

DUYGU SENDAG  
French Institute for Anatolian Studies  
HEALING AS MULTIMEDIA PRACTICE:  
CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY IN TURKEY

*Introduction*

Zeynep, a 37-year-old Turkish woman, comes from a secular family background. She has traveled to Bali and India on different occasions to participate in yoga and meditation courses. Her main goal for joining these activities was to heal her childhood traumas and release emotions related to unpleasant memories. During both courses, much to her surprise, the facilitators led the group in a chant of an ‘eastern mantra,’ the *zikr*<sup>1</sup> of the phrase *La ilah illallah*. Zeynep says, “We all stood up, held hands, and started singing *La ilah illallah* accompanied by a guitar, while also turning around hand in hand!”. She explains that in her friend and family circles, public expressions of Islam, such as reciting religious expressions in Arabic, did not exist and were not appreciated. Therefore, hearing the Arabic phrase during the activity stirred mixed feelings in her; on the one hand, she felt ‘at home,’ but on the other, she could not help thinking how ‘that thing’ found her there – in a yoga and meditation course. Zeynep continues to engage in Sufi readings and practice yoga and meditation, which she sees as instruments that heal her ‘inner child’ on the path to reaching her own truth and finding her ‘authentic’ self.<sup>2</sup>

What particularly strikes my curiosity in Zeynep’s narrative is how a practice, previously unimaginable for someone like her – a ‘secular,’ ‘modern,’ and ‘free’ woman, as she describes herself – has become imaginable. What are the underlying conditions through which the *zikr* or chanting *La ilah illallah*, laden with political implications, particularly in the Turkish context, becomes a sensible practice in specific situations for a secular individual? What are the processes by which certain religious and traditional practices get delinked from their particular cultural contexts and find new meanings? Lastly, in what ways are new connections and continuities drawn between past and present or old and new, such as between Sufi rituals and therapeutic methods for trauma processing?

To answer these questions, I will present an analysis of contemporary spiritual practices from the theoretical framework of “religion as mediation.” I argue that healing practices emerge as the primary practices of mediation through which individuals seek to transcend the ordinary and form links between a number of culturally meaningful dichotomies, such as external and internal, visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, constructed and authentic/real. I suggest that the notion of

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<sup>1</sup> *Zikr* literally means ‘remembering.’ In Sufi culture, it is the practice of repeating the same Quranic expressions over and over as a way of remembering God. *La ilah illallah* literally means ‘There is no God but God.’

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all interlocutors throughout the article.

healing acquires its specific meaning through an interplay between religion and psychology, whereby old practices get refashioned within a psychologizing framework and acquire a ‘therapeutic’ label. Once religious practices are framed as therapeutic, they are rearticulated in scientific terms and *rationalized* based on their effects on the psychological and physiological functions of the human body. The therapeutic serves as a frame within which individuals reorganize diverse past forms and draw links between them. Hence, the meaning of healing in contemporary spiritual forms extends far beyond a mere elimination of a disease, recovery from sickness, or the transformation of self. It rather refers to a ‘world repairing’ process, occurring at both personal and collective levels, whereby participants of the contemporary spiritual milieu gather the fragments of past forms and recombine them in personalized bricolages through the mediation of the therapeutic. In this way, past and present, old and new, sacred and secular, mystical and rational are recomposed into one coherent, consistent, and continuous *whole* where the individual can *safely* dwell.

This study draws primarily on data gathered between 2018 and 2020 during a joint research project funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey.<sup>3</sup> The fieldwork spanned five different cities, and 72 interviews were conducted with individuals who either organized or participated in activities that fall outside of institutional or traditional forms of faith. As part of the research team, I took part in various events, workshops, circles, and retreats which involved different combinations of practices, such as yoga, meditation, shamanic and Sufi rituals, tai chi, qigong, homeopathy, storytelling, art therapy, astrology, breath therapy, energy healing, reiki, detox diets, ayurveda, mindfulness technics, regression therapy, feng shui, aromatherapy, family constellation, and numerology. Some participants were primarily interested in affecting a change in their personal lives and some others, who saw themselves as ‘changemakers’, believed that change at the individual level would also work as a positive transformative force upon the larger community. The existing literature recognizes that the meaning of healing in contemporary spiritual forms is much more than a simple elimination of an illness or a disease.

For instance, McGuire observed that for adherents of very different healing approaches, healing signified a particular type of ‘self-transformation’.<sup>4</sup> Beckford suggested that new religious and healing movements in North America and Europe cultivate and promote a distinctive relationship between ethics, spirituality, and healing.<sup>5</sup> The majority of relevant academic works focus on the therapeutic techniques

<sup>3</sup> This research project was funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Project number 215K300).

<sup>4</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Ritual Healing in Suburban America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> James A. Beckford, “Holistic Imagery and Ethics in New Religious and Healing Movements,” *Social Compass*, 31(2-3) (1984), 259-272.

adopted by diverse groups, the different conceptualizations of body, mind, and soul in healing systems, and the ways healing effects and experiences are produced. However, the existing literature has not sufficiently explored the questions of why and how healing has become such a central theme in religious/spiritual discourse.<sup>6</sup> I believe the reason is because despite the recognition that the signification of the notion varies culturally, ‘to be healed’ is somehow assumed to be a major function and a *desired* state for *all* religious and spiritual cultures. In my analysis, I intend to problematize this assumption by providing a brief comparison as to the varying significations of healing in different spiritual and religious cultures existing in Turkey. In so doing, I aim to contextualize the central position of healing in contemporary spiritual forms and relate it to the rise of ‘therapy culture’ and the spread of the therapeutic language.

The essay is structured as follows: First, I review the media perspective in religious studies and explain how I use the therapeutic as a historically specific medium, a product of a scientific endeavor to articulate and manage human processes. Second, I present the meanings that the notion of healing has acquired in various spiritual and religious discourses in Turkey to avoid a generic understanding of the concept and to highlight the distinctive forms it has taken in contemporary spiritualities. Third, I discuss how the therapeutic as a medium interacts with religious mediums and *remediates* past forms, initiating connections between systems and processes that were previously considered to be discrete and incompatible. Finally, I examine how the initiated connections come to define healing as a ‘world repairing’ act, through which both the individual and the world are constructed as *wholes* made up of *connected* parts, rather than disconcerted fragments.

