The orthodoxization of ritual practice in western Anatolia

ABSTRACT

In rural western Turkey, villagers have replaced male performances of davul (bass drum) and zurna (double-reed wind instrument) as well as men’s dancing with mevluts, special prayer services, and they have replaced women’s dances to taped or live electric harmonium music with sohbets, sermons. Villagers are motivated to transform “cultural practices” that appear “backward” from the perspective of state-based ideologies of cultural progress and that are considered sinful from the perspective of Islamists. I trace their quests for spiritual and secular salvation and how they relate to the construction of a modernist Islamic worldview. [Turkey, Islam, time, ritual practice, Islamist movements, the state]

In the Yuntdağ, a mountainous region in western Turkey, between the market towns of Bergama and Manisa, villagers have replaced cultural rituals involving dancing and music with emotionally constrained mevluts and sohbets. Mevluts are prayer services commemorating Mohammed’s birth, and sohbets are prayer events that include sermons delivered by a religious leader, readings from the Koran, and ilahi, or hymns to Mohammed. In this article, I discuss these transformations in the context of the rituals of marriage, but the villagers’ work to reconsider social, spiritual, economic, and political practices characterizes global movements to objectify Islam (Deeb 2006; Kresse 2009; Schielke 2009; Schultz 2008) and Turkish ones in which Sunni Muslims revamp their style and form of religion in conformity with notions of modernity, state-approved orthodoxy, and alternative versions of orthodox practice (Tapper and Tapper 1987b). I demonstrate that the villagers’ concerns with the authenticity and efficacy of Islamic practice relate to anxious feelings about the meaning and significance of modernity, to knowledge of other people and themselves (Hart 2007b), to time and the value of tradition (Hart 2007c), and to the state.

The villagers’ interest in the state institutional form of Sunni practice, which is constructed by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (the Diyanet), complicates and confuses Turkey’s “secular” status. As many scholars discuss, the state is laic (Parla and Davison 2008; Silverstein 2003), meaning that Sunni Islam is incorporated into the state, which thereby defines orthodox practice and, in so doing, distinguishes official and accepted practice from other practices, such as those of the Alevi (a Shi’i sect unique to Anatolia; Mandel 2008; Shankland 1999) and illegal Sunni movements, brotherhoods, and communities. Does the rationalization of Sunni Islamic practice by the state make Turkey secular, or is it more accurate and meaningful to describe what is happening as laicism? Implicit is Talal Asad’s (2003:5) point that “secularism” does not take a single form, even in countries regarded as self-evidently Western, for example, France,
the United States, and Britain. The question cannot be put to rest by changing the term; there is a society-wide disagreement in Turkey, about what power, authority, religion, and the state should look like. If secularism is a state construction in which the parameters of religiosity are defined, separating the sacred and secular but encompassing both, then Turkey can be regarded as a secular state with a highly devout population. Alternatively, the legitimization of spiritual authority through state institutions might be regarded as a demonstration that the Republic of Turkey has extended the Ottoman legacy of Islamic authority, although Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the republic’s founder, disbanded the office of the caliphate and eliminated the ulema (religious authorities; Meeker 2002:62). In that case, Turkey is not secular. Kemalists, the urban elite who follow the ideological beliefs and practices of Atatürk, would disagree, arguing that a secular society is one in which religion is a private endeavor, not one that should influence political, legal, economic, and seemingly private but publicly noticeable social affairs, such as polygynous marriage. Esra Özürek (2006), interestingly, describes Kemalists who worked to make Turkey modern on the basis of their perception and interpretation of European Western secularist society, and the devout majority of Sunni Muslims, who have politically mobilized (White 2002), as infiltrating what had been a pure Western model with their Islam-based politics.

As should be evident, this is a complex ideological polemic, which necessitates a consideration of radically different viewpoints. A detailed history of villagers’ concerns with secular and spiritual salvation demonstrates that the religious changes they have made relate to their attempts to gain more legitimacy and power in both spiritual and secular realms. In other words, this case shows the importance of laicism in constructing an Islamic modernity in Turkey. Several modernities exist in parallel in this ethnographic space, and their examination enriches literature on alternative modernities, which rely on but also critique teleological constructions of Western modernity as the endpoint in a progressive, unilinear model of social development (Knauff 2002; Piot 1999). Nevertheless, in Turkey this Western construction of modernity is an ideological imperative affecting how modernity is understood and evaluated as well as implemented through state policies. These policies include the regulation of Sunni Islam and, thereby, presume that it should be a focus of modernization.

In this article, I trace when, why, and how the villagers decided to replace male performances of davul (bass drum) and zurna (double-reed wind instrument) and men’s folk dancing with mevluts and women’s dances to taped or live orkestra (electric harmonium) music and dance with sobs. Replacing music and dance with sober mevluts is not unknown in the scholarship on Turkey and other parts of the world (Kresse 2009:81). Cihan Tuğal (2006:257), for instance, describes how, in a neighborhood in Istanbul, people feel pressured to have Islamic weddings, eliminating music and dance from them. The decision to transform ritual practice in the case I observed relates to villagers’ concern with “cultural” traditions that mark them as rural people, with their engagement in Islamic movements at both national and global levels, and with individual fates in the “next world.” That is, they express worry about damnation, explicitly and directly, and are concerned with national ideologies of cultural progress and development, modernity, and class position. In many ways, I argue, these concerns are linked.

In their work to transform “cultural practices” that appear “backward” from the perspective of state-based ideologies of cultural progress (Navaro-Yashin 2002) and sinful from the perspective of Islamists (Tuğal 2006), villagers show that the past should be separated from the present. Their quests for sacred and secular salvation are connected by their relationship to ideas about time and relate to an understanding of progress as an apex in a temporal order (Wallerstein 1984). In addition to reflecting the Turkish state’s construction of a progressive modernization program leading to an apex of Westernized, secularist modernity (Özyürek 2006), this idea of progress relates to the villagers’ cosmological understandings of the individual moving through life in time, into an unknown future and fate in the “next world” (Delaney 1991). In these dual and parallel configurations of time, modernity, and the nature of progress, the villagers identify with the time of the state, which includes state-approved Sunni practice narrated through “history” rather than experienced through cultural memory or “tradition” (Nora 1989). They reject the amorphous experience of time via tradition in their own lives and rank the implicitly “old” traditional practices of their collective “past,” as this is vaguely understood (Hart 2007b), against “new” practices that take place in codified sacred time, as understood through Sunni Islam, and that can be contained by the mosque and, thereby, the laic state (Parla and Davison 2008; Silverstein 2003) or outside it, among practitioners from the Gülen movement, the Suleymançici community, and others who refer to texts, not “tradition,” for legitimacy (Turam 2004; Yavuz and Esposito 2003). Villagers are convinced that these formalized Sunni Islamic practices, whether they come from the state or not, are necessary for spiritual salvation.

