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The Aftermath of Defining "Authenticity" as Discourse:

The Case of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony

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Thank you for your consideration

The aftermath of defining "Authenticity" as Discourse: The case of the Mevlevi Sema Ceremony

It is June of 2016, and I am on a dinner and entertainment boat tour along the Bosphorus in celebration of the birthday of one of my closest friends. The table is covered with plates of food and copious alcohol, and we are surrounded by tourists who stare in avid fascination at the skillful performance of a belly dancer. In my distraction, I barely notice the belly dancer leave and another dancer take her place: a single "whirling dervish." As the DJ plays the haunting melody of the reed-flute, the "dervish" begins to whirl with a face fixed in contemplation. He stays upon the center-stage for just ten minutes, whirling the entire time. Later, he returns to the stage in the costume of a folklore dancer, and performs another routine. My friends find the sight completely normal, but I find I have to leave the room to think about the strange event that has just transpired in front of me.

At another time, I observe a group of dervishes "performing" the same ritual ceremony at a concert hall. Conducting the ritual is Nedim Karnıbüyükler, known fondly as Nadir Efendi, a Mevlevi sheikh. He received his training from Sheikh Hüseyin Top, who was trained by Sheikh Mithad Baharî Beydur, who was in turn trained by Sheikh Hüseyin Fahreddin of the Bahariye Mevlevi dervish lodge.[1] After Sheikh Hüseyin Top found him to be ready for the role, he was given permission (*icazet*) to be a sheikh from Faruk Hemdem Çelebi, the current patrilineal descendant of the last Head of the Mevlevi order (*Makam Çelebi*). Surrounding Sheikh Nadir Efendi are five dervishes initiated into the Mevlevi doctrine, all of whom have been trained by the sheikh not only in the proper performance of the ceremony, but also in Islamic scripture and Sufi literature. Before entering the stage they perform ritual ablutions, pray an additional *salat*, and read from Rumi's Mesnevi. For the

[1] To avoid exclusive terminology, this paper uses English-language equivalents and spelling of terms as much as possible (Ex. "Sufi order," "Sheikh," or "Salat"). When translation is not possible, I use consistent Turkish transliteration.

next hour, accompanied by live music from a group of musicians and singers sitting in a corner of the stage, they perform an elaborate ceremony consisting of seven stages. Only part five involves the iconic act of whirling, and as they do so they internally chant the name of God as they turn. After the ceremony is finished, Sheikh Nadir Efendi and his dervishes retreat for contemplation.

While the same ritual is performed in both examples, *the Mevlevi Sema ceremony,* known to the West as *the whirling dervishes*, it is clear that the actual performances are in stark contrast. Sufi practitioners today would not hesitate to state the many problems with the whirling dervish on the boat tour, arguing that Sema is a prayer and thus must be done after ritual ablutions, outside the presence of alcohol, etc. They would also add that it could not qualify as a full Sema ceremony, but rather a mere imitation, as he is not, internally, worshipping God. Yet the folkloric whirling dervish is not an unusual sight: upon entering the ancient Istanbul neighborhood of Sultanahmet, a popular destination for tourists, visitors will find themselves assaulted by the motif of the whirling dervish on all manner of boat tour advertisements, cafe billboards, and even menu items (“Mevlana kebab”). As such, lovers of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony everywhere are tackling a major issue: How can the authenticity of this ritual be preserved?

Yet we, as academics, cannot ask the same question. Examining this case study from the perspective of the academic study of religion, it would be deeply problematic to point to a specific iteration of this ceremony and assert that it is more authentic than another. Our current understanding of authenticity, as a discourse rather than an innate and naturalized category, means that the moment we search for the authentic we have left the realm of critical study. However, the reality is that this situation is not an internal transformation, but a phenomenon caused by external state suppression. The Sema ceremony would still be the *Mevlevi* Sema ceremony if the Turkish government had not banned the Mevlevi order and

then absorbed them into the narrative of secularism and statehood. For this reason, I argue that failing to hold unequivocally that the second case is more authentic than the first obscures the implicit violence of the situation. Thus, I argue that the real-world dynamics of the case of the Mevlevi Sema ceremony presents one challenge to our academic approach to authenticity. This is not to deny the reality of authenticity as a discourse, but rather to acknowledge that because of this very reality it has a great deal of power in society. Due to this, we must acknowledge that as scholars of religion, we can and should strategically employ the language of authenticity for marginalized communities in need of protection or assistance.