### *Culture, Mediation, and Therapeutic Media*

The line of scholarship that views religion as mediation concentrates on the diverse ways whereby the ‘distance’ between the earthly and the divine or the visible and the invisible are mediated in different religious/spiritual traditions<sup>7</sup>. The focus, in this approach, is placed on the techniques and technologies referred to as ‘medium,’ through which communication with and about ‘the sacred’ becomes possible.<sup>8</sup> Here, a medium is not taken as a fixed genre or a simple vehicle of communication that embeds a particular content. Instead, a medium is seen as a cultural construction endowed with the power to serve a particular purpose, the

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<sup>6</sup> I use religion only with reference to the institutionalized forms of belief. My usage of spirituality, however, comprises both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms.

<sup>7</sup> Hent de Vries, “Media Res: Global Religion, Public Spheres, and the Task of Contemporary Comparative Religious Studies,” in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3–43; Birgit Meyer, “Religious Remediations: Pentecostal Views in Ghanaian Video-Movies,” *Postscripts* 1, no 2/3 (2005), 155–181; David Morgan, “Introduction: Religion, media, culture: the shape of the field,” in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2008), 1–19.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Stolow, “Religion and/as Media,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 22/4 (2005), 125.

value of which is also generated and embraced by groups or individuals in a given context. Examples of a religious medium might involve both material and nonmaterial things, such as certain bodily practices, sensations, performances, words, books, images, prayers, prophecies, music, dance, spirit mediums, priests, healers, prophets, amulets, icons, oils, powders, incenses, liquids, shrines, temples, churches, mosques, audiocassettes, or videos.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Quran is also a religious medium, and a variety of practices derived from it, such as reciting verses, producing Islamic calligraphy, or chanting the *zikr* of the phrase *La ilah illallah*, are mediation practices through which the sacred word is channeled on earth in various aural and visual forms. Such practices are endowed with power in mediating the assumed ‘distance’ between the sacred and the profane.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, performing them is considered to incite a process of transformation that will progressively render humans ‘closer’ to the sacred presence.

Mediation is intrinsic to culture; experience is constructed and put into narrative through the recognized forms of mediation in a particular cultural context. In this paper, the way I use ‘therapeutic’ is also related to a historically specific cultural framework which is termed ‘therapy culture’ to refer to the distinctive influence of psychotherapeutic language in shaping our understanding of what is sensible, possible, communicable, and doable.<sup>11</sup> My use of ‘therapeutic’ should not be confused with the term’s clinical connotations that inform the relationship between a patient and a therapist. Rather, by ‘therapeutic,’ I mean a range of practices and discursive tools that help mediate between a series of dichotomies, such as internal vs. external<sup>12</sup>, conscious and unconscious, visible vs. invisible, known vs. unknown, self vs. the other, representation vs. reality, rational vs. irrational, chaos vs. order, discord vs. harmony, and conflict vs. unity. These tools, which I will refer to as ‘therapeutic media’<sup>13</sup> from now on, involve a variety of concepts, narrative templates, idioms, causal frameworks, vocabularies, explanatory schemas, methods, techniques,

<sup>9</sup> Marleen De Witte, “Spirit media: charismatics, traditionalists, and mediation practices in Ghana” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2008), 19–20.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Robbins, “Keeping God’s distance: sacrifice, possession and the problem of religious mediation,” *American Ethnologist* 44/3 (2017), 464.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of faith after Freud* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper Torchbooks, 1968); Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008); Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> It is also possible to formulate the distinction between internal and external through more psychological terminology: the ‘demands of the unconscious’ vs. the ‘imperatives of the superego.’

<sup>13</sup> Throughout the article, I use both ‘medium’ and ‘media.’ Though I do not see a difference in meaning, I keep both terms to differentiate between old and new mediums. Therefore, when I mention religious forms, I use ‘medium’ and for therapeutic ones, I use ‘media.’

procedures, treatments, and modes of intervention through which human beings build their world and make sense of it. Therapeutic media reifies that world and the ‘therapy culture’ by acting as an institutionally authorized medium, that draws links between various oppositions and oversees a sensible exchange between them. Different from religious mediums, therapeutic media does not necessarily claim to mediate between the sacred and profane. On the contrary, its emergence was a result of a search for materialistic explanations for the ‘higher mental powers of humans,’ which were traditionally associated with the realm of the divine.<sup>14</sup> The history of therapeutic media goes back to the emergence of psychology as a modern scientific discipline in Europe and North America in the second half of the 19th century. Though a multiplicity of approaches within psychology and its cognates existed, the discipline evolved alongside and out of the secularization processes. It sought to find laws, procedures, and techniques with which the ‘hidden’ aspects of human thinking and behavior could be rendered not only visible and intelligible but also manageable.<sup>15</sup> It, therefore, is taken as a ‘technology of self,’ that constructed the contemporary apparatus for ‘being human’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, therapeutic media does not only incorporate tools for ‘world-building’, but it also directs humans in terms of how to inhabit that world.

### *Changing Meaning of Healing*

Most scholars recognize the central role of healing in contemporary spiritual practices. However, there has been insufficient exploration into the specific meanings this complex notion has acquired within contemporary spiritual forms. I believe that the elevated status of healing in contemporary societies often obscures its potential negative connotations or its peripheral position within various religious and spiritual cultures. The excerpt from Hervieu-Léger’s work, wherein she describes healing as one of the three primary themes of new spiritualities, aptly illustrates my point:

The first of these thematic centers, and undoubtedly the most central, is that of representations and expectations about health and healing. It will rightly be pointed out that this centrality of the theme of healing in contemporary constructions of belief is neither *original* nor *new* [emphasis added]. Protection against illness, which reflects the mortal condition of the individual, is a central concern of all known forms of magic. The return to health constitutes, in *all human societies* [emphasis added], one of the primary purposes of the ritual mobilization of supernatural powers. No

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<sup>14</sup> Wade E. Pickren and Alexandra Rutherford, *A History of Modern Psychology in Context* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010): 8.