In pitting “cultural” practices against those taking place in the secular time of the state, with its positivist project to construct “modernity” as the culmination of state policies—that is, the Kemalist philosophy on which the republic was founded and “individual psyches and subjectivities” are experienced (Neyzi 2002:141)—the villagers rank them. The cultural practices of an indeterminate “past,” that is, those rituals regarded as “traditional” are less prestigious and less effective in the individual quest for personal salvation in the next world, just as they rank lower in the
state's rendition of prestige and secular salvation through the achievement of social and cultural development. For these reasons, as well as local ones, the villagers decided to eliminate “cultural” practices and replace them with sober rituals. The ethnographic story I tell here, then, is about the assimilation of a village to a hegemonic narrative of cultural and spiritual development and the villagers’ concerns about their standing in this narrative. This story is familiar in Turkey, where many feel pressured to conform to the Kemalist project of cultural development through the construction of a national identity predicated on a rejection of “tradition” (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Neyzi 2002; Tapper and Tapper 1987b). As Yael Navaro-Yashin argues (2002), and as Leyla Neyzi also points out, “Those on the margins of society reproduce the state by acting as if the ideology of the state is true” (2003:292–293). The villagers conceal their assimilation to a hegemonic narrative of modernity and as Limbert also points out, “paradoxically, perhaps, as more people claim ‘religion’ is a way of life, fewer things qualify as properly ‘religious’” (2008:375). The work of codifying religious life can be seen as a secularist modern movement because it divides domains of thought and practice (Latour 1993), enabling, in the Turkish case, as in many others in the Islamic world, the classification of Western, Christian-based secularist modernization movements (i.e., one aspect of the intellectual foundation of the Turkish state) as distinct from Islamic ones, which reflect on, if only to create a discourse of difference from that of, Western modernity (Deeb 2006). In so doing, an Islamic modernity, which is often understood as a religious resurgence or movement, emerges.

I have studied Örselli village for a decade, beginning with a short visit in 1998, followed by a year and a half of doctoral research, and return visits in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008. I was inspired to study this village because it is the base of a women’s carpet-weaving cooperative, founded by Harald Böhmer and Josephine Powell, expatriate scholars in Istanbul who had an interest in revitalizing plant dyes and women’s artistic textile heritage. The project implicitly engages in notions of economic development and the revival of “tradition,” the aim of which is cultural progress (i.e., women’s emancipation; Anderson 1998). The villagers are economically embedded in discourses of progress, and one aspect of my research has been to study how they react to these ideologies. At times, they are ambivalent (Hart 2007b, 2007c) and, at other times, they make accommodations (Hart 2007a). In the process of studying the cooperative, I traveled to other villages in the region where cooperative members or relatives and friends of Örselli weavers lived. As a result, I was often invited to spiritual events, mevluts, celebrations of return visits from pilgrims, and other ritual events such as engagements, weddings, funerals, and circumcision parties. The time I have spent in the region and travelling to other villages has given me a basis for understanding transformations in local practice and the meaning and purpose of debates about social change as well as how these domains are interrelated. I have witnessed the concerns the villagers have about the role of music and dance in wedding feasts, listened to their debates about what should and should not happen at happy ritual occasions, and considered their attempts to contain and control youthful
Legitimacy of practice: Salvation, the state, and time

The local interest in contemporary debates in the Sunni Islamic world and a willingness to change practice are quintessentially about modern Islam, that is, the transformation of ideas of spiritual legitimacy and efficacy through Islamic movements that foster objectified ideas of correct practice, among both Sunni and Shi’i (Deeb 2006; Kresse 2009; Silverstein 2005, 2008; Tuğal 2006). Transforming Islamic practice demonstrates the villagers’ agency and relates to local concerns with “tradition” and challenging that construction through a notion of “progress,” which requires the uprooting of “old” rituals and interests and replacing them with revamped, transformed, and seemingly “new” ones. These transformations demonstrate the modernist need to create a rupture with past practice. The villagers thus work to make themselves into members of a national majority, a Sunni Islamic population attentive to global Islamic movements, and to connect themselves to powerful networks, including those inside state institutions. To invert Özyürek’s (2009:95) insights into the danger of converts who point out the incompleteness of national hegemonies, the villagers do not want to remind the nation of its unfinished hegemonic project to create a modern world; rather, they wish to present themselves as examples of the successful elimination of difference and successful institutional incorporation. In a twist in how they interpret the nation, however, they diverge from Kemalist ideology, which creates a secular modernity by dividing religion from other conceptual domains. From Islamist perspectives, the Turkish republic’s ethnocratic hegemonic modernity is legitimized as an extension of Ottoman policies of empire (Meeker 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2002), which gave the Muslim majority greater rights and privileges against other religious communities (Baer 2004), reconfigured in contemporary practice as cultural and ethnic Others (Özyürek 2009). The villagers’ interpretation of national history is different from that taught in schools, which points to how they reimagine national history and are able to claim a majority status as purified Muslims who have stripped themselves of a minority identity as rural people. One woman declared that Atatürk never prevented women from wearing the headscarf because he was a true Muslim, but that the “communists” did so. She implied that only godless communists would have tried to undermine Islam and, by implication, the state.

Several recent works on Islamic societies describe agency in “nonliberal” contexts, pointing to how ethnographers have read the “romance of resistance” into a cultural context, misapprehending systems of power in Islamic practice (Abu-Lughod 1990). These forms of Islamic agency require a revised understanding of piety as disciplined practice, often sustained patience and self-control (İşık 2008; Mahmood 2001). As Brian Silverstein (2008) argues, in Turkey, the notion that politics and systems of power are understood through “nonliberal” traditions is not so clear. Turkey is heir to an imperial tradition, which incorporated many “Western” features to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Europe during the 19th-century Tanzimat era of reform (Silverstein 2008). After the foundation of the republic in 1923, the government reformed itself by using “Western” models, systems, and codes (Zürcher 2004). The outcome has been a hybridized system, both part of the “nonliberal” world Saba Mahmood (2001) discusses and an idealized Western one, creating disjunctures and ruptures in identity and in how people manage the self (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Neyzi 2003; Özyürek 2006). Thus, what is modern Islam in Turkey is part of a fluid environment in which one can refer to a secular state and society at the same time that one has to recognize that Sunni Islam is contained and controlled by the state through a laic practice. But, in a context in which Sunni Islam is in part created by state institutions that are themselves characterized by liberal traditions, can one speak of the nonliberal Islamic tradition? The state itself has taken a hand in the purification of practices, beliefs, and texts as well as ethnicity, national identity, memory, and historical narrative (Baer 2004). The outcome is not a completed hegemony but a state form of practice and a proliferation of illegal practitioners in brotherhoods and communities (Meeker 2002) who, in historical narratives, were seemingly dismantled without apparent difficulty by Atatürk, the founder of the republic (Berkes 1964). I realized these stories were myths of the state (Navaro-Yashin 2002), which the villagers’ insightful commentaries on the Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen and his followers, the incident at Menemen (Zürcher 2004),1 and other heterodox movements and moments unraveled.2

