

Dervish on the Eurovision Stage

Popular Music and the Heterogeneity of Power Interests in Contemporary Turkey

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Turkey's journey of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), dominated by nationalistic identity claims, started in 1975, culminated in the country's victory in 2003, and abruptly came to an end in 2012 in Baku. Turkey's four decades of ESC participation illuminated conflicting power interests from the selection process of the songs to the decision process of the stage performances. The debates peaked in the 2004 final ESC night in İstanbul regarding the representation of whirling dervishes. Different stakeholders, including the tourist industry, the national broadcast channel Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu (TRT), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Sufi circles, and the singer and winner of the 2003 ESC Sertab Erener, influenced the participation of whirling dervishes in the 2004 round of the ESC. In doing so, they created a web of contesting power dynamics, which can be theorized in the context of public diplomacy.

Historian Jessica Gienow-Hecht emphasizes the heterogeneity in the structure of agency in cultural diplomacy (10). In a parallel manner, this chapter argues that there are heterogeneous power interests of different agents in the context of popular music and diplomacy in Turkey. How does the performance of "Turkishness," emblemized by whirling dervishes on the ESC stage, reflect the competition and collaboration of actors in the cultural domain? In an effort to highlight power dynamics behind Turkey's ESC performance, this chapter first focuses on Turkey's ESC history. It then moves towards the competitive staging of whirling dervishes in other public events, followed by a Bourdieusian analysis of power and music diplomacy.

TURKEY AT THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: A SHORT HISTORY

Turkey's participation in the ESC has been a source of national pride and shame from the very beginning that can be compared to the Turkish reception of international soccer matches. Turkish soccer fans have treated matches between Turkish and non-Turkish teams like a war for many years. The experienced technical director and soccer celebrity Yılmaz Vural, for instance, did not hesitate to call the Ukrainian team Dynamo Kyiv "crusaders" in late 2016 (HaberTürk). Similarly, the ESC turned into a "war zone" for the Turkish nation after the country's debut in 1975 when the journalist Burhan Felek referred to the first ever contestant of Turkey, Semiha Yankı, as a "fedai" (warrior) (Şıvgın 201). Every year, the contest was treated as another war to be won over Europe and became a spectacle of nationalism (Şıvgın 205), raising debates related to the contest and finding resonance in wider popular culture. In the debuting year, for instance, two winners came out in the national final and the jury selected Semiha Yankı's "Seninle Bir Dakika" (One Moment with You) to represent Turkey in Stockholm, where ABBA's epic victory had brought the contest to. The other winner, Cici Kızlar's "Delisin" (You Are Insane), meanwhile, became the soundtrack of the namesake movie starring Tarık Akan, the most famous actor in Turkey at that time, and gained nationwide reputation just like the former.

Although the jury of experts sought to represent Turkish national culture, they selected entries that followed popular music trends in Europe. For the ESC in 1982, Tahir Nejat Özyılmazel's (Neco) disco-pop song "Hani?" (Where?) was selected as the Turkish contribution to the ESC. The title was deemed appealing since it sounded like the English word "honey" (Dilmener 294). In a similar effort, Çetin Alp and Kısa Dalga Vokal Grubu were selected to represent Turkey at the 1983 ESC with their song "Opera." The lyrics of the song involved names of opera composers such as Wagner, Puccini, and Verdi, and referenced well-known European operas like Tosca, Carmen, and La Traviata. The band performed on the ESC stage with the English translation of their name (The Short Waves) and although the song was in Turkish, the naming of composers and operas made it sound "more European" as in the case of Neco's song (Dilmener 295). This also led to comments on social media that the song echoed the title of the runner up in the 1980 ESC, "Theater," by German singer Katja Ebstein.

Besides artistic concerns, such global issues as the 1979 Oil Crisis also found entrance in Turkey's representation at Eurovision. In 1980, the Turkish celebrity singer Ajda Pekkan represented the country with a song named "Pet'r Oil." With

