



universität  
wien

# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Whirling between Sema and Dance

-

A transnational perspective  
on the transfer of whirling rituals  
in Austria and Turkey”

verfasst von / submitted by

Margarethe Christine Bendix, B.A.

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna 2020

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

UA 066 810

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Doz. Dr. Elke Mader



*Photo by the author. Istanbul. 2019.*

When you dance the whole universe dances.

All the realms spun around you in endless celebration.

Your soul loses its grip.

Your body sheds its fatigue.

Hearing my hands clap and my drum beat,

You begin to whirl

*RUMI*

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Univ. Prof. Dr. Elke Mader, for her patient support. I also thank Prof. Besim Can Zırh, for his supervision during my semester at ODTÜ university.

I want to express my thanks to my interview partners and the people whom I met during my research.

Thank you, Caro, for your help, advice, and motivation in all the ups and downs of the whole research process.

Thank you, Irina for your input and for helping me form my thesis.

Thank you, Dieter, for reading and struggling with my Denglish.

And thank you, all my other friends and family, for your motivation and care.

# Content

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	WHIRLING, YOGA, AND ERASMUS - MY MOTIVATION .....	2
1.2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
1.3	STATE OF THE ART.....	5
1.4	RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	7
1.5	RESEARCH PROCESS .....	8
1.6	OUTLINE .....	9
<b>2</b>	<b>METHODS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1	MOVING FROM ONE FIELD TO ANOTHER - MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER.....	10
2.2	GROUNDING THEORY METHOD .....	11
2.3	MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY .....	12
2.4	PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION .....	15
2.5	QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS.....	16
2.6	ONLINE DATA AND VISUAL INFORMATION .....	17
2.7	DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS .....	18
2.8	SUMMARY – METHODS .....	19
<b>3</b>	<b>THEORY.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1	TRANSNATIONALISM THEORY .....	20
3.1.1	<i>Transnationalism - Between boundaries and flows .....</i>	<i>21</i>
3.1.2	<i>Summary – Transnationalism .....</i>	<i>23</i>
3.2	RITUAL THEORY .....	23
3.2.1	<i>History of ritual research.....</i>	<i>24</i>
3.2.2	<i>Ritual elements.....</i>	<i>25</i>
3.2.3	<i>Ritual dynamics.....</i>	<i>26</i>
3.2.4	<i>Transfer of rituals .....</i>	<i>30</i>
3.2.5	<i>Summary – Ritual theory .....</i>	<i>34</i>
3.3	PERFORMANCE.....	34
3.3.1	<i>Performance and performativity.....</i>	<i>35</i>
3.3.2	<i>Ritual performances and theatre performance .....</i>	<i>36</i>
3.3.3	<i>Cultural performance.....</i>	<i>39</i>
3.3.4	<i>Summary – Performance theory .....</i>	<i>39</i>
3.4	SUMMARY – THEORETICAL PART .....	40

<b>4</b>	<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1	BAGHDAD SUFIS AND A FEMALE MYSTIC - EARLY SUFISM .....	41
4.1.1	<i>Spiritual ancestries – The formation of tarikas .....</i>	<i>44</i>
4.2	MUSIC, WHIRLING, RECITATION – MEVLEVI SEMA .....	48
4.3	NEW SPIRITUALITY AND IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS –SUFISM IN THE WEST .....	50
4.4	REVIVING TURKISH MUSIC - ORUÇ GÜVENÇ AND TÜMATA .....	51
<b>5</b>	<b>EMPIRICAL PART .....</b>	<b>55</b>
5.1	DIFFERENT FORMS OF WHIRLING – INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH FIELDS .....	57
5.1.1	<i>“Es gibt nur an Allāh. “ - Sema at Haus des Friedens - Vienna .....</i>	<i>57</i>
5.1.2	<i>“Mevlana sema gösteri” – Sema at Mevlana culture center - Konya .....</i>	<i>62</i>
5.1.3	<i>„The turquoise whirling skirt“ - Karabas-i Veli culture center – Bursa.....</i>	<i>65</i>
5.1.4	<i>“Performing solo” - Khatoon Fallah’s dance performance - Ankara .....</i>	<i>68</i>
5.1.5	<i>Summary – Different Forms of Whirling .....</i>	<i>70</i>
5.2	TRANSNATIONAL CHARACTER OF WHIRLING .....	70
5.2.1	<i>“The local should be globalized” – Transnational in Turkey .....</i>	<i>71</i>
5.2.2	<i>“There were 86 different nations” - Tümata – a transnational group .....</i>	<i>74</i>
5.2.3	<i>Summary – Transnational character of whirling.....</i>	<i>78</i>
5.3	WHIRLING PRACTICE AS A TRANSFER OF RITUALS .....	79
5.3.1	<i>“Sema is a spiRITUAL act” – Identifying whirling.....</i>	<i>79</i>
5.3.2	<i>“Come, come whoever you are” – Whirling practitioners.....</i>	<i>81</i>
5.3.3	<i>“Of course there are differences in the cultures, perhaps” - Analyzing contexts ..</i>	<i>88</i>
5.3.4	<i>“You can come and learn how to do it.” - Permanent transfer through teaching..</i>	<i>92</i>
5.3.5	<i>Summary – Whirling Practice as a Transfer of Rituals .....</i>	<i>97</i>
5.4	WHIRLING DANCE – TRANSFER ‘OUT’ OF RITUAL? .....	99
5.4.1	<i>“Imagined dance” - Historical perspective on contemporary whirling dance .....</i>	<i>99</i>
5.4.2	<i>“You know that from Matrix, right?” – Ritual vs. dance performance .....</i>	<i>100</i>
5.4.3	<i>“Sema vs. whirling in masks” - Performative character of whirling .....</i>	<i>102</i>
5.4.4	<i>Summary – Whirling Dance – Transfer ‘out’ of Ritual .....</i>	<i>105</i>
<b>6</b>	<b>FINAL CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>REFERENCES CITED .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>124</b>
8.1	GLOSSARY .....	124
8.2	OUTLINE OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED.....	126

# 1 Introduction

“Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet again, come, come.” Rumi

This poem of Rumi is often recited as an illustration of Sufism's open attitude. Sufism is seen as a peaceful religious practice with pluralist potential, as it is not only accepting of the different Islamic denominations but also embraces other religions. Especially in the context of new religious and spiritual movements in Western European contexts, Sufism has long been of interest. Its depiction as a mystical<sup>1</sup> and tolerant form of religions has found many followers.<sup>2</sup> For example, in America, the Inayat Khan Sufi order was founded. The order's practices and teachings are detached from its Islamic background.<sup>3</sup>

In parallel, Sufism is constructed as an opponent to radical forms of Islam, such as Islamism<sup>4</sup>. Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi<sup>5</sup>, for example, argues that Sufis orientate their practices and teaching on the transformation of the inner selves, rather than making political alignments. Sufis have the same two principles as mainstream Islam, which is the unity of God *tawhīd*<sup>6</sup> and that there is no other God other than *Allāh*. Nonetheless, since Sufi masters criticize radical Islamic's claim to absoluteness, they are harassed and persecuted in countries such as Pakistan. Considering political Islam, both historically, as well as in the modern-day, Sufism has long influenced the politics of countries with Islamic majorities. For example, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a member of the Naqshbandi Sufi order.

Thus, Sufism is an active part of building bridges between different cultures, ideologies, and philosophies<sup>7</sup>.

Also, practices of arts, such as dance, are uniting people from different contexts, and serve

---

<sup>1</sup> While the term mystic is widely used in the everyday language to describe Sufism, in scholarly literature the term is more contested (see e.g. Schimmel (1975); Schielke (2008); Cook (2015); Sedgwick (2017)).

<sup>2</sup> Ilija Trojanow (2016): Sufismus. Der größte Feind des islamischen Extremismus. <https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/der-schriftsteller-ilija-trojanow-ueber-den-sufismus-der-groesste-feind-des-islamischen>; last accessed 2020/01/19.

<sup>3</sup> These movements of Islamic renewals, coming into existence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were described as Neo-Sufism. Very soon, the term was deconstructed, as it was based on simplified descriptions and mirrored orientalist perspectives. Nevertheless, the term is still used as a descriptive term. (O'Fahey and Radtke (1993); Voll (2008); Lawrence (2010)).

<sup>4</sup> Islamism describes a political part of Islamic fundamentalism, which aims to have its own political system. They strive to build an Islamic state. Wentker and Feichtinger (2008:37).

<sup>5</sup> Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi (2016): Die stärkste Waffe des Islams ist die Liebe. <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2017-01/sufismus-islam-mystik-fundamentalismus>. last accessed 2020/01/18.

<sup>6</sup> An overview of the Arabic and Turkish words used in this thesis are listed and explained in the glossary (chapter 8.1).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Malik states “Sufism can thus be read as a tool of and for intercultural encounter or dialogue, affecting interchange on versatile itineraries and complex processes of cultural translation” Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh (2019:2).

for a deeper understanding of each other. Considering this, my aim for this thesis was to build bridges; to cross boundaries of geographies and of categories.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to research whirling practices in Turkey and Austria, in both religious and dance contexts. The starting point of my research was the Mevlevi *dervish* dance, also called Sufi whirling or *sema*<sup>8</sup>. I did not limit myself to this form of lived religiosity but was also looking at ‘whirling dance’ as an artistic expression.

Whirling performances, *semas*, are mostly known in the context of the Mevlevi Sufis in Turkey. However, it is also practiced in different countries and other regions. People practicing the rituals and following the teachings of Sufism, so-called Sufis, are often organized in *tarikas*, comparable with Christian orders. There exist various *tarikas*, which often claim a heritage back to the early times of Islam. Mevlevi is one of these orders, which was formed by the teaching of the Sufi master and poet Dschalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī. His poems receive(d) great popularity and inspired Goethe’s “West-östlicher Diwan.”<sup>9</sup> Mevlevi Sufis practice the whirling in a specific ritual, called *sema*. As part of the ritual, they spin around their bodily axis, holding one arm up to the sky and the other one to the ground. Musicians accompany the whirling *dervishes*, and the whole composition symbolizes the unity with *Allāh*. *Sema* performances can be visited in Turkey but are also performed elsewhere in the world.

## 1.1 Whirling, Yoga, and Erasmus - My Motivation

I was first introduced to whirling through researching on a female spiritual Sufi center in Vienna in the frame of a research seminar. Here, I also discovered *sema*, practiced in its specific shape, formed by Oruç Güvenç and his group Tümata. I was fascinated by the different appearances of whirling and wondered about its potential in building bridges. Personally, the different forms of whirling practices reminded me of the transformation in Yoga. Yoga was and is practiced in different Hindu and Jain groups. Today, it is not only a sportive practice but also part of pop culture and a commodity in the global market of capitalism.<sup>10</sup> Most of its religious significance was lost in this modification process. I was asking myself if similar processes, such as commercialization, could also happen to the whirling practice. I realized that answering this

---

<sup>8</sup> Whirling is described with different words and terms. In the course of my theoretical and empirical discussion the different connotations of the term become clearer. If a more overall term is needed, I decided to speak of whirling practice; nevertheless, when talking about specific context or presenting the voice of my interview partners I apply the emic term, *sema*.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/200-jahre-west-oestlicher-divan-goethes-dichter-ischer.976.de.html?dram:article\\_id=455090](https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/200-jahre-west-oestlicher-divan-goethes-dichter-ischer.976.de.html?dram:article_id=455090); last accessed (2020/02/04).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Fish (2006); Samuel (2008); Jain (2014).

question would reach over the frame of a master thesis. Nevertheless, it motivated me to focus on modifications and transformations of whirling rituals, as well as to extend the research field to those whirling practices, which do not only appear in spiritual rituals.

As I planned to live in Ankara for the length of an Erasmus semester, I was curious about forms of whirling that can be witnessed there. In Vienna, I already got into contact with members of a Sufi group called Tümata, which is originated in Turkey. Therefore, it was interesting to study which transnational relations exist. I decided to put the practices of whirling and the people practicing it in the center of my thesis. This study is exploratory in nature, following a qualitative research approach.

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

My research process was guided by the approach of the Grounded Theory Method (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]). In this approach data collection, analysis, and theory building are an interdependent process taking part at the same time. Applied to my research, my research fields, methods, and theoretical framework came into existence in close interaction of these processes and by means of personal reflection. The selection of the theory was influenced by my personal interests in the transformation of the whirling practice and by the application of a transnational perspective in different cross-border relations.

The theoretical perspective of transnationalism was formed by the research of migration processes and of relations between people in the homeland and the diaspora. A new research approach developed which focused on new social connections and fields that cross geographical, political, cultural, or social boundaries. Identifying the consequences of modernity (Giddens 1991), the perception of space was redefined (Appadurai 1991); the idea of boundaries was re-conceptualized (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), and the relations between the local and the global newly defined (Kearney 1995). Thus, a transnational perspective enables the researcher to look at global transformations and to identify transnational connections and dimensions.

I applied the theory of transnationalism since I was researching in two countries, Austria and Turkey. This enabled me to investigate national phenomena, which are connected to global processes. Additionally, a transnational perspective leads to a shift of focus away from places to movements and dynamics.

I added the concept of ritual dynamics to my theoretical perspective in order to combine this processual perspective with my research object. Ritual theory had been the heart of Anthropological research, as it was seen as a proof of a universal category of human life. Durkheim set the milestone for researching rituals, by theorizing religions in the context of rites and not



only of beliefs. Furthermore, he defines religious rituals as a social phenomenon, of interactions and symbolic representations. The functions of rituals are social cohesion and creating a community (Durkheim 2012 [1912]). Lévi-Strauss developed a structural analysis of rituals and set them in contrast to myths (Lévi-Strauss 1966). Turner and Geertz examined rituals on the symbolic level and describe how rituals evoke symbolic systems and how symbols influence the way social actors perceive their environment (Turner 1967, 1969; Geertz 1973). Grimes has formed an overview of the theoretical perspective on rituals by discussing inter alia, its elements, and dynamics (Grimes 2014).

In relation to this theoretical basis, I focused on the theory of transfer of rituals. This concept is part of the theoretical framework of ritual dynamics. By applying the concept of transfer of rituals, the processes of transfer, transformation, and modifications in rituals can be analyzed. The changes are evoked by the interaction of different groups, such as through the process of migration. A transfer of rituals has taken place when the ritual has changed through its transfer from one social context to another. This can be identified in the modification of ritual elements. (Kreinath, Hartung, and Deschner 2004; Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006; Langer et al. 2006; Hüskens and Neubert 2012; Langer and Snoek 2013)

I have chosen this approach, as the theory of ritual dynamics helps to describe transnational and cross-cultural formations of rituals and ritual phenomena. In addition, by primarily focusing on the transfer of rituals, I can identify changing elements in the *sema* (whirling ritual) and analyze their impact on the transformation of the practice of whirling.

Furthermore, I included in this analysis aspects of a theoretical perspective on performances. This theoretical approach did not seem relevant to me at the beginning of my research. However, during the course of my study, I included this perspective, as it enabled me to conceptualize the respective appearance of the whirling performances of my research.

The performance theory enables one to study cultural phenomena and enactments in a processual and dynamic way. The theoretical discussion of the boundary between ritual performances and theatre performances was decisive for my analysis of the different forms of whirling performances. For instance, Fischer-Lichte, Walsdorf, and Schechner define different elements, such as the aesthetics through which the categories of ritual and theatre performances can be differentiated (Hanna Walsdorf 2013; Schechner 2013 [2002]; Fischer-Lichte 2016). Additionally, the approach of cultural performances, which describes how performances are used as a form of representation, was relevant for analyzing my empirical data (Lewis 2013).

Concluding, first, the theory of transnationalism helped me to define my research focus; secondly, ritual theory enabled me to conceptualize my research object; while finally, performance theory supported me in analyzing the specific appearances of my research object.

### 1.3 State of the Art

Since the 1970s, there has been a continuous interest in Sufism in Anthropological research (e.g., Geertz 1971; Gellner 1983). The first studies described different groups of Sufis in Islamic countries. At this time, a great number of literature had been published as Sufism is present in all Islamic regions, such as Central Asian countries (e.g., Ewing 1983), Middle Eastern countries (e.g., Werbner and Basu 1998), or Turkey (e.g., Hammarlund, Olsson, and Özdalga 2001). Newer research on Sufi practices in Islamic regions, discuss them in demarcation to other forms of Islam. For example, Ridgeon deconstructs the popular existing image of Sufism as the mystical and peaceful version of Islam (Ridgeon 2015). Anthropological scholars also studied local forms of Sufism and their intertwining with cultural and political structures (e.g., Pinto 2003; Werbner 2003; Lizzio 2007; Pinto 2016; Klinkhammer 2017). These studies show that there is a diversity of forms and practices in Sufism with “no coherent tradition” (Howell and van Bruinessen 2007:16f.). Researchers have also described an increasing interest in Sufism in Islamic countries in the last decade (Hefner and Cook 2010). Increasingly Anthropologists were researching “Sufism in the West” (Westerlund 2004; Malik and Hinnells 2006) looking at Sufi groups in , for example, Great-Britain (Atay 2012), New York (Dressler 2010) or Germany (Schleißmann 2003). Sufism in Vienna and Austria has been less researched (Kuehn and Pokorny 2019).

Also, a great variety of research exists on Sufism in Turkey. Dominguez discusses processes of Turkish national identity-making, in the contexts of an increasing religious consciousness (Dominguez Diaz 2013). As another example, Catherina Raudvere has studied the Gönen Foundation between 1993 and 1998 and analyzed the group in relation to social and political contexts in Turkey (Raudvere 2002). In newer studies, she focuses mainly on women who whirl (Raudvere and Stenberg 2008).

There are studies in which authors analyze other forms of transformation and modification in the context of Sufism. For example, Franklin Lewis has done detailed research about Mevlevi Sufism describing its appearance in new geographical settings, as well as on the internet (Lewis 2013).

Moreover, changing the research perspective to forms of Sufi practice in non-Islamic countries also means describing the phenomena in transnational and global terms. For example, Diaz

focuses on women by researching transnational Sufi orders (Diaz 2014). Dressler et al. instead discuss if there is a form of trans-global Sufism introduced by transmigration movements (Dressler, Geaves, and Klinkhammer 2009). Acim analyses the attraction of Sufism in the West by studying American and European converts. He concludes that the Sufi whirling and music attracted most of the American converts. (Acim 2018)

In addition, other scholars have mainly focused on the research of whirling dance. Fremantle published one of the early in-depth studies of *dervishes* in Turkey (Fremantle 1976). Njaradi, coming from theatre studies, discusses if the dance of the Mevlevi *dervish* should be seen in authentic or transnational terms (Njaradi 2008).

Küçük discusses the political and historical influence on the formation of Mevlevi *dervish* performances and the city of Konya, describing a process of cultural heritage making (Küçük 2007). Box instead, does not focus on a specific region but, instead discusses the role of *dervishes* in global space (Box 2008). Erzen presents the *dervish* dance with an approach of aesthetics (Erzen 2008).

Newer studies discuss whirling in this context of representation since the *sema* was declared UNESCO intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008. For example, Pietrobrunner compared the portrayal of *sema* on the internet with the one by UNESCO. He describes how UNESCO shows a homogeneous, male-dominated image, whereas on the Internet different forms can be found, in which for instance women whirl. (Pietrobruno 2015) Cizmeci also researches whirling, but from a perspective of performance studies. She describes how Sufi performances are used as a source for mobilization through which Sufis and non-Sufis come into contact. (Çizmeci 2016, 2018).

There are only a few studies on the specific group Tümata, which was in the center of my empirical work. Langer has analyzed the group with a particular focus on the transfer of rituals. He identifies several transfer processes that are performed by Oruç Güvenç and his group Tümata. Langer focuses on the group's music played during the whirling ritual, *sema*. He concludes that in their rituals, they incorporated elements from different musical contexts, such as Central-Asian-, classical Sufi, and Western folk -music. (Langer 2011) Langer analyzes Oruç Güvenç's and Tümata's activities in another article. Here, he examines the therapeutic-religious character of the *sema* ritual and its performative and somatic influence. (Langer 2015)

In addition, Osman Öksüzoğlu's research on Sufi music in Germany shortly mentions Tümata and Oruç Güvenç. Selim et al. analyze one concert given by Tümata in Berlin in the context of their research about the "*Willkommenskultur*" in Germany during the refugee crisis starting in 2016 (Selim et al. 2018). Nevin Şahin analyzes in her master thesis about Sufi music

in Turkey, some events of Tümata that she visited. She has a less positive image of the group, describing the musicians as unprofessional (Şahin 2016).

Some research analyzed the performances of Ziya Azazi, due to his status as a well-known dancer who also includes whirling dance in his choreographies. For example, Bayraktar asks how whirling can lead to individual and social transformations. The author examines Ziya Azazi's movements techniques and representations of two whirling dance performances in Turkey (Bayraktar 2016).

The literature presented here only depicts a limited part of this wider body of research. Much more literature about Mevlevi Sufism is published in Turkish, that I did not include.

## 1.4 Research Questions

I formed several research questions, which formed my open research process. Guided by the Grounded Theory Method, my research was separated into two empirical phases. I formulated open research questions for the first steps in the empirical process, which became concretized later. For the first phase of my research, which I did in Vienna, I defined the following questions:

- What different forms of whirling rituals and performances exist in Vienna?
- Who is practicing them and in which contexts?
- How do the practitioners refer to the whirling practice?

I posed these questions to identify the different forms and appearances of whirling and the contexts in which they occur. I decided to focus on whirling practices that relate to Mevlevi Sufism.

In the second phase of my research, I included a transnational perspective and focused on transformation processes; thus, I asked:

- What transnational encounters are taking place around the group of Tümata?
- How are the transnational encounters connected with the changes of whirling practices?
- How is the whirling practice transferred from one context to another?
- What are the dynamic elements in the transfer of the whirling rituals?

## 1.5 Research Process

Between November 2018 and May 2019<sup>11</sup>, I explored the for me unfamiliar world of Sufism by doing participant observation at four different *sema* (whirling performances), two dance performances, and several *zikrs* (prayers in the evening) with different groups. Additionally, I did in total ten expert interviews in Vienna and several cities in Turkey. My sample resulted from an exploratory approach. When designing it, I decided to interview key persons of the respective research fields. I found my first research field through internet research. Later on, I was introduced to my interview partners through personal contacts, following the snowball-principle.

My research started at the female Sufi center *Haus des Friedens* in Vienna in November 2018. I interviewed Fawzia al-Rawi, the leader of the center, Solveig Fiedler, an active member of the association at the center, and Annika Skattum, who visits the center frequently and has been giving whirling lessons. At the center, I learned about Tümata, a Sufi group, which is also researching and performing old Turkish music. The group was formed and led by Oruç Güvenç. In Vienna, his teaching and practice are kept alive by Gernot Galib Stanfel, whom I interviewed in January 2019.

I continued my research in Turkey in February 2019. Besides continuing my study on the group of Tümata, I also visited other ritual places of Mevlevism, such as Konya, the birthplace of Rumi, a Sufi *tarika* in Bursa and contemporary whirling dance performances. I interviewed Oruç Güvenç's wife, Andrea Azize Güvenç and Emre Başaran, who is also an active member of the group Tümata.

Additionally, I conducted research on whirling in the context of dance performances. I interviewed Julia Fraunlob, an Austrian dance teacher, and Ziya Azazi, a well-known dance performer originally from Turkey but now living in Vienna. In Ankara, I interviewed Elin Tezel, who was organizing and participating in a workshop of Ziya Azazi. Additionally, I talked with Khatoon Fallah, an Iranian dancer now living in Turkey. All of them are somehow interconnected to each other; since at least every one of them, besides Elin Tezel, visited a *sema* of the group Tümata. Methodologically I decided to include the concept of multi-sited ethnography to structure my research process. I quickly noticed that not only sites in the sense of locations were relevant, but also certain persons being experts for a specific form of whirling. Here, my

---

<sup>11</sup> An overview of the research process can be found in the appendix (chapter 8.2).

sample consists of whirling performances that I visited and where I did (participant) observation and of experts with whom I did qualitative interviews.

## 1.6 Outline

The overall structure of the thesis takes the form of six chapters, with the empirical section at the end. This paper begins by introducing the methods used during my research (Chapter 2). It continues with the theoretical part, where I present and discuss the different theoretical perspectives (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I give some short background information about Sufism, its institutionalization in *tarikas* and the whirling performance *sema* with a focus on Turkey. I give a short insight into the conceptualization of “Sufism in the West,” and I present the group Tümata, as well. In the empirical section, I start with an ethnography of some of the whirling performances that I visited (Chapter 5.1). The structure of the following chapters has been influenced by the theoretical perspective of the transfer of rituals. A transfer of rituals is taking place in a transnational field; therefore, I discuss first, the transnational character of whirling, and analyze if Tümata can be described as a transnational group (Chapter 5.2.5.4). Following, I apply the theory of transfer of ritual by discussing my research findings (Chapter 5.3). In the remaining chapter of the empirical part, I analyze the specific connotations of whirling as a dance and as a religious ritual (Chapter 5.4). The final chapter reflects my empirical work and theoretical discussions (Chapter 6).

## 2 Methods

My research was an explorative process guided by a way of data collection and processing, called Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]). In the beginning, I had a slight idea about what *sema*, the whirling performance is and did not know much about Sufism. During my research, I gained more and more knowledge about the different connections and relations in my research fields. Following the idea of Grounded Theory, I did not divide my research into a data collecting and analysis phase. Consequently, I already started processing the data while I was still doing participant observations and interviews. I coded my collected data and wrote first memos, which summarized and structured my findings. The first results and new input from my research in Turkey led me to redefine my research fields and questions. Following “the logic of ongoing inclusion” (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967] :49), I continued the process of gaining and processing data until I defined different forms of whirling and their inter-relatedness. In the following chapters, I present the methodological approaches which guided my research. In the first part (Chapter 2.1), I discuss my role as a researcher. Subsequently, I present the concepts of Grounded Theory Methods (Chapter 2.2) and Multi-Sited Ethnography (Chapter 2.3) as both form the basis of my methodological approach. Then, I present my methods of participant observation (Chapter 2.4) and qualitative interviews (Chapter 2.5), which helped me in guiding my data collection. I was also using digital and visual material, and hence discuss these methods applied in the following chapter (2.6). In the last chapter (2.7), I describe my steps of processing and analyzing the data.

### 2.1 Moving from one field to another - My Role as a Researcher

My research fields were quite diverse, and so was my role as a researcher. Before I started conducting my research, I had never experienced the whirling dance as a spectator nor as a practitioner. During my research, the grade of my personal involvement differed from one research field to the other - from active participation to only observation.

For my research on the *sema* in Konya and the performances of Khatoon Fallah, I was only part of the audience, whereas my role as a researcher was entirely present in the context of the *semas*, which I visited in Ankara and Bursa. Being a researcher from another country made me quite visible, as my Turkish language skills are limited. I had to concentrate a lot to grasp the conversation topics and I was never a fully integrated member of the group. In order to communicate, I strongly relied on my contact persons, who at times served me as translators. In contrast, during the *sema* in Vienna, I felt less like an outsider, as there was no language barrier, and I was not the only person who did attend the evenings for the first time.

It was challenging for me as a researcher to take on these diverse roles, and it raised reflections about my positionality. It was difficult from time to time that I was always in different roles, since I was changing research sites. While researching in a religious and spiritual context, I was not sure how the people I met would perceive me, and if my non-religious affiliation would be relevant or seen as a disturbance. Nevertheless, I realized that my own experiences and thoughts would be quite useful for a deeper understanding. The idea of reflexive Grounded Theory (Breuer 2009) helped me to understand my individual role. It has its origins in the field of psychology and criticizes the limited reflexivity of the researchers themselves in the epistemological process of the Grounded Theory Method. The Reflexive Grounded Theory leads to especially question one's position in the course of the research. In addition, it serves to reflect one's research process, such as data acquisition, documentation, interaction, representation, and presentation. In their book, Breuer et al. give a great sampling of guiding questions for reflection<sup>12</sup>. I applied some of their advice during my research process and noted down the reflection in my field research diary. (Breuer, Dieris, and Lettau 2009:65; 107; 115f.; 118-120)

## 2.2 Grounded Theory Method

Grounded Theory is methodology and method at the same time. Glaser and Strauss originally developed the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to study localized social processes within a particular setting (e.g., chronic illness in a hospital) to explain social interactions and their outcomes. The authors assumed that data collection, analysis, and theory building are interdependent. Therefore, there are no individual process-related steps, but all three stages are realized simultaneously. In contrast to other research methods, such as qualitative content analysis, GTM does not have a theoretical framework at the beginning. The researchers rather develop their theory during the research process itself. Like this, the individual experiences of the researchers are relevant during the whole research process. The researcher is, therefore, not seen as a neutral and objective actor, but as a subject. The task is to collect and interpret data and to shape the research design. Glaser and Strauss provide an analytical approach, which is not constructed as a strict set of rules, but rather as flexible guidelines for the research design. The procedure is also described as a circular analytical triad. In the first phase of the analysis, theo-

---

<sup>12</sup> Questions are for example: "Worin/woraus besteht mein Gegenstand? Welche seiner Merkmale halte ich für wichtig bzw. welche interessieren mich als Forscherin? Und welche Merkmale interessieren mich nicht? Wofür bin ich – bzw. wofür ist die von mir gewählte Methodik – empfänglich, und wofür bin ich (ist sie) blind und taub?" Breuer, Dieris, and Lettau (2009:65).



retical sampling should be reached by collecting new data. In the second part, the existing material is coded, with codes gained from the material or predefined codes. The aim is to formulate and conceptualize the first theoretical ideas. In the third step, it is attempted to identify systematically superordinate concepts and categories. These are brought together by formulating theoretical ideas, which are recorded in so-called memos. Results from this process are meant to inspire further data collections. The cycle starts all over again. (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]:3–21; Strübing 2008:13–34)

GTM is used in different sciences and consequently has been adapted. For this research, I partly adapted the method since my goal was not to create my own theory. Instead, I used it for a concretion of my research field and the development of precise research questions. These limitations occurred in a long evaluation of various research ideas and already achieved insights. My research process was consistently open to changing research sites and questions. I had to learn to work with uncertainties, as I did not know in advance whether I have set the appropriate research focus, and if I am collecting relevant data. For example, I interviewed a woman from the Inayati Order at the early beginning of my research. I could not use the information to answer my research questions when my research interest shifted to the whirling and the Mevlevi practices.

This chapter has demonstrated the method of Grounded Theory. It has led, in combination with an approach of multi-sited ethnography, to a formation of a new research context: I combined research fields from different countries and backgrounds. In the next part, I explain the concept of multi-sited ethnography to understand this empirical procedure.

## 2.3 Multi-Sited Ethnography

Analyzing cultural phenomena in a de-territorialized way is a core approach to understand the relations between local and global connections in its current shapes (Appadurai 1996). In this context, multi-sited ethnography is a widely used, but also criticized method. It was a useful method to guide my fieldwork and to help me understand the shifting locations of cultural productions, as I conducted fieldwork in two different countries.

The method of multi-sited ethnography was introduced into anthropological theories by George E. Marcus (Marcus 1995). He argued that the traditional field research taking part in only one site is insufficient if one wants to investigate social phenomena in the globalized world. For this reason, multi-sited ethnography is seen as the first attempt to break with classic ethnography (Falzon 2009:1).

Intensifying global connections such as capitalism, migration, or media changed the understanding of social processes. In anthropology, this led to the spatial turn: space was described as socially produced (Lefebvre 1991), and the localization of culture and its idea as a bounded entity was criticized (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In addition, Marcus included similar approaches from interdisciplinary fields, such as media studies, sciences, and technology studies, which already worked multi-sited. (Marcus 1995:102)

Taking a multi-sited approach implies the break with the ‘Malinowskian’ idea of fieldwork, where the anthropologist stays bounded at one site to study social processes. Marcus argues that cultural meanings, objects, and identities, circulate in a broader field and must be located from a macro perspective, recognizing current flows in the global system. However, it does not imply breaking with “traditional ethnographic concerns” since questions about agency, symbols, and everyday practices are still relevant. (Marcus 1995:96; 99) Moreover, Marcus states:

“multi-sited research is to see subjects as differently constituted, as not products of essential units of difference only, but to see them in development – displaces, recombined, hybrid in the once-popular idiom, alternatively imagined. Such research pushes beyond the situated subject of ethnography towards the system of relations which define them”. (Marcus 2009:184)

In order to apply the presented thoughts, Marcus proposes six different strategies for doing research. The core of the strategies is that the researcher traces cultural phenomena by following the people, things, metaphors, social memory, biographies, or conflicts in different settings. Regarding my research, especially the strategy of first, following the people, and second, following the biographies were relevant. Firstly, following the people, Marcus wants the researcher to trace the movements of a particular group or individual. This is quite common in the research of, for example, migration or diaspora. Secondly, following a biography, means that the story of a certain individual’s life is traced. This strategy can be adapted to my case if the concept of biography is extended from the individual level to the cultural and conceptual level of practice<sup>13</sup>.

Concerning my research process, first, I analyzed the relations among people and did not follow the movements of one specific person and one particular practice. Specifically, I was interviewing people who had been in connection with Oruç Güvenç by visiting at least one of his *sema*. Second, I applied the idea of following the biography, as far as I was tracing the

---

<sup>13</sup> Applying the concept of biography not only to persons, but to other phenomena of research, was discussed by Kopytoff, for example. He referred the idea of biography on objects, analyzing their meaning in a process of commodification. Kopytoff (1986).

biography of whirling by visiting different places and occasions in which it manifests itself. For example, I visited Konya, which is the birthplace of the Mevlevi whirling. Next to this, I saw whirling on stages and in private homes, too. All these different places are part of whirling's biography.

Thus, identifying the different forms of whirling and the relational network in which it comes into appearance was part of my research process. Nevertheless, this focus also made it more difficult to define my sample and to set the boundaries of the research. For example, if I asked who establishes the practice as such, I would have to trace the whirling concerning Mevlevi everywhere, where this whirling occurs, which is practically impossible. Other questions arose: What relationships are to be defined when I focus on the practice itself? When does the observation end? When the whirling ends, or is the whole process relevant? That is why I focused on the contexts in which the whirling appeared and how people refer to it. I put the group around Oruç Güvenç in the focus of the relationship network to narrow my sample down. Thus, I applied a multi-sited research design by focusing on the whirling as a fixpoint, while I traced the different localities, persons, and environments in which it became apparent.

However, multi-sited ethnography is controversially discussed among scholars. For example, Falzon (2009) questions if multi-sited ethnography loses the idea of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), as the limited time frame impedes detailed research, and the participant observations remain rather short. Within the framework of my research seminar, I conducted more extended participant observations at the *Haus des Friedens* to counteract the potential problem. Going there regularly helped me to get familiar with the people, their stories, and the practice of whirling. Through this, I was settled in the field; and continued to follow further connections to identify other sites of research. The *Haus des Friedens* did not stay at the center of my research when I opened my data collection to the transnational field.