Nevertheless, questions about where observant Muslims fall along an axis of progressive modernity irk villagers. Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper (1987a) found townspeople in central Anatolia who had similar concerns several decades ago. As Silverstein argues, “It is important to recall that Islam is for its practitioners, and others, a moral

exuberance through sober mevluts and sohbets (sermons). I collected stories about past wedding rituals from the elderly and middle-aged, some of whom were critical of changes and some of whom insisted on their importance. And I heard discussions among young people about personal salvation, the “costs” of enjoyment, and, on the flipside, the importance of enjoying one’s youth. These discussions constitute a debate about how, when, and why ritual occasions should be celebrated and the relationship between these celebrations and local notions of modernity and class prestige, as well as their weight and significance among the angels of heaven, who observe and record all of one’s actions in a book that is used to assess one’s fate after death.
tradition, involving the ongoing elaboration of normative judgment about correct practice” (2008:127). Although obtaining a perfected Islam is probably not cosmically possible, the villagers begin with the problem of tradition. As a young imam from a neighboring village argued, the villagers in the region are only now becoming schooled in “real” Islamic practice as they put aside “cultural traditions” that they once imagined were Islamic (such as using henna) but that were, in fact, based on “superstitions and incorrect understandings of Islam.” Significantly, the newer practices villagers prefer are legitimized by texts (the Koran, the poem performed at mevluts, and texts about Mohammed’s life written in Ottoman Turkish), not cultural practice, which seems timeless and located in the fuzzy memories of the elderly. The mevlut, of course, is not “new” at all, as it is based on a poem written in the 15th century, but the villagers’ replacement of other events with mevluts is a response to contemporary Islamist debates on practice (Tügal 2006). Arabic texts require study, which many villagers acknowledge would take too much of their time and effort. This may account for their use of texts in modern and Ottoman Turkish, as learning Arabic is quite difficult. Yet, as Tügal points out, “The need to learn the meaning of the Koran rather than only reading and memorizing its Arabic original, is one of the most pronounced principles of Islamism in Turkey” (2006:258). Although they would like to become Islamists in this sense, villagers feel overwhelmed and have a persistent worry that they cannot take the time for this study and, therefore, that their interpretations may not be correct.

They worry about immoral acts, incorrect bodily postures in ritual, and improper forms of recitation, which stem from a lack of schooling and all of which have consequences for their fates in the next world. There is a certain urgency in how they work to scrub “traditions” from their lives and replace them with what they hope are “real” rituals. As one woman said, “We don’t know what will happen in the next world.” Thus, the individual practitioner expresses concern about his or her fate in the space–time of religious practice on this earth and chooses to put him- or herself in a secure position, performing and enacting practices codified by texts, approved by the state, enhanced by global debates among Islamists, and removed from questionable traditions, which are timeless, infected with uncertainty, and contaminated by fun and the cost of which, as one preacher pointed out, “is not worth eternal damnation.”

The holism and fluidity of Islamic practice

Sunni Islam infuses everyday life in rural Turkey with meaning, structuring time and bodily practice as well as an ethnic–national identity (Akin and Karasapan 1988), the global umma (community), and political action and mobilization through the villagers’ interest in and votes for the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK; the Justice and Development Party; White 2002). The Diyanet creates a Turkish brand of Sunni Islam through mosques, which disseminate sermons to their imams (Delaney 1991:284; Mardin 1982:191; Soon-Yong Pak 2004). These state institutional practices make Islam “into a religion” (Silverstein 2003:511), codifying, controlling, and separating it from its more diffuse role in creating time, space, cosmic order, and meaning as described by other ethnographers (Delaney 1991; Loefflner 1988). Through the institutionalization of religious practice, the orthodox subject is created. This modern subject, the Turkish orthodox Muslim, is a subject of power (Foucault 1980:122). The subject is created by and creates the institutional form of Islamic practice through the disciplining of the body (through prayer and other actions) and by putting that body into a temporal and spatial frame in which Mecca is the center but in which the Turkish state takes a shadow presence. The local mosque is a state institution as well as being privately funded through local donations. The villagers refer to their imam, for instance, as a memur, a government clerk. However, they also concede that the imam is a spiritual leader. Religious expression is not devoid of reference to state institutions, even in villages. Spirituality thereby reverberates with political meaning and reference. But Islam supersedes the state. Personal and aesthetic experiences of faith run parallel to a global community of Muslims as well as a national, state-based orthodoxy.

In addition to Islamic practice and belief within this state context, the villagers are deeply aware of the personal development of their spiritual lives. They enjoy pondering and discussing how life is a spiritual journey with set stages, each of which is marked by intense practice. As other scholars have noted, Muslims often experience an intensification of spirituality as they age (Delaney 1991; Rasmussen 2001). In the village, children attend Koran school during the summer, young people increase the frequency of prayer as they approach marriage, and elderly people perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. In addition to its escalating intensity of prayer, Islam structures time and the body through the five daily calls to prayer and the namaz, the physical performance and ritual recitation of prayer. These prayers structure social time and global space. Meals and work are timed in relation to the calls to prayer. Even the animals are grazed and milked in relation to prayer, the timing of which changes with the movement of the sun across the seasons. The act of prayer is the most concrete demonstration of the community of faith in practice, of acting simultaneously with other believers, even when people pray alone. I often noted the lone shepherd praying in the pastures, the elderly woman breathing deeply as she found solace and peace through prayer in her small home, and harried mothers grasping at the private performance of prayer to give themselves a chance to think clearly. The daily prayers are timed in relation to the individual’s location with respect
to the cosmos, the position of the sun in relation to that person’s location on earth, as believers address the timelessness and preeminence of God. In this way, daily Islamic practice is unifying on several levels: for the individual, the village, the region, the nation of Turkish Muslims, the global community of Muslims, and cosmically.

Islamic identity links villagers to the state through the state’s construction of Sunni practice, although they remain open to experimentation with other religious groups, but they are also linked through their ethnic identity as Turks, regardless of the messiness of their pasts. The history of this process, the links to the past, and the importance of continuity in the construction of subjectivities of power requires more space than I have here (Baer 2004; Meeker 2002). Instead, I focus on the contemporary context, in which this configuration of identity is called the “Turkish–Islamic Synthesis” (Akin and Karasapan 1988). After the last official coup d’état in 1980, the military government used Islam as a moral foundation of social life and a tool for healing the fractured and crushed social fabric, which had suffered political chaos and violence (White 2002). This led to the emergence of a combined ethnic and religious identity, which the villagers express as self-evident. They slip between religious and nationalist positions, implying that a good Turk is a good Sunni Muslim; it follows that a real Muslim is obviously a Turk. This formulation calls into question religious and ethnic Others within the nation. Villagers have a Turkish identity, which is both ethnically nationalistic and Islamic, allowing them to belong to and simultaneously supersede the borders of the nation. In this sense, faith creates an imaginary community (Anderson 1983), which is wider and deeper in scope than the nation, in that it relates to a divine legitimacy of order.