<sup>15</sup> Rose, *Inventing Our Selves*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

religion fails to address, in various forms, the fundamental human quest to escape suffering and illness (Translation from French is mine).<sup>17</sup>

In the above passage, an unquestioned relationship is assumed between healing and spirituality, and healing is framed, in a way, as the ultimate function of religion/spirituality. I consider Régis Dericquebourg's book, *Croire et Guérir (To Believe and to Heal)*, particularly important in this respect, because he adopts a historical perspective and refrains from assigning a fixed position to healing in religious discourse.

Dericquebourg's main argument is that while healing was only peripheral within the matrix of other theological notions, it constitutes the central pillar of practices and doctrines for religions founded through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, although terms like 'healing,' 'health,' 'illness,' and 'suffering' have been fundamental in shaping human cultures, they do not carry fixed meanings or clear positive/negative connotations. Instead, they work as metaphors for understanding how a social reality is constructed in a specific context. Consequently, I believe that examining the various meanings of healing, while giving due attention to the authorized forms of mediation within the broader cultural context, can offer a more nuanced understanding of the concept. Below, I present a brief outline of spiritism and the signification of healing within the spiritist culture, yet another non-institutionalized form, which emerged and rose in popularity in the 1940s, alongside the secularization policies promoted and imposed by the Turkish Republic. The comparative framework will help to contextualize the therapeutic turn in contemporary spiritualities by allowing to trace the (dis)continuities between these two forms. The particular meaning of healing in these two distinct non-institutional forms is informed by the different positions they have taken vis-à-vis science, in particular, psychology and religion. My focus, therefore, will be primarily on two things; first, the selectivity at work in how spiritism and more contemporary spiritual forms appropriated certain psychological concepts, and second, their attitude towards Sufi traditions, which have heavily influenced both the institutionalized form of Islam and heterodox religious forms practiced throughout the country.

#### *Spiritism: Séances as Practices of Mediation through the Intermediary of a 'Medium'*

The history of Turkish spiritism is studied in two waves. The first wave concerns the arrival of spiritist ideas in the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s, which coincided more or less the same period as they became popular in

<sup>17</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Bricolage vaut-il dissémination? Quelques réflexions sur l'opérationnalité sociologique d'une métaphore problématique," *Social Compass* 52/3 (2005), 301.

<sup>18</sup> Dericquebourg defines a new category called 'Healing Religions' (*Religions de Guérison*) based on his analysis of the following four religions: Scientology, Christian Science, Antoinism, and Invitation of Life. See Régis Dericquebourg, *Croire et guérir - Quatre religions de guérison* (Paris: Dervy, 2001), 12.

Europe and the USA. During this time, spiritism was mainly embraced by the non-Muslim inhabitants of the Empire rather than the Muslim ones for whom 'the marvelous and the supernatural' were still completely integrated into 'official Islam' as well as in 'popular Islam' and 'Islamic mysticism'.<sup>19</sup> The second and the stronger wave, which is my main point of focus here, however, occurred in the 1940s, at a period when well-established Sufi practices and expressions of folk religion were prohibited as part of the secularization policies of the Republic. In this context, spiritist ideas and the séance practice received considerable popularity, particularly among the Republican elites who appropriated and reinterpreted them as a way of mediating between humans and the spiritual realm. The possibility of communicating with spirits without the guidance of religious intermediaries such as a *shaykh* or membership to a specific group, in particular, a Sufi *tariqa* aptly conformed with the values of a secular state. For the spiritists, their practice had nothing to do with religion, 'piety', 'devotion', 'angels', 'djinns', or the 'devil'.<sup>20</sup> Contacting the 'disembodied beings,' was a *natural* phenomenon taking place under certain conditions as an effect of some physiopsychological processes.<sup>21</sup>

According to Bedri Ruhselman who was the pioneer of the Turkish spiritist thought, 'hypnoses' was an essential *technique* to loosen the link between the medium's spirit and body and initiate spirit-to-spirit communication. The 'influences' and 'vibrations' emanated from the spirit realm were received in the 'surconsciousness' (*şuurüstü*) of the medium, and were subsequently transferred to the related part of the brain, inciting the molecules there and stimulating extraordinary capacity increase on the part of the medium.<sup>22</sup> The spiritist group saw séances as *scientific* experiments whereby the *laws* of the divine order could be deciphered in the form of *knowledge*. The members of the group firmly distinguished themselves from the Sufis on the grounds that spiritist methods provided the most up-to-date, accurate, direct, and immediate way for human-spirit interaction. Bedri Ruhselman was particularly critical of mediums who summoned the spirits of some elevated Sufi figures which, in his view, were 'backward' and 'primitive'.<sup>23</sup> Though the séances aimed to produce *knowledge* about the order of the universe which would serve for the

<sup>19</sup> Maxime Rodinson, "La place du merveilleux et de l'étrange dans la conscience du monde musulman médiéval", in Arkoun, Mohamed, et al., *L'étrange et le merveilleux dans l'islam médiéval. Actes du colloque tenu au Collège de France à Paris, en mars 1974* (Paris: Editions J. A., 1978), 167–87, quoted in

Özgür Türesay, "Between Science and Religion: Spiritism in the Ottoman Empire (1850s–1910s)," *Studia Islamica* 113/2 (2018), 199.

<sup>20</sup> Duygu Sendag, "Between Tasavvuf and Spiritism: The Case of Enis Behiç Koryürek," *Turkish Historical Review*, 15/1 (2023), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 94. Also, it is important to note that the spiritist hypothesis enjoyed scientific prestige up until the 1920s as part of experimental psychology and psychic research in Europe. It lost significant legitimacy in the 1930s with the decrease in the interest of the scientific world towards the supernatural.

<sup>22</sup> Bedri Ruhselman, *İlahi Nizam ve Kainat [Divine Order and Universe]* (Istanbul: MTIAD, 2013), 146.

