested slogans.” He continued, “Today is Newroz, dance, have fun, and light the fire of Kawa against the tyrants!” Prominent Kurdish activists delivered speeches highlighting the significance of Newroz for the Kurdish cause, criticizing the government’s repressive Kurdish policy, and demanding the official recognition of Kurdish presence and legal acknowledgement of their political, cultural and civil rights in Turkey. These speeches were followed by Kurdish protest music concerts interrupted by slogans and cheers. Although the event continued until the evening, the security forces did not intervene.

While Newroz celebrations still keep their political overtones, today’s Newroz events are relatively less violent. As the above description illustrates, the celebrations, however, are not without restrictions. Newroz events are still held under tight surveillance by state authorities. The Newroz participants have to go through several security checks before they can access the festival areas (or the city centers in the predominantly Kurdish regions), and they are often shot with cameras from the military helicopters. Moreover, hundreds of people are still arrested each year in Newroz celebrations across Turkey. In Istanbul itself, twenty-nine people, some of whom were children, were detained after they opened an Öcalan poster in 2010 (CNNTURK News Portal 2010). Equally important, during interviews with Kurdish respondents I was often told about the ways in which Law 2911 on “Meetings and Demonstrations” still constitutes a

significant obstacle against the celebration of Newroz without restrictions in Turkey. These respondents often raised concerns over the ways in which state authorities have the final word on "if, where and when" the celebrations would be held. One of the Kurdish respondents provided an example from the celebrations in Diyarbakir:

> State authorities do everything to isolate the Newroz festival from the masses. For instance, the official Nevruz celebrations are being held at the Diyarbakir city center, while the celebration area assigned for Newroz is 20km outside of the city. We try to provide free bus services to the festival area. But it is impossible to transport hundreds of thousands of people. They, however, still manage to come. Many wake up around 5 a.m. in the morning and walk all the way to the area. The ones with cars often give free rides to the pedestrians. (Interview 35)

Indeed, despite these restrictions, the number of Newroz participants keeps growing each year. In 2010 about 100 thousand people celebrated Newroz alone in Istanbul, while 30 thousand police officers served during the celebrations in Istanbul (Zaman Daily 2010). Approximately 300 thousand people celebrated Newroz in Diyarbakir in 2011 (Sabah Daily 2011), while about 100 thousand people participated in the celebrations in Istanbul (Deliklitaş, Ezber, and Can 2011).

Overall, the above discussion clearly demonstrates that Turkey's endeavor to Turkify Newroz has been largely unsuccessful so far. Despite the heritagization of Nevruz as part of government attempts to justify and promote the validity of Nevruz as a genuine Turkish tradition, Newroz continues to be a powerful symbol of Kurdish identity and struggle in Turkey. One of the Kurdish respondents explains why Turkey's attempts to disassociate Kurds from Newroz have been unsuccessful thus far, through the Kurdish resistance to forced assimilation:

> I do not believe that these efforts to Turkify Newroz would eventually result in the abandonment of the Newroz tradition by Kurds. On the contrary, as long as Turkey's repressive assimilation policies against Kurdish identity and culture continue, Kurds will pour out into the streets on Newroz days to react against state oppression. But the heritage declaration of Newroz is still significant in demonstrating that we are moving towards more separation

> and isolation between Kurds and the Turkish government. I believe that if Turkey does not put an end to its policies of assimilation of Kurds into Turkish identity and guarantee Kurdish existence by law, it will be impossible for Turkey to solve its Kurdish problem. (Interview 38)

Conclusion:

The previous chapter discussed the critical impact of nationalist concerns on the selection and management of intangible heritage through the case of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony. The heritagization of Sema reveals the ways in which the JDP government favors a policy of recognition of Mevlevi religious identity and rights in line with its political agenda that emphasizes Sunni Islam as a unifying national element. Drawing on the case of Nevruz, however, this chapter demonstrates that heritage-making does not always allow for an inclusionary process that favors, acknowledges, or promotes marginalized cultural practices. This is because heritage-making might also serve the government's nationalist interests when it is employed to pursue a policy of nonrecognition; to deny and delegitimize marginalized groups' recognition claims in an effort to construct a unifying national identity.

The UNESCO declaration of Nevruz as Turkey's intangible heritage functions to legitimize and promote the validity of Nevruz as the "accurate" "original" and "transnational" version of the festival both at a national and global level. Equally important, it serves to disguise the nationalist motives behind the "Turkification" of Newroz. Claiming that the political overtones of the Newroz celebrations damages the "original meaning" and "purely cultural" experience of the festival, and employing the UNESCO discourse on the loss of the world's cultural diversity, the JDP government justifies its policies on the dissemination of Nevruz tradition in Turkey as an effort to sustain and revitalize an ancient Turkish tradition, other than as endeavors to suppress Kurdish claims on Newroz. Hence, unlike the heritagization of the Sema

ceremony, which shows the JDP government's support and promotion of Mevlevism as Turkey's common Islamic heritage, Nevruz's heritagization reaffirms the government's efforts to deny and suppress Kurdish identity. In this respect, the JDP government's Nevruz policy is congruent with Turkey's long-term efforts to assimilate Kurds into the "Turkish" national identity; and thus reveals the ways in which the JDP's nationalist stance shows no divergence from that of Kemalism on the promotion of Turkishness as Turkey's national identity marker.

ALEVI-BEKTA□ISM FROM A SUNNI OUTLOOK: THE CASE OF THE SEMAH RITUAL

Introduction

Semah is a religious ritual conducted exclusively by Turkey's Alevi-Bektaşi population.[60] Having a "quite autonomous interpretation of the fundamentals of Islam" (Vorhoff 2003: 94) and distinct religious principles and practices, Alevi-Bektaşis can best be described as a heterodox Islamic community. Their central religious service is a sacred gathering ceremony called *Ayin-i Cem* (henceforth the Cem ceremony) that is usually held weekly on Thursday evenings. Instead of practicing the five-time daily prayer *Namaz* for worshiping God, Alevi-Bektaşi adherents instead perform the Cem ceremony for the purpose of "attaining religious fulfillment" and showing loyalty to Hacı Bektaş Veli, and the twelve Imams (Shankland 2004: 40).[61] Traditionally, the Semah ritual constitutes a part of the Cem ceremony, and is practiced as a sacred "ritual movement system," other than as a "separate dance event" (Öztürkmen 2005: 252).

[60] I am following Elizabeth Özdalga (1998) in my use of the term "Alevi-Bektaşi" when referring to both the Alevis and Bektaşis (unless I mention their differences or quote others). Her reasons are based on the fact that Alevism and Bektaşism belong to the same religious tradition; as she states "although Alevis and Bektaşis, upon a closer examination, cannot be treated as one and the same, the fact that these orders often shared the same fate and beliefs justifies grouping them together" (1998: 23, footnote 6). Traditionally, one of the most pronounced differences between the two traditions is that while anyone could become Bektaşi, one has to born into an Alevi family in order to be considered as one. However, both Alevism and Bektaşism originated from the same source, the doctrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli, a Sufi saint who lived in Anatolia in the 13th century (Mélikoff 1998: 9). Sharing the same belief system, their differences have been mostly social in character (Mélikoff 2009: 25). Historically, Bektaşis were educated urban elites who followed the Bektaşi Sufi order representing the organized and institutionalized form of the belief, while Alevis were semi-nomadic rural communities and tribes concentrated in central Anatolia (Mélikoff 1998: 9). Many Alevis, however, also followed the Bektaşi order. The difference between Alevis and Bektaşis have come to be less pronounced, especially since 1960s, when Alevis migrated to the cities (Massicard 2007: 56). Currently, "Alevi" is often used as an umbrella term in general public discourse in Turkey and in the related literature, when referring both to Alevis and Bektaşis.

[61] The twelve Imams are the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed (Ali, Hassan, Hüseyin and his nine other descendants). Like Shia Muslims, Alevi-Bektaşis also believe that the twelve Imams are the spiritual successors of Mohammed.

The ritual is performed to the accompaniment of the chanting of religious songs and the music made by *saz* (long-necked lute).

Up until the 1960s (a time characterized by large scale rural-to-urban migration of Turkey's Alevis), the specifics of the Semah ritual were unknown to non-community members. Due to the Sunni oppression that they faced under the Ottoman rule, Alevi-Bektaşis performed their religious rituals in absolute secrecy for centuries. While their support for the Kemalist reforms in the early Republican era is highly debatable (Massicard 2007), Alevi-Bektaşis came to have a relatively less troubled relationship with the central authority after the foundation of the secular Turkish Republic (Özdalga 1998). Nonetheless, under the Kemalist rule that promoted a new national identity based on the unity of secular Muslim-Turks, the nonrecognition of their distinct religious identity "has been the price they had to pay for being accepted as a legitimate part of the nation" (Dressler 2010: 126). As Sökefeld puts it, "even today, Alevis continue to lack any kind of formal and collective recognition as Alevis in Turkey" (2008a: 270).

Tambar suggests that when Semah finally gained public visibility in the 1960s, "this very visibility has been justified, legitimated, and sanctioned by discourses that re-inscribe a unitary vision of the nation" (2010: 658). In other words, "the category of folklore provided a legitimate avenue of public recognition" for the Semah ritual (p. 668). Alevi-Bektaşis began to show a growing concern about the adverse impact of folkloric representations of Semah on the ritual's sacred content and spiritual purpose following the revival of "Alevism" as a religious movement in the 1990s. The movement became largely successful in revitalizing the religious performance of Semah among the Alevi-Bektaşi community.

Many Alevi-Bektaşis organized around voluntary organizations to react against the rise of political Islam in the 1990s. Indeed, with "the embrace of Sunni Islam" by the Turkish government following the 1980s (Van Bruinessen 1996: 8), Alevi-Bektaşis have increasingly been subject to state-enforced policies seeking their assimilation into the Sunni Muslim majority. This chapter is an attempt to show that despite its claims to stand at an equal distance from all religions, the JDP government's "Alevi policy" is no exception to this. In fact, many Alevi-Bektaşis claim that they experience further restrictions due to the growing dominance of Sunni Islam in Turkey under the JDP rule. Alevi-Bektaşi organizations have held a series of demonstrations across Turkey with tens of thousands of people, opposing the government and demanding their official recognition as a distinct Islamic sect as a condition of their acceptance as equal citizens of Turkey. Nonetheless, arguing that the recognition of sectarian differences within Islam would damage Turkey's Muslim unity, the JDP government rejects the distinct religious identity of Alevi-Bektaşis. Instead, consistent with its nationalist political agenda, the government favors (mis)recognizing Alevi-Bektaşism as a Sufi tradition, i.e., as a subdivision of Sunni Islam.

The Semah ritual was inscribed onto the UNESCO ICH list, in the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee Meeting for the Safeguarding of the ICH held in Nairobi on 15-19 November 2010. This chapter discusses the JDP government's policies on the heritagization of Semah as part of its nationalist efforts to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşism into the unifying Sunni identity. Despite the UNESCO documents that claim the full-support of the community to the heritagization of Semah, my research reveals that it is neither welcomed nor supported by the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşi representatives, who claim that their ideas on the definition and management of Semah are manipulated and distorted during the process. Claiming that Semah

constitutes a crucial component of their worship (just like Namaz is for the Sunnis), they oppose the government's Semah policy for intentionally and systematically misrepresenting the ritual's religious significance for Alevi-Bektaşis by labeling Semah as a Sufi tradition within Sunni Islam, rather than as a religious ritual of a distinct Islamic sect.

After introducing the Alevi-Bektaşi religious tradition and the Semah ritual, I discuss the impact of the early Kemalist policies on the Alevi-Bektaşi religious identity and traditions; then, I relate this to the redefinition of the Semah ritual as an element of Turkish national culture in the 1960s. I proceed by discussing the return of Alevi-Bektaşis to religion following the 1990s and how it paved the way for Alevi-Bektaşi community's readaptation of their religious traditions, including the Semah ritual. Subsequently, examining the JDP government's response to the demands raised collectively by Alevi-Bektaşis for recognition of their religious difference, I discuss how the government interprets Alevi-Bektaşism from an exclusively Sunni outlook. I conclude by discussing the government's policies on the heritagization of the Sema ceremony, and how these policies contribute to its efforts to "Sunnify" Alevi-Bektaşis.

A Brief Note on the Alevi-Bektaşi Tradition

Similar to the Shias in Iran and the Nusayri Alevis in Syria, Turkey's Alevi-Bektaşi community displays strong religious devotion to the fourth Caliph Ali, son-in-law and the cousin of the Prophet Muhammed.[62] The Alevi-Bektaşis, however, constitute a distinct Islamic group

[62] The exact number of Alevi-Bektaşis in Turkey is unknown as the Turkish national census does not record sectarian differences among Turkey's Muslim population (Tambar 2010: 654). In the literature, the population estimations of Alevi-Bektaşis in Turkey ranges from 10 to 30 percent of Turkey's total population; however, Shankland argues that, they are "unlikely to be over 20 per cent, and perhaps nearer to 15 per cent" (2003:20). This makes Alevi-Bektaşis the second largest religious group after the Sunni majority in Turkey. Turkey also has a minority of Azerbaijani speaking Alevis in the East of Turkey whose beliefs and rituals resemble more to that of modern Iran, and a minority of Arabic speaking Alevi communities that compare closely with the Nusayri Alevis of

with heterodox religious identity, belief and rituals. The Alevi-Bektaşi adherents pay homage to their patron saint, Hacı Bektaş Veli.[63] While the doctrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli started to spread in Anatolia among the Turkmen tribes and the Ottoman army from the 14th century (Ocak 1996b: 233), Alevi-Bektaşism as it is known today, emerged in the 16th century when it blended with Shiaism owing to the rise of Safawid propaganda in Anatolia (p. 238).

The Alevi-Bektaşi belief system differs from both the Sunni and Shia Islam in manifold ways. As Ocak suggests, following a quite unmethodical and deeply mystical Islamic theology with traces from Shamanism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Shiaism, their belief system could be defined as syncretic Islam (1996b: 246-249). The Alevi-Bektaşis submit to a traditional set of moral rules and principles and "claim to live according to the inner (*batin*) meaning of religion rather than its external (*zahir*) demands" (Van Bruinessen 1996: 7). They do not usually attend mosque services or follow the five pillars of Islam, the essential requirements of the Islamic belief as accepted both by the Sunnis and Shias. The majority of Alevi-Bektaşis does not practice Namaz, fast, or give *Zekat* (alms) during Ramadan,[64] or make pilgrimage to Mecca. In contrast to Sunnis and Shias who follow the guidance of the *Imam* as their religious leader, Alevis follow

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Syria (Van Bruinessen 1996: 7). Around 3 to 4 million Alevis are also of Kurdish origin (Nigogosian 1996: 44). Whether Kurdish Alevis define themselves through religious or ethnic lines is a matter for debate. For more on Kurdish Alevis, see Shankland 2003 and Van Bruinessen 1997.

[63] The biography of Hacı Bektaş Veli is mostly based on a historical work called *Vel□yetn□me*, which was written at least two hundred years after his death and carries significant historical errors and contradictory information on his life (Ocak 1996b: 230-231).

[64] Alevi-Bektaşis fast for twelve days during the month of Muharrem to moan for the death of Hüseyin and his followers in the battle of Kerbala. During this period, festivities are limited and instruments are kept silent (Markoff 1993: 102).

the leadership of the *Dede*, while Bektaşis follow that of the *Baba.*[65] Whereas Sunnis and Shias worship in Arabic, Alevi-Bektaşis worship in Turkish.

The Ottoman Empire had a pronounced Sunni character from the beginning. The nomadic Turkmen tribes of Anatolia who followed a heterodox Islamic faith, however, had a relatively unproblematic relationship with the central Ottoman authority in the early years of the Empire (Ocak 1996b: 267). This situation has changed considerably from the 16th century, when these Turkmen tribes were influenced by the Shia Safawid movement and allied with Shah Ismail in the rivalry between the Sunni Ottoman and Shia Safawid Dynasty (Zürcher and Van der Linden 2004:123-124). It was during this period that these Turkmen tribes appeared in the Ottoman documents as *Kızılbaş* (redhead), who were declared rebellious heretics to be executed whenever apprehended (see Imber 1979).[66] The massacres of Kızılbaş communities by the Ottomans became even more systematic following the end of the rivalry in favor of the Ottoman Empire (Massicard 2007: 33). Having been secluded from their center in Iran, Kızılbaş communities managed to survive by withdrawing to remote rural areas and practicing *taqiya* (religious dissimulation), pretending to be Sunnis whenever they had contact with outsiders (Zeidan 1999: 76).

Bektaşis enjoyed relative tolerance and acceptance under the Ottoman rule compared to their Kızılbaş counterparts. Having found support among the professional and elite Ottoman

[65] The duties of Alevi and the Bektaşi spiritual leaders are quite similar, involving conducting traditional religious services, directing religious ceremonies and mediating social problems among community members. While Alevis believe that Dedes hold spiritual powers due to their decent from the holly lineage of the Prophet Muhammed through the twelve Imams, the Bektaşis reject such hereditary leadership, and determine their spiritual leaders by election (Camuroğlu 1998: 82-83).

[66] Mélikoff explains that the term Kızılbaş emerged in the 15th century at the time of Sheikh Haydar (the father of Shah Ismail) as the name of the Safawid supporters wearing red headgear and came to have a bad reputation in the Ottoman Empire, with connotations of rebelliousness and being an infidel (2009: 52). In fact the term Alevi, which literally means the followers of Ali, is a recent invention that emerged in the 19th century (p. 51).

army of Janissaries, Bektaşism was institutionalized into a heterodox Sufi order in the early 16th century during the reign of Sultan Bayazıd II (Küçük 2002: 20). Massicard mentions the role that Kızılbaş revolts might have played in the support the Bektaşis received from the Ottoman authorities during this period; by supporting Bektaşism, the authorities might have aimed at controlling rebellious Shia-influenced Kızılbaş communities by integrating them into the relatively conventional and centralized Bektaşi belief (2007: 34). At the same time, however, increased affiliation of Kızılbaş communities with Bektaşism led to further unorthodoxication of Bektaşism owing to the introduction of Shia elements into the doctrine (p. 34-35).[67] Nevertheless, the Bektaşi order remained robust as an official doctrine of the Janissaries and spread out across the Empire, especially in Anatolia and the Balkans.

This situation radically changed in 1826, when the Janissary army was abolished and then replaced with a modern army by Sultan Mahmud II. The Bektaşi order, as a result, was officially proscribed, its adherents were vastly executed, and all the Bektaşi lodges (except the ones that were given over to the Nakşibendi order, -such as the main Bektaşi lodge in Haci Bektaş) were closed down (Özdalga 1998: 24). The Bektaşi order, although legally banned, still functioned unofficially under the Nakşibendi authority until the resolution of the Ottoman Empire. As Küçük (2003) states, the Bektaşi order's activities resumed about thirty years after the ban. While the Nakşibendi Sheikhs functioned as the official head of the Bektaşi lodges, their purpose, more symbolic than practical, merely limited to maintaining the communication with the Ottoman authorities (p. 210).

[67] The Kızılbaş influence on Bektaşism led to the reorganization of Bektaşism into a dual structure (Massicard 2007: 35) of *yol evladı* (children of the path) and *bel evladı* (natural descendants). Claiming that Hacı Bektaş Veli had no children, *yol evladı* followed the *Baba* as their spiritual leader, and accepted voluntary membership to the order, while believing Hacı Bektaş Veli actually had children, *bel evladı* followed the spiritual leadership of the *Çelebi*, as the direct descendant of Hacı Bektaş Veli (Norton 1983: 74-75). From the 16th century onwards, the Bektaşi lodges accommodated both the Çelebi and Baba (p.75). While the urban Bektaşi population mostly accepted the authority of the Baba, village groups mostly accepted the authority of the Çelebis (ibid).