Despite the influence of the state, through the imam and the consumption of Islamic media on radio and satellite television, and their involvement with Sufi orders, especially sermons by Gülen (Yavuz and Esposito 2003) and the Suleymançısı, the villagers, especially women, engage in practices that might be regarded as “superstitious,” such as wearing “milk stones,” visiting hocos (religious leaders) to write amulets and prayers to be ingested, having elderly women say healing prayers (accompanied by massage), believing in the evil eye, applying henna, and so forth. They often revealed these practices with embarrassment. Other commonly observed Anatolian “folk” practices are absent in the Yüntdağ: visiting saints’ tombs, tying cloth on holy trees, and drinking water from sacred streams and springs. When I asked about these practices, which I have seen from Istanbul to central Asia, villagers reluctantly admitted that “in the past” they “might” have engaged in some of them. The notable absence of “folk” practices is interesting in light of Tapper and Tapper’s work on the town of Eğirdir. By the 1980s, they found, all heterodox sacred sites (saints’ tombs, sacred springs, etc.) had vanished and townspeople seemed unaware that they had ever existed (Tapper and Tapper 1987a:64). Tapper and Tapper (1987b:63–64) argue that, with Atatürk’s particular brand of “secularism,” the institutional and state control of religion attempted to contain or subvert mystical, ecstatic, and “popular” practices. Sufi orders are, in fact, illegal in Turkey, although they are also influential (Silverstein 2008:121). As other “folkloric” and unorthodox practices are contained, orthodoxy is linked to state ideologies and practices (Tapper and Tapper 1987b:52, 61). “Republicanism and Islam . . . are aspects of a single ideology . . . [this ideology] creates and reproduces an orthodoxy and homogeneity in which ideas about Turkey as a nation state and ideas about Islam are mutually reinforcing” (Tapper and Tapper 1987b:61). Thus, the state construction of Sunni Islam is part of a modernist rupture with past practice, which includes scrubbing tradition from the landscape and daily spiritual life.

By drum or by prayer? Davullanmak, duwallanmak

In this section, I describe how I uncovered the significance of davul and zurna music and dance and how, why, and when the villagers decided to eliminate these celebratory performances and replace them with mevluts, which marked the beginning of sober and contained ritual practice. The infusion of everyday life with ritual and spiritual significance is, as I maintain above and continue to demonstrate in this section, deliberately enacted and performed as well as maintained. Furthermore, the villagers’ perception of “correct” practices and their concern with maintaining and transforming them show how ideas about spiritual practice demonstrate agency as deliberate containment and control and individual subjugation to God’s will (Mahmood 2001; Silverstein 2008; Torab 1996). Yet their ideas about how God’s will is manifested, through which texts and according to whose interpretation, are in a state of flux. My endeavors to learn how, when, and why they had made the decisions to change their practices took place over many years. Orthodox practice is not a fixed compendium of beliefs and ritual activities, although the term orthodoxy would seem to imply the contrary, but it exists in a state of flux in relation to social and political debates, as I argue above. For this reason, I describe how I learned about transformations in practice within the context of my fieldwork.

In 1998, as I prepared to visit Örselli for preliminary fieldwork, I heard from Harald Böhmer and Josephine Powell that the villagers had banned all music in a radical endeavor to transform Islamic practice. A few days later, I was genuinely surprised when Ahmet Çınar, the director of the carpet-weaving cooperative, inserted an audio tape of Turkish folk music into the truck’s cassette player as we drove to the Yüntdağ. Ahmet switched off the music as we drove into the village. I thought I had broken the code: Music is OK outside the village but not inside. But, as I
visited looms in homes where women wove for the co-operative. I met many who passed the time listening to cassette tapes. I quickly learned that young daughters listened to heart-rending *arabesk* (see Stokes 1989, 1992) and middle-aged mothers and elderly women to folk music or *ilahi*, religious hymns, on the radio. As Martin Stokes argues, “Music as a whole falls into the juridical category of *mubah*—neither specifically approved nor forbidden but merely tolerated in Islam” (1989:29). For this reason, I would not have been surprised to find that the villagers, who were deeply concerned with the correctness of Islamic practice, were ambivalent about music, but my observations did not, at least initially, demonstrate this to be so.

Two years later, in 2000, the rumors circulating among expatriates in Istanbul about the villagers’ apparent fundamentalism had not ceased. Although, at first, I discounted these discussions and pointed out that the villagers often listened to music, I decided to investigate the question more closely. Back in the village, after talking to people about music, I realized that there was something of a “ban” in place. Although music, in itself, was regarded as unproblematic, music played by davul (bass drum) and *zurna* (double-reed wind instrument) was seen as cause for concern. I heard many conflicting opinions about the merit and role of this music. During 2000, the most common response to my question about why davul and *zurna* music was not performed in the village was that the players charged too much. Others said davul and *zurna* music was a sin, *günah*. Although in the past, davul and *zurna* players were hired for the Kına Gecesi (Henna Night) at wedding rituals and circumcision parties, they had been banned from these occasions several decades ago. Surprisingly, this ban did not ease villagers’ minds about the problem of music and dance. Families having one of these events would debate among themselves about whether they would permit the women to dance, whether there would be live or taped music, where the event would be held, and when it would occur. Young women getting engaged or married usually had no idea what form their ritual celebration would take until just beforehand. Interestingly (because of changes in these rituals as of about 2008), they had little control over these decisions.

In the earlier form of wedding rituals, davul and *zurna* players played from three days to a week, and all the men from the groom’s side danced while women watched from the earthen rooftops of the houses. Meanwhile, the women of the bride’s side danced together, playing an upturned wash basin and singing folk songs. In its contemporary form, the bride’s friends and female relatives on the groom’s side attend the bride’s Kına Gecesi to dance to taped or live music while men watch from the periphery. The men on the groom’s side dance to taped music on the eve before taking the bride, and the groom is given a shave by one of his friends. This is an occasion for the women to watch the men dance. However, male folk dances, folk music, and folk plays, once the core entertainment, have been eliminated.

Underscoring the tremendous diversity in rural life as villagers engage in a lively debate about ritual practice and spiritual legitimacy, the tension and anxiety in Örselli about celebratory feasts is not replicated in neighboring villages, many of which continue to employ davul and *zurna* (often clarinet) players and allow male dancing, although women are not permitted to watch. At a wedding I attended in another village in the region, for a young man from Örselli and a local woman, men and women at times danced separately but at the same time to music provided by a harmonium and a davul player, and at other times, they danced together as couples, waltzing to taped arabesk music. Many villagers from Örselli praised this event afterward, saying it was fun. The groom’s mother, however, was disturbed that the bride’s family had hired a davul player without telling her. These variations show the state of flux relating to local debates about practice. I pondered these differences and asked in Örselli about a neighboring village that employed davul and *zurna* players and permitted male folk dancing. One response was that people in that village have “hidden gold” and they use it to pay for davul and *zurna*. I was not convinced by this explanation, although I heard it many times, because families in the village in question sell *pekmez* (grape molasses), which is neither highly profitable nor more prestigious than weaving. Both weaving and *pekmez*, the only sweetener available before white sugar, are “traditional” and thereby tainted. The villagers in this nearby but parallel universe dress conservatively and wear polyester clothing from their trousseaux, rather than purchasing new clothes. They have fewer expensive appliances, such as televisions, washing machines, and satellite dishes, than residents of Örselli. For these reasons, I was unsatisfied with the explanation that the villagers are rich and that, instead of buying the typical creature comforts, they spend their money on davul and *zurna* players. Finally, while attending a wedding there, I learned another piece of the puzzle. When men dance to davul and *zurna*, they drink alcohol. The musicians arrive on Friday and stay until Sunday. The drinking, therefore, lasts several days. Banning the musicians in Örselli also eliminated alcohol consumption at weddings. Consuming alcohol is regarded as a major sin because it causes one to lose control over the self, and although men (in other villages) do it, it would be beyond the pale for a woman to drink.