I will begin by providing context. The Mevlevi order was founded by Mevlâna Celâleddin-i Rumi's son Sultan Veled in the late thirteenth century, with the aim of preserving the teachings of his father. Over the span of its history, this Sufi order established over thirty-four dervish lodges in which dervishes would live a monastic life and be assisted by a Sheikh in the "path" of a Sufi.[2] The Mevlevi Sema ceremony is the iconic form of Sufi chanting (*zikir*) that this Sufi order practiced, which, towards the modern period, was performed on a weekly basis in a dervish lodge in a room specially built for this purpose (*Semahane*).[3] Sufi chanting (*zikir*), a term that literally translates to "remembrance," is a continuous chanting of *Allah* or one of God's ninety-nine names, thus "remembering" God, expressing love and devotion, and the worshiper's positionality. As in many Sufi traditions, a Mevlevi dervish, due to their intense love of God, aims to reach a state of grace (*İnsan-ı Kamil*) where they might return to God before death. To do so, they must go through various stages of self-transformation, ultimately ending in the destruction of their ego (*Fenafillah)* and their reaching the eternal and the perfect that is God (*Bekabillah*).

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[2] Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevi adab ve erkanı (*Istanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1963).
[3] During, J. and Sellheim, R., "Samāʿ," In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Accessed May 10, 2018.

When music is added to chanting to create the Sema, emotions are intensified. Sema, literally "to listen," is a type of Sufi ritual performed across the Islamic world. It involves "listening to chanted or recited poetry that might or might not be accompanied by musical instruments."[4] The Mevlevis are set apart by their focus on dance, in which their singing of verses of poetry is used as accompaniment to the dervishes' act of whirling around the axis of their own body.[5] The Mevlevi focus on dance during the act of listening helps to further intensify emotions.

While Sema dates back to the ninth and tenth centuries CE, however, the Mevlevi order's particular version was only finalized in the 15th century,[6] and formed from multiple contributions over a long time period (from Sultan Veled [d.1312] to Pir Adil Çelebi [d.1460]). The modern Mevlevi Sema ceremony is thus a hyper-stylized form of Sufi chanting packed with symbols: the minutia of every movement, the presence of every object, every sound has an assigned meaning. To state the detail of every move could constitute a paper in itself.[7] What is most important to note is how every section (s*elam*) of the Sema ceremony exists to invoke certain emotions in the dervish, to guide them through their praise and love of God. Section one is to impart an understanding of their positionality as a servant of God, section two is to invoke the state of awe for God's greatness and power, section three is to invoke ecstatic love for God, and section four is a return to the state of servitude.[8] Through this ceremony, the dervish experiences multiple transformations in the self before being guided back into the world. A grounded expression of this elevated concept is given by

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[4] Carl Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam (*Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 180.
[5] Ibid., 5.
[6] Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Sama?: Listening and Altered States*, Routledge Sufi Series (London: Routledge, 2015), 4.
[7] And has been explained in this manner skillfully by modern Mevlevi scholars such as Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı and Hüseyin Top.
[8] Nuri Özcan, "Mevlevî Âyini," *TDV Islam Encyclopedia,* (Ankara: TDV Islam Research Center, 2004).

twelve-year-old dervish Fahri Özçakır,[9] who in an interview explains "Sometimes during the Sema, it feels as if Mevlana is holding my hand. I begin to smile inside, and my heart is warm, and later it is as if what my eyes see is different from before."[10]

This makes clear how important this ritual to this Sufi order. As J.Z. Smith explains, "ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are, in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary course of things."[11] In the case of the Mevlevis, they themselves "ought to be" perfect servants of God. Through the actions of the ritual, Mevlevis can change themselves, not only in the ritual space, but in the ordinary course of things — or as Fahri puts it, "later it is as if what my eyes see is different from before." The ceremony was thus a space for a dervish to bring into being a path he is already on, that of radical self-transformation.