Despite their noncompliance with the orthodox interpretation of Islam, unique religious traditions of Alevi-Bektaşis have survived for centuries through their conduct in strict isolation and secrecy. One example is the Cem ceremony, the central religious service of Alevi-Bektaşis. The Cem ceremony sharply differs from other Muslim worship rituals by the occasional consumption of alcohol during the ceremony and its conduct in the accompaniment of music and dancing by both men and women, who are called concomitantly as *can* (soul). These aspects of the ceremony led the Alevi-Bektaşis to be subject to insulting rumors from the Ottoman times onwards, -the most notorious rumor being that they practice *mum söndü* (candle extinguish) during the Cem ceremony which implies that they put out the candles and partake in sexual orgies, even in incest (Soileau 2005: 98).

Traditionally, the Cem ceremony took place in the Bektaşi lodges or in the largest house of the Alevi village, although it came to be organized from the 1990s in the new urban Alevi-Bektaşi gathering places called *Cemevi* (gathering house). Not having a fixed length, a typical Cem ceremony might last up to four or five hours (Shankland 2004: 40). The ceremony is performed in the Turkish language, and its enactment involves the conduct of twelve duties by the twelve assistants of the Cem in the direction of the spiritual leader.[68] In addition to its practice as a form of worship to God, the ceremony also functions as an instrument of judicial decision to solve intra-community problems and disagreements under the supervision of the

[68]Fuat Bozkurt explains the twelve services of the Cem ceremony (2007: 32-35). The spiritual leader and his assistant, *Rehber* (guide) fulfill the first two services by directing the ritual. The *Cerağcı* (light keeper) accomplishes another service by managing the light, the *sazcı* (saz player) by playing the saz and singing religious songs, the *süpürgeci* (sweeper) by symbolically cleaning the ritual space in front of the dede and the *gözcü* (watch-keeper) by ensuring the order of the ceremony. *Dolucu* distributes the traditional alcoholic drink, *İznikçi* provides the security of the village during the ceremony, and the *Kapıcı* (gatekeeper) guards the entrance door, not letting foreigners in. *Kurbancı* cooks the sacred meat and prepares the sacred dish "lokma," *Kuyucu* buries the left-overs of the sacrificed animal, and finally the *Selman* distributes the sacred water to the participants at the end of the ceremony. It is believed that if these services are not properly held, what is to be eaten and drunk after the ceremony would be ill-gotten (p. 32).

spiritual leader (see Shankland 1993: 55-58). A community member might be categorized as *düşkün* (fallen), if she/he is found guilty of a serious crime. The düşkün might be forbidden to take part in the religious ceremonies, excluded from daily social interaction, or prohibited to work with other community members in daily tasks; in extreme situations (such as when düşkün is found guilty of murder, theft or adultery) he/she is excommunicated from the village (Shankland 1993: 57). Although showing some variance, a typical Cem ceremony also involves lectures on the Alevi-Bektaşi belief and rituals, recitations from the Quran, narrations of religious stories, and invocations called *gülbank*, chanting of religious songs called *nefes*, and performance of the ritual dance of Semah.

Figure 7: Semah Ritual conducted by the Semah performance group of Hacı Bektaş town in December 2010 (photo by author)

While the exact origin of the Semah ritual is unknown, some literature traces it back to the pre-Islamic rituals of the Central Asian Turkic tribes (Bozkurt 2007; Erseven 1996). Many Alevi-Bektaşis, however, believe Semah to have originated from the *Kırklar Semahı* (Semah of

the Forty) in the time of the Prophet Muhammed.[69] While the Semah of Forty is the most widely practiced form of Semah today, the Semah performances also show regional differences in terms of the choreography, number of performers and religious songs that are chanted.[70]

While the Mevlevi Sema ceremony and Alevi-Bektaşi Semah ritual are occasionally confused with each other due to the resemblance of their names and the similarity of their spiritual content,[71] there are structural differences between the two in terms of their choreography, dance figures, and body postures, as well as their ethical codes and rules of conduct. One of the unique aspects of Semah is its performance by both women and men together, in contrast to the public conduct of Sema by men and its private performance by women. Traditionally, both the performances of Sema and Semah were restricted to outsiders; Sema, however, was performed as a public ritual open to the inspection of non-Mevlevis, while Semah remained as a secret dance, strictly forbidden to be seen by non-community members. The Semah performers did not receive a particular training on how to turn Semah as in the case of Sema but rather learned it on-site watching older generations performing it during the Cem ceremonies. Both Sema and Semah performers whirl in a circular form avoiding bodily contact (see figure 7). However, the Sema is performed spinning on one feet autonomously by holding

[69] Öztürkmen narrates the story of the origin of Semah of the Forty: "the Prophet Mohammed visits a group of thirty-nine people who were indifferent to his newly rising Islamic thought. At the meeting they offered the Prophet a grape and told him to divide it into forty equal parts. When he said that it is not possible, one of them squeezed the grape and offered one drop to each. All of them were so moved by this event that they all began whirling, including the Prophet himself, who then decided that these people are true saints. The *semahs* are therefore believed to be derived from this original whirling of the forty people… and they are believed to have been modified in various ways depending on regional differences…" (2005: 252)

[70] For the detailed description and characteristics of various Semah forms, see Bozkurt 2007: 37-115, who discusses around thirty different forms of Semah performed in Turkey at present.

[71] Both the Sema and Semah are rituals practiced for the purpose of religious worship. The terms Semah and Sema drive from the same root (Bozkurt 2007:2). However, the person who performs Semah is called *Semahçı*, while the act itself is called *Semah dönmek* (turning Semah); in contrast to the use of the term *Semazen* for the Sema performer and *Sema etmek* (making Sema) as the name of the performance.

both arms horizontally and motionless in the air, while the Semah performers move together with synchronized steps in a line or in a circle facing each other and moving their arms up and down (Bozkurt 2007: 12).

The conduct of the Semah ritual is usually composed of three consecutive parts; it begins with the *ağırlama* that involves slow motion arm and walking movements, continues with the *yeldirme* performed with faster steps and arm figures (said to imitate the flying birds), and is finally followed by the *hızlanma* (not always performed), which is composed of more complex and intense figures (Markoff 1993: 105-106). In addition to the particular body gestures, the conduct of Semah should also follow certain moral codes and rules expressive of its religious significance. Markoff explains:

> The gözcü [watch-keeper], one of the twelve assistants of the dede during the ceremony, has the responsibility of choosing sema[h] performers and monitoring their movements as they dance. Once he has made his decision, he motions to various men and women with a subtle gesture or touches them with a sacred stick known as *tarik* or *dayak*.…the selected individuals make their way to the central area in the room in order to make the ritual *niyaz* (bowing, prostration to the religious leader that can include kissing him on both knees, on the chest, or the floor in front of him) to the dede. The dede gives his blessings and recites a prayer (*dua*) in which he asks for a blessing from Allah, Muhammad, the twelve Alid imams, and Hacı Bektaş, for all the members of the community…Once the musicians begin to play, the dancers, who can number from one to sixteen or more, acknowledge one another with dignified and respectful bows or symbolic embraces…During this time, the audience observes in silence, sometimes swaying from side to side in response to the rhythm and sensual appeal of the music. (1993: 105)

The aforementioned specifics of the Semah ritual had been practically unknown to the outsiders until the 1960s, owing to its performance strictly as part of the secret Cem ceremony. The second chapter has discussed the dramatic and abrupt impact of the Kemalist secularization policies on the sustainability of the Sema ceremony. Sema is a public practice by tradition,

whose preparation and exercise heavily relies on the institutionalized structure of the Mevlevi order. The Semah ritual, on the other hand, was traditionally conducted in privacy and in the absence of an external public audience. Additionally, its performance required neither an institutionalized training nor a special spatial setting. These aspects of Semah enabled the Alevi-Bektaşis to practice the ritual relatively free from state intervention in the initial years of the Republic. This is, however, not to say that Kemalist nationalist policies had no impact on the Alevi-Bektaşi community. The Bektaşi order was not exempt from the ban on Sufi orders. Moreover, the institutionalization of the "Kemalist ideal of ethnic and religious unity" in the new Republic led to the nonrecognition of their distinct religious identity (Dressler 2010: 126). This prepared the ground for state-enforced policies to integrate Alevi-Bektaşism into the Turkish national culture, and then, with the rise of political Islam in Turkey after the 1980s, into the Sunni Islamic one.

Kemalist Nationalism and the Alevi-Bektaşis in the Early Republican Period

The Alevi-Bektaşis' relationship with the Turkish state is a matter for debate in the related literature. While some Alevi-Bektaşi groups sided with Mustafa Kemal during the War of Independence, it would still be misguided to assume their overall support, as many rather chose to ally with the opposing forces.[72] Much scholarship, however, assumes their prevalent support to Turkey's Kemalist tradition and to its secular principles from the early years of the Republic

[72] During the War of Independence Mustafa Kemal approached Alevi-Bektaşis in search for support: he exchanged letters with the Alevi-Bektaşi leaders, and even visited the main Bektaşi lodge in Hacı Bektaş town in December 1919 and stayed there for a night (Küçük 2003: 128).Van Bruinessen, however, states that the Alevis' "participation in the War of Independence… was at best half-hearted" (1997:10). The Koçgiri Rebel organized by the *Kurdistan Teali Cemiyeti (*Society for the Elevation of Kurdistan) in 1920 was supported by both the Kurdish and Turkish speaking Alevis (Dersimi in Van Bruinessen, 1997: 10). In addition, Küçük indicates that some Bektaşis based in Istanbul supported the Ottoman government against Mustafa Kemal (2003: 200). For more information on the attitude of Alevi-Bektaşis during the Independence War, see Küçük 2003; Massicard 2007: 48-52.

(e.g., Shankland 2003; Özdalga 2008; Zeidan 1999). It is true that after suffering years of harsh discrimination as heretics under the Ottoman authority, the new administration's emphasis on creating a modern Turkish nation appealed to some Alevi-Bektaşis (Özdalga 1998: 24). Massicard, however, suggests that the resonance of the Kemalist ideals among the Alevi-Bektaşis is a phenomenon that has developed gradually after the 1960s, and only came to the fore with the rise of political Islam in Turkey after the 1980s (2007: 48).

Having been neither particularly supported nor privileged by the Kemalist regime, the Alevi-Bektaşis have also been given no special concessions after the foundation of the Turkish Republic. They were, in other words, expected to be integrated into the emerging homogeneous national sum, at the expense of abandoning their distinct religious identity (Zırh 2008: 111). The previous chapters have examined how the Kemalist nation-building project promoted a secular Muslim-Turkish identity model for the creation of a homogeneous national citizenry. Granting official minority status only to Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities, Turkey uniformly labeled all other elements as "generically *Türk* or, likewise, Muslim" in regards to citizenship (Shankland 2003: 159). Furthermore, claims of divergence from such a unitary model were perceived as a danger to the existence of the Turkish state and thus remained repressed (Dressler 2010: 126). As a result, the majority of Alevi-Bektaşis came to stress their Turkishness to form legitimate links with the Kemalist state (Shankland 2003: 19-20). Turkey's neglect of sectarian differences within Islam, however, led to the official classification of the community within the broad Muslim category and eliminated the possibility of their recognition as a distinct religious group (Tambar 2010: 654).

Secularization of public life had been an integral component of the Kemalist modern nation-building project. The Kemalist regime proscribed and criminalized all Islamic activities

that it saw as a danger to its authority. The second chapter discussed the ways in which the Sheikh-Said revolt (1925) set the ground for the ban on Sufi orders. Soon after the suppression of the revolt, the Sufi orders were declared as reactionary and anti-secularist institutions against the modern Kemalist ideals. Accordingly, the regime enacted the infamous Legal Code 677 in 1925 that closed down all the Sufi lodges and criminalized all Sufi activities. Even though, as a heterodox doctrine, the Bektaşi order radically differed from Turkey's other Sufi orders subscribed to Sunni Islam, it was not exempt from the ban on Sufi orders. The Bektaşi lodges were shut down, and all public and institutional activities of the order became illegal after 1925.[73]

Although Sufi activities were eliminated from Turkey's public sphere, the Turkish state "chose from the outset not to withdraw from the field of religion entirely" (Shankland 2003: 14). Kemalism reinforced the state's direct involvement in religious matters to minimize the role of religion in Turkey's social and political life. To this end, instead of defending a secularism that was built upon the notion of the separation of the domains of religion and state, Kemalism supported the regulation of public manifestations of the former by the latter. It was during this period that compulsory religious education was excluded from the public school curricula, calls to prayer came to be conducted in Turkish, and Muslim pilgrimage was banned. Placing religion under the control of the state not only served for the restructuring of Islam along with the Kemalist ideals and principles,[74] it also paradoxically institutionalized Sunni Islam as the state

[73] It is significant to note that unlike Mevlevis, Alevi-Bektaşis could not secure any concessions from the government in the one party period. While the Konya Mevlevi lodge was opened as a museum in 1927 (after a direct demand from Mustafa Kemal), the Hacı Bektaş lodge was converted into a Faculty of Agriculture, and the lodge's properties were given to the use of the state museums and public libraries (Küçük 2003: 193). The decree to convert the lodge into a museum was released years after Mustafa Kemal's death in 1960 (p. 206).

[74] As Özdalga states, in an effort to reform and modernize religion in the early republican period in line with the Kemalist principles, the government created a commission "to purify, simplify and intellectualize the mosque

religion in Turkey. The Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) was founded by the Kemalist regime in 1924 as a state institution to manage and regulate Islamic religious services throughout Turkey. Moreover, following the ban on Sufi orders, mosques became the only legitimate public institution for Muslim worship. Mosque expenses were paid by the state, and its personnel served as state officers. The regime also founded public Imam-Hatip Schools, which trained those who delivered sermons and led prayers and would be employed in mosques and other state-sponsored religious institutions. Adopting an exclusively Sunni understanding of Islam, these state institutions, however, denied all other Islamic interpretations including those of the Alevi-Bektaşis. In a way, being Muslim came to stand for being Sunni Muslim in the Turkish national context.

Neither the ban on the Bektaşi order nor the institutionalization of Sunni Islam by the state generated collective public opposition from the Alevi-Bektaşis. While the ban on Sufi orders technically prohibited Alevism as well (the title of Dede, for instance, was also banned under Legal Code 677), having minimum contact with the central state authority, many Alevi communities continued to practice their religious traditions in isolated villages during the early Republican period (Shankland 2003: 28). The impact of Kemalist nationalist policies on the urban Bektaşis was relatively more pronounced. After the abolition of the Bektaşi order, some prominent Bektaşis went to Albania, and continued their activities there. The Bektaşi order remained strong in Albania in the 1930s, having between 150,000 and 200,000 followers (Rregullore e Bektashijvet Shqiptare in Birge 1991: 100). Many others, on the other hand, chose to stay in Turkey and tried to adapt to the new regime. Küçük argues that some Bektaşis tried to console themselves by claiming the compliance of fundamental principles of Bektaşism with

services" and found state institutions to train theologians who would preach "in an enlightened and intellectual atmosphere" (1998: 21).

Kemalism, and praised Kemalist reforms for freeing the Turkish populace from religious domination and for providing individual freedom and rights (2003: 195-196).

The self-identification of the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşis as Turkish allowed for their positive public perception in the early Republican period.[75] The secular principles of the Republic led to the promotion of Turkishness rather than Sunni-Islam as the "dominant national identifier" (Shankland 2003: 20). With an aim of disassociating secular Turkey from its Ottoman roots, the regime emphasized "the pre-Islamic, Turkish roots of the nation" (p. 156). This allowed for the legitimization of Alevi-Bektaşism as a reminiscent of pre-Islamic Turkish culture, and thus as an alternative to the Ottoman religious tradition, which was claimed as reactionary and non-Turkish (Massicard 2007: 44). The Alevi-Bektaşis' conduct of religious rituals in Turkish, their closely knit community structure, and even their practice of endogamy came to be perceived positively, as efforts to preserve Turkish civilization and culture. For instance, an article published in 1926 in the journal *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Land), official publication of the state-sponsored nationalist association called Turkish Hearts, maintained that the Alevi-Bektaşi way of life contributed greatly to the Turkish national ideals in protecting the Turkish language, race, and blood (Sait in Birge 1991:14).

As Massicard suggests, Alevi-Bektaşism was in fact subjected to a policy of selective re-appropriation following the foundation of the Turkish Republic: while some of its religious

[75] The Kemalist promotion of a homogeneous Turkish-Muslim national identity, however, resulted in a quite troublesome relationship between the Kemalist regime and the Kurdish Alevis. As Shankland suggests, "while the Turkish Alevis can stress their Turkishness, and Kurdish Sunnis their religious bond with the contemporary Republic, neither route is available to the Kurdish Alevis in any straightforward way" (2003: 19). The previous chapter has discussed the implementation of the 1934 Resettlement Law to assimilate Dersim's Kurdish Alevi population into Turkish national identity. When the population of Dersim rebelled against this policy, the Turkish military forces responded harshly, which resulted in thousands of deaths, and the destruction of hundreds of villages in the region. As Shankland indicates, restrictions on the Kurdish Alevis are still harsher than the Turkish Alevis and the Sunni Kurds today, as they constitute a high proportion of asylum seekers in Europe (2003: 19)

aspects (such as its heterodoxy and religious community structure) were marginalized, some others were integrated into the Turkish national culture (2007: 45). The Ministry of Education published a book on Bektaşi poets, and the Bektaşi literature was taught in the public schools as part of Turkish literature courses in the 1930s (Birge 1991: 14). In addition, Alevi-Bektaşi folk singers and poets were claimed as representatives of Turkish national culture; removing religious traces from the traditional Alevi-Bektaşi songs and poems, they came to glorify the Turkish nation in their works (Massicard 2007: 45). Alevi-Bektaşi rituals were also redefined as pre-Islamic Turkish customs in this period. Birge (1991) mentions a prominent feuilleton on Bektaşism, written by Ziya Bey and published in the Yenigün daily in 1931, as an example. Ziya Bey argued that the Bektaşi rituals, in which women and men participated together in social equality, were in fact the perpetuation of ancient Turkish national rituals, which came to be conducted in secrecy due to the restrictions Bektaşis faced under the Ottoman authority (p. 99-100).

The impact of the Kemalist nationalist policies on the sustainability of the Semah ritual was relatively less damaging than that of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony in the early Republican era. The practice of Semah as part of the secret Cem ceremony persisted both among the urban Bektaşis and the rural Alevis in private house-gatherings. In an interview conducted by Hülya Küçük, Turgut Koca Baba (the former head of the Eryek Baba Bektaşi lodge in Istanbul) claimed that among urban Bektaşis conducting Cem ceremonies in private house-gatherings increased after the ban on Sufi orders (2003: 196). He further explained that, the ban on Sufi orders had no detrimental effect on sustaining the Cem ceremony, as historically Bektaşi lodges were accessible only to the members of the order, and the Cem ceremony was held at private gatherings even before the ban on Sufi orders (ibid). Nonetheless, as in the case of other public

manifestations of the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition, when Semah finally gained public visibility in the course of the 1960s as part of the attempts of Alevi community to adopt to the urban context, its conduct was legitimized as a national folklore element rather than as a religious worship ritual in Turkey (Tambar 2010: 665).

