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# Transfer Processes within Sufi Rituals: An Example from Istanbul<sup>1</sup>

Robert Langer

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## Introduction

- 1 In this article, I present research material concerning Oruç Rahmi Güvenç and his Sufi group, linking it to the theory of ‘transfer of ritual’. After an introductory overview of the literature on contemporary Sufism and a short summary of the theoretical concept of ‘transfer of ritual’, I describe how I encountered Oruç Güvenç, what activities I documented directly or indirectly over the years and what sources were available to me in connection to the methods applied in the research. After summarising his biography as given in the books written by his wife Azize, special attention is given to his activities in Germany based on interviews and participant observation of a ‘*sema* night’ conducted by Güvenç’s TÜMATA group in Heidelberg. This ritual night is described partly, relating ritual structures and elements observed to the analytical framework of “transfer of ritual”.
- 2 The last decades have seen an increase in research on Sufism and dervish culture. However, most studies deal with aspects of Sufism within its ‘classical’, historical context (Buckley 1992, Hammarlund/Olsson/Özdalga 2000). Some of these, nevertheless, consider the outreach of historical Sufism into modern times, such as some contributions in Lifchez 1992 and Silverstein 2010. Others deal with the re-establishment of more or less ‘traditional’ or ‘classical’ Dervish order (*tarikât*) structures and rituals, mainly in terms of religious politics *vis-à-vis* movements of political Islam (Geaves 2006, Toprakçıyan 2005). The new role of such forms of Sufism is analysed either in the country of origin, for example in Turkey (Atacan 1990, Neubauer 2008, on female Sufis esp. Raudvere 2002 and Neubauer 2009), or in ‘the West’ (Westerlund 2004, Malik / Hinnells 2006). Few researchers have explicitly focussed on hybrid (Hermansen 2000), transnational (Werbner 2003, Spellman 2004) transcultural/

globalised (Raudvere / Stenberg 2009), or post-modern forms of Sufism and their connections to Western esoteric trends (Taji-Farouki 2009).

- 3 It is clear that these concepts, ‘hybrid’, ‘post-modern’, ‘transcultural’ (and ‘transnational’), have to be applied with caution. Recent ritual studies’ literature suggest that ritual, as a mode of human behaviour and cultural practice, has always been dynamic, changing and receptive, be it in pre-modern or (post-)modern contexts. I use ‘hybrid’ and ‘post-modern’ here in a pragmatic way, to distinguish the practices described in this article from more localised or ‘one-tradition-centred’ forms of ritual practice, which are, out of different reasons, not as receptive of elements and participants from other cultural, religious or ethnic contexts as Oruç Güvenç and his group are. A major historical watershed is obviously the invention of modern forms of transportation and communication, which has increased the possible degrees of ‘transculturation’. In this context, the connection and relation of Western esoteric trends to Sufism addressed in this article is of especial interest to further investigation. To cite van Bruinessen (2003): “There is no strict boundary separating Sufi groups from New Age-type movements—which raises questions of conceptualization as well as sociological explanation.”
- 4 This paper deals with the Turkish Sufi, musician and “musical therapist”, as he calls himself, Oruç Rahmi Güvenç<sup>3</sup>, and his loosely organised group of musicians and disciples known under the name TÛMATA, an abbreviation for “Türk Musikisini [or in the modern form: Müziğini] Araştırma ve Tanıtma Grubu”. As a theoretical framework and research paradigm concerning ritual forms and their reception, adaptation and transformation, “transfer of ritual” is applied. This analytical tool systematises the inter-connectedness and interdependency of ritual-imminent ‘dimensions’ (script, performance, media, ‘meaning’, communication etc.) with the different context factors into which such cultural performances are embedded (such as ecology, geography, economics, politics, group formation etc.). Specifically, it supplies the researcher with a tool to investigate the dynamic processes such as the changing context factors leading to changes in ritual dimensions and repercussions of—consciously or unconsciously—changed ritual dimensions onto the surrounding socio-cultural fields. This concept seems to be applicable to the case of TÛMATA and to recent forms of Sufism in general, too. The concept was developed at Heidelberg and was applied so far especially in the study of the Alevi from Turkey. (Langer *et al.* 2006).<sup>4</sup>
- 5 “Transfer of ritual” refers to a shift of a ritual or ritual elements into another or a changed context. Context aspects are the media of the ritual and the geographical, spatial, ecological, cultural, religious, political, economic and social surrounding of the ritual practice. A change of context—whereby the different context aspects may influence each other—causes modifications of the internal dimensions of the ritual. As dimensions of the ritual, script, performance, performativity, aesthetics, structure, transmission, intentionality and instrumentalization, self-reflexivity, interaction, communication, functionality, mediality symbolism and meanings ascribed to the ritual can be discerned. The process of transfer of ritual is accomplished by the participants. The study of such processes, therefore, should concentrate on the interactions between the context aspects, the internal dimensions and the participants of the rituals concerned. When modification of one or more context aspects is observed, changes in the internal dimensions of a ritual are predicted by this theory. Conversely, when

changes in the internal dimensions of a ritual are found, one should verify whether one or more context aspects have changed as well, which may be the triggering factor(s).