Matei Candea makes another point, criticizing multi-sited ethnography. She argues that "imaginary research" remains holistic in the multi-sited research process and that the limitation and boundaries of ethnographic perspectives remain relevant:

“whereas the strength of the multi-sited imaginary lies in its enabling anthropologists to expand their horizons in an unprecedented way, its weakness lies in its lack of attention to processes of bounding, selection, and choice – processes which any ethnographer has to undergo to reduce the initial indeterminacy of field experience into a meaningful account.” (Candea 2009:27)

Thus, since the researchers do not stay bounded to one specific research field, they have to co-ordinate to visit the right place at the right time to gain an all-encompassing view. In some

parts of my research process, I have chosen the locations somewhat out of an intuitive feeling, and the time was more a question of my own possibilities to travel than a reflection in coherence with the research object. In addition, working multi-sited also implied to make compromises. A relevant site for my research would have been the three days and nights long *sema* in Gökcedere at the beginning of July. The event did not fit into my research plan, because of my limited time scope of an Erasmus semester which ended at the beginning of June. Therefore, only the stories of my informants helped me to gain an impression of this event. Nevertheless, I had the possibility to visit other performances, in which I did participant observation. I introduce the method in the following chapter.

## 2.4 Participant Observation

The concept of participant observation first appeared in sociology in 1924. Its design was decisively influenced by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the context of field studies (Malinowski 1979). It developed into a frequently used method for qualitative research, especially in the social and cultural sciences. (Bernard 2006:342–71) Doing participant observation means that the researchers join the social event under investigation. The researchers take both an inner and an external perspective by being observant and participant, passive and active at the same time. The researchers thus acquire relative proximity to their research fields that enables them to experience a general, every day and ordinary situation as an object of research. (Flick 2010:371–78; Franke and Maske 2011) In the following, I explain how the participant observation was applied in my field research.

The researcher has to decide if she wants to go into the field covertly or not. This question is always an ethical question. (Knoblauch 2003:76–81; Franke and Maske 2011:111f.). Also, my approaches changed because my research fields differed quite a lot. I mostly entered the field in a (semi)-open approach. Practically, conducting open research signified that I contacted one of the persons at different places in advance. I define it ‘semi’ in brackets since I did not introduce myself to every person individually where more people were attending, or when new people joined to the events. Nevertheless, I introduced my role as a researcher when I started an individual one to one conversation.

I also did participant observation in a covered way while I was visiting the *sema* in Konya. Here, I only was one of the thousands of visitors and did not have personal contact with the practitioners.

For me, the advantage of open participant observation was that I could act in the field as a researcher and always ask questions. Nevertheless, I tried not to be perceived solely as a researcher, as I did not want to influence the field. I tried to achieve that by actively participating. For my cases, I was participating in the *semas* by doing the movements, trying to learn the recitations, playing the drum, or also whirl. Often, I was encouraged to join, and the people were happy when they saw me participating.

In some cases, I decided against recording and taking notes during the events for several reasons: First, because I would not have been able to participate; second because the atmospheres were quite intimate. Therefore, I wrote protocols afterward and recorded audios through which I captured my thoughts, or I wrote in my field diary. In addition to the participant observation, I have conducted qualitative interviews. In the following chapter 2.5, I present their detailed conceptualization.

## 2.5 Qualitative Interviews

Various forms of qualitative interviews exist within social research. These are characterized by the fact that information can be recorded, distorted-authentic, intersubjectively reproduced, and arbitrarily reproduced (Lamnek 2005:301 transl. from Geman by the author). In addition, the information can be adapted to the respective research object, as well as to the research topic through a large selection of questions and interview techniques.

I did qualitative interviews with key figures of the different research fields. Hence, I decided to do mostly expert interviews (Liebold and Trinczek 2009). The interviews were non-standardized, semi-structured, and had narrative parts (Bernard 2006:210–51). I first introduced my research and myself during the process of my interview. This part was more or less briefly, depending on what the interviewed person already knew. I continued the interview with a narrative impulse (Schütze 1977) by asking the persons to tell me their biography and how they first discovered whirling. I have chosen this as a first question, on the one hand, to become acquainted with the persons and their background and, on the other hand, to learn about the person's relationship to the research field without imposing predetermined concepts on them.

I continued with the semi-structured parts. For this, I defined some rough guiding topics. For each of these topics, I formulated more detailed questions. I did not rigidly adhere to the order of the topics, which I had outlined beforehand. Instead, I changed the order according to the course of the interview. I finished the interviews with another narrative impulse by asking the interviewee if he or she wants to add something; in order to be open to other ideas or concepts that I did not thought about yet.

My interviews were not-standardized (Hopf 1995) because each person was an expert for the different research fields, and I needed to conceptualize different questionnaires. Nevertheless, they were similar to make the data comparable.

After the *semas* in Vienna and Ankara, tea and some snacks were offered. Sometimes extensive or less extensive conversations took place, depending on the day and the persons. I used this time to have informal interviews. I did not prepare questions for this purpose beforehand. Instead, I followed the course of the conversation and asked questions spontaneously.

I only interviewed key persons, whose identity is either relevant or would be difficult to anonymize. Hence, I decided to ask for their permission to use their full name in my thesis. All of my interview partners agreed. Concerning the other people mentioned, I use pseudonyms, because I was researching openly, but did not ask every person individually, if they want to stay anonymous.

## 2.6 Online Data and Visual Information

Analyzing digital media and its embeddedness in society constitutes a whole field as such. Nevertheless, while looking at transnational processes today, the online world has to be taken into consideration. Individuals, as well as groups who want to reach persons outside the nearer environment, use media to, for example, circulate information or represent events (Coleman 2010:488). In my research, digital media was used primarily as a form of communication, documentation, and source of information:

Since my contacts and interview partners were living in quite different regions, I used the web pages and Facebook sites to get first information and to be acquainted with the various forms of whirling. Additionally, I used e-mails and WhatsApp to have informal interviews. Like this, I asked more detailed questions, which arose when I analyzed the data. It also helped me to overcome language barriers with my contact in Ankara, because she felt more safely writing in English than speaking. My contact in Bursa used WhatsApp to inform me about current and upcoming events.

Furthermore, a lot of visual materials about the places I researched are accessible on YouTube. For example, although I did not visit a *sema* in Gökcedere, I found material online to combine the stories of my interview partners with images. Moreover, I took my own recordings. I mentioned before that some of the places I researched were quite intimate. For this reason, I decided against taking photos or recordings as it would not have been welcomed and would have influenced the setting. For example, in the case of the *sema* at the *Haus des Friedens*, Galib Stanfel, who organized the evening, emphasized the importance of a safe and

comfortable environment and prohibited any recording and pictures. Alternatively, at the observation in Bursa, I did not record while I was in the female-only place, but I did take photos and videos of the men's *sema*, which was publicly accessible. I also took pictures and videos while I was visiting the dance performances. Mostly, I used these data as a 'visual notebook' and included a selection of photos in the empirical part of this thesis to strengthen my arguments. I bore in mind that they are only representations of reality, and hence "subject to the influences of their social, cultural, and historical contexts of production and consumption" (Banks 2002:8). I further present how I processed and analyzed my data in the following chapter.

## 2.7 Data Processing and Analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed to compare the data material throughout the research process to get an empirical generalization. In contrast to other analysis methods, such as Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring 1994), there is no pre-given theoretical framework. Instead, the researcher examines the empirical material by posing fundamental questions to form a theory. The process proceeds "the logic of ongoing inclusion" (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967] :49). I did not divide my research in a data collecting and analysis phase. Instead, I already started processing the data while I was still doing participant observations and interviews.

The idea of coding during the process of GTM is to elaborate concepts based on the empirical data and to systemize them simultaneously to identify ideas of theories. These are captured in memos, which are used to structure the research process. I started with an open coding by analyzing the data on a descriptive level, which helped me to compose the interviews. In a second step, I compared the codes I defined, which is called axial coding. I focused especially on those codes, which appeared in most of the interviews. Nevertheless, also those, which had smaller numbers were useful for drawing conclusions. In addition to the evaluation of the empirical data, I referred to existing studies conducted in different countries. With these categories in mind, I went back to the field and constantly compared the ideas with my new experiences. Here, especially the history of *sema*, helped me to understand what I saw and to comprehend historical influences.

Glaser and Strauss define the process of joint coding and analysis, through which more categories can be identified, as "constant comparative method" (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967] :101–15). (Strübing 2008:26–28) According to GTM, the researcher continues to collect data until the theoretical saturation is reached. Thus data is collected until it leads to the same point, and no additional information is found. (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967] :58–60). My goal was

not to create a new theory, and thus the point of theoretical saturation was not achieved. Nevertheless, at one point during my research, I had the feeling that I identified and understood more and more relations between the people and places.

I included written ethnographic parts as another process of data analysis. Writing ethnographic articles goes beyond the simple description of the research results, as it has been elaborated by Malinowski and his idea of “thick description” (Malinowski 1979). Ethnographic writing is a process of data interpretation, in which the researchers present and reflect their research processes and results. It is one part of the self-conscious, self-reflective, and self-critical process the anthropologist undertakes. (Madden 2017:152–67) Writing ethnographies also means describing a social reality or social interaction from the ‘inside’ (as far as possible). It is important to bear in mind the potential moral and ethical implications of encoding cultural differences. (Gullion 2016) Applying these thoughts to my research process, I decided to write a detailed description of my research fields and include my experiences in the parts of the analysis (see Chapter 5.1).

## 2.8 Summary – Methods

The process of my empirical research was guided through the concept of Grounded Theory Methods. I defined the whirling practice as the focus of my research. By applying the approach of Multi-Sited-Ethnography, I determined several interrelated research fields in Turkey and Austria, in which whirling is performed. There, I did several participant observations, with different intensity of involvement. This data is presented in detail by ethnographic writings in Chapter 5.1. These experiences are, next to the qualitative interviews I conducted, the basis for the following discussions (Chapters 5.1 - 5.3). I analyzed my interviews in an open coding process, in the idea of Grounded Theory Methods. By including personal reflection and in considering the quality criteria of research (see Knoblauch 2003:162–71), I try to make my process comprehensible and verifiable. Since my focus was on the practice of whirling, and not on specific research site, I included a broad theoretical framework, which I present in the next part (Chapter 3).



### 3 Theory

The theoretical discussions presented in this chapter provide the framework for considering my empirical data and for answering my research questions. My research process, which was guided by the Grounded Theory Method, resulted in differentiated research questions and a broad theoretical framework. In the beginning of each theoretical field, I elaborate, why the specific theoretical field is relevant for research the practice of whirling in Austria and Turkey. The selection was influenced by my focus on whirling as a practice within a ritual framework, and by the analysis of the different relationships between the actors.

In the first section, I start with a short introduction to the theory of transnationalism (Chapter 3.1). On the one hand, this was decisive for my empirical framework, and on the other hand, this theoretical perspective is crucial in researching transfer of rituals. Additionally, migration processes, transnational relations, and exchange processes are relevant here. I discuss ritual theory as a second theoretical field (Chapter 3.2). Therein, the transfer of rituals is the focus of my theoretical consideration. Finally, I present the theoretical approach of performance studies (Chapter 3.3). This theoretical perspective did not seem crucial to me at the beginning of my research. However, in the course of the research process and after considering the first interim results, it became relevant for my theoretical discussion. I noticed that in my cases, the concept of performance and performativity are useful to define the different forms of whirling practiced that I analyzed. In addition, I embed the practices of representation theoretically by discussing the concept of cultural performance

#### 3.1 Transnationalism Theory

Transnational research is a relevant perspective in studying cultural and social phenomena as soon as transnational movements and relations beyond national borders are involved. This theoretical approach was useful for my empirical work in different concerns. Firstly, I researched in two countries, Austria and Turkey, but whirling is practiced across borders worldwide and not only in the two countries. Also, the people I interviewed were connected to more than those two countries. The transnational perspective helped me to stay focused on the two countries and not to get lost in global connections. Secondly, in contrast to globalization theories, a transnational perspective still focuses on the nation-state as such. It provides one with the framework to reflect on the role of the government and national history. Finally, a transnational perspective contributes to a shift from places to processes (Wilding 2007), which is essential for my theoretical perspective of the transfer of rituals. In the next chapter 3.1.1, I give

a short introduction to the theory of transnationalism and how the movements observed can be termed. In the final part of the chapter, I look at the intersection of transnationalism and religion.

### 3.1.1 Transnationalism - Between boundaries and flows

In the social sciences, since the 1990s, transnationalism developed as a theoretical concept to identify cross-border phenomena, which are still nationally connected. The idea was applied to different fields, such as research on migration, and through this, various concepts developed. Therefore, transnationalism can occur as a notion, a framework, or one or more processes (Hannerz 2001 [1996]:6).

Furthermore, Quayson and Daswani understand transnationalism as a key concept explaining the notions of nation, identity, and globalization in today's world. Through this, the researcher's perspective focuses on different conditions that lead to new forms of migration, mobility, and mediatization. Therefore, transnationalism has huge intersections with theories of globalization and diaspora. (Quayson and Daswani. Girish 2013). Vertovec states that transnationalism "refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation state" (Vertovec 1999:447). Thereby, different interactions and movements can be identified, be it be between persons, technologies, ideas, or finances. While looking at people, transnationalism can define different forms of migration. It puts the attention on those, who migrated, and shows their connection to those in the homeland. The concept of transnationalism enables the researcher to identify multiple personal ties and exchanges, such as relationships or dependencies, as the connection remains.

Moreover, transnationalism is always connected to the idea of borders and boundaries, which divide real or imagined political, social, or legal territories. Hannerz describes these boundaries as sharp lines of demarcation (Hannerz 2002:7). Researching boundaries helps to identify structures and limitations, as well as forms of permeability, transcendence, or irrelevance (Quayson and Daswani. Girish 2013:3). For example, transnational corporations can be situated across borders and exist and work simultaneously in different countries; for them, the national borders are less relevant. Thus, methodological wise transnationalism concentrates less on places, than on relations and movements. (Wilding 2007:332). Nevertheless, the spatial dimension cannot be excluded, since transnational phenomena and encounters can lead to a (re-)construction of places and localities. For instance, people living in a different nation for a long time change their relation to space and develop, for example, trans-local forms of identities. (Vertovec 1999:455) Furthermore, Appadurai describes that a transnational perspective helps

to dissolve the image of a center-periphery model as it shows the equality of multiple centers and multiple peripheries. (Appadurai 1990)

Often transnational dynamics are described with the term flow. Flow refers to “things not staying in their places, to mobility and expansion of many kinds, to globalization along many dimensions.” (Hannerz 2002:4). Additionally, cultural phenomena are in movement; they are transformed, combined, or re-invented. These modes of dynamic cultural productions can produce new hybrid cultural forms (Vertovec 1999:451–52).

Moreover, the concept of transnationalism is linked to theories of nation and nationalism. From a constructivist perspective, nations are understood as “imagined communities” built by its members (Anderson 1991). Practices of nation forming and power legitimization are also done through “invented traditions.” These serve to strengthen the ties between social groups and to communicate common values and norms. Here, Anderson sees a parallel between nations and religions. While he defines these as two different concepts, Brubaker focuses on the “intertwining of religion and nation.” (Brubaker 2012) Furthermore, the different relations between nationalism, religion, and secularism (Asad 1999) are crucial to understand the current conditions in Turkey (White 2014; Göl 2017).

Furthermore, religion is an important player in the field of globalization and transnational processes. By researching transnational religions and religious diasporas, the relations between religions and globalization can be analyzed in a multi-directional and inter-related way. Thereby, the goal is not only to understand “how religions become global but also how religious movements and ideologies are closely intertwined with the transnational networks and movements of people across the globe” (Daswani. Girish 2013:43).

Different shapes of religious forms and practices have developed crossing national borders and historical and cultural boundaries. In religious contexts, people or ritual commodities are most often in flow. One example of religious movements is pilgrims or spiritual tourists who move across national borders to visit holy places in different countries. (Csordas 2007) For instance, in Islam, and especially Sufism, the practice of visiting tombs of deceased *sheikhs* (spiritual leaders) exists. Also, in Konya, every year, thousands of people come from all around the world to the commemoration of the Mevlevi master Rumi.

Csordas emphasizes that routes of religious movements are not pointing in only one direction. Different actors are involved in the transfer of religious or spiritual ideas and practices from one place to another. (Csordas 2007)

Jain, for example, describes how different global impacts, such as the global cultural economy has formed a specific form of ‘postural Yoga.’ Here, the bodily experience and movements grew in relevance, while the spiritual context became less important.

### 3.1.2 Summary – Transnationalism

In the present thesis, I use the concept of transnationalism as a research approach and not as a social theory. A focus on flows and movements, as well as on nation-states and boundaries, characterize a transnational research perspective. I apply it in my thesis, to first identify the whirling practice in its mobile and multi-localized shape. Second, to focus on the two nations, Turkey and Austria, and the transnational relations and movements in between. Third, using a transnational perspective means questioning ideas of center and periphery. Therefore, it helps me to avoid cross-country comparisons, since this quickly leads to a description of an ‘authentic’ center and the ‘westernization’ of the practices and thereby reproducing orientalist<sup>14</sup> perspectives (Varisco 2005; Dominguez Diaz 2011).

## 3.2 Ritual Theory

Kapferer states, „[r]itual is one of the most used, perhaps overused, sociological categories and one of the most resistant to adequate definition“ (Kapferer 2005:35); also, other authors have the same opinion. However, in my case, using ritual theory is relevant: Ritual research is a constituent subject in empirical social research, and particularly in religious anthropology. By using the concept, it is possible to draw on a wide range of research backgrounds. Broad diversity of epistemological and methodological approaches is available to enable a well-founded collection and analysis of data. In addition, my research focuses on rituals in the classical sense as well as on events and performances. The connection between ritual theory and performance theory, which resulted from the theoretical development of the concepts, is thus also reflected in my empirical approach.

I develop an own understanding of ritual, which is useful for my empirical work, as there exists a multitude of different approaches to rituals. I specify the theory of ritual dynamics and the theory of transfer of rituals. I start the following part with a short introduction into the history of ritual theory in Anthropological research (Chapter 3.2.1). I then discuss some deci-

---

<sup>14</sup> The term ‘orientalism’ is shaped by Edward Said. He investigated the construction of the Orient in English and French colonial writings. He states that the Orient is a creation of colonialist. The construction is an essential part of European culture and power. It does not reflect the real situation and the people of the region. Said (1978).

sive ritual elements and characteristics (Chapters 3.2.2). Following, I analyze in detail the concept of ritual dynamics (Chapter 3.2.3); from this presupposition, I continue discussing the concept of transfer of rituals (Chapter 3.2.4).

### 3.2.1 History of ritual research

The term ritual has its origin in the Latin word *ritualis*, which means concerning the *ritus*. Additionally, the word ritual was used in religious contexts describing a religious habit, custom, or ceremony. Moreover, some theorists trace back the word to the Sanskrit root ‘*rta*’, which has the meaning suitable and right. The Greeks and Etruscans also used the word, mainly in the context of religious acts. Dücker concludes that "the distinction between self and alien belongs to the framework of the meaning of *ritus*" and that "its history refers to the hybridity of culture" (Dücker 2007:14). Thus, a more exact definition might differ, depending on the perspective or approach of the researcher. For example, while looking from a functionalist perspective, rituals are tried to understand from the outside perspective and are therefore seen as a form of collective actions and expressions of social order to stabilize relations in the society. (Dücker 2007)

Studying rituals started by trying to theorize religious practices since most religions have a great variety of performative ritual practices. Most often, rituals are framed in transcendental terms. Common in religious contexts and existing in profane contexts are ‘rites de passages’ (rites of passage). Van Gennep compared different ethnographic reports and concluded that rituals have the same structure. He showed that rituals have three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. He defined birth, marriage, and death as the primary rites of passage. Turner referred to the ideas of van Gennep and developed the theory further. (van Gennep 1986 [1909])

Both Turner and van Gennep shifted the perspective of rituals to a more processual character, and a temporal perspective grew in relevance. Turner showed the importance of the liminal phase and its relevance in the transition of the social order. While society is normally structured by social differences, in the liminal phase, liminality arises. That means that there is an ambiguous state which is characterized by the anti-structure. During the liminal phase, also the “*communitas*” comes into existence. With this term, Turner describes a form of community, in which everyone is on the same level. It allows persons to have shared experiences and overcome social hierarchies. Likewise, Turner distinguishes between three different forms of *communitas*, which are spontaneous and emotional, ideological, or normative. The first time, Turner explained the concept of liminality through his research with the Ndembu in northwest Zambia. Later, he showed that this concept could also be found in societies with a diversified structure

of economic, social, and political relations. Here, rituals are most often not in the center of the social acting, but more on the periphery. (Turner 1967, 1969)

Until today, ritual theorization has evoked a great diversity of empirical approaches and theoretical perspectives. Especially in empirical studies, researchers try to demarcate rituals from other performative forms such as ceremonies, plays, events, and cults. Some authors try to make a clear distinction between these terms, but they are also often used synonymic wise. Additionally, the term ritual is widely used in everyday language, for example, as an attractive purpose in tourism or the esoteric branch, which makes a clear definition of the term even more complicated. (Dücker 2007)

### 3.2.2 Ritual elements

Moreover, in anthropological research, the term ritual is used in a polythetic way. Thus, the phenomena ritual is described through several criteria or elements, which are part of the ritual. (Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006) Under the term ritual elements, a broad diversity of phenomena is encompassed, such as actors or liturgy. The identification of the elements is influenced by the previous knowledge and the specific viewpoint of the researcher or other persons involved. Consequently, rituals can be defined differently from the emic, those who are directly involved, and the etic perspective of the researcher. (Brosius, Michaels, and Schrode 2013:12f.)

Researchers specified a broad diversity of elements that characterize rituals by using a polythetic approach. These characteristics are defined, for example, by descriptive or functional perspectives (Dücker 2007:29f.; Brosius, Michaels, and Schrode 2013:13–15). In the following paragraph, I list six criteria, which are often used by researchers or theorists to construct the term ritual. First, rituals are defined as actions created by the interrelation between people and the environment involved. The second criterium is the frame of rituals. A defined ending and beginning can characterize them. The beginning and end of a ritual often consist of certain practices, which are the same in every ritual's performance. For example, the *sema* I visited was framed by a recitation of the *Fatiha* at the beginning and the end of the performance. As a third criterium, formality can be listed. Brosius et al. describe that “[r]ituals are characterized by a formal, stylized, partially stereotypical performance” (Brosius, Michaels, and Schrode 2013:14 transl. from German by author). Fourth, ritual actions have intentions, being deliberately performed. Hence, rituals are distinguishable from ritualized actions, such as brushing the teeth. Also, someone must define these actions if it is assumed that the ritual's actions have an intention. Thus, fifth, the question of agency is involved. Thus, a specified order of actions and

a mode of procedure is established under pre-given rules. A sixth criterion is repetition, which means that ritual actions are repeated frequently, often at a specific date or time. (Dücker 2007:29f.) In the next paragraph, I concentrate on ritual actors and their different conceptualizations.

Grimes describes that ritual actions are mostly interactions since they are performed through several people. They interrelate with each other and the specific actions and thus form a performance group. Consequently, a researcher who wants to define a group involved in a ritual or performance should analyze: first, the whole group as such; second, the interrelationship between different actors; and third, the actor itself. In this context, the researcher must consider that each person can have a specific role, which differs from the ones of other people involved. For example, a sole spectator or a leader of the ritual could be such roles. Nevertheless, the actors interfere and interact with each other and build a “corporate body” (Grimes 2014:251). If different people are engaged as a collective in a ritual, they do not have to share the same assumptions or values. They can apply specific ritual actions as a disguise of their values and beliefs.

Action and actors are two ritual elements, which cannot exist without the other. Thus, they are often discussed and defined in relation to each other. According to Grimes, if one focuses on the actors themselves, their intentions and beliefs can be identified and analyzed. Researchers socialized by a Western perception of the separation of mind and body often forget to look at interiorized actions. Instead, researchers should bear in mind that the actors’ beliefs, emotions, or intentions, interact with their personality and identity on the one hand, and with their actions, on the other hand. (Grimes 2014:242–56)

I designate the ritual elements that I outlined before, as a pre-requisite for a further examination of the concept of ritual dynamics. I decided to include this theoretical perspective, as it firstly, helps to conceptualize rituals in an interrelated and processual way. Secondly, dynamics identified through the empirical approach of transnationalism and the methodological approach of multi-sited ethnography can be embedded in a theoretical framework. I introduce the theory of ritual dynamics in chapter 3.2.3 and continue discussing the theory of transfer of rituals, which is a specific concept of ritual dynamics in chapter 3.2.4.

### 3.2.3 Ritual dynamics

From the late 1990s onwards, researchers changed their focus in ritual studies to studying how rituals come into existence, disappear, change, or transform. Brosius et al. state that this

new theoretical discussion on the dynamics of rituals can be seen as the most significant change in ritual's theorization of the last decade. In this process, researchers from different disciplines, such as religious studies, anthropology, or political sciences, conceptualize rituals by looking at dynamics, movements, and processes involved. They consider changes in the structure of rituals and analyze them in contexts of social, political, or historical influences. (Brosius, Michaels, and Schrode 2013:15).

Furthermore, when researching ritual dynamics, rituals are understood as "distinct forms of action and composite action complexes" (Mader 2015:112 transl. from German by the author) In the research process questions are posed, such as:

"When do rituals change? When do they change accidentally, and when are they changed intentionally?" or "Who has the power or agency to change rituals intentionally? Who decides whether or not to accept a change?" (Kreinath, Hartung, and Deschner 2004:1).

Hence, social and cultural phenomena can be the cause of modifications. These modifications can be part of the potentials of change and part of internal negotiations, which can signify ritual dynamics.

Handleman develops his own description of ritual dynamics in the anthology "Rituals in its own rights." He gives not only a definition but also develops a methodological approach. He acknowledges the heterogeneity of the category ritual, yet he criticizes a purely symbolic or functional approach. Authors who use this approach, describe rituals as a representation of a broader social and cultural order. They explain rituals by defining only external ritual elements. Structures and phenomena inherent to the ritual, such as agency, are not included in the analysis. Therefore, Handleman argues that the ritual has to be examined "in relation to itself, how it is put together and organized with itself" (Handelman 2005b:2). Thus, rituals are a collection of their elements and phenomena. Their external appearance can be highly diverse. The relation between the ritual's environment, agency, symbolic meaning, or function needs to be analyzed. Consequently, the ritual's inner complexity and self-integrity can be identified. (Handelman 2005b:1–10)

As another point of criticism, Handleman discusses that rituals are defined per se as a social phenomenon, as a group mostly performs them. Structures, dynamics, and ritual processes are often only interpreted in relation to society. It leads to hasty considerations of what surrounds the ritual and of its meanings and functions. Handleman emphasizes, instead, the autonomy and agency of a ritual. Then, appearances of self-organization can be identified, which are not related to socio-cultural influences. Handleman argues, that the larger the ritual in terms of complexity, the higher is its self-organization and inner dynamics. (Handelman 2005a)



While Handleman focuses on the agency of rituals itself, I want to put the attention again on the actions taking part in the ritual by referring to Grimes. The author discusses the ritual elements of actors and actions by elaborating on the concept of ritual dynamics. Grimes discusses first the linguistic implications and states that a connotation of physic forces is constructed if one defines rituals as dynamic. The term is also paraphrased by using words such as acting, operating, or working. Hence, different implications are created automatically.

Furthermore, different kinds of actions can be considered as ritual dynamics, such as human movements, acts that constitute rituals, or interactions among ritual elements (Grimes 2014:295). In describing the actions, Grimes criticizes those who equate theatre performances with ritual actions. The audience of a theater play can be identified as consumers, and the play is framed as unreal. In rituals, people are personally involved in congregations or communities and define the ritual as something real. People not being part of the ritual might describe it as something constructed and believed. Grimes states that the different perspectives on the rituals' functions and frames are another form of ritual dynamics. (Grimes 2014:297).

I have already discussed actors and actions which interact with ritual dynamics. Further, other ritual elements, such as first, instrumentality, second, agency, and third, intention, are relevant in researching ritual dynamics and presented in the next paragraph. First, Grimes argues that rituals are performed to achieve something. Thus, they must have an instrumentality, employing the specific function, or serving a specific purpose. Second, rituals must have an agency to employ this instrumentality. This capacity of a ritual to act or exert power is interrelated with the function of rituals. Thereby, rituals

“can serve one or several functions, and these functions may operate not only with each other but also against each other. A ritual may, for instance, inhibit one kind of change while precipitating another.” (Grimes:300)

The agency of a ritual is directly linked to the effects or outcomes it evokes. Thus, the agency forms the performance and external appearance of the ritual. Nevertheless, those people being in power influence the performance of the ritual. They have the power and agency to change ritual policies or legislation and through this its performance. The rituals instrumentality and agency are strongly connected to the actors' intentions, which I discuss in the next paragraph.

Third, Grimes argues that neither functions nor appearance may be equal with the intentions. Unexpected actions might change the outcome from what has been aimed at first hand. There are two major outcomes connected to different purposes in the dynamic process of a ritual. Either the ritual reinforces the status quo (conservation) or enacts transformation. In this

context, Grimes describes two different types of conserving dynamics. First, people participating in the rituals might preserve specific elements of the rituals. Here the dynamic is taking part on the formal level. For example, Tümata, the group I researched on reconstructs old instruments with which they perform the *sema* rituals. Second, the ritual can be used to reinforce traditions or old values; this is defined as a functional dynamic. As another example, Tümata performs healing sessions by using old melodies, played by healers during the pre-Ottoman time.

While looking at functional dynamics often, greater actors come into play, such as nation-states. Grimes defines here a connection to Hobsbawm's and Ranger's 'Invention of tradition'<sup>15</sup> (Grimes 2014:301–12). He shows that a static image is created through ritual repetition, conventionalization, and prescription by authorities. It goes hand in hand with transformations or inventions of rituals or ritual elements (Grimes 2014:316)

Another of these conventional processes is meaning making. Grimes argues that “meanings are laid atop rituals, so they are infinitely variable” (Grimes 2014:318). On the one hand, he argues that the process of meaning-making is not directly linked to the rituals but is driven by external rewards. On the other hand, communication in rituals is meaningful when rituals are performed. Plus, the ritual itself must have a meaning for those being involved. (Grimes 2014:316–20) Additionally, Bell argues that while looking at the interrelation between ritual and meaning, one must consider that it depends on certain perspectives. The meaning of the ritual for those who are involved in the ritual is most often different from the researcher's perspective. (Bell 2010:31)

Next to the concepts presented, there exist other approaches to the dynamics of rituals. Kreinath et al. categorize them and identify: first, a focus on recursivity and innovation, second on performance, media, script, and representation, third on the transformation of the contexts (Kreinath, Hartung, and Deschner 2004:1). Recursivity terms the changes, which occur through the modification of an existing ritual by, for example, changing practices. On the contrary, innovation describes the formation of a new ritual by taking up and reframing existing traditions. Both recursivity and innovation respond to existing needs or interests. They are not static but can change with each new performance of the ritual.

Secondly, studies, which focus on media and representation of rituals, describe, for example, the transformation of the ritual's script or ritual performances. New cultural contacts or

---

<sup>15</sup> Hobsbawm argues that traditions, often only appear as old. They are created recently, by reconstruction historically facts; or they are even newly invented. Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000 [1983]).

migration movements can imply these transformations. (Kreinath, Hartung, and Deschner 2004) Thirdly, scholars developed another theoretical approach connected to the ritual's dynamic by analyzing the modifications which occur through different movements such as migration. How transnational movements such as migration influence the dynamic of a ritual and especially its transfer from one context to another has been defined in the theory of transfer of rituals. In the next chapter, 3.2.4, I present this theory by discussing two different approaches.

### 3.2.4 Transfer of rituals

#### Transfers of rituals

“give a complex analysis of transfer and transformation processes that can arise not only through cultural interaction but also through different group-interests within their various social and political contexts” (Kreinath, Hartung, and Deschner 2004:1).

In the following chapter, I present the conceptualization of the term transfer of ritual (German: “Ritualtransfer”)<sup>16</sup> by a special research group in Heidelberg. The concept of transfer of rituals has been actively developed and presented until 2013. The scholars come from different fields such as Anthropology or Islamic studies; their research focused on migrated groups or diasporic groups such as Alevites (Langer, Motika, and Ursinus 2005; Yaman 2010), or Jesides (Langer et al. 2011) in the nearer East and West Europe. These groups are often marginalized and in conflict with the majority group in society. Other scholars focused on the transfer of rituals in the online world (Radde-Antweiler 2006; Heidbrink 2007). In both contexts, rituals are seen as a link between old and new origins.

Langer, Lüddeckens et al. presuppose that transfers of rituals are forms of ritual dynamics. Structural or contextual changes of the ritual itself (internal) or modifications of the social environment (external) are defined as ritual dynamics. For example, small mistakes or creative attempts can lead to these variations and changes. However, modifications, more minor changes, which do not lead to a transformation of the ritual, can also influence the ritual. In summary, “transfer of rituals include a change of a ritual; or elements of rituals from one context to another” (Langer et al. 2005:23 transl. from German by the author).

In their approach to the transfer of rituals Langer et al. emphasize the context of the ritual and its relation to the social environment. A transfer of rituals takes place when at least one aspect of the context changes. Contexts are not part of rituals, but they interact or relate to it.

---

<sup>16</sup> English writing authors use mainly the term ‘transfer of rituals’. Sometimes, also ‘ritual transfer’ is used in English, as well as in German. I apply the first term to describe the theoretical concept.

The authors present different settings, such as the geographical-spatial environment, the political environment, or the economic environment. These environments are not static; they change and interrelate with different historical processes.

Furthermore, Langer et al. define aspects that are immanent to rituals. The historical performance or scripts of the ritual give it its own identity. It shapes the ritual's individual appearance and enactment. Inherent to the ritual can be different dimensions such as script, performativity, aesthetics, or communication. The contextual aspects, as well as the internal dimensions, are interrelated to each other. Changes on one of the levels might imply changes on the other level. Therefore, the authors argue that, both the contextual aspects and the ritual-immanent dimensions should be examined to determine a transfer of ritual. The following table lists the contextual aspects and internal dimensions, which possibly change in a transfer of ritual.