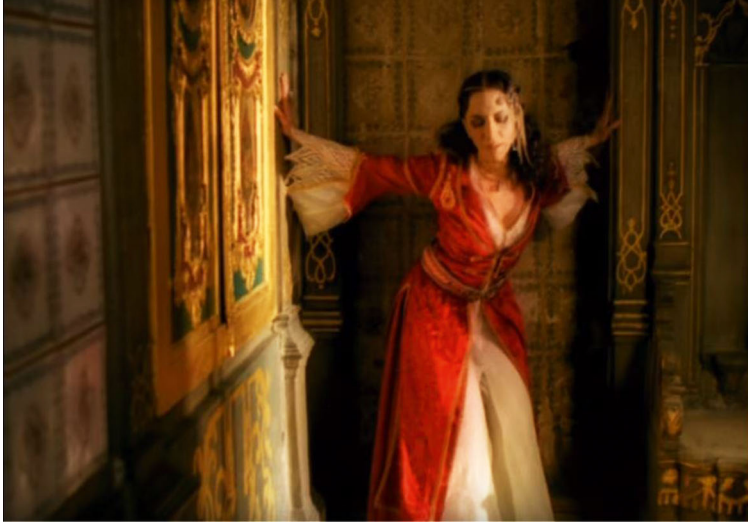
lyrics like “Artık dizginlerim senin elinde petrol” (Oil, you now bridle me), the song equated the inevitable demand for oil during the embargo of Arab countries with the need for a lover’s affection. That song was special in that TRT decided that year to directly select composers of the ESC song, rather than allowing national selection. In addition, the song was recorded in three different versions, Turkish, English, and French, and included “oriental” elements like the peculiar *düyek* beat in contrast to previous songs which had tried to adapt to the aesthetics of European popular music (Meriç 295-96). Despite the new strategies for better ranking, the song received 23 points and placed fifteenth (out of 19), ending up only slightly better than Semiha Yankı’s debut entry, which had come in last (Akın 125). In 1983, Çetin Alp’s “Opera” would stand for another episode of failure as it became the second Turkish contribution to the ESC to place last in the contest, and the first ever to receive zero points (Kuyucu 21).

Similar to the preparations for an international soccer match, Turkey prepared for the ESC with nationalistic enthusiasm and an updated strategy as a response to the failure of the previous years. But still there came another failure. By blaming “defeat” on the jealousy of Europeans (“Fortress Europe”), Turkish journalists and critics negotiated the fact that the Turkish contributions tended to do poorly in the ESC, forming antagonisms between East and West, and Christians and Muslims (Şıvgın 202-03). Up until Şebnem Paker’s third place in the 1997 ESC in Dublin, the results almost always evoked the same feelings of disappointment among the Turkish audience. The long-awaited victory came only in 2003 with Sertab Erener’s contribution to the ESC, but this success was followed by criticism.

Sertab’s performance of the winning song “Everyway that I Can” was criticized by Turkish audiences, particularly with regard to her intonation, which was frequently off on the ESC final in Riga, as well as her narrow victory over Belgium’s entry by only two points. Most of all, journalists and commentators focused on criticizing the language preference in the song, emphasizing that the song was the first ever Turkish entry performed solely in English. The use of English lyrics had become possible after the ESC changed its language rule in 1999, which had tied the songs of participating countries to their official languages (Schacht and Swann). As an English-language song, “Everyway that I Can” challenged Turkey’s linguistic nationalism. The disappointment of previous contests therefore took a different form at the 2003 ESC: critics claimed that Turkey was allowed to win only because it had given up its linguistic sovereignty by embracing a Western European language (Kuyucu 29). Despite the Europeanization efforts of the preceding entries and the use of English lyrics, Sertab’s song and performance included many neo-Ottoman elements, such as an oriental

beat performed with goblet drums and the seraglio-themed music video as figure 1 shows, which thereby promoted “ethnic” styles in the ESC (Solomon 147).

Fig. 1: A Screenshot of Sertab Erener’s “Everyway that I Can” featuring neo-Ottoman mis-en-scène.



Source: Courtesy of YouTube.

This trend was followed by the Ukrainian singer Ruslana in 2004, who performed with dancers that evoked the Hutsul people of Ukraine, and by the Greek singer Helena Papanicolaou in 2005, whose song included traditional Greek instruments and a local “ethnic” sound (Baker 174). Despite these controversies, Sertab’s success made İstanbul the host city of the 2004 ESC.