This system was ruptured, however, with the 1925 passing of Law no. 677, titled "The closing of *tekke* (dervish lodges), *zaviye* (small dervish lodges), and tombs; and the abolishment of various titles."[12] Following the passing of this law, the government seized the assets of dervish lodges, sealed their doors, and had their inhabitants leave the premises. Usage of and service to Sufi titles were banned, as well as all religious practices specific to Sufi orders, such as Sufi chanting and ordeals. Though passed by the newly established Parliament of the Republic of Turkey, this law had a longer ideological lineage tracing back to the Young Turk movement of the early twentieth century Ottoman Empire.[13] The Kemalist

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[9] Today, Fahri Özçakır is the Sheikh of the Konya whirling dervish group, connected to the Ministry of Culture.
[10] Ira Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes: Being an account of the Sufi order known as the Mevlevis and its founder the poet and mystic Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1975), 68.
[11] Jonathon Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63.
[12] Official Gazette, No. 243. Law No. 677: "Tekke ve zâviyelerle türbelerin seddine ve türbedarlıklarıyla bir takım ünvânların men' ve ilgâsına dâir kânûn." www.resmigazete.gov.tr
[13] Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State* (NY: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2010), 7.

state, drawing on Ottoman practice as well the French model of *laïcité*, understood secularism as the control of religion by state institutions.[14] Young Turks such as Ziya Gökalp and Ahmet Rıza saw religion as an instrument of social control and cohesion. Islam had an important function as the cement of society, a common ground between Turks. Good Islam was that which served the nation, while Bad Islam (*İrtica*) could be anything that went against the Kemalist state and its ideals.[15]

The Mevlevi order found itself in an unusual position in this new Republic. The Mevlevi order was historically the Sufi order of the elite; Sultans such as Sultan Selim the Third and Mahmud the Second would visit one of the numerous lodges in Istanbul. While the Mevlevi order was technically in the same category as the *İrtica* and thus had to be shut down, they were also involved in the move towards Western-style secularism. The Young Turks frequently visited the Yenikapı Dervish Lodge in Istanbul and conducted political meetings at the location.[16] Moreover, both heads of the Mevlevi order of the 1920s dedicated themselves to the Turkish War of Independence and the following creation of a parliamentary democracy. Coupled with this was the fact that Mevlevi doctrine was open to open to reinterpretation under the ideals of Good Islam: In leftist circles, the teachings of Mevlâna Celâleddin-i Rumi lent itself to a humanistic reading free of dogma or ritual; in conservative circles, the Mevlevis represented a genteel tradition that one could uphold in the modern world without apology.[17]

Thus, unlike other Sufi orders, the doctrine of the Mevlevi order acquired the status of "a semi-legitimate cultural institution," and received different treatment from the

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[14] Ibid., 8.
[15] Ibid., 8.
[16] Ahmet Cahid Haksever, *Modernleşme sürecinde Mevleviler ve Jön Türkler* (Istanbul: H Yayınları, 2009).
[17] Cemal Kafadar, "The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life," in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), 312.

government.[18] As a consequence, Rumi's tomb was the only shrine of a Sufi saint allowed to be re-opened, albeit as a folk heritage museum.[19] After much negotiation between Mevlevi dervishes and the regional government of Konya, the Mevlevi Sema ceremony was re-permitted as a "cultural and touristic event." Today, there are two Mevlevi troupes under the direct employment of the government, who perform the ceremony weekly in Konya (Mevlana cultural center) and Istanbul (Galata Mevlevi dervish lodge museum). Sheikhs of both groups have received permission (*icazet*) from a *Makam Çelebi.* In areas such as the *Hodjapasha Culture Centre,* Mevlevi Sheikhs such as Hüseyin Top and Kadri Yetiş have led dervish groups in performing the Mevlevi Sema ceremony in its traditional form for crowds of tourists.

However, from the short period between 1925 to 1953, the systems of teaching the Mevlevi doctrine, Mevlevi rituals, and the Mevlevi Sema ceremony were irreparably harmed. Due to the stress of WWI, the War of Independence, and the closure of the Mevlevi order, many Sheikhs died young.[20] While some of the new generation were educated privately on how to uphold ritual conduct, education could not be as rigorous as that of a full-time life in a dervish lodge. In many cases, the next generation was purposely not educated in respect to the law. After 1950, this gave birth to the need to *preserve* the Mevlevi Sema ceremony as it was before the closure, as the threat of forgetting key aspects of how it must be performed was, and still is, a genuine threat.