- 6 With this model, processes of transfer of ritual through time and space may be analysed, since the context aspects and internal dimensions of rituals in their different variations, differentiations and interactions can be described.
- 7 In short, “transfer of ritual” is a research paradigm that systematises the interconnectedness and interdependency of ritual-imminent ‘dimensions’ with the different context factors into which such cultural performances are embedded (in our case for example geography, society, group formation etc.). Specifically, it supplies the researcher with a tool to investigate the dynamic processes, such as changing context factors leading to changes in ritual dimensions and the repercussions—conscious or unconscious—of changed ritual dimensions onto the surrounding socio-cultural fields. This concept seems to be applicable to the case of TÛMATA and to post-modern Sufism in general, too.

## Ethnographic Encounter with a ‘Transcultural’ Sufi

- 8 How did I come to know Oruç Güvenç? As several of our department’s students were practicing Sufism in southern Germany, I became aware of a list of addresses of locations hosting Sufi rituals in Istanbul circulating within German Sufi circles. This list contained several major or minor sites, where different groups practice Sufi rituals more or less openly, including also the major Alevi community centres (*cemevi*) at that time in Istanbul. All of them, the Alevi centres as well as other Sufi sites, were designated in this list indiscriminately as ‘Dervish lodges’ (*zaviye* or *tekke*). The authors of such lists implicitly recommend their visit to the “Sufi seeker”, also by describing how to get there and how ‘the ritual’ (*zikir*)<sup>5</sup> there is conducted. (This was, oddly enough, my first foray into ethnographic research on Alevi ritual). In those German Sufi circles, one renowned teacher known for his use of music and ritual dance was Oruç Güvenç. He was visiting one Sufi centre in the South-German Rhine-Neckar area regularly, conducting seminars, workshops, concerts and rituals in cities, such as Ludwigshafen / Rhein, Mannheim, and Heidelberg.<sup>6</sup> He also participated in the meeting of different Sufis from German-speaking countries in 2009 and 2011 in Ludwigshafen am Rhein, which were organised by the “Mannheimer Institut für Integration und interreligiösen Dialog e.V.” He also took part in the most recent of these so-called “Sufitreffen”, which now took place in the neighbouring city of Mannheim from 11 until 13 May 2012. Additionally, in 2011 he conducted a concert and a workshop in Munich (at the Völkerkundemuseum and the “Zentrum für orientalischen Tanz”). During the years, he visited several times the Mannheim / Heidelberg area in Southern Germany to conduct concerts, ritual events, and seminars on his so called “altorientalische Musiktherapie” (‘ancient oriental music therapy’).<sup>7</sup> These are just some examples of his many activities, which he also conducts in other parts of Germany and throughout Europe as well.
- 9 Nevertheless, I first came to know him in Istanbul, visiting one of his weekly musical evenings (at the same time rehearsals for his TÛMATA group as well as occasions to enter the Sufi group for newcomers). This was at his musical centre in Sultanahmet, Istanbul, where TÛMATA also sell their and others CDs, books, and instruments, which is one main source of income.<sup>8</sup>

- 10 Later, I came to know of his interest in historical healing practices at Anatolian *türbes* (saintly tombs), especially in the different ‘sanctuaries’ (*makam*) of Karacaahmet Sultan in Western Anatolia, an Anatolian saint from the Middle Ages, also revered much by modern Alevis living in Istanbul.<sup>9</sup>
- 11 In July 2003, I took the opportunity to accompany him on a trip together with his then still partner in the therapy business and former disciple, Gerhard ‘Kadir’ Tucek from Austria.<sup>10</sup> We travelled through northwestern Anatolia from Aydın to Afyon and Manisa to Kütahya, visiting also his hometown Tavşanlı, where his followers of TÛMATA joined in for a public concert and visits to saintly tombs (*türbe ziyaretî*). Afterwards, I was his guest in his home at Istanbul for some days, and met him later at several occasions mainly in Heidelberg, where I observed two concerts and participated in one nightlong ritual.

## Sources and Methods

- 12 As one of my intentions is to understand the dynamics of ritual practice, I mainly documented Güvenç’s and his followers’ performances with a film camera. The other interest, as a student of Islamic cultures, is in the history of the cultural resources applied in the practices, the reception processes involved and the discourses around the rituals. For that reason, I collected and began to analyse the written materials (as well as internet representations) around Oruç Güvenç, starting from his doctoral thesis from 1985 on musical therapy (Güvenç [1985] 1989). Rich in detail are the books written together with his wife on his life and his teachings and methods of healing (Güvenç/Güvenç 2009) during the last years.<sup>11</sup> I also considered some material used within the group, such as the collected musical notes for a “Seven Days Seven Nights *Sema*”<sup>12</sup> conducted in Lalita, Spain, in Winter 2007—material obviously still used as a canonical song book in the TÛMATA events (Tümata 2007).<sup>13</sup>
- 13 My main interest, therefore, as an Islamologist-cum-cultural anthropologist lies in the interaction of the use of cultural resources such as material or intangible heritage and traditions and collective practices in processes of identity and group reproduction and formation. For this purpose, at the Research Centre “Ritual Dynamics” (University of Heidelberg),<sup>14</sup> we developed the research matrix “transfer of ritual”. It is obvious, as can be shown from the collected material, that several transfer processes (transferences) from different contexts take place in the rituals of Oruç Güvenç. My hypothesis is that these facilitate its attractiveness for a diverse audience: People from his inner circle as well as outsiders from an interested public of Turkish (mostly urban) background. Additionally, it attracts at the same time ‘Westerners’ such as Germans, who are fascinated because of its ‘exoticness’, including references to ‘Islamic mysticism’ and ‘shamanism’, or in recent times even Turkish Germans of the second or third generation. These, instead of the exotic, are rather looking for aspects of their ‘own’ culture in a certain form more adaptable to their mode of living now acculturated to a large degree to ‘Western’, European modes of living.<sup>15</sup>