THE VICTORY AND THE DEBATES ON PERFORMANCE: THE ESC IN İSTANBUL 2004

Sertab’s 2003 ESC victory provided the country with abundant opportunities for cultural tourism. Similar to the victory the previous year, however, the 2004 ESC in İstanbul triggered controversies. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism put great effort in representing the country’s cultural and tourism features, thus seeking to cater to the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1-2) of European audiences. The Ministry organized a reception for the contesting countries in the Dolmabahçe

Palace, delivered presents and souvenirs to the delegates of these countries, and filmed 46 “postcards” (video clips displayed before a country’s performance to entertain spectators during the preparation of the stage and the installment of props) with images of different parts of Turkey instead of receiving the videos from delegations of participating countries (Selcuk). The concern for the “tourist gaze” was an issue throughout the performances of the contest. Anatolian Fire, a modern dance group based on local themes and figures from Anatolian folk dances, for instance, performed before the moderators announced the voting results (Üstünel), thus musically promoting the regions of Anatolia as a tourist destination.

Besides promoting tourism to Turkey, Sertab’s personal effort regarding her opening performance was significant for the evening. She prepared a medley including her 2003 winning song and the more operatic ballad “Leave,” an adaptation of her earlier song “Aşk” (Love), which had been released in 1999. Similar to Sertab’s 2003 ESC performance in Riga, the first part of the medley was accompanied by belly dancers. For the second part, she insisted on the accompaniment of male and female whirling dervishes. Musicologist Victor Vicente found this performance design meaningful as he identified Sufi connotations in the ballad (234-35). Nevertheless, Sertab’s preference for, and insistence on, female whirling dervishes led to a broad-scale debate due to the largely accepted gender segregation in Mevlevi practices, in which men and women were not allowed to whirl together, and women were prohibited from whirling in public. The general coordinator of the contest, Bülent Osmalı, argued that the organization committee did not favor the use of female whirling dervishes as it was not in line with the tradition, but they eventually decided to have both male and female dervishes, considering that it was only a show, not a religious ritual, and that Sertab found it unmodern to question the participation of women in stage performances (Altuntaş).

Although the debate concerning the ESC opening performance had cooled down, the debate between non-governmental organizations of Mevlevi Sufism (Mevlevi NGOs) did not cease. The vice president of the International Mevlana Foundation and descendant of the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Esin Çelebi, said Sertab knew that women can also whirl, but that it was not appropriate for men and women to whirl together. According to Çelebi, Sertab’s insistence on a mixed gender whirling performance was regrettable (Gülmez). Another member of the foundation, Işın Çelebi, once more emphasized that whirling is not a show but a ritual. She said the famous Turkish singer Zeki Müren and “queen of pop” Madonna had consulted the foundation years ago on including female whirling dervishes with colorful dresses in their perfor-

mances. According to Çelebi, both Madonna and Zeki Müren dropped the idea of whirling in their stage shows after the foundation had informed them about the religious meaning of the whirling ceremony (Haber Vitriini).

The debates on female whirling dervishes were over before the ESC final, and Sertab managed to share the stage with half-naked male belly dancers, which is unusual in the Turkish context, and mixed gender whirling dervishes, as can be seen in figure 2, which is also not common in the Turkish context.

Fig. 2: A screenshot from the ESC 2004 opening ceremony in İstanbul, 15 May 2004.



Source: Courtesy of YouTube.

As her 2004 performance was not further criticized by mainstream media concerning whirling dervishes, she continued her successful stage performances, sharing the stage with the people she met during the ESC.

WHIRLING DERVISHES BETWEEN RITUAL AND ENTERTAINMENT

The whirling dervish controversy, despite dominating her ESC experience, did not recur in Sertab's career afterwards. However, the whirling dervish started to occupy the national agenda especially after the debate concerning the ESC in İstanbul. Sertab has performed and collaborated internationally since the late 1990s. Long before performing at the ESC, she released singles together with

international musicians. In 1999, for instance, she recorded a maxi single with the a cappella group Voice Male, and the following year she performed in a Turkish adaptation of Ricky Martin's cover song "Private Emotion" (originally recorded by The Hooters), which he first released featuring the Swedish singer Meja. The same year, she covered her operatic ballad "Aşk" with Greek singer Mando, with half of the lyrics in Greek partly sung by herself. After their successful collaboration on the single "Φως/Aşk" (Love), Mando and Sertab coincidentally competed against each other in Riga in 2003. Probably as a result of her victory at the 2003 ESC, Sertab hit the top of the Greek charts with her singles "Here I Am" and the competing song "Everyway that I Can" ("Greece Top 20").