The consumption of alcohol while the davul and *zurna* played and men danced explained why the very conservative villagers in Örselli would never permit these activities in their village, but I continued to ask about celebratory music and dance. A year or so later, during a period of time when I interviewed the elderly about their wedding celebrations and trousseaux, I asked a couple I was visiting about davul and *zurna*. Hatice, the mother of the family,
who was in her sixties, had come from Yenice, a neighboring village, to marry Hasan. In their elder years, they were notably close; I often saw them in the fields together or working in the house, and on this day they were shucking pistachios. They described how they had married in 1962 in a double wedding. The plan was for Hatice to be married into Örselli at the same time that another woman from Örselli was to be married into Yenice. Hatice and Hasan described how, at the big wedding, there was davul and zurna, drinking, and a fight. Their memory of the event was vivid. At the wedding, the youth from Yenice opened fire with guns to celebrate. Hasan exclaimed that in Örselli someone said, “Why are you opening fire inside the village?” There was a knife fight between the young men. Hatice added, “Someone was stabbed, but not killed.” In anger, the Örselli family took their daughter back from her new marital family in Yenice, which seems to have started a bitter relationship between the two villages. They continue to refer to each other as “enemies.” Villagers in Yenice also remember the event vividly, but they put the blame on young men from Örselli. Since Hatice and Hassan’s wedding, there have been no weddings between the two villages, which once freely exchanged brides.

Learning that davul and zurna had been eliminated as a result of this event dated the change. I returned to elderly villagers who had married before and after the elimination of the music and asked them how they had celebrated their weddings. Interestingly, elderly women distinguished the style of their marriages by coining two verbs: davullandık (my nonliteral translation: we were married by drum) and duallandık (we were married by prayer). I learned that in 1963, after Hatice and Hassan’s wedding, there had been one more marriage in Örselli celebrated by davul and zurna; thereafter, the imam forbade this music and accompanying celebrations, saying “it was a sin.” I learned a surprising piece of the puzzle in 2008 when people in Örselli whom I had known for a decade pointed out that they were not only Yörük, or nomads, but also Karadenizli, people from the Black Sea, far to the north of the Yıntdağ. Imams from this region, who were known for their religious authority and learning, settled in Anatolia to work as religious leaders (Meeker 2002:57). Michael Meeker delineates practitioners who “would have been ‘seriatçı’ subscribing to an interpretation of the sacred law of Islam so literal as to bar any kind of music or dancing, not to mention the use of alcohol and tobacco” (2002:58). I spoke to the Deveci (his name referring to his former occupation as a camel driver), the eldest man in the village, whose father had been the imam whose ancestors had settled among and intermarried with the Yörük to spread Islamic knowledge. He explained his father’s authority: He had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, was well respected, and apparently had his theological roots in leaders who condemned music for its “association with drink, dance, and sexual impropriety” (Stokes 1992:214). Whereas some villagers now question whether davul, in particular, or all music is sinful, members of the elderly and middle-aged generations consider only davul to be sinful. A few elderly women said this was not true at all, that davul was not a sin. The Deveci breathlessly confirmed that davul in particular is a “günah” (sin) when I asked him in 2008. Davul and zurna were replaced with mevluts to celebrate the groom’s wedding feast. However, the bride’s düğün (wedding) was still celebrated with dance and music.5

The practice of the mevlut

A mevlut is a deeply aesthetic and moving ritual, which centers on the performance of a poem, sung in the vernacular, commemorating Mohammed’s birth. According to Tapper and Tapper (1987a:73), around 1400, Suleyman Çelebi wrote what is the best-known mevlut poem in Turkey today. As I became accustomed to village life in 2000–01, I realized that important ritual occasions were all met with mevluts: marriage, death anniversaries, circumcisions, leaving for military service, returning from military service, and rain prayers. The seeming universality of mevluts in providing a public ritual response to special occasions is well substantiated in ethnographic literature on Turkey (Delaney 1991:317–319; Marcus 1987; Ökten 2007:98–99; Tapper and Tapper 1987a) and the Balkans (Bringa 1995:169–171), but the use of mevluts for all ritual occasions in the Yıntdağ is a recent development.

Mevluts play an interesting theoretical role in ethno- graphic literature. The Tappers (1987b), Tone Bringa (1995), and Julie Marcus (1987) describe mevluts as women centered, emotionally moving, and often held in private homes, followed by meals shared among women. Informants regard these events as examples of heterodox practice and therefore as less important and powerful than orthodox practice led by men (Bringa 1995; Marcus 1987; Tapper and Tapper 1987a). Each of the ethnographers cited uses the mevlut to demonstrate the vibrancy of women’s Islamic practice. In contrast, mevluts in the Yıntdağ are institutional, held in the mosque, emotionally contained, and regarded as important Islamic rites led by men. At the first mevluts I attended, I remained outside the mosque with “daughters” (i.e., women of my marital status) and young married women (of my actual age). I learned that, from their perspective, the mevlut is not an interesting experience. It was impossible to hear the beautiful recitation, and we were with the children, who were running and screaming through the mosque courtyard. Part of the rite includes drinking a glass of serbet (a sweetened red drink), being given rosewater, and having incense smoke wafted over one’s body. Outside the mosque, we were included in these sensual experiences when a woman came outside to distribute the liquids and diffuse the incense, but it was not possible to understand what was happening. Because
piety increases with age, older women become more active in mevluts and enter the mosque. However, their involvement only extends to listening silently inside the women's section. They never look at the men in the main part of the mosque below their balcony for fear that they will distract them and also because their view is blocked by fabric draped over the railing. The gendered and structured forms of these mevluts are surprising, given that the Tappers, Marcus, and Bringa describe the mevlut as a specifically and powerfully female, though heterodox, ritual. Unlike the cases described by these scholars, in the Yuntdağ the mevlut is dominated by men and regarded as an important, prominent orthodox ritual.

Sohbetli or çalgılı? By sermon or by music

Although I returned to Örselli for visits in 2002, 2003, and 2004, I had not gathered any material that suggested that women had begun to consider their “cultural” practices with the same critical eye that men had several decades before. But, by 2008, women had become more concerned with their fates in the next world, the correctness of their religious practice, and their class-based position in the national imaginary. In part, I connect these changes to the decline of the carpet-weaving cooperative’s power in employing women and keeping families in the village. The village’s somewhat closed perspective, as I understood the place in 2000–01 was due to cooperative director Ahmet Çınar’s efforts to prevent women from gaining employment outside the village. However, in 2003, Çınar died. I returned to mourn his death on the 40th day after his burial in 2003 and again in 2004 to survey household economics. At this point, the villagers had only begun processing Ahmet’s death and its implications for the future of the cooperative.