## Biographical Narrative

- 14 Before describing some significant examples from the original material I gained during my participant observations at the rituals and by some interviews in the German context of his ritual practice, I should give a brief account of the biography of Oruç Güvenç. This narrative is the one established by himself and his wife (in her German publications and free translations of his speeches from French<sup>16</sup> into German) concerning his vocation or calling to become a musician and ‘dervish’ and his career as a ‘musical therapist’. (I extracted most of the following instances of his narrated biography from Güvenç 2007.)
- 15 His parents are of Volga Tatar background, on his mother’s side also with Kirgiz roots. Their ancestors came from the Russian Empire to Ottoman Turkey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His father settled in the Western Anatolian provincial town Tavşanlı where he worked repairing watches and later as a journalist for the local newspaper. From this fact stems Oruç Güvenç’s strong interest in ethnography, as his father obviously had started collecting ethnographic objects and local folklore when he practiced as a journalist. In course of this, his father already established relations with a nearby Bektaşî village, which hosts a tomb of one of the presumed successors (*halife*) of Hacı Bektaş. At the age of twelve, Oruç had a dream, where a man in a long black coat gave him a violin and said, “Play!” Oruç replied, “I am not able to play.” The man then said, “Yes, you can”, and Oruç found he could play, much to his pleasure. He later got a real violin from a friend of his father and spent three years learning to play. (This widespread dream motif is common in Shamanistic vocation stories as well as in narratives of people becoming dervishes.)
- 16 He also developed a strong interest in Turkic folk music and, later in the 1960s, he formed a music group with some friends in Istanbul. This group somehow even managed to travel to Central Asia, at that time still part of the Soviet Union. In his youth, he also experimented with hypnosis and spiritism, eventually visiting spiritistic sessions. In one of these, he met a certain Fazıl Güvey, musician and Sufi, who is supposed to be the pupil of a sheikh of Daghestani-Caucasian origin. This still happened in the town of Tavşanlı.
- 17 Oruç moved to Istanbul to study in the 1960s. There, he met Turgut Söylemezoğlu, called Turgut Baba, who is claimed to be one of the last pupils of the last head of the *Galata Mevlevihanesi* (‘Mevlevi lodge’), Ahmed Celaleddin Dede. Finally, a friend brought him to Ziyadeddin Kuldur, called Ziya or Ayar Baba, who was a Sa’dî dervish, but who supposedly also had the *icazet* (permission to function as a spiritual guide) for the Kadiri, Rufa’î, Uşşaki, Mevlevi and Bektaşî ways. Oruç also claims to have these *icazets* through that connection, or at least a thorough knowledge of the respective *zikir* techniques. As there is no reference to other Sufi contacts in the biographical narrative—especially not to Kadiri, Uşşaki, and Bektaşî—, one can assume that Oruç obtained from Ziya Baba a kind of collective *icazet*. (He has contacts to one Halvetî sheikh though; see below. In his house, he keeps a *hırka*—the ritual mantle—of one sheikh, a symbolic vestment of authority and several documents, some in Ottoman script.)
- 18 His early life in Istanbul remains unclear in the narrative, as well as the details of his Central Asian journey. A closer investigation could shed more light on the formation of his thought and practice in this formative period, which in the written narration is

overshadowed by the Sufi contacts. Additional biographical interviews of friends of his from this period would be necessary to reveal other elements in the initial formation of his thought and practice that are not mentioned in the narrative, nevertheless are identifiable in *habitus* and practice as stemming from a 'life style' of the 1960s and 1970s. I have established contacts to some of his early musical and Sufi partners from that period, who together formed a milieu interested in musical practice, especially of the Mevleviye. In the 1960s and 70s, they had contact with descendants of the Istanbul-based Mevlevi sheikhs as well as with major British scholars working on the Mevleviye, and were part of a society for Sufi music. Some of them were conservatory-educated professional musicians. I have not had the chance to conduct longer interviews. However, it is clear that several splits between former friends occurred, who especially criticise his popularisation and 'commercialisation' of Sufism.

- 19 He continued his studies in clinical psychology at the Cerrahpaşa University Clinic in Istanbul, where he received his doctorate with a dissertation on 'musical therapy in general and in Turkic cultures specifically' in 1985. The thoughts about an ages old culture of musical therapy both in pre-Islamic, 'shamanistic' Turkic cultures as well as in Islamic history, he formulated in this dissertation (circulated as a Xerox copy of a German translation mainly), remain at the centre of his thinking, speech and practice until today.
- 20 Most prominent in Güvenç's thought is the general concept of Dervish culture being an Islamicised form of shamanism. As effective the concept was in integrating the religious history of 'the Turks' into the narrative of the modern nation state of Turkey by scholars such as Mehmet Fuat Köprülü (see Dressler 2010b), it is just as effective in making Sufi practice attractive to interested Westerners.