When the ceremony was re-authorized, the dynamics of the violence inflicted upon the Mevlevis shifted. First, with the re-contextualization of the ceremony from "religious" to "cultural," the Mevlevi doctrine was no longer considered a product of generations of

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[18] Ibid., 313.
[19] Rose Aslan, "The Museumification of Rumi's Tomb: Deconstructing Sacred Space at the Mevlana Museum," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 2, no. 2 (2014).
[20] For example, Sheikh Bahaeddin Dede of Eskişehir died in 1930 (age 55), Sheikh Ali Dede of Isparta died around 1932-33, Sheikh Nuri Dede of Demirci died around 1918, Sheikh Abdülbaki Baykara of Yenikapı died in 1935 (age 52), and Sheikh Abdülhalim Çelebi died in 1925 (age 56).

Mevlevi dervishes, but an aspect of the rich culture of the Turkish people. This rhetorical move meant that the Mevlevi order was no longer the owner of the ceremony and had no authority to back up their need to re-establish lost knowledge. The government began using the ceremony as a cultural object to represent the richness of the Turkish people, and thus transformed it into a commodity. The Republic of Turkey's decision to couple Tourism and Culture under the shared banner of "The Ministry of Culture and Tourism" is not incidental — In the eyes of the state, culture is capital to be employed both in the political arena and in the arena of economy. Advertisements for Turkey involved various images of Whirling dervishes. In diplomacy, it becomes part of Turkey's soft power.

Vincent Miller in *Consuming Religion* argues that "Capitalism's insatiable hunger for marketable stuff (…) creates a world where everything is transformed into a commodity that can be brought to market, exchanged, and consumed: selves, others, culture, religion."[21] As exchange demands interchangeability, this causes a "great hollowing out." In other words, commodities must be abstracted from their original contexts to retain their marketability. This is seen clearly in the performance of the ceremony in completely foreign contexts for the purpose of extracting revenue from tourists interested in the "mystical" and "ancient" ceremony of the Whirling dervishes. For the Mevlevis, this is not a problem just of appropriation or of cultural piracy, but a transformation of the ceremony's meaning. When the ceremony is emptied of its religious intentions and done for the purpose of profit instead of God, it leaves the realm of the divine and enters into the territory of the profane (*Haram*).

The ritual was not performed in non-Islamic contexts prior to the 1925 law. As it was undoubtedly a religious ceremony, laymen would have instantly recognized that to employ it in certain contexts would render it profane. For example, such laymen would have found it

[21] Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004).

deeply problematic to consume alcohol during a ceremony that called for partakers to recite the *Al-Fatiha*. Additionally, the Mevlevi order held enough cultural capital to control the usage of their ritual. As the order was made of a rigid hierarchical structure run by highly-educated elites and headed by patrilineal descendants of Rumi, their claims to authority afforded them much power. The social ramifications of declaring oneself to be a Mevlevi Sheikh would have been much more significant. Today, despite status as a semi-legitimate cultural institution, Mevlevis have little direct political influence on the government.[22] Functionally, Mevlevis are powerless to prevent the ceremony’s use in contexts that are deeply troubling. When the ritual was moved out of the realm of religion, and knowledge about Sufi practice lessened, laymen began using the ritual in unknowingly problematic situations.

This leads to the problems in presenting authenticity as discourse. While diverging on the specific dynamics of its creation, key scholars in the social sciences and humanities have created an understanding of authenticity as a discourse rather than as an innate and naturalized category. Lionel Trilling in *Sincerity and Authenticity* creates a (Western) history of “moral life” in which the modern ideal of authenticity is the contemporary epoch.[23] He argues that there is no such thing as essential human nature, and the importance we place on authenticity is a modern phenomenon born from our modern culture of individualism. Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity* feeds from Trilling and similarly historicizes the term authenticity by locating it as a powerful moral ideal of the modern era, using it as a descriptor of the culture of self-fulfillment caused by the rise of individualism.[24] Theodor

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[22] Cemal Kafadar, "The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life," in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), 313.
[23] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Presss, 1972).
[24] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 16.