By 2008, dramatic changes were in place. Örselli is a small village. In 2000–01, there were 87 households. By 2008, 25 families had migrated. Once-occupied and thriving houses stood empty. All of the families that had left were young, either newly established or with children reaching the age of middle and high school, when families face an educational crisis. There are no high schools in the region, and boarding a child in Manisa is not only expensive and, therefore, out of reach for poor families but also a cause of worry for parents. The young women who remained in the village described how they sought out men who lived in a city, or said they wanted to migrate for marriage to avoid the labors of rural life, including weaving. Thus, there was a general tendency to abandon the drudgeries, inconveniences, and the lack of state services that characterize rural life. Those who remained had also become more involved in urban life. The connections and exchanges between city and village were much denser than in the recent past. The minibuses, for example, previously made a single round-trip per day, but by 2008, they made three round-trips. This led to livelier exchanges with former villagers in the city, and with urban friends and through former villagers, relatives, and coworkers. These networks led to invitations to ritual celebrations, including women’s gatherings, mevluts, and sohbets, in the city.

Although the first wave of religious purification, focusing on men’s activities, began with the settlement of imams from the Black Sea region, in 2008, women had begun to transform their spiritual practices to become more educated in Islam, conforming to the construction of the sober, modern Sunni Muslim and eliminating cultural events as they were influenced by new ties to the city. These transformations included the introduction of women’s gatherings on Fridays, at which middle-aged and elderly women met to read the Koran and eat a meal together. One woman explained why they had instituted this practice as well as the performance of mevluts in their homes: “Of course, women are more educated.” This woman relied on the Islamist position that the study of religious texts is a demonstration of increased piety. Another said these new practices came from the city: “We saw them there and decided to do them ourselves.” Just as middle-aged and elderly women met to read the Koran and pray on Fridays, young women planned to have sohbetli engagements and wedding rituals (i.e., with a sermon). As I had once asked elderly women whether they had had davullandı (by drum) or duallandi (by prayer), I now began asking if young women had had a sohbetli nişan (engagement with sermon) or a çalgılı nişan (engagement with music and dance).

I learned that one 23-year-old woman would have her engagement party in July and that this would be a sohbetli nişan rather than a çalgılı one. This would be the third such engagement party in the history of the village. Upon arriving at her house, I broached the subject of the nature of the party with her father, a shepherd with whom I had had many conversations about global humanitarian unity, realizing belatedly the connection in his discourse to Gülen hoca in 2008. The family, clearly, was engaged in global Islamic movements. The father said, “You need to ask Elif. It was her decision.” Given the anxiety and problems surrounding rituals that include music and dance, young women are given the “choice” to have a sermon instead. Elif said that she had decided to have a sohbetli nişan because she was “planning for the next side,” that is, the next world. The event was unlike any engagement I had attended in the Yuntdağ. Typically, engagement parties consist of a feast, followed by the women gathering in the teahouse, with the groom attending. The bride and groom wear gold rings, tied together with a red ribbon, which a relative from the groom’s side cuts. The bride’s future mother-in-law gives the bride gold coins, earrings, and, possibly, bracelets, and a watch. The bride’s new female relatives pin gold coins and bills to her dress. The bride, mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law dance in a circle to taped music. After this ritual dance,
the young women in the village dance in celebration. They then have a ritually significant trousseau event, at which the mother-in-law presents the bride with each item she is contributing to her trousseau by placing it on the bride’s head, as if to “remind” her of the many good deeds she is performing on the bride’s behalf. All the guests toss their gifts (they are always cloth) to the center of the packed room, and the mother-in-law places each item on the bride’s head, announcing the giver. This gift-giving practice ritualizes the transfer in personal textile property (i.e., cloth and clothing) to the new bride. The event ends with more dancing.

Elif’s engagement did not follow this pattern. There was a feast in the late afternoon at which gold was given. Very late, around 10 p.m., two female hocas, who belong to the Suleymanci community, arrived from Manisa. They had been invited to a previous engagement in the village, which is how Elif knew them. On the one hand, the appearance of women from a Sufi order seems extraordinary, especially considering that such groups are technically “illegal,” although influential and powerful. On the other hand, there are no female imams trained by the state who could take their place. This means that, as women become more concerned about religious practice, they involve themselves in religious communities that are outside the Diyanet’s control. As I understood in 2008, the villagers are not aligned with a particular religious community and pick and choose among imams trained in state-run Imam Hatip schools and among hocas from other communities, such as the Suleymanci. I was told by the imam in a neighboring village, however, that some villages in the region have mosques headed by imams from the Suleymanci. Villagers such as Elif’s father also listen to taped sermons by Gulen, who is the leader of a global religious organization that has significant business holdings and schools around the world, including Turkey (Turam 2004; Yavuz and Esposito 2003), but who has been temporarily barred from entry to Turkey because the state is concerned about his influence (Turam 2004:272). Several villagers, both male and female, told me that they enjoyed listening to cassette tapes of sermons by Gulen, that they admired his message of humanitarian tolerance, and that they disagreed with the state’s ban against him. Although many secularists in Turkey disagree, the followers of Gulen claim that their goal is “to reconcile Islamic faith and ways of life with a secular institutional milieu” (Turam 2004:261).

The villagers’ ability to combine multiple practices and ideologies is surprising. Mixing them means disregarding the state’s designation of legal Islamic practice and not paying too much attention to intellectual and ideological differences. In contrast, as Tugal describes for a neighborhood in Istanbul, people trust “traditional” religious education, that is, that associated with Sufi communities rather than the state schools that train imams—who are then placed in mosques as memur, state clerks—because there is “a lack of popular trust in such modern institutions” (Tugal 2006:260). In Orselli, the villagers’ tolerance is a result of their trust in “modern” institutions and their suspicion of “tradition.” The villagers have sent their sons to state imam schools for many decades. Only a few have graduated from a secular high school, among them, the children of the director and president of the weaving cooperative. With their salaried positions, these parents could afford to send their children to secular high schools, whereas many village parents rely on the state to help fund their sons’ training. Extending, perhaps, the practice of training imams in the Black Sea region, where villagers had few other resources than learning (Meeker 2002), many men in the Yuntdagh could work as imams, but most cannot find a position.