*Table 1: Contextual Aspects and Internal Dimensions; from (Langer et al. 2006:2).*

<b>Contextual Aspects</b>	<b>'Internal' Dimensions</b>
Media	Script
Geography / Space	Performance
Ecosystem	Performativity
Culture	Aesthetics
Religion	Structure
Politics	Transmission of Ritual Contents
Economy	Intentionality (Strategic Use, Instrumentalisation)
Society	Self-Reflectivity
Gender	Interaction
Group carrying the Ritual Tradition	Communication
History	Psycho-Social Functionality
	Mediality
	Symbolism
	Ascribed Meanings

According to the authors, people who are involved in the ritual are often the driving factor for change. The people can participate both actively and passively and can be involved in varying degrees. There usually exists different dependencies and power relations between the participants. For example, a priest has more influence on the performance of the ritual than a person who is just watching. By changing the place where the ritual is practiced, for example, in the course of migration processes, the context of the ritual, as well as the dimensions inherent in the ritual, can change. That leads to new and different interactions between these two spheres. However, the authors explain that one can speak of a transfer of rituals when individual ritual objects or symbols are transferred. Transfer of rituals usually does not run "unilinearly, from one context to another," it is instead a "reciprocal process" (Langer et al. 2013:32).

The authors analyze rituals on the internet as an example of a transfer of rituals. The transfer of rituals in the online world directly influences the actors' relations and roles during the ritual.

For example, first, persons can be involved in the ritual at the same time, although they are in different geographical zones. Second, communication within and about the ritual takes place in a new context and often in a different way, such as by chatting. New power structure evolves because persons who have control over internet communication, such as webmasters, now have basic power to make changes. In addition, the transfer of the rituals to the internet changes the ritual's performative character. (Langer et al. 2005, 2013) For example, similar *semas* like the ones I visited can be found on You-Tube. Nevertheless, watching it feels different from the life experience: I am just looking on a screen, and the music comes from my loudspeakers. I can neither talk to people nor actively participate.

By discussing the conceptualization of transfers of rituals defined by Langer et al., I showed the transformations of different ritual components, which can lead to its transmission. Neubert also uses these components, but also refer to some of them to create his conceptualization of transfer of rituals. I will discuss this definition in the next paragraph.

In his article from 2009, Neubert describes his working definition in which four elements are relevant. He explains that he speaks of a transfer of rituals when actors permanently transfer a ritual from one social environment to another social environment. (Neubert 2009:3). Only if these elements can be found in a ritual, it is defined as a transfer of rituals.

The first element in the definition is ritual. Neubert applies a concept of ritual, which he defines by discussing two specific concepts of ritual by Michael and Rappaport. Rappaport says: "I take the term 'ritual' to denote the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers." (Rappaport 1999:24) Hence, the reference to formal actions means that there must be regularity and correct behavior.

Neubert also refers to Michaels, who defines like Rappaport, rituals as limited to external-technical aspects. Michaels elaborates five criteria by which rituals can be distinguished from ritualized action. Neubert discusses these and describes them as:

- 1) Existence of a causal change which leads to ritual actions
- 2) Characterizing rituals through a formal decision
- 3) Formal criteria: formality/repetitiveness, principle publicity, irrevocability
- 4) Modal criteria: communality, transcendence reference, reference to emotions
- 5) Change of ritual's identity, status, significance, role, or competence

Like Rappaport and Michaels, Neubert discusses rituals by only analyzing external criteria. Neubert understands rituals as complexes of action. Consequently, rituals can not only exist as

scripts but must actually be performed. Here his approach differs from Langer's one, who also includes written rituals.

As the second element of Neubert's definition, actors are relevant to the transformation of the ritual. Neubert defines three different types of processes, which the actors shape. First, missionary and exporting – the ritual is brought by the people exercising the ritual. Second, importing – people take the ritual from another social environment. Third, through migration/diaspora – the people migrating import the ritual.

As another element, Neubert mentions the social environment (“soziales Umfeld”) and defines it as different contexts in which the ritual can take place or is transferred. The contexts are shaped by various parameters, such as religion, ethnicity, geography, or gender. It has to be distinguished from case to case, which of these parameters is relevant for the transfer of ritual.

Finally, the element permanence defines that rituals change the location, not for a limited time but permanent. (Neubert 2009)

A more detailed discussion of the elements can be found in chapter 5.3 of the empirical part. In this part, I answer whether the practices of whirling can be described as a transfer of rituals. I discuss my empirical data by applying the different elements presented. Different scholars have already discussed the theory of transfer of rituals with their empirical data. Through these different types of transfer of rituals can be identified. I shortly discuss these in the following paragraph.

I already mentioned above that rituals might be described differently from an emic or etic perspective. The same can be applied to transfers of rituals. People, directly involved, often consider the ritual as static and not changing. Langer et al. distinguish three different types of transfers of rituals; synchronic, diachronic, and recursive. A synchronic transfer of rituals can occur through the migration of people, which might lead to a simultaneous practice of the ritual at two different places. The diachronic transfer of ritual can arise when there is a continuity in the location and group, while the historical context changes. However, a transfer of ritual does not always move only in one direction. There might also be repercussions on those practicing the ritual, or on the contexts of the group of origin, which is described through the third category of the recursive transfer. (Langer et al. 2006, 2013) In addition, as shown by Gladigow, possibly only sequences, symbols, or objects of the ritual can be transferred (Gladigow 2004).

### 3.2.5 Summary – Ritual theory

I use the term ritual as a polythetic term. Therefore, I discussed different ritual elements, such as action, intention, or agency, which are first, a prerequisite for a processual understanding of rituals and consequently for the theorization of ritual dynamics. Second, they are relevant to discuss my empirical data. Moreover, agreeing with Grimes, Bell, and Handleman, I define it necessary to research rituals and ritual elements in contexts other than religious contexts. Also, public events or, in my case, dance performances can support the conceptualization of ritual theories.

Furthermore, I state that it is important to define rituals in a processual way and look at transformations and dynamics taking part. The concept of ritual dynamics helps to deconstruct the static perception of rituals and to focus on changes taking place. Through this perspective, different appearances of rituals, different contexts in which they appear, and various actors being involved can be identified.

If one wants to analyze ritual dynamics, influenced by people's mobility, such as migration, the theory of transfer of rituals can be applied. Transfer of ritual is a specific form of ritual dynamics. It defines specific contextual aspects and internal dimensions, which might change through the ritual's transfer from one social environment to the other. Therefore, the theory enables one with specific elements, which can be used in an empirical analysis, as I have done. Other theoretical concepts, which were relevant in processing my data, belong to the theoretical field of performance studies, which I present in the next part.

## 3.3 Performance

In Anthropology throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the performative turn developed. On the one hand, researchers tried to define performative aspects in rituals, and on the other hand, they tried to distinguish performances and rituals. The interdisciplinary research fields bring together approaches of social sciences, arts, and especially theater studies. Using methods of performance studies supports a perspective on “small-scale, face-to-face interactions” (Schechner 1995:20). A focus on performance guides the interpretation of rituals and enactments in a processual and dynamic way. Consequently, a broader understanding of social-cultural transformations can be reached. Performances can be found in the everyday world, as well as in social, political, religious, and artistic spheres. Studying performance means “comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” (Madison and Hamera 2006:XII). Thus, performance works in the fields of theory,

method, and event. For the first field, it gives an analytical framework; for the second, it provides a defined way of application; and for the last field, it shows the aesthetics and actions involved. (Madison and Hamera 2006)

In the following part, I discuss different approaches and perspectives on performance, that were relevant in my research process. In the first chapter 3.3.1, I shortly present the definition of performance and performativity shaped by a linguistic approach. In chapter 3.3.2, I discuss the term performance by setting it into relations with other concepts of performance. On the one hand, I consider performance in relation to theater, play, and enactment and analyze the demarcation of ritual and performance. On the other hand, I concentrate on the role of performance in transformation processes. In chapter 3.3.3, I shortly look at the specific concept of cultural performance, as it was useful to understand my empirical findings.

### 3.3.1 Performance and performativity

The term performance was specified by Austin's speech act theory (Austin, Urmson, and Sbisà 1974). Following a linguistic approach, Austin characterizes performative statements by the fact that the speaker fulfills the corresponding action with his utterance. For instance, performative statements are part of marriages or baptism. If two persons want to marry, only by the statement: 'Yes, I will' the facts are created, and they are a married couple.

Constitutive statements, utterances about facts, can be distinguished from performative statements through different criteria Austin defined. For a performative utterance to succeed at all, all participants must know and accept the fact it expresses. Thus, there exist certain conventions between the participants that must prevail. All participants must carry out the statement or act correctly, and it needs to be identified by everyone. Nevertheless, a performative utterance may or may not succeed. For example, if a person says 'no' before the altar instead of 'yes', no new facts have been created, the performative utterance has failed. Austin mentions a further condition stating that performative utterances cannot be true or false since they always imply assumptions whose truth content cannot be verified. (Austin, Urmson, and Sbisà 1974:12-14; 23)

Theatre studies also deal with the concept of performativity. Researchers of theatre studies refer mostly to the term's origin of 'to perform,' in the sense of to do something, to act, or to execute. Richard Schechner is one of the most influential researchers in performance studies. He states that 'to perform' can be explained by the terms being, doing, showing doing, and explaining showing doing (Schechner 2013 [2002] :28). As Schechner showed, performances can be described by different terms. As well, performances can be defined through the different



contexts they appear. In accordance with my empirical data, I will mainly look at the two contexts of ritual and theatre.

### 3.3.2 Ritual performances and theatre performance

Performances occur in different contexts, such as theater, events, or rituals. Also, they can take place in different places, such as on stage, in religious buildings, or at home. Theorists discussed if these performances are the same or how they can be distinguished. In the following chapter, I present some of these debates, which are relevant for analyzing my empirical data. I discuss elements such as existence, social and political impact, aesthetics, and agency.

Fischer-Lichte states that performances exist only in the moment of their being; after they end, they are lost. The objects involved, such as bodies, space, and sounds already exist before the performance. However, they receive their materiality and their specific appearance only during the performance in the moment of their enactments. Performances are subject to constant change and do not have a stable and constant state. Nonetheless, they follow a specific "principle of order" (Fischer-Lichte 2016:64). The foreseeable and unpredictable, as well as the interdependent relationship between body, space, and sound, are combined to form an overall picture. Each participant has an individual perception created through their overall impression and individual meaning. However, the perception is different for all participants because it is created by different patterns, such as the aesthetic feeling or the different perception of symbolic actions. (Fischer-Lichte 2016:53–64) Fischer-Lichte defines performance with a focus on structures and individual experience. In comparison to that, Turner focuses on social and political forms of performances, which can be distinguished from performances with a focus on aesthetics. These two forms are discussed in the next part.

Schechner, in close cooperation with Turner, discussed the distinction between social drama and aesthetic drama. The social drama describes the disruption of the social order of a society and can be characterized by four phases (Turner 1974). The social drama describes social or political performances, used by political actors to implement or influence activities, taking place on the social level. Aesthetic dramas describe artistic performances. Artists use social and political material for their staging of an aesthetic drama. Thus, both continuously influence each other. (Fischer-Lichte 2016:50)

Similarly, by also referring to the social context and the role of aesthetics, Walsdorf tries to distinguish between rituals and theatre performances. She describes that rituals, as well as theatre performances, are created in a defined social context and with a specific intention. Both

events take place at a specific occasion, defined by time, space, and public constitution. Walsdorf states that the performance of a ritual is based on the repetition (or repeatability) of known sequences of actions. It creates unity between actors and spectators through the joint performance. In parallel, a play in its performative execution is - at least in part - the product of such a process of joint performance (Hanna Walsdorf 2013:89). Defining differences, Walsdorf explains that in a ritual, social relations are negotiated and reflected. While a theater play intends to act on an aesthetic and educational level. Moreover, Walsdorf states that in a ritual, the individuals and their identity are less important than on a theatre stage. (Hanna Walsdorf 2013)

Like Walsdorf, Kapferer and Hobart include the aspect of aesthetics into their discussion about performance. They argue that aesthetics are expressive activities, which are symbolically organized. People perceive and are affected by these activities. They state that aesthetics produces and is only a reflection of experiences. Thus, aesthetics itself has an agency. In defining aesthetics, performances are an essential factor. Only in performances the symbolic processes, inducing aesthetic experiences come into full existence. Moreover, “aesthetics processes [...] achieve their distinctive character and potencies in their performative practice and the way they are made to appear to and through the senses”. (Kapferer and Hobart 2005:12) Kapferer and Hobart argue that rituals, as well as performances, get their specific character from aesthetics. (Kapferer and Hobart 2005) I discussed the element of aesthetics to define different forms of performances, and the next paragraph focuses on intention as another criterion.

Theatre performances are not only shaped by their aesthetics but also through their intention. The performances are directed and produced to enact something for a specific audience. With their senses, the audience perceives the various means of self-presentation and incorporations taken place in the performances. (Dücker 2007:120)

Additionally, Handleman uses broader definitions to distinguish between the different public forms of performances. He introduces the term “public events” to encompass events such as assemblies, ceremonials, rituals, or festivals. Handleman argues that such a typology is needed as most of these different appearances of events are difficult to distinguish. Nevertheless, he argues that through looking at intentions, the forms can be categorized. Their intentionality and their practice characterize public events. Handleman, in reference to Kapferer (2005), defines practices, as enactments in events, and thus as a performative element. Handleman conceptualizes intentions, as an element which design or structure events. Intentions emerge from existing structures of the events or are newly invented. Intentions also lead to a specific design of events. He focuses on “forms through which doing is done” (Handelman 2005b:19). Events can fluctuate and constantly change, following intentions and the logic of the event’s design. Through

this, he distinguishes his approach from other approaches of performances. These perspectives, he argues, stress more on the process of doing. (Handelman 2005b:17–21)

Furthermore, focusing on aesthetics, practices, or intentions, other phenomena are discussed to demarcate performances in rituals, everyday life, and theatre. For example, actors can be analyzed as another element. Schechner describes that in a theatre performance, the actors, as well as the audience know that the persons on stage are not the ones they enact. In contrast, in everyday life or rituals, the boundary between the person and a role they enact is more difficult to define. (Schechner 2013 [2002] :170–77)

As another example, Mitchell follows a similar line of argumentation. While Schechner's definition was based on persons, Mitchell (2006) considers objects. He analyzes, which different roles they have, being applied in a ritual or everyday-life. He discusses how objects of material culture and space can become subjects in performances. He argues that while looking at an initiation ritual, it is obvious that the body changes. Hence, if during a performance, objects are in reciprocity with persons and other things, they can be understood as social. Therefore, they have a social agency, which goes over their sole materiality. They become part of transformation processes, which occur in ritual performances. Thus, he argues that performances are embedded in a ritual and not separated activities of everyday-life actions. (Mitchell 2006:391–99)

Other authors categorize performances by either evaluate them as behavioral performance (everyday-life) or aesthetic performances (stage) (Shepherd 2016:42–45).

This chapter has demonstrated that there exist different appearances of performances. They can be distinguished through different elements. For example, the intention is one of these factors. On the one hand, those who enact the performance can have a specific purpose. On the other hand, this intention can be influenced or be different from those having power over the performance. As discussed in the context of social drama, those being in power often have the agency to design the performance in accordance with their intentions. I observed a similar process in Turkey, where different actors intend to present whirling performance as a uniquely Turkish. One theoretically perspective, describing such phenomena, is called cultural performance. In this particular form of performance, the boundaries between ritual and staging are blurred. In the next part, I shortly discuss this perspective.

### 3.3.3 Cultural performance

Milton Singer introduced the term cultural performance into social research in the mid-1950s. He understands performance as a constituting element of culture and as a unit of observation. Singer determines cultural performances, by a defined beginning and ending, an organized program of activities, as well as the involvement of performers and audience. The performance is thereby happening in a specified locality and for a specific occasion. Singer characterizes such performances, as weddings, temple festivals, concerts, or dances as cultural performances, as they are embedded in cultural structures and value systems. (Singer 1972)

In addition, Turner refers to the concept of cultural performance. He argues that fields of cultural performance draw their meaning and force from the social drama. (Turner 1988) Equally, Shepherd discusses the parallels between cultural performance and Turner's concept of social drama. He states that both concepts “offer an insight into how a society manages itself and in particular, negotiates change.” (Shepherd 2016:46). Cultural performances are modes of articulating cultural norms and values.

While the previous definitions focused on cultural performances as a representation of cultural phenomena, other authors apply it to specific cultural phenomena. Here, the concept of cultural performances is used to concentrate on the representational and political character of performance and performativity. For example, (Huarcaya 2015) shows the role of performance in constructing indigeneity as a social reality. Parallel, in the context of tourism, performances are discussed in the process of heritage making (Smith 2011). Performances occur next to processes of self-consciousness, and reflexive public performances (Graham and Penny 2014:10).

The division between ritual and theatrical performances becomes blurred in these forms of cultural performances, which focus on political implications. For instance, if the ritual is intentionally performed as a tourist attraction, it adopts some characteristics of an event. New performative means, such as aesthetics, can be introduced to create interest and to gain a favorable judgment by the audience. Or, certain conditions such as the time and place of the performance can be adapted to meet the needs of the audience.

### 3.3.4 Summary – Performance theory

In this chapter, I presented some theoretical discussions about the theory of performance. On the one hand, the term performativity is used in a linguistic approach analyzing utterances. Here, it implies ideas of making something real and creating content of true and false. On the other hand, the term is formed by social sciences. Especially, theatre studies imply the connotation of doing and putting something in a scene. The term is used in performance theory. Here,

I have linked theoretical debates to show different characteristics between ritual performances and theatrical performances. Through this, I identified several criteria of comparison, such as social and political context, agency, intention, or aesthetics. These criteria are also relevant in the specific form of cultural performance.

### 3.4 Summary – Theoretical part

I selected the theories described in the theoretical part, on the one hand, because of the results of my research on whirling practices. On the other hand, I used the theoretical perspectives to analyze my data and to structure my empirical discussion. Since I was researching multi-sited in Turkey and Austria, I included a discussion about transnationalism. I have decided in favor of this approach and against a global perspective, as I have been looking at national processes and experiences of individual persons. Applying transnational theory as an empirical tool helps me to answer my research questions concerning transnational relations and encounters. I use this theory in chapter 5.2. of the empirical part. Furthermore, I show that transnational connections are a pre-requisite for studying the transfer of rituals. This theory is part of a development in ritual studies to a more processual and dynamic understanding of rituals. The theory of transfer of rituals defines modifications and transformations of ritual elements. These changes are often caused by the movement of people, such as groups in the diaspora. I have been researching the group Tümata, which leader is originally from Turkey, but his teachings are also practiced in Western European countries such as Austria or Germany. The theory seems to be useful in analyzing my empirical data. I apply the concept of the ritual of transfers by discussing the different elements found in Neubert's definition (chapter 5.3). This theoretical framework enables me to answer my research questions of how the whirling practice is transferred from one context to another.

Next to the group of Tümata, I was looking at different contexts in which whirling is practiced. Here, I found forms of ritual and theatre performances. I discussed the demarcation of these two forms by referring to concepts such as intentions or aesthetics. In the empirical part, I identify the intentions and aesthetics by giving ethnographic insights into my research fields (chapter 5.1). Furthermore, by applying the theoretical concepts, I discuss my research questions of what different forms of whirling practice exist. I refer to the theoretical discussion between ritual and performance to deconstruct the categories of whirling ritual and whirling dance (chapter 5.3).

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the methods and theories applied to my research. In the next part, I give some short background information before discussing my empirical data.

To understand the different appearances of the whirling practices I researched, a basic knowledge of historical and social influences is necessary.

## 4 Background Information

Sufism is used to describe a broad diversity of religious groups within the Islamic regions, as well as in other countries. There exist different theoretical approaches to explain Sufism. I start with a short description of the coming into existence and the early times of Sufism. Several versions about this topic exist; I tried to extract the necessary information to give a short overview. I start with a brief etymological discussion as it already offers a basic idea about Sufism, and I continue with some historical insights (Chapter 4.1). The next section explains the organizational form of *tarikas* (orders) existing in Sufism (Chapter 4.1.1). Here, it is necessary to look at how these forms have developed Turkey. I then move on to explain *sema* (Chapter 4.2). In the following chapter 4.3, I give a short insight into the contextualization of “Sufism in the West.” The last chapter introduces the group *Tümata*, which was a relevant research field in my research process (Chapter 4.4).

### 4.1 Baghdad Sufis and a Female Mystic - Early Sufism

In Arabic writings from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the terms *sufi* and *mutasawwif* are used to refer to specific Islamic devotees. The etymology of the term Sufism is subject to different debates. One of the most common theories of origin states that the word has the Arabic root (s – ū – f). The Arabic word (*sūf*) means wool. Thus, the Arabic verb *taṣawwuf*<sup>17</sup> means “wearing woolen garments.” Another interpretation defines the word’s root as “*safa*’,” which means purity. Other theories attribute the word to the expression *ahl aṣ-ṣuffa* (People of the Bench), which was used to describe Muhammad’s companions. These pious and poor people lived in the mosque in Medina. The word *tasawwuf* is still used in Arabic as an equivalent for the English word Sufism. (Knyš 2000:5) The first theory of origin seems the most plausible, although the other approaches picture as well some of the characteristics of Sufi. As early as the 8<sup>th</sup>-century, ascetics were wearing simple woolen clothes as an act of renunciation. They distinguished themselves from the majority of society, which was wearing linen and cotton clothes. During the Abbasid rule, the early Sufis negotiated existing social and cultural norms and ori-

---

<sup>17</sup> Arabic language has short and long vowels. In transliteration, long vowels are often marked with a dash above the letter. In some transliteration, a long u is also written with a w. The form written here, can be found in most of the literature.

entated their life away from worldly forms of life. They concentrated on their spiritual development. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward, a pious movement of Sufis was identifiable. The center of the movement was Baghdad. Sufis tried to gain more knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God by including God's remembrance into their daily lives. They lived a life in asceticism, including personal purity, seclusion, and moral uprightness. The Baghdad Sufis used the term *taṣawwuf* as a self-description. They became more and more organized following the teachings of a Sufi master, while at the beginning, they were still loosely connected.

Sufi masters, *sheikhs*, refer to a lineage of masters to legitimize their spiritual position. Thus, detailed knowledge about early Sufis exists. One of these first Sufis was *Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*, who was born in 642 in Medina. He lived until 728 and is seen as one of the earliest Sufi teachers and theorists. He belonged to the successor of Prophet Muhammad's companions and was popular due to his uprightness and religious teachings.

“[H]e not only warned his fellow citizens against committing sins, but also commanded them to regulate their whole life in anticipation of the Last Judgement, as he did himself.” (Knyš 2000:11)

These early forms of Sufism did not have standardized teaching, but most of them had similar ideas of individual piety to be close to God. Sufis describe this as cultivating the heart. Additionally, the

“closeness to God entailed a sharp turn from lower concerns of this world toward the realm of ultimate matters and a movement away from the lower self toward the inner locus of God's presence” (Karamustafa 2007:253).

This approach to God was seen as a journey, where the Sufis has to follow their own paths (*ṭarīqah*). They have to pass different stations (*manzil*) and conscious states (*ḥāl*) in which the ultimate experience is the becoming one with God. Similar to *Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*, also other pious people, who had occupations such as fighters, scribes, traders developed new moral orientations. They criticized luxury, hypocrisy, and oppressive rules.

Another famous Sufi, whose stories have been told a lot, is *Rābi'a al-ʿAdawīyya al-Qay-siyya*. She is one of the most famous female ascetics. She lived during 714 and 801 in Basra; therefore, she is also named Rabia al-Basri. It is told that she was born into a poor family and sold into slavery. She freed herself and lived in celibacy and seclusion. Disciples came to her to ask for advice and hear her teachings. She showed them that their affection and egoism bounded them. Also, she rejected all possible marriage proposals to stay independent. Instead, she saw God as the only “worth[y] object of desire, love and worship” (Knyš 2000:28). Next to Rabia al-Basri, other Sufi teachers and poets taught the cultivation of love, heart, and reaching unity with *Allāh*.

From the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it was only a few Sufis, which became prominent for the religiosity and closeness to Allāh. These experts had their own students, which followed them at the beginning of their spiritual training. The pupils then traveled all over the Islamic region and spread their master's teaching. Through this master - pupil relations, Sufism became institutionalized in different cities and regions of Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia. Various forms of Sufi teaching and practices came into existence. Thereby, Sufis developed practices different from prominent Islamic practices. They developed different methods of praying, in which getting into trance was possible. The goal was to embrace Allāh in the heart. Sometimes it was an informal practice, and sometimes a guided activity. They practice the remembrance of *Allāh*'s name <sup>18</sup>(*dikr*). The praising of *Allāh* through poetry or music (*samā*'), has been associated with Sufism by scholars not earlier than the middle of the 9th century. (Melchert 2005:228f.) In addition, initiation practices were developed (Karamustafa 2007:254). On the contrary to the inner ward and private orientated Sufis, other Sufis, in reaction to the cruel and impious behavior of the reigns of the Omayyads, were criticizing politics. They discussed the right and faithful leadership of the community (Schimmel 1975:29).

From the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Sufism spread more and more over Islamic regions in North Africa and Central Asia, but scholars have not specified the routes of movement. On the one hand, at the borders of the Islamic Empire, Sufi practices mixed with other existing religious and spiritual practices. On the other hand, some Sufi disciples started to record the biography and teachings of their masters to avoid the coming into existence of new practices. The documentation of these present teachings created normative forms of Sufism. These written forms served for a:

“pedagogical guidance for those who aspired to become Sufis, pious commemoration of past masters, building corporate solidarity among Sufis, and confident self-presentation and self-assertion vis-a`-vis other groups competing for authority within the Muslim community“ (Karamustafa 2007:258).

Writings have always played an essential role in Sufi practices. The authors referred to the teachings of the *Qur'ān* and the *Hadīth*. Nevertheless, some also included biographies and writings of famous Sufis. The writings of the early Sufis also play with the beauty of the language. Poetry was a meaningful way to express the love for *Allāh* and spiritual experiences. (Schimmel 1975:33) The heart and love were and still are important symbols, as they describe the relationship between Sufis and *Allāh*. The heart plays a special role in Arabic language usage. It is

---

<sup>18</sup> There exist synonym names for *Allāh*, describing his 99 characteristics. The names are recited as a form of prayer.



regarded as the center of the mind and a place where feelings manifest themselves. Also, it is the place where religious knowledge is located, a place of logic and understanding. (Gardet and Vadet J.-C.)

At the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the teachings and politics between the Shiite and Sunni started to differ more and more, and the Shia groups grew in size and importance in the Muslim Empire. More Sufis had been adhered to Sunni teachings, but Sufis also played an important role in the early stages of the Shia in Iran. Still today, Sufis are part of the different Islamic groups. (Schimmel 1975:82f.)

Sufis themselves, but also scholars, or journalists construct in opposition to the institutionalized forms of Islam, which follow the principles of the *Sharia*. (Cook 2015) In this regard, Sufism is often described as mystical Islam. Schimmel, for example, says that Sufism can be understood as a mystical or inner dimension of Islam, in which becoming one with good is the center of practice (Schimmel 2000:5). Ridgeon, in contrast, argues that it is not accurate to define Sufism as Islamic mysticism; he pleads for calling Sufism a form of intense piety and obedience to *Allāh* (Ridgeon 2015:1).

Concluding, the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries was crucial in forming the Sufi way of living, teachings, and practices. During this time, some masters formed local communities, of which some survived for more than a few generations. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the institutionalization of Sufism grew. Today, we still find spiritual lineages, called *ṭarīqa* (Turk.: *tarika*), which I will explain in the next part.

#### 4.1.1 Spiritual ancestries – The formation of *tarikas*

The term *ṭarīqa*, called *tarika* in Turkish, has two meanings. Firstly, it describes the spiritual path a Sufi is following and going in his life. Secondly, it represents an organized group of Sufis, often translated to English as order, or school. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, organized convents grew in importance. These were resting places for wandering Sufis. They stayed only for a short time, as most of them were moving from one place to another. In the beginning, these places were more like shelters and lodges, and later on, some of them become prosperous and flourishing establishments. Some of these convents were isolated in the countryside, while others were in cities. In these housings, already institutional rules came into existence, which regulated the day-to-day life. Some of them become later on religious obligations. In addition, these places were not totally separated from sites and teachings of institutional Islam. For example, Sufis were using the mosques for their *zikr*.

The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, was an essential period in Islamic history since the overthrow of the Shi'ite dynasty and the establishment of the Sunni dynasty happened. During this time, more and more Sufi orders established. Trimingham calls this 2<sup>nd</sup> stage in Sufi history the “formation of mystical schools” (Trimingham 1998:8). These were only a few in number so that it cannot be seen as a popular movement. Nevertheless, by some of the orthodoxy, Sufism was seen with suspicions. Thereby “it was the formation of esoteric and mystical congregations outside the regular organization of Islam, together with the liturgical organization of the *samà'*, or spiritual concert for inducing ecstasy” (Trimingham 1998:9) which provoked adverse reactions by the orthodoxy.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, existing Sufi *tarikas* grew in popularity, and new ones were formed. The early convents, until the 13<sup>th</sup> century had been linked by “enthusiasm, common devotions, and methods of spiritual discipline, with the aim of stripping the soul and eliminating self to attain vision of reality” (Trimingham 1998:13) From then onwards the *sheikhs* (*Turk.: üstad*) and their spiritual ancestries formed the specific *tarikas*. The leadership of *tarikas* was inherited, not necessarily in the family. Nonetheless, a continuous line of succession characterizes each *tarikas*. The master was responsible for the elaboration of the teachings, mystical exercises, and rules. Most of these *tarikas* also developed initiation rules. A *murshid* (teacher/guide) organized the spiritual and daily life in the centers. Only a few *sheikhs* became successful and founded *tarikas* that lasted more than a few generations. Thus, *tarikas* existing today are mostly subgroups of one of these few initially ones.

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the *tarikas* grew in importance and spread all over the Islamic regions. Sufism became established, which was mostly tolerated by the institutionalized Islam. Tombs of the death founders of *tarikas* became places of devotion and pilgrimage. In addition, some *tarikas* become centers of sciences, such as astrology. (Trimingham 1998:1–30)

Moreover, two primary sources of religious influence developed in Islamic societies through the institutionalization of Sufism. People with political impact were, on the one hand, the Islamic scholars, organized in Islamic schools and, on the other hand, Sufi leaders with their *tarikas*. Ernest Gellner describes that Islamic scholars were most often considered by the elite, while local Sufi leaders and *sheikhs* had more influence over the masses. (Gellner 1983:115) Also, in Turkey, different Sufi *tarikas* developed, which were in constant negotiation with the respective rulers and dominant Sunni Islam. In the next chapter, I further explain one of these *tarikas*, the Mevlevi.

#### 4.1.1.1 The Mevlevi Tarika in Turkey

In Turkey, Sufism grew in importance during the time of the Seljuks (11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> century). Especially with the approach of the Mongols during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Seljuks invited endangered *sheikhs* from Turkistan and Iran. Those who fled, most often settled in the cities of Konya, Kayseri or Aksaray, which became influential centers of Sufi teaching. Konya was not only the capital of the Seljuk but also two famous Sufis, *Alī ibn `Arabī* and *Dschalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī* lived there. (Küçük 2007:242)

Rumi was born in 1207 in the city Balch of the Persian Empire. Rumi's father, *Baha ad-Din Walad*, was a known Sufi *sheikh* and Islamic scholar. Rumi fled with his father because of local conflicts and the approach of the Mongols. They finally settled down in Konya. Rumi was taught by his father and became a renowned scholar of Islamic thoughts. In 1244, he met the wandering *dervish*, Shams-i-Tabrīzī.

“[L]ife was then transported into new dimension which turned him from a sober follower of tried paths into an ecstatic, whose visions transmuted into inspired Persian poetry.” (Trimingham 1998:60)

For fifteen months, Rumi and Shams stayed together. Shams had a great spirituality, which formed his relationship with Rumi. He thought Rumi inter alias the renunciation of the world and whirling. Shams disappeared ominously. It is assumed that he was killed. Because of his strong influence on Rumi, Shams had some enemies in Konya. Rumi transformed his mourning into poetry, which made him famous until today. Rumi also got a new title *Mevlana* (our master).

Küçük analyses the influence of immigration on Rumi's writing. She stated that immigration is a central theme in Rumi's teaching. His universal perspective is influenced by the knowledge that he gained through moving and traveling. For example, Rumi had an open view towards people of other religions. Through this also his famous saying ‘*Come! Come again! Whoever, whatever you may be, come!*’ might have come into existence. Therefore, until today Rumi inspires people from different religions. Some of them call themselves Mevlevi, although they do not see themselves as Muslims. Nevertheless, he also had critics, for example, the *sema* was criticized as not permitted in Islam and as a source of disturbances and noise. (Küçük 2007:246)

The institutionalization of Rumi's teaching developed after his death in 1273. His eldest son Sultan Veled and other followers established the buildings of Rumi into a *tekke* (Sufi convents) Konya and institutionalized the Mevlevi *tarika* in Turkey. The *tarika* stayed quite stable

and did not break up in different local branches, as it is known from other *tarikas*. Its central power stayed in Konya and the Anatolian region. (Sağlam 2017)

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the fall of the Seljuks, the Ottoman dynasty raised. They formed an influential Islamic dominion. Mevlevi, as well as other local Sufi groups such as Bektasi, Nakshabandi, or Halveti, formed strong ties with the sultans of the Ottoman Empire. The *tarikas* “supported the state in terms of legitimacy, security, public relief and religious propaganda” (Sağlam 2017:417). The other way around the Mevlevi order received financial support from the Empire. During the time of the Ottoman Empire, the Mevlevi order flourished. It was more an urban order, based in the upper classes of society. It became an important center of art and culture, especially in music and literature. For example, there had been five Mevlevi *tekkes* in Istanbul.

Moreover, during the Tanzimat, a period of reforms in the Ottoman Empire, some Mevlevi were actively involved in politics. They supported the constitutional movement, and some Sufi leaders became members of the first national Parliament in 1920. (Trimingham 1998:245–59; Sağlam 2017)

With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the situation for the Sufi *tarikas* changed. In the first constitution of 1924, Islam was declared as an official state religion. Atatürk planned to liberate Turkey from its Ottoman culture and to form a modern nation-state. In this context, the Ottoman Empire abolished the caliphate and official Islamic institutions. Nonetheless, the government founded a ‘Department of Religious Affairs,’ and own schools, which regulated religious practice and teachings. In 1925, all Sufi *tekkes* were officially prohibited and dissolved. The government closed all buildings related to Sufi practices and forbid all forms of ceremonies. Next to this, an abolition of Islamic clothes, headgear, as well as bans on calligraphy and music with Sufi influence took place. Through this, Sufi *tarikas* lost their visibility and prestige in Turkish society. In 1928, the state was declared as secular. The idea of laicism was introduced through an amendment of the 1924 constitution.