## From Turkey to Germany

- 21 How did he establish his activities in a European context? His career started in Austria in the late 1980s and shortly afterward continued on to Switzerland and Germany. Additionally, he was also active in Spain and in other European countries.
- 22 I have gained insight into that historical data by a German music psychotherapist, who is now active at a German university, both as an independent therapist and coach as well as an associate at an institute for medical psychology at the university clinic. An interesting fact, I was not aware of in the beginning of my own work, is, that the director of that unit is also a friend of Oruç Güvenç and is very fond of his musical as well as spiritual abilities. These medical practitioners and researchers are interested, although to some extent critically, in what Oruç Güvenç presents as a coherent system of "ancient oriental musical therapy", as he calls it, which he describes as effective in different therapeutic contexts.<sup>17</sup> Some of these German medical doctors and therapists practice European clinical Music Psychotherapy themselves. This is one important factor for taking part fully in these Sufi rituals: either by playing along with an instrument, self-educated or educated by Oruç Güvenç, or dancing during the *sema* nights conducted by Güvenç and TÛMATA.<sup>18</sup>
- 23 The scene of therapists, patients and people interested in esoteric practices in Germany is complex; it mixes with the academia at least in the field of medical psychology and psychotherapy (this would be a separate research project). However, this fact is the

basis for an on-going practice of Sufi ritual in a Western context, outside of Sufi centres such as the one in Mannheim. The latter actually has distanced itself to an extent from Oruç Güvenç and follows now, at least as a part of its members is concerned, the way of the Indian mystic and musician Inayat Khan. However, the musicians from Mannheim still take part in the collective *sema* rituals held at Heidelberg. This German scene is somehow paralleled in Turkey by people interested in esoteric ritual and practice in the form of 'traditional Islamic' practice; at least some of them seem to be upper middle-class people from Istanbul, as I got the impression during my fieldwork with Oruç Güvenç there.<sup>19</sup>

- 24 Concerning the German side of this transnational network, I had the opportunity to interview one central informant, a German musical therapist.<sup>20</sup> The data from the interview presented here give exemplary insight of how Oruç Güvenç established contacts in Western Europe. There are probably similar contacts in other places in Germany and Western Europe, which form part of his network.
- 25 She met Oruç Güvenç first in Austria. There, he played in a group with two other musicians, Gerhard 'Kadir' Tucek, who had converted to Islam before his encounter with Oruç, and Gülten Urallı, said to be also of Tatar origin like Güvenç himself. They played in a cultural centre (a former farm) in Northern Tyrol in the context of a public workshop, attended by around thirty people. My informant has actually a family connection to Islamic cultures, as her former husband was of Afghan origin, said to come from a Kabul Sufi family. As her husband had separated from her, leaving her alone with their son, she was in search of peace of mind, and the music of the group had a positive effect in this regard, as she relates. She was already a music psychotherapist at that time. She stated that Oruç Güvenç almost never did individual healing ceremonies or therapies, but instead includes people with individual problems in the collective ritual. In 1990, she invited him to her research project in psycho-oncology at Hamburg University, where he again gave a concert and a workshop. In 1991, she organised a congress on altered states of consciousness. There, Güvenç also gave a concert. Later, Gerhard Tucek invited him to Vienna where they tried to establish the "ancient oriental musical therapy" as an officially recognised therapy within the Austrian medical insurance system. In 1990 or 1991, also other academics from Marmara University were present in Vienna in that endeavour.
- 26 In the 1990s, Oruç Güvenç and his group were active on many occasions in Western Europe, sometimes invited by the aforementioned psychotherapist from Heidelberg. She mentioned also that he "initiated" her (as she terms it) around 1998 with a special ritual conducted in Frankfurt. I have not participated in such an initiation ritual yet, however according to her description, it is a rather short ritual without the group taking part.
- 27 The German informant concludes that she actually considers the ritual 'much too westernised' now, which she ascribes to the influence of active and influential German female participants in the rituals. Although distancing herself from orthodox Islam (she never converted; she describes herself as a former feminist and emancipated), she criticises that nowadays it is no longer common for women to wear a headscarf during the ritual, which she calls "*dhikr*-prayer".<sup>21</sup> During the ritual dances, she herself wears a loose headscarf.
- 28 Her activities in inviting and staging Oruç Güvenç and his group are exemplary for his network in Western Europe, which stretches not only into therapeutic circles, but also



into other Sufi contexts (e.g. the Sufi Centre “Gayanshala” in Mannheim). A more thorough research on his activities would need to map his entire network in many different countries such as Spain, Switzerland and Austria among others. With more material, it would probably be possible to classify certain categories for his success in and adaptability to differing audiences, be it people seeking for healing, cultural practice, spiritual guidance, identity, etc.

## Activities in Turkey

- 29 To evaluate the involvement of a Turkish academic context, a wider study on new religious trends, attitudes and practices, which are rather not integrated into the ‘classical’ religious trends and institutions and sometimes linked to Western esotericism, would be necessary involving specialists on ‘alternative healing’ as well as ethnographers working in an urban context such as Istanbul. To my knowledge, this has not been done so far.<sup>22</sup> However, considering my general experiences with him at events in Turkey it is clear that there Oruç Güvenç far more stresses his pan-Turkistic attitude including a strong Muslim identity than he does addressing a ‘Western’ public. Recently, he organised a larger conference on “Regenerative Medicine and Spirituality: From Heart to Medicine, From Medicine to Heart”.<sup>23</sup> This conference involved a wide spectrum of politicians, Sufis, Turkish as well as European, medical doctors and academics, therapists, health activists, and even a Muslim theologian.
- 30 Besides ‘Sufi Journeys’ organised by TÛMATA for Western and urban Turkish persons, Oruç Güvenç and his wife organise smaller tours with Turkish followers. If there is an opportunity, they stage TÛMATA for a concert in local contexts such as town halls or recreation centres. At religiously significant places, such as *türbes*, Oruç Güvenç not only holds concerts together with his followers but also alternatively sometimes switches into the role of an ethnographic researcher, collecting interviews with local people in order to research historic ‘healing practices’ at the locations. I assume that, besides his academic training, he follows to some extent the role of his father, who has worked for a local newspaper as a journalist and as an amateur ethnographer. (As I was told, he contributed to the establishment of the local museum in Tavşanlı or at least to parts of its collection.)
- 31 Additionally, the Güvenç group conducts *türbe* tours, especially to Konya; and so called “forty days forty nights”, “seven days seven nights” or “three days and nights” *halvet* (‘retreat’) and *sema* rituals, during the last years obviously regularly in a place outside Yalova. Turks from Germany and other Europeans regularly participate in these events. His wife Azize, who is very interested in getting their practice documented and researched by academics had invited me too. Unfortunately, I had not the opportunity to attend such an event yet. It is significant that his activities appear not to stretch into Sufi networks based on the tarikat tradition, although he has regular contacts to at least one Halveti Sheikh in his home region in North-Western Anatolia, who recently died.<sup>24</sup>