From the 1960s to the 1990s: Semah Goes Public as a Folklore Show

Turkey has experienced from the 1950s a massive rural-to-urban migration due to rapid urban industrialization. With a considerably higher migration rate than that of the rural Sunni communities, many rural Alevis came to settle in large Turkish cities (mostly Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir) and in foreign countries, predominantly Germany (Özdalga 2008: 178). The rural Alevis gradually adopted to the urban context: many first-wave Alevi immigrant families who found employment in low-paying blue-collar jobs due to their relatively low education background and lack of craft skills (Massicard 2007: 53), came to experience an upward mobility owing to the upsurge in the number of educated Alevis (Camuroğlu 1998: 79). The impact of urban migration on traditional closed-community structure of Alevis was profound. Sahin states that, traditionally, a cluster of Alevi villages in a certain region belongs to a particular *ocak* (hearth) and is assigned to a Dede, who occasionally pays visits to these villages to conduct religious services, such as performing Cem or to lecture on the particulars of the tradition (2005: 471). These strong social ties between the Dede and his followers, to which the Alevi social system had relied on for centuries, started to loosen when the Dedes could not perform their religious duties due to the geographical dispersion of their followers (ibid). Moreover, the Dedes began to lose religious authority among the urban Alevi population, as they needed to work in

daily jobs in order to survive in an urban environment (Massicard 2007: 53). Equally important, the shared urban space strengthened the bonds between the Alevi immigrants and urban Bektaşis, whose difference came to be less pronounced after the 1960s (p. 56).

Urbanization, together with the liberal environment initiated by Turkey's 1960 constitution, opened new possibilities for the public expression of Alevi-Bektaşi identity and culture. The first political party with an Alevi-Bektaşi emphasis, Birlik Partisi (The Party of Union), was established in 1966.[76] A few Alevi-Bektaşi periodicals and journals with limited circulation also appeared in this period (Massicard 2007: 55). More significantly, traditional community networks that used to be maintained by the bond between the *Dedes* and their followers were reestablished by the newly emerging, urban voluntary associations from the 1960s (Sahin 2005: 471). Adopting new practices to enliven the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition in an urban context and providing sites for uniting its adherents, these associations have since played an ever-growing role in the manifestation of the Alevi-Bektaşi identity in Turkey.[77] The first Alevi-Bektaşi public events were introduced by these associations in the form of public Cem ceremonies, festivals, music concerts, and special community dinners, as well as seminars and lectures on the specifics of Alevi-Bektaşi traditions (interview 43). The introduction of Semah as a separate and independent public performance also occurred in this period.

[76] The minor Party of Union was closed down in Turkey after the 1980 Military Coup. While some efforts were later introduced by the Alevi-Bektaşis to establish political parties, they were mostly unsuccessful. In contrast to Turkey's Kurds who are largely organized around the pro-Kurdish parties, Alevi-Bektaşis chose to organize in voluntary institutions. In the course of the 1980s, marked by the emergence of Sunni Islam as a strong social and political force in Turkey, the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşis came to support the Kemalist RPP (Republican People's Party) based on their belief that its secular stand could curtail the rise of Sunni domination in Turkey (Ciddi 2009:90). For more information on the political organization of the Alevi-Bektaşis in Turkey, see Güler 2008; Massicard 2006.

[77] Alevi-Bektaşi organizations have functioned as the voice of Alevi-Bektaşis in Turkey, playing a salient role in the framing and expression of their political demands. As will be discussed in the following pages, the real emergence of the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations as a powerful political force, however, occurred in the course of the 1990s when the "Alevi movement" came to gain widespread strength in Turkey.

The Semah ritual, which was conducted in secrecy for centuries, gained some degree of public visibility for the first time, when it was performed as part of the Cem ceremonies organized by the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations in urban settings. Massicard mentions the organization of the first public Cem ceremony by the Hacı Bektaş Veli Tourism and Promotion Association in Ankara as early as 1963 (2007: 55). Although these ceremonies were conducted for and by the urban Alevi-Bektaşis, they were public events opened to foreign inspection (interview 33). The 1960s also witnessed the first performances of Semah out of its traditional context. Öztürkmen discusses the conduct of Semah independently from the Cem ceremony in social community gathering events organized by the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations, where event participants performed Semah to celebrate their reunion (2005: 253). The real emergence of Semah as a popular stage performance, however, was brought about by the Hacı Bektaş Veli festival.

Following the mid-1960s, the festivals organized for the commemoration of notable Alevi-Bektaşi saints emerged as a new tradition among Turkey's Alevi-Bektaşis (Soileau 2005: 92). Being the first event of this kind, the annual Hacı Bektaş Veli commemoration festival has been the most popular Alevi-Bektaşi cultural event in Turkey. In 1950, the conservative Democrat Party government amended the law on the ban on Sufi orders to allow for religious tombs belonging to significant Turkish ancestors to be opened to the public by the Ministry of Culture. Accordingly, the main Bektaşi lodge located in the Hacı Bektaş town of Nevşehir was renovated and opened as a public museum on 16 August 1964. Alevi-Bektaşis secured permission from state authorities to organize a state-sponsored tourist event on the opening day of the museum for commemorating Hacı Bektaş Veli. Since then, the festival has been held annually in the month of August as a three-day-long event. Not unexpectedly, however,

permission for the festival was granted under the condition that it should be conducted to commemorate a "great Turkish thinker" rather than an "Alevi-Bektaşi saint". Norton explains:

> Since 1953 the Mevlevis had been allowed an annual whirl in public in Konya for the benefit of visitors, so the Bektashis followed this example and put on their three-day celebrations as a tourist festival honouring Hajji Bektash, who was portrayed as a great Turkish philosopher. The emphasis on Turkishness become strident and insistent…Now, Turkish Bektashis take every opportunity to put forward Hajji Bektash as a sort of patron saint of Turkey. This, of course, is popular with Turkish audiences and, Bektashis hope, will make the authorities reluctant to clamp down on their activities. So, Hajji Bektash is portrayed as having been sent from Khurasan with a divine message specifically for Turks, a Turkish pioneer in Anatolia, a Turkish liberator… Articles in the national press around festival time take a similar line, emphasising the Turkishness of the Order, its assocation with the Janissaries and its contributions to pure Turkish language and literature.[78] (1983:80)

The mainstream *Milliyet* daily, for instance, referred to the event as the "festival for the commemoration of the great Turkish thinker Hacı Bektaş Veli" until the late 1980s when the Alevi-Bektaşi character of the festival came forward.[79] In addition, the festival program was heavily combined with a nationalist agenda. The festival began with an official ceremony that involved practices such as crowning the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's bust, paying homage to him, and singing the national anthem. This was followed by speeches delivered by state authorities (the president, the prime minister, and the culture minister participated frequently in the festival), who regularly praised Hacı Bektaş for his contributions to Turkish civilization, language, and culture. The festival also included spectacles with nationalist themes, such as the 1973 competition for the "folksinger" who best expressed Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Milliyet Daily

[78]Although Norton identifies the festival strictly as a 'Bektaşi' event, it has never carried an exclusively Bektaşi character, and both the Alevis and Bektaşis participated greatly in the festival from its early years onwards.

[79] The details on the conduct of the Hacı Bektaş Commemoration festival is based on a brief content analysis of the major *Milliyet Daily*, on the articles around the festival time during the period of 14-20 August from 1964 to 1990. *Milliyet* came to mention the festival as the "international festival for the commemoration of Hacı Bektaş Veli", from the 1990s when it gained an international character.

1973). In fact, the word “Alevi” or “Bektaşi” had been almost absent in the representation of the festival in mainstream public discourse. The *Milliyet* daily kept referring to the Alevi-Bektaşi artists participating in the festival as “folk musicians” or “folk music singers”, and to their religious hymns as “Turkish folk songs”.

Although it was blended with nationalist concerns, the Hacı Bektaş festival has played a salient part in strengthening communal identity and solidarity among Alevi-Bektaşis. It has also provided the possibility for the sustenance of their traditions. In a study that provides an ethnographic account of the Hacı Bektaş festival, Mark Soileau suggests that the festival has served as one of the largest communal Alevi-Bektaşi events, gathering a considerable crowd in a single place and time (2005: 92). During the three days the festival was held, Alevi-Bektaşis that are otherwise geographically dispersed, found the opportunity to establish closer ties with each other (p. 95-96). Many town residents opened their houses to host festival participants who could not find places to stay or restaurants in which to eat due to the limited number of facilities the region offered (Interview 31). Soileau also states that the festival allowed Alevi-Bektaşis to collectively practice traditional religious practices: festival participants paid visits to the tombs of the Alevi-Bektaşi saints, sacrificed animals for the saints or for fulfilling a vow, and prepared traditional dishes to distribute to the crowd (2005: 93). In addition to traditional activities, the staged music concerts, poetry recitals, theatrical representations of important historical events, public Cem ceremonies, and Semah shows were held as part of the festival schedule (p. 94).

The first public performances of Semah as separate stage shows were also introduced as part of the Hacı Bektaş festival program, which immediately attracted great interest from the Alevi-Bektaşi public (Interviews 42 and 46). While the Semah shows had been one of the most eye-catching and essential activities of the festival from its early years onwards (Interview 31),

there was hardly any reference to its Alevi-Bektaşi character in the mainstream public discourse until the 1990s. Similar to other public manifestations of Alevi-Bektaşism at the time, the public conduct of Semah was legitimized in the eyes of the Turkish state and larger public as a display of Turkish national culture. The *Milliyet Daily* recurrently referred to these Semah performances as "folklore shows" or as "folk dances particular to the region". The word Semah, in fact, was inexistent in the journal's lexicon when referring to its performance as part of the festival program until the mid-1980s. Although these Semah performances undoubtedly meant more than a dance spectacle for many festival participants, the way it was performed, however, would resemble many other folk dance shows.

In contrast to the previous occasions where the distinction between the performers and the spectators of Semah was hardly existent (event participants used to participate collectively in the turning of Semah), the festival program involved performances by specific Semah groups organized in the form of stage shows that were meant for consumption by a passive audience (Soileau 2005: 102). These staged Semahs were first conducted by semi-amateur groups, who occasionally performed Semah in other community events organized by the Alevi-Bektaşi associations (Öztürkmen 2005: 253). From the 1970s, however, the festival began to host Semah performances staged by trained dancers from non-Alevi-Bektaşi backgrounds (ibid). It was during this period that Semahs began be widely performed independent of their context in the Cem ceremony, by folklore dance groups in various spectacles in Turkey, and in national and international folklore competitions (Tambar 2010: 665). [80]

[80] Öztürkmen discusses (2005) the first folkloric performance of Semah by the Boğaziçi University Folklore Club in Istanbul, where she narrates the story of Durmuş Genç, the originator of this new tradition. Being an Alevi saz player migrated to Istanbul in the early 1960s, Genç participated in the activities organized by the Hacı Bektaş association and later in the Karacaahmet association, by playing saz to accompany Semah performances (p. 253). Genç came to teach Semah to the members of the Boğaziçi University Folklore Club (where he was employed as a

Öztürkmen (2005) outlines two factors underlying folklore club interest in performing Semahs. Firstly, having been disguised for centuries, Semahs presented a new dance genre for folklore clubs in search of novelties in their dance repertoire to attract the audiences' attention (p. 249). At the same time, in the political conjecture of the period, the performance of Semah came to carry a symbolic political meaning and was staged as a "form of protest" to express left-wing ideas, when it was too risky to voice them by other means (ibid). During the 1970s, which was marked by the radical polarization between right and left wing politics in Turkey, many Alevi-Bektaşis, turned to left-wing politics taking "active roles in almost all leftist organizations, from trade unions to parties and underground leftist associations", as a reaction against the rise of right-wing movements that "used Islam for mass appeal" (Sahin 2005: 471).[81] The strong association of Alevi-Bektaşis with left-wing movements also led some of their historical figures, symbols, and rituals to be adopted by the movement. Norton (1983), for instance, comments that the Hacı Bektaş festival carried a predominantly leftist character in the course of the 1970s. The festival committee invited radical left-wing singers, writers, and musicians from non Alevi-Bektaşi backgrounds, who presented Hacı Bektaş as an opponent of fascism, Western capitalism and American imperialism (p. 81).[82]

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tee maker), when the club members wanted to stage it as part of their folklore spectacle (p. 253). It was also the Boğaziçi University Folklore Club that held the first Semah performance by a folklore club in the Hacı Bektaş festival; Genç could not gather a Semah group from his neighborhood and asked the members of the Club to perform in the festival with him (p. 253). This performance was followed by others: another such Semah performance, for instance, had taken place in the Hacı Bektaş festival by the Ankara University folklore club in 1984 (Milliyet Daily 1984).

[81] During this period, Alevi-Bektaşis became the target of deadly attacks by radical right-wing organizations due to their strong association with left-wing movements. Among the attacks targeting Alevi-Bektaşis from 1978 to 1980, one that occurred in the city of Kahramanmaraş (southeastern Turkey) in 1978 was the deadliest, which resulted in the killing of 111 people, and wounding of more than 1,000 people (Jongerden 2003: 84). Another such deadly attack occurred in the city of Corum (central Anatolia) resulting in the killing of 51 and wounding of more than 200 people (Kaleli in Jongerden 2003: 84).

[82] This transformation in the tone of the festival from Turkish to leftist, however, brought restrictions from the right-wing government. In 1976, three "folksingers" were excluded from the festival program, two students got arrested

The nonconformity of the Semah shows with the traditional Semah performances were increasingly pronounced by more complicated stage settings and professionalization of performers, who presented choreographed and rehearsed performances for entertainment purposes in contrast to the spontaneous and ritualistic conducts of Semah exclusively by Alevi-Bektaşi adherents (Soileau 2005: 103). The performance of Semah no doubt contributed to Semah's identification as a "staged folk dance genre" rather than a ritual performance (Öztürkmen 2005: 258). At first there was no collective reaction from Alevi-Bektaşis to the folklorization of Semah. Many thought that these Semah performances introduced Alevi-Bektaşism to a larger general public in Turkey and softened the false prejudices against them (interviews 31, 39 and 43). However, conduct of Semah by non-community members, as part of folklore spectacles and for entertainment purposes, were increasingly challenged by the community following the emergence of a robust "Alevi" movement in Turkey in the 1990s that succeeded greatly in reclaiming Semah as an Alevi-Bektaşi religious tradition.

The Alevi Awakening and the Revival of Semah as a Religious Practice

The 1990s were marked by the revival of Alevism as a religious movement in Turkey.[83] The Alevi-Bektaşis' return to religion was underlined by two mutually related sociopolitical factors. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the 1980 military coup not only put an end

for making communist propaganda (when they distributed an illegal journal), while many others were detained in police stations during the festival (Milliyet Daily 1976).

[83] Especially from the 1990s, "Alevi" came to be used as an umbrella term both in the related academic literature and mainstream public discourse when referring to the Alevi-Bektaşi identity. Mélikoff states that this is due to the fact that while the Alevi identity comes forward in Turkey's socio-political sphere, the Bektaşi identity is pushed underground (1998: 12). While the majority of the voluntary organizations define themselves as both Alevi and Bektaşi, many also share the notion that Alevism constitutes a supra-identity of the community, while Bektaşism is a subculture within Alevism (see for example the definition of Alevism at the Hacı Bektaş Veli Culture Association's website, http://www.hbvkd-oss.nl).

to radical left-wing movements in Turkey but also marked the beginning of an era of strict restrictions on the manifestation of leftist ideas. On the other hand, Turkey witnessed the rise of political Islam in the 1980s when the Turkish state came to promote the Turkish-Islam synthesis as an official ideology to counterbalance the influence of radical left-wing movement (Van Bruinessen 1996:8). [84] Discussing the Turkish state's official approach to Sunni Islam as a great departure from its Kemalist heritage, Van Bruinessen explains how Turkey's political conjuncture of the 1980s contributed to the Alevi revival:

> Religious education, previously an optional subject, was made obligatory. The Directorate of Religious Affairs was strengthened, numerous new mosques were built and imams appointed–not only in Sunni towns and villages, but also in Alevi communities. Among the Alevis, one effect of the changes was a renewed interest in Alevism as a religion. Whereas in the 1970s most of the young Alevis had completely rejected religion and had only taken pride in Alevism as a democratic social movement, the failure of the left gave rise to reflection on Alevism as a cultural and then as a religious identity. (1996:8)

In 1989, Turkey's prominent journalists, academics, authors and artists put together an Alevi manifesto (published in 1990 in various major daily Turkish newspapers), with which "the Alevi identity made its first influential public appearance" (Erman and Göker 2000: 102). As Vorhoff states, for the first time with this text "the Alevi declared themselves openly not only as a political force, but also as a religious community claiming the right of self-determination and official recognition." (1998: 31) Indeed, defining Alevism as a branch of Islam like Sunnism, the manifesto publically announced the existence of Alevis as a distinct religious group and declared their demands to halt legal, political, and social discrimination against them (Alevilik Bildirgesi 1989). It stresses that while the freedom of religion and conscience is guaranteed under the

[84] Blending nationalism with religion, the Turkish-Islam synthesis claims the inseparability of Sunni Muslim identity from the Turkish one. Van Bruinessen suggests that "what began as a confused doctrine combining fervent Turkish nationalism and Muslim sentiment, formulated by a small group of right-wing intellectuals as an answer to socialism, was virtually elevated to the status of official ideology". For more on Turkish-Islam Synthesis and the rise of political Islam in the 1980s, see Toprak 1990; Güvenç ed. 1991; Zürcher 2007: 288-306.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Turkish state denies the existence of Alevism by describing it within the Sunni whole. It further argues that, while Sunni Islam is officially represented by the DRA and promoted by the Turkish state, Alevis have to hide their religious identity due to the state restrictions and widespread prejudice of the Sunni population against them. The manifesto goes on to list the Alevi demands to be accepted as equal Turkish citizens, and calls for the Sunnis and the Turkish state to change their negative attitude towards Alevis, the DRA to stop mosque construction in the Alevi villages, and the Alevi traditions to be presented in the Turkish media and in the public schools.

The real emergence of Alevism as a robust movement, however, occurred in the course of the mid-1990s, when the community became victim to Islamist-nationalist violence with no protection from the Turkish state. Since 1989, Alevi-Bektaşis have been annually organizing a festival in the central Anatolian town of Sivas for commemorating Pir Sultan Abdal, a famous Alevi-Bektaşi poet and rebel who lived in Sivas in the 16th century (Sökefeld 2008b: 67). On the 2nd of July 1993, however, the festival turned into bloodshed when an angry Islamist crowd set the Madımak Hotel on fire after a Friday Prayer, and killed 37 people (most of whom were Alevi-Bektaşi writers and artists) in the arson. The event was covered extensively in the international media. The *New York Times* (1993), for instance, described it as "the worst outburst so far of fundamentalist violence in Turkey". The mayor of Sivas and the security forces were accused of sympathizing with the Islamists and for not interfering in the events, they were, however, never tried.[85] Over fifty people were sentenced to imprisonment for setting the hotel on fire. The parliamentary commission investigating the issue, however, accused the festival

[85] In a police film shot during the events (that was leaked to the press), one hears an order given from the police radio for not stopping the Islamist crowd (Van Bruinessen 1996: 9).

participants for provocating the Islamists in the matter "of displaying prohibited literature, the shouting of 'revolutionary slogans', the invitation of Aziz Nesin[86], the moving of the festival that year to the [predominantly Sunni] city of Sivas from the provincial (and predominantly Alevi) town of Banaz, and the loud playing of drums whilst the faithful were on the way to Friday prayers" (Stokes 1996: 195).