<sup>23</sup> Samiha Ayverdi, *Mülakatlar* (Istanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyat, 2005), 216.

progress of humanity, Sufi spirits lacked the background and the competence for that. Channeling the words of Sufi spirits would only reproduce religious expressive forms in the style of metaphors, analogies, and mystical poetry, and therefore run counter to the ultimate cause of systematizing the divine laws in the form of *knowledge*. In line with the modernist ethos of the era, *knowledge* was viewed in direct opposition to religious expressive forms and regarded as an expression of truth in its most transparent form. Its source was universal human *reason*, not the *heart* which different Sufi cultures pointed to as the origin of authenticity.

I have not come across any references to healing, therapy, psychotherapy, or therapeutic within the spiritist literature of the 1940s and the 1950s. For spiritists, Truth was to be mediated by a communicative practice between mediums and 'disembodied beings' in scientifically-held séances through *knowledge*, which carried with it a transformative force for the evolution of the individual, the society, and humanity. In the spiritist magazine of *Spirit and Matter (Ruh ve Madde)*<sup>24</sup>, which started in 1960, however, it is possible to find translated articles involving references to healing.<sup>25</sup> In these articles, the word healing is used interchangeably with 'spiritual treatment' which is carried out by the 'medium-healers' to cure illnesses with the assistance of spirits. Healing events are mainly depicted like spectacles:

The renowned healer of the time Harry Edwards, accompanied by 200 mediums, treated 90 patients in front of 3000 people" [...] One of the most painful cases was that of the eleven-year-old Paul Cowell. It was worth seeing how pleased his mother was during his treatment. The doctors had told the mother that there was no cure for the child's illness. Nevertheless, Mr. Edwards responded, "No, we don't agree." After a short examination, Harry Edwards detected the bend in the child's spinal cord and head. With the help of George Burton, they readjusted the child's spine in one to two minutes. The healers did not apply any pressure or pain while doing that. Then, they moved Paul's body back and forth slightly and straightened the bend in his head. That was also completed in two minutes (Translated from Turkish by me).<sup>26</sup>

The magazine has many articles of this type which disclose the 'miracles' of healer-mediums in different parts of the world. In an issue dated June 1960, it was announced that a renowned 'medium-healer' would come to

<sup>24</sup> The monthly journal was established in 1960 by the Metaphysic Investigations and Scientific Research Society (MTIAD), founded by Bedri Ruhselman in 1950 in Istanbul. The journal incorporated articles written by Turkish spiritist figures and translations from international spiritist literature. Since 2012, the journal has been published online and can be accessed at the following web address: *Ruh ve Madde Dergisi aylık sayıları*, accessed on June 13, 2020, <http://www.bilyay.org.tr/Ruh-ve-Madde-Dergisi.php>.

<sup>25</sup> *The Two Worlds* is a British weekly periodical founded by the medium Emma Hardinge Britten in 1887. It is now published monthly.

<sup>26</sup> The article originally appeared in The Spiritist magazine called *The Two Worlds* on May 7, 1960. It was translated by Refik Kayahan and was published in *Spirit and Matter* in July 1960 (8).

Turkey and readers could register if they wanted to receive a treatment.<sup>27</sup> The call, however, was restricted to individuals who found no remedy through medical science. From this, one could infer that the spiritist concept of 'healing' primarily supplemented medicine, focusing on alleviating disorders or illnesses. For spiritists, healing or spiritual treatment by medium-healers was only one application of the spiritist *knowledge* rather than its primary focus. These healing spectacles were viewed as a means of reaching a wider audience to promote spiritist *knowledge* and demonstrate the potential of spiritist research and metapsychic sciences.

*Contemporary Spirituality: Therapy as a Practice of Mediation through the Intermediary of a 'Therapist-Healer'*

By tracing the content of the spiritist magazine throughout the 1970s, one can observe the emergence of new meanings associated with healing, alongside the increasing appearance of the word 'therapy,' particularly in translated articles from other spiritist magazines. I do not suggest a replacement of healing as 'spiritual treatment' with the help received from the spirit realm with a purely therapeutic interpretation. Instead, I observe a coexistence of both approaches during the 1970s. One of the articles that illustrate the new usage of healing emerged in an issue dated January 1979 and was originally written by Karlfried Dürckheim (1896–1988), a psychotherapist and a Zen master. Different from the spiritist perspective outlined above, Dürckheim's article suggested a readjustment in the direction of the spiritual search from the realm of the 'disembodied beings' toward the 'interiority' of embodied human beings:

[All therapies] aim at saving humans from pain. There are two kinds of pain: The first type is caused by a functional disorder. Yet, the second type is about being detached from one's true self, caused by not being who you are meant to be (Translated from Turkish by me).<sup>28</sup>

According to Dürckheim, the first type of pain arises from functional disorders and can be considered 'worldly pain,' while the second stems from 'self-alienation.'<sup>29</sup> In the first type, the cause of the pain is a deficiency that hinders the person from fulfilling worldly needs and seizing opportunities, which may result from a lack of knowledge or capability. The second type of pain is characterized by the absence of something fundamental to the person's existence; at the core of their true essence, the individual cannot fully be themselves.<sup>30</sup> Dürckheim further suggests that all forms of therapy aim to alleviate this 'pain,' but the specific type of therapy varies depending on whether the pain and the desire for healing

<sup>27</sup> The article originally appeared in *The Two Worlds* on April 23, 1960. It was then translated to Turkish by Jale Gizer and published in *Spirit and Matter* (June 1960).

<sup>28</sup> Karlfried Dürckheim, in *Spirit and Matter* (January 1979), 36.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

are rooted in a person's pursuit of worldly success or their quest for 'self-realization.' Two distinct forms of therapy correspond to these two types of pain: 'pragmatic therapy' for the former and 'initiative therapy' for the latter. He explains that 'initiation' entails revealing a person's innermost secrets, or their 'true essence in the depths of their soul.'<sup>31</sup> He adds, "There is a transcendent being in every person, and this being manifests in the world through the person. True happiness and health for a person are possible through the achievement of this."<sup>32</sup> The following excerpt from one of Dürckheim's translated articles will shed light on how he interconnected concepts such as 'relieving pain,' 'reaching true essence,' 'self-realization,' and 'initiative therapy.'