## Transfer of Ritual – Examples from a “Sema Night” in Germany

- 32 In order to illustrate the character of Oruç Güvenç and TÛMATA’s ritual and processes of transfer occurring therein, I will partly describe one event. In 2009, I attended one “Wirbeltanz-Nacht” (‘whirling dance night’). The event took place in a middle-sized university lecture hall after an evening concert of TÛMATA from around 11 p.m. until around 6.30 in the morning. The hall was emptied of chairs between the concert and the nightly ritual. The low stage used already for the public concert was also the place for the musicians, which played during the ritual night, around twelve persons from the TÛMATA group plus some other pupils of Güvenç, mostly from Germany, Austria, possibly also from other European countries. Later in the night, also one of the local Sufi musicians from the Sufi Centre “Gayanshala” (Mannheim, Germany) joined in. Most of the active musical participants were dressed more or less ‘oriental’, or ‘dervish-like’ or ‘shamanic’, from complete dress like Oruç Güvenç (wearing for example a Kirgiz hat and an embroidered dress from Central Asia) to only a cap or the like. The guest participants—around forty people—were sitting in a wide circle around the *meydan* (‘square’), the middle space left free and later used for the *sema* dance ritual.<sup>25</sup> Only some of the women were covering their hair with a shawl or scarf. As the organiser told me, most of them are one way or the other attached to the healing and therapy business.
- 33 Oruç Güvenç gave a short introduction and a kind of ‘crash course’ in *sema*, translated from the French by his wife Azize sitting next to him. This was illustrated by one of his ‘disciples’, who showed the basic moves and postures, from ‘prostration’ (*niyaz*) and kissing the *meydan* up to how to start the whirling, with closed arms first and then unfolding, one palm up the other down, until ending the ritual dance by ‘greeting’ the ritual leader and again doing *niyaz*. He also advised all the participants to take part in the *zikir* by singing along the songs when they are not dancing. It was interesting that Azize usually translated “Allah” as ‘die Göttlichkeit’, ‘the divinity’, which is a gender-neutral expression in German. Altogether, this introductory part took around twenty minutes.
- 34 Güvenç started the ritual proper by pronouncing the *fatiha*, the first *surah* of the *Qur’an*. He advised the participants to pronounce the prayer, verse by verse, by repeating his words, which most of them did. Those participants demonstrating their ‘Muslim-ness’ or being ‘overcorrect’ in mimesis towards the ritual leader additionally held their hands in the usual Muslim prayer gesture (palms up, *raf’ al-yadayn*) like Oruç Güvenç and his disciples did. Following the *fatiha*, he initiated a first kind of *zikir* with the repeated expression “*estağfirullah*”, which he calls “a *mantra*”. It is the common Islamic formula for repentance, pronounced rhythmically on two pitches by moving the head from right to left for several minutes. In an effective way, this *zikir* brought the group in a common mood of bodily and audio-visual perception. Güvenç ended this rite by pronouncing “*estağfirullah*” in a higher pitch.
- 35 He took the dervish flute (*ney*) and initiated a second *zikir* hymn which repeats the words “*hu, hu, huva’llah*” (‘he, he, he is God’). Almost immediately one woman from the circle of disciples entered the *meydan* and started to ‘whirl’. Other musicians accompanied Oruç Güvenç with frame drums and later by *oud*; then he switched to a kind of *rebab* (oriental ‘spike fiddle’). In addition, his wife Azize stepped on the *meydan*

and started to whirl. The next tune was a kind of *tevhid* hymn<sup>26</sup> with the refrain “la ilahe illa’llah” in a faster mood. Now, several people stepped on the *meydan* to whirl, including a boy approximately ten years of age. He seemed to be well acquainted with the procedure, as he did *niyaz* while entering and while leaving the *meydan* without hesitation. Several other attendants practiced a sitting *zikir*, moving their bodies in a circling move back and forth. The hymn had Turkish verses, which were sung mainly by TÛMATA members or otherwise well-rehearsed disciples. Some participants—already at this early stage of the ritual—practiced a kind of breathing technique releasing rhythmically their breath pronouncing markedly the “i” of “illa’llah” or uttering “hü” (or ‘hu’, the Arabic pronunciation versus ‘hü’ in Turkish). The *oud* player had switched to a *kanun* (trapeze zither), and other *oud* players had stepped in. During the course of the night, the different instrumentalists, who also took a break from time to time, changed instruments many times.