Sertab's international collaborations with musicians not only resulted in commercial success but also led to improvements in musical and cultural relations between Greece and Turkey. Despite the countries' shared history, which is filled with wars and conflicts since the Ottoman period (including the war between Turkish and Greek armies in 1922 and the Cyprus Operation in 1974), Sertab continued to work for peace and friendship on the stage with other Greek artists. After the ESC final in İstanbul, she gave a concert with the Greek popstar Sakis Rouvas, whose ESC entry ended up in third place in 2004. Co-organized by the Ministries of Culture of both countries, the concert took place before a large audience in Sultanahmet, a historical region of central İstanbul (Vatmanidis). The main theme of the concert was friendship and peace, underlined by Sertab and Rouvas's shared performance of John Lennon's signature song for a peaceful world, "Imagine."

Nevertheless, the collaboration was not always peaceful. Rouvas had previously collaborated with another Turkish pop singer, Burak Kut. As he was also cast for the Turkish voice in the Walt Disney animation film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1996, Kut recorded the soundtrack of the movie with Rouvas in 1997. This collaboration led to a peace concert at Ledra Palace on the Green Line in Cyprus, which separated the Turkish and Greek Cypriots after the war in 1974. Unfortunately, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots protested the concert, and Rouvas interpreted this protest as a demonstration of the fact that the two nations were not ready for peaceful diplomacy (Akbaş). Compared to Kut's effort, Sertab's collaboration with Rouvas can be regarded as a diplomatic success in that this collaboration attracted a peaceful audience in contrast to the protests in 1997.

Keeping the collaboration of pop singers and Ministries of Culture in mind, we can return to the whirling dervishes to see if there is a similar path of diplomatic collaboration. Even though the debate was mainly on gender during the ESC, the actual issue related to whirling dervishes became their increasing

visibility, to which the ESC night inevitably contributed. Whirling dervishes emerged in the Turkish context several centuries ago, when, following Rumi's death on 17 December 1273 in Konya, Mevlevi Sufism became an order. Ever since, devotees of this order have performed whirling in their special white gowns, accompanied by a special music performed in the background as part of the ritual called the Sema ceremony. Although the order became illegal by the implementation of law No. 677 in 1925 by the Turkish Republic, whirling gradually gained cultural heritage value and Sema ceremonies became part of the tourism in Turkey. The yearly Şeb-i Arus (Wedding Night) festivals held in December in Konya in order to commemorate Rumi, who interpreted death as reunion with "the Beloved" like a wedding, attract thousands of people to the city.

2004 was significant not only for the ESC in İstanbul but also because it was the year the Mevlana Cultural Center in Konya opened during the Şeb-i Arus Festival. In terms of size, staging, and spectacle, the opening event resembled the ESC. Before the opening of the Mevlana Cultural Center, the Şeb-i Arus festivals had taken place in sports halls. Both the Turkish state and Mevlevi NGOs criticized the relegation of this important ritual to such an irrelevant place as a sports hall. As a consequence, the Turkish government funded the construction of the Mevlana Cultural Center, which was especially built for whirling ceremonies and also included smaller halls for other events. The opening ceremony of the cultural center took place on Sunday, 12 December, with fireworks and an excessive crowd comparable to the actual Şeb-i Arus celebrations on 17 December. The Prime Minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was present to honor the opening ceremony, and the audience applauded when he crossed the stage where the whirling ceremony was to take place. When Vicente attended this ceremony during his fieldwork in Turkey, he was shocked by what he described as the Erdoğan's "inappropriate behavior to cross the whirling ground in a linear way" (159). The whirling ground was considered a holy place for the whirling ritual and only the *postnişin*, the dervish representing Rumi in the ritual, was traditionally allowed to walk straight across the whirling ground. Vicente was also astounded that the emcees warned the audience to respect the sacred ritual, asking them to turn off their cell phones and to refrain from using their cameras, applauding, and leaving their seats so as to preserve the tranquility of the ceremony (160). His bewilderment by the political leader's disrespectful behavior and the emcees' reminder implied what was emphasized in Osma's declaration concerning the appearance of whirling dervishes on the Eurovision stage: the whirling ceremony was treated both by the Prime Minister and the audience more like a show than a ritual.

Sertab's desire to see female whirling dervishes on the ESC stage was based on a secularized image of whirling dervishes detached from their ritualistic context. This detachment was so far-reaching that even in the original, ritualistic context of the Sema ceremony, the emcees felt the necessity to remind the audience that, in contrast to the ESC, the ceremony was not a show, but a ritual—a sacred event. All of a sudden, the whirling ground of the Mevlana Cultural Center built especially for a religious Sufi ritual turned into a mere performance hall where people needed to be asked to leave behind their secular attitudes towards the stage, which contributed to Vicente's disappointment. The changing meaning of the whirling ground in the experiences of different actors signaled the heterogeneity of interests.