Adorno in *The Jargon of Authenticity* argues that the jargon of authenticity, in the context of 1964 Germany, is a social disease that pervades all of society. Authenticity, for Adorno, describes existentialist terms that blur the relation between language and truth, and overflow with fake human emotion.[25] In essence, the work of all these scholars places the concern with authenticity firmly in the realm of the contemporary. In doing so, they problematize and hollow out any claim to an "authentic" object or idea and place it as a discursive reality rather than an innate one.

This means it is deeply problematic, in academic research, to search for an "authentic" representation of a culture, practice, group, etc. Charles Lindholm in his book *Culture and Authenticity* explains that anthropologists are stuck between two roles, that of the Romantic participant of the discourse of "authenticity," and that of the empirical observer. He situates those who search for the "authentic" in a culture as those who are "embarked on a personal spiritual journey to discover their authentic being (if it exists). If we are to be objective as possible and avoid proselytizing, we must avoid waging this quest in our work."[26] It is doubly problematic to search for authenticity in the academic study of religion, as to search for authenticity in religion quickly turns into a search for the "essence" of religion.

Talal Asad has explained the problematic nature of such exercises in *Genealogies of Religion*. Asad explained that one cannot find an "essence" of religion because it is functionally impossible to define religion: "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive process."[27] Thus, if we

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[25] Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
[26] Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 141-142.
[27] Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

were to state a certain religious tradition is “authentic,” we would simply be focusing on historically specific elements and relationships. As such, this lineage of academic work has created an intellectual community in which not just searching for the authentic is deeply problematic, but also stating that there can be anything authentic becomes impossible.

The fact that authenticity is discourse does not prevent claims to authenticity from being powerful. As Michel Foucault effectively argued, discourse is not only intrinsically attached to relations of power, but also is powerful in and of itself. Foucault generally notes discourse to be a powerful tool of the elite class, consistent with his Marxist worldview; however, there is nothing preventing it from being strategically employed for, or by, groups in need of protection. The Mevlevis are clearly one such group. While it is impossible to state that the example of the boat tour is “less authentic” due to our current models, we can still safely argue that it is harmful. Such usage of the ceremony transforms it into an object to be consumed, and in turn, the rich religious and intellectual history, and the community behind it, is also consumed. This causes problems on two fronts: The employment of the ceremony as an actualization of “the world that ought-to-be” is halted, as focus on an earthly object such as a commodity means that the ceremony is rendered profane. Finally, the ceremony becomes abstracted from its context and hollowed out its meaning, and thus efforts to preserve ritual conduct after state intervention are also halted.

As scholars, we have a certain power over such discussions based in discourse and knowledge, compared to the average layman. We are frequently called to television screens to talk as the “authority” on a subject, or called to courts in order to testify. If we simply state that authenticity is a discourse and thus nothing can be called authentic, we are seriously set back when we are given a platform to raise awareness about issues of violence, and rendered incapable of intervening in law-making. By failing to attribute some greater authenticity to

the Sema ceremony led by Sheikh Nadir Efendi over that of the boat tour, we forfeit our ability to contribute to the betterment of these communities.

Perhaps the best defense of this argument is the community in question. The Mevlevi community presents an excellent example of how to employ the discourse of authenticity. In the face of the varied harms of the folkloric application of their ritual, their response was to find a way to define the "authentic" Mevlevi Sema ceremony while still keeping the ceremony in the domain of culture. To do so, they employed the authority of Western institutions and academia to "protect" the ceremony in its "traditional" form.