- 36 The hymns are by no means all classical *zikir* hymns or *ilahis* (hymns in the praise of god), let alone typical *Mevleviye* pieces for the *sema*. To the contrary, the repertoire, like in his concerts, is composed of songs in the style of classical Turkish music as well as folk songs, which are in key, mode and melody more adjustable to Western culturally modelled audio perception. However, the texts in the majority show God related, ‘religious’ topics and verses and usually are in Turkish, with occasional exceptions in German. It is noteworthy that songs with texts dominate the repertoire of Oruç Güvenç for accompanying *sema* dance. Actually, almost the complete TÛMATA repertoire consists of songs with vocal singing whereas more contemplative solely instrumental parts, as in other Sufi contexts (including *Mevlevi*), are missing. In this context, we can observe transference from other Sufi and Islamic contexts (sung *zikir* hymns, *ilahis*) into the *Mevlevi sema*, which then mainly is realised by the whirling, but not in other ‘traditional’ forms such as classical *Mevlevi* music, singing, specific instruments of the *Mevlevi* orchestra, or dress.
- 37 However, even more obvious transfer processes take place when one Austrian disciple introduces German Language *ilahis*. Some are obviously translated from Turkish, when the style of the music remains ‘oriental’. Some are in German with a consciously pronounced Austrian accent in the style of Austrian folk songs, but having Islamic texts (with refrains such as “Allah hu” or “la ilahe illa’llah”), especially one praising the prophet Muhammad and another one for “Mevlana” (i. e. the patron of the *Mevlevi* order, Celaluddin Rumi). Some of these songs are completely “Western” except for the Islamic texts and the fact that they are played on an *oud*; however, even the *oud* then is played like a Western folk guitar. Despite this fact, startling to the observer, the participants continued their whirling or *zikir* moves without much irritation (although there is some laugh towards the unconsciously comical appearance of an Islamic Austrian folk song; mainly the organiser seems to be a little bit annoyed). To the contrary, the fact of ‘Austrian *ilahis*’ seems to contribute to the adaptability of the ‘strange’, ‘alien’ ritual. Generally, even ‘oriental’ songs are realised in many cases in a more ‘Westernised’ style concerning melody, intervals, and harmony, especially when ‘polyphony’ (or rather homophony, in the sense of chordal singing, versus monophony) —normally unknown to classical oriental music—is introduced, mainly by the realisation of the same melody in different pitches by different singers. In the concrete case observed, it was usually a major third interval, which is known not from classical European music but from ‘old-European’ folk music, such as Celtic music. This shows an acquaintance of some of the musicians with other musical forms related to

contemporary Western esotericism. This fact enables a strong participation by people socialised into the Western musical system in the ritual by singing along ‘familiar’ melodies and keys without problems. The kind of *zikir* hymns often used by TÛMATA is possibly influenced by styles established by early introducers of Sufi music and Sufism into the West, mainly from Indian origin, such as Inayat Khan.

- 38 Turkish novices might be attracted by the utilisation of standard sing-along Turkish folk songs such as “Üsküdar’a Gider İken”. Interestingly, during the ritual night a much more ‘Sufi-like’ atmosphere and ‘tuning’ is brought in by the German Turkish Sufi musician from the Mannheim Sufi Centre “Gayanshala”, when he steps in later at night with his *ney* and later with *oud* and voice. He is *inter alia* singing a *deyiş* (religious hymn, literally ‘saying’) with a text from Nesimi, a 15<sup>th</sup> century poet, whose texts are much esteemed and sung by Anatolian Alevi. An additional transference is the introduction of a round dance style *sema*, which is clearly derived from recently much publicised and mediatised Anatolian Alevi ritual. It is realised with expressive breathing sounds in the rhythm of the dance steps, which is not known from standard Alevi ritual. It has to be noted that Oruç Güvenç has a mainstream Sunni background (albeit with Sufi specification) without any explicitly documented contacts to Alevi circles to my knowledge. (However, he surely is aware of the ‘Alevi revival’; there is actually—looking at this material and comparing it to modern Alevi rituals by the Alevi *CEM Vakfı* organisation that include *Mevlevi semas* and *Mevlevi dervishes*—a competition over Sufi forms, especially over the *Mevlevi sema*. Large public Alevi *cem* rituals with the participation of *Mevlevi* dancing *sema* were organised by the *CEM Vakfı* for example in İstanbul, Ankara or Malatya during the last years.)
- 39 In any case, it is remarkable how the group, led by Oruç Güvenç, keeps up a kind of flow the whole night. This is due to his ability to adapt and realise very different styles and modes on a variety of instruments. Additionally, he has obviously established a kind of standard repertoire and sufficient basic abilities in playing, singing and dancing within the core group of his disciples responsible for the uninterrupted conduction of the ritual event. This helps to get over the inevitable moments of tiredness and boredom during the long hours of the night. Although some participants fall asleep, there are always enough people actively participating so that no real breakup of the ritual occurs. Oruç Güvenç closes the ritual by initiating a joint “hu” and a long prayer of plea and blessing, in French, with some core terms that he leaves in Turkish, translated by his wife into German. Then, he leads the ritual community in praying the *fatiha* together. At the very end, he shakes hands with the musicians sitting next to him and advises them to repeat this handshake of reconciliation with all the members of the ritual community. Lastly, the organiser, who announces the communal breakfast following the ritual, gives a speech of gratitude and announces a following workshop by Oruç Güvenç. Whereas the concert had a (moderate) fee, the whirling night was free; however, donations were expected. The main income for the ‘professional’ musicians therefore possibly is the fee for workshops, usually held during the days before or after the *sema* rituals or a concert, where paying pupils are educated in oriental instruments and ritual dance techniques.