This political change did not lead to a total disappearance of Mevlivism as prayers and ceremonies continued in secret meetings. Also, the state had interests in keeping Rumi’s heritage alive within a process of nation-building. For instance, in 1926, Rumi’s tomb in Konya was formed into a Museum, the ‘*Konya Asar-I Atika Müzesi*’ (Konya Museum of Historical Works). This place was, on the one hand, transformed into a historical building dissociated from its former meaning; on the other hand, it did not lose his religious importance as a site of pilgrimage. In 1942, for the first time, the Turkish Republic initiated a public and large-scale remembrance of Rumi’s death in Konya. Today, the commemoration has grown in popularity, and

during a 10-days festival, various celebrations and performances are taking place with thousands of visitors. (Küçük 2007; Sağlam 2017)

From 1925 onwards, civic organizations and researchers held up the theoretical discourse on Sufism by arranging symposia and conferences. In this context, Küçük analyzes, Rumi's heritage was reconstructed in nationalist, humanist, or traditionalist terms to fit the individual interests of different political players (Küçük 2007). For example, Mustafa Kemal gave a speech in which he described Rumi with adjectives such as 'reformist,' 'tolerant,' and 'modern' to make him fit in the discourse of Turkey's modernization (Sağlam 2017:419).

In the 1950s, the Democratic Party of Turkey came to power. The moderately right-wing party had to oppose themselves to the former leading Republican People's Party. Therefore, they eased the secularist strictures. In this time, the *sema* was reintegrated into society as a tourist attraction. Sufi *tekkes* founded themselves as cultural associations, showing performances in public. In addition, after the military coup in 1980, the secular actions of the state grew less. The military regime religiously opened the country as a counter-strategy to communism. Today, the ban on Sufism is still not officially lifted, but Sufism has found its way back into society. For example, the Naksabandi is the most widespread Sufi order in Turkey and strongly supported by Erdoğan, as he is also a member. Mevlevi *dervish* performances can especially be found in tourist destinations such as Istanbul or Konya, because of its tourist attractiveness. Nevertheless, there still exists a high number of informal practices, which have not been recorded yet. (Yükleyen 2008) It can be concluded that

„Turkey [...] illustrates the contested nature of contemporary Sufism. For instance, many urban Muslim professionals in Turkey are rediscovering Sufism as an alternative to both conventional secularism and traditionally patriarchal forms of religious practice.” (Voll 2007:XIII)

I already mentioned the practice of *sema* with its meaning for Sufism and how it became institutionalized in Turkey in the previous chapters. In the section that follows, I explain in detail the meaning of *sema* and its formation in Turkey.

## 4.2 Music, Whirling, Recitation – Mevlevi *sema*

Many people I talked to associated whirling with the whirling Mevlevi *dervishes* in Turkey. The whirling takes place in a special ritual called *sema* in Turkish and *sama* in Arabic. The word derives from the Arabic root *s-m-a*, which means “that which is heard,” and therefore can be translated with listening. In pre-Islamic Arabic, the word was used to describe musical performances. Still today, it is used, on the one hand, to describe the whirling, but also to describe Sufi musical performances.

Already, in the early Islamic times, musical *semas* were held. First descriptions can be found from the 9<sup>th</sup> century of the Sufis in Baghdad. Here, the public recitation of the *Qur'ān* was mixed with secular performances of poetry and music. At this time, the practice was already connected with the idea of revelation. Participants felt relief from daily life, the inauguration of mysteries, and the reaching of higher spiritual states such as the oneness with God. The early composer and poets of the music performed in *semas* were Persians. The music and poems spread to other Muslim regions and were incorporated by Arab, Turkish, or Indian Sufis. *Semas* were also criticized by Islamic scholars, who forbid music and other forms of amusement, understanding them as contrary to the teaching of the *Qur'ān*. Hence, *semas* were always part of theoretical discussions in non-fictional literature. For example, in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, prominent Sufis wrote different dissertations on *semas* explaining their social and devotional relevance. Through this, *sema* was connotated with an improvement of the spiritual path and various other symbolic meanings. These theoretical discussions, as well as a growing of Sufi *tarikas* in number, lead to broad acceptance.

Moreover, the practice of *sema* changed to a more entertaining character. In some contexts, it developed into a “means of quickly working oneself into trance without paying much attention to the requirements and necessary decorum” (Knyš 2000:324). Here, the dance, getting into trance, and its social aspects were more important than its religious meaning. These ‘profane’ *semas* became increasingly widespread. As a reaction to this, some Sufi writers developed guidelines and rules regulating the performance and participation of the *semas*. The theorist discussed such topics as how beginners should be involved if musicians and what musical instruments should be included. That lead to even more diversification of the *semas* and the specific types were formed in different *tarikas*. (Knyš 2000)

One of these forms, which became institutionalized, is the Mevlevi *sema*. The performance of music and whirling dance is practiced by the so-called, whirling *dervishes*. A tale exists, which describes how Rumi turned the whirling into the Mevlevi *sema*. Rumi, who was still mourning over the loss of his friend Shams, went through the town. When he reached the marketplace, he heard the hammering beats of the goldsmiths’ *ambos*. Rumi mixed in his mind the beating with the prayer “*la ilaha ilallah*” (“There is no God but *Allāh*”) and started whirling to this sound. Still today, the whirling symbolizes the remembrance of *Allāh*. Every step of the feet moves one demi-circle, and each half-circle symbolizes one of the syllables of *Al-lah*.

*Sema* and the whirling *dervishes* were institutionalized only after Rumi’s death by his son. Until today there exist a defined script describing the different sequences of the *sema*. The ceremony is led by a ceremony master and accompanied by musicians playing the *ney* (flute),

*kudüm* (tambourine), bells, and singing. The *dervishes* wear specific clothes and are called *semazen*. I will give a more detailed description of the *sema* performances, how I witnessed them in the ‘today-world’ in chapter 5.1.

Nevertheless, whirling as a part of a ritual already existed before Sufism. Since through whirling a form of trance can be reached, it was used as a form of healing, for instance. Still today, there exist different whirling practices and rituals performed by Sufi groups or other groups in various countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Bulgaria, or Egypt. (Howell and van Bruinessen 2007)

Whirling performances are also practiced in countries without a Muslim majority. Describing the motivation of American converts, Acim argues that especially Sufi music and whirling performances attracted interest because the practices are “neither elitist nor exclusive converts” (Acim 2018:67).

How Sufism got introduced and established in Western European countries and North America is part of a diverse scholarly debate. In the following chapter, I give a short overview.

#### 4.3 New Spirituality and Immigrant Associations –Sufism in the West

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there exists an exchange between people practicing or being interested in Sufism in countries of Muslim majority and Western European countries and North America. Especially the colonialization of countries, where Sufism was present, led to an introduction of Sufism in the ‘West.’ For instance, Sufi practices and teaching were integrated in Britain through the Pakistan diaspora (Werbner 2009).

Moreover, Malik describes an overall trend of the cross-cultural exchanges, which led to new forms of Sufism: On the one hand, Euro-American scholars, of Sufi immigrants or Sufi converts, influenced Sufism in Islamic countries. On the other hand, “a gradually increased appreciation for Sufi literature and art in the West” can be witnessed, which is “combined with the establishment of Sufi communities, institutions, and practices, along with their habitus and effects on the broader religious and intellectual environment” (Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019:5).

For instance, Geaves describes that new forms of Sufism came into existence in Britain, which did no longer organize themselves in *tarikas*. Although they are defined as transglobal, their practices still rely on the teachings of institutionalized Sufism. (Geaves 2009)

Furthermore, Klinkhammer argues that the situation in Germany is different from countries such as Great-Britain or France, which had great colonies in Islamic countries. He defines three

different Sufi forms in Germany: First, he defines those people who refer to Sufi literature, music, and healing methods. Second, there exists an interpretation of Sufism as an universal mystic, which is the root of all religions. Finally, there are immigrant associations, which continue the practices and teachings from their home countries. (Klinkhammer 2009)

Also, different forms of Sufi practices can be found in Austria. Kuehn and Pokorny did an in-depth study of women leaders of Vienna's branch of the Inayati order. They conclude that:

“the Inayati female teachers in Vienna follow a spiritual path that crosses borders and, in so doing, they embrace an agenda of pluralism, feminism, and the unity of mystical experience” (Kuehn and Pokorny 2019)

Oruç Güvenç and his group Tümata are another group present in Austria, but also active in Germany and other countries of Europe. I introduce them further in the following chapter since they had an important role in my research.

#### 4.4 Reviving Turkish Music - Oruç Güvenç and Tümata

Tümata is the abbreviation for ‘Türk müziği araştırma ve tanıtma grubu.’ This can be translated as ‘Group for the Research and Promotion of Turkish Music.’ This group was founded in 1976 by Oruç Güvenç, a Sufi master, ethnomusicologist, and movement therapist. I first shortly elaborate on the biography of Oruç Güvenç and then presenting the group of Tümata and its activities, although both are interconnected.

Oruç Güvenç was born in 1948 in Tavşanlı in the western part of Turkey. At the age of 12, he told his father about his dream<sup>19</sup>. Following this, his father encouraged his son to learn the violin. Since then, he learned to play different musical instruments. Also, at the age of 12, Oruç Güvenç found his first Sufi-master Fazıl Bay, transmitting the teachings of the Mevlevi *tarika*. Oruç Güvenç went to Istanbul for his studies at the philosophical department. There he first met his new spiritual master. Oruç Güvenç learned from different spiritual master and also from a *dervish*. Through this he received different spiritual teaching permissions. In Sufism these permissions are given by the spiritual master of a *tarikat*. He got written and informal permission<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>19</sup> The narration, that important decision for the formation of life, or for personal transitional are introduced by a dream, is quite common in Sufism. During my research in Turkey, also other Sufis told me that a dream led them to practice Sufism.

<sup>20</sup> He first received a permission for four *tarikats*, one of these Mevlevi. From another master he received two more written permissions. Furthermore, he has several informal licences. Due to the political reasons the authorization was symbolized in a Mevlevi head, or other personal objects. Additionally, from the Makam Celebi (highest person in Mevlevi tradition) Süleyman Dede, (who, in the absence of a competent member of the Celebi family, was the only one to hold this office as a non-family member) received a positive valuation and a request to continue the Mevlevi tradition.



Besides spiritual contacts, Oruç's life was strongly influenced by music. (Güvenç 2018:27) Already, during his studies, Oruç Güvenç was interested in Central Asian folk music and was traveling in this region with his music group. After a degree in philosophy and a doctorate in clinical psychology, Oruç Güvenç founded Tümata. His researches in Central Asian countries gave inspiration to the music, which the group revived.

Moreover, Oruç Güvenç primarily focused on the combination of music ethnology and therapy. From Turkey, he also brought his teachings to other European countries, such as Spain, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. For example, Oruç Güvenç has been a co-founder of the Rosenau School for Traditional Oriental Music Therapy, as well, in 1989 an Ethnomusicology Foundation was founded in Vienna. Also, in clinics, Oruç Güvenç was doing projects using the therapeutical impact of Turkish music. The oldest project has taken place in Meidling Clinic in Vienna.

Furthermore, I interviewed **Andrea Azize Güvenç** in Turkey; she is a trained occupational therapist as well as a music and movement therapist. She first got into contact with Tümata in Germany, where she was born. Since then, she learned more and more about Sufism and alt-oriental music therapy following Oruç Güvenç's teaching. In 1999 they married. She has been an active part of the group Tümata. About her relationship to Oruç Güvenç, Azize Güvenç told me:

„Wir haben dann geheiratet und bin dann hier in die Türkei gezogen. Und weil er- für mich war klar, ich gebe mein altes Leben auf. Ich gehe, ich habe meine Praxis verkauft, ich habe alles aufgegeben und mir war dann klar, [...] ich möchte an seiner Seite mitgehen, [...] Und das war auch von ihm so gewünscht, weil er ein bisschen Körper behindert war, und auch immer auf Hilfe angewiesen. Und ja dann waren das 20 wunderbare Jahre, die wir miteinander verbracht haben, bis er dann eben vor 2 Jahren plötzlich verstarb.“ (Azize Güvenç: 2019/05/20)<sup>21</sup>

Still, after Oruç Güvenç's death in July 2017, musicians, dancers, and singers are loosely organized as Tümata. During Oruç Güvenç's lifetime, the number of people following his teachings in Turkey and different European countries varied. Some of them are also part of Tümata.

Tümata researches and promotes Turkish history, giving concerts, for example. They relate to the more than 1000-year-old history of Turk music and show different musical performances,

---

<sup>21</sup> Direct quotes of my interviews are marked with the partner's name and the interview's date. I decided to not give these details, in quotes which are embedded in the text, as this would have decreased the flow of reading. If not marked differently the quotes are from the certain interviews. All the interviews are also listed in the appendix in chapter 8.2.

dances, costumes, and decorations sourcing from Ottoman and pre-Ottoman times. Azize Güvenç told me that there exist historical papers, which documented the music and practices. For example, Turk music was used in *shifahane*, hospitals in the Nearer East, to heal physical and psychological illnesses. Trained musicians came to the hospital with their instruments and played specific music, which assisted the healing process. Tümeta tries to preserve this knowledge by documenting, collecting, and building musical instruments.

These instruments can be visited in a small museum, which is near the Sultan Ahmet mosque in Istanbul. Close to the museum, there is a small shop selling instruments. There I met Oruç Güvenç's brother, who keeps the shop running. Also, other followers of Oruç Güvenç, try to keep his teachings and practices alive. For example, his daughter Kanikey Güvenç is holding Sufi events. As well, Emre Başaran, whom I interviewed in Istanbul, is organizing *semas*. Galib Stanfel, who is keeping the tradition of Oruç Güvenç in Vienna alive, connected me with Emre Başaran.

In Vienna, I met **Gernot Galib Stanfel** during the *sema* at *Haus des Friedens*, which he organizes. Galib Stanfel was taught by and accompanied Oruç Güvenç for more than 30 years. Galib Stanfel is a musician, music therapist, and lecturer. He organizes the monthly *sema* and leads a weekly *zikir* in Vienna, which is taking place in a private home. As well, he and other people organized a *sema*, which lasted three days and three nights in Lower-Austria. In the interview with Galib Stanfel<sup>22</sup>, he told me the story of how it happened that they organized such a specific form of *sema*: Once, in a seminar in Switzerland, Oruç Güvenç was talking about the history of *sema*. He explained that during times of Mevlana, the *sema* was less organized and could take place for several days. It was only later that the Mevlevi *Sheikh* Adil Celebi transformed the *sema* in a shorter ceremony of less than an hour. There also exists a book of an old master, in which he described a *sema* that lasted for three days and three nights. At this seminar, the idea was formed to establish a similar event.

Since then, Tümeta has held more than 30 times *semas* lasting three days and nights, and also other *sema* with longer durations. The longest was 114 days and nights. Most of these *semas* were taken place in the Rasim Mutlu Center in the town of Gökcedere, in western Turkey, not far away from Istanbul. The heart of the center is an eight angular room, where the *sema* is taking part. Here, during the respective period, musicians are playing non-stop music. Always at least one person is whirling. Those who whirl, the *semazens*, and the musicians perform in

---

<sup>22</sup> The Interview with Galib Stanfel was on the 16.01.2019.

shifts. As well, all daily tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, are done self-organized. Everyone is asked to participate and as well to donate, as there exist no fees and no external donors exist.

I already had to go back to Europe end of May, and with that, my research phase was finished. In summer, there would have been an event in the center again, but unfortunately, I was not able to attend. Nevertheless, from the stories of my interview partners, online-blogs<sup>23</sup>, or YouTube videos, I got an impression of the atmosphere there. Next to the *sema* organized by Galib Stanfel at *Haus des Friedens*, I visited other events in which whirling took place. In the next chapter, I give an ethnographical insight in these different contexts in which whirling is practiced.

---

<sup>23</sup> <https://miamantequilla.wordpress.com/2016/04/30/3-tage-24-stunden-am-tag>; (last accessed 2019/11/29).

## 5 Empirical Part

“Close your eyes, cross one arm over the other one in front of your chest. Put the tip of your right foot over the left one. Breathe in and breathe out slowly. Imagine the earth rotating, imagine the sun, rotating around the earth. Now, slowly move: with your right foot make a step to the left side, with the next step try to draw a circle and keep on doing this. When you feel ready, open your arms slowly. Move your right arm up to the ceiling, while stretching the left arm towards the ground.” I slowly opened my eyes and saw the brown of the wooden floor, and the images on the white wall shining as if someone would have gone over it with a paintbrush soaked of water. “Is this it?” I was thinking. “Am I whirling? Am I doing the same movements that those *dervishes* are doing?” Suddenly, my body was shaking. I quickly crossed my arms over my shoulders to keep myself in balance. The voice of Fawzia al-Rawi caught my attention. “Concentrate,” I was saying to myself. Again, I imagined the rotation of the earth, and my feet kept on moving step by step.

Four months later. I was standing barefoot on a one square meter large white wooden panel. My left foot almost touched the small mound of salt in the center of the board. My arms again are crossed over my chest. I was imagining seeing a clock on the ground, and my right feet tried to move from three o’clock to nine o’clock. I tried to imitate the *dervish*’s feet in black lace shoes moving next to me. I turned my gaze from my feet toward Zeynep’s face. “*Tamam mı?*” I asked. “*Cok iyi.* Keep on!” she was encouraging me with a welcoming smile. I kept on trying and look at the other two women — Ayşe in her black skirt and a long blouse. Her black veil frames her angular face with the alert, warm eyes which are focusing on the steps she was doing. Next to her, Rima, also barefoot in jeans, a long blouse, with curly hair, was trying to keep the balance by moving her arms. Zeynep flitted next to me to the second room. I tried to concentrate again on myself. I crossed the arms in front of my chest. “Breath in, breath out slowly,” I was telling myself.

These two insights into my research, show one of the paths I took, trying to find out more about the whirling I witnessed for the first time at *Haus des Friedens* in Vienna. It shows how on the first sight, one simple movement, turning around one’s own axis, can turn into a practice. A practice of whirling that is learned, practiced, taught, and performed in different ways and contexts. In the empirical part of my thesis, I want to analyze these different appearances of whirling and the different settings it appears, as well as the dynamics lying beneath.

My master thesis evolved from a research project, which I pursued as part of a research seminar during the winter term 2018/2019. The seminar focused on rituals and cultural performances in Vienna. I decided to look for Sufi groups in Vienna, as my interest lies in religious practices with a focus on Islam and gender. I became especially curious about the ‘Center of female spirituality and Sufism’ called “Haus des Friedens” in Vienna. In the context of the seminar, I was looking at the *zikr* and *sema* rituals taking place at the center with a particular focus on gender and the body. I designed my master thesis as an open research process, guided by the method of Grounded Theory. Therefore, different research fields and ideas have formed the course of my research. In the following part, I shortly present this process, which resulted in the final research fields and the research questions to make my research procedure understandable and verifiable.

Being at the center, I became aware of the spiritual master Oruç Gücenc and his group Tümeta, as people following his teachings have been organizing a monthly *sema* in the *Haus des Friedens*. At the beginning of my research process, I asked myself what other forms of Sufi practices and groups exist in Vienna. To get a first impression and a broad overview, I started with researching online and through personal connections, which I had established at the center. I also started to visit other Sufi groups in Vienna but noted that there is a great variability of groups and persons practicing Sufism, which are more or less institutionalized. It reflects the broad definition of the term Sufism and the significant diversification, which comes from the long history of Sufism and its varying institutionalization. Thus, researching the groups in Vienna would have only been possible with a greater pre-knowledge. I noticed that a whole status analysis and comparison of the groups in Vienna would have been quite extensive and time-consuming. Therefore, I decided to change my focus. At the *Haus des Friedens*, I discovered the whirling practice and tried it myself, which made me curious and more questions arose. While I was looking for different forms of Sufi practices in Vienna, I became acquainted with Julia Fraunlob, who is teaching whirling as dance, for example, in USI sports. This reminded me of the establishment and development of Yoga in the USA or Western European countries.

I decided to follow up on the idea of cultural transformation and to continue focusing on the practice of whirling. At the same time, I made the decision that I would spend a semester abroad in Turkey the following summer term. This led me to include a transnational perspective into my research and to follow up on the group Tümeta, as the founder Oruç Güvenç, was situated in Turkey, but also active in Austria.

The empirical part of my thesis is structured in four chapters. The first chapter (5.1) gives insight into the research fields and introduces the different forms of whirling performances that

I included in my research. The second chapter (5.2) analyzes the transnational character of whirling and through this defines a pre-requisite for the analysis in the next chapter. In the third section (chapter 5.3), I employ the theory of ritual of transfer by discussing my empirical data. Finally, in the fourth chapter (5.4), I look at the connotations of whirling as a religious ritual and dance performance and discuss if it should be described as a transfer ‘out’ of rituals.

## 5.1 Different Forms of Whirling – Introducing the Research Fields

This chapter aims to present the various forms of whirling practices that I encountered in my research. For this presentation, I have chosen the method of ethnography.

“Ethnographic writing should aspire to meet the challenge of conveying an interesting, accessible and believable portrait of a culture or society, and to do so it has to find a balance between the duty to facts and validity and a literary voice that conveys rich, evocative and persuasive description. This is the balanced approach I call the ‘storied reality.’” (Madden 2010: 166)

Thus, I invite the readers to follow me to the world of whirling. I describe four different *sema* performances that I have visited. I explain in greater detail the first *sema* that I attended at *Haus des Friedens* since there exists no recording. Additionally, it was the most revealing in my research project because I was more involved than in others, where I was rather part of the audience. I visited my first *sema* in Vienna in November 2018 and the second one in January 2019. Both *semas* were quite similar concerning the course of the evening. In the next part, I will give insight into the first evening that I participated in.

### 5.1.1 “Es gibt nur an *Allāh*.” - *Sema* at *Haus des Friedens* - Vienna

At the *Haus des Friedens*, a *sema* is regularly held once a month. It is organized by a group under the guidance of Gernot Galib Stanfel, who is following the teachings of Oruç Güvenç and has been part of *Tümata*. I visited a *sema* twice, once in November and one in January. The evening course was quite similar both times. There were four musicians, on the first evening, there were three men and one woman, on the second evening there were two women and two men. The musicians sat on one side of the room. The official part started at 8 pm; nevertheless, people would come up to one hour later or leave earlier. Both times, about 20 people were participating.

I entered the *zawiya*, the room where the *sema* and other ceremonies take place, about ten minutes before the official beginning. I said, “hello,” and looked around. The room was familiar to me because I had been here before for *zikr* evenings. Nevertheless, the setting had changed

a bit. When there was a *zīkr* on Mondays or Thursdays, pillows were laid in a circle on the left side of the room. In the middle of the circle, there was a candle and often some flowers. This time, I saw Solveig putting the pillows along the walls of the room. I smiled at Sarah, as I knew her from the last *zīkrs*, she smiled back. I saw other familiar faces. Lia and Hilde were preparing some food and tea in the kitchen corner, which will later be hidden by a long curtain. Rosa was lightening candles, which were situated in the wall's niches. I sat down on a pillow in the right corner, trying to get an idea of the atmosphere. Two women, I had not met before, were sitting next to me on a stone bench. I observed the musicians unpacking their instruments. One of them was coming to the two women and was greeting them. I overheard their conversation: He had invited the two women. They had been in contact with Sufi music but had not been to a *sema* evening before.

Sandra was entering the room. I also knew her from the *zīkrs* before, and one evening we had already talked when going to the U-Bahn station. After she had taken off her coat, she sat down next to me, and we started chatting. "I prefer sitting here in the back," she told me. "I have been once directly in front of the musicians, but in some parts, it just gets too loud and intensive." "Mhm," I was thinking and nodding, not knowing what to expect. "Are you going to whirl?" I asked her. She told me that it took her a while to be able to whirl. The first time she felt really sick. So, she stopped for a while. But at one point, she thought that she had to try again. She then practiced at home or in the garden. Now, she was feeling safer and also had been whirling in public. "And you?" she asked me. "are you going to whirl!" "Me!? Whirling in front of everyone!? Will I fall? Will I hit the floor!? Will everyone stare at me!?" I was thinking. "Let's see," I answered, as I did not want to admit and share my anxiety. Indeed, I did not whirl at the first *sema* that I attended, as I was a little bit overwhelmed with what I saw and was still a little bit sick. But the second time I visited the *sema* at *Haus des Friedens*, I whirled.

More and more people entered the *zawiya*. Some of the women were wearing long skirts or dresses, others wide comfortable trousers. While sitting down, some of them loosely wrapped a scarf around their head. Some people wore clothes that I knew from photos of historical clothing in Turkey.

While we were talking, the musicians sat down at the right side of the wall. Some pillows lay on the ground, and a large colorful sheet lay in front of them. A candle was lit next to a vase of flowers. The musicians prepared themselves, sat on the pillows and put their music sheets on the ground in front of them. Now, the area was looking like a small stage. One older man, Galib Stanfel, stood up. He greeted everyone and introduced himself. "Is anyone new here?" he asked. The two women I have noticed before, another young woman and I were raising their

hands. He welcomed us and started with a little explanation. It seemed like a routine for him, as he was talking calmly and fast. He described that *sema* had been taking place in the *Haus des Friedens* for 11 years<sup>24</sup>, not always every month but still regular. They are held in the tradition of the *Sheikh* Dr. Rahmi Oruç Güvenç. Most times, the *semas* at the *Haus des Friedens* last for about four hours until midnight. Galib Stanfel also mentioned a few words about the *sheikh*: that he deceased a few years ago and that with coming together, they want to continue his legacy and keep him in remembrance. Also, Galib Stanfel said that it is good when people from different religions are together here in this room. Everybody can come with their own reasons and motivations. He wanted to support us to get in touch with God, Allāh, or, however, one might call them.

He also encouraged everyone to whirl, including the new ones. He shortly explained the steps and asked Rosa to demonstrate it. It started with kneeling and kissing the floor and touching it with the forehead. This is done, he explained, to show respect to Allāh and his creations. Afterward, one has to stand up and bow towards the musicians. Then, to be prepared for the whirling, the right foot tip is put on top of the left one. Then one should slowly start to spin. The right-hand shows up and the left-hand down. With every turn, Allāh is recited. The whirling ends by doing all the steps in the opposite order.

Galib Stanfel also explained what one would expect from the evening: The musicians and participants carry the course of the evening. There will be quieter parts and louder parts. Furthermore, he explained the idea of continuity. The *sema* should go on for the four hours, and he asked everyone to participate so that someone is always whirling. As well, he asked to consider that if people wanted to help each other, for example, by cushioning and holding them after whirling, it should be done among the same genders. He explained that great intimacy is created, and different emotions evoke. Thus, a person might feel more vulnerable and exposed after whirling. In an interview that took place in January, Galib explained to me that for Oruç Güvenç and in his tradition, it is accepted that women and men practice next to each other, while in many other Mevlevi groups women and men practice separated.

All this talking made me even more curious. I was wondering what to expect, and my thoughts wandered. When I heard “*Fatiha*,” my attention was focused back on the action. I listened to how Galib Stanfel quickly reciting: ‘*bismi ’llāhi ’r-raḥmāni ’r-raḥīmi*’ (‘*In the name of the merciful and gracious God*’). The words seemed familiar to me because it was also recited

---

<sup>24</sup> The form of the *sema* described here is similar to the ones given by Oruç Güvenç, as for example described by Langer (2011).



during the *zīkr* I visited. Galib Stanfel continued reciting other verses. When he started reciting ‘*lā ilāha illā allāh*’ (‘*There is no god other than Allāh*’), the people in the room repeated the phrase in a quiet voice and moved their body in accordance. The upper body was calmly rocking from right to left. I also already knew this practice from the *zīkrs* before. I closed my eyes concentrated on the Arabic sayings and listened to the different voices, male and female, coming from the different corners of the room. I slowly started with the movement of my upper body in the rhythm of the recitation. At one point, the musicians began to play. The oud formed a basic melody while the drum and the recitation forming the baseline of the song.<sup>25</sup> The other people were continuing with the recitation. The musicians played the whole evening. They switched instruments from time to time, sometimes only one person was playing, but the music did not stop over the entire evening<sup>26</sup>.

During the evening, I kind of lost track of time. “Should I record how long everything lasts?” I was asking myself. Since I did not have a wristwatch, I would have had to get my phone. I decided against it. Instead, I was diving in the feeling of time created by the changes in the music. Sometimes, the music was loud and fast, sometimes quiet and slower. Sometimes Galib Stanfel started with common Arabic verses, and the other people in the room joined the chanting. Sometimes, the musicians put their instruments on the side and Allāh was recited only. Sometimes the recitation was only accompanied by the drum.

A few songs were also sung with lyrics in different languages, mainly Turkish and Arabic. At one point, I hear, “Es gibt nur an *Allāh*. Und sonst kan *Allāh*” “Is this Austrian-Dialect?” I was wondering. The song continued with some yodeling. Some of the people around smiled and joined the singing.<sup>27</sup> Within the course of the evening, following the changing waves of music and recitations, the intensity and attentiveness in the room altered.

There was one part, when first Galib Stanfel, then the other musicians and one after another the whole room came into standing, while the two people in the middle, continued whirling. After everyone stood up, Galib Stanfel started to recite in a particular aspirated voice. All the others, now more loaded with energy joint the reciting and the rocking of the body. At one

---

<sup>25</sup> I do not know the different music styles, but in his article Langer (2011), as well as Sahin (2006), in her master thesis, describe that the songs played by Oruç Güvenç and Tümeta are not only typical Mevlevi songs. In style they refer to classical Turkish music or folk songs. Langer furthermore discusses how the different music styles helps to involve people with different music socialization and defines it as a decisive characteristic in the ritual’s dynamic.

<sup>26</sup> As an example for the music listen to following song series: Oruç Güvenç and Tümeta - La ilaha ill Allāh (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62ydSQJvycI>; (last accessed 2019/10/12).

<sup>27</sup> The song is also on Youtube: „Es gibt nur an Allāh. 3gp” (2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xmlt82-vZB0> (last accessed 2019/10/12).

point, one after another, sat down again. And then in the middle, I still saw the persons continue whirling. It was beautiful, impressive, and unfamiliar at the same time.

The whirling took place in the center of the room. In the middle of the room, there was quite a big space, as everyone was sitting along the walls. Almost directly after the music started, one man went into the middle and began to whirl. From then on, continuously, at least one person was whirling. I also noticed similar takeovers of intensity in whirling, identical to the waves of concentration evoked by the music. People, they whirled shorter or longer. They whirled faster or slower. They whirled only in one place, or by moving slowly through the room. Sometimes one, sometimes two, and once even up to five people whirled at the same time. The area would have been too limited for more people. It was great to see that everyone was whirling in their own way and their ability – everyone was concentrated on their inner self. “How long am I already sitting here?” I asked myself as I became a little bit tired. Then, Lia stood up. She was wearing a long black blouse and a long skirt; her hair was covered by a red scarf, loosely wrapped around her face. She was bowing and kneeling on the floor before she started whirling. Slowly her body began to move; her wide black skirt was following the rotation. Gracefully she unfolded her arms, and her hands were showing up to the white ceiling of the room and down to the wooden floor. I looked at her feet in the black whirling slippers, which were stepping up and down, up and down. Her body was rotating faster and faster; her black skirt was unfolding, drawing a circle around her body. She bent her head back to the side, as I had seen from pictures of whirling *dervishes*. Smoothly, she released from this classical position; moving her upper body down, while she was rotating calm and fast. The red scarf freed itself, moving downwards on her shoulders, while the ends were drawing, parallel to the skirt, a circle around her body. After this moment of looseness, she moved her body up again, pulled her arms around her body, and letting them free after a while. I cannot estimate how long she was whirling — being captured by the moment, being impressed by her skills, being overwhelmed by this beauty.

It must be after about three and a half hours that Galib Stanfel stood up and everyone followed; the musicians kept on playing – it was getting impulsive again and then the music slowly softened. Galib Stanfel loudly said, “*Huuu*,” and the music stopped. The whirling person in the middle also slowly came to an end and included himself in the circle of the people standing. Like the beginning of the evening, Galib Stanfel was retaking the lead. Everyone bowed and he started with the prayer. He talked very fast, being secure in the words he must have spoken for lots of times. “Ya, rabi” (‘my lord’), he said and formulating an intercession. “Ya, rabi.” he pleaded. He asked for humanity, he asked for love, he asked for appreciation. “*Fatiha*,” he was

saying, and everyone together prayed the *Fatiha* again. The musicians walked from their stage in the middle in the room and making a line. The first person from the back of the room went to the musicians; he gave them a hand and enqueued. One after another was following, saying thank you and goodbye. I looked at all the people, feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. There seemed to be all kinds of feelings; some looked at me with open, smiling eyes full of energy; in others' eyes, I saw the exhaustion. But, all of them reflected an inner peace. I reached the end of the line and jointed the other. It created a feeling of community to say thank you to everyone personally since everyone was looking into the eyes of each other and smiling at each other. Someone was removing the curtain, and most of the people gathered in the kitchen corner. They started chatting, drinking tea, and eating from the food prepared. I helped to put back the room to regular order by collecting the pillows and stapling them on the side. In then go to the kitchen corner, took some dates and chatted with some people.

This evening was the first *sema* that I visited life and, therefore, remember the most. Nevertheless, visiting other *semas* and whirling performances in different cities of Turkey was also exciting. I present these in the next chapters.

#### 5.1.2 “Mevlana *sema* gösteri” – *Sema* at Mevlana culture center - Konya

I already explained in the chapters 4.1.1.1 & 4.2 that there exist more institutionalized forms of *sema* than the one described in the previous part. The most popular *sema* in Turkey takes place every Saturday in Konya. In the following section, I shortly present the *sema* that I visited in April<sup>28</sup>. At this point, I had already read a lot about whirling *dervishes*, *sema*, and had seen several YouTube videos. Nevertheless, I was still curious, and it was impressive to see the performance live. In the following description, I decided to include the background knowledge that I gained.

The *sema* takes part in the extra built ‘*Mevlana Kültür Merkezi*’ (Mevlana culture center), which is run by Konya’s municipality. The center is extra built for the Mevlana cultural program, such as *semas*, seminars, or conferences. Already from outside, the building is quite impressive. My friends who joined for the performance and I entered the building by walking through a small green area, and we were passing the outside stage. It looked like a modern little amphitheater embedded in the ground. Inside there was a big entrance hall, one floor with booths where different souvenirs were sold, a mosque, and several other rooms. The *sema* took

---

<sup>28</sup> Similar performances are in whole length on Youtube. One example is: Whirling Dervish *sema* @ Melvana Rumi Festival Konya (HD full session) - December 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mb2XGnxsu8k> .(Last accessed 2019/11/23).

place in the inside stage, which like the outside stage, encompass seats for more than 2500 people each. The event we visited almost all the seats were occupied. Also, the inside hall is built like an amphitheater, with a round stage in the middle and rows of chairs around it. The course of the evening followed a defined script.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 1: *Sema* of whirling *dervishes* in the Mevlana cultural center (photo by the author: Konya. 2019).