The event in 2004 revealed the shared interest of Mevlevi NGOs and the government to promote whirling dervishes, leading to their collaboration in cultural heritage management. Representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the International Mevlana Foundation prepared a comprehensive application to UNESCO on the cultural heritage status of Mevlevi Sufism (Yılmaz). In 2005, UNESCO proclaimed the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, officially inscribing the ceremony on its Representative List in 2008. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the International Mevlana Foundation, and UNESCO jointly celebrated the 800th anniversary of Rumi's birth in 2007 as the so-called Mevlana Year. This level of international recognition inevitably provided abundant opportunities for cultural and national representation, similar to the visibility afforded by the ESC.

Following Sertab's performance at the 2004 ESC, the second most significant name to bring whirling dervishes to the stage was Sami Savni Özer, a popular performer of religious music and an alleged member of a Sufi order, the Cerrahis. A pioneer of Islamic pop in Turkey, he started releasing albums in the 2000s in which he sang hymns with a more secular, pop sound. His main success came with his 2006 album *İnliyoruz Hasretinle* (We Are Yearning for You). He recorded a video for the eighth track "Demedim Mi" (Didn't I Say) with whirling dervishes as figure 3 shows, and he appeared on mainstream pop music channels with his video in Turkey.

Fig. 3: Screenshot from the video of Sami Savni Özer's "Demedim Mi."



Source: Courtesy of YouTube.

The piece was a hymn of the Bektashi order, another Sufi order different from Mevlevi Sufism. Although the piece has a Sufi message that would also fit Mevlevi Sufism, it is not a Mevlevi piece of music. The hymn became very popular when it was released in 2006. Although Özer became famous across Turkey for his soundtracks of Cem Yılmaz's movies, he continued performing the Bektashi hymn "Demedim Mi."

The success of this hymn associated with whirling dervishes gave rise to more appearances of whirling dervishes on music TV channels as well as in movies. For instance, director Doruk Somunkıran's 2009 TV project *Sufi Klipler* (Sufi Videos) made "Demedim Mi" popular once more. According to conservative critics, TV representations of religious music could not be combined with mundane images of daily life, but rather had to be accompanied by "natural" images, such as flowers and the sun (Somunkıran). In contrast with this conservative approach, Somunkıran nonetheless decided to put religious music into the context of everyday life. In addition to including the streets and city walls of İstanbul in his videos, Somunkıran concentrated on whirling dervishes. "Demedim Mi" was part of the project and it was sung by Hayko Cepkin, a rock musician with Armenian origins. Besides his ethnic and religious difference compared to the majority of the country, his combination of Muslim Sufi music with a Mohawk, blue hair, and a hard rock sound were also unusual. Next to all the new and alternative images integrated into the scene, Hayko, with the accompaniment of whirling dervishes, whirled around as if he were another whirling dervish in the video. This unusual appearance of a rock singer with whirling dervishes in the Bektashi hymn was just one indicator for the hymn's

popularity. “Demedim Mi” was performed in almost every occasion possible, frequently with the accompaniment of whirling dervishes as reflected in the video, shown in figure 4. That the hymn was parodied in Selçuk Aydemir’s 2011 movie *Çalgı Çengi* (Musician and Dancer) testifies to its great popularity.

Fig. 4: A screenshot from the Hayko Cepkin episode of the Sufi Klipler project.



Source: Courtesy of YouTube.

Nancy Snow emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and multi-directionality of public diplomacy: “While dialogue between cultures is an admirable goal, it begins with dialogue between individuals, whether they are representatives of governments or private citizens” (17). Nothing can illustrate this better than Turkish public diplomacy on the level of micro-cultures regarding the adaptations of this Bektashi hymn. Besides the range of styles in random performances, this hymn also accompanied the dialogue between politics and the wider public in Şeb-i Arus İstanbul 2013, the second largest whirling event following the one in Konya.