If someone asks me what my real problem is I would answer in the following way: "How can I go beyond Karlfried, Dürckheim?" Dürckheim is my surname and Karlfried is my name. Surname reflects the self which is conditioned by certain worldly requirements; he was born in a particular house and he had a particular childhood: This person had certain needs when he was a child. He received a certain education; he had stories of success and failure. To attain different titles, such as a professor or a librarian, he followed a particular path on earth. This is the person as the external world knows of him. However, the person we call through his first name is not this one. He is not conditioned. He is *original* [emphasis added]. He is not a person conditioned by the external world, but on the contrary, he exists through his *true* being [emphasis added] and wants to prove this being regardless of all earthly conditionings (Translated from Turkish by me).<sup>33</sup>

Dürckheim draws on the distinction between the 'internal' and 'external' world, represented in the text by an individual's name and surname, to refer to two different modes of subjectivity. While one is 'unconstructed (unconditioned),' 'original,' and 'true,' the other is a 'construction' of the *external* world out of elements like one's age, profession, title, family background, status, projects, and social labels. The function of 'initiative therapy' is to undo the effects of the *external* world upon the individual so that she can relate with the *true* being *within*.

In the relevant academic literature, the relocation of truth to the individual's interior is widely recognized as the distinctive feature of contemporary spiritual forms.<sup>34</sup> Paul Heelas coined the term 'self-spirituality' to denote the belief that 'the inner realm and the inner realm

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Also see Karlfried Dürckheim, *Le Maître intérieur* (Paris: Courrier du Livre, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Also see Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998); David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, 2004); Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 10-14; Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

'alone' serve as the 'source of authentic vitality, creativity, love, tranquility, wisdom, power, and authority'.<sup>35</sup> This concept is rooted in the conviction that the deeper layers of the self are endowed with sacrality, while the socialized self and the society from which it springs constitute its profane counterpart.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the description of the term closely parallels the points made in the quoted passage where Durkheim distinguishes between the internal and external worlds, referring respectively to one's *true* being and earthly conditionings. However, I contend that the term 'self-spirituality' lacks explanatory power if not considered in conjunction with the role ascribed to therapy in the process. The mere belief that truth lies *within* is far from being contemporary; on the contrary, it is shared by several esoteric traditions. The cultural and historical specificity of contemporary spiritual forms, in my view, therefore lies in the particularities of the medium, that is, healing understood in therapeutic terms, whose relevance, meaning, and function are culturally constructed.

One of the points of divergence between the spiritist perspective and the contemporary spiritual one is that while the spiritists invested in an understanding of truth that is universal, objective, and capable of being articulated through *knowledge* acquired from *bodiless* beings, contemporary spirituality aligns itself with a postmodern understanding in which truth is construed as personalized, partial, and subjective – its search involving therapeutic practices that address *embodied* human beings. The term 'self-spirituality' is meaningful when discerning the difference between these two forms. However, it falls short in effectively delineating the distinguishing features of contemporary spiritual forms from other mystical traditions, such as that of the Sufis, for instance. To illustrate, in various Sufi traditions, like in contemporary spirituality, human beings are prescribed to search for *truth* in their interiority, and the *heart* symbolizes the sacred aspect *within*. A Sufi is supposed to carry out certain practices with the aim of 'polishing her heart' so that truth will shine through. In Sufi literature, however, healing never appears as a practice mediating between the sacred and the profane. On the contrary, in different Islamic sources, ranging from mystical poetry to recently broadcast TV programs by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, the common usage of the notion is rather negative. Although healing (*deva, derman*) is a topic that appears frequently in old poetry, it is used as an allusion to the worldly aspirations of comfort and pleasure.<sup>37</sup> 'Healing' appears next to its opposite, 'pain' (*dert*), which is used positively to remind humans of their frailty, weakness, and ephemerality. Even in one poem, when describing a non-believer, thus regarded as outside of the path of *truth*, Rumi writes the following two lines to emphasize how unsought the figure was by God:

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<sup>35</sup> Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 19. Also see Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998); David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Aupers and Houtman, *Religions of Modernity*, 10-14.

<sup>37</sup> Diyanet TV, *Dert ve Deva [Suffering and Healing]*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rPYQVErP5s>.

"In his entire life never have this wretched had a headache/ so that he would not implore God."<sup>38</sup>

Of course, traditional healing practices that carry religious references did exist and still do exist. However, on the spiritual path and in the quest for truth, in which Sufi *shaykhs* play an intermediary role, their disciples aim to achieve 'servitude,' not healing. By placing themselves in physically distressing and even socially unacceptable situations, disciples must subdue their ego (the main reason for their detachment from the sacred element *within*), and experience and embody submission. I acknowledge that what 'servitude' signified has shown variation among different Islamic/Sufi groups. My point rather is that although religious mediation practices greatly differed across time and space for Muslims/Sufis, what brought such a different range of practices into a degree of unity was their attributed value for cultivating 'servitude' to the divine will on the part of the believer. While traditional forms of Islam emphasized 'servitude,' and experimental spiritism focused on 'knowledge,' contemporary spiritual forms prioritize 'healing' as the primary mode of mediation.

Consequently, while at first glance, Dürckheim and the prominent Sufi figure Rumi may appear to be discussing the same concept when they identify the human being as the bearer of the sacred element, adopting a media perspective proves useful in avoiding confusion between different temporalities. It directs attention toward the historical context of mediation practices. Spiritual mediums do not randomly appear; they are socially embedded and are authenticated/authorized through power which also constructs the self in a particular mode. Even though the notion of healing recurs in different spiritual cultures, it secures a prominent position in contemporary spirituality and follows a therapeutic trajectory within wider networks of power and authority.