The picture was taken in the first third of the performance. In the beginning, there was one man dressed in a usual suite giving a short introduction with background information in Turkish. During this time, the light in the hall was still on. The light was turned off when the musicians entered their small stage, which was at the side round. A ceremony master went to the microphone. The ceremony started with the “*natt-i Şerif*,” here Allāh, Prophet Muhammad, and the other Prophets are praised. The “*kudum*” followed. We only heard a small drum when, suddenly, the soft voice of the ney flute arose. The ney flute is a reed flute, which is a popular instrument in Sufi music. It gives the music its characteristic Sufi sound.

The ceremony master (*semazenbashi*) entered the round stage. He was wearing a long black coat, which covered his white ceremony dress. He wore the brown had, which differed a little bit from the one the other *dervishes* were wearing as it had a black base. He passed slowly and gracefully the round stage to the other side, over his arms lay a red fur, which he then put down to the ground. He bowed and walked back to the other side of the stage. Then the other *dervishes*

---

<sup>29</sup> Information can be found at: <http://www.mkm.gov.tr/sayfadetay.php?mID=84> (last accessed 2019/11/23).

entered the stage one after another, arranged by their height and age. I saw whirling *dervishes* of all different ages and body figures - from old aged, white-bearded to young and skinny children. Nevertheless, they were all male. The taller and older *dervishes* entered first, while at last, the smaller children were coming. These *dervishes* as well wear the brown hat and the black coat, which they hold together at their chest. The coat covered their white dresses.

After the *dervish* had entered the stage, he bowed in the direction of the ceremonial master and then moved to his place. White furs lay next to each other on the ground at the side of the stage, one for each of the *dervishes*. After all the *dervishes* had entered the stage, the ceremony master walked back to the other side of the stage. The *dervishes* walked now from their place at the side to the ceremony master and bowed.

We were sitting quite above in the seating rows of the audience and had a good overview of the whole performance. Nevertheless, we did not see the faces and expressions of the *dervishes* in detail. Being that separated from the action, I felt much less emotionally involved than in the *sema* at the *Haus des Friedens*.

After the second phase of greeting, another similar addressing took place. It should symbolize the welcome of the *dervishes*' soul by their hidden inner soul. Afterwards, the *dervishes* took off the black coat, and they revealed their wide robes: a white blouse-like shirt, a white flowing dress, and a big black waist belt. Over this, they wore a fitting long-sleeve jacket. The dropping of the coat symbolizes the revelation of truth.

Now the *dervishes* again faced the ceremony master, bowing and kissing his hand. Through this, they ask for permission to enter the *sema*. Passing the master, the *dervishes* finally started to whirl by slowly turning counter-clockwise and unfolding their hands up, which they had been crossing in front of the chest. The right hand reached up to heaven, while the left hand moved down to the ground. It symbolizes the communication between heaven and earth. The *dervishes* whirled for about ten minutes. During this time, the ceremony master wandered past them, as he was observing and making sure everything ran smoothly. At one point, he stepped with his foot, a sign for the *dervishes* to stop whirling, by slowly coming back to their standing position. They bowed and then slowly went back to their places.

Then another round of bowing and whirling began. In total, they performed four whirling sessions. They did not differ a lot, but light spots always illuminated the scene in different colors. Only for the last round, the ceremony master joined the whirling, turning slowly, in the middle still wearing his black coat. The session ended similar to the beginning, and the *dervishes* took on their black coat again. Then a prayer was recited, and the ceremony ended with

reciting the *Fatiha* and a collective bowing again. Then one *dervish* after another was leaving the stage.

It was quite fascinating and beautiful to see the *dervishes* whirling. Nevertheless, I did not feel quite involved as everything was taking place on a stage, and I was sitting in theatre-like chairs. Additionally, the performance seemed quite long. There was no great variety in the performance besides the change of the color. Also, the music stayed more monotonous than during the *sema* at *Haus des Friedens*.

Another *sema* that I visited in Turkey was in Bursa. One of my contacts in Ankara connected me with a German-Turkish woman. She lives in Germany but often flies to Turkey to visit the events of *sheikh* Mustafa Özbağ who leads the *tekke* (convent) in Bursa. She invited me to spend a weekend with her in the *tekke*. We met on a Saturday at noon in the center of Bursa and then went together to one place of the *tekke*, where the women's afternoon was taking place. I spent the whole afternoon there and witnessed the *sohbet* with the master and a *zıkr*. After eating altogether, we went to the main building for the evening *sema*, which I describe in the following section below.

### 5.1.3 „The turquoise whirling skirt“ - Karabas-i Veli culture center – Bursa

*Karabas-i Veli Kültür Merkezi* is a cultural center in an old restored Sufi *tekke* in Bursa. Bursa is one of the biggest cities in Turkey and is located in the western part. It was the first major capital city of the early Ottoman Empire. The center opened in 2005 and is in the hand of the municipality. In its brochure, the mayor describes the center; it says: “[W]e share the philosophy of Mevlana Celalettin Rumi and integrate his valuable sermons by means of the whirling *dervish* performance.” Next to the *sema*, reed flute performances, poetry nights, and training courses are taking place. The Foundation for Promotion and Protection of Mevlana Culture runs the plays. The responsible *sheikh* is Üstad Mustafa Özbağ. Female *dervishes* also train and perform in the center:

“There are teachers, accountants, nurses, financial experts and housewives among them although many of them are students in high school and university. Even if their lives are different, they meet in Karabs-I Veli Culture Center with a common motivation. Today's women respond Mevlana Celeleddin Rumi's call “Come, whoever you are, come!” through whirling.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Quote from the brochure of Karabas-i Veli Kültür Merkezi: Kültür Mirasları Serisi – Cultural heritage site (n.A.).

Moreover, the main program in the center is taking place on Sundays. I am not good at estimating, but I guess about 50 women, kids, teenagers, women, and older women, were at the place where we spent the afternoon. During the afternoon, there was a *sohbet* (talk) with the *sheikh*, a *zikir*, and a joint meal (*sofra*). I also had time to talk to the women at the *tekke*. Sevim Nas introduced me to two young women, who were teaching the whirling. They told me that not all women who are coming to the *tekke* also whirl. At some point, the women dream that they should start whirling. Also, the color of their whirling dress, which is in this *tekke* in different colors, appears to them during a dream. The women do not regularly perform in public, but another woman told me about a great event in October, where they had a huge performing event. Here, they whirled in a big theater hall, in front of other women, who came to see this performance.

In the evening we went to the *tekke*, where people were already waiting outside. The *tekke* consists of several small rooms, which are used as offices, to welcome guests, and for the *der-vishes*. As well, there is the *sema* hall. It is a magnificent hall, built by dark wood. It consists of two floors. Downstairs in the middle is a free space, covered by a red carpet. Around it slightly elevated and separated by a small wooden balustrade is a space to sit down. During the *sema*, the men were sitting there on the floor, tightly next to each other as it was really crowded. The musicians were seated on one side of the room. Upstairs along three sides of the hall was a balcony, which was reached through a stair from the main building. Here, the women and I were sitting on the floor, also crammed together. Sevim and I came already early so we would catch a place in the first row. I watched the whole *sema* looking through the balustrade. The following picture shows my perspective:



Figure 2 Photo of the sema at Karabas i-Veli Sema (photo by the author: Bursa. 2019)

Besides myself, two other tourists were visiting. Other visitors come mainly from Bursa and its surrounding cities, but some of the followers even travel about two hours from Istanbul, my contact explained.

The evening started again with a *sohbet*. Here, the *sheikh* was giving answers to questions the men posed. The *sheikh* was wearing more formal clothes than in the afternoon. He wore a long black coat over a white shirt. He had a big red hat, in the same shape of the *semazen*'s (whirling *dervishes*) hats, but around his, a long scarf was folded, which ends were falling over his shoulder like a long ponytail. The *sema* started with the *sheikh* entering the room again from the side opposite to the *mihrab* (prayer niche). Next to the *semazen*, the ceremony master was standing. He was wearing a long black coat over a white shirt and a brown hat with a light green scarf wrapped around. The *sheikh* was saying a short prayer, turned around to the first *semazen* who was standing behind him. They bowed to each other, and then the *sheikh* crossed the room. In front of the *mihrab*, a red fur was lying; the *sheikh* kneeled and bowed down. Then he stood up and turned again in direction to the *semazen*.

The music started as the ney flute created the soft sounds. One *semazen* after another was entering the room; the arms crossed over their chest. The youngest *semazen*, in the age of a teenager, started to whirl first. One after another began to whirl, as I already have seen it before by unfolding their arms. The ceremony leader was standing at the side, rocking the head from one side to the other, in time with the music beat. The evening I visited one young boy in a light



turquoise dress was whirling most of the time in the middle of the room, while the other *semazen* were whirling in white robes in a circle around him. At one point also other *dervishes* were joining the circle. He was wearing a black coat over his dress. The music had different intensity as sometimes more or fewer musicians were playing at the same time. The whirling was terminated by the ceremony master, as he was saying loud “*huu.*” The music stopped, and the whirlers slowly came to stand. Then the *semazen* were sitting down, and the *sheikhs* recited another prayer. I did not check the time, but I estimate that the whole performance was lasting twenty to thirty minutes<sup>31</sup>. This performance again was, on the one hand, different from the ones I had seen before, as it was in a different context. Nevertheless, I identified several similarities, such as the music or the movements of the *semazen*. In the next part, I describe a whirling performance that I visited, which differed greater from the one described before.

#### 5.1.4 “Performing solo” - Khatoon Fallah’s dance performance - Ankara

In the following chapter, I shortly present the dance performance “*kadın*” (Turkish for woman) of Khatoon Fallah that I visited in May in Turkey. Khatoon Fallah calls herself a modern sema dancer, choreographer, and theatre artist. She was born and grew up in Iran and moved to Ankara recently. She is a trained computer engineer, but about 10 years ago she became a professional artist. She does not only perform but also gives classes in classical Persian dance and whirling. I became acquainted with her at a modern contemporary dance festival at ODTÜ university, where I did my Erasmus exchange semester. Next to the performance at the university’s festival, I visited another performance at a small theater place called ‘*sahne 367*’ in Ankara. In the following chapter, I describe this performance, which was quite long; thus, I only give insight into some scenes.

About thirty people attended the performance. It was mostly young people in their twenties and thirties. They seemed to be belonging to the artist’s scene, judged by their appearance.

When the light eliminated the stage, some soft Iranian music started to play. Khatoon Fallah was lying on the ground, wrapped in a white tight elastic cloth. The cloth was closed; thus, she could move insight without the tissue falling. She was moving inside, and she was opening her mouth as she was screaming. At the end of this first sequence, she freed herself from the cloth, and suddenly, the light went off. Now, I only heard some slow guitar melody. A guitar player was sitting in the first row of the audience and playing live. The light went on again, and while continuously playing, the musician went slowly on the stage and sat down on a chair in the

---

<sup>31</sup> Some of the sema of the tekke are also posted on You-Tube as for example: Kadir Gecesi Karabaş-i Veli Tekkesi sema - 10.06.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dM6RMVAWBE> (last accessed 2019/12/01).

middle of the stage. Khatoon Fallah was still lying on the stage but then rose up slowly. She was dancing by running from one wall to the other and moving around the guitarist. He stood up from the chair and slowly walked down the stage, at the end of this sequence. The light went dark.

In another scene, the music came from the speaker again. This music was more dynamic, consisting of rhythmic music instruments and singing. Khatoon Fallah danced with a long scarf. She formed it in her hands and, at one point, moved it around her neck. Now she started turning around herself, with the long ends of the scarf flying to both sides. They looked like two strings, which were holding and moving her. She slowly started to whirl and kept on turning, she unfolded the scarf and covered her body, and later on her face it. This all happened while she is turning, turning, turning. She was whirling freely, turning with her upper body down, turning with her arms stretched out, and the scarf drawing circles around her body; she was whirling with her head down and her long her flying.

In another scene, Khatoon Fallah entered the stage with a white dress over which she wore a long black cardigan; this costume reminded me of the *semazen*'s dress. She was first holding a light in her hand and moved around the stage as she was looking for something. She was accompanied again by the guitarist and a trumpet player. Also, in this scene, she whirled again, as I captured in the following picture:



Figure 3 Dance performance “Kadin” by Khatoon Fallah. (photo by the author: Istanbul. 2019)

### 5.1.5 Summary – Different Forms of Whirling

The aim of this chapter was to give insight into my research fields and to show how the different forms of whirling are practiced. Through small parts of ethnographies, in which I share my individual experiences of the specific social realities that I witnessed, I identified similarities and differences between these performances.

It was not always easy to research in these quite different research sites as I had to adapt to the different contexts and conventions. During the *sema* at *Haus des Friedens*, everything was still entirely new for me. It was a quite intimate atmosphere, so it was different from the *sema* in Konya, where I was only part of the huge audience. During the *sema* at Bursa, I also felt differently connected to the performance. First, it was a smaller place, and although I was sitting on the balcony, I could get a close impression of the whirling performance. Second, I had already spent some time with the persons at the place. The visit of the dance performance was then totally different again. It felt more entertaining than the other, although I was part of the audience and not actively involved.

Additionally, I identified the similarities between the three *semas* that I visited. For example, they all included prayers, and the whirling was started and ended with the same movements. Also, the music was similar, although the *sema* in *Haus des Friedens* varied more than in the other two. Khatoon Fallah included Sufi music in her performance, but it was not live performed; also other music was played. Having presented the research fields in this chapter, in the following chapter, I want to combine the data collected during my research process with the theoretical discussion presented in chapter 3.1.

## 5.2 Transnational Character of Whirling

The first aim of this chapter is to identify whirling as a transnational phenomenon, as it an important step in understanding the dynamics of whirling and a prerequisite for analyzing it as a transfer of rituals. Langer et al. state, “[t]he group carrying the tradition to which the rite or ritual concerned belongs” is an “empirically observable, describable and scientifically interpretable contextual aspect[s]” of a transfer of rituals (Langer et al. 2006:2). Thus, I focus on the groups and persons who practice the rituals. Furthermore, according to Langer et al., the transgression of national borders are often described phenomena in transfers of rituals. Not only persons but also scripts, books, or the internet, transgress borders and serve as transmitters.

Next to this, my second aim is to answer my research questions, which I developed in reference to my transnational and multi-sited research. I first discuss how the whirling ritual is formed in Turkey by looking at global and national processes (Chapter 5.2.1). Through this, I

answer how the whirling ritual is established in Turkey. Additionally, I give some explanations to the question of how the whirling practice is transferred from one context to another. Finally, I analyze if Tümata can be defined as a transnational group and if they are a potential dynamic element in the transfer of rituals (Chapter 5.2.2).

### 5.2.1 “The local should be globalized”<sup>32</sup> – Transnational in Turkey

In the previous chapters, 5.1.2 & 5.1.3, I already presented some of the ways of whirling that I witnessed in Turkey. Additionally, I demonstrated how different political and historical forces have come into play in identifying and presenting a Turkish form of Sufism (Chapters 4.1.1.1 & 4.2). The following analysis discusses some Turkish actions, which rely on these forces.

By just walking around in Turkish touristic regions or just regular cities, I came across different depictions and representations of Sufi whirling. Also, in personal conversations with Turkish people, I noticed different perceptions. In this chapter, I discuss some of these phenomena and identify what implications they have for a transnational definition of the whirling practice.

In reaction to the laical regulations of the Turkish government, different forms of *sema* practices have developed. I shortly present these national forms of *sema* and analyze how they influence the global character of the whirling.

Some forms of *sema* are promoted and regulated by the Turkish government; others are organized by individuals or non-governmental organizations. After the governmental prohibition under Atatürk, some Sufi *tekkes* re-opened from the 1980s onwards as cultural centers. They present whirling ceremonies publicly.

Other ceremonies take place in private settings of lodges, shrines, or residences. Nevertheless, whirling shows are also taking place in museums, castles, train stations, restaurants, or venues intentionally built for them, as the Sufi cultural center in Konya. The events embrace parts of *sema*, already practiced in the same way from the early Mevlevis, even though they are specially created for tourists. Vicente argues that *sema* has always been a communal experience and that since the formation of Sufi *tekkes* in the 11<sup>th</sup>-century, *sema* was open to visitors (Vicente 2019:44). After the *sema*, people gather and have a joint meal, which is called *sofra*. Vicente argues that the tradition of *sofra* is maintained through the whirling events which take place at restaurants. (Vicente 2019:45).

---

<sup>32</sup> Interview (Ziya Azazi:2019/08/05).

The appearance of the ‘traditional’ *sema* differs depending on the contexts, for example, cities. The following photo was taken in Istanbul, exemplifying a tourist event. It takes place at an old train station, which has no direct connection to a Mevlevi order. In addition, the price of the event is that high, that average Turkish citizens could not afford it.

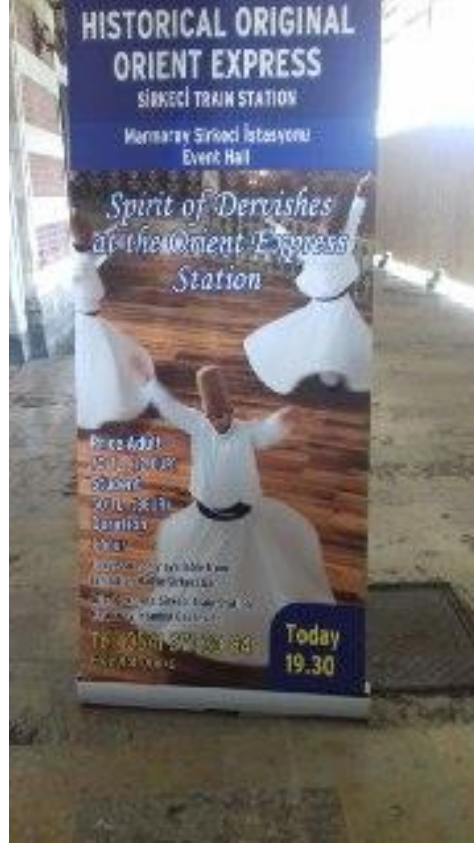


Figure 4: Advertisement for a *sema* at the Sirkeci Train Station. (photo by the author: Istanbul. 2019).

Konya, the origin of Mevlevism, is a popular destination for those primarily interested in Sufism and Rumi. Many of those people who practice Sufism that I spoke to have already visited the city. I visited Konya in April 2019 and went to the big *sema*, taking place every Saturday (s. chapt. 5.1.2). The municipality employs the people who perform at the center. In contrast to similar events in Istanbul, the one in Konya is free.

Whirling *dervishes* are part of the tourism industry, more specifically the “sacred tourism market” (Vicente 2019), which targets Muslims and people interested in Sufism. Guided tours and pilgrimages are offered that include visiting places of importance, such as tombs. For example, through the *Haus des Friedens* or Tümata, people can book such tours. They offer them in German or English and thus are mainly directed to people from Western European countries. Nevertheless, also people from other countries, especially from Muslim countries, visit these places.

Moreover, *sema* shows are also part of tourist attractions for people not directly interested in Sufism. The Turkish government and tourism industry invest in global advertisements on television or on the internet, in which *dervishes* are shown as a unique characteristic of Turkey. It shows the specific dynamics of cultural performances discussed in chapter 3.3.3. Whirling is constructed and presented as a national heritage but promoted beyond national borders. This promotion can be regarded as part of a global flow, in which whirling is intertwined with tourism. A process of cultural performance and national heritage making, as for example, described by Brosius et al., can be identified (Brosius and Polit 2011). Next to a process of nationalization, the global market is targeted. This process was institutionalized in 2008 when *sema* was proclaimed an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. This leads to a dilemma of authenticity: On the one hand, the ‘traditional’ should be preserved, but simultaneously new forms are created to correspond with tourists’ interests. Only the so-called ‘traditional’ forms congruent with heritage-making and selling strategies are depicted and represented by the government. This is why hybrid forms such as the one in the train station or hotel lobbies come into existence. Even though their setting is not in accordance with the former Mevlevi places, they are very attractive for tourists. In contrast, more artistic forms of whirling are not included in the advertisement. (Pietrobruno 2015) This parallel process of nationalization and globalization described in this part is not a recent trend. The fascination of Europeans with *dervishes* and their use as an advertising strategy already existed during the Ottoman times.

European travelers during the Ottoman Empire have already made contact with whirling *dervishes*. Authors like Molière or Goethe mention them in their travel diaries. It was not only the fascination with the whirling *dervishes*, but with the mystical Islam in general, which was very popular in Europe during that time. This contributed to the ambivalent depiction of Sufism. Zarcone’s analysis of *dervish* depictions shows that already during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, first pictures of whirling *dervishes* were published in travel magazines. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, *dervishes* fascinated Western artists who traveled to Constantinople. (Zarcone 2013) Lots of them were influenced by the idea of the *dervish* as an embodiment of the ‘mystical’ and ‘exotic’ and by the presentation of the Muslim civilizations in Orientalist terms. On the other hand, Sufi poets were highly regarded and seemed like proof of civilization. Additionally, similarities were constructed by describing Sufism in mystical terms, which raised its appreciation. (Sharify-Funk, Dickson, and Xavier 2017:101)

The phenomena described previously represent the transnational dynamics of Sufism. Through these movements, whirling performance as *sema* was introduced to Western European countries. Contemporary dancers brought the whirling as a dance practice to Western European

countries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I further discuss in chapter 5.4, the religious component was less relevant. Thus, this can be defined as another form of transnational movement.

In the following part, I want to present how Emre Başaran, who is part of the group Tümatat discusses these elements of nationalization. Through this, I also want to give an inside perspective and not only describe the aspects of transnational movement from the outside. In the interview, Emre Başaran states that the tradition of Mevlana is very popularized, first concerning tourism and second concerning the local population. He describes that there exist whirling lessons without a focus on spiritual backgrounds. When asked about the role of the government, he told me that a real tradition does not need recognition. According to him, another problem is that even in the case of Sufism, some people prefer centralized opinions and decisions. The performances organized by the government and performed by employed musicians are not the same as those conveyed by Oruç Güvenç.

Emre Başaran's viewpoints already show, the difference between the governmental forms of *sema* and the way practiced by Tümatat. In chapter 5.3, these aspects are analyzed further. I discussed in general terms that nationalization, historical constructions, and global marketing form the construction of the whirling practice in Turkey. In the next chapter, I apply a more specific perspective by analyzing the transnational character of the group Tümatat.

### 5.2.2 “There were 86 different nations” - Tümatat – a transnational group

I realized that Tümatat moves in a transnational space when I became acquainted with members from Tümatat and when I talked to people who refer to them. I already introduced the group in detail in chapter 4.4; therefore, I only mention aspects important for my argumentation.

By just considering the name Tümatat (Group for the Research and Promotion of Turkish Music), we can see that it does not deny its national origins and its aim to preserve traditions. Nevertheless, the group was giving concerts globally. Especially in Western European countries such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland, or Belgium, the group became more institutionalized, as regional groups were founded. People from all around the world also visited the *sema* taking part in Gökcedere. Azize Güvenç told me that during the *sema*, which lasted 114 days and nights, in total, people from 86 different nations were present.

Tümatat gave concerts, not only on stages but also in hospitals and hospices. The idea was that by reviving ancient knowledge about music, such as special music scales, the healing process of the person could be influenced and work alongside today's medical and therapeutic treatment. Thus, Tümatat firstly dissolves borders of medical practices by combining different

medical systems. Secondly, it dissolves boundaries of time, by reviving old music and integrating it into today's music world. Thirdly, it crosses the borders of nations, as they are active in different countries.

Notably, the latter process takes place in different directions. On the one hand, through the introduction of Central Asian music to Europe. On the other hand, as I described in chapter 5.1.1, they also integrate German into Sufi music<sup>33</sup>. In addition, Langer analyzes Tümata in reference to the transfer of rituals and draws a similar conclusion. He examines one *sema* night he visited in Germany in detail. He concludes that the rituals performed by Oruç Güvenç and Tümata are already a result of several transfer processes in which ritual elements from different musical contexts such as Central Asian, classical Sufi music and dance, and Western folk music have been incorporated (Langer 2011:11). These different styles are combined by Oruç Güvenç's approach of reviving old Turk music and practices, by playing old songs, while being open to new interpretations. Tümata has also established a vast repertoire of different styles of songs, influenced by the musicians coming from different musical and regional contexts. This way, the ritual can adapt to different audiences in Turkish and Western contexts. Thus, Langer defines it as a "master example of extreme ritual dynamics" (Langer 2011:17).

Concluding, the music helps to transcend borders, making them become permeable and transcends narrow perceptions of nationality.

Another transnational aspect is the people following the teachings of Oruç Güvenç and being involved in Tümata. Although Oruç Güvenç used to travel a lot to support the groups in different countries, died, his legacy is held up in different countries. Azize Güvenç, Oruç Güvenç's wife, described:

"Also es wird hier in unterschiedlichen Orten noch weitergeführt. Also der Galib macht es jetzt ja in Wien weiter. Und hier in der Türkei Oruç Töchter machen das noch weiter. Also die eine lebt jetzt in Alicver, die haben da ein Seminarzentrum da wird das weitergeführt. es wird auch im kleineren Rahmen weitergeführt. Emre Başaran zum Beispiel. Mit Emre Başaran haben wir auch ein 3 Tage *sema* schon organisiert. Also jeder versucht jetzt es weiter zu tragen. Und das was gesät ist, jetzt zu begießen, damit es wachsen kann." (Azize Güvenç: 2019/05/20)

The simultaneous practice of a ritual in different places, described by Azize Güvenç, is not something unique since it is caused through processes of migration. The migrating group might change geographically and adapt to different social or cultural contexts, but they often uphold

---

<sup>33</sup> One of these songs, which I heard during the *sema* is also on YouTube: "Aşk Aşk Aşk" und "Es gibt nua a'n Allah" live am 25. 8. 2018. (2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dcsC1cwbUs>. (last accessed 2020/02/05).



their religious practices (Langer et al. 2006:5). Thus, the ritual is similarly practiced in both countries. Langer defines this transfer as synchronic (Langer et al. 2006:5f.). In the case of Tümata, a diaspora can not be identified. On the one hand, there exists no stable group in Turkey, and on the other hand, as in the case of Austria, it is mostly formed by Austrian. Still, the specific appearance of *sema*, shaped by Oruç Güvenç, takes place in different countries. For example, Andrea Azize travels between Turkey and European countries, such as Italy or Germany, and maintain transnational communication. She told me about a project she planned in Germany, where they will visit different hospitals to perform the music. Contact can also be created via the internet as Tümata has an own webpage and Facebook. A first glance in the practices can also be reached through different YouTube videos.

As already presented above, Langer also did a short analysis of the group Tümata. Langer has been mainly researching transnational Alevi communities originating from Turkey. In that context, he has been especially studying the re-established ritual forms, applying it to the theory of transfer of rituals. The material used for the article “Transfer processes within Sufi Rituals” is a “by-product” (Langer 2011:15) of this research project. Langer classifies Tümata as part of 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.” (Langer 2011:17)

Tümata is incorporating whirling and musical therapy, and he describes their activities as a “‘hybrid’ kind of complex ritual,” referring to the concept of hybridity. He also states that this new form of ritual is especially attractive for the “modernized citizens of Turkey” and the “Western Europeans” (Langer 2011:17).

Concluding, Tümata can be described as a transnational group, as its members cross the national borders, rituals are performed synchronically, and characteristics of different nations are incorporated in the music. Nevertheless, also heritage-making processes can be examined as Tümata tries to keep on old Turkish music traditions.

#### 5.2.2.1 “It's not West/East anymore.” - Geographical Relations

I presented in the previous chapter that Tümata is a transnational group. Also, my further research field can be defined transnationally. Most of my interview partners move around globally, by, for example, taking whirling workshops in other European countries, visiting Konya for the Rumi's birthday, or doing spiritual tours in countries of Sufi importance. Nonetheless, I situate them in one of the two countries, Austria and Turkey, where I did my field research. Following graphic shows in which countries I situate my interviewpartners:

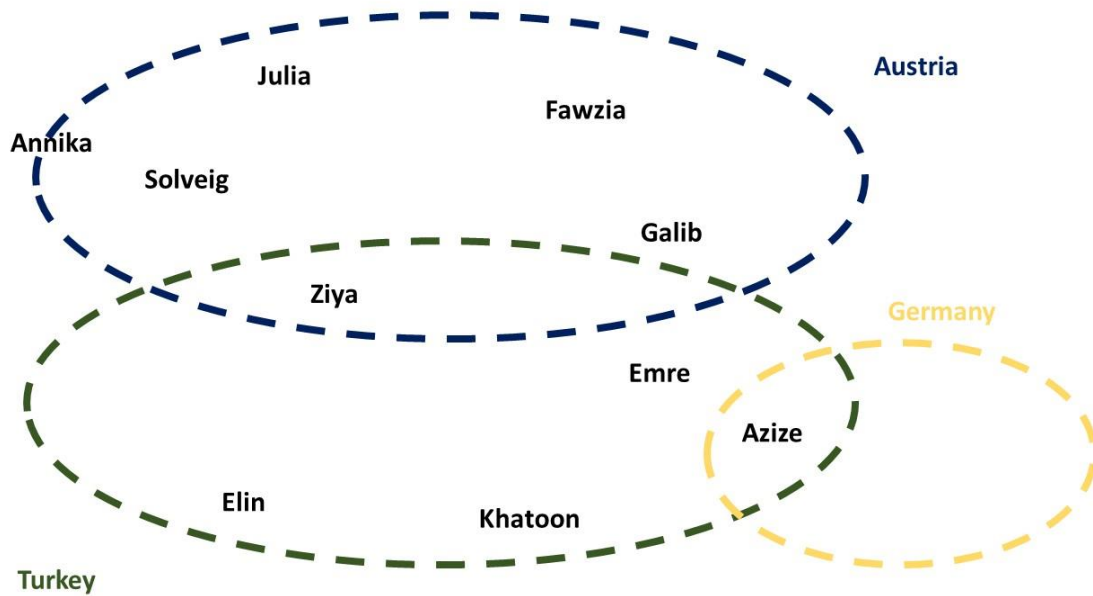


Figure 5 Geographically location of my interview partner

The upper, blue circle encompasses the people living in Vienna, except for Annika Skattum. She lives in France but is strongly connected to the *Haus des Friedens*, that is why I put her on the circle. The lower green circle describes the people living in Turkey. In the yellow circle, representing Germany, I put Azize Güvenç, as she was born in Germany, but moved to Turkey when she married Oruç Güvenç. I arranged the performance dancer Ziya Azazi in the middle of the two circles, as he was born in Turkey but had been living in Austria for about 15 years. This graphic only shows part of the migration movements, the dancer Khattoon Fallah moved to Turkey, and Fawzia al-Rawi moved to Austria, later in their life. I left these movements out because they are less important for my research. With the dotted lines of the circle, I want to symbolize that some of the informants move more or less frequently between the countries. There exist a lot of national and transnational ties and relationships between persons and localities.

For instance, Solveig Fiedler, a member of the *Haus des Friedens*, described the connections between those who follow the teaching of Fawzia Al-Rawi:

„Ja und mir gehören alle zusammen. In prinzip gibt es eine Gruppe in Vorarlberg, in Genf und ich glaub in Südfrankreich auch, [...] und Wien. Dort ist kein eigenes Haus, aber eben Frauen, die. In prinzip kennen wir uns auch alle. Und die, die dort wohnen, die organisieren sich dann den Dhikr bei sich. Und Fawzia reist ja sehr viel und ist auch immer wieder dort und dort und dort.“ (Solveig Fiedler: 2018/12/13)

Solveig presents the transnational connections of the *Haus des Friedens*. All women are connected through their interest in Sufism and a special relation to Fawzia Al-Rawi. Often, they know each other through spiritual workshops, or travels they did together.

Ziya Azazi focuses less on individual connections. He sees that there is a great movement of people, which take their ideas and practices with them, as he did. Through this, the boundaries between East and West got more permeable, and relations globalized. He stated:

„Es geht nicht mehr um. Weißt du es gab eine Zeit wo es Westen und Osten. Es ist nicht mehr Westen Osten. Es ist jetzt global, weißt du. Alle sind überall.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Similar to Ziya Azazi's perspective, I do not want to reconstruct the East and West images in my empirical analysis. I have shown in this chapter that people of my research field move flexible in a transnational space, often independent of geographical, cultural, religious, and social differences that exist. Hence, I do not want to reproduce dualistic viewpoints, but identify relations and movements following all directions.

### 5.2.3 Summary – Transnational character of whirling

This chapter aimed to identify transnational encounters and elements that occur in the context of whirling practices. Bringing together experiences of my stay in Turkey with historical and political discussions, I identified the transnational character of whirling. Moreover, from the presented analysis, I confirmed my assumption of Tümata as being a transnational group.

In more detail, the discussion in this chapter indicated that the appearance of whirling performances in Turkey, national and transnational dynamics and global flows go hand in hand to form a specific form of *sema*. Historical conditions, political forces, and tourist promotions have led to the coming into existence of these different forms of *sema*. These forms show a strong congruence with the phenomenon described by the theoretical concept of cultural performances. On the one hand, the Turkish government attempts to establish it as a national heritage in order to strengthen the national identity. On the other hand, the government, as well as other players in the global market, use it as an advertisement strategy to boost tourism in Turkey. For many centuries, people from all over the world have been fascinated by its beautiful and 'exotic' character. Thus, it is effective to promote Turkey across national borders.

The analysis of this chapter also further develops the idea of a transnational character of whirling by describing the group of Tümata and its master Oruç Güvenç as transnational actors. These results reflect the idea of a transnational religious movement with a network of people across the globe, which was also described by Daswani et al. (Daswani, Girish 2013:43). I argue that these forces are not only transnational but can also be described in global terms. When

focusing on Turkey, especially the effects of nationalization came into focus. By researching Tümata in Austria and Turkey, I was focusing on the micro-level with personal stories, and relations and the nation itself played a smaller role.

In this chapter, I also identified whirling practices in cities of Turkey and Vienna as transnational. The practice of whirling has changed through its performance in different contexts. The dynamic elements which lead to this transnational character are identified in the next chapter.

### 5.3 Whirling Practice as a Transfer of Rituals

This chapter has the purpose of analyzing the different appearances of whirling performances that I described in chapter 5.1 by applying the theory of transfer of rituals. I identify which elements are either inherently dynamic or introduce a dynamic that leads to the transfer of a ritual. Through this, I hope to answer my research questions such as “How is the whirling practice transferred from one context to the other? What changes are taking part? What are the dynamic parts of the transfer?” The analysis is supported by the voices of my interview partners.