Another series of deadly events occurred in March 1995 in Istanbul's predominantly Alevi neighborhood of Gazi when police shot into a mass of protestors demonstrating against several recent drive-by shootings in the neighborhood that had killed two Alevis; the event resulted in the killing of another fifteen people (Van Bruinessen 1996: 9-10). The Turkish state authorities visibly sided with right-wing police officers accused of the killings: the majority of these officers were acquitted, -even a police officer accused of killing seven people had his imprisonment reduced from twenty-four years to one year and one month (Jongerden 2003: 86-87). In contrast to only about two dozen police officers that were charged by the Turkish courts for killing civilians, more than one hundred people from the Gazi neighborhood were charged for participating in illegal demonstrations (Marcus 1996: 26). These two events played a salient role in mobilizing Alevi-Bektaşis across Turkey against radical Islamist violence and state discrimination. One of the respondents relates:

> From the mid-1960s onwards, Alevis and Bektaşis came to gather around village associations, which later took the names of prominent Alevi-Bektaşi figures.[87] It was, however, the Sivas and Gazi massacres that led to a

[86] Aziz Nesin is a prominent Turkish author, who received considerable opposition from Turkey's conservative Islamic segments, when he stated his will to translate Salman Rushdie's controversial book, *the Satanic Verses* in Turkish in 1993.

[87] The 1983 Law on Associations banned the organization of distinct religious groups as associations and foundations for the purposes of supporting a specific religious identity, as such actions were defined as attempts to damage the unitary state structure and the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic (Massicard 2006: 76). Not being able to openly express their objectives, the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations were named after significant Alevi-Bektaşi saints, such as Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal, this prohibition was removed in 2002 as part of the EU harmonization packages (p. 77).

> massive explosion in the number of Alevi-Bektaşi organizations and their members throughout Turkey. We openly saw that the Turkish state didn't protect our rights. We realized that if we wanted to be treated equally in all spheres of life and to live without facing discrimination in Turkey, we needed to be organized, to fight for our rights and to voice our claims collectively. (Interview 33)

Indeed, following the mid-1990s, Alevi-Bektaşi identity became more visible in Turkey's public sphere. Erdemir details the signs of such visibility: the publication of a great quantity of books and journals on Alevism, an upsurge in the number of the voluntary organizations and their members,[88] the founding of various local and national radio stations serving the Alevi audience, the visibility of Alevis in Turkish visual, print and cyber media, and the increased willingness of Alevis to present themselves as "Alevi" (2005: 939-940).

It was also during this period that the Alevi-Bektaşi religious traditions came to be reclaimed and reappropriated by the community, owing largely to the efforts of Alevi-Bektaşi organizations. From the mid-1990s onwards, the Dedes gradually regained their prestige and authority over the community as spiritual leaders, when the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations appointed them to perform traditional religious services (such as directing funerals, weddings, and Cem ceremonies). Equally important, the construction of new spatial structures called *Cemevi* as urban places of worship originated during this period (Sahin 2005: 472).[89] The Alevi-

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[88] In addition to hundreds of local Alevi-Bektaşi organizations across Turkey, the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (1988), the Alevi Culture Associations (1991) and the Cem Association (1995) have 64, 102 and 10 branch offices respectively, throughout Turkey (as of December 2011). At present, the Alevi-Bektaşi Federation (2002) unites 31 Alevi-Bektaşi associations and their over 170 branch offices that function throughout Turkey. On the differences amongst these organizations in terms of their definition of Alevi-Bektaşism and their approach to the 'Alevi' politics, see Erman and Göker 2000.

[89] The Cemevis can only function under the name of 'cultural centers' in Turkey, as their identification as a place of worship is unlawful to the Turkish constitution that only recognizes mosques as Muslim places of worship. Their construction is generally sponsored by the community and managed by the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations, while the construction of Cemevis by the municipalities searching for the Alevi-Bektaşi political support is not uncommon. In addition to the Cem ceremonies, these places host other Alevi-Bektaşi related social and educational events such as courses, panels and charity dinners.

Bektaşi organizations began to organize regular weekly Cem ceremonies in the Cemevis and sometimes in a special room in the organization's building arranged to host Cem ceremonies.

Receiving ever-increasing attention from the Alevi-Bektaşi adherents, these Cem ceremonies also provided the possibility for the performance of Semah in its ritual context. During my fieldwork, I participated in two Cem ceremonies organized by different Alevi-Bektaşi organizations based in Istanbul in March 2011 and had the chance to witness the religious conduct of Semah. Both occasions were open to the public with a high participation rate, and my presence was welcomed. However, despite being the only 'outsider' on both occasions, I was expected to actively participate in the ceremony and move with the crowd by following their body gestures and movements.[90] Both ceremonies took approximately three hours, and Cem participants performed Semah towards the end of the ceremony. Showing slight variances from each other and from the traditional Semah performances described in the literature, these Semahs were conducted by non-professional Cem participants. After getting the blessings of the Dede, about fifteen mostly middle-aged men and women came to turn Semah to the accompaniment of hymns sang by the dede, with rather spontaneous movements, in casual outfits and in a state of spiritual emotion. While they were turning Semah, other participants were sitting on the floor side by side facing Semah area and swaying together with the rhythm.

In addition to the religious performance of Semah as part of the Cem, the Semah shows have continued to be performed independently from Cem ceremonies by the Alevi-Bektaşi adherents. The performance of Semah by non-community members in the Alevi-Bektaşi events

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[90] In both instances, some Cem participants entered a state of trance during the ceremony. I witnessed both men and women crying loudly, hitting their legs and chests, and shouting the name of holy figures. In one occasion, a man in his thirties began to cry loudly, moving around on his knees and strongly hitting himself. The Gözcü (the watch-keeper) intervened by throwing water on his face and shaking him harshly.

ceased to a large extent in the course of the 1990s, when the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations, following the example of Folklore Clubs, introduced free Semah training courses. Öztürkmen states that the first Semah training course was opened by Durmuş Genç in 1986 in the Karacaahmet association, after he retired from his job at the Boğaziçi University to train a Semah group that would perform in the Hacı Bektaş festival (2005: 254). By the end of the 1990s, nearly all the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations in Turkey offered a free Semah training course. The Alevi-Bektaşi youth developed a keen interest in these courses. Given that public schools have provided no religious education other than that of the Sunni Islam, these young Alevi-Bektaşis had the chance to learn not only how to turn Semah, but also the specifics of the Cem ritual (Öztürkmen 2005: 254). Currently, almost all the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations have a "Semah group" composed of young Alevi-Bektaşis and trained by Alevi-Bektaşi teachers.

The Semah performances, in fact, turned into one of the most powerful symbols for Alevi-Bektaşis to publicly assert their distinct identity from the 1990s onwards. The Semah groups affiliated with the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations started to perform staged shows with slightly varying choreographies and specific costumes throughout Turkey. These shows were incorporated into all kinds of events attended by Alevi-Bektaşis, such as festivals, charity dinners, music concerts, conference openings, weddings, and television shows (even the political party rallies and new business openings). Moreover, separate Semah events were organized by various Alevi-Bektaşi establishments. An Alevi radio, *Radyo Barış* (Radio Peace) has organized a Semah event annually since 2001 in Istanbul called "Turning Semah for Peace" where thousands of Alevi-Bektaşis gather in a stadium to view performances by various Semah groups. The Alevi-Bektaşis also secured some support from the Turkish government in the 1990s regarding the Semah performances. In 1997, following the example of Sema performance group in Konya, the

Turkish government founded a Semah group in Hacı Bektaş town to perform in the Hacı Bektaş Veli festival and in official state events such as the protocol meetings and conferences. The group operates under the TMCT and its members are employed by the Turkish state with fixed salaries. The Semah group has also performed daily Semah shows in the town of Hacı Bektaş since the opening of the Hacı Bektaş Veli cultural center in 2001 (interview 29).

In recent years, however, Alevi-Bektaşis came to express growing concern about the adverse impact of "folkloric" Semah spectacles on the Semah's religious significance. During my fieldwork, I encountered several discussions by Alevi-Bektaşis on how the conduct of Semah solely for entertainment purposes and in the events unrelated to the Alevi-Bektaşi cause (such as business and conference openings, protocol meetings, weddings and folklore spectacles) is detrimental to the sacred content and spiritual purpose of Semah. These respondents stressed the essentialness of the Semah courses for the socialization of the Alevi-Bektaşi youth into the tradition. They also stated their support (or at least toleration) for conducting Semah at Alevi-Bektaşi community events, mentioning their significance in creating stronger bonds among community members. The Semah ritual was declared an intangible heritage by UNESCO in 2009 when these concerns were brought to the attention of the general public by Alevi-Bektaşi organizations. Before moving on to discuss the heritagization process of Semah, however, it is first necessary to give some background on the JDP government's Alevi policy.

The JDP and the Alevi Question: A Solution from a Sunni Stance

The JDP secured a third consecutive term in the government in the June 2011 general elections in Turkey and increased its popular vote (by three percent) to about fifty percent of the

votes. The increased role of Islam in Turkish society and politics, however, continues to be the main concern of the anti-Islamist segments of the society that blames the JDP government for putting Turkey's secular structure in jeopardy. At the level of discourse, the JDP rejects the control of religion by the state as antidemocratic and instead proposes an alternative notion of secularism that would provide distinct religious groups the freedom to express and practice their faith. Accordingly, the JDP party program states that:

> Our Party refuses to take advantage of sacred religious values…and to use them for political purposes. It considers the attitudes and practices which disturb pious people, and which discriminate them due to their religious lives and preferences, as *anti-democratic* and *in contradiction to human rights and freedoms*. On the other hand, it is also *unacceptable* to make use of religion *for political, economic and other interests*, or to put pressure on people who think and live differently by using religion. [Emph. added] (JDP 2011)

As Warhola and Bezci suggest, the JDP's Alevi policy becomes "emblematic of its orientation toward *laiklik* [secularism]" (2010: 447). In recent years, Alevi-Bektaşis came collectively to assert their aspiration for an "official recognition as a community legitimately different from Sunni Islam" (Dressler 2010: 126) and greatly agreed on three main principles that would hinder their assimilation into the Sunni whole.[91] The Alevi-Bektaşis, first of all, demand the exclusively Sunni Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) to be completely annulled or downsized. As Dressler explains,

> Alevis accuse the DRA of trying to assimilate them into mainstream Sunnism. They claim that they are discriminated against by the DRA since the type of Islam the latter sponsors would one-sidedly be based on the Sunni tradition; that DRA employees are almost exclusively Sunni, and in its activities, such as its publications and sponsored events, the organization of religious education, the interpretation of Islamic law, policies regarding

[91] Despite having different political stances and approaches to Alevi-Bektaşism, a great majority of the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations agree with the priority of these principles. The centralization of the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations from the 2000s onwards with the foundation of the Alevi-Bektaşi Federation (2002) contributed to the formulation of these common demands to a great extent.

> places of worship, and the organization of religious holidays follow the Sunni and disregard the Alevi tradition." (2010: 125)

Secondly, Alevi-Bektaşis disapprove the compulsory religious education in public schools due to its overwhelmingly Sunni content, and ask for its total elimination from the public school curricula, or at least its reformulation as an elective course.[92] Last but not least, Alevi-Bektaşis demand the official recognition of Cemevi as places of worship, which would open the possibility for their legal recognition as a distinct religious community. Given that the Turkish state only recognizes mosques as places of Muslim worship, the Cemevis can only exist under the status of "cultural centers" in Turkey. As Yıldırım (2011) states, the nonrecognition of Cemevis as places of worship brings both legal and financial restraints on the community: it denies the Cemevis exemptions from property, electricity, and water taxes, and makes worship activities in the Cemevi technically unlawful. Moreover, Alevi-Bektaşis experience obstacles in opening Cemevis, as the denials of permission or long delays on their requests for the construction Cemevis are not uncommon (USCIRF Annual Report 2009).

Indeed, the demands of the Alevi-Bektaşi community are technically in line with the notion of secularism that the JDP government claims to promote. During interviews with Alevi-Bektaşi respondents, I was often told that fulfillment of their demands necessitates the conditions of a "genuine" secular state, in which neither the state nor religion interferes with the other's affairs. Claiming Turkey's Alevi question as an issue of its ailing implementation of the principle of secularism, a respondent stated that: "a secular state is nonreligious by definition: recognizing

[92] In fact, the issue of compulsory religious education was also brought before the European Court of Human Rights in 2007. While the court ruled that religious education should be elective for the Alevi-Bektaşis (given that its curriculum only covers information about Sunni Islam), the government rather decided to briefly cover Alevi-Bektaşism as part of the course content (USCIRF Annual Report 2009). The new content of the course, however, criticized by the community for reducing their creed into "a mystic order within Islam" (ibid).

Sunni Islam as an official state religion while denying other Islamic interpretations, conforms neither to the principle of equality nor to that of secularism" (interview 31). Another respondent further explained:

> If the Turkish state is based on the principle of secularism, our relationship with it cannot be defined through the legitimacy of our faith. How to define our faith is our problem. If an individual is calling himself something, then he should be accepted as what he says he is… A secular state does not have the right to question the legitimacy of any religious identity unless it is against the general social morality or it is detrimental to the functioning of the society. Yet, Sunni Islam is the only legitimate religious identity in Turkey. We react against this because we claim that the recognition of our religious difference is our fundamental right. (Interview 37)

The JDP government, however, has thus far rejected the demands raised by Alevi-Bektaşis. In fact, during my fieldwork, I encountered several discussions by Alevi-Bektaşis on how the government instead pursues an active policy to assimilate them into Sunni Islam. These respondents indicated that they face further constraints due to the growing institutionalization of Sunni Islam in Turkey during the reign of the JDP. The increased influence of the DRA in Turkish social and political life is often mentioned as illustrative of this situation. The budget of the DRA rose remarkably under the JDP government, reaching 2.6 billion dollars in 2011 (CNNTURK News Portal 2010). In 2007, the DRA received the 13th highest budget among the fifty public agencies: this was twice more than the budget of the TMCT, 2.3 times more than that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 35 times more than that of the Supreme Court, and 45 times more than that of the Council of State (Hürriyet Daily 2006). Some Alevi-Bektaşi respondents stated that they objected to financing the pro-Sunni policies of the DRA with their taxes, as they ran counter to the interests and values of Alevi-Bektaşi community (interviews 31, 37, 39 and 43). During these interviews, I was also told about the intensification of the assimilation policies of the DRA against the Alevi-Bektaşis under the JDP rule. A rapid increase in enforced mosque

construction in Alevi villages is mentioned as an example. An executive member of an Alevi-Bektaşi organization noted that,

> Today, we have more mosques in Turkey than the entire Arab peninsula. We are not against the construction of mosques; but they should be built, when and where they are needed. We do not use mosques for any reason. But when the Alevi villagers ask for a school, water or electricity, the district governors tell them: "let's build a mosque in your village first, and then we will see"… Then the DRA constructs a mosque and assigns an Imam, who calls to prayer five times a day. If this is not a policy of assimilation, then I don't know what it is! (Interview 33)

Some respondents proposed that instead of financing mosque construction, the DRA should build Cemevis to serve Alevi-Bektaşi community (interviews 31 and 34). The attitude of the DRA regarding the status of the Cemevi, however, is loud and clear: stating that the construction of Cemevi is not under the responsibility of the DRA for the very reason that it is not an alternative to the mosque according to the Islamic principles, the DRA asserts that mosques are the places of worship for all Muslims, including Alevi-Bektaşis. A statement of the previous vice president of the DRA, Necati Tayyar Taş, is exemplary of this perception: "If you ask Alevis they will say that they are Muslim. So that they are Muslim, their place of worship is the mosque or their home. The Cemevi cannot be considered as a place of worship; it is a house of carousing, they play saz there" (Akşam Daily 2003). While Taş was dismissed from his position due to harsh critiques he received from Alevi-Bektaşi community for calling their sacred place a "house of carousing", the government's assessment of the status of the Cemevis in fact is in line with that of the DRA. In response to a parliamentary question regarding the opening of Cemevis as places of worship, the State Minister Mehmet Aydın claimed that places other than mosques and masjids could not be considered as places of Muslim worship, and that their

definition as “social and cultural facilities” would be more appropriate (Haber7 News Portal 2005).

As Yıldırım (2011) states, even though the DRA does not have a binding legal status in Turkish law, the government constantly relies on its opinion to deny Alevi-Bektaşi identity and demands. She mentions, as an example, the continuing court case opened by the Ministry of Interior Affairs to close down the Ankara-based Cankaya Cemevi Construction Association due to the description of the Cemevi as a place of worship in its legal statute. As she states, following the Ministry’s demand for a clarification on the status of the Cemevis, the DRA sent a communication (No. 1773) to the Ministry on 17 December 2004. It stated that “it is not possible to consider cemevi and other places as places of worship because Alevism, which is a *sub-group within Islam,* cannot have a place of worship *other than mosques or mescit* [masjid] that are common places of worship within Islam” (emph. added). Based on this opinion of the DRA, the Ministry asked the association to remove the particular statement from its statute. When its founding members rejected the DRA’s opinion as irrelevant, the Ministry applied to the court to close down the association (Yıldırım 2011). One of the respondents criticized the government’s constant reliance on the DRA’s judgment as a manifestation of its anti-secular policies:

> A secular state is, by definition, profane. Yet, Turkey is not a secular country; it is increasingly becoming a modern Sheikh ul-Islam [chief Ottoman Islamic institution in charge of managing the state’s religious affairs]. For instance, when the Prime Minister makes a comment on Alevism, Bektaşism or Cemevis, the head of the DRA could warn the Prime Minister by stating that ‘everyone should mind their own businesses’….The sermons delivered at the Friday prayers are now centralized by the DRA. The imams now deliver the same messages in every mosque throughout Turkey. Is there any difference of this from the fatwa of Sheikh ul-Islam? (Interview 37)

From the mid-2000s, for the first time in the history of the Republic, Alevi-Bektaşi organizations began to hold widespread demonstrations throughout Turkey to protest the

government's assimilation policies (interview 33). In 2008, about 50 thousand Alevi-Bektaşis gathered in a demonstration called the "Grand Alevi Rally" in Ankara (Hürriyet Daily 2008). In order to respond to the increasing political salience of the community and to address its concerns, the JDP government launched in 2009 an official program, the "Alevi initiative" (Warhola and Bezci 2010: 446). The Ministry of State held seven workshops from June 2009 to January 2010 as part of the initiative, chaired by the State Minister of Turkey Faruk Celik and moderated by Dr. Necdet Subaşı, the Alevi initiative coordinator of the Prime Minister's Office. In Minister Celik's words, the workshops were designed to "readdress and evaluate major problems and requests of the Alevi citizens in line with the democratic and human rights principles" (Alevi Calıştayları Nihai Rapor 2010: xi). Each workshop was conducted with the participation of Turkey's political, religious, and cultural elite (including non Alevi-Bektaşis), who shared opinions on their interpretation of Turkey's Alevi question and its possible solutions.[93] The workshops participants were selected by the government, and the workshops were held closed to the public and the media. In an article that evaluates the workshops, Necdet Subaşı mentions the Alevi initiative as part of the government's efforts to "bring together underrepresented and mistreated communities… with the aim of developing a discourse in the area of religious rights and freedom, as it is included in its political program" (2010: 114). While Subaşı acknowledges the Alevi initiative as a historical event taking positive and deliberate steps on to solve Turkey's

[93] The first meeting that was held on 03-04 June 2009 in Ankara hosted thirty-six representatives from Alevi-Bektaşi associations and foundations as well as the Alevi religious leaders. The second workshop was held on 08 July 2009 in Istanbul with thirty academicians who have produced works on Alevi-related issues. The government organized the third workshop on 19 August 2009 in Ankara with the participation of thirty-eight Islamic theologians and the representatives of the DRA. The fourth workshop was organized on 30 September 2009 in Ankara with the participation of thirty-three representatives from the trade-unions, human rights and religious organizations and businessmen associations, while the fifth workshop brought together twenty-seven representatives from the media on 11 November 2009 in Istanbul. The government organized the 6th workshop with the participation of thirty-six parliament members and politicians on 17 December 2009 in Ankara, while the final workshop was conducted on 28-30 January 2010 in Ankara with thirty-nine participants who took part in the previous workshops.

Alevi question (p. 110), the initiative instead experienced significant opposition from the Alevi-Bektaşi community, which condemned it as the government's attempt to Sunnify them.