### *Remediation*

Philip Rieff states that "To perpetuate themselves, religious doctrines ordinarily develop modes of psychological retraining; conversely all psychological retraining develops some of the characteristics of religious doctrine"<sup>39</sup>. The complex relationship between therapeutic and religious as depicted by Rieff is key to understanding the specific meaning healing acquires in contemporary spiritual forms. In order to map out the relationship between therapeutic and religious as remediation, it is important to keep in mind two important points about what a medium is and how it functions. The first has already been discussed: A medium is not a simple carrier of content. Second, the content of a medium is another medium. Marshall McLuhan illustrates this point by stating, "The content of the press is literary statement, the content of the book is speech, and the

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<sup>38</sup> Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, *Mesnevi*, 3<sup>rd</sup> book, part 7, line 13;  
<https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/masnavi/daftar3/sh7>

<sup>39</sup> Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, 35.

content of the movie is the novel".<sup>40</sup> Remediation, therefore, is intrinsic to a medium, for a medium always *remediates* what precedes it. According to Bolter and Grusin, a medium "appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of previous mediums and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real".<sup>41</sup> In their view, remediation refers to a specific relationship between old and new that involves the processes of 'refashioning,' 'repurposing,' and 'reforming.'

### *Refashioning and Repurposing*

In Zeynep's case, presented at the outset of this paper, we see the coalescence of two religious mediums, *zîkr* and *mantra*, placed side by side despite the differences in their conventionally attributed symbolic value within the belief systems that each belongs to. Their differences are managed through the operation of the therapeutic frame that 'refashions' and 'repurposes' them as techniques for 'emotional release' and 'trauma processing.' To a certain extent, these religious mediums get stripped of their differences just as they are enframed by the therapeutic, which attaches them to a psychological narrative. Their attributed wisdom and power are made sense of and embraced within this narrative. In addition to Zeynep, many other interlocutors expressed similar attitudes towards very different traditional practices they adopt as part of their bricolages. Buse's<sup>42</sup> case is another example. She is a 35-year-old yoga instructor and currently manages a studio where she organizes Sufi whirling events, in addition to yoga classes. Buse also performs the daily Islamic prayer and regularly reads Sufi texts, in particular Rumi's *Masnavi*<sup>43</sup>. She has traveled to India several times to participate in yoga workshops and, during her travels, learned about the Hindu tradition, which, in her view, resembles the Sufi culture in Anatolia. Buse's bricolage contains elements that make references to Hindu, Islamic, Sufi, and Shamanic practices, unfolding coherently precisely because such traditional mediums are remediated by the therapeutic media which refashions and repurposes them as therapeutic techniques for overcoming traumas and regulating emotions: Yoga poses detox the body, your posture changes, your aches decrease, and you can also observe your traumas dissolving. We do not know exactly which traumas dissolve in what way. However, we often observe in our yoga classes that people start crying, and laughing. That's because the process helps deal with traumas.

Buse believes that for an individual to encounter her *true self*, she needs to develop self-awareness and increase her self-knowledge, which is only possible by releasing certain emotions and treating 'traumas.' Another

<sup>40</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 305.

<sup>41</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin Richard, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>42</sup> Buse was interviewed in Çanakkale on September 13, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> *Masnavi* is Rumi's masterpiece, consisting of six volumes.

informant, Jan<sup>44</sup>, a 38-year-old male who grew up in a family setting 'oriented more toward science than religion,' offers *tai chi* and meditation courses in a psychological counseling center. His practice incorporates elements from different religions, from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity to Buddhism. Though the components of Jan's bricolage differ from Buse's, he explains the purpose of his practices through a similar psychologizing vocabulary, involving references to 'childhood,' 'unconscious,' and 'trauma':

When you sit for meditation, you can heal your whole body and you can go back to your childhood. It is an incredible process...Using materials from your unconscious, you can deal with some of your traumas.

For Jan, meditation provides an awareness of one's emotions and thoughts. Moreover, in his view, one can only transcend the cultural forms imposed by the 'external world,' and, in turn, reach the 'real' essence of things by developing such awareness. My point in this part is very similar to the argument raised by Véronique Altglas in her book called *From Yoga to Kabbalah*. Altglas's main concern is to problematize the usage of 'bricolage' in the sociology of religion and spirituality as a fluid and playful practice, a sign of increasing individual freedom and entrepreneurship in the religious/spiritual domain. In her view, this approach neglects the fact that a certain degree of coherence and homogeneity is produced in between seemingly diverse religious resources through their psychologization.<sup>45</sup> Despite their different origins, doctrines, and practices, diverse religious elements become standardized by being refashioned with the core narratives of the therapy culture such as 'inner-worldly realization of the self', 'personal growth', and 'taking individual responsibility' for effecting inner change and life transformation.<sup>46</sup> My argument partially coincides with that of Altglas. Yet, different from her, I choose to think of contemporary bricolages in terms of a particular relationship between 'old' and 'new', and use the concept of 'remediation' for this purpose. As I will try to show in the rest of this paper, such framing will be helpful in not only revealing the layered processes at work but also capturing the peculiar meaning the notion of healing takes in contemporary spiritual forms.

### *Reforming*

Another important aspect of the remediation process is the new medium 'reforming' the old one. For Bolter and Grusin, the new medium is justified because it fulfills the unkept promise of an older medium by filling a void or repairing a fault.<sup>47</sup> Their statement conveys that the

<sup>44</sup> Jan was interviewed in Ankara on May 5, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Véronique Altglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>47</sup> Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 60.

relationship between old and new, thus religious and therapeutic is much more complex than a simple replacement of one by the other. The scholarship on ‘therapy culture’ has predominantly concentrated on the situations in which the therapeutic code overwhelms more traditional codes of meaning.<sup>48</sup> Philip Rieff’s analysis of the relationship between religious and therapeutic followed a similar line. For Rieff, “Old illusions no longer functioned satisfactorily,” and in turn “faith reappeared, understood in terms of therapy”.<sup>49</sup> In media studies terms, his perspective aligns with a specific interpretation of Marshall McLuhan’s renowned phrase, “The medium is the message,” which suggests a relationship where the content is wholly shaped by the medium itself. Regarding contemporary spiritual forms, my field observations suggest a more nuanced relationship between religious and therapeutic than that. A new medium considerably weakens “the symbolic power of traditional senders external to the system”.<sup>50</sup>