Initially, I recall Neubert’s definition: He states that the transfer of rituals had taken part when actors permanently transferred a ritual from one social environment to another social environment<sup>34</sup> (Neubert 2009). Neubert’s definition embraces concrete elements, which I use to structure my analysis. Each of the paragraphs elaborates on one aspect. In the discussion, I included codes gained from my data analysis, which are related to the elements.

#### 5.3.1 “*Sema* is a spiRITUAL act” – Identifying whirling

The first element in Neubert’s definition is ‘ritual.’ He defines rituals as complex of action, that can be analyzed by its external criteria. He argues that rituals must actually be performed. Therefore, this chapter explores how whirling constitutes the *sema* ritual, as well as which performative aspects define the whirling.

Different levels of argumentation can be included to define the relations between whirling and *sema*. Through an argumentation on the linguistic level, it can be noted that the word *sema* is used by the practitioners themselves to define different forms of performances. In Mevlevi *tarikas*, the term is, on the one hand, applied for sole musical performances and, on the other hand, for the specific whirling ceremonies. Other Sufi *tarikas* use the term *sema* for their religious ceremonies. They often consist of music and body movements and dance, which are not

---

<sup>34</sup> The original version of the definition is: „Von Ritualtransfer spreche ich, wenn Akteure (2) ein Ritual (1) von einem sozialen Umfeld (3) in ein anderes soziales Umfeld (4) dauerhaft (5) übertragen(6).”.

the same as in Mevlevi *semas*. Thus, if the term *sema* is used for describing religious rituals, it does not directly implicate that whirling is integrated. In addition, in Turkish and in Persian, the word *sema* describes the act of whirling itself, as well as ritual performance. Neither is a clear identification of the connotations of the word *sema* nor whirling possible.

Moreover, when analyzing how whirling is embedded in the performances, also differences in the design and in the way of participation can be identified. For example, I described in chapters 5.1.2 & 5.1.3 that in Konya and Bursa, the whirling is embedded in the particular performance of the *tekke*. It was only performed by trained *semazen*, wearing their costumes. Also, the *semazen* were whirling together in a specific order. The performance in Konya, for instance, follows a script defined centuries ago. The whirling itself was thus not part of variations, only the setting changed. In contrast, during the *sema* in the *Haus des Friedens*, everyone was invited to whirl; one does not have to be an expert. I described in chapter 5.1.1 that the ritual, as well as the whirling, consists of a defined beginning and end. The time in between gives space for improvisations; for individual forms of playing music and body movements. Tümata legitimizes this form of *sema*, by referring to the original way of how Rumi has practiced *sema*, and by relating it to the long tradition of whirling practice going back to earlier Shamanistic rites.

In the next section, I include the perspective of my interview partners, to analyze how they identify the whirling as part of the *sema* ritual.

Khatoon Fallah, the dancer of the performance described in chapter 5.1.4, had classical training of whirling. She told me that she practiced both forms of whirling, as *sema* and as dance. First, a Sufi master trained her in whirling. She did not want to adhere to the strict bodily postures the master taught. “I love to move my hands,” she explained. It made her argue with her master because he defined whirling as a religious activity. Including new movements in the dance repertoire would destroy the spiritual character. Khatoon Fallah instead sees the beauty of the movements and whirling as one form of expression. For her whirling is part of a greater variety of bodily movements; it does not only need to be performed in a ritual way.

Andrea Azize Güvenç, a member of Tümata, has similar to Khatoon Fallah, defined it as an individual choice, how whirling is performed. She stated:

„Also natürlich kann ich den *Sema* aus diesem Ritual herausnehmen und ihn nur als Tanz machen. Ich kann nicht in jemanden hineinschauen und sagen, der macht das jetzt als Showprogramm, oder der macht das, weil er innerlich so beseelt davon ist. Dass er das jetzt eben machen muss und dass das seine Aufgabe ist, dass kann ich nicht beurteilen.“ (Azize Güvenç: 2019/05/20)

In the further course of the conversation, she explained that whirling is practiced in *semas* because next to the music, it can introduce trance. Trance is one way of being spiritual, as it helps one to get closer to God.

Fawzia Al-Rawi argues in a comparable way than Azize Güvenç. She states that there are different ways of expressing spirituality. How the whirling is performed depends on the people and their background. In this context, she explained that “Praktiken und Rituale sind ja da, sozusagen das Werkzeug, das heißt, das ist der Eimer, den man in den Brunnen wirft um das Wasser zu schöpfen.” (Fawzia al-Rawi: 2019/02/21)

Having discussed the different connotations of *sema*, as well as of whirling it shows that, no consistent definition of *sema*, nor whirling can be giving. Using the term, *sema*, in its broad definition, it is not clear if whirling is included. But, the Mevlevi whirling *sema*, only gets its respective appearance through the inclusion of whirling and music. Whirling does not only take place in the context of Mevlevi *sema*. Whirling itself can be defined as a practice of dance, prayer, or a healing process. Thus, it is performed in different settings, and whirling is part of cultural performances, spiritual performances, religious rituals, or dance performances.

I described on a theoretical level in chapter 3.3.2 that it is often individual processes such as intentions or aesthetics, which distinguishes one performance's form from another. Additionally, I have analyzed how my interview partners defined whirling in this chapter, and how different social and historical influences shaped the appearance of whirling performances in previous chapters. Combining this, I argue, that the forms of whirling performances can be defined through individual frames, as well as historical and cultural definitions. Here, the whirling practice is the decisive factor, which gives each of these performances and rituals its specific appearance. Therefore, whirling can be defined as the constituting factor of the performances.

Transferring this thesis onto the methodological level, this means individual framings should stay in the center of research and analysis, instead of defined concepts and appearances. In response to this argument, and having in mind the transformation of the religious practice of Yoga into a ‘postural Yoga’ practice, I decided to include the different forms of whirling performances into my analysis of a transfer of rituals, although they might not be defined as a ritual on the first hand. Hence, after first introducing my research partners and how they are interrelated to each other, I present their definition of whirling.

### 5.3.2 “Come, come whoever you are” – Whirling practitioners

Neubert defines actors as active players in the process of the transfer of rituals. He describes three ideal types. The first type is a missionary, which exports the ritual to a different social

environment. In the second type, rituals are imported by actors, who take it to their social environment. Thirdly, a transfer of rituals takes place through migration or people in the diaspora. The people are taking the ritual with them into the new social environment. (Neubert 2009:6f.)

Grimes states that actors are essential for a ritual, as they influence it, for example, with their specific relations to each other, their beliefs or intentions. Ritual actors can be perceived as a collective or as individual persons, where the particular role of the actor is relevant. (Grimes 2014:238) In my research, I focus on individual persons. I understand them as the expert of their specific context. All of my interview partners are somehow connected, as each of them visited a *sema* of the group of Tümata. In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate how my interview partners define whirling. In the last part, I analyze what role the actors have in the transfer of the whirling practice. First, I exemplify this by categorizing key persons into the ideal types defined by Neubert. Second, I illustrate their interrelations.

### 5.3.2.1 „Feeling your Axis“ - Whirling as Prayer, Dance or Spiritual Practice

Whirling does not consist of a big repertoire of movements. Still, it is an act implying different meanings and feelings. This chapter highlights the different connotations my interview partner attributes to the whirling.

**Fawzia Al-Rawi** is the spiritual leader of the *Haus des Friedens*. She was born in Baghdad as the daughter of an Iraqi father and an Austrian mother and grew up in Iraq and Lebanon. She studied Arabic and Islamic Studies and Anthropology in Vienna and Cairo and has a Ph.D. in Oriental Studies. After having completed her studies in Austria, she went to Jerusalem, where she received twelve years of teaching from a Sufi-master. She married the *Sheikh*'s son and had three children. Furthermore, she told me that after the living conditions in Jerusalem became more difficult; she decided to move to Vienna. This was possible due to her Austrian passport. She then started to teach what she had learned in Jerusalem. In a YouTube video, she described her understanding of whirling in the following terms:

„Alles im Universum dreht sich. Vom Atom bis zu den großen Planeten.  
Und wenn man beginnt zu drehen, so bettet man sich in die natürliche Bewegung des Lebens ein. [...] Deswegen ist das Drehen eine Art von Gebet.  
Ein Gebet, ein intimer Austausch zwischen dir selbst und das Göttliche,  
das in deinem Herzen lebt und das zu finden ist.“ (Youtube-Interview with Fawzia al-Rawi<sup>35</sup>)

---

<sup>35</sup> Fawzia al-Rawi (2012): Drehtanz - Interview mit Dr. Fawzia Al-Rawi.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PztprFBfzxs>; (last accessed 2019/02/25).

She described whirling as a form of individual prayer, which helps to feel the silence and to get into connection with God. Furthermore, it supports the one who whirls to focus on itself.

**Solveig Fiedler** was one of the first persons I met at the *Haus des Friedens* in November 2018. She has learned whirling dance with Fawzia Al-Rawi and has always been interested in belly dance. This interest also made her curious about Sufism. She came in contact with Fawzia Al-Rawi accidentally. However, then she became fascinated and had been practicing whirling with other women in workshops and on whirling evenings. She loves whirling and explained it to me with a lot of enthusiasm. In whirling dance, you can feel your axis, from log to sole, she said. While traditionally<sup>36</sup>, the axis goes over the left leg, the other one is wandering through the world. Furthermore, she explained:

“Und in dieser Achse zu sein, innerlichen [spirituellen] und der äußerlichen [physischen]. Das drehen hilft dabei- in der Achse zu sein, weil es ja keine statische Angelegenheit ist. [...] In der Drehung um die- spürt man noch stärker die eigene Achse. Man spürt sich selber stark und man beginnt den Raum zu spüren. Und die ganze Welt- also die Erde- weil es dreht sich. Es ist ein Faktum. Ein physikalischen Faktum, das sich alles dreht.“ (Solveig Fiedler: 2018/12/13)

Also, Solveig Fiedler explained that whirling is making you vulnerable. On the one hand, vulnerable if you lose your inner balance and fall to the floor, on the other hand, there is an inner vulnerability. The whirling practice is also important for her spirituality. She stated:

“Also das in der Bewegung den Körper, den ganzen Körper mitnehmen, mit hineinnehmen in die Spiritualität. Also das ist nicht etwas das man abseits schiebt. [...] Ein Teil der Spiritualität ist mit und über dem Körper. Jede kleine Zelle - jeder Zellenbestandteil gehört zum Weg der Spiritualität dazu“ (Solveig Fiedler: 2018/12/13)

It is the feeling that she is whirling with and for the world, which is important for her. Whirling itself means joy, she told me, that is why he whirls for her pleasure.

I conclude that for Solveig Fiedler, whirling is a form of dance, like other forms of dancing she has done before, which gives her bodily exercise and pleasure. But on top of that, it is also a tool for or a form of spiritual practice.

I also met **Annika Skattum** at the *Haus des Friedens*. She lives in Paris but visits Vienna frequently because Fawzia Al-Rawi is her spiritual leader. She used to perform and teach whirling regularly, but now doing it more occasionally. She said that whirling is like opening a big door to the divine. Practicing whirling, in the beginning, made her shy because of the vulnerability it evoked. That is why she did not want to show it to others. She further told me that it

---

<sup>36</sup> I am aware of the implications using the expression ‘tradition’. However, since my interview partners use the term, I apply it in the contexts in which I present their emic perspectives.



took her a while to accept that whirling is connected with Sufism. Only after about eight years, she opened herself to Islam and spoke the *Shahada*<sup>37</sup>.

Furthermore, she explained that people in Europe are less used to do bodily and spiritual practices. “In the church, we sit on a chair [chuckles] or a bench,” she visualized it. The whirling lessons she gave become more like a dancing class. It made her feel uncomfortable. “I’m not a dance teacher. You don’t come and learn it”, she told me. Although she had been quite successful in performing *sema* evenings and teaching whirling, at one point, she stopped teaching. Only after a while, she started again. She illustrated:

“But now, of course, I- I do it differently. So, I don't teach you anything. You come to learn about yourself. And it- the aim is not to learn to dance. The aim is to know yourself. And [to] know God. Through yourself.” (Annika Skattum: 2019/01/24)

Concluding, Annika Skattum had witnessed whirling as a dance and as a spiritual practice. But she highlights the importance of the spiritual aspect of whirling in contrast to its dance character.

I met **Emre Başaran** through Galib Stanfel. We met in Istanbul in May 2019. I picked him up at the Continental Hotel near Taksim Square, where he gave a concert. He was with his daughter, and we first walked around the neighborhood and later on sat down on a park bench, so that his child could play at the playground<sup>38</sup>. He was a musician with Tümata and had been playing with Oruç Güvenç a lot. Additionally, he has been and is still active in organizing processes. Emre Başaran stressed that for him, whirling is not merely a dance. He said that *sema* could be seen as healing. Music and dance influence the physical body, and at the same time, they hold together the inner psyche. He told me an example of a friend who used to be an alcoholic. Once, this person came to the *sema* in Gökcedere, where he whirled for three days and nights. After the person finished whirling, he slept for a whole week. His body was cleansed, and he woke up with a completely new inner attitude, Emre Başaran explained to me. Thus, he defines whirling mostly through the spiritual aspects and performative power.

**Ziya Azazi** is a well-known dance performer who was born in Turkey but had been living in Austria for about 15 years. After his studies of Mining and Mineral Engineering, he became

---

<sup>37</sup> The Shahada is the Islamic creed and is part of the daily prayer and reciting the prayer with the right intention, also symbolize an official conversion to Islam. "Lā ilāha illā 'llāhu wa Muḥammadun rasūlu 'llāh(i)" - "There is no God but God and Mohammed is the messenger of God". See: D. Gimarte, "*Shahāda*," Encyclopedia of Islam, last reviewed on 2020/02/05, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_6755](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6755);

<sup>38</sup> We did not have a real interview setting. That is why I did not do any recordings. We first talked; and I was directly writing it in my notebook after we sat down. Then I posed him more questions I prepared and was directly writing notes.

a professional dance artist with a specialization in repetitive movements and whirling. He contextualized whirling in a frame of movements. It was the recursion of whirling, which fascinated him in the first hand. Furthermore, he described whirling as a way to activate the body and the sensational system. He told me:

„Motorisches System, plus Atemsystem wird beschleunigt. Egal, was wir tun. Fitness, Fahrrad fahren, Tanzen und Drehen das Ganze. Das Gleiche. Wenn die zwei aktiviert sind, dann die anderen Systeme werden beeinflusst, also Kreislauf, ehm Nervensystem.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Furthermore, he connected the whirling with its history and religious context. He explained that in his tradition, there exist different stories about *dervishes*. For him, "*dervish*" is just a title and less relevant, as he considers himself a 21<sup>st</sup>-century engineer. Thus, for him, whirling is a design, something, which can be updated with knowledge, skills, and expertise. That is why he called his dance program „Dervish in Progress”.

Similar to Emre Başaran or Azize Güvenç, Ziya Azazi described a healing aspect in whirling. He stated that:

„Und drehen ist eben eine von den wichtigsten, stärksten, besten Instrumenten. Würde ich sagen, weil der Mensch kann nicht mehr sehen. Also Außenwelt. Er ist separiert worden. Isolated, wie sagt man isoliert von der Außenwelt, er ist bei sich. Weil er um zu überleben, nicht zu fallen, dass er nicht aus der Balance ist, dass er dass es nicht übel wird, schlecht wird. Er muss immer lernen, denken.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Thus, also for him whirling helps one to be connected with the environment and to connect body and mind again.

In this chapter, I presented some of my interviewees' personal definitions of whirling. However, the way how they frame the whirling does not necessarily imply that others, such as their audience, recognize it in the same way. In the next chapter, I focus on their specific role in the transfer of rituals.

### 5.3.2.2 “Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving” – Relations of the Interviewees

This chapter compares the different types of actors in a transfer of rituals, defined by Neubert. I identify these roles with key persons in my research fields. Therefore, I shortly introduce my interview partners and how they are interrelated and continue with the discussion of the roles.

Most of my other interview partners travel to different places to visit holy places of Sufism or to do whirling workshops. Through this, a widely spread web of relations came into existence. I tried to visualize the relations in the following graphic. It represents my viewpoint gained through my research, and it only presents those relations I detected; others might exist.

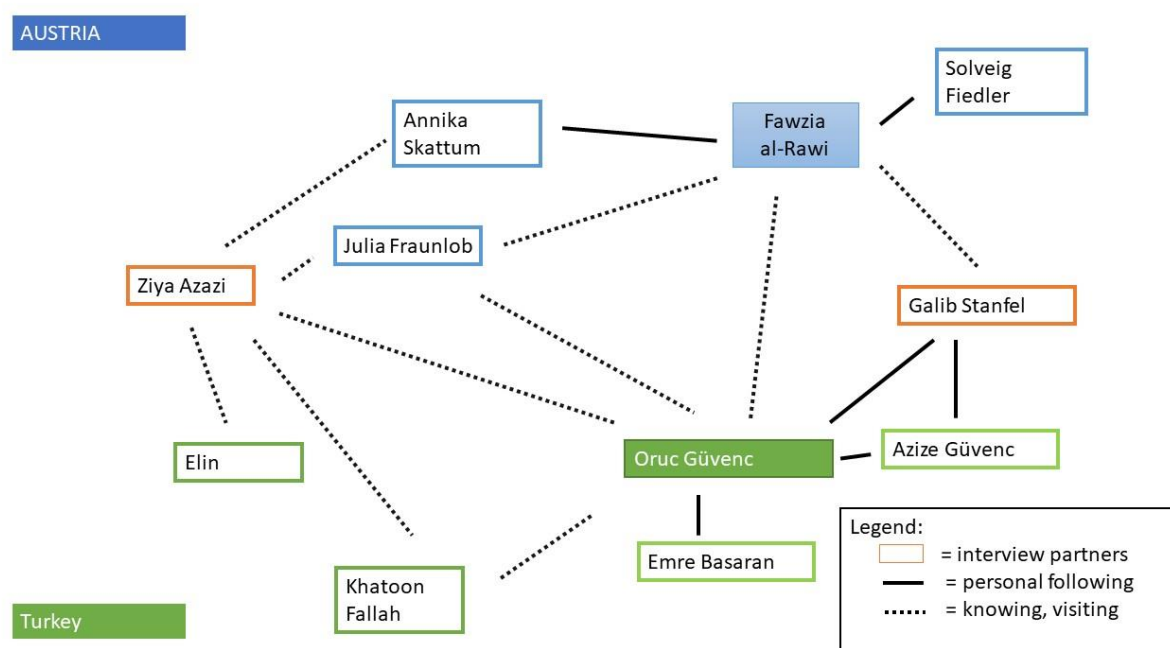


Figure 6 Relational Network of my Interview Partner

The thicker lines mean that there is a close connection between the people, for example, a master-follower relationship. While the dotted lines symbolize a looser connection. For example, Khatoon Fallah visited once the sema in Göcedere; or Julia Fraunlob visited the sema of Oruc Güvenc in Haus des Friedens. In this overview, I did not include all relations, but only those being relevant for a better understanding of my transnational field. For instance, Annika Skattum and Solveig also know Galib Stanfel. In Austria, I identified Fawzia Al-Rawi as the key person. She is the leader of the Sufi center, where I visited my first *sema*. Those people who have most of their relational ties in Austria are marked in a blue box. A green box symbolizes that I somewhat relate them to Turkey. Those people who have strong relations, both in Turkey and Austria, are in an orange box. As an example, I describe the relation of the dancer Khatoon Fallah. She visited a *sema* in Gökcedere once, but she is not closely linked to the teachings of Oruç Güvenc. Khatoon Fallah was also inspired by Ziya Azazi but has not met him personally, yet.

All of these people have become part of my research interest because they practice whirling in different forms and are more or less intensively connected to Tümata. Despite these relations,

they have different understandings of whirling. Also, they play different roles in the transfer of the whirling practice from one context into another. In the next part, I exemplify some roles.

I already presented the practices of Oruç Güvenç in chapters 4.4 5.2.2. Because of his traveling all around the world, the transfer of his teaching and institutionalization in different European countries, as well as the continuation of his teaching, I define him as a missionary type of actor in the transfer of rituals.

I identify Fawzia Al-Rawi as a migration type of actor in a transfer of rituals. As described in the previous part, she received most of her spiritual teachings in Jerusalem and brought it with her to Austria. In Vienna, she decided that she will open a spiritual center, which primarily addresses women. She explained:

„[W]enn man den Weg der Liebe geht und jeder spirituelle Weg eigentlich ein weiblich geformter Weg ist, von der Ausrichtung her. Aber trotzdem in den orientalischen Ländern natürlich eine patriarchalische Gesellschaft vorherrscht. Und deswegen war mein Bedürfnis - vor allem mit Frauen zu machen, auch weil ich selber eine Frau bin, - dadurch sehr groß. Und deswegen habe ich es [das Zentrum] dann sehr plump weibliche Spiritualität und Sufismus genannt“ (Fawzia Al-Rawi: 2019/02/21)

This quote shows that Fawzia Al-Rawi tries to connect the experience from the region in which she grew up, with the circumstances and needs in Vienna.

I have not introduced **Julia Fraunlob** yet. She is an Austrian dancing teacher, teaching different styles of dancing and especially whirling dance. I found her unintentionally through my web research. She offers her whirling courses, for example, at the University's Sports Program in Vienna or at a Tai-Chi school. She told me that she was first introduced to whirling through a *Tenoura*<sup>39</sup> dancer in Egypt. She learned to whirl for the first time in a workshop given by Ziya Azazi at a contemporary dance festival in Vienna. Additionally, she does not adhere to a specific type of whirling and is less interested in the religious part. Thus, I would instead identify her with the role of an import actor in the transfer of rituals.

In reflection of the discussion in this chapter, I shortly conclude that my interview partners define the whirling performance differently as a prayer, dance, or spiritual praxis. Nevertheless, there also common understandings in its functions just as the whirling impact in the healing process. In their specific description, their interpretation of the practice and the different forms of whirling become apparent. These different framings of the whirling practice relate to their own interest, motivation, and socialization. These factors can also be identified as dynamic,

---

<sup>39</sup> Tenoura is another form of whirling dance associated with Sufism. Its characteristic is the colorful skirts the whirlers are wearing.

informing a transfer of ritual. Nonetheless, they are also formed by the social environment in which the actors move. Hence, in the next section (chapter 5.3.3), I closer analyze the role of the social environment in the process of transfer of rituals.

### 5.3.3 “Of course there are differences in the cultures, perhaps” - Analyzing contexts

Neubert states that he prefers to replace the term ‘context’ with the term ‘social environment’ (“soziales Umfeld”), as it is used inflationary. Applying the word ‘social environment’ instead of ‘context’ in the framework of rituals prevents a broad usage. Neubert describes that the boundaries of social environments can be permeable. A ritual can be performed in different social settings, which can be defined, for example, spatially or religiously. It must be determined empirically, which of these social environments are decisive for the respective ritual. If the ritual has been transmitted from one social environment to another or to a new one, the ritual’s modification can be described as dynamic. Consequently, it can be defined as a transfer of rituals. Neubert explains that if only aspects of one social environment are changing, it should be described as a ritual adaptation. Nevertheless, individual aspects of the new environments can overlap with those of the former context. (Neubert 2009:8)). In the next part (chapter 5.3.3.1), I try to identify dynamics informed by the social environment, by analyzing how the setting impacts the whirling.

#### 5.3.3.1 Stage or *tekke* – How the setting impacts whirling

In the following part, I want to analyze how whirling has been transferred to a new social environment. Additionally, I show how the changes in a social environment impact the appearances of whirling. Therefore, I consider the social environments in which Tümata is and was performing *sema*. As well, I present how my interview partners perceive a change in the social environment and how this informs the perception of whirling.

Tümata’s first travel to Europe took place in the 1980s following an invitation of an Austrian professor, who had been in contact with Oruç Güvenç before. They first played at a music and dance festival and later on toured through different European countries. Furthermore, the founding of the "International Society for Music Ethnological Research and Music Therapy" by Gerhard Tucek in Vienna in 1987 was an essential factor for establishing Oruç Güvenç’s teachings in Europe. The research center tried to find out “whether a method that was successfully practiced centuries ago in an eastern cultural area could also be used meaningfully in the present, in western industrialized countries” (Güvenç 2018:34 transl. from German by the author). Furthermore, it is stated in the book of Azize Güvenç that “it became the life task of Oruç

Güvenç to preserve the old traditions of the Sufi ways, as well as the old oriental music and movement therapy, and to make them accessible to the people” (Güvenç 2018:34 transl. from German by the author).

Galib Stanfel explained that Tümata got invitations from many different countries, and thus also played in various settings. After the death of Oruç Güvenç, traveling became less, but they still try to keep up his spirit in different regions. Galib Stanfel points out that the whirling performance was perceived differently depending on the setting or the audience. For example, when they played on a stage, and the audience was sitting on chairs in front of them, the audience felt less involved, and it sooner had the character of a concert.

Often, their ‘concerts’ aimed to show people the traditional forms of alt-oriental music and Sufi practices. In her master thesis, Şahin Nevin, who visited such a concert, criticizes this representation of ‘traditions.’ She writes that Tümata claimed to show the transition from shamanic music and dance to *sema* but would not accurately represent it. She describes that the sound was horrible, but does not give further explanation. (Şahin 2016:127)

Additionally, Tümata performed in hospitals, since certain forms of *sema* have healing power. Azize Güvenç told me about a project *Karawane der Liebe*, in which she and other women travel to perform in one hospital in Germany after another. Sufis, in the form of wandering *dervishes*, used to go from one health center to another to play and heal.

*Sema* has an essential meaning for the individual spiritual development, next to its importance in the healing process. Galib Stanfel clarified that *sema* is more than just a cultural performance, like the ones that can be witnessed by Turkish groups performing in Austria. To find and express the spiritual meaning in *sema* is important. He elaborated that in Islam, a remembrance of *Allāh* is possible everywhere, a special room is not needed. He explained that Oruç Güvenç strongly agreed to the famous saying of Rumi, “Come, come who ether you are.” Therefore, the teaching of his spiritual path was open for everyone independent from a religious or social affiliation.

Tümata opened a place where they put this idea into practice. They organized *semas*, in which brought alive a form of *sema* described by early Mevlevi. The first event was a three days and three nights session, and over the years and during different events, they increased the number, The longest *sema* lasted for 114 days and nights. Most of these longer *semas* took place in the *Rasim Mutlu Center* in Gökcedere, Yalova, a town about 100 km away from Istanbul. In a documentary, Oruç Güvenç says that they created a place where people can get to know Sufi

knowledge and practice. “Those who are looking for the truth are welcome”<sup>40</sup> It should be a place of respect and without discrimination.

Galib Stanfel and Emre Başaran told me this meant that they had to deal with different offenses. For example, Emre Başaran talked about a challenge they faced in Gökcedere. People from the *Rainbow Family*<sup>41</sup> came and wanted to participate. Oruç Güvenç’s form of practice is already quite open, he explained, but for some people, it was hard to get along with these people. They were discussing excluding them, but Oruç Güvenç stressed that in the spirit of Mevlana, everyone should be able to participate. Emre Başaran illustrated: First, they came because it was free and there was food, but soon those who realized that we are celebrating and that we are a community, they helped with the daily task and respected our rules. Still, this did not mean that no conflicts evoked. People were not following the rules of the event and other disagreements evolved. In this case, we had to set limits, he explained.

Moreover, Galib Stanfel clarified that in many forms of Islam, it is not usual that men and women worship next to each other. But in Oruç Güvenç’s way of practice, it is allowed. While this is a smaller problem for those raised without segregation between men and women, this might be a challenge for people who are used to a strict division between genders. Also, in most mosques, there exists a particular room for women, most often visibly separated from the men.

For example, at the *tekke* in Bursa, where I visited a *sema*, the women were sitting upstairs on a balcony, while the men were seated downstairs. In Bursa, women practice *whirling* separated from men. A woman at the *tekke* showed me photos of a big public event, where female *semazen* were whirling in front of a stage. This performance was only open for women. Nevertheless, there are settings in Turkey, where women whirl in public.

The analysis showed that subject to the social environment, the whirling performance appears differently, as for example, segregation of gender is taking part or not. The instance of gender segregation also showed that it is not the national borders, which define the social environment. Or, argued the other way around if Turkey is defined as the social environment, the modification has taken place within.

---

<sup>40</sup> Oruç Güvenç in a film about the *sema* in Gökcedere. *Meleklerin Sesi - Sound of Angels* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXJs8RoQO3M>; last reviewed on 2019/12/10.

<sup>41</sup> The Rainbow Family is an international, alternative and loosely organized group which exist since the 1970s. They meet and live together in so called rainbow gatherings, where they try to achieve a life based on love and peace.

Thus, it does not have to be different ‘cultural backgrounds,’ which introduce a different appearance of whirling. This experience. The experience Tümata made maybe also let Azize Güvenç state:

„Also die die kommen, kommen mit einem großen Interesse und sehr offen die meisten ja. Ehm. Und natürlich gibt es Unterschiede in den Kulturen, vielleicht.“ (Azize Güvenç 2019/05/20)

The contemporary dancer Ziya Azazi also discussed how whirling in different social environments introduces different perceptions of his performances. He explained that when he spins in Turkey, conservative people would ask themselves, who he is, and what he is doing. They do not comprehend his performances and react in two different ways: a small percentage find it astonishing and exciting, while some get aggressive. He told me that he is perceived as a dangerous person, someone who is taking advantage of the ‘tradition’ and doing crazy stuff like dancing with a naked upper body. On the contrary, if he is dancing in Austria or in other Western European countries, people consider him as ‘traditional’:

“Sobald ich den Rock anziehe, sie glauben, dass ich ein folkloristischer Junge, der einfach Folklore aus mittlerer Osten präsentiere. Sie verstehen nicht, dass es eigentlich überhaupt nicht zu tun hat mit- natürlich es hat zu tun, aber nicht traditionell präsentiert.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

He gives another example of how the country influences the perception of his performances. He had performed in China before, but recently the festival committee censured his performance. They regarded his performance as religious and decided to cancel their invitation. Concluding, Ziya Azazi determines the different perceptions of the whirling performances to the attitude of the people.

Instead, for Annika Skattum, if she was performing whirling as a dance or as a spiritual practice was informed by an inner process. Individual negotiation took place concerning the way she was giving whirling lessons and the decision to stop. She used to whirl frequently on stages with musicians, from one day to the other, she stopped totally. Only after a while, she kept on going slowly; now she only whirls occasionally with musicians. She explained that she needed this cut to make herself clear that whirling is not seen as a sole practice, but part of a spiritual path. That is the reason why she now only integrates the whirling into spiritual practices. For example, during weekend retreats that she offers, she includes whirling into the program with other spiritual practices. Now, also for her, whirling is “no longer a performance. It is really. A sharing. If I whirl in front of somebody who is not whirling. Eh, it's really different know” To conclude, for Annika Skattum, the change of the social environment from a public



setting on stages to a more private and spiritual environment helped her to find inner peace and a spiritual path.

For Khatoon Fallah, the public space has a different dimension. In Iran, it is prohibited for women to dance in public. Thus, moving to Turkey gave her more freedom, here, she can perform in theaters, for instance. She included the restrictions and other limitations she experienced in her choreographies. She used dancing and whirling to express the oppression of women. Concluding, for Khatoon Fallah, the public is a contested place. The social environment in which cannot perform is incorporated in her whirling performances. Her whirling is a form of expression and protest, in which she combines aesthetics and political messages.

I conclude that the actors, although partly living in the same geographic region, practice whirling in different social environments — these influence how they perform whirling, how they experience it themselves, and how others perceive their performances. In his definition, Neubert assumes that the transfer of rituals includes a change in the social environment. I showed that my research protagonists also move from one social environment to another. Still, for a transfer of ritual, the transfer has to be permanent: I analyze this criterion in the next chapter.

#### 5.3.4 “You can come and learn how to do it.”<sup>42</sup> - Permanent transfer through teaching

Neubert defines transfer and permanence in two different paragraphs. For an empirical approach, it makes more sense to think these two categories connected to each other, as it is not possible to analyze permanence without transfer. According to Neubert, if a ritual is only once performed in a different place or social environment, it is not a transfer of ritual. He still classifies actions like this as ritual dynamics but would instead describe this in terms of flexibility or adaptivity. Next to the dynamic factors in the transfer of rituals, there must be a static factor; otherwise, the ritual would dissolve. Therefore, he concludes, that “in this respect, dynamics is correctly understood as the tension between immutability and change, which must be reflected in the research process” (Neubert 2009:10 transl. from German by the author)

Consequently, in this chapter, I attempt to research on dynamics in the transfer of the whirling practices, which initiates changes that are permanent. Grimes states that „movement and change occur through the interaction of human characters” (Grimes 2014:296). Hence, I analyze the transfer processes in the interrelations between one person and another, and not only by looking at macro-processes. In the process of coding, I noted that my interviewers were often

---

<sup>42</sup> Quote from the interview with Annika Skattum 24.01.2019.

talking about the teaching they experienced or their style of teaching. I define teaching as one person is transmitting knowledge, practice, or values to other persons. Mostly, the persons are only teaching what they know or can do by themselves. Through teaching, they can create an individualized form of practice.

Moreover, in Sufism master - student relations already exist from the early beginning. Dance techniques are often transmitted by a teacher and learned by a dance group. Through these personal relationships, knowledge and practices were and are transferred. Concluding, I identify teaching as a certain category to analyze the dynamics and changes in the transfer of whirling. In the first part of this chapter, I address how my research partners describe their experience of teaching (chapter 5.3.4.1). I then move on in discussing how they present their style of teaching (chapter 5.3.4.2).

#### 5.3.4.1 “The rotating döner and the moon’s orbit”- Experiencing Teaching

Julia Fraunlob learned to whirl in a workshop of the performance dancer Ziya Azazi. She told me that his teaching is influenced by acrobatics and dancing and that he was not following a classical meditative and Sufi way of teaching. In his way of teaching, Julia explained, Ziya Azazi pushes the workshop participants a lot. He started with a short theoretical input and after that with a „super exhausting hardcore-Yoga.” He was really flexible; she continued explaining and expected others to be flexible as well. Since she was not, she felt a bit uncomfortable. Additionally, she criticized that he was sometimes including political topics.

I also talked with Elin, a student at ODTÜ University in Ankara, where Ziya Azazi gave a workshop in which she participated for one day. She told me that Ziya Azazi started with an hour introduction, talking about his personal experiences and how whirling works. He talked about the mechanics and used more of an engineered language. He also used different images. She described:

“And he gave the analogy of döner. Like you have to keep your center, like the center of the döner, like the thing. Ehm You know. And we had to keep it in mind while we were turning. Basically, we started turning. That's why I remember. Slowly, and you just tried to keep your center. And try not to fall. Always reminding yourself something. And he always tries to make you remind something, while you were doing that. ” (Elin Tezel: 2019/05/26)

She also remembered that Ziya Azazi was pushing a lot mentally. He placed buckets everywhere in the room; for the case, people had to throw up during their practice. “But so many people did throw up. Going to the same bucket. It was eh it was very interesting ((laughs))”.