The first workshop was held with the participation of prominent Alevi-Bektaşi representatives who collectively requested official recognition of their faith and, reinstated the fulfillment of the previously mentioned demands as the conditions of such recognition. In addition, they demanded that the Madımak Hotel, where the Sivas massacre took place, be transformed into a Museum of Disgrace. The subsequent workshops, however, were held with the extensive participation of Sunni politicians, media executives, religious leaders and academics (some of whom were known to be openly hostile to the Alevi-Bektaşi demands), in contrast to fewer Alevi-Bektaşi representatives. This prompted some prominent Alevi-Bektaşi organizations to protest the workshops, claiming that the Alevi initiative was taking place in the absence of relevant representatives of the community. In the words of a respondent, the government showed its "true colors" by choosing to "discuss Alevis with their Sunni opponents" (interview 45). The criticisms peaked when Ökkeş Sendiller (the main suspect of the 1978 Kahramanmaraş Massacre) was invited to the 6th workshop. Although the organizing committee withdrew his invitation due to excessive protests, many Alevi-Bektaşi organizations boycotted the workshops, declaring their distrust of the sincerity of the government in addressing their concerns and interests. Comparing Şendiller's invitation to the 6th workshop with welcoming Hitler to a Jewish conference, the vice-president of the Alevi-Bektaşi Federation, Ali Kenanoğlu, stated that Sendiller's invitation revealed how the Alevi initiative had become a means to insult them (Birgün News Portal 2009).

Despite these harsh critiques, the government completed the workshop process, and the final report written by Subaşı was released to the public in March 2011. While the government

authorities often valued the Alevi initiative as a significant step towards meeting the community's demands, the initiative in fact failed to hit the mark among Alevi-Bektaşis. Two other grand Alevi rallies that were organized by the collaboration of several Alevi-Bektaşi organizations to demonstrate against the process in Istanbul and Izmir, brought out tens of thousands of Alevi-Bektaşis. Indeed, the majority of Alevi-Bektaşis believe their demands to be systematically misrecognized by the government and claim the Alevi initiative an attempt to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşism into Sunni Islam. Based on a nationwide representative survey, the Alevi Report published by the Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE), demonstrates that only 2.6 percent of community members claimed the government's Alevi initiative to be sufficient in solving Turkey's Alevi question (SDE 2009: 52). More significantly, 59.8 percent mentioned the Alevi initiative as part of the JDP's efforts to sunnify Alevis, in contrast to 21.9 percent, who highlighted it as the JDP's attempt to solve Turkey's social problems (p. 56).

The measures taken and proposed by the government in the aftermath of the Alevi initiative greatly justified the community's concerns over the process. The Madımak Hotel, for instance, had recently been expropriated by a cabinet decree. The government, however redesigned it as a "Science and Cultural Center" instead of a Museum of Disgrace to avoid drawing a reaction from the Sunni masses. Not unexpectedly, this decision encouraged considerable protest from the Alevi-Bektaşi community. Instead of abolishing the compulsory religious education from the public school curricula or making it elective, the government chose to revise and broaden the content of the courses to cover Alevi-Bektaşis and other non-Sunni Muslims, such as Caferis and Nusayris, as a subgroup within (Sunni) Islam. While Alevi-Bektaşi respondents deeply criticized the content of the courses, they also argued that teaching their faith as part of the compulsory religious courses adds to the discrimination against them, as these

courses are taught by the Imam Hatip and Theology school graduates who receive an exclusively Sunni training (interviews 33, 31, 40 and 44). Rather than downsizing or dissolving the DRA, the government has initiated efforts to broaden its scope by establishing an Alevi-Bektaşi branch to operate under the supervision of the DRA.

Equally important, the Alevi initiative process signaled no change in the government's approach to the legal status of Cemevis. The official recognition of the Cemevi as a place of worship is especially significant for Alevi-Bektaşis as it would open the possibility for their official recognition as a distinct Islamic sect. Relying on the thoughts of prominent Sunni figures, however, the government rejects the recognition of the Cemevi as a Muslim worship place on "theological grounds"; claiming the mosques as the only legitimate public institution for Muslim worship. In the words of the State Minister Faruk Celik:

> The workshop participants reached a consensus in terms of granting legal status to the Cemevis. Yet, the question of what kind a status it will be brings along two significant discussions. The first one is related to the *theological dimension* of the issue. Academicians competent in theology state that despite the existence of different religious interpretations and sects, there is only one place of worship in Christianity and Judaism, and also that *the place of worship in Islam is unique,* and acceptance of other places of worship would evoke incongruous connotations. Another subject matter that was discussed during the workshops was the *legal dimension* of the issue. At this point, Law no. 677 on the abolition of Sufi Brotherhoods that is… directly related to the principle of secularism has a fundamentally decisive role. [Emph. added] (in Birgün News Portal 2011)

As a matter of fact, however, removal of legal constraints on the recognition of Cemevis as houses of worship does not necessitate any changes in Legal Code 677. As mentioned earlier, although Legal Code 677 closed down the Bektaşi lodges and banned the Alevi-Bektaşi religious titles, the Cemevi is not mentioned within the scope of the law among the abolished places of worships simply because it is a recent invention that was nonexistent in 1925. While Cemevis are

not technically banned by the Turkish constitution, they are not particularly mentioned by it either. Therefore, the legal recognition of the Cemevis as places of worship could be achieved by just adding the word "Cemevi" in the regulatory statute of the Construction Law No. 3194 that defines places of worship as "mosques, churches and synagogues" (Oehring 2009:1). The final report of the Alevi initiative, however, discards such proposition by citing the Sunni participants who claim that the potential definition of the Cemevi as a worship place would result in the disintegration of Islam and would sabotage national unity and solidarity (2010: 172). Instead, it recommends the conduct of further research to specify a formula that would legally recognize Cemevis but without calling them a "place of worship" (p. 176).

In fact, while the final report rejects the compatibility of the Cemevi and the mosque, it hints towards the recognition of Cemevi as a Sufi convent. The report states that during the workshops "the Sunni participants highlighted the necessity to revise the law on Sufi lodges for the Cemevis to gain a legal status" (2010: 164). It also mentions that this suggestion was not welcomed by the majority of the Alevi participants, who disagreed with the definition of their faith as a Sufi tradition and highlighted the importance of the ban on Sufi orders for the struggle against reactionary Islam (p. 113). Nonetheless, insisting on the definition of Alevi-Bektaşism as a Sufi tradition (p. 175) and holding the "oppressive" state practices caused by Turkey's institutionalized secularism responsible for Turkey's Alevi question (p. 106), the final report takes the side of the Sunni representatives. Therefore, adopting a clearly Sunni interpretation of the Alevi question and noticeably serving Sunni interests, the final report recommends the lifting of the ban on Sufi orders for the Cemevis to achieve a legal status. In addition to serving as a means to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşis into the Sunni national identity, the Alevi initiative, then, also contributes to the government's political agenda for lifting restrictions on Sunni Islam. Not

unexpectedly, claiming that their core demands remain unsettled, many Alevi-Bektaşis "resolutely rejected" the final workshop report (Warhola and Bezci 2010: 447). İzzettin Doğan,[94] who actively contributed to the workshop process and participated both in the first and the last meetings, severely criticized the final report:

> We once again sadly witness the exploitation of Alevi citizens' goodwill… These reports show that instead of giving constitutional rights to Alevis, the JDP government wants to use Alevism for disguising its aims to better organize Sunni Islam and to transform the [Turkish] state into a Sunni State (in Ergin 2011a)

Although the heritagization of the Semah ritual was not particularly discussed in the process, its timing corresponded to the Alevi initiative. During interviews with TMCT officers and ICH Committee Members, however, I was often told their timing was a mere coincidence. These respondents argued that the Alevi initiative and the heritage declaration of Semah are totally unrelated processes and claimed that "purely cultural" reasons underlie the heritagization of Semah. A Committee member, for instance, explained their reasoning for designating the Semah ritual to the ICH listing: "Semah is a strong cultural element: it is a visual performance, composed of religion, dance, costumes, music, choreography, and a specific philosophy" (interview 23). The TMCT officer in charge of supervising the ICH related activities also claimed that:

> Our activities on intangible heritage are totally outside the domestic political agenda. We don't have any political interests; our concern is only the cultural and artistic principles of intangible heritage… Personally, I would like to address the issue [ICH designation of Semah], by removing Semah from its religious and political dimensions and considering its cultural aspects… For me, the significant question is how to cherish and sustain the Semah ritual for further generations as an important cultural heritage. (Interview 19)

[94] İzzettin Doğan is the president of the Cem Foundation and honorary chairman of the Federation of the Alevi Foundations. He is criticized by many Alevi-Bektaşi activists and organizations for entering into "too close relationships with the Turkish state" (Sökefeld 2008b: 85)

The majority of the Alevi-Bektaşi respondents, however, often mentioned the emphasis on "culture" when describing Semah, as a pretext for denying its religious significance for the community. During these interviews, the respondents were highly skeptical of the goodwill of the government concerning the heritagization of Semah which was often discussed in relation to the current government's policies regarding the Sunnization of Alevi-Bektaşis. One of the respondents stated that "all these Alevi initiatives and heritage declarations are, in fact, designed as parts of a package program and implemented by the government to create its own Alevi" (interview 37). Another respondent likewise claimed:

> I find it strange that all of a sudden the government felt the need to safeguard a practice that has existed for hundreds of years, and even stronger than before today. I believe their aim is not to safeguard Semah but rather to deny its spiritual meaning for us. (Interview 43)

The next section, therefore, discusses to what extent the Alevi-Bektaşi perspective on the definition and management of Semah is misrepresented in the ritual's heritagization process and in what ways this relates to the government's efforts to redefine Alevi-Bektaşism as a subgroup within Islam.

The Heritagization Process of the Semah Ritual

Bottom-to-top community-based approach that the ICH Convention seeks to introduce to the field of heritage management has been discussed in the previous chapters. In an attempt to reverse the dominant position of experts and government authorities over tradition-bearers in the identification and management of intangible heritage, the Convention states that for a cultural practice to be subscribed into the ICH listing, it needs to be recognized by tradition-bearers (and not by the experts and state officials) as part of their shared identity and legacy. One of the ICH

expert committee members further explains the significance of community participation in the ICH Convention:

> When a cultural practice is nominated for the UNESCO ICH listing, the NGOs, associations and foundations representing tradition-bearers should be consulted on their thoughts and opinions about the process. The initial question is, of course, whether they want this practice to be listed by UNESCO. If they are against this process, one cannot go ahead and nominate the practice regardless of the opposition of the community. If they support their cultural practice to be listed as intangible heritage, then the second question becomes what kind of safeguarding measures they think it is necessary to sustain this practice for future generations. If we don't get the community's support for the nomination process, the nomination would be rejected in the UNESCO meeting. (Interview 20)

The case of the heritagization of Nevruz, however, demonstrated the ways in which the aforementioned conditions might not always be satisfied when inscribing cultural practices to the UNESCO ICH list. In examining the nomination file of Semah, one first gets the impression that, this time, the TMCT has done a better job in representing community values and interests. In contrast to the Nevruz nomination file, which completely leaves out Kurdish Newroz tradition when describing the ritual, the Semah file identifies the practice exclusively as the religious tradition of Turkey's Alevi-Bektaşi adherents (UNESCO 2010: 4). Moreover, the TMCT conducted fieldwork on various Semah traditions in the regions of Tokat, Tahtacılar, Denizli and Hacı Bektaş (where Alevi-Bektaşis communities predominantly live) before the preparation of the nomination file (interview 15). The TMCT also contacted approximately forty Alevi-Bektaşi institutions during the process; asking their written opinions on the Semah's inscription onto the UNESCO ICH listing and on the measures to be implemented for its safeguarding (interview 14). Furthermore, these institutions were invited to a meeting held by the TMCT on the 4th of

August 2009 (henceforth the August meeting) in Ankara to finalize the nomination dossier, to which thirteen representatives from Alevi-Bektaşi organizations attended[95] (UNESCO 2010:9).

As the third chapter has shown, the action plan of the Nevruz nomination file proposed rather vague measures, most of which were not directly related to the safeguarding of the festival. The Semah file, however, cites specific safeguarding measures to sustain Semah, to be taken by the TMCT together with other public institutions, the media, and the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations (UNESCO 2010: 7-8). Indeed, the nomination file is noticeable in that the Turkish government officially commits to providing financial and technical support to the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations to sustain the Semah tradition. The long-term measures proposed in the action plan include: making inventories of the "authentic forms of semahs," preparing and publishing educational materials (such as films, books, catalogues, documentaries, and a website), and providing "technical assistance as regards to financing and legislation" to the Alevi-Bektaşi community on issues relating to Semah training. The file lists further long-term measures such as: initiating a Semah training program for transmitting the tradition to further generations and organizing annual "Semah Days" activities with the participation of community members. In addition, the nomination file mentions various short-term measures for enhancing the visibility and the awareness of the Semah ritual: organizing photography and art exhibitions as well as painting, poetry, and short story contests (in 2010), preparing an international Semah symposium (in 2010), taking necessary measures to establish a Semah museum by 2012, and creating a coordination committee for the implementation of the action plan.

[95] These organizations are the Erenler Educational and Cultural Foundation, the Sahkulu Foundation, the Cem Foundation, the Alevi Institute, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Educational and Cultural Association, the Alevi Bektaşi Federation, the Alevi Cultural Associations, the Eriklibaba Cultural Association, the Association for Sustaining the Garipdede Shrine, the Istanbul Alevi Cultural Association, the Turkish Culture and Hacı Bektaş Veli Research Center, the HAKEV Educational and Cultural Foundation; and the Kayseri Haci Bektaş Veli Foundation for Cultural Research.

The action plan also lists specific measures to be taken by Alevi-Bektaşi organizations such as: carrying out academic studies and publications regarding Semah, opening Semah courses, and encouraging the conduct of Cem ceremonies (UNESCO 2010:8). The responsibilities of the public institutions are mentioned as: taking measures necessary "to open new premises for Alevi-Bektaşi cem rituals", establishing "public institutions and institutes in universities regarding Alevi-Bektaşi faith and culture," transferring necessary funds from the TMCT and Prime Ministry Promotion Fund to the appropriate organizations for the preparation of a documentary and the academic publications on Semah, and providing "financial and technical assistance to Alevi-Bektaşi associations and foundations working on semahs" (p. 9).

While the examination of the Semah nomination file gives the impression that the heritagization process of Semah was conducted with the collaboration and support of Alevi-Bektaşi community, my research demonstrates that their ideas on the definition, representation, and management of Semah were largely misrepresented in the process. During the interviews, the TMCT officials claimed that they received positive reaction from the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations to the heritagization Semah. One of the respondents, for instance, stated that the August meeting was a success in that the Alevi-Bektaşi representatives gave an affirmative opinion to the Semah's UNESCO ICH listing and agreed on the safeguarding measures to be implemented after its heritage designation (interview 14). During my fieldwork, however, I discovered that the government practices on the heritagization of Semah were neither demanded nor welcomed by the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşi representatives that I interviewed within the scope of this research, including those who participated in the August meeting.[96] In fact, among fifteen respondents that represent various Alevi-Bektaşi organizations in Turkey, only two

[96] I interviewed seven of thirteen representatives from the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations that participated in the August meeting.

(affiliated with the organizations known for their close relationships with the JDP) acknowledged the ICH declaration of Semah as a positive event that represents the goodwill of the government in preserving and acknowledging the Alevi-Bektaşi traditions (interviews 49 and 50). The majority, however, were overtly opposing, or at best highly skeptical of the process. These respondents often discussed the heritagization of Semah in relation to the Alevi initiative and thus as part of the government's efforts to (mis)recognize Alevi-Bektaşism within Sunni Islam as a Muslim Sufi tradition, rather than as a distinct Islamic sect. One of the participants to the August meeting claimed that the government's real intentions on the heritage declaration of Semah had already become evident in the meeting:

> In the meeting, they gave us a booklet describing the processes and safeguarding methods to be discussed. At the back of the booklet, there was a picture of Hacı Bektaş Veli with a quatrain that was supposed to be his, praising fasting and performing Namaz. Everybody was asking each other about this quatrain. Among us, there were people with extensive knowledge of Alevism and Bektaşism, but nobody ever heard of this quatrain… This is significant in revealing the real intentions of the government. Their actual aim is obviously to modify our faith according to their Sunni mindset. (Interview 33)

A close look at the heritagization process of Semah better explains these concerns. To begin with, while the nomination file states that "requests for the inclusion of the element of semah in the national inventory, its safeguarding and registration in the [UNESCO] Representative List" came from Alevi-Bektaşi community (UNESCO 2010:9), none of the Alevi-Bektaşi institutions that are part of this research had contacted the Ministry with such a request or heard of other institutions doing so. During the interviews I learned that all the respondents that were affiliated with the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations were informed about the process, when they received a letter from the TMCT proposing the subscription of the Semah ritual to the ICH listing. More significantly, in contrast to the claimed support of the community

by the government to the heritagization of Semah, the majority of Alevi-Bektaşi representatives that I interviewed were critical to its identification as cultural heritage in the first place and thus rejected the nomination of Semah for the UNESCO ICH listing. These respondents mentioned that Semah constitutes a religious practice for Alevi-Bektaşis just like Namaz is for the Sunnis, and its categorization as intangible heritage would serve to diminish its religious significance for the community. A respondent, for instance, harshly criticized the ICH declaration of Semah by stating that,

> I believe the heritage declaration of Semah serves as part of the government's plan to destroy Alevism. This is ridiculing my belief and is an insult to my religion. Semah is my worship ritual. Is it a concern of the world community to protect the movements of Namaz or a Christian ceremony? Why, then, protecting our Semah becomes the world's concern? This is an issue between me and my God, why do the government or UNESCO wish to interfere in it? (Interview 17)

During these interviews, respondents often rejected the heritagization of Semah by claiming religion and culture as closely-related yet separate domains. They supported this argument by associating Semah with the religious practices of other belief systems (such as the Namaz, Baptism or Confession) and discussing how their declaration as intangible heritage would be inappropriate to their religious significance.[97] Highlighting possible detrimental international repercussions of labeling religious practices as cultural heritage, another respondent claimed:

> Semah is our Namaz. If the government considers Semah as cultural heritage, then they should consider Namaz the same way. Can you think of the

[97] While it is stated at the ICH Convention's website that religion is not a domain of intangible heritage, "cultural practices and expressions inspired by religions" (such as rituals and festive events) are mentioned as part of the definition of intangible heritage (UNESCO 2011c). Since "religious practices" are not mentioned within the scope of the ICH Convention, the practices such as Namaz or Confession are not entitled to be considered as intangible heritage. Given the community's emphasis on Semah being a religious rather than a cultural practice, the same argument might also apply to Semah.

> worldwide consequences of the declaration of Namaz as intangible heritage? It would serve as a good reason for another World War. (Interview 41)

These concerns were also communicated to the government and the media by some Alevi-Bektaşi organizations during the Semah's heritagization process. The reaction of a prominent Istanbul-based Alevi-Bektaşi foundation to the Semah's nomination on the ICH list is exemplary of this situation. The foundation was informed about the process when the TMCT asked their written opinion about Semah's nomination for the UNESCO ICH listing. Subsequently, the foundation's executive board organized a meeting with the Alevi-Bektaşi religious leaders to discuss the subject-matter, and decided to oppose such a nomination on the grounds that Semah constitutes a "religious worship" rather than a "cultural heritage" (interview 47). The foundation then elected a committee to prepare a manuscript emphasizing the religious significance of Semah and held a subsequent meeting to create a common written statement opposing the Semah's nomination for the ICH listing (interview 48). The statement first argues that there is an underlying difference between the concept of culture and religion and claims that "while the source of religion is God, that of culture is the society".[98] It then opposes the Semah's classification as cultural heritage, arguing that such definition is inappropriate to its traditional religious significance; in the same way it is inappropriate to define the Muslim Friday Prayer as cultural heritage. The organization sent this document to the relevant TMCT office a month before the August meeting (interview 47). Furthermore, a representative from the foundation who participated in the meeting delivered a speech clearly opposing the Semah's ICH nomination (interview 48).