A collaboration of the metropolitan municipality, private entrepreneurs, and several other sponsors, Şeb-i Arus İstanbul 2013 commemorated Rumi on 13 December that year. The intended audience were İstanbul residents, who could not travel to Konya for the annual Şeb-i Arus festivals. The event imitated the aforementioned Konya festivals, in which a concert of religious music precedes the Sema ceremony. The concert at the 2013 event in İstanbul starred Sami Savni Özer, the singer who had first popularized the hymn, and two pop-arabesque singers, Serkan Burak Tektaş (Alişan) and Ahmet Kutsi Karadoğan

(Kutsi), who had never been associated with religious music in their careers. With ticket prices ranging from 25 to 235 TRY (app. €9 to €85 at that time), the event had a diverse audience from every district of the city, with people from different economic backgrounds and political orientations in attendance. The invited politicians sat in the front rows as they had in Konya, and Prime Minister Erdoğan was invited on stage first to salute the audience. Despite the prime minister's short salutation, which had a mere message of love and tolerance related to Rumi, his speech was protested by the audience—a response to the Gezi uprising which had taken place the same year, and which witnessed Ziya Azazi whirling in Taksim square while wearing a gas mask, shown in figure 5.

Fig. 5: Ziya Azazi whirling in Gezi Park, in toxic green whirling gown and with gas mask, June 2013.



Photo: Arda Bengü.

Supporters of the prime minister countered the booing and whistling with applause (“Başbakan”), turning the event into a “protestival,” a portmanteau of the words protest and festival (St John 130, 133). Sami Savni Özer afterwards held the microphone towards Erdoğan so that he could sing along to the Bektashi hymn “Demedim Mi.” After the concert, the whirling dervishes appeared on stage in order to perform the ritual, but neither the Sema ceremony nor the

Bektashi hymn could outshine the protests of the audience. The audience inevitably associated whirling dervishes with this competition between popular figures and political messages.

This contextual connection between Eurovision and the whirling dervish, embodied in a popularized and politicized hymn, signals the relationship between music and power, in which dialogue and protest can be observed alongside images of whirling dervishes. The debate on the appearance of whirling dervishes on the ESC stage, the collaboration of different actors in promoting the cultural heritage value of the Sufi ritual of whirling dervishes, and the sharing of the stage with pop-arabesque singers and politicians with dervish performers point to the heterogeneity of power interests that intersect in the domain of music. A theoretical glimpse at this relationship and identification of different actors claiming power over Mevlevi Sufism can offer new perspectives in understanding the intersecting cultural agendas involved in the country's musical diplomacy.

PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCES AS AGENTS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR REPRESENTATION

The gender, national, religious, and political controversies related to the performance of whirling dervishes revolve around issues of cultural heritage and national representation. Different religious, political, and cultural actors appropriate whirling for their own benefits, especially when their interests intersect with one another, utilize different strategies within the struggle to dominate the whirling ground.

As mentioned above, the inscription of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity resulted from the collaboration between the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and a Mevlevi NGO. This collaboration between two actors with different structures and agendas brought diplomatic success on an international level. But it should be kept in mind that this "heritagification" of Sufi practices privileges institutions over communities. At the 2008 UNESCO convention, governments were encouraged to put effort in making decisions and implementing policies on intangible cultural heritage, while taking precautions to preserve potential heritage, which led to an extensive demonstration of the nationalist interests of governments in cultural heritage management (Aykan 2). The convention implied that heritage does not have inherent value, but that it acquires cultural value through the socio-political construction of heritage (Byrne

229). According to Jean During, this led to a situation in which state authorities “skillfully appropriate the cultural heritage, turn it into an instrument of power and use it to their own advantage” (144).

The “heritagification” of Mevlevi Sufism in Turkey was not solely in the hands of state authorities, but it began as a collaboration between the state and NGOs. In truth, however, the state authorities and representatives of Mevlevi foundations did not always collaborate. Despite their common success in the recognition of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony as cultural heritage, they conflicted with each other in the debate on the visibility of whirling dervishes in Sertab’s opening performance for the 2004 ESC. Whereas the International Mevlana Foundation was completely opposed to the appearance of whirling dervishes on the Eurovision stage, TRT, together with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, supported the idea to some extent. The conflict was resolved by state authorities who eventually claimed that the performance of whirling dervishes was not part of the religious ritual but only an element of a secular stage show. Four years after the ESC in İstanbul, however, the Ministry delivered a notice which contradicted the earlier decision. According to the notice, the ritualistic structure of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony was confirmed holistically as cultural heritage and all events involving whirling dervishes other than the ceremony itself were condemned and imposed with sanctions so as to stop the corruption of the ritual (“Mevlevilik ve Semâ”). In a sense, the ministry was now condemning the Eurovision performance that had officially been approved. The recently gained and internationally recognized cultural heritage status of the whirling dervishes provided new opportunities for the country to appeal to the “tourist gaze,” on the one hand, but made the state authorities discard long benefitted opportunities of this gaze on the other. The lack of mutual agreement on how to interpret dervish performances resulted in upcoming notices by the ministry reaffirming the sanctity of whirling dervishes.