At Elif’s engagement party, many of the women and children in the village assembled in the teahouse. The hocas began by chanting a greeting and then a prayer. They then sang ilahi (songs venerating Mohammed’s life) and greeted us. They mentioned that we were all gathered together with our husbands’ permission to learn a few important words from the Koran. One of the women recited passages from the Koran in Arabic, in a stylized nasal tone. This was the only textual recitation at the event. The woman then began to preach in Turkish. One detail in the long sermon struck me, given my interest in davul and zurna. The hoca said that we might enjoy dancing and enjoying ourselves at a wedding, but imagine how many sins we accumulate at that one event. She said that all our sins are weighed against all the good things we do and that both are taken into account when we try to enter heaven. She described the angels at the gates of heaven, who hold scales loaded on the one side with our sins and on the other with our good deeds. She described how we needed to balance the scales in favor of the good things. “Even though we may enjoy dancing and music, we have to take account of the next world, tomorrow, not yesterday, which is over.” She also argued that davul and dancing might be enjoyable, but they are costly, “and is it worth paying the price for sin?” She asked, “How can we explain why we paid so much money to dance when it weighed against us, on the side of our sins?” The women sat silently, listening, at times quieting their children. They finished with a prayer and passed around rosewater and candies before leaving. The village women pinned money and gold on the bride, and, with less ceremony than at previous engagements, they tossed their contributions of cloth into a big sheet in the middle of the room, without the bride’s mother-in-law putting them on the bride’s head or announcing the giver. They treated these older practices as unseemly. When I asked about it, a woman said, “This is how we do it now.”

The next day, I went to Elif’s house to find out how she and her family received the event. Elif and her mother were overwhelmed with dirty dishes, but both paused to say that they thought the sermon “was very beautiful” [cok...
güzeldi]. By chance, I was included in a ritually important process, that of taking trays loaded with baklava and gifts to the mother-in-law’s house, which reciprocate for trays the mother-in-law sent to the bride on the day of the engagement. This was fortuitous because I went with a group of young women, all of whom were married. None of them had had sohbetli engagements or weddings, and yet they felt the need to praise the previous night’s event, so markedly sober and emotionally contained, and to justify their decision not to have had such an event at their own weddings. At the mother-in-law’s house, while having tea, the groom asked how the sohbet was. The youngest woman, Elif’s sister-in-law, said, “It was very nice.” She said wistfully that she wished that she had had a sohbetli nişan and düğün instead of çalgılı, as “having music was so chaotic. This was much nicer. Everyone sat quietly and listened, then they got up to give the gold and leave.” The groom replied, “Yes, we often like to have music and dance, but these things are for this world. We need to think about the next world.” This conversation was echoed by the middle-aged couple I lived with. The wife praised the sermon and felt the need to explain why her daughter had chosen to have a çalgılı düğün. She said that she had talked to her daughter about having a sohbetli nişan and düğün, but “she didn’t listen.” On a separate occasion, her daughter explained her decision herself. She exclaimed in annoyance, “Oh Mommy, forget about these hocas! I am young and want to have fun and dance!” It came out at that moment that her father had been a davul player in his youth. Bolstered by his daughter’s opinion, he added that “no one wants to go to a wedding if there is no music and dance. It isn’t fun.” At the daughter’s new home, we watched hours of video footage from her engagement and wedding parties. She had married a boy from a town far from the Yuntdağ. As we watched the different rituals of marriage practiced there, her mother asked me what I thought about them: “Wasn’t it bad that they had a davul and that men danced?”

Later that week, a neighbor was having a circumcision feast in the unpaved street outside the newly constructed apartment buildings on the edge of the town. The mother shouted in horror when the mehter band (an Ottoman-style marching band) played the davul and zurna, “When the davul is beaten the devil appears!” She felt she had cast her daughter into a foreign territory where strange and spiritually dangerous ritual activities occurred.

These occasions and the discourses surrounding them underscore a series of anxieties about spiritual practices and the implications of music and dance for people’s futures in the next world. The villagers chose to eliminate ritual expressions and the emotional practices of music and dance (and drinking alcohol) and to replace them with the mevlut to contain emotional and spiritual expression. This substitution demonstrates that a repositioning of practiced identities and reformulations of spiritual practice have taken place. Considering the mevlut gives clues to how and why these political reinterpretations have occurred and what they mean in terms of how the villagers wish to imagine and practice “cultural traditions” and Islam. The villagers’ replacement of men’s “folkloric” expressions shows the villagers’ engagement with discourses and practices of modernity, in which cultural practices appear “lower class,” “traditional,” and “backward.” The neo-Ottoman mehter band, replete with men in Ottoman-style costume who perform amid huge banners and tents, should not be treated in the same category as village davul and zurna players, whose style of music, costume, and dance make no reference to court practice of the former empire. Yet even this upscale version of davul and zurna horrified the village mother. She assured me that the family would be having a mevlut as well. In the village, the mevlut is a public forum for the performance of a modern, rural sensibility. Women attend and enjoy mevluts, but unlike Marcus’s, Tapper and Tapper’s, and Bringa’s discussions of these events, they are not for women and are not regarded as heterodox. This modern, rural sensibility shows a reformation of local Islamic practices to make them “correct,” a concern with emotional sobriety and decorum, which the villagers view as part of being enlightened, modern people (Tapper and Tapper 1987b:59; White 2002:35).

The early transformation in rituals reinforced the notion that women are associated with “folkloric” practices, because only men’s rituals were changed. Now, women have found they need to change their ritual practices, to make them pious, contained, and sober. In the process, women have defied the stereotype that their practices are more closely linked to the past, tradition, and folklore, as they have also begun to seek purified forms of practice based in textual legitimacy, as Deeb (2006:122) also argues for Shi’i women in Lebanon. The most striking aspect of their struggle to locate alternative practices is their tendency to act like the bricoleur, who mixes discordant activities without regard for their epistemological contradictions. They do so, as I intend to explore in future fieldwork, because the state version of Islam marginalizes women, many of whom want to gain textual authority, as do Muslim women in other places as well (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2001). However, women in rural Turkey are looking outside of the official and constrained institution of the mosque to find religious authorities to guide them. Thus, their heightened interest in an authentic, purified practice leads them to alternative religious communities, Sufi brotherhoods.

Conclusion

Many authors have discussed the contemporary dynamic of Kemalist and Islamist practice, ideology, and politics in urban Turkey (Mardin 1971; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Özyurek 2006; White 2002). Here, I have considered the construction
of the rural subject as a “modern” Muslim. In my discussions of their labor to reform Islamic practice, stripping it of “tradition,” I have demonstrated how these changes link villagers to Islamic modernities, which seek sacred progress, and to state ideologies of modernity, which seek secular progress. These forms of progressive constructions of time, piety, legitimacy, and modernity are not limited to Turkey or the Islamic world but relate to the construction of alternative modernities (Gaonkar 2001; Knauf 2002; Piot 1999) parallel to, reflective of, and often formed in relation to Western secular modernity. In this case, an Islamic alternative modernity constructs legitimacy in texts, state institutions, and religious communities but not tradition. The villagers in Örselli seem enmeshed in local dramas, but the institutional structures of the state, which include Sunni Islam, play a role in how they live. The villagers have intentionally and willingly embraced state structures, identities, and opportunities. Thus, rather than being a traditional, rural peasantry, remote from the politics of urban life, as many Kemalists and Islamists would assume, they are agents of spiritual as well as economic and infrastructural transformation. Sunni orthodoxy and an attention to correct practice, in their view, are part of this modernity. I would argue, however, that their understandings of Islam and configurations of correct practice are in a state of flux; they borrow from state-approved Sunni Islam and the teachings of various religious communities, and they continue some traditional practices.