## Conclusion

- 40 The flexibility to react to very different circumstances and audiences in ‘Western’ as well as ‘Oriental’ contexts shows Oruç Güvenç’s ability as a musical performer, knowing how to design a program for an event, to select appropriate pieces and to improvise; an ability also demonstrated by some of his followers. This is an interactive process, however. There are some standard core practices and canonical musical pieces in his rituals. This fact gives the somewhat individualistic and of course eclectic and syncretistic practice of Oruç Güvenç a certain continuity and establishes a tradition of a fluctuating group, centred on him and his German wife Andrea Azize.
- 41 The ritual forms are the result of different transfer processes of ritual elements from different traditions: Central Asian, classical Sufi music and dance, Western folk music, to name some of them. Thus, the Sufi ritual of Oruç Güvenç is a system of practices constructed via many processes of reception and accommodation. It can be described as an eclectic system of practice, thought and discourse. However, it forms a system ‘in its own right’, as every ritual performative practice linked to a committed “community of practice” does. It is a master example of extreme ritual dynamics, which enables its adaptability from rural Anatolian up to urban Turkish or Western contexts. In light of recent research in the Research Centre “Ritual Dynamics” (University of Heidelberg, Germany) on ‘ritual design’ (see Karolewski et al. 2012), it could also be stated that Oruç Güvenç can be called an unconscious ritual designer. Unconscious, because he is determined to uncover age-old systems of effective practice, while at the same time creating very new forms of fluctuating “communities of practice” (Stausberg 2001). He is, however, conscious of the need to adapt to different audiences. His large repertoire of different musical styles, instrumentations and personnel allows him to do that without having to feel opportunistic. Rather, he sees himself as integrating different, but related cultural resources that are connected to his general aim: to provide a framework for therapeutic healing. This is the perspective of an ethnographer and historian of religion. As aspects of healing efficacy lie out of the scope of my research and outside my expertise, I cannot evaluate the possible effectiveness of the practices involved. Nevertheless, in terms of ritual as a mode of human expression and identity building, they seem to be highly effective in several ways.<sup>27</sup>

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## NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented as part of the panel "Sufism, Neo-Sufism and Spirituality in Turkey, 1/2: Social Change and Individual Endeavour (Panel 404)", organised by Béatrice Hendrich, at the *World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies, WOCMES 2010* in Barcelona, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, European Institute of the Mediterranean, July 19th–24th 2010 (23 July 2010). I am grateful to Janina Karolewski (M. A.), Dr. Béatrice Hendrich, Prof. Dr. Rolf Verres, Sabine Rittner and anonymous referees for critically reading earlier drafts of this paper and providing me with additional information. All remaining errors and flaws remain my own responsibility.
2. For an application of the concept of 'hybridity' in ritual studies, see Henn / Koepping 2008.
3. For a rare account on Oruç Güvenç in scholarly literature, see the encyclopaedic work on 'Turkish' music in Germany by Martin Greve: Greve 2003: 397. I am grateful to Martin Greve for alerting me to this account in his book.
4. This paper gives me the opportunity to present some material that actually was a by-product of my research project on Alevi from Turkey and their transnational "community of practice". In the context of that project on the Alevi *cem* and other re-established ritual forms and structures, the concept of "transfer of ritual" was developed. As the focus of my research was the Alevi community, I did not investigate the material on post-modern Sufism in an equally systematic way. I especially hope that this paper containing description and preliminary considerations might encourage other researchers to take a closer look at this fascinating phenomenon of contemporary Sufism in a transnational and transcultural context. Moreover, a comparison with other contemporary Sufi contexts is highly desirable. This task lies beyond the scope of this article.
5. *Zikir* (from Arabic *dhikr*, 'remembering') is the most common term for sometimes very different forms of Sufi/Dervish ritual, mostly however involving mentioning (and thereby 'remembering') the name(s) of God. It can include singing and dancing.