During my fieldwork on contemporary experiences of Mevlevi Sufism in 2013, I observed the commemoration ceremonies for Rumi in December. The official ceremony was held in Konya. Organized annually by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, this 10-day event attracted an international audience, turning the month of December into Konya’s peak tourist season. The opening of the 2013 celebrations started with a candle lighting ceremony in central Konya on a symbolic location where Rumi and his spiritual mentor, Shams Tabrizi, allegedly met. The lighting ceremony was followed by the March of Love and Tolerance towards the Mevlana Cultural Center, which had been opened a few months after the 2004 ESC with a ceremony of similar glamor. The ceremony at the Mevlana Cultural Center went on in two sessions every day until 17 Decem-

ber, with each session including a concert of religious music, readings from the *Masnavi* poetry collection, and a Sema ceremony as figure 6 shows. The whirling dervishes were for the event's conclusion, prolonging the evening ceremony until around 11 pm. The schedule was tiring both for the performers and the audience. Parallel to the candle lighting ceremony, representatives of the state and Mevlevi NGOs gave speeches in the evening ceremonies of the first and the last days of the festival. After their speech on the candle lighting ceremony on 7 December, guest politicians started the March of Love and Tolerance, which ended with a concert of military music provided by a state ensemble named after Mehter, the military band of the Ottoman Empire, in front of the governorate building. The members of the ensemble were dressed like Ottoman soldiers, and they performed traditional pieces on period instruments.

Fig. 6: Whirling dervishes during the Sema ceremony in the opening day of the Şeb-i Arus Festival at the Mevlana Cultural Center in Konya, 7 December 2013.



Photo: Nevin Şahin.

In the early republican period, advocates of the founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideology, Kemalists, legitimized their policies by rejecting all Ottoman values for the sake of creating a national identity. This included closing all dervish lodges in the country and pushing whirling dervishes underground (Ayas 45, 66). Conversely, the conservative government of the twenty first century embraced these once rejected values in an effort to create a neo-Ottoman identity

against the Kemalist identity of the early republican period. Bearing in mind the conservative government's policies of promoting values and symbols related to the Ottoman Empire, I interpret the appearance of a military band in the official ceremony before the performance of the whirling dervishes in two ways. First, it served the government's conservative claim that it is embracing Ottoman values, thus making visible the dichotomy between Kemalist and neo-Ottoman policies. Second, the military band "self-exoticized" (Volcic 168) the traditional images belonging to the Ottoman period in order to appeal to the VIP audience and the "tourist gaze." In a way, this self-exoticizing strategy was similar to the approach that had allowed Sertab to win the ESC with "oriental" tunes and Ottoman themes in 2003. The whirling dervish as an image of cultural heritage thus served the conservative interests of the state in the Konya ceremonies. The whirling ceremony ended with a prayer of the *postnişin*, including a salutation to the contemporary government. Hence, the whirling dervish on the stage was also involved in the power struggle to establish the neo-Ottoman identity via the *postnişin*'s collaboration with the state in his prayer.

In contrast to the celebrations in Konya, yet another ceremony was organized in Ankara by the Mevlana Culture and Art Foundation, another Mevlevi NGO based in the capital city, which holds looser ties with the state compared to the International Mevlana Foundation. The event took place in a concert hall constructed by a music foundation devoted to Kemalist ideology. The venue carried messages related to this ideological stance as pictures and sayings of Atatürk. Support from the state for this event was minor in that the ensemble on the stage involved a few musicians employed in state ensembles, who had been assigned duties in the Konya festival by the Ministry and who had received official permission to participate in the 2013 event in Ankara. Held on 13 December, the ceremony consisted of a short opening speech by the vice president of the foundation, Gülden Arbaş, a candle lighting ceremony, and the Sema ceremony, shown in figure 7.

Fig. 7: Celebration of Mevlana Culture and Art Foundation in Ankara. State musicians among the ensemble on the right, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's signature on top and his photo next to the banner of the foundation, 13 December 2013.



Photo: Nevin Şahin.