In 1996 Mevlevis began to re-organize themselves as an NGO, *The International Mevlana Foundation,* continuing a long trend of Sufi orders re-organizing themselves as NGOs for state approval. Created under the leadership of Celâleddin Bâkir Çelebi, grandson of the last head of the Mevlevi order in Turkey Abdülhalim Çelebi, the NGO aims for the "further researching the works of the scholar and poet Mevlâna Celâleddin-i Rûmi, as well as passing them on to future generations and contributing to relating activities carried out domestically and internationally."[28] In an effort to protect the integrity of the ceremony, in 2005 various Mevlevis and academics[29] under the banner of the *International Mevlana Foundation,* in coordination with the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Tourism, applied to UNESCO for "Sema and Mevlevi Music" to be added to the list of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."[30][31] They succeeded, and in doing so the NGO brought their perennial issue to the political table. As a UNESCO accredited NGO, their voice had gained the authority of the EU. More importantly, the passing of this decision

[28] The International Mevlana Foundation, "About and News," accessed December 11, 2018, https://mevlanafoundation.com/index_en.html.
[29] Dr. Bârihüdâ Tanrıkorur, Musician Bekir Reha Sağabaş, Dr. Esin Çelebi.
[30] Ibid.
[31] UNESCO, "Mevlevi Sema ceremony," UNESCO Intangible World Heritage, accessed May 28, 2018, https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mevlevi-sema-ceremony-00100

came with it various responsibilities for the Turkish government. They were required to assist in making concrete moves to preserve the “intangible heritage” of the Sema ceremony.

In 2008, the government made a declaration that “examples of skewed applications of the Sema ritual are causing problems in our promise to UNESCO to protect Mevlevi culture and the Sema ritual,” and they would punish those who ruined the “originality” of the ritual.[32] In this declaration, the ministry defined a proper Sema ritual in four bullet points, covering issues such as the space of the ceremony, the audience, the necessity of live music and the imperative that the ritual be performed in its full form. Point four is the most open to interpretation, which requires that “dervishes and musicians must know they are doing an act not only of cultural promotion, but also ‘a practice with the attributes of love’” and act to accordingly.[33] In essence, they had defined an “authentic Sema ceremony,” and threatened to police it.

It is important to note that this declaration is not advocating for Mevlevi practices to be united under the authority of the hierarchical structure of the Mevlevi order. The government’s declaration leaves much room for varied religious expression, vague enough that Sufis of various traditions can employ the Mevlevi Sema ceremony and not fall on the wrong side of the law. It presents less a creation of religious orthodoxy and more a halt to commodification. As such, it is evident in this example that leveraging outside authority to employ the discourse of authenticity was hugely useful for not just the Mevlevi community but all those interested in using it as a religious ceremony. The only groups harmed by this declaration are those who employ it solely for profit as a touristic event.

Ultimately, the ceremony was never policed in this manner and such promises were left unfulfilled. The growing popularity of the Sema ceremony due to this project eventually

[32] —. 2008. "Bildirge no. 192106: Mevlevilik ve Sema törenleri hakkında genelge." October 22.
[33] Ibid.

would backfire. Use of the Sema ceremony increased, and policing of it became much more problematic. In 2017, the government changed their decision by declaring that the protection of the ceremony "fell onto all sections of society" and gave a general guideline to citizens on how to conduct themselves in relation to the ritual.[34] In essence, they removed themselves from the equation due to the lack of interest in maintaining the ceremony as a religious one. Today, the International Mevlana Foundation's efforts to create an authentic Sema ceremony and to police those who do not adhere to it are almost completely halted.

Such issues of authenticity go beyond the realm of this example. I use the case of the Mevlevis due to the way they themselves have demonstrated how the discourse of authenticity can be employed. However, but there are many other vulnerable communities. Tibetan Buddhists face state intervention in their religion, as the Chinese government appoints their own Lamas to replace systems of lineage already in place. Native Americans face issues of authenticity on multiple fronts, but a current example of this could be the *Native American Church* advocating their use of Peyote as a legitimate religious practice. To say that authenticity is a discursive construct of the modern era means we, as scholars, are encumbered from intervening when these vulnerable groups are located in systems of power where they cannot intervene for themselves. This does not mean we need to revoke our critical methods of studying religion. Instead, it means we must find a way to remain empirical observers without rendering our intellectual community obsolete in the face of real-world issues.

[34] The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey. 2017. "Bildirge no. 181001: Bakanlıktan Semâ Genelgesi." June 5. Accessed December 10, 2018. http://basin.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR-181001/bakanliktan-sema-genelgesi.html.

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