Nevertheless, she told me it was really fun, as Ziya Azazi was also using more unfamiliar methods to keep them whirling just as picking them up and turning with them or putting a skirt on them.

Khatoon Fallah started to learn *sema* dance while she was still living in Iran. Her teacher was training the Mevlevi whirling. She explained that for her, from a technical dance point of view, the Mevlevi whirling has just one form, which she learned from the master. She wanted to combine different forms, because she was already experienced in other forms of dances, such as ballet. She clarified that she loves to move her hands in other ways but was not allowed. She continued to whirl freely, and at one point, her master resigned. Nevertheless, other people in her class became disappointed with her individual style. She stated that this is typical in Iran. If people try to break with 'traditions,' they are criticized.

I described in the introduction of chapter 5, how I learned to whirl through Fawzia Al-Rawi and my experiences of a whirling lesson with a small women Sufi group in Ankara. Both times I did not feel enormous pressure; instead, the teaching was adapted to my individual capabilities and described in a visual way such as the rotating of the respective planets. The style of the teachers influenced it. That is why, in the next part, I present how my interview partners describe their way of teaching.

#### 5.3.4.2 “Mindfulness, spiritual empathy and equation” - Teaching experiences

Annika Skattum told me that she noticed that those people, who are interested in whirling and Mevlevi Sufism, are that fascinated that they also want to try whirling. Many people are astonished when they realize that everyone can learn the dance and that it is not only for Turkish men. She assumed that people are attracted to Sufi dance because it is hypnotic. She explained that longing, the whirling is about, is essential for those who want to learn it. It took her a while until she was confident enough in whirling to transmit it. She had been whirling for about eight years individually until she visited a workshop of Ziya Azazi. It was him, she told me, that was pushing her to start a group and teach the whirling. She followed his advice, but at one point, it did not feel right to her anymore, as she was only transmitting the bodily movements, but not the spiritual background. After some time of reflection, about three years ago, she kept on transmitting whirling, but less intensively, as she had done before.

Like Annika Skattum, Julia Fraunlob visited a workshop of Ziya Azazi. The experience of teaching she faced strongly influenced her individual style of teaching. In the context of writing a diploma thesis, she developed her method of teaching. She described it as a smooth method. She does not want her students to get sick, as it made her almost stopping learning it. She uses

different warm-up techniques from other sports such as Tai-Chi, or improvisation dance. However, she prepares her students for whirling by making them focus on their breathing and sensations. These are the necessary forms of mindfulness and helps one to concentrate on the inner realm, she explained. Julia Fraunlob also discussed that in whirling dance, the bodily, cultural, philosophical, and spiritual parts are embraced. She said:

„Also ich mag schon so diese Mischung aus Bewegung und Intellekt. Also das haben wir beim Drehen jetzt schon besonders. Also man kann jetzt jeden Tanz auf den Intellekt ziehen, aber da würde man wenige Leute für finden. Die meisten wollen sich mal auspowern, im Körper bleiben. Usw. Und das finde ich so schön, dass es beide Aspekte hab.“ (Julia Fraunlob: 2018/03/12)

Those who are interested in Sufi dance do not only want to “auspowern” themselves but are also involved in spiritual aspects and scientific aspects of trance. Julia Fraunlob included as spiritual parts in her workshops reading Rumi’s stories or poems, little background information about Sufism, or playing Sufi music.

I already mentioned the experience of those who learned to whirl with Ziya Azazi. He also explained in the interview how he started to teach whirling. When he noticed that people became interested in his form of dancing, he also began to transmit it. He had been teaching his way of dancing for about 15 years in a special “Workshop-Sprache.” He wants his style of dancing and teaching to be spread even further. Therefore, in 2018, he started a teacher education program, in which he teaches younger and interested persons in teaching whirling. He calls this program “DIP-TEP” a shortening for “Dervish in Progress - Teacher education program.” Ziya Azazi supposed that learning to whirl is easy and something everyone can do, once they know how to do. He explained:

“Wir wissen jetzt es gibt Gravitation dank Newton. Und es ist jetzt kein großes Thema mehr. Und so ist es geworden. Und heutzutage ich habe eine equation wie sagt man auf Deutsch. Ein Formular. Das erkläre ich jeden. Und wenn jeder der das implementiert im Körper, das versteht, dann ist er fähig zu drehen. Ich nenne das three times three, equal DIP. Wenn man diese equation eben ausübt, dann ist es gemacht.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Ziya Azazi stressed out several times, that whirling dance has to be freed from its original frame and brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An update of the former techniques and teaching is needed, and existing rules have to be broken. He criticized that Mevlevi Sufi practices from Konya have not reflected on their own rules. He stated that also Tümata has only made a small update and is still classical. It bothered him that they present and teach their style of *sema* as the original one and right one. He explained:

„Sie haben Regeln, wie zum Beispiel, den Boden küssen bevor man zu drehen anfängt. Hast du selber erfahren wahrscheinlich. Man soll so drehen, Arm soll so ein und so sein, man soll in der Richtung drehen und so weiter. Hallo, wo ist der update? Also du hast einmal update gemacht, und warum hast du aufgehört? Weiter. Update hat nie zu Ende. Nie.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Partly, Azize Güvnec had the same perception of what Ziya Azazi criticized. She stated that there are differences between the countries. In Turkey, people are more conventional and adhered to forms and structures. If people start to dance, they are less free in their movements, because they directly have a certain knowledge of dance forms. Through this, the sensational, individual, and expressive character of dancing disappear. These forms, she assumed, give kind of rescue from getting lost. She added that these given forms might be helpful in some contexts but that they can be obstructive, especially when looking at the psychotherapeutically level of dancing. She gave the following example:

„Ich kann mich erinnern, bei dem ersten *sema*, den wir hier hatten, der 40, der erste 40 Tage *sema*. Da waren viele Kinder dabei. Da waren viele türkische Familien mit Kindern gekommen. Und die Kinder ehm probierten das dann auch. Und traditionell wird in der Mevlevi Tradition nach links gedreht. Jetzt haben wir aber auch rechts-füßler und links-füßler und manche Menschen drehen auch nach links, eh also nach rechts, entgegengesetzt, mit dem Uhrzeigersinn. Und dann waren viele Familien dann, wenn die sahen, dass ihr Kind dann plötzlich eben falsch rum drehte liefen dann sofort hin und stoppten das. Und wir haben dann immer gesagt, nein, nein, nein bloß nicht lassen. Also an solchen kleinen Beispielen, da merkt man das so. Wie das Denken dann funktioniert. Also aber, aber das war dann gut also. Ja wir hatten auch viele Iraner dabei bei dem *sema*, und die drehen sowieso häufig beide Richtungen. Also das ist in deren Kultur auch so verankert.“ (Azize Güvenç:2019/05/20)

I could not witness personally, Tümata's *sema* in Turkey, in the way Azize Güvenç described it. Nevertheless, the *sema* that I visited in Vienna partly mirrored her description.

Furthermore, I illustrated in chapter 5.1.1 how Galib Stanfel explained at the beginning of the *sema* evening, which different movements need to be included in the *sema* and their individual meaning. Despite this frame of how to begin and end, people were free in their style of whirling. I have seen people whirling in reliance on their ability and capability. People participating did not adhere to the strict forms given in the Mevlevi Sufism. For instance, they whirled at different speeds, or with more arm movements. I do not actively remember if everyone was whirling in the same direction, but I think everyone was, as Galib Stanfel also explained, the direction of the turning in the beginning.

The analysis of this chapter has described another important dynamic in the transfer of rituals, by showing that different perceptions and ideas of transfer exist. It leads to a permanent transformation of how the whirling is practiced.

### 5.3.5 Summary – Whirling Practice as a Transfer of Rituals

First, the purpose of this chapter was to identify dynamic parts in the whirling practices I witnessed. Second, the main objective was to analyze if the processes taking part can be described as a transfer of ritual. In discussing the respective elements of Neubert's definition of transfer of rituals, I identified different dynamic elements, which can lead to a transfer of rituals. For this, I defined whirling as the essential practice forming a whirling performance. The different appearances of whirling performances can be demarcated through individual frames and historical and cultural influences. I took a broader perspective of rituals and also included those whirling performances, which are rather framed as dance performances. All performances have in common that they involve whirling.

Referring to the second criteria of Neubert's definition, I discussed what role the actors have in the transfer of rituals. People practicing a ritual are essential for the formation of and the transfer of the ritual. By identifying the three types of actors defined by Neubert, I showed that in my case, different motivations and intentions are a dynamic part of the transformation of the whirling practice. Although people practice in the same ritual, they can have different interests and intentions. My interview partners defined whirling differently, depending on the context in which they practice whirling and their specific biography and motivation. For some, whirling is seen mostly in the context of rituals, while for others, it is a dance form.

Through discussing the third criterium, I highlighted that my interview partners are situated in different social environments. Additionally, some of them also move from one social context to another. On the one hand, the social environment influences how and where people can whirl, for example, in public or not. Limiting factors can be political circumstances, as in the case of Khatoon Fallah, or social norms of a certain group, as in the case of the *sema* in Bursa. On the other hand, the audience has different pre-understanding and perception of the whirling practice depending on the specific context they are situated in. Their different expectations and motivations also depend on their respective social environments.

Thus, the social environment influences how the actors perform, but also how people perceive the whirling practice in a particular performance. Therefore, I see this as an important factor in creating different forms of whirling practices and as a dynamic element in the transfer of rituals.

As the third line of argumentation, I assumed that a permanent transfer can be described through the act of teaching. The specific movements that are part of a performance need to be learned and trained. Only if the actor can do the specific actions, the performance can come into existence. Thus, the whirling dancer must know how to whirl and must somehow have learned it.

My interviewees highlighted their personal understanding and bodily knowledge of learning and teaching whirling. Ziya Azazi and Julia Fraunlob do not see whirling as bound to a specific spiritual practice; thus, their teaching embraces practices from different spiritual practices, theater, and dance. However, they simplify and individualize the technique so that people can learn it faster and smoother. That is why they understand their teaching as an innovation. Nonetheless, Annika Skattum and Azize Güvenç, who experience the whirling rather as a spiritual practice, are also open to changes of the practice itself; as well as of its combination with other forms of spiritual practices. Thus, also in their workshops, the individual experience of the whirling is highlighted.

I showed that my interview partners have the power and ability to change or preserve the whirling practice in different ways. With this, they also bring practices from one social context into another, such as from a spiritual to dance performance context. In addition, the learning processes are often connected to some specific competencies or insider knowledge, which teachers transmit. This process might lead intentionally or unintentionally to new forms and through this to a permanent transformation of the whirling practices.

Neubert's working definition, applied here, was useful as it is a clearly arranged definition. Nonetheless, his explanations about the several criteria were quite limited, and his examples very short. Therefore, in my case, I had to adapt the criteria to my specific examples. His initial definition consists of six elements, which he defines in relation to each other and through this are not clearly defined. Because of this, I decided to discuss the elements in a combined way. Hence, I had only four categories of interpretation. This analysis contributed to the identification of dynamics lying in the performances of whirling. Through this, the different appearances of whirling that I empirically identified can be described as the outcomes of processes of transfers of rituals. The transfer has taken place on different levels. For example, there have been actors transferring the practice from one place to the other, but also the audience in different context leads to a different understanding of the ritual.

Furthermore, I included dance performances, which are not rituals in the classical sense, into the analysis. Although I explained in the chapter why this is possible for my particular case, I reflected on what exactly makes the difference between these two categories. I asked: How

does it come that one is more perceived as a religious ritual, while the other is perceived as a secular dance performance? Furthermore, I posed the question, if there are also dynamic elements lying behind, which led to this transformation. In the analysis of the following chapter, I tried to find answers to these questions.

## 5.4 Whirling Dance – Transfer ‘out’ of Ritual?

The previous analysis and discussion of my empirical data have shown that boundaries between the different categories of whirling practices are blurry. There are whirling practices that I identified as a practice of dance (Ziya Azazi, Julia Fraunlob, Khatoon Fallah), and as a religious practice (Tümata, *sema* at *Haus des Friedens*). In the previous discussion, I have shown that the characterizations of the different forms are constructed by the respective perspective of the actor or the audience. From the beginning of my research project, the two categories of dance and religious ritual came up and prevailed in my research. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on these categories. The first aim of this chapter is to identify how these categories emerged. In chapter 4.2, I already explained how the *sema* in Turkey came into existence. That is why in the next part (chapter 5.4.1), I only discuss how *sema* was introduced to contemporary dance in Western European countries. The second aim of this chapter is to analyze how my interview partners have described these categories, which I present in chapter 5.4.2. Thirdly, I aim to distinguish the categories by their performative character and identify if these are dynamics, which could have led to a transfer ‘out’ of ritual (chapter 5.4.3).

### 5.4.1 “Imagined dance” - Historical perspective on contemporary whirling dance

One explanation of how whirling in its specific appearance as a dance has come into existence can be explained historically. Sufi teachings came to the West mostly through travelers. Dunja Njaradi, who analyzes contemporary Mevlevi dance-forms, argues that Mevlevi Dervish dance has a “contemporary transnational life as it moves swiftly with the flow of capital, people, goods” (Njaradi 2008:23). She claims that interest in Mevlevi dance started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the avant-garde of contemporary dance artists. They were only interested in the technical character of the whirling, but not in its spiritual background. She argues that there is a recent trend in Western European countries, as well as in those with a long history of Sufism, in (re-) integrating Sufi knowledge<sup>43</sup>. Also, in both regions, the interest in whirling as a form of contemporary dance as increased. For instance, in Turkey, people not practicing Sufism

---

<sup>43</sup> This has also been described by Voll (2007); Lawrence (2010).



became interested in whirling and started to learn these techniques, applying it as a new form of dance. Talking about the people in Turkey, who are going to these dance lessons, Elin Tezel, a Turkish student and passionate dancer, assumed:

“I think it would be something like 40ish-year-old people in some interest in like this and the money they have for take the workshop. People would be interested in doing this.” (Elin Tezel: 2019/05/26)

Mc Clure, a dance theorist, also argues that the beginning of the twentieth century, Mevlevi whirling inspired Western dance styles. Through a lens of Othering<sup>44</sup>, whirling was seen as sensational and exotic, speaking to a European phantasy of wild, ecstatic Others. She explains that it was instead an imagined dance, as the contemporary dancer of this time very rarely had personal contact with Sufi dancers or even not at all. In Turkey, a process of rewriting history has taken place, which formed a nationalized folkloric canon. In this chapter, I described how historically whirling has been transferred by dancers to Western European countries. Here, the appearance of whirling as a dance has been formed. In the previous chapter 4.2, I also described that the more religious characteristic had been formed historically by intellectuals, artists, and tourist advertisement has transferred the whirling. Each of these transfer practices thus leads to a re-inscription of certain characteristics. In the next chapter, I want to analyze the situation of today, by defining how my interview partners describe these two characteristics.

#### 5.4.2 “You know that from Matrix, right?” – Ritual vs. dance performance

In the previous chapter, I already showed that at least for about a hundred years, whirling practices appeared as a dance, next to its form as a ritual. It shows that there exists a dualistic understanding of rituals, between its belonging to the religious sphere and the art context. I already presented a similar conclusion in the theoretical part of this thesis, in chapter 3.3.2. Here, rituals, as belonging to the field of religions, were demarcated from stage performances, which are part of every-day life. Hence, in the following chapter, I want to analyze how my interview partners referred to these two fields. Of religious ritual and art performance.

All my interview partners, while legitimizing their way of whirling, refer to Sufi knowledge and teaching but connotate it in different ways: The Sufi group Tümata defined *sema* as “a form of worship like praying” to acquire “closeness to Allāh or a form of worship.” They accentuated

---

<sup>44</sup> Othering describes the (negative) differentiation of a group considered different or foreign, from one's own group, considered normal. The term derives from the context of postcolonial theory. Among others, Edward Said, has shaped the term by analyzing the constructing of the other. Said (1978).

that also in “ancient shamanistic times,” *sema* has been practiced and that it leads one into a deep trance.<sup>45</sup>

The Sufi master Fawzia Al-Rawi embeds whirling in a religious context. She explained that whirling could be understood as a prayer, which helps one to find one’s meaning in life and to get a feeling of unity. She stated:

“Das heißt, wenn ich den Tanz verwende, um über mein Ich und meine Orientierung an diesem Ich hinauswachsen kann, dann wird der Tanz ein Gebet.“ (Fawzia Al-Rawi: 2019/02/21)

Both, Tümata, as well as Fawzia Al-Rawi, described the whirling as a tool of self-healing and strengthening of spiritual powers. While practicing whirling, the focus lies on the inner self, although it is mostly practiced in a group.

In addition, other religious practices, such as prayers, *sohbets*, or *zikrs*, took place next to the whirling during the *semas* I visited. Additionally, these were embedded in a guided ceremony with a defined beginning and end.

Ziya Azazi, the dancer performer, referred to Sufism to legitimize his practice. He described his performance as a “conceptual and motional analysis of traditional Sufi dance”<sup>46</sup> and as a transformation of the Sufi dance into a spectacular form. Nevertheless, he also understood it as a way of mediation and personal rituals that transgress the “boundaries of existing belief systems.” Therefore, whirling is an instrument of meditation and helps to free body, mind, and soul. Nonetheless, he defined it as a practice not fundamentally different from „schwimmen, lieben, Familie gründen, gute Arbeit schaffen.“ He understood it as a flexible practice, which is and should be subject to ongoing change. Therefore, he consciously distinguished himself from other forms of Sufi whirling performances. He described his way of whirling as that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and referred to Tümata as a group, which only partly took the right steps. He stated:

„Deswegen finde ich Tümata, wie Nokia 69 eh 96. Kennst du von eh Matrix, oder? [[Diese mit dem zum Rausziehen]] krch. Genau, genau. Ja also schau, wie Telefon geworden ist. So muss es sein. Es funktioniert nicht, mit solchen Geräten. Besser gesagt, es kann funktionieren, ich kann immer noch dieses Gerät verwenden, aber es ist nur Telefon.“ (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/15)

Thus, Ziya Azazi draws parallels between his dance form of whirling and the spiritual forms of whirling practiced in Konya or by Tümata. He accentuated the changes he has done and

---

45 Quotes from the website of Tümata. <https://tumata.com/en/activities/sema/what-is-sema/>; (last accessed 2019/10/05).

46 <https://www.ziyaazazi.com/about-ziya/>; (last accessed 2019/10/05).

defined his version as “updated” since he does not frame whirling in a religious ‘traditional’ context. He also described his way of whirling as part of a creative process, and not as one embedded in a ritual framework. Versions of his updated whirling performances include, for instance, spectacular parts, like whirling with a skirt on fire.

Julia Fraunlob also described whirling as a form of meditation, which trains life balance, mindfulness, and body knowledge. Nevertheless, she did not draw other relations to Sufism than reading Rumi poems and playing Sufi music in her classes. Furthermore, she demarcated her way of practicing and teaching from classical Sufi ways, as she disapproved of strict rules, such as a predefined direction of turning. Although she sees a spiritual core in the whirling practice, she does not want to draw religious connections. She stated:

„Also ich glaub das man sehr spirituell oder auch religiös sein kann, ohne diesen einengenden Vorschriften von Islam, Christentum, aber auch von den, die jetzt ja auch nochmal anders sind als der Mainstream-Islam, aber trotzdem diese traditionellen haben einen ganz genauen Ablauf, haben Hierarchien und da habe ich gemerkt, dass ist nichts für mich. Weil da habe ich auch gemerkt, weil ich auch weiß für meinen Unterricht. [...]. Deswegen nenne ich es auch Drehtanz.“ (Julia Fraunlob: 2018/12/03)

Julia Fraunlob consciously describes her form of practicing whirling as a form of dance.

To conclude, the performance dancers draw parallels to Sufism and Rumi, being aware of the roots of the practice. Nevertheless, they allow alterations and understand it as a new up-to-date version of individual practice. They see the bodily practice as a notable aspect in whirling, but also include sensual and psychological aspects. Thus, they integrate whirling into other spiritual practices and compare it to meditation, which has also become a practice separated from its specific religious connotation.

Moreover, if the whirling is practiced in a religious context, it is embedded in a whole range of spiritual teachings and part of a greater repertoire of worship practices. In Mevlevi Sufism, it is not an obligation to practice whirling, but it is important to practice it in a community and with musicians. It depends on the respective Sufi group how ceremonial regulations have to be fulfilled and how exact bodily movements have to be performed. Having concentrated on the religious aspects of performance in this chapter, in the following chapter, I analyze further performative aspects, which constructs the difference between whirling as a dance and as a ritual.

#### 5.4.3 “*Sema* vs. whirling in masks” - Performative character of whirling

In chapter 3.3 of my theoretical part, I defined several characteristics through which ritual performances can be distinguished from theatrical performances. Referring to this discussion, I analyze in this part; its performative appearance, the role of aesthetics, the usage of political

messages, and finally, the role of the audience in the construction of a religious ritual versus a dance performance.

*Semas* at the *Haus des Friedens* were not performed on stage. Musicians and participants were sitting in a circle. There was no clear differentiation between an audience and performers. Everyone was asked to participate and encouraged to whirl and thus part of the performance. Azize Güvenç pointed out that in *sema*, Sufi teachings must be understood and incorporated. It cannot only be a physical practice or a beautiful stage act. She stated:

„Aber, *sema* ist kein Musikfestival. *Sema* ist ein Ritual, auf dem Weg der Persönlichkeitsschulung und -bildung. Und deswegen muss beim *sema*, *sohbet* sein. Also, man muss die Bücher lesen, von Mevlana, man kann den Koran dazu nehmen, man sollte den Koran dazu nehmen.“ (Azize Güvenç: 2019/05/20)

Thus, in the context of Tümata, it is crucial that whirling is part of the whole religious performance and practiced with interest in its religious and spiritual connotations. Nevertheless, the *sema* itself and the whirling itself, does not have to follow strict rules. For instance, the performances of Tümata included improvisation; the musicians did have sheet music but did not follow them constantly. Whirling was partly regulated, as it should include a bowing at the beginning and the end, which belongs to the religious repertoire. The whirling itself was open to personal bodily movements. I described in chapter 5.1.1 that for me personally, through this individual style, a beautiful whirling performance came into existence.

The way the *sema* is performed marks a significant difference between Tümata and the one I have seen in Konya. Here, the musicians were placed on a small stage and the *semazen* whirled in the middle. The audience was sitting in comfortable theater chairs. Despite praying the *Fatiha*, they were not included in the performance. There was no room for improvisation because the performance followed a specific script. In addition, in the *sema* of Konya, aesthetics played a particular role. In chapter 5.1.2, I described how the *sema* performance and its setting were well designed. The specific choreography formed a consistent performance, and with the costumes of the *semazen*, they created beautiful and fascinating images. Additionally, the different spotlights illuminating the whirling were means of designing the performance. It contributed to a distinctive aesthetic; it reminded me of music band performances or television shows.

Moreover, in the dance performances, the audience did not participate. The whirling performance artists danced alone. Sometimes they included other dancers or artists in the performance, but the primary attention is on their choreography. The choreography often encompasses a variety of movements in which the whirling is embedded. For example, the modern

dance performance of Khatoon Fallāh, “*kadın*,”<sup>47</sup> that I visited and described in chapter 5.1.4, was a performance of several sets, including live music and different requisites. She told me that her performances sometimes also include improvisations. For her, dance is a meaningful way to express her thoughts and to criticize existing stereotypes and norms. The following picture shows the flyer of the performance mentioned. It shows, the veiling and tensions she expressed in her dance choreographies:

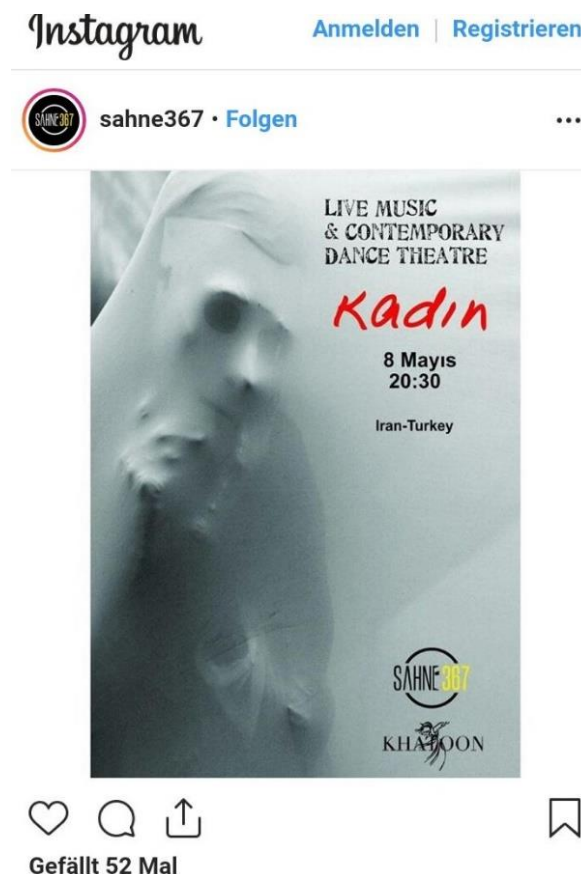


Figure 7: Flyer of Khatoon Fallah's performance *kadın*; (screenshot from Instagram by the author; 2019/05/05)

Similar to Khatoon Fallah, Ziya Azazi used the whirling to express political messages. He used whirling as a tool of protest when he was dancing during the Gezi protest<sup>48</sup>. He described his motivations and the performance in following terms:

“Ich kann mich erinnern, dass ich am vorigen Abend hier saß, ich wohne in der Nähe von diesem Café. Und ich habe von ihm Nachrichten erfahren, dass eben die Proteste in der Türkei angefangen haben. Und ich war völlig

<sup>47</sup> A short summary of the performance can be found here: “Extract of dance theatre solo performance “Kadın” directed by Khatoon Fallah” (2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGe1mML5cQE>. (last accessed 2020/01/04).

<sup>48</sup> This video shows part of the performance: Protestor does a Sufi whirling dervish dance in a gas mask in Gezi.(2013): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ihMkhIjXQ>. (last accessed 2020/01/04).

überrascht, wie es schnell sich so weit verbreitet hat. [...] Dann habe ich entschieden hinzugehen, ohne zu wissen was zu tun. Ich habe meine Röcke mitgenommen und weil es wieder diese Gasbomben geschossen waren, [...] Habe ich mir eine Gasmaske gekauft und wie alle anderen zum Taksim Platz gegangen. Mit der Fotografin und ich habe immer gedreht und sie hat immer gefilmt, oder Fotos gemacht. Und ich habe das Motto von Mevlana von Rumi genommen. Er sagt ja komm, egal wer du bist komm. Auch wenn du Fehler gemacht hast, macht nichts, komm. Und ich habe so einen Ruf gemacht, zu Regierung, zu allen, zu Polizei zu Menschen und ich hab nur gesagt einfach, ja es kann immer Fehler entstehen, hauptsache, dass wir draufkommen es korrigieren und weitermachen. Also Künstler muss Künstler bleiben, Politiker muss gute Politik machen, der Arzt muss Arzt sein. und wenn jeder seine Aufgabe gut macht, kann funktionieren.” (Ziya Azazi: 2019/08/05)

Thus, to form his message, Ziya Azazi defined the whirling as art. He combined the aesthetic aspects of whirling, with the spiritual message of Rumi, to support the protestors and to criticize the government.

I conclude that aspects of settings, aesthetics, choreography, or design constitute specific performances. In all performances, the question of aesthetics is relevant; and in the religious performances, the focus lies on the spiritual aspects which are embodied through the whirling. On the contrary, for dance performances, political and personal motivations play an essential role in the way whirling is practiced.

#### 5.4.4 Summary – Whirling Dance – Transfer ‘out’ of Ritual

The purpose of this chapter was to determine the difference between the two categories that prevailed in my research: practicing whirling in a ritualized religious and a dance context. The elements, through which I determined the difference between the two categories, can as well be identified as part of the internal dimensions in the transfer of rituals (chapter 3.2.4). Thus, they are elements of (ritual) dynamic. I intentionally set the brackets, because if I wanted to deconstruct the categories of ritual and dance, I can consequently not speak of ritual dynamics. Since I have identified changes in the previous chapters, I want to discuss if these processes should instead be described as a transfer ‘out’ of ritual. I shortly recapitulate my findings before elaborating on this question.

Firstly, it can be noticed that the existence of these categories is part of a long historical process, in which different actors, such as artists and governments, have been involved. Furthermore, I identified that the intentions of the actors vary, depending on their embeddedness in religious and spiritual contexts. All highlight the importance of whirling practice for ‘psychical’ well-being and ‘bodily’ health. Nevertheless, they situate themselves differently towards religious institutions. If whirling is understood as a dance, it is instead framed in secular

terms, while for whirling as a ritual practice, referring to a conglomerate of religious practices and knowledge is important. Furthermore, I showed that the categories can be described by considering their performative appearance. Whirling as a dance is associated with arts. Here, the focus is laid upon forms of aesthetic staging and the expression of political opinions, such as critiquing social inequalities. The whirling comes into existence as part of a broader diversity of religious practice in *semas*, like the ones in Konya or by Tümata. It is embedded in a long historical formation of different spiritual and religious practices. Between Tümata and Konya, there is a difference in how the performance is staged. Tümata's performances provide space for improvisation and resemble the dance performances on this issue. Nonetheless, aesthetics is relevant in all performances.

In the analysis in this chapter, I did not discuss the role of the audience. However, the audience had been part of arguments in the previous chapters. Based on these discussions, the theoretical hypothesis of Fischer-Lichte, and my personal experiences, I assume that the perception of the performance as a ritual or dance performance might be different depending on the individual's knowledge. Fischer-Lichte describes how the audience, as well as actors, perceive a performance differently depending on various patterns, symbolic actions, and aesthetic feelings (Fischer-Lichte 2016:53–64). At the beginning of my research, when I associated whirling, only with the *dervishes* from Konya. I did identify their whirling performance as a 'true' ritual because I did not know any historical or political implications forming the Mevlevi *sema*. I did not know about the other forms of whirling performances that exist in different countries and different forms

I experienced the first *sema* I visited very differently from all the others; (see chapter 5.1). The first time, everyone was new to me, and I did not know what to expect. My perspective changed, with the time of my research, visiting more than one whirling performance, and as I gained more and more background knowledge from literature and talking to people. I assume that, for instance, tourists without knowledge about Sufism perceive the *sema* in Konya totally different from persons who might be practicing Sufism themselves.

I now return to the question if the processes going on between the whirling practice embedded in a religious ritual versus a dance performance should not rather be described as a transfer 'out' of ritual.

In the previous chapter 5.3, I discussed the transfer of ritual by focusing more on the contextual aspects of the rituals than on the internal dimensions (s. Table 1). In this chapter, by discussing the performativity of the ritual, I focused on the ritual's immanent level. Despite the

differences on the contextual level, which I assumed from the beginning, I also identified changes in the internal dimensions.

Referring to Langer's definition of transfer of rituals, a change in both categories are typical for a transfer of rituals. Also, in my specific example, modifications have taken place in both categories. But the transfer process has dissolved the ritual structure, in which the whirling practice was embedded. The whirling practice is now part of a dance performance, and no longer an intentional religious practice. Thus, the modifications on the external and internal levels of the ritual have evoked a transformations process, which dissolved the ritual framework. I proposed to describe this phenomenon as a transfer 'out' of ritual. Through using this terminology, the conceptual idea of a transfer of rituals remains. In the meantime, it stresses that a transformation process has taken place, in which the defining practice has been introduced in a non-ritualistic context.

In the following part, I give a first definition of the concept. The initial point has to be a religious or spiritual ritual, which is defined through a specific practice. (Since the *sema*, in its specific form I researched, was defined through the whirling.) The practice is then transferred into another context, which is no longer defined through its religious and ritual structure. The transfer process can be identified through changes in ritual elements. First, the practice is no longer framed and legitimized through its embeddedness in a religious context. Instead, it is part of a new context, and it finds its forms in, for instance, art or political messages. Second, the practice is no longer embedded in a ritual framework. Through this, it can be part of improvisations, modifications, and new inventions (which also take place in rituals). Finally, the performance in which the practice takes place is intentionally formed by participants and audiences with new motivations and objectives.

I do not have any background knowledge, but I assume that similar processes could be described analyzing, for example, Yoga, Chi Gong, or Tai Chi. Thus, the concept could be applied in the fields of ,new' sports trends, health practices, or practices of mindfulness.

The juxtaposition of ritual with another phenomena, such as sports,, could be a problem of this concepts. It can lead to a contrasting depiction of 'religious' versus 'secular'. Through this, it refers to a wider framework of constructed dichotomies such as 'East' – 'West' or 'traditional'



– ‘modern.’ These constructions should be discussed considering different viewpoints and interpretations. Thus, the analysis has to be embedded in a broader discourse of emic perspectives and theoretical discussion<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>49</sup> For my case, Malik gives a faceted interpretation of the construction of East- West; Muslim majority – minority in context of Sufism. Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh (2019).

## 6 Final Conclusion

This thesis defined and analyzed different forms of whirling performances. In this context, another purpose was to build bridges. The distance between Austria and Turkey was reduced, as well as the boundary between practicing whirling as a ritual and as a dance, were both dissolved. The research was designed as an explorative ethnographic approach focusing on the practice of whirling and the personal relations around the group of Tümata and its deceased master Oruç Güvenç. I started researching in Vienna, in order to find out what forms of whirling exist and who is practicing them in which contexts. The second phase of the study was done in different cities in Turkey. In addition, to answer the question already mentioned, the goal was to identify transnational relations, forces of ritual dynamics, and aspects of the transfer of rituals.

The research's starting point was the Sufi whirling ritual, *sema*. Sufism is a spiritual path, practiced in all denominations of Islam. The individual experience of unity with *Allāh* is the central aspect of Sufism. This spiritual relationship can be experienced in different religious practices; some of them introduce a state of trance. One of these forms is the whirling, in which the person spins along one's axis. In Sufism, whirling is performed in several rituals, called *sema*. Subject to the different Sufi *tarika* (Sufi order), the ritual and the whirling is performed differently. This thesis focused on the particular form of *sema* practiced by the Mevlevi *tarika*. Its founder Rumi had been living in the Turkish city of Konya in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the *tarika* has grown, and different groups have come into existence, worldwide.

My motivation for the design of this research was the fact that the whirling practices reminded me of the development of Yoga practices. Yoga is a spiritual practice and ritual performed by different Hindu groups. It has developed as well into 'postural Yoga,' a bodily practice of the modern world, detached from its religious background. I considered if a similar process has already started and will happen with the whirling practice.