There were no other formal speeches, no *Masnavi* talks, no music other than that of the Sema ceremony, and no prolonged prayers. In her short speech, Arbaş criticized “those conservatives” who claimed to conserve the ritual but who, in essence, destroyed the humbleness, naivety, and integrity of the ritual in the name of preservation (Şahin). She referred both to the state institutions that organized the Konya event and to the private entrepreneurs who were condemned by the 2008 notice of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In her speech, she affirmed the NGO’s claim of preserving the simplicity and humbleness of the ritual. In line with her speech, the performance was simple and short, lasting only until 9 pm. Arbaş claimed that the ceremony organized by their NGO adhered to the authentic ritual more closely than the state’s, and the performance afterwards affirmed her claim. This competition between one NGO and the state did not resemble the collaboration that brought the ritual the status of intangible cultural heritage.

The protests against the prime minister right before the Sema ceremony in İstanbul and the contrasting celebrations in Konya and Ankara mentioned above showed that, in addition to the state and Mevlevi foundations, the performers, and even the audience, can become actors claiming power of representation in

the context of whirling dervishes. Influenced by Wittgenstein's language-game in his theory on "obeying a rule" (*In Other Words* 9), Pierre Bourdieu focuses on the fields of struggle for power (*Practical Reason* 58, 59) and compares power relations in the field to a card game. Just as joining a card game necessitates the pre-acceptance of the rules, the agents entering the field tacitly accept the legitimated forms of struggle, putting power in the center of cultural life. Loïc Wacquant, in addition, compares this card game analogy to a "battlefield" (268), where bases of identity and hierarchy are constantly disputed. The fluidity of power relations in the field challenging hierarchies corroborates Gienow-Hecht's notion of a heterogeneity of power interests in music diplomacy. The context of Mevlevi Sufism in twenty-first-century Turkey exemplifies this heterogeneity where multiple actors struggle for power over the image of the whirling dervish and constantly change roles, compete one day and collaborate another day, seeking to realize identity claims and achieve recognition beyond national borders. The war analogy of the Turkish audience in the contexts of soccer mentioned at the beginning, thus, not only applies to the competition for victory and collaboration for representation in the ESC, but also to the heterogeneous struggles for representing the values and meanings attached to whirling ceremonies on national and international levels.

CONCLUSIONS: DERVISH CEREMONIES AS "BATTLEFIELDS" OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Turkey's Eurovision history, on the one hand, and recent developments in the representation of whirling ceremonies as cultural heritage on the other, shed light on the heterogeneity of strategies of similar actors in the context of cultural diplomacy. As the most significant figure of Turkey's ESC history, Sertab Erener has been a cultural ambassador of a modern and historically connected Turkey on a European stage. Not only did she mediate between competing cultures and nations, but she also combined tradition with modernity, associating the ritual of whirling dervishes with modern popular music. This effort, besides arousing debates between institutions on the representation of whirling dervishes, helped the whirling dervish image gain recognition beyond the religious domain and national borders, resulting in processes of cultural heritage management, popularization, and politicization.

Since then, the whirling dervish both as image and practice has been appropriated by a variety of actors ranging from directors to artists, tourism companies, and political institutions. The ESC winner wants to include whirling

dervishes in her performance on the opening ceremony of the contest, challenging the ritualistic meaning with a secularized stage show. The Mevlevi NGO and the Ministry collaborate for international recognition of the whirling ceremony as cultural heritage. The dancer whirls in a special whirling gown with a gas mask on his face as a way of protesting the government at Gezi Park. The dervish salutes the government at the end of the Sema ceremony in Konya. The state-employed musicians apply for official permission to perform in the NGO-organized Sema ceremony in Ankara instead of the state-organized Sema ceremony in Konya. The audience mark the Sema ceremony with protest by whistling and applauding in İstanbul. These actors all contribute to the struggle for power over the image and use of the whirling dervish. Debates over the representation of whirling ceremonies show that collaboration can lead to international recognition, as in the inscription of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which resulted from a shared initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the International Mevlana Foundation. At the same time, competition among actors can lead to a "protestival" spectacle, as in the case of Şeb-i Arus İstanbul 2013. In conclusion, Mevlevi Sufism has an expansive area of influence both at the national and international levels. In twenty-first-century Turkey, performances of whirling dervishes involve complex interplays of power, and heterogeneous interests struggling for the power of representation lie beneath the tranquility of whirling ceremonies.

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