The villagers’ interest in a revamped spiritual practice relates to a self-reflexive application of ideas of status. For instance, Nilufer Göle’s describes Islamists’ project to “introduce the ‘real Islam’ to social groups with lower levels of education and culture who otherwise experience folk Islam” (1996:113) as entailing consideration of their own lives in the light of Others viewed their practice. And as Tuğal argues, “Radicals attack popular rituals, labeling them ‘traditional religion,’ which they claim they will replace with ‘real Islam’” (2006:259). Here again, they see themselves as backward and in need of spiritual maintenance. Although there is considerable debate and flexibility among religious scholars in Turkey and in other parts of the Islamic world about what should be retained and what transformed (Deeb 2006; Silverstein 2005; Tuğal 2006), powerful prejudices in Turkish society are at work to marginalize rural people, devout practitioners of all varieties of Islam (Alevi and Sunni). Örselli village is a rural place, with a deliberately and self-consciously devout population. Thus, the villagers feel that everything they do is labeled marginal with respect to the nationalist project of modernity. In discussing the villagers’ understanding of Islamic modernity, I have described how they imagine orthodox practice as distinct from local, folkloric or traditional, alternative ritual celebratory or spiritual expressions. Whether a product of the Diyanet or religious communities, the villagers rank such practice higher and see it as more real than their cultural traditions, which refer to an indeterminate past. Thus, it is not the state that they resist, but cultural heritage, which places them in a low position in a progressive modernity. They thus work to eliminate or forget traditions, because they are socially contaminating (Hart 2007c) and spiritually damning.

From an analytical perspective, it is important to avoid essentializing practices as either official or folk, orthodox or heterodox. These are distinctions that anthropologists rightly criticize (Bringa 1995:229; Tapper and Tapper 1987a). Social theorists critique the process of categorization as distorting because it solidifies what otherwise is fluid. Thus, categories of culture (Abu-Lughod 1993:9), the state (Herzfeld 1997:1), class (Liechty 2003:22), gender (Butler 1990:17), and so on, when bounded, subsume the fluidity of social arenas of power and its contestation through individual and collective agency. Categorization and reification destroy holism and the acceptance of ethnographic fluidity and ambiguity (Latour 1993). The processes of categorization are political, as they create domains of occident (Carrier 1992) and orient (Said 1978), geographic constructions of civilization and development (Pigg 1992) both pitted against and mirroring each other. As they are deployed, these categories create the sense of lost worlds (Carrier 1992), a nostalgia for what imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism have destroyed (Özyürek 2006; Rosaldo 1989). In the distinction between “official” and “folk” Islams, villagers as well as scholars, state officials, middle-class urban dwellers, and the elite categorize practices in relation to dichotomies of urban–rural, male–female, Kemalist–Islamist, and traditional–modern (Helvacıoğlu 1996). Whereas ethnographers and theorists can afford to deconstruct these classifications, the villagers in Örselli are invested in these notions of worth. The villagers attempt to gain power over categorizations, and instead of resisting, they select those practices that gain them the most prestige, in this world and the next (Meeker 2002:72).

The villagers situate themselves in the historical framework of the republic, which was constructed on the notion that positivistic scientific rationalism could transform a broken, backward, and Eastern society into one that looked Western and would be progressive, secular, and rational (Zürcher 1992:246). The Atatürk Revolution put the necessity of rupture into the imaginary space of the nation (Özyürek 2007:4–6). It is enacted in the performance of fragmentation, the self-conscious worries of class and status, the troubled and alienating sense of not being quite modern enough and of needing to catch up (Deeb 2006:33). Orhan Pamuk (2004:35) poignantly evokes the feeling of melancholy of the people of Istanbul, who, in striving to attain a modern, secularized, and Westernized level of civilization, desire the darkness of night, which cloaks the ruins of the Ottoman Empire dispersed throughout the city, and he describes their shame at not having attained Western
modernity, which they imagine these ruins demonstrate. They desire to cast off the old but also to protect this heritage. The process is reflexive. "Whenever I sense the absence of western eyes, I become my own westerner" (Pamuk 2004:288). Many urban Turkish people who came to visit Örselli often were caught between these conflicting desires. On the one hand, they wanted to be sure that I understood that they were modern, urban people (i.e., not what they assumed the villagers to be: "traditional" people), and they wanted to protect the villagers from me, assuming I would exploit their innocence and expose that untainted authenticity to the crude Western gaze, to the academic audience that would not be able to understand, with the same degree of intimate concern, "traditional" village life. This position echoes Michael Herzfeld's (1997) formulation of the "intimacy of the nation." The villagers apply this reflexive process to themselves. They know that the politics of identity and culture are interlaced with geographic stereotypes, that is, that Muslims are poor, rural people who have infiltrated the cities or who remain mired and isolated in their provincial locales. These geographic and class prejudices are reproduced in state ideologies of progress. Hasan Yavuz asserts that "Kemalism based its raison d'être on the perception of its Islamic 'other' as backward and conflict-ridden" (1999:200). And Richard Pfaff argues, "Kemalism is essentially an urban ideology, and, while the peasant could participate in the Turkish transformation proposed by Kemalism, the object of that transformation was to create a Turkey within which the peasant would be disengaged" (1963:95). Conforming to the state construction of "correct" Sunni Islam forces rural people to reject themselves and their cultural practices, including those related to their spirituality. Yet it also empowers them, allowing a degree of resistance to Kemalist orders while making a claim to the state. In addition to its implications for the politics of modernity in this world, Islamic practice has meaning and power in the next world for believers. Theorists have to recognize this and consider it when explaining how and why practitioners make choices about faith. Demonstrations of spiritual agency show how rural people make accommodations to state constructions of orthodoxy, alternative Sunni movements, and their local history of practice to achieve both secular and spiritual progress.

Notes

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1. The incident at Menemen is known as the Kubilay Olayı in Turkey. In 1930, urged by a local religious leader of the Naksibendi Islamic brotherhood to rebel against the state’s secularization program, a crowd attacked a young soldier, Kubilay, beheaded him, and paraded his head on a pike. The incident resulted in the conviction and hanging of individuals involved.

2. These political and historical processes of identity construction are part of a larger process that created religious and ethnic Others, who stood in opposition to the state’s ethnocratic construction: the Sunni Muslim Turk. Thus, religious and ethnic Others—Alevi, Kurds, and so on—stand outside that hegemonic project. Given the villagers’ work to cleanse themselves of difference stemming from traditional practice, it is not surprising that they are hesitant to involve themselves with these Others.

3. The AK is the current ruling party of the state, with members holding the offices of prime minister, president, and mayor in major cities, including Istanbul. Jenny White’s 2002 monograph chronicles the party’s rise to power via community activists.

4. Some girls have had wild experiences in the city, including drinking in bars with friends, but they conceal this.

5. Women’s celebrations never included davul and zurna and therefore were unaffected by the ban.

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