The research process was a close interaction of my empirical work and the theoretical approach. Using a transnational approach enabled me to identify global processes in a transnational field between Turkey and Austria. In addition, I researched the *sema* ritual with a specific focus on ritual dynamics. The theory provided me with a theoretical framework of studying

transfers and modifications of the whirling practices. To this framework, I included the theoretical perspective of performance. Through this, I introduced the appearance of whirling as a dance performance, which I identified on the empirical level, by the application of the theory.

I defined different forms of whirling performances through my empirical work. They are dissimilar in their appearance, the staging, the atmosphere, or the involvement of the audience.

I described these performances in various places in Austria and Turkey. Therefore, I first contextualized the whirling practice in a transnational field. I concluded that in Turkey, historical circumstances, political influences, and the promotion of tourism had an impact on the formation of whirling performances and the transfer over the national borders. Additionally, I introduced Tümata as a transnational group, being one of the actors, who lead to these movements over borders on a more individual level.

As a third step, I systemized these movements and different appearances of the whirling performances by applying the theoretical framework of the transfer of rituals. I showed that my interview partners were active actors in the transformation of whirling practices. They introduced the whirling into a new setting because of their missionary, immigration, or importing intentions. Their individual perception of whirling as a dance, prayer, or spiritual practice informed the different appearances of the whirling practice. Furthermore, most of my interview partners continue to transmit whirling practice. I identified how they incorporate their whirling experience in their teachings. Through this, they formed individual styles of whirling: Tümata tries to connect the reviving of old practices with an openness to improvisation and personal styles. Annika Skattum combines whirling with the experience of spiritual empathy. Julia Fraunlob connects whirling with mindfulness. Khatoon Fallah uses whirling as an expression of individual experiences of oppression, while Ziya Azazi frames his technique as the up-to-date version.

Additionally, I determined the changes in the whirling's appearance in reference to the social environments. Social contexts are formed by contrasting understandings of, for instance, gender segregation - as in the case of Tümata and Bursa or 'traditions' – described by Ziya Azazi and Khatoon Fallah.

In the final part of my analysis, I deconstructed the differentiation between whirling in a ritual performative and dance performative context. I demonstrated that this distinction, which prevailed in my research process, has inter alia long historical roots. For example, contemporary dance choreographers have imported whirling to Western European countries, as a dance

form separated from its religious context. On the empirical level, I identified the distinction between these two categories by their different intentions, aesthetics, and performative character. I proposed to use the term transfer ‘out’ of ritual, to describe a process of transfer, in which a practice is taken out of the institutionalized religious context. In the meantime, it is embedded in a new social environment in which the ritual structure is dissolved.

This theoretical idea could also be applied to the practice of Yoga, which was also a starting point in the formulation of my research questions. By comparing whirling practice and Yoga, potential parallels, as well as differences, could be determined. These can give a hint for the possible future development of whirling as a practice of dance.

Moreover, further analysis of the dynamic elements that I defined in my thesis can also give insight into the expansion of whirling dance.

For example, one research field could be to identify the impacts of the global market further. Here, the phenomena of offering ‘authentic’ Sufi performances as a tourist attraction could be analyzed globally. Similarly, the impact of consumer culture could be further researched. Already, postcards and other souvenirs of *dervishes* show different ways of marketing. Additionally, Ziya Azazi has begun his own strategy of selling whirling related products. He opened a webshop, where he, for example, sells the whirling skirts.

Imagining the future transformation of whirling into a trendy sport or lifestyle, I assume that more transformation processes need to take place. Whirling’s shift in meaning by embedding it in new individualistic terms needs to be continued. For example, I think that the German term for whirling, ‘Drehtanz,’ is not the most attractive and effective word for promotion.

In addition, for further research on the whirling practices, it is not necessary to search outside Sufism. There exist other whirling forms outside Mevlevi Sufism. For example, the Tenoura dance in Egypt has its roots in Sufism, as well. The whirling, performed by dancers in colorful skirts, could be examined to define unidirectional processes of dynamic and transfer. For example, Ziya Azazi stated that Tenoura dancers already included whirling with flaming skirts, although he was the one bringing this to stage for the first time.

Another form of whirling I noticed through an internet advertisement was whirling performances during wedding celebrations in Turkey. One person I talked to told me that she assumes that especially ‘traditional’ people are having these dancers at their weddings. They want a spectacular performance that incorporates aspects which they perceive as religious.

Next to relating my work in the empirical field, I also situate it in the research context of ritual dynamics and ritual transfer: Although the Heidelberg research group on Ritual Dynamics and Ritual Transfer ceased its work in 2013, the research area is still relevant. In 2001 the research program was included in the UN "*Dialogue Among Civilizations*," which aimed to contribute to an interreligious and intercultural understanding. Still today, it is essential to create knowledge about lived religious practices in order to strengthen dialogue.

However, my research is not only socially relevant but also continued the interests of the research group. They developed a matrix of guiding questions that define relevant aspects of the research (Harth and Michaels 2009:31). My work contributes to the first area in the matrix (genesis, transformation, and complexity increase) through its focus on the transformation processes of the whirling rituals. Concerning the second area (spatial and temporal structuring modalities of ritual action), I was able to show that, through the transfer of the whirling, spatial locations were dissolved, and the ritual was performed in different contexts. By analyzing the view of my interview partners, as well as, political and structural influences in Turkey, I was also able to contribute to the third area (institutional focus and standardization of the rituals). Through my detailed descriptions, which referred to both external and internal forms of whirling appearances, I can also locate my work in the fourth and last area (external (performance) and internal (composition) organization of the rituals).

In conclusion, my research contributes to the goal of the research program, to define, in the context of rituals, the relations between experiences and actions. As well, it describes socially relevant aspects of symbolic actions and their changes in time (Harth and Michaels 2009:32).

On a personal level, the research process has strengthened my skills in the application of research methodologies. Researching at many different sites, trained me to evaluate situations and to get familiar with new research environments quickly. Nonetheless, some challenges, such as language barriers I could not solve instantly. This lack required improvisation and flexible adaption to the situation.

Additionally, researching in religious contexts is also always challenging for me. Here, my self-identification and the identification of the other is often a 'negotiation' process. It is not always easy to make clear that I am interested in religious practices as a researcher and not interested in becoming part of the community. Furthermore, being part of the research field personally means to be open to new practices and teachings. Nevertheless, I am and will not be affected in the same way as the participants. Hence, an understanding can never happen at the same level.

Researching religious practice also makes me face different ideas of gender roles, which are unlike the ones of my own social environment.

I tried to reflect during my research upon the orientalist views that I might have because of my socialization. I noticed how challenging it is not to reconstruct dichotomic ways of thinking. For example, as I was trying to find out transfer processes, in describing these differences, I quickly tend to refer to 'East' and 'West.' Next to forming generalizations, this term implies the narrative of the 'civilized West' versus the 'original East' grounded in colonialism and other practices of 'Othering.' The 'East' is equalized with the 'Orient.'

Sufi whirling gives a great example of how these images are constructed. The practice is often seen as an 'exotic' 'oriental' practice. Nevertheless, Sufi orders, practicing whirling, can be found in Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, as well as in Indonesia, which would not be regarded as the 'Orient.' In those cases, in which I could not give a concrete regional reference, and was describing more general phenomena, I used the term 'Western European' countries. Through this, I did not overcome the dichotomies but tried to reflect on them.

## 7 References Cited

- Acim, R. 2018. The Reception of Sufism in the West: The Mystical Experiences of American and European Converts. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 38(1):57–72.
- Anderson, B. R. O.'G. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* / Benedict Anderson. Rev. and extended ed. London: Verso.
- Appadurai, A. 1990. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Theory, Culture & Society* 7(2-3):295–310.
- . 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asad, T. 1999. Religion, Nation-State, Secularism. In *Nation and religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, eds. Pp. 178–96. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Atay, T. 2012. *A Muslim mystic community in Britain: Meaning in the West and for the West*. 1st ed. Bremen: Europ. Hochsch.-Verl.
- Austin, J. L., J. O. Urmson, and M. Sbisà. 1974. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Banks, M. 2002. Visual Research Methods. *Indian Folklife*(9):8–10.
- Bayraktar, S. 2016. Ziya Azazi's Dervish-In-Progress and Contested Choreographies of 'Whirling' in Turkey. *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities* 3(3):279–95.
- Bell, C. M. 2010. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernard, H. R. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 4. ed. Lanham, Md. AltaMira Press.
- Box, L. C. 2008. The Global Dervish: Intercultural and Intracultural Appropriations of the Sufi Performance Space. *Ecumenica* 1(2):57–74.
- Breuer, F., B. Dieris, and A. Lettau. 2009. *Reflexive Grounded Theory: Eine Einführung für die Forschungspraxis*. Wiesbaden: VS Verl. für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Brosius, C., A. Michaels, and P. Schrode. 2013. Ritualforschung heute - ein Überblick. In *Ritual und Ritualdynamik: Schlüsselbegriffe, Theorien, Diskussionen*. Christiane Brosius, Axel Michaels, and Paula Schrode, eds. Pp. 9–24. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Brosius, C., and K. M. Polit. 2011. *Ritual, Heritage and Identity: The politics of culture and performance in a globalised world*: Routledge.

- Brubaker, R. 2012. Religion and nationalism: Four approaches\*. *Nations and Nationalism* 18(1):2–20.
- Candea, M. 2009. Arbitrary Locations: In defence of the bounded fieldsite. In *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Mark-Anthony Falzon, ed. Pp. 25–47. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Çizmeci, E. 2016. World as Sacred Stage for Sufi Ritual: Performance, mobilization and making space with the act of whirling. *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities* 3(3):199–215.
- . 2018. Performing Sufi Disfiguration: Transformation of the self. *Performance Research* 23(8):74–82.
- Coleman, E. G. 2010. Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 39(1):487–505.
- Cook, D. 2015. Sufism. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.
- Csordas, T. J. 2007. Introduction: Modalities of transnational transcendence. *SAGE Publication* 7(3):259–72.
- Daswani, Girish. 2013. The Anthropology of Transnationalism and Diaspora. In *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Ato Quayson and Daswani, Girish, eds. Pp. 29–53. Sussex: Wiley Blackwell Publishing.
- Diaz, M. D. 2014. *Women in Sufism: Female religiosities in a transnational order*: Routledge.
- Dominguez Diaz, M. 2011. Shifting Fieldsites: An alternative approach to fieldwork in transnational Sufism. *Fieldwork in Religion* 6(1):61–82.
- . 2013. Are New Sufis “Grey Turks”? Urbanite National Identities and Religious Reconfigurations. *Euxeinos* 10:29.
- Dressler, M. 2010. Between Legalist Exclusivism and Mysticist Universalism: Contested Sufi Muslim Identities in New York. *The Muslim World* 100(4):431–51.
- Dressler, M., R. Geaves, and G. Klinkhammer. 2009. A Case of Cultural Binary Fission or Transglobal Sufism? The transmigration of Sufism to Britain. In *Sufis in Western Society*. Pp. 107–22: Routledge.
- Dücker, B. 2007. *Rituale*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.
- Durkheim, É. 2012 (1912). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New Port: Dover Publications.
- Erzen, J. 2008. The Dervishes Dance—The Sacred Ritual of Love. *Contemporary Aesthetics* 6(1):7.



- Ewing, K. 1983. The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the saints of Pakistan. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 42(2):251–68.
- Falzon, M.-A. 2009. Introduction. In *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Mark-Anthony Falzon, ed. Pp. 1–25. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. 2016. *Performativität: Eine Einführung*. 3., unveränderte Auflage. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Fish, A. 2006. The Commodification and Exchange of Knowledge in the Case of Transnational Commercial Yoga. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 13(2):189–206.
- Flick, U. 2010. *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung*. Vollst. überarb. und erw. Neu-  
ausg., 3. Aufl. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl.
- Franke, E., and V. Maske. 2011. Teilnehmende Beobachtung als Verfahren der Religionsforschung. In *Religionen erforschen: Kulturwissenschaftliche Methoden in der Religionswissenschaft*. 1. Aufl. Stefan Kurth and Karsten Lehmann, eds. Pp. 105–34. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Fremantle, A. 1976. Whirling Dervishes in Turkey. *History Today* 26(5).
- Gardet, L., and Vadet J.-C. *Kalb: Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (accessed February 1, 2017).
- Geaves, R. 2009. A Case of Cultural Binary Fission or Transglobal Sufism? The transmigration of Sufism to Britain. In *Sufis in Western Society: Global networking and locality*. Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, eds. Pp. 97–113. London, New York: Routledge.
- Geertz, C. 1971. *Islam Observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books: Basic Books.
- Gellner, E. 1983. *Muslim Society*: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gladigow, B. 2004. Sequenzierung von Riten und die Ordnung der Rituale. In *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*. Michael Stausberg, ed. Pp. 57–76. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Glaser, B. G., and A. L. Strauss. 2006 (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. 4. paperback printing. New Brunswick, London: Aldine Transcation Publishing.
- Göl, A. 2017. The Paradoxes of ‘New’ Turkey: Islam, illiberal democracy and republicanism. *International Affairs* 93(4):957–66.

- Graham, L. R., and H. G. Penny. 2014. *Performing Indigeneity: Global histories and contemporary experiences*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Grimes, R. L. 2014. *The Craft of Ritual Studies*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Gullion, J. S. 2016. *Writing Ethnography*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Gupta, A., and J. Ferguson, eds. 1997. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in critical anthropology*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Güvenç, A. A. 2018. *Hey Reisender: Eine Reise durch islamische Welten & orientalisches-musiktherapeutische Landschaften*. Wien: silsile.
- Hammarlund, A., T. Olsson, and E. Özdalga, eds. 2001. *Sufism, Music and Society in Turkey and the Middle East: Papers read at a conference held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, November 27-29, 1997*. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul.
- Handelman, D. 2005a. Epilogue: Toing and Froing the Social. In *Ritual In Its Own Right: Exploring the Dynamics of Transformation*. Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist, eds. Pp. 213–23. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- . 2005b. Introduction: Why Ritual in its own rights? How so? In *Ritual In Its Own Right: Exploring the Dynamics of Transformation*. Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist, eds. Pp. 1–34. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Hanna Walsdorf. 2013. Performanz. In *Ritual und Ritualdynamik: Schlüsselbegriffe, Theorien, Diskussionen*. Christiane Brosius, Axel Michaels, and Paula Schrode, eds. Pp. 85–91. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Hannerz, U. 2001 [1996]. *Transnational Connections: Culture, people, places*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2002. *Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids: Keywords in transnational anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Harth, D., and A. Michaels. 2009. Grundlagen des SFB 619 - Ritualdynamik: Soziokulturelle Prozesse in historischer und kulturvergleichender Perspektive. : *Diskussionsbeiträge des SFB 619 »Ritualdynamik« der Ruprecht-Karls- Universität Heidelberg* 1.
- Hefner, R. W., and M. Cook, eds. 2010. *Muslims and Modernity: Culture and society since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Heidbrink, S. 2007. Exploring the Religious Frameworks of the Digital Realm: Offline-online-offline transfers of ritual performance. *Masaryk UJL & Tech* 1:175.
- Hobsbawm, E. J., and T. O. Ranger, eds. 2000 (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. 19th pr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr.

- Hopf, C. 1995. Qualitative Interviews in der Sozialforschung: Ein Überblick. In *Handbuch qualitative Sozialforschung: Grundlagen, Konzepte, Methoden und Anwendungen*. 2. Auflage. Uwe Flick, Ernst v. Kardorff, and Heiner Keupp, eds. Pp. 177–82. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Howell, J. D., and M. van Bruinessen. 2007. Introduction: Sufism and the modern in Islam. In *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia D. Howell, eds. Pp. 3–19. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Huarcaya, S. 2015. Performativity, Performance, and Indigenous Activism in Ecuador and the Andes. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3(57):806–37.
- Hüsken, U., and F. Neubert, eds. 2012. *Negotiating Rites*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Jain, A. R. 2014. *Selling Yoga: From counterculture to pop culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kapferer, B. 2005. Ritual Dynamics and Virtual Practice: Beyond Representation and Meaning. In *Ritual In Its Own Right: Exploring the Dynamics of Transformation*. Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist, eds. Pp. 35–55. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Kapferer, B., and A. Hobart. 2005. Introduction: The Aesthetics of Symbolic Construction and Experience. In *Aesthetics in Performance: Formations of symbolic construction and experience*. Angela Hobart and Bruce Kapferer, eds. Pp. 1–23. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Karamustafa, A. T. 2007. What Is Sufism? In *Voices of Islam*. Vincent J. Cornell, ed. Pp. 249–69. Westport, Conn. Praeger Publ.
- Kearney, M. 1995. The Local and the Global: The anthropology of globalization and transnationalism. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24(1):547–65.
- Klinkhammer, G. 2009. Sufismus im Westen: Entwicklungen, Strukturen, Organisationen. In *Die unbekannte Seite des Islam: Rollen und Positionen des Sufismus*. Lidwina Meyer, ed. Pp. 105–13. Rehburg-Loccum: Evangelische Akademie Loccum.
- . 2017. Afterword on the Relation between the Understanding of Sufism and the ‘Modern’ Self: Mysticism, secularity and identity. *Culture and Religion* 18(2):181–90.
- Knoblauch, H. 2003. *Qualitative Religionsforschung: Religionsethnographie in der eigenen Gesellschaft*. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Knyš, A. D. 2000. *Islamic Mysticism: A short history*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Kopytoff, I. 1986. The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as process. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective* 68:70–73.
- Kreinath, J., C. Hartung, and A. Deschner, eds. 2004. *The Dynamics of Changing Rituals: The transformation of religious rituals within their social and cultural context*. New York: Lang.

- Kreinath, J., J. A. M. Snoek, and M. Stausberg. 2006. *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, topics, approaches, concepts*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Küçük, H. 2007. Dervishes Make a City: The Sufi Culture in Konya. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16(3):241–53.
- Kuehn, S., and L. Pokorny. 2019. On Inayati Female Visions in Austria: Female leadership in the Western Sufi tradition. In *Religion in Austria 4*. Hans G. Hödl and Lukas Pokorny, eds. Wien: Praesens Verlag.
- Lamnek, S. 2005. *Qualitative Sozialforschung*. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- Langer, R. 2011. Transfer Processes within Sufi Rituals: An example from Istanbul. *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 13:2–17.
- Langer, R., D. Lüddeckens, K. Radde, and J. A. M. Snoek. 2005. Einleitung. In *Migration und Ritualtransfer: Religiöse Praxis der Aleviten, Jesiden und Nusairier zwischen Vorderem Orient und Westeuropa*. Robert S. Langer, Raoul Motika, and Michael Ursinus, eds. Pp. 7–23. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang.
- . 2006. Transfer of Ritual. *Journal of Ritual Studies*(20):1–10.
- . 2013. Ritualtransfer. In *Ritual und Ritualdynamik: Schlüsselbegriffe, Theorien, Diskussionen*. Robert Langer and J. A. M. Snoek, eds. Pp. 23–35. Göttingen [u.a.]: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Langer, R., T. Quartier, U. Simon, J. Snoek, and G. Wiegers. 2011. Ritual as a Source of Conflict. *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*:93–132.
- Langer, R., and J. A. M. Snoek, eds. 2013. *Ritual und Ritualdynamik: Schlüsselbegriffe, Theorien, Diskussionen*. Göttingen [u.a.]: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Langer, R. S., R. Motika, and M. Ursinus, eds. 2005. *Migration und Ritualtransfer: Religiöse Praxis der Aleviten, Jesiden und Nusairier zwischen Vorderem Orient und Westeuropa*. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang.
- Lawrence, B. B. 2010. Sufism and Neo-Sufism. *The New Cambridge History of Islam Volume 6: Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society since 1800*:355–84.
- Lefebvre. 1991. *The Production of Space*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: Chicago Press.
- Lewis, J. L. 2013. *The Anthropology of Cultural Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Liebold, R., and R. Trinczek. 2009. Experteninterview. In *Quantitative Methoden der Organisationsforschung: Ein Handbuch*. 2. Aufl. Stefan Kühl, ed. Pp. 32–56. Wiesbaden: VS Verl. für Sozialwiss.

- Lizzio, K. 2007. Ritual and Charisma in Naqshbandi Sufi Mysticism. *Anpere E-Journal for the Anthropological Study of Religion* 32:1–37.
- Madden, R. 2017. *Being Ethnographic: A guide to the theory and practice of ethnography*: SAGE.
- Mader, E. 2015. Rund um die Palme: Rituelle Prozesse, indigene Politik und Medien in Ecuador. In *Mediatisierung – Religiosität – Heilung: Ethnographische und anthropologische Annäherungen an Performativität und Transformation*. 1. Aufl. Philipp Budka, Franz Graf, and Martin Luger, eds. Pp. 111–35. Göttingen, Niedersachs: V&R unipress.
- Madison, S. D., and J. A. Hamera. 2006. Performance Studies at the Intersections. In *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*. Judith A. Hamera, ed. Pp. XI–XXV. London: SAGE.
- Malik, J., and J. Hinnells. 2006. *Sufism in the West*: Routledge.
- Malik, J., and S. Zarrabi-Zadeh. 2019. Introduction. In *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and cross-cultural exchange in the modern world*. Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh, eds. Pp. 1–30. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Malinowski, B., ed. 1979. *Argonauten des westlichen Pazifik: E. Bericht über Unternehmungen u. Abenteuer d. Eingeborenen in d. Inselwelten von Melanesisch-Neuguinea*. Frankfurt a.M. Syndikat.
- Marcus, G. E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*(24):95–117.
- . 2009. Multi-Sited Ethnography: Notes and queries. In *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Mark-Anthony Falzon, ed. Pp. 181–97. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Mayring, P. 1994. *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*. Konstanz: UVK Univ.-Verl. Konstanz.
- Melchert, C. 2005. Basran Origins of Classical Sufism. *Der Islam* 2(82):221–40.
- Mitchell, J. P. 2006. Performance. In *Handbook of Material Culture*. Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, eds. Pp. 384–401. London: SAGE.
- Neubert, F. 2009. Ritualtransfer: Eine projektbezogene Präzisierung. *Forum Ritualdynamik*(15). <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/6569/1/NeubertRitualtransfer.pdf>.
- Njaradi, D. 2008. Mevlevi Dervish Dance: ‘Authentic’ and/or ‘Transnational’. In *Established Scholars’ Conference: Proceeding*. Society for dance Research, ed. Pp. 23–28. London: Roehampton University.
- O’Fahey, R. S., and B. Radtke. 1993. Neo-Sufism Reconsidered. *Der Islam* 70(1):52–87.

- Pietrobruno, S. 2015. Social Media and Whirling Dervishes: Countering UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage. *Performing Islam* 4(1):11–33.
- Pinto, P. 2003. Mystical Bodies: Ritual, experience and the embodiment of Sufism in Syria. <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=5264532>.
- Pinto, P. G. 2016. Mystical Bodies/Unruly Bodies: Experience, empowerment and subjectification in Syrian Sufism. *Social Compass* 63(2):197–212.
- Quayson, A., and Daswani. Girish. 2013. Introduction - Diaspora and Transnationalism: Scapes, Scales and Scopes. In *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Ato Quayson and Daswani. Girish, eds. Pp. 1–26. Sussex: Wiley Blackwell Publishing.
- Radde-Antweiler, K. 2006. Ritual is Becoming Digitalised: Introduction to the Special Issue on Rituals on the Internet. *Online–Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 2.
- Rappaport, R. A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Raudvere, C. 2002. *The book and the roses: Sufi women, visibility and Zikir in contemporary Istanbul*. Istanbul: Swedish Research Inst.
- Raudvere, C., and L. Stenberg. 2008. *Sufism today: Heritage and tradition in the global community*: IB Tauris.
- Ridgeon, L. 2015. *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Sağlam, B. 2017. A Discussion on the Myth of Mevlânâ in Modern Turkey. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 38(4):412–28.
- Şahin, N. 2016. Contestations, Conflicts and Music-Power: Mevlevi Sufism in the 21st Century Turkey. Master-Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
- Said, E. W. 1978. *Orientalismus*. London: Routledge and Henley.
- Samuel, G. 2008. *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic religions to the thirteenth century*: Cambridge University Press.
- Schechner, R. 1995. *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- . 2013 (2002). *Performance Studies: An introduction*. 3. ed. London, New York: Routledge: Routledge.
- Schielke, S. 2008. Mystic States, Motherly Virtues: Female Participation and Leadership in an Egyptian Sufi Milieu. *Journal for Islamic studies* 28(1):94–126.

- Schimmel, A. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 2000. *Sufismus: Eine Einführung in die islamische Mystik*. München: CH Beck: CH Beck.
- Schleißmann, L. 2003. *Sufismus in Deutschland: Deutsche auf dem Weg des mystischen Islam*. Köln Weimar: Böhlau Verlag.
- Schütze, F. 1977. *Die Technik des narrativen Interviews*. Bielefeld: (Manuskript).
- Sedgwick, M. J. 2017. *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the new age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sharify-Funk, M., W. R. Dickson, and M. S. Xavier. 2017. *Contemporary Sufism: Piety, Politics, and Popular Culture*: Routledge.
- Shepherd, S. 2016. *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Singer, M. 1972. *When a Great Tradition Modernized: An anthropological approach to modern civilization*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Smith, L. 2011. The 'Doing' of Heritage: Heritage as Performance. In *Performing Heritage*. Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, eds. Pp. 69–81. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Strübing, J. 2008. *Grounded Theory*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Tambiah, S. J. 1979. A Performative Approach to Ritual. *Proceedings of the British Academy*(65):113–69.
- Trimingham, J. S. 1998. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, V. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. New York: Cornell Univ. Press.
- . 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and anti-structure*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- . 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: Cornell University Press.
- . 1988. *The Anthropology of Performance*. 1. paperback ed. New York: PAJ Publ: PAJ Publ.
- van Gennep, A. 1986 [1909]. *Übergangsriten*. Frankfurt a.M. Campus.
- Varisco, D. 2005. *Islam Obscured: The rhetoric of anthropological representation*: Springer.

- Vertovec, S. 1999. Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22(2):447–62.
- Vicente, V. A. 2019. Itineraries of Enlightenment: Whirling dervish shows, ethnographic reflexivity, and tourism in Egypt and Turkey. *Musicologist* 3(1):37–57.
- Voll, J. O. 2008. Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 42(2-3):314–30.
- Voll, O. J. 2007. Contemporary Sufism and Current Social Theory. In *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia D. Howell, eds. Pp. 281–99. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Wentker, S., and W. Feichtinger. 2008. *Islam, Islamismus und islamischer Extremismus: Eine Einführung*. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag.
- Werbner, P. 2003. *Pilgrims of Love: The anthropology of a global Sufi cult*. London: Hurst.
- . 2009. Playing with Numbers: Sufi calculation of a perfect divine in Manchester. In *Sufis in Western Society: Global networking and locality*. Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, eds. Pp. 113–30. London, New York: Routledge.
- Werbner, P., and H. Basu. 1998. *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, locality, and performance of emotion in Sufi cults*: Psychology Press.
- Westerlund, D. 2004. *Sufism in Europe and North America*: Routledge.
- White, J. B. 2014. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. New edition, with a new afterword by the author. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Wilding, R. 2007. Transnational Ethnographies and Anthropological Imaginings of Migrancy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(2):331–48.
- Yaman, A. 2010. Ritual Transfer within the Anatolian Alevis: A Comparative Approach to the Cem-Ritual. In *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual: Transfer and spaces*. Axel Michaels, ed. Pp. 269–77. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Yükleyen, A. 2008. Sufism and Islamic Groups in Contemporary Turkey. In *The Cambridge history of Turkey: Volume 4: Turkey in the modern world*, vol. 1. Reşat Kasaba, ed. Pp. 381–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zarcone, T. 2013. Western Visual Representations of Dervishes from the 14th Century to Early 20th. *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 6:43–58.



## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Glossary

The following table shows the foreign words used in the thesis. In English scientific literature, most often the Arabic words are used when describing Islamic concepts. Therefore, I also applied these terms, only when I was writing about specific aspects in Turkey, I used the Turkish term. For those words which already have a common transcription in English, I used these; such as dervish.

Turkish	Arabic	Meaning in English
semazen	sama	Dancers during the <i>sema</i> (also often called whirling <i>dervish</i> )
Allah	Allāh	The Islamic word for God
derviş	faqir	Dervish, Member of a Sufi group; or person living an ascetic life
hadis	ḥadīth	Collection of the stories, and words of Prophet Muhammad; one of the sources of Islamic law
hâl	ḥāl	Here, a temporary state of consciousness Sufis pass on their path to come closer to the spiritual unity with <i>Allāh</i> .
kihrap	Mihrab	Praying niche in praying rooms/mosques, directed towards Mekka
Kuran	Qur'ān	Koran, Quran; holy Islamic book
marifet	ma'rifa	In this context, the 'mystical' knowledge of Sufis, that cannot be gained rationally, but for example, in trance.
menzil	manzil	In this context, the different steps and stations Sufis have to fulfill on their path to come closer to the spiritual unity with <i>Allāh</i> .
Mevlana Muhamed Celalettin Rumi	Mevlânâ/Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī	A 13th-century poet and Sufi master; often called Rumi or Mevlana
mürşit	murshid	Guide, or teacher in the spiritual path
nakşebendiye	Naqshbandīyah	Naqshbandi; a widespread Sufi order of Sunni Islam
sema	samā'	Ceremony/ ritual in Sufi groups
semazenbashi		Ceremony master in the <i>sema</i>
şeriat	ṣarī'a	Sharia, Islamic law
Şeyh	sheikh	Sufi master; leader of the <i>tariqa</i>

sohbet	muhādifa	Conversation; talk of the Sufi master
tarikāt	ṭarīqa	Sufi order, group
tasavvuf, sufilik	taṣawwuf, Sufiyye	Sufism,
tekke	kangah, zawfiya	Center, lodge of the Sufi group
üstād	Mualim, sheikh	Teachers of the tariqa
zīkr	dhikr	Remembrance; kind of a prayer, devotional act in Sufi groups

## 8.2 Outline of Participant Observations and Interviews Conducted

Research	Date	Place
<b>Research phase in Vienna (October 2018 – January 2019)</b>		
Interview in German Julia Fraunlob	2018/12/03	Café Yppenplatz
Interview in German Solveig Surur Fiedler	2018/12/13	Private apartment
Interview in German <sup>50</sup> Gernot Galib Stanfel	2019/01/16	Büro im Institut der Islamischen Religion - KPH Wien/Krems
Interview in English Annika Skattum	2019/01/24	Haus des Friedens
Interview in German Fawzia Al-Rawi	2019/02/21	Skype
Interview in German Ziya Azazi	2019/08/15	Café Goldschlagl
Participant observation Zikr	div. dates btw. 2018/10/29 & 2019/01/28	Haus des Friedens, Private apartment
Participant observation <i>Sema</i>	2018/11/24 2019/01/26	Haus des Friedens
Participant observation Whirling workshop von Fawzia Al-Rawi	2019/11/17 2019/11/24	Haus des Friedens
<b>Research phase in Turkey (February – May 2019)</b>		
Participant observation Women group Bursa & <i>Sema</i> Bursa	2019/03/30&31	Karabaş-i Veli Dergahı Kültür Merkezi – Bursa
Participant observation	2019/03/02 2019/03/23	Tasavvuf vakfı, Ankara

<sup>50</sup> The recording stopped accidentally after five minutes. Directly after the interview, I did a detailed memo protocol.

Women group Tasavvuf vakfı, Ankara		
Participant observation Mevlevi <i>Sema</i> Konya	2019/04/20	Mevlana Kültür Merkezi - Konya
Participant observation Dance performances of Khatoon Fallah	2019/05/04 2019/05/08	ODTÜ Contemporary Dance Festival; Sahne 361; Ankara,
Interview in Persian <sup>51</sup> Khatoon Fallah	2019/05/15	Office building in Ankara
Interview in English Emre Başaran <sup>52</sup>	2019/05/18	Park in Istanbul
Interview in German Azize Güvenç	2019/05/20	Café in Gökcedere
Interview in English Elin Tezel	2019/05/26	Café ODTÜ, Ankara

---

<sup>51</sup> I conducted this interview with a friend. She translated the prepared questions from English to Persian. She as well translated during the interview. We recorded the interview and I kept notes during the interview, which I used for the coding.

<sup>52</sup> Interview without recording.

## 8.3 Abstracts

### 8.3.1 Abstract in English

The practice of whirling is a vital part of the Sufi's sema rituals, as well as of contemporary dance performances. This thesis analyzes the ritual dynamics of the whirling practices and applies a transnational perspective. It studies how whirling practices are transferred into different geographies and performance contexts. Following a qualitative explorative approach, ethnographic field work was conducted in different sites in Turkey and Austria. The results of this multi-sited ethnography are analyzed by applying the theoretical perspective of the transfer of rituals by Langer (2006) and Neubert (2009). I interviewed people, practicing whirling and identified how they move transnationally, leading to a transfer of the ritual from Turkey to Austria and vice versa. I conclude that whirling manifests in different forms such as dance, spiritual practice, or ritual. The personal intentions and motivations of those who practice whirling, as well as the social environment, affect the dynamics that evoke transformations and modifications of the whirling performances. In some cases, these changes lead to a dissolution of the ritual character of the whirling performances, and thus I propose to describe such phenomena as transfer 'out' of rituals.

### 8.3.2 Abstract in German

Sich um die eigene Achse Drehen ist eine spezifische Praktik, die sowohl Teil sufistischer Sema-Rituale ist, als auch ein Element moderner Tanzperformances. Die vorliegende Arbeit stellt heraus, wie dieses Drehen in unterschiedlichen geographischen und performativen Kontexten auftritt und welche Ritualdynamiken diesen zugrunde liegen. In meiner ethnographischen Feldforschung an unterschiedlichen Orten in der Türkei und Österreich interviewte ich Personen, die diese Form des Drehens in sufistischen Orden, Gruppen oder im Rahmen zeitgenössischer Tanzperformances praktizieren und analysierte, wie diese sich in transnationalen Feldern bewegen. Mit Hilfe der Theorie des Ritualtransfer nach Langer (2006) sowie Neubert (2009), identifizierte ich die Elemente eines wechselseitigen Ritualtransfers zwischen der Türkei und Österreich. Daraus gewann ich folgende Erkenntnis: Persönliche Intentionen und Motivationen, wie auch die soziale Umgebung beeinflussen die Dynamiken, die zu Transformationen und Modifikationen führen. In manchen Fällen kommt es zu einer Auflösung des rituellen Charakters der Dreh-Aufführungen, ein Phänomen, für das ich den Begriff "transfer 'out' of rituals" vorschlage.