6. Leaflet: *Sohbet: ein Lehrgespräch mit dem Meister Dr. Oruc Güvenç mit Musik und Poesie* (Ludwigshafen, 2006); *Dr. Oruc Güvenç mit TÛMATA und Hosh Neva - Sema-Abend: Musik und Heiltänze der Sufis* (Ludwigshafen: Musikverein Gayanshala, 2006).
7. Leaflet: *Oruç Güvenç - Musik und Tänze der Sufis und zentralasiatischer Schamanen & Altorientalische Musiktherapie: Konzert am Freitag, 1. 12. 2000, 20.00 Uhr, Workshop vom 2.-3.12.2000.* (Heidelberg: Förderverein Zukunftsmusik, 2000).
8. The sale of media and instruments is organised by the so-called Otağ Müzik Merkezi.
9. For accounts on the now Alevi-held Karacaahmet-sanctuary in Istanbul and religious practices surrounding it, see for example Langer 2008.
10. In the past, they appeared together at many events, for example at a large congress of modern Shamans in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, in 2000. Their talk and concert was published as an audiotape by ZIST (Penzberg) in 2000. See Güvenc; Tucek 2000.
11. Azize Güvenç apparently has published a new book recently, which I could not consult yet.
12. *Sema* (from Arabic, literally 'hearing') is the ritual dance in a Sufi context, most prominently the dance ritual of the so-called 'whirling dervishes' of the Mevlevi order (*Mevleviye*).
13. This collection, like the musical program of TÛMATA in general, would be an interesting field of study for a musical anthropologist. For a participants' account on two earlier events, a "three days three nights" *sema* in Lower Austria in 2004, and even a "forty days forty nights" in Turkey (presumably in 2006), obviously also organised and led by Oruç Rahmi Güvenç, see Özelsel 2009.
14. See Ritualdynamik website.
15. It would be interesting to compare the different socio-cultural types of the participants to the categories established by Hüttermann (2002) in his outstanding ethnographical study on a more traditional *tarik*at context: the Naqshbandiyya. However, this would require further long-term study of larger portions of participants in TÛMATA ritual events. On thoughts about how to categorise and analyse Sufism-related material that relates to 'Muslims' as well as 'non-Muslims' conf. Dressler 2010a; see also Dressler 2009.
16. Oruç Güvenç's first foreign language was French, which was quite usual in Turkey until about the 1970s. He speaks that fluently and prefers to use it when talking to non-Turkish-speaking audiences.
17. At the institute, they also conduct research that involves techniques from music therapy. See for example Fachner / Rittner 2004 and 2006.
18. TÛMATA is conducting concerts, workshops and rituals regularly for example at the University of Heidelberg, such as *Konzert: Musik und Tänze aus Zentralasien & Sufi-Musik mit Dr. Oruc Güvenç und Musikern der Gruppe TÛMATA. Volks- und Liebeslieder aus Zentralasien und der Türkei & Musik der drehenden Derwische und anderer Sufitraditionen. Sa., 18.12.2006, 20.00 Uhr* [Leaflet] (Heidelberg: Förderverein für Medizinische Psychologie, Ethnomedizin und Musiktherapie e. V. am Institut für Medizinische Psychologie der Universitätsklinik Heidelberg, 2006).
19. Many of his activities are documented in the Internet, either by different media or on the homepage of TÛMATA. Additionally, there are also several clips available on *YouTube*.
20. She conducts many activities with different musicians from several cultures, all under the heading of "medical psychology, ethno-medicine and musical therapy"; the main topic of her own seminars is trance techniques. The former anthropologist, then practitioner of trance techniques, the late Professor Felicitas Goodman, has trained her. Her own workshops have titles such as "Trance as a Source for Power and Inspiration" or "Journeys into Other Realities".
21. *Dhikr* is the Arabic original of *zikir*, the latter being the (Ottoman-)Turkish spelling.
22. A recent dissertation that deals with forms of (religious) healing in modern Turkey, not necessarily with connections to Sufism, is Dole 2002. See also Dole 2004.
23. Program: *Rejeneratif Tıp ve Spirituality: Kalpten Tıbbı, Tıptan Kalbe. Geleceğe Hazırlık Sempozyum-Semineri 7 = Regenerative Medicine and Spirituality: From Heart to Medicine, from Medicine to Heart.*

*Preperation [sic] for the Future Symposium-Seminar 7.* Yalova: Tmata Trk Musikisini Arařtırma ve Tanıtma Grubu; Otađ Mzik Merkezi; Neva Sanat ve Geliřim Merkezi, September 18–19, 2010. A preceding conference was organised already in 2009 in İzmir, another symposium in 2011 again in Yalova. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Rolf Verres (University Clinics Heidelberg) for this information.

24. See “Halveti řabani řeyhi Aziz Mehmet Dumlu Ktahyevi” [16 Nov 2011].

25. The people sitting around it constitute this place. It is not an architectural feature here.

26. *Tevhid* is the confession of the oneness of God, such as in the general Islamic confession ‘There is no god but Allah’.

27. For the discussion in the academic field of ‘musical therapy’, see Oberegelsbacher; Timmermann 1999 and the reply by Rittner; Verres 2000 (with following statement by Oberegelsbacher). A recent M. A. thesis from this discipline is Haarer 2010. I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Rolf Verres for supplying me with this literature. Very recently, a conference on German-Turkish encounters in the field of musical therapy was organised at the German “Orient-Institut” in Istanbul under the title “Dinleyiniz: Trk-Alman Mzik Terapi Tecrbelerinin Paylařımı / Hren Sie: Erfahrungsaustausch deutsch-trkischer Musiktherapie” in May 2012. In that context, there was a lecture by Alexandre Toumarkine on “Oruđ Gvenç’in Rolu ve Mirası / Die Rolle und das Erbe von Oruđ Gvenç”.

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## ABSTRACTS

For years, Oruđ Rahmi Gvenç, his German wife Azize and his loosely organised group of musicians, singers, and dancers (TMATA) from Turkey and various Western European countries are practicing a (post)modern form of dervish ritual, incorporating musical forms, songs and dance practices from different parts of the Turkic world and several Islamic traditions, but also from Central Europe. Focussing on the ritual dance of the ‘Whirling Dervishes’ (*Mevleviye*), but also practicing forms of modern western ‘(Musical) Therapy’, this ‘hybrid’ kind of complex ritual<sup>2</sup> became very attractive to the modernised citizens of Turkey as well as to Western Europeans. This paper is an attempt to analyse some elements of this ritual practice and their application in varying contexts (such Turkey or Germany). Sources for this description are several participant observations, biographical data, publications and internal working materials of the Sufi group, as well as media coverage on their activities.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** 20th/21st Centuries, Alevi, Ethnography, Field Work, Germany, Islam, Istanbul, Mevlevi, Music, Oruđ Rahmi Gvenç, Ritual, Sema, Sufism, Transfer of Ritual, TMATA, Turkey, Western Europe, Zikir.

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