Indeed, the respondents who participated in the August meeting stated that, many event participants rejected the content of the nomination file presented by the TMCT during the

[98] The president of the foundation gave me a copy of the document during our interview.

meeting, which ended with the TMCT's proposal to hold a subsequent meeting. Although expecting the TMCT to notify them about the whereabouts of the subsidiary meeting, they were instead informed by the media that Semah had already been declared as intangible heritage by UNESCO. One of the respondents explains:

> We discussed the safeguarding measures one by one, but we couldn't reach an agreement on them. What's more, some organizations were against the Semah's nomination for the UNESCO listing. That's why, the TMCT proposed to prepare a document summarizing the discussions, send it to us via email, and then hold another meeting. Some months later, I read the heritage designation of Semah in the newspaper. They have our contact information and everything…They neither called, nor contacted us by any other means since. (Interview 33)

Paradoxically however, in contrast to the Nevruz's nomination file that included a letter of support signed by the ICH Expert Commission members, that of the Semah included the letter of informed consent signed by all the representatives who participated in the August meeting.[99] Stating that "the communities concerned were consulted during the nomination process, and provided their free, prior and informed consent to the element's nomination", UNESCO decided that Semah satisfied the criteria for its inscription on the ICH list (Decision 5 COM 6.43).

In my research, I surprisingly discovered that not all of the respondents who had their names and signatures on the letter of informed consent were actually aware of this fact; given that, three among seven respondents who participated in the August meeting did not recall signing the letter (Interviews 33, 34 and 48). I realized this when a respondent became very suspicious of my research project's legitimacy. She could not figure out how I had accessed her name and knew about her participation in the August meeting. When I explained that I accessed

[99] The Letter of informed consent attached to the nomination file includes the title of the organizations, the name of the representatives, and their signatures. It reads: "we, hereby, approve and support the studies conducted by Turkish Republic Ministry of Culture and Tourism for the inscription of *"Semah"* on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010." The letter of Informed Consent of the Sema ritual can be accessed at www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/download.php?versionID=04461.

her name through the letter of informed consent available on the UNESCO ICH website and showed her a copy with her signature on it, she was very surprised as she did not recall signing such a form (interview 34). A similar dialogue also took place between me and another respondent when he explained that he had signed a document before the meeting, yet had thought that it indicated his participation in the meeting only:

> - …There was no such thing as signing anything. We participated in that meeting and they told us that they would reinvite us for a second meeting.
> - But there is a signature of yours on the letter of informed consent?
> - I only signed a form indicating that I participated in the meeting; I did not sign any letter of informed consent. In every meeting you sign a document indicating that you participate in it. I even asked for a photocopy of that form. They told me that they would send it via email. I cannot believe how they deceived us! (Interview 33)

Even the representative of the aforementioned foundation clearly opposed to the heritage designation of Semah has a signature on the letter of informed consent. During our meeting, this representative explained to me that he learned about this situation, when the foundation sent another written statement to the TMCT objecting to UNESCO's decision to inscribe Semah on the ICH list (Interview 48). He further stated that the foundation was subsequently informed by the TMCT that their representative approved the process by signing the consent form. As he stated furiously,

> This is a real scandal! ...In the meeting, the TMCT officials tried to impose their opinions on us to convince us to approve the heritage declaration of Semah. But I didn't think they would go this far… I remember signing a document indicating my participation in the meeting, and this was definitely before the meeting started. I don't remember signing any other document. Neither before or after the meeting, nor during the lunch break, had they mentioned any consent form to be presented for our approval… I went there to read the statement rejecting the intangible heritage status of the Semah. As a representative of our foundation, I told them that we do not accept Semah as intangible heritage but as a component of our worship… I have already checked the form and saw that the signature is mine, but I did not

> put my signature under that text. How could I sign such a document, when I am clearly opposing it! (Interview 48)

This situation makes it even harder to understand on what grounds the nomination file claims that the written opinions of the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations as well as the outcomes of the August meeting were taken into consideration during the Semah's nomination process (UNESCO 2010:7). Instead, a great majority of the respondents representing the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations believe their opinions to be deliberately and systematically misrepresented in the nomination file. These respondents often criticized the content of the nomination file for its representation of Semah out of its religious significance, and as a folkloric element. The nomination file categorizes Semah into two groups: *İçeri* (private) Semahs, representing its religious performance as part of the Cem ceremony, and *Dışarı* (public) Semahs conducted "for the purposes of teaching the *semah culture* to the younger generations or simply [for] *entertaining*" [emph. added] (2010: 5). None of the Alevi-Bektaşi respondents, including the ones declaring a positive opinion on the heritagization of Semah, accept such a categorical division. A Semah teacher, for instance, noted that all Semahs are of religious importance:

> I found these concepts very odd. There is no such thing as public or private Semah. There are regional differences in the performance of Semah; yet all is one and the same, performed for the purpose of showing devotion to God. Even if I begin to turn Semah at this very moment, I would do so as part of my worship. (Interview 42)

During these interviews the respondents explained that the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations do not provide Semah courses only for the purposes of teaching how to turn Semah, emphasizing these courses as significant means to socialize the urban Alevi-Bektaşi youth into the tradition. One of the respondents mentioned the difficulty of practicing their traditions, due to the urbanization of the community, and emphasized the importance of Semah courses in

familiarizing younger community members with the details of their faith (interview 43). In another instance, a Semah teacher explained the content of the Semah course he offers: "if I teach how to turn Semah for fifteen minutes, I explain for an hour the specifics of the Cem ceremony and the foundations of the Alevi-Bektaşi belief, its fundamental concepts and terminology" (interview 46). The practice of Semah for the purpose of "entertainment", however, is something that the community has long been reacting against. As one respondent put it succinctly "go and tell any of us that Semah is a form of entertainment, if you want to break our hearts" (Interview 44). Another respondent explained that owing to the efforts of the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations, there is now a growing reaction among community members against the conduct of Semah for entertainment purposes:

> At first, we didn't react against the performance of Semah at weddings, in bars and at music clubs for entertainment. We wanted our rituals to be publicly available, and to be viewed by others. Yet, when Semah became part of music videos or even, supermarket openings, the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations took a joint decision to react against these inappropriate conducts of Semah. They came to emphasize Semah's religious significance and stopped organizing Semahs for entertainment purposes... Our foundation arranges charity dinners to support the Cemevis. Five years ago each dinner included a Semah show, now we don't include them anymore; or when we do, we make sure that it is performed at the very start, before our Dede gives his blessings. We mention in all our meetings that Semah is our religious ritual and practicing it for entertainment is an insult to our faith. Our efforts are now widely supported by the community and these Semah shows are disappearing… It is really disappointing to see that when we are showing such awareness on the issue, the nomination file defines Semah as a form of entertainment. (Interview 43)

Alevi-Bektaşi respondents also criticized the safeguarding measures offered in the nomination file as attempts to represent Semah out of its religious significance. One respondent opposed the TMCT's plan to establish a Semah Museum by claiming that, "Semah is not a cultural object to be presented in the museums, it is a religious practice: have you ever heard of

any Namaz museums?"(Interview 45) The government's proposal on launching Semah training courses was also criticized as an attempt to diminish the religious meaning of Semah. One of the respondents asked cynically: "who will teach Semah in these courses, the Sunni Religious Affairs personnel?" (Interview 39) The majority of the respondents stated that if the government were to sustain the tradition of Semah, they would rather do so whilst leaving the rest of the initiative to the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations, by providing them with technical and financial support.

Not unexpectedly, the subscription of Semah to the ICH listing has provided no financial or technical support from the government to the Semah related projects and activities so far, despite the government's commitment to do so as part of the Semah's action plan. In fact, none of the measures mentioned in the action plan had been put into practice (as of December 2011). Following the heritage declaration of Semah, for instance, two Alevi-Bektaşi foundations jointly applied to the Prime Ministry Promotion Fund for a funding with a joint project to organize Semah symposiums and festivals with an aim to create a cultural dialogue at international level among the academicians, researchers and the Semah performers for a period of ten months.[100] Their application, however, was rejected. One of the respondents involved in the preparation of the project explains why:

> I cannot really be specific, but we learned through unofficial channels that some forces within the government decided that it would be unsuitable to provide financial support to us. Yet, in the meeting organized by the TMCT [August meeting], they were assuring us all kinds of financial support… They basically used us; they contacted us only to get our signatures. (Interview 37)

[100] The respondent involved in the preparation of this project gave me a copy of the project dossier during our interview.

Another respondent that participated in the August meeting contacted the ICH office of the TMCT to ask their assistance in finding a Semah teacher, only to be informed that she should contact the Konya Sema group to send them a Sema teacher (Interview 34). As she claimed, "It is a real shame that the officers, who are supposed to be in charge of sustaining the Semah ritual, cannot even differentiate Semah from Sema: I never contacted them again for any other reason."

Indeed, the sharp contrast between the government's response to the heritage declaration of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony and to that of the Semah ritual provides further insight into the government's overwhelmingly Sunni lenses. While the government provides significant funds and efforts to enliven and popularize the Mevlevi tradition as an element of Turkey's Islamic heritage, it largely neglects the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition. In the words of a respondent, "it is as if they are the offspring and we are the stepchildren of this country: The Mevlevis receive considerable funding from the government, while we receive nothing" (interview 33). Indeed, in contrast to the increased support that the Seb-i Arus celebrations received from the government, the Hacı Bektaş festival has experienced serious budget cuts from the TMCT and the Prime Ministry Promotion Fund (Interview 31). In addition, the project that was approved by the previous government to construct a stadium for hosting the festival activities was suspended when the JDP came to power (Interview 31). Not unexpectedly, while the government provides significant resources and assistance to the Konya Sema group, the Hacı Bektaş Semah group is largely neglected. The number of members of the Semah group had decreased from thirty in 1997 to twelve in 2011, and despite their requests for additional personnel, there have been no hirings (interview 30). One of the members of the Semah group explains how this affects their performances: "We can only perform a limited part of our repertoire, if one of us is off-duty or has a health problem, we cannot figure out which Semah to turn with such few people"

(interview 29). Another member of the Semah group explains the ways in which the government's neglect towards them relates to its Sunni outlook:

> The Mevlevi group of Konya is in every government organized cultural event; we are not even called for ten percent of those events. They also see us more like a folklore group. When we are called by the government to perform in an event, it is very rare that such an event relates to the Alevi-Bektaşi faith. We mostly perform in the protocol meetings. The Mevlevis, on the other hand, represent Turkey at an international level. They perform nearly everywhere in the world. We are never asked by the government to perform Semah outside of Turkey. Since 1997, we have participated in three international events; in Belarus, Macedonia and Albania, where the Bektaşi culture is still alive. So the demand actually came from them… This is all because, the Sema is part of Sunni culture, and Semah is not. The prime minister visits Konya every year during the *Seb-i Arus*, even his presence is an act of support for the Mevlevi tradition. In contrast, he never sets a foot in Hacı Bektaş. (Interview 30)

Having been neither requested nor approved by the Alevi-Bektaşis, Semah's heritage designation has brought no financial or technical support from the JDP government to the Alevi-Bektaşi institutions so far. The above discussion shows that, denying the religious significance of Semah for the Alevi-Bektaşis, the heritagization of Semah is consistent with the government's nationalist agenda to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşism into Sunni Islam. Indeed, the "theological restrictions" that are discussed regarding the recognition of the Cemevi as a place of worship, also applies to the recognition of Semah's religious significance. One of the respondents relates:

> It has been one and a half years since the heritage declaration of Semah. The government didn't contact us for any purpose. I see now that they used us to obtain an official permission. We do not want to be safeguarded, defined or interfered with. They should leave us be. We can solve our problems, turn our Semah, and find ways to sustain it by ourselves…. Their actual aim is yet to marginalize the practice of Semah as a religious ritual and popularize its folkloric artifacts. If they were to sustain Semah, they would first recognize the Cemevis as places of worship. We should, in other words, turn Semah as a cultural activity, but then go to the mosque to pray with them. (Interview 43)

Conclusion:

Since the JDP came to power in 2002, the relationship between state and religion has become an issue of heated debate in the political and public arena in Turkey. The second chapter examined how despite its claims to stand at an equal distance from all religions, the JDP government instead advances an Islamic nationalist agenda that seeks to strengthen the role of Sunni Islam in Turkish social and political life. The government's Alevi policy provides further insight into its Sunni outlook and how it brings additional restrictions on non-Sunni Islamic groups in Turkey. The JDP government denies the demands of Alevi-Bektaşis on the recognition of their religious difference, claiming that it would damage the Sunni Muslim unity of the nation. It instead favors an explicit policy of misrecognition of Alevi-Bektaşis, in an effort to redefine their faith as a subculture within Sunni Islam; claiming Alevi-Bektaşism as a Muslim Sufi tradition, regardless of community members demanding to be perceived as a distinct Islamic sect.

This chapter showed that by rejecting the religious significance of the Semah ritual for the community and misrepresenting their perception of the ritual for nationalist ends, the heritagization of Semah has added to the government's assimilation policies towards Alevi-Bektaşis. Relying on the opinion of the Sunni authorities that stress the universality of fundamental Islamic principles and the unity of Turkey's Islamic community, the JDP government rejects the compatibility of Semah and Namaz, and claims the latter as the only legitimate worship practice for Turkey's Muslim community. In fact, the ex-president of the DRA, Ali Bardakoğlu, explains it all:

> We are not against the Cem ceremony, but Islam is not an obscure domain that the DRA personnel or even the DRA president could easily envisage. We can consider neither the Mevlevis' Sema nor the Alevis' Semah or a zikr ritual of another Sufi brotherhood as worship that is comparable to

Namaz. This is the fundamental approach of Islam and is beyond our domain. (in Müderrisoğlu 2008)

CONCLUSION

As Michael Brown and other heritage scholars have noted, the last three decades have seen a major growth in the field of cultural property, when its scope that was limited to the "portable works of art and architectural monuments that embodied the history and identity of particular peoples or nation-states", was broadened to include nonmaterial cultural elements (2005: 40). UNESCO's decision to adopt the ICH Convention in 2006 has no doubt carried the policies and practices for the management of nonmaterial cultural elements (as intangible heritage) onto a global level. Concerns over the loss of cultural diversity have been the major factor in the implementation of the Convention as a binding international instrument. Requiring state-parties to identify and manage intangible heritage located within their borders, the Convention aims at ensuring their safeguarding against the deteriorating effects of globalization and social transformation. In this study, however, I chose not to engage in a discussion whether, for what reasons, or in what ways intangible heritage, or particularly the cultural practices that I studied, needed to be safeguarded. Instead, claiming heritage-making to be deeply contested and exclusionary process, I have explored the vital political questions underlying intangible heritage: what is to be considered and managed as heritage, by whom, for what reasons, and with what effects.

The scope of heritage management has been extended in the few last decades, but the debates surrounding the field of heritage still raise fundamental questions about its inherent political character. Problematizing UNESCO's approach to heritage for privileging national over local perspectives, the literature on cultural property and heritage calls attention to the ways in which UNESCO heritage programs are dominated by nationalistic concerns. This study focused on UNESCO-initiated intangible heritage-making in Turkey in an attempt to render more

understandable its influence on marginalized populations and how such influence unfolds in various complex ways in relation to broader national political processes. In this respect, I discussed the heritagization of marginalized cultural practices in Turkey as a process that reveals the parameters of recent transformation in the contours of state nationalism; from *secularist Turkish nationalism* of Kemalism to the *Islamist Turkish nationalism* of the JDP government. Drawing on interviews, ethnographic research, and content analysis of UNESCO documents, I sought to demonstrate how the heritagization of the Sema ceremony, Nevruz festival, and Semah ritual contributes on various levels to the JDP governments' nationalist agenda.

There is a symbiotic link between heritage and identity. The literature on cultural property and heritage has long been concerned with how ownership claims on heritage are invariably tied up with constructing, restructuring and legitimizing collective forms of identity (e.g., Brown 2004; Graham et al. 2000; Hall 2005; Rowlands 2004; Silverman and Ruggles 2007; Smith 2007). Collective identities, as the first chapter of this study has explored, are often formed through claims of mutual attachment to a historic past that is materialized in certain objects, places, and traditions. In this respect, as Anico and Peralta suggest, cultural heritage provides a substantial material and symbolic assistance for identity construction, "both serving as a resource for the representation of identities and a place for its performance" (2009:1). The processes of inclusion and exclusion operate simultaneously in the formation of collective identities: assumptions about group similarities, as often argued, heavily rely on other assumptions about intergroup differences. Whereas shared heritage encourages unity and belonging among some persons, it does so by excluding others from such heritage: "all heritage is someone's heritage and inevitably not someone else's," as Graham et al. remind us, "ultimately, because it is what and where we say it is (the pivotal variable being 'we') then one

person's heritage is the disinheritance of another" (2000: 93). Conflicting interpretations, meanings and narratives of the past often overlap in a single heritage tradition, site or object: – this is what makes heritage, according to Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996), dissonant in nature. Heritage, in this respect, "is closely linked with power" (Anico and Peralta 2009:1) with a complex and ongoing process of negotiation and conflict among multiple interest groups over the right to define, interpret and manage cultural heritage.

Heritage has no doubt been a significant tool for the assertion of shared national identity, history and culture. Graham et al., indeed, narrate how nationalism and heritage, as we know it today, co-emerged in 19th century Europe: "The nation-state required national heritage to consolidate national identification, absorb or neutralize potentially competing heritages of socio-cultural groups or regions, combat the claims of other nations upon its territory or people, while furthering claims upon nationals in territories elsewhere" (2000: 183). Especially in the last decades, however, with the rise of politics of recognition as an effective means of struggle for marginalized populations against the economic, political and social inequalities, cultural heritage came to be pronounced as a tool for claims of difference from a totalizing national narrative. According to Laurajane Smith, claims to cultural heritage are demonstrative of claims of communal identity, which might assist subordinated groups to achieve further political legitimacy (2009: 160). Struggle over the control of heritage sites and objects (and, we might add, nonmaterial cultural expressions) takes place in an arena where claims on the recognition of communal cultural identity circulate to inform and legitimize other claims to equity (p. 161).

One fundamental question regarding dissonant heritage is then how conflicting national and local values, interests, and purposes are worked out in heritage schemes. Heritage-making often reflects the dominant narrative, and this is often the national one. UNESCO heritage

programs, projects, and activities are no exception to this. Much scholarship has so far problematized the ways in which UNESCO's approach to cultural heritage, though possibly unintentionally, allows for privileging national over the local interests (e.g., Askew 2010; Beazley 2010; Blake 2000; Kearney 2009; Marrie 2009; Shepherd 2006). Blake criticizes cultural heritage practices in the contemporary world (including those of UNESCO) by claiming that "the decision as to what is deemed worthy of protection and preservation" is a political decision that is "generally made by State authorities on national level and by intergovernmental organisations-comprising member States-on international level" (2000: 68). Indeed, nationalist concerns mostly take over community interests because what is often represented in UNESCO heritage lists are cultural practices, objects or sites of national importance. UNESCO heritage mechanisms thus often "play into the hands of those assimilationist governments" (Marrie 2009:178). Examining the inscription of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) by the Japanese government onto the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1996, Beazley discusses how the process has served the Japanese government "to silence the voices of not only the non-Japanese victims of the atomic blast but also of the survivors" (2010: 45). He argues that as the UNESCO membership extends only to national governments, the narratives that are promoted through UNESCO heritage programs are often selective and hegemonic national narratives that considerably undermine "the representation of minority cultures and ethnic minorities within nation-states" (p. 60). Showing how the discourses and meanings surrounding the Genbaku Dome was "wholly constructed and manipulated by the States Parties and by ICOMOS to meet nationalistic and international diplomatic imperatives," Beazley claims that even though deemed to be a depoliticized practice, the subscription of places onto the WH list is in fact deeply politicized, contested and malignant (p. 62).