However, precisely due to that, in order not to disappear, ‘the traditional senders,’ i.e., old mediums, recode themselves in the new system.<sup>51</sup> Recoding enables the old medium to ‘reform’ and supplement itself with the potentiality offered by the new. So, Furedi and Rieff were partially right because when old forms cannot but ‘recode’ themselves in the new media as a matter of survival, they end up being labeled as ‘therapeutic’ regardless of their traditional signification in specific temporal and spatial settings. This process, however, does not automatically lead to the ‘triumph of the therapeutic’ – which is also the title of Rieff’s book. ‘Reformed’ by the potentials of the therapeutic media, religious mediums appropriate a contemporary relevance and get to circulate in geographies that were previously out of their reach or inaccessible to them. This aspect of remediation also indicates the mnemonic implications of the process which is a rather unexplored aspect. The new media enables and structures the reconstruction and the recollection of different pasts in the present.

A review of Hervieu-Léger’s point as to the breaking of the memory chain in modern societies is essential at this point. Hervieu-Léger suggests that culture breaks free from the control of religions as a result of the disruption in the chain of memory, and new cultural forms emerge with the aspiration to reconstitute a memory chain through the assembling of the deregulated pieces in a new order. I see this process as consisting of two essential aspects: First, old religious mediums get detached from the belief systems that they conventionally belong to and are abstracted into the more generic category of ‘spiritual’. In turn, they get refashioned, repurposed, and reformed by the therapeutic media where they get standardized in terms of function and value. As a consequence of this process, in contemporary spiritual forms, ‘spiritual’ and ‘therapeutic’ turn

<sup>48</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Manuel Castells, quoted in Henk de Vries, “Media Res,” 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

out as two categories that can be used interchangeably without posing a conceptual problem.

I view healing practices in contemporary spiritual forms as products of such a remediation process through which old religious forms are rebranded as therapeutic, while therapeutic forms take on religious significance, evolving into tools for the pursuit of truth. In light of this, revisiting the distinction made between spiritist and contemporary spiritual perspectives, which also represent modern and postmodern forms of religiosity/spirituality, leads to the following observation: In the Turkish context, while spiritists aimed to envision a spiritual realm devoid of religious elements, particularly those associated with Sufism, constructed upon scientific methods and knowledge, participants in the contemporary spiritual milieu are rediscovering and reinventing both Sufi and other religious forms as therapeutic and, consequently, scientific techniques.

### *Circuits: Religion and Science*

If I were to visualize the remediation of the religious by the therapeutic, the closest to what I have in mind would be an image I came across in Heike Behrend's article. Behrend talks about 'the medium in the medium' with reference to a photograph of a Bible which is used to ward off sorcery among some Christian groups.<sup>52</sup> Though the Bible is privileged over the photo, it is the photo that enables its presence. Healing should be considered in relation to a similar relationship between religious and therapeutic. The therapeutic enframes the religious, and through that framing, religious mediums acquire new paths of circulation. One crucial characteristic of the remediation process is that it draws connections between spaces, memories, and different conceptions of the sensible, initiating 'circuits' out of diverse systems and processes.<sup>53</sup> An important aspect of this circuitry concerns the reorganization of different pasts within the therapeutic frame as discussed earlier. As a result, new continuities and connections are generated between different temporal and spatial realities; not only between diverse historical pasts but also past and present, religion and science.

Participants in the contemporary spiritual milieu frequently look for a scientific basis for their spiritual practices by relating relatively abstract terms such as 'awareness,' and 'enlightenment' with the operation of certain bodily entities articulated in modern scientific language. Elif's<sup>54</sup> case is quintessential in this regard. She is the creator of a workshop called

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<sup>52</sup> Heike Behrend, "Photo Magic: Photographs in Practices of Healing and Harming in East Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33/2 (2003), 135.

<sup>53</sup> Kajri Jain, "Gods in the time of automobile," *Current Anthropology* 58/15 (2017), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Elif was interviewed in Istanbul on May 23, 2019.

'Live Your Magic' in which she uses meditation and certain psychological reinforcement methods. For her, awareness, a crucial stage on the path to healing, is related, more than anything else, to certain brain functions: Awareness is a capability of the prefrontal neocortex. This organ has mind-blowing capabilities for regulating our emotions. It is responsible for empathy, collaboration, planning, analysis, and imagination. The prefrontal neocortex should work in coordination with other parts of the brain, which we call 'brain integration.' However, when we are in panic mode, our mind loses connection with other parts of the brain, so from the neuroscientific point of view, the capacity for awareness is dependent on brain integration.

Elif believes that an individual can 'reenchant' her world and reclaim her magic and mystery only when she heals her trauma. The initial step for healing is to develop an 'awareness' of emotions in which the 'prefrontal neocortex' plays a key role. Another informant, Havva<sup>55</sup>, who organizes Shamanic events combined with certain psychological approaches, thinks similarly. Havva took an online psychology course to provide more 'solid' answers to her clients' trauma-related questions arising during her Shamanic retreats. She firmly identifies herself as 'a scientific person' and perceives no contradiction or incompatibility between her spiritual and scientific orientations

For me, what is spiritual is not about some crazy work or a miracle. The pineal gland in the brain is connected to the spirit. You can start receiving information from a higher level when you feel the vibrations of the 'amygdalae'<sup>56</sup>, which can be triggered through certain rituals.

There are many such examples. The idea behind explaining spiritual phenomena based on the unexplored potentials of the human brain is not new. Spiritists also frequently resorted to this kind of framing. This is very much related to the modernist thought that religion will eventually give way to science as the latter develops and expands its scope of rational explanation. Healing practices, nevertheless, defy the logic of either/or and then/now as individuals think of religion(s) and science as parts of a coherent *whole* that form components of the same 'circuitry'. The framing of religious practices as therapeutic techniques enables their re-articulation in modern scientific terms based on their effects on the physiological or psychological functions of the human body. This undertaking provides a 'rational' basis for religious/spiritual practices and complicates any possible categorization of healing practices as either rational or mystical, scientific or religious, secular or sacred. During an interview, when explaining the kind of practices she incorporates in her gatherings, one of the interlocutors listed the Sufi practices of *zikr* and *sema*, immediately adding afterward that she only employs scientific ones. Indeed, a

<sup>55</sup> Havva was interviewed in Istanbul on June 13, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> The amygdala is found in the brain and they are part of the limbic system; they have been shown to play a key role in memory, decision-making, and emotional reactions (such as fear, anxiety, and aggression). "Amygdala," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified April 21, 2024, 18.16, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amygdala>

distinctive yet baffling feature of healing practices is that for their practitioners, they are spiritual, therapeutic, and scientific all at once.