The ICH Convention's endeavor to reverse the dominant position of national governments and experts over communities in the making of intangible heritage has been detailed in the previous chapters. When asked about how the ICH Convention responds in relation to the aforementioned critiques, a program specialist in the Division of Cultural Objects and Intangible Heritage at UNESCO headquarters in Paris enthusiastically explained:

> This [ICH] Convention differs from other UNESCO heritage programs for its taking the issue of community involvement and representation more seriously. The older Conventions have problems in their approach to community involvement in heritage management. They provide more of a top-to-bottom approach to heritage, where the experts and government officials choose the practices to be selected as heritage and decide on how they could be protected. The 2006 Convention aims to reverse this approach. It stipulates that working with communities is a must. Ideally, the request for safeguarding intangible heritage should come from communities and not from the experts or government officials. (Interview 1)

At least at the discourse level, the ICH Convention can be considered as the most community-friendly UNESCO heritage program. The convention, in an attempt to formulate a community-based definition of intangible heritage, stipulates that in order for a cultural practice to be inscribed onto the UNESCO ICH list, it needs to be rooted in the traditions of any given social group as an element that provides a sense of belonging and communal identity. A TMCT official further relates:

> Let me give you an example from a highly controversial area of intangible heritage: the cultural practices relating to food preparation. *Patlıcan musakka* [eggplant dish with minced meet], for example, cannot be considered as a constituent of intangible heritage, because, that dish is just about how to cut vegetables and mix them in a certain way… Just know-how isn't enough. This practice neither has a place in the cultural structure of a community, nor provides people with a sense of collective identity. But take, for example, *keşkek* [dish made with lamp chops and wheat]. In certain regions of Turkey, it is a crucial component of marriage ceremonies; you cannot organize a wedding without keşkek. Hence, given that marriage is a significant community ritual, keşkek can be considered as the intangible

> heritage of any community who prepare the dish as part of their wedding ceremonies. (Interview 2)

Equally important, UNESCO's selection criteria for the ICH listing clearly specify that a successful nomination has to be prepared with the widest-possible participation of the community and should demonstrate their free, prior and informed consent to the nomination process.[101] Despite the efforts of UNESCO to empower the role of tradition-bearers in the identification, selection and management of intangible heritage, national governments still play a decisive role in the implementation and administration of the Convention. This often allows for domestic political concerns to take precedence over community interests and needs. UNESCO, in fact, has no direct contact with tradition-bearers at any stage of the enactment of the ICH Convention. It also provides no mechanisms to control whether the aforementioned standards are really met on the ground. As Askew (2010) suggests, limited presence of UNESCO on a local level allows for the marginalization of community perspectives and interests by rendering the process vulnerable to the political priorities of national governments:

> …the World Heritage List and others (now including 'Intangible Heritage') validates the continuing activities of UNESCO as an arbiter of cultural status and inclusion - it is a harmony that obscures the forms of suppression and manipulation of symbols by its member states which pursue their own ideological agendas by appropriating globally-endowed status. Despite the best intentions of its advocates,…UNESCO is a complicit partner in nation-states' domestic projects of cultural reification and domination (Askew 2010: 40-41)

The Turkish case, in fact, provides a good example on how the intangible heritage criteria of UNESCO can easily be disregarded on the ground, for meeting further political ends (and in quite creative ways). As the heritagization process of the Nevruz festival and Semah ritual

[101] Being very vague, however, the criteria introduces further complications to the field of heritage management in terms of who decides who is eligible for representing community values, interests and concerns, who qualifies for signing the consent forms, or how many consent forms would be sufficient for each nomination to meet the ICH criteria of UNESCO.

demonstrate, the content of the nomination files and consent forms submitted to UNESCO might be incorrect or misleading when it comes to community representation and involvement. For instance, the nomination files, which claim to have the support of communities in the heritage making process, can be submitted without the knowledge of tradition-bearers, or even when community representatives openly express their disapproval to the government's heritage policies and practices. What's more, the validity and reliability of the consent forms becomes highly questionable when they are signed by heritage experts on behalf of communities, or by community representatives unaware of signing them.

While the cases of Nevruz and Semah clearly fail to meet the criteria for the inscription on the ICH list, UNESCO chose not to intervene, -even when informed by community members about this situation. In an interview with the president of a prominent Alevi-Bektaşi foundation based in Istanbul, concerns were raised about the inability of communities to have a voice or place in the UNESCO's heritage practices to express their opinions (interview 47). As the president further explained, their foundation recently informed the UNESCO ICH Center in Paris that their ideas on the Semah ritual were marginalized and manipulated in the nomination file, and that the consent forms submitted to UNESCO were inaccurate. Nevertheless, the UNESCO authorities indicated that the institution could not get involved in domestic issues, and that they should instead bring their concerns to the attention of the relevant TMCT office (interview 47). I have encountered several similar discussions during my fieldwork by other Alevi-Bektaşi as well as Kurdish respondents on how the top-to-bottom approach of UNESCO to intangible heritage allows for the neglect and manipulation of community perspectives, concerns, and interests by national governments seeking other political objectives. In the words of a president of another prominent Alevi-Bektaşi organization in Istanbul:

> I found the UNESCO's approach to intangible heritage highly problematic. Of course it is important for UNESCO to work with the TMCT, but this is giving all the power over the control of Semah to the government… They [UNESCO] should have also communicated with the relevant Alevi-Bektaşi institutions that would better represent the community's perspective and ideas on Semah. If you work only with the TMCT, you will only get the government's approach on the issue, which misrepresents the community's interests for its own political purposes. (Interview 43)

During interviews with TMCT personnel and Expert Committee members, I was often told that "purely cultural" reasons and interests grounded the decision to nominate the Sema, Nevruz and Semah for the ICH listing. Quite unexpectedly, however, during a follow-up interview with the previous Head of the ICH department, she agreed with the Kurdish and Alevi-Bektaşi respondents on how the selection process is conditioned by wider political factors and calculations:

> Of course these three traditions are strong traditions of Turkey, but Turkey has many other strong traditions. I am not supposed to say this, but the ICH department is not independent from the political conjecture of Turkey. There is a specific ideology behind all this. I cannot be specific but let's say that we had cases when we nominated a cultural practice because a high-ranking government officer asked us to do so. (Interview 18)

My intention is not to propose that there is a consciously and carefully designed hidden agenda or a single clearly-defined motive behind the heritagization of these three marginalized practices by the JDP government. I would like to suggest, however, that their heritagization as representatives of Turkish national culture greatly serve the government's nationalist agenda. Examined together, these three practices display how intangible heritage making unfolds in various complex ways in response to the emergent nationalist trends in Turkey. The previous chapters provided insight into the alternative nationalist vision and policy of the JDP government that signals a shift in Turkey's official nationalist narrative from Kemalist nationalism (that promotes a unifying secular Muslim-Turkish identity), to that of the JDP (that supports the

nation's Sunni-Turkish unity). The current government's use of nationalism does not diverge from Kemalist nationalism in promoting Turkishness as a national identity marker. At the same time however, the JDP government disapproves of the secular aspects of Kemalist nationalism as antidemocratic and restrictive. The JDP, in this respect, pursues a determined policy of removing restrictions on public manifestations of Sunni Islam in an attempt to promote a unifying Muslim national identity and culture. It is these present nationalist tendencies that make Turkey's intangible heritage practices not only an aspect of politics of recognition (in the case of the Mevlevis), but also of nonrecognition (in the case of the Kurds), and misrecognition (in the case of the Alevi-Bektaşis) with respect to whether or in what ways, these marginalized ethnic and religious identities comply with the current government's nationalist agenda.

The Kemalist modern nation building project also employed Sunni Islam, -to which 80 to 85 percent of the population subscribes (Zürcher and Van der Linden 2004: 122), as the binding national force, in its aim to promote a new national identity based on the unity of secular Muslim-Turks. Nevertheless, Islam was not a "dominant national identifier" in Turkey up until the 1980s (Shankland 2003:20). While the Kemalist project defined the nation as both Turkish and Muslim in regards to citizenship, it also promoted the secularization of public life as part of Turkey's modernization program. Supporting a notion of secularism based on the regulation of religion and its public manifestations by the state, the Kemalist regime quickly launched policies that required the state's direct involvement in religious matters. While these policies led to the institutionalization of Sunni Islam as the official state religion, its public presence remained highly restricted due to the limitations imposed by the secularization policies. The regime thus banned and criminalized all Islamic institutions and activities that were opposing state authority and were deemed to be reactionary and non-progressive (such as the Caliphate, the Sufi orders,

religious courts and schools). At the same time, it introduced new state institutions (such as the DRA and Imam Hatip schools) that would deliver Sunni religious services and instructions in line with the modern secular principles of the new Republic.

As Hale and Özbudun suggests, "Not unexpectedly, Turkish Islamist parties have found themselves at odds with the secular character of the Kemalist notion of nationalism" (2009: 75). The JDP does not reject its Sunni Islamic background. Nonetheless, by taking a conservative rather than overtly Islamist stand, the JDP separates itself from its predecessors (at least at the level of discourse) by suggesting an alternative form of secularism that would remove the restrictions on the display of any religious beliefs –and without privileging Sunni Islam over any other religious belief. Defining secularism as a "principle of freedom" in its political party program, the JDP argues against the supervision and domination of religion by the state, while supporting the separation of the domains of state and religion as a condition of democracy. Although the discursive stand of the JDP has been praised in some international media and literature for providing an ideal model for the reconciliation of Islam with secular democracy, the JDP's attempt to redefine Turkey's principle of secularism serves its interests by removing restrictions on and strengthening the authority of Sunni Islam on domestic grounds.

Having a strong orientation toward Sunni Islam, the JDP government increasingly confronts Kemalist secular national identity to further an Islamic nationalist agenda, directed at redefining Turkish national identity along Islamic lines (Duran 2008: 99). The government overtly and exclusively supports Sunni Islam in an attempt to emphasize its role as a binding force in the construction of shared national identity. At the same time, it perceives the recognition claims of distinct Islamic groups as damaging to Turkey's Sunni unity and solidarity. Despite the JDP's claim to stand at an equal distance from all religions, Prime Minister Erdoğan,

for instance, often describes Islam as the "cement of Turkish society." The intensification of the authority of the DRA in Turkish politics, the increase of government funding for Islamic institutions and activities, the dramatic increase in the employment of pro-Islamists in state positions, the rapid growth in the number of mosques and people attending their services throughout Turkey, and the upsurge in the organization and observance of public Islamic events and practices, can all be cited as examples of the growing institutionalization and influence of Sunni Islam in Turkey. While Sunni religious traditions gain in popularity and an increase in its followers achieve wider freedom to display and practice their faith under the reign of the JDP government, its attempts to further an Islamic nationalist agenda bring additional restrictions on those religious groups that do not subscribe to Sunni Islam. Denying sectarian differences within Islam not on the basis of Turkey's secular principles but, this time, on the basis of a purported uniformity of Islamic theological principles, the JDP pursues an active policy of assimilating diverse Islamic elements into a unifying Sunni identity. Examining government policies regarding the heritagization of the Sunni Mevlevi and non-Sunni Alevi-Bektaşi traditions, the second and forth chapters provided further insight into the JDP's Islamic nationalist agenda and its effects on marginalized religious communities. Emphasizing Turkey's Sunni Muslim unity, the JDP openly acknowledges the Mevlevi tradition as Turkey's Sunni Muslim heritage. At the same time, however, it pursues an active policy of misrecognition that denies the distinct religious identity of Alevi-Bektaşism in an attempt to redefine it as a subdivision of Sunni Islam.

The heritagization process of the Sema ceremony reveals how the JDP government favors a policy of recognition of Mevlevi religious identity and rights that gradually transforms the Sunni Mevlevi Sufi tradition from a marginalized subculture to the mainstream. During my fieldwork, I was often told by participants affiliated with the Mevlevi groups that the

heritagization of the Sema ceremony initiated a process where their concerns were heard and addressed for the first time by the Turkish government. The Mevlevi religious tradition, indeed, came to be financially and technically supported and officially promoted as the representative of Turkey's Islamic heritage under the reign of the JDP. While the government has not so far taken a concrete step on lifting the ban on Sufi orders (to avoid alerting Turkey's Kemalist segments), government authorities never hesitate to express their disapproval of Law 677. The condemnation of the ban by the government as anti-democratic and a severe violation of religious freedom in Turkey has been frequently discussed in political and media circles as the JDP's attempt to set the tone for lifting the ban on Sufi orders. As Turkey currently seeks to draft a new constitution under the JDP government, it is expected that the new constitution would bring some legal relief in restrictions on Sufi orders, -if the ban is not totally lifted.

The heritage declaration of Sema has so far served the government to support and promote the Mevlevi religious tradition and its practices without making fundamental changes in the legal status of Sufi orders in Turkey. Despite the ban on Sufi orders, the heritage declaration of Sema serves both government and community interests and functions in easing the restrictions against the public manifestation of Mevlevi religious practices. In addition, providing greater visibility of Mevlevi activities in Turkey's public sphere, heritagization of Sema allows for the further popularization of the Mevlevi tradition in Turkey. While until recently, the public presence of Mevlevis in Turkey was mostly limited to Sema performances or music concerts organized mostly in Istanbul and Konya for touristic purposes, today Mevlevi religious activities are increasingly visible and popular among pious Sunni Muslims throughout Turkey. Since the heritage declaration of the ceremony, the government has provided an ever increasing amount of public funds to sponsor and organize various Mevlevi activities and events on a national and

international level, ranging from Sema and Mevlevi music courses and performances to symposiums, lectures, and publications on the Mevlevi tradition. In line with the ceremony's action plan, the TMCT also issued a notice against the conduct of Sema outside of its traditional religious significance and etiquette. Also recently, the first public Mevlevi institution for providing traditional Sema training and for teaching the specifics of the tradition has been founded in Konya. Equally important, the Sema performances are now being held regularly in various state-organized cultural events, such as protocol meetings, official receptions, conference openings and banquets. The state-sponsored Mevlevi Sema group conducts Sema performances weekly in Konya and frequently all over the world.

Receiving an increased amount of financial and technical support from the government, the Seb-i Arus celebrations of Konya became one of the principle gathering events for hundreds of thousands of pious Muslims throughout Turkey. Moreover, several high-ranking state officials, including the president and the prime minister, regularly participate in the celebrations. Hence, the celebrations in Konya have recently developed into a major Islamic festival in Turkey, including over week-long events of several Sema shows and Mevlevi music concerts, Islamic art expeditions, as well as panels, symposiums, and lectures on the specifics of Islam and Mevlevism. Furthermore, celebrations with similar but narrower content came to be organized in other cities throughout Turkey. The government also contributed to the popularization of the Mevlevi tradition by renovating various Mevlevi convents in Turkey from ruins and opening them to the public. Despite the ban on Sufi orders, these places came to function as community gathering places (though under the name of museums or cultural centers), where the Sema training courses, Sema performances enacted by newly established local Sema groups, lectures, meetings and other Mevlevi related activities are held regularly with mass attendance. In addition

to the Mevlevi convents, the government also established a research institute to encourage and financially support studies on the Mevlevi tradition, together with cultural centers and museums for hosting various Mevlevi events and activities.

While the second chapter discussed the heritagization of the Sema Ceremony as part of the government's efforts to promote the Mevlevi tradition as an element of Turkey's Sunni Islamic culture, the fourth chapter revealed how similar nationalist motives underline the JDP's policy of misrecognition towards the Alevi-Bektaşis. In fact, the Alevi-Bektaşi demands for equal rights (official recognition of their non-Sunni religious identity and place of worship, downsizing or annulation of the DRA, and elimination of compulsory religious courses from public school curricula, or, at least, their reformulation as elective courses) are technically in line with the notion of secularism that the JDP government claims to promote. As Öktem suggests, however, with a "pious Sunni Muslim mindset, the AKP [JDP] can reach out only to those Alevis who are already assimilated and to those who are willing to integrate themselves into the fold of Sunni Islam for one reason or another" (2008b). The JDP is thus willing to recognize Alevi-Bektaşism as an Islamic religious tradition; yet, to redefine it as a subculture within Sunni Islam. The government has so far largely ignored the Alevi-Bektaşi claims for recognition as a distinct Islamic sect, and pursued policies to assimilate them into the unifying Sunni Islamic identity. A recent declaration of the Prime Minister Erdoğan, in fact, explains it all: "If being an Alevi means loving Hz. Ali, I am a better Alevi than all Alevis" (in Ergin 2011b). During my fieldwork, I have encountered several discussions by Alevi-Bektaşi respondents about being subjected to further discrimination due to the growing institutionalization of Sunni Islam under the JDP government. To them, while the JDP argues for a secularism that would provide

freedom for all religions, in practice it rather follows an active policy of Sunnification towards the Alevi-Bektaşis. In the words of the president of an Alevi-Bektaşi organization:

> If they [the JDP] were to stand at an equal distance to all religions, like they repetitively mention, they wouldn't talk about religious freedom only when it concerns the Sunni practices. A secular state should be profane. It cannot decide on a specific religion for itself… Yet in Turkey, owing to the JDP's overtly Sunni politics, Sunni Islam has become a structure that incorporates and manages the state itself. This has greatly increased the oppressive state policies that aim at the Sunnification of Alevism. (Interview 44)

The forth chapter discussed how despite the government's claim for the success of the Alevi initiative for addressing the Alevi-Bektaşi demands, the process has been condemned by a majority of Alevi-Bektaşis. Claiming that the government manipulates their demands, the Alevi-Bektaşi organizations protested against the Alevi initiative. Tens of thousands of Alevi-Bektaşis participated in the grand Alevi rallies co-organized by the prominent Alevi-Bektaşi organizations in various cities, to react against the JDP's assimilatory policies against them. Indeed, the Alevi initiative process has revealed how the government reads Turkey's Alevi question from exclusively Sunni lenses. The official recognition of Alevi-Bektaşism as a non-Sunni Islamic sect was rejected on "theological grounds", citing the opinion of the DRA and other prominent Sunni figures, who claim that the acceptance of sectarian differences within Islam would threaten Turkey's Islamic unity. The demand of Alevi-Bektaşis on the official recognition of Cemevi as a place of worship was also refused on similar grounds, stating that mosques are the only legitimate public institution for Muslim worship.

The measures that the government has taken so far in the name of solving Turkey's Alevi question also reveal how the process functions for the JDP government to further its assimilation policies against Alevi-Bektaşis. Instead of downsizing or annulling the DRA, the government is now working on a plan to widen its scope, by founding an Alevi-Bektaşi branch that would operate under the supervision of the Sunni establishment of the DRA. Furthermore, rather than

annulling compulsory Sunni religious education from the public school curricula or making it elective, the government chose rather to broaden the content of religious education: starting from this education year onwards (September 2011), compulsory religious courses cover Alevi-Bektaşis and other non-Sunni Muslims, such as Caferis and Nusayris as a subdivision of (Sunni) Islam. In addition to serving as a vehicle to Sunnify Alevi-Bektaşism, the Alevi initiative also suits the government's nationalist political agenda for lifting restrictions on Sunni Islam. Defining Alevi-Bektaşism as a Sufi tradition within Islam, the final workshop report, for instance, holds the ban on Sufi orders responsible for the emergence of Turkey's Alevi question and suggests its annulment, -regardless of the majority of the Alevi-Bektaşis that reject this definition and support the ban on Sufi orders as a measure against reactionary Islam. Hence, manipulating and misrepresenting the demands of Alevi-Bektaşis, the government once more reveals its interest in lifting the ban on Sufi orders.

It is not only the timing of the heritage declaration of Semah that corresponds to that of the Alevi initiative. My fieldwork has revealed that contrary to the case of the Sema Ceremony, the heritagization process of Semah was neither demanded nor welcomed by the majority of community representatives, who often discussed the process in relation to the Alevi initiative and thus as part of the government's efforts to redefine Alevi-Bektaşism within Sunni Islam. These respondents, most of who were contacted by the government during the heritagization process of Semah, stated that the process greatly manipulated and misrepresented their ideas on the definition and management of Semah. One thing often mentioned was that Semah constitutes a religious practice for the Alevi-Bektaşis -just like the daily ritual practice Namaz is for the Sunnis. Thus, its categorization as intangible heritage is inappropriate to its religious significance for the community. In addition, the content of the nomination file, including the action plan, was

criticized for its efforts to represent Semah as an entertainment element. Although these concerns were communicated to the relevant government bodies, Semah was subscribed to the ICH list without any modifications to its content and meanings of the nomination file. In fact, the government's attitude towards Semah has been loud and clear: describing Semah as a Muslim Sufi tradition (just like the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony), the JDP government denies the compatibility of Semah with Namaz and claims Namaz as the mutual worship practice among Turkey's Muslims. In this respect, rejecting the religious significance of Semah for Alevi-Bektaşis, inscription of Semah on the UNESCO ICH list allows the government's nationalist agenda to legitimize and promote its own interpretation of the Alevi-Bektaşi religious identity both at a national and international level.

The heritage declaration of Semah is relatively recent, and it is hard to claim that the government is yet following an active policy of Sunnization of Semah. Not unexpectedly, however, Alevi-Bektaşis were given no financial or technical support from the government to the Semah related activities. Furthermore, the government showed no signs of departure from its assimilatory policies against Alevi-Bektaşi identity and tradition. The sharp contrast between the government's response to the heritage declaration of Mevlevi Sema ceremony and to that of Semah ritual provides further insight into the government's Sunni outlook. While the government is taking strategic measures to sustain Mevlevi tradition in line with community demands, none of the long-term or short-term measures mentioned in Semah's action plan has been put into place so far. The TMCT never contacted Alevi-Bektaşi representatives once their signatures were obtained for the consent forms. Equally important, the requests of Alevi-Bektaşi organizations for financial and technical support for Semah related activities have also been rejected by the government, regardless of the action plan that guarantees the government's

commitment to provide such support. The JDP government contributes greatly to the creation of new public gathering places for Mevlevis by renovating Mevlevi convents and opening Mevlevi cultural centers throughout Turkey. Cemevis, on the other hand, still receive no financial support from the government. Moreover, their construction is facing severe restrictions by state authorities, while enforced mosque construction in Alevi populated areas is on the rise. In contrast to the increased support the Seb-i Arus celebrations receive from the government, the Hacı Bektaş festival is suffering from significant budget cuts. In addition, government authorities are rarely present at the festivals, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who has never visited Hacı Bektaş as prime minister. Last but not least, while the Konya Sema group represents Turkey in various state-sponsored events in and outside Turkey, the Hacı Bektaş Semah group is largely neglected, not even having sufficient group members to properly carry out Semah performances.

When it first came to power, the JDP also intended to incorporate Kurdish identity into the national whole on the basis of Sunni Islam. As Yavuz and Özcan suggests, "Identifying secularism as a cause of division between Turks and Kurds", the JDP rather presented "its own solution –'Islam as cement'- to end the societal polarization of Turkey" (2006:103). At first, the JDP's Islamic stand and its divergence from the conventional Kemalist discourse appealed to many pious Kurds. The government also showed some timid gestures on improving Kurdish cultural rights in line with the requirements of the EU admission process. However, the fact that these efforts were not followed by major policy changes and initiatives for solving Turkey's Kurdish question increased the discontent among Kurds. As a result, the JDP began to lose its Kurdish support to the pro-Kurdish parties. In the words of Larrabee and Tol, Kurdish identity ultimately proved to be more significant to Turkey's Kurdish population than any other issue

(2011: 147). Equally important, finding the government's efforts inadequate in meeting Kurdish demands, the PKK cancelled the ceasefire in 2006.

When the PKK attacks were increased, the government responded by modifying its moderate Kurdish policy which had until then downplayed the military measures against the PKK and highlighted the unity of Turks and Kurds based on their shared Sunni Islamic identity (Duran 2008: 99). From 2006 onwards, the JDP government came to embrace Turkey's long-term nationalist stand that presents Turkishness as a unifying national force. Adopting Turkey's conventional "one state, one nation, one flag" policy against the Kurdish demands (Duran 2008: 99) and cooperating with the Kemalist military and state structure, the JDP quickly re-implemented Turkey's zero-tolerance policies against terrorism and separatism. Counter-attacks by Turkish military forces targeted the PKK camps in Iraq and predominantly Kurdish regions in eastern Turkey. Several Kurdish intellectuals and politicians were imprisoned for collaborating with the PKK or attempting to divide the unity of the nation. As a result, as Yavuz and Özcan observes, Turkey has been further polarized along ethnic lines during the reign of the JDP, as the government "has not only failed to develop a coherent policy towards the Kurdish question but has actually sharpened the conflict" (2006: 104).

Öktem suggests that "the strategy of neglect of the "other's" cultural heritage is a long-term administrative policy linked to the cultural priorities of local and central governments, and might probably be seen as an extension of the strategy of destruction, albeit in times of peace" (2004: 566). Focusing on the heritagization of Nevruz by the JDP government to further Turkify Newroz, the third chapter showed how the JDP's Kurdish policy contributes to Turkey's conventional nationalist policy (outlined by Kemalism) to assimilate Kurdish identity into the Turkish national mainstream. In fact, both the cases of Semah Ritual and Nevruz typically

involved marginalization of community views, concerns, and interests on heritage-making by a national government seeking nationalist ends. However, while the case of Semah has shown how community claims on the ritual have been redefined, manipulated, and misrepresented in the name of national unity, the case of Nevruz illustrated a much more radical and aggressive form of marginalization, where the very community of tradition-bearers had been redefined as Turkish, entirely neglecting, suppressing, and delegitimizing Kurdish claims on the festival.

In line with Turkey's official Nevruz policy adopted in the 1990s, the festival was inscribed onto the UNESCO ICH list as a traditional Turkish custom without even mentioning the words "Kurd" or "Newroz". This was justified by claiming Newroz as a "fake" tradition, which deteriorates the "accurate", "original" and "transnational" Turkish meaning of the festival and damages its "purely cultural" experience for political ends. In this respect, UNESCO's ICH declaration of Nevruz plays into the hands of the Turkish government to prove the validity and genuineness of the official Turkish version of the festival both at a national and international level. Equally important, the ICH declaration has provided new possibilities to disguise the nationalist political motives behind the policies on the popularization of the Nevruz tradition in Turkey. The government has justified its efforts to disseminate the Nevruz tradition in Turkey in the name of safeguarding Nevruz as intangible heritage; as efforts to sustain and enliven the "true" meaning of an old Turkish tradition, other than as endeavors to deny the Kurdish demands over the festival. Overall, the heritagization of Nevruz provides yet another example, where Kurdish claims to distinct identity and culture are rejected by the Turkish government as part of ongoing state efforts to assimilate Kurds into Turkish identity through nonrecognition.

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Since the Islamically rooted JDP government came to power in 2002, Turkey has been going through a remarkable process of change that has been seriously transforming the country's social and political life. Such transformations can be attributed to the current government's departure from the Kemalist nationalist-secular principles, which heavily circumscribed religious expression and advocacy in Turkey's public sphere from the early years of the Republic. A nation-wide representative survey run by Carkoğlu and Toprak in 2006 as a follow up of a study they conducted in 1999, shows that the JDP's nationalist policies resonate among the majority of Turkish citizens, who define themselves increasingly in religious terms. When respondents were asked to locate themselves on a religiosity scale of 0-10, the rate of people who identified themselves as "extremely religious" (10) and as "very religious" (7-9) rose from 6 to 12.8 percent and from 25 to 46.5 percent between 1999 to 2006, respectively (2007: 41). Moreover, respondents who recognize "being Muslim" as their primary identity has increased from 35.7 percent in 1999 to 44.6 percent in 2006, and those who describe themselves first as "being Turkish" remained second with a slight decrease from 20.8 to19.4 percent, while those who described themselves as "the citizen of the Turkish Republic" decreased from 34.1 to 29.9 percent (p. 44).

The three cases that I have examined within the scope of this study unfold in various ways in response to how Mevlevi, Kurdish, and Alevi-Bektaşi identities conform to these shifting nationalist trends in Turkey. Heritagization of the Sema ceremony points to the current government's policy of recognition of Sunni Mevlevi identity and rights that demarginalize and actively promote Mevlevi religious tradition as Turkey's Islamic culture. This policy not only eases the institutional restrictions on the manifestation of Mevlevi identity but also serves to popularize Mevlevi tradition and its activities in Turkey. The cases of Nevruz and Semah, on the

other hand, indicate that intangible heritage can also be used as a means to force marginalized groups to adopt dominant national identity and culture. While heritagization of Semah is in line with the government's policies to assimilate Alevi-Bektaşi identity through its misrecognition within Sunni Islam, heritagization of Nevruz conforms to a more hostile form of assimilation through nonrecognition that denies a distinct Kurdish identity.

Appendix 1

List of Interview Participants

Interview 1– UNESCO Program Specialist, Division of Cultural Objects and Intangible Heritage UNESCO Paris Headquarters *Paris, 20 March 2009*

Interview 2- Department Head, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Intangible Cultural Heritage Department *Ankara, 03 July 2009*

Interview 3- President, Turkish National Commission for UNESCO Intangible Heritage Expert Committee
In addition to being the President of Turkish National Commission for UNESCO, the respondent represents Turkey in the Intergovernmental Committee Meetings for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Ankara, 07 July 2009*

Interview 4—President, Istanbul-Based Mevlevi Association
Founded in the early 1990s, the association offers private Sema training and ayin music courses. The association has a Sema performance group that conducts bi-weekly spectacles in Istanbul. The group also performs Sema in other cities across Turkey and abroad upon request. *Istanbul, 22 July 2009*

Interview 5- Art Historian and Researcher on Mevlevi Convents
The respondent was a member of the team that prepared the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony's candidature file for UNESCO's Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. *Istanbul, 24 July 2009*

Interview 6-Journalist and Columnist
The respondent is a prominent columnist who writes on Islamic and Mevlevi affairs for a mainstream Islamist newspaper in Turkey. He previously held executive positions in various Mevlevi associations. *Istanbul, 24 July 2009*

Interview 7-President, Istanbul-Based Mevlevi Association
Founded in the early 1990s, the association offers private Sema courses. It has a Sema performance group that conducts Sema spectacles three times a week in Istanbul. The group also performs Sema in other cities across Turkey and abroad upon request. *Istanbul, 25 July 2009*

Interview 8- Professor Emeritus of Art
The respondent was a member of the team that prepared the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony's candidature file for UNESCO's Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. *New York, 12 December 2009*

Interview 9- Novelist and Writer on Kurdish Issues
The respondent has actively been involved in Kurdish politics since the mid-1970s. He has also held executive positions in various voluntary Kurdish organizations and engaged in organizing Newroz celebrations in Turkey. *Istanbul, 14 March 2010*

Interview 10- Board Member, Istanbul-Based Mevlevi Foundation
The foundation was established by a prominent Mevlevi family in the mid-1990s. While the foundation does not offer Sema courses or have a Sema group, it organizes Sema performances with other Istanbul-based Mevlevi associations across Turkey and abroad. *Istanbul, 15 March 2010*

Interview 11- Owner of an Istanbul-Based Kurdish Publishing Company
The respondent has actively been involving in Kurdish politics since the mid-1970s. He has also held executive positions in various voluntary Kurdish organizations and engaged in organizing Newroz celebrations in Turkey. *Istanbul, 15 March 2010*

Interview 12- Writer on Kurdish Issues
The respondent has actively been involving in Kurdish politics since the late 1970s. He has also held executive positions in various voluntary Kurdish organizations and has engaged in organizing Newroz celebrations in Turkey. *Istanbul, 16 March 2010*

Interview 13- Project Coordinator, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate *Ankara, 17 March 2010*

Interview 14- Branch Chief, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Intangible Cultural Heritage Department *Ankara, 17 March 2010*

Interview 15- Department Head, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Intangible Cultural Heritage Department *Ankara, 18 March 2010*

Interview 16- Folklore Researcher, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Intangible Cultural Heritage Department *Ankara, 18 March 2010*

Interview 17- President, Pro-Kurdish Party
The respondent is a Kurdish-Alevi who has actively been involving both in Kurdish and Alevi politics since the early 1970s, and engaged in organizing various Newroz celebrations. *Ankara, 19 March 2010*

Interview 18- Follow-Up Interview (See Interview 2) *Ankara, 19 March 2010*

Interview 19- General Director, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism *Ankara, 20 March 2010*

Interview 20- Follow-Up interview (See Interview 3) *Ankara, 20 March 2010*

Interview 21- President, Ankara-Based Mevlevi Association
Founded in the early 2000s, the association offers private Mevlevi ayin music courses and organizes Sema events with other Mevlevi associations. *Ankara, 22 March 2010*

Interview 22- Deputy General Director, International Organization of Turkic Culture *Ankara, 23 March 2010*

Interview 23- Turkish National Commission for UNESCO Intangible Heritage Expert Committee Member *Izmir, 21 July 2010*

Interview 24- Director, Konya-Based Mevlevi Research Center
In addition to being an Assistant Professor of Literature and Eastern Languages in a public university, the respondent has recently become the Director of a state-sponsored Mevlevi Research Center in Konya. He previously held executive positions in various Mevlevi associations and foundations. *Konya, 12 December 2010*

Interview 25- Sema Whirler, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Konya Sema Performance Group *Konya, 13 December 2010*

Interview 26- Director, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Konya Sema Performance Group *Konya, 13 December 2010*

Interview 27- Vice-President, Istanbul-Based Mevlevi Foundation (See Interview 10 for Details) *Konya, 14 December 2010*

Interview 28- Sema Whirler, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Konya Sema Performance Group
The respondent is also the founder of a highly popular website on Mevlana and Mevlevi tradition in Turkey. *Konya, 14 December 2010*

Interview 29- Director, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Hacı Bektaş Semah Performance Group *Hacı Bektaş, 15 December 2010*

Interview 30- Semah Dancer, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Hacı Bektaş Semah Performance Group *Hacı Bektaş, 15 December 2010*

Interview 31- The Mayor of Hacı Bektaş Town *Hacı Bektaş, 16 December 2010*

Interview 32- The Director of Hacı Bektaş Veli Museum *Hacı Bektaş, 16 December 2010*

Interview 33- Executive Board Member, Ankara-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
Founded in the early 2000s, the association offers free Semah courses and organizes various Semah events and weekly Cem ceremonies. It unites over 100 Alevi-Bektaşi associations throughout Turkey. *Ankara, 17 December 2010*

Interview 34- Executive Board Member, Ankara-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
Founded in the mid-1990s, the association offers free Semah and music courses and organizes weekly Cem ceremonies as well as Semah performances. *Ankara, 17 December 2010*

Interview 35- Vice Co-President, Pro-Kurdish Party
The respondent has actively been involving in Kurdish politics and engaging in organizing Newroz celebrations in Turkey since the late 1980s. *Ankara, 18 December 2010*

Interview 36- President, Ankara-Based Kurdish Association
The respondent has engaged in organizing Newroz celebrations in Turkey since the early 1970s. He founded an association in the early 2000s that provides Kurdish language lessons as well as organizes panels and symposiums on Kurdish issues. *Ankara, 18 December 2010*

Interview 37-Board-Member, Ankara-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The association does not offer Semah courses but organizes various Semah related events together with other Alevi-Bektaşi associations. *Ankara, 19 December 2010*

Interview 38- President, Paris-Based Kurdish Association
The respondent has organized Newroz celebrations and receptions in Turkey and abroad since the late 1960s. He is also the founder of one of the most prominent Kurdish associations in Europe. *Paris, 11 February 2011*

Interview 39- President, Izmir-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The association offers free Semah courses and organizes music concerts and weekly Cem ceremonies. *Izmir, 21 March 2011*

Interview 40- President, Izmir-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The association offers free Semah courses and organizes weekly Cem ceremonies. *Izmir, 21 March 2011*

Interview 41- Alevi Dede, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation
The respondent performs religious services and duties, and leads Cem ceremonies three times a week. The foundation that he is affiliated with offers free Semah courses. *Istanbul, 24 March 2011*

Interview 42- Semah Teacher, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation
The respondent has been working as a Semah teacher in various Alevi-Bektaşi associations and foundations since the mid-1990s. *Istanbul, 26 March 2011*

Interview 43- President, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation
The foundation offers free Semah courses, and organizes Semah performances and weekly Cem ceremonies. *Istanbul, 27 March 2011*

Interview 44-President, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The association is a branch office of a prominent Alevi-Bektaşi association that was founded in late 1980s, and has more than 60 branch offices throughout Turkey at present. The branch office offers free Semah and music courses, and organizes music concerts, Semah events and weekly Cem ceremonies. *Istanbul, 29 March 2011*

Interview 45- Board Member, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association (See Interview 44 for Details) *Istanbul, 29 March 2011*

Interview 46- Semah Teacher, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The respondent has been working as a Semah teacher in various Alevi-Bektaşi associations since the late 1990s. *Istanbul, 29 March 2011*

Interview 47- President, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation
Founded in the mid-1990s, the foundation has over 10 branches and 30 Cemevis throughout Turkey. It organizes weekly Cem ceremonies. The foundation has recently stopped offering Semah courses and organizing separate Semah events due to its concerns over the folklorization of Semah. *Istanbul, 30 March 2011*

Interview 48- Board Member, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation (See Interview 47 for Details) *Istanbul, 30 March 2011*

Interview 49- Alevi Dede, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Association
The respondent performs religious services and leads weekly Cem ceremonies. The association that he is affiliated with offers free Semah courses. *Istanbul, 31 March 2011*

Interview 50- President, Istanbul-Based Alevi-Bektaşi Foundation
Established in the late 1990s, the foundation offers free Semah and music courses and organizes weekly Cem ceremonies. *Istanbul, 02 April 2011*

Appendix 2

Criteria for the Inscription on the UNESCO ICH Listings

Selection Criteria for the Inscription on the *UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List* as set out in Chapter 1 (1.1) of the Operational Guidelines (the nomination files should satisfy all the below mentioned criteria to be inscribed onto the List):

U.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

U.2 **a.** The element is in urgent need of safeguarding because its viability is at risk despite the efforts of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals and State(s) Party(ies) concerned; (or)

b. The element is in extremely urgent need of safeguarding because it is facing grave threats as a result of which it cannot be expected to survive without immediate safeguarding.

U.3 Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may enable the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned to continue the practice and transmission of the element.

U.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation othe community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

U.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention.

U.6 In cases of extreme urgency, the State(s) Party(ies) concerned has (have) been duly consulted regarding inscription of the element in conformity with Article 17.3 of the Convention.

Selection Criteria for the Inscription on the *UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List* as set out in Chapter 1 (1.2) of the Operational Directives of the ICH Convention (the nomination files should satisfy all the below mentioned criteria to be inscribed onto the Urgent Safeguarding List):

R.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

R.2 Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity.

R.3 Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element.

R.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

R.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention.

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