### *World-Building and the Disappearance of the Medium*

The following statement was repeated by many of my interlocutors: "They all point to the same thing." Different individuals said it regarding various traditions, religions, spiritual cultures, psychotherapeutic methods, and modern science. This attitude, which is quite prevalent in the contemporary spiritual milieu, was often met with criticism by scholars like Steve Bruce, who related it to a failure to notice the incompatibilities between different assumptions and truth claims on the part of the practitioners.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Hervieu-Léger described the eclecticism in the field as "an awkward conglomeration of beliefs cobbled together".<sup>58</sup> What looks so 'incompatible' and 'awkward' for these scholars is, nevertheless, experienced as harmonious, consistent, and meaningful by the participants of the contemporary spiritual milieu. In my perspective, the crucial question here revolves less around a 'failure to notice' on the part of practitioners, and more about how these connections appear genuinely real, organic, and meaningful to them. One important characteristic of media, which is its disappearance in the act of mediation, I believe, can help respond to this question. When a medium is conveying a particular content, attention is drawn away from the medium's materiality and redirected toward what is being mediated.<sup>59</sup> This is because the power that authorizes it as a medium also hides its constructedness. The paradox here is that media combines two features with a rather curious relationship to one another: On the one hand, it is utterly creative and generative; on the other, it becomes hidden when mediating. The therapeutic media also functions in the same way. It generates numerous links between diverse practices, memories, conceptions, categories, spaces, and temporalities, yet what assures the smooth functioning of this vast network is its disappearance in the act of mediation. The disappearance of the media creates the semblance that the links generated exist naturally and 'make sense' independent of the therapeutic frame.

This paradox reminds me of a story written by the renowned poet Attar (1145–1221) about a legendary king in Iran called Kay Khosrow, who possessed a crystal ball (*Jaam-e Jam*) that not only reflected the whole

<sup>57</sup> Steve Bruce, "The New Age and Secularization," in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, eds. Steve Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 228.

<sup>58</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 29.

<sup>59</sup> Kraemer, S. 2008. *Medien, Bote, U"bertragung. Kleine Metaphysik der Medialita"t*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. Larkin, B. 1997. 'Indian films and Nigerian lovers: media and the creation of parallel modernities', *Africa* 67: 406–39, quoted in Patrick Eisenlohr, "The anthropology of media and the question of ethnic and religious pluralism," *Social Anthropology*, 19 (2011), 44.

world but also revealed the future and the unknown.<sup>60</sup> One day, when the king takes his ‘crystal ball’ to watch ‘seven earths and seven heavens,’ ‘the good and the bad,’ ‘the visible and the invisible,’ he realizes his inability to envision the entire universe in one instant unless the crystal ball itself also becomes visible. The crystal ball (i.e., the medium) becomes invisible during the process of mediation, concealing its constructed nature. This concealment creates the illusion that the revealed truth is genuine, rather than a specific perception generated by the medium. According to the poem, the king has absolute faith in the truth of the reflection appearing in the crystal ball up until the moment when he wants to see the ball itself. In Attar’s tale, the medium’s appearance and disappearance mark a decisive moment in the king’s relationship with truth and his conception of self. When the king is unaware of the very materiality of the ball itself—in other words, when the ball is invisible to him—he knows himself as the sovereign power, watching his ‘property’ revealed before his eyes in its entirety. Nonetheless, when he realizes that the reflection was constructed by a medium, he no longer remains the omnipresent king. The rest of the poem is about his ‘dispossession’ and initiation into the Sufi path, which is praised and promoted throughout the poem for its promise of immediacy.<sup>61</sup>

One important feature of Attar’s story is that it alerts us about the relationship between the two properties of a medium: First, it builds a world, second, it hides itself. In contemporary spirituality, the therapeutic media also functions as a ‘world-building,’ or more precisely, ‘world-repairing’<sup>62</sup> tool which re-assembles the fragments of a ‘world’ whose integrity is considered to be disrupted by modernization. It serves to organize different systems, processes, and categories into a *whole* made up of interconnected parts. The therapeutic media promises to keep the world ‘intact’ by holding in place multifarious links between not only different past and present forms but also science and religion. In addition, precisely like Attar’s story suggests, it assigns ‘the users,’ i.e., ‘the practitioners,’ a place and a role vis-à-vis this construction. They must contribute and become part of this process by ‘healing’ themselves through healing practices.

In contemporary spiritual forms, healing, I suggest, refers to a project of reclaiming meaning by ‘rebuilding’ links that are considered to be erroneously lost, erased, or eliminated. Hence, it is not that individuals project connections between diverse elements without realizing their

<sup>60</sup> Attar, *Elahinameh*, 12<sup>th</sup> part, “Hekayate Kay Khosrow ve Jaam-e Jam” <https://ganjoor.net/attar/elahinameh/ebkhsh12/sh3>.

<sup>61</sup> In the rest of the story, the solution Attar offers to the king is to turn himself into the ‘crystal ball’, i.e., to the very medium itself that reflects, mirrors, and reveals.

<sup>62</sup> In using this expression, I am inspired by the work of Beaman and Stacey in which the authors use ‘world-repairing’ as a practice of meaning making which entails a sense of brokenness in the social and physical world. L. G. Beaman and T. Stacey, *Non-Religious Imaginaries of World-Repairing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

incompatibility. Rather, the practice of generating links between different forms, however far-fetched they might seem from the outside, is itself assigned a value as an act of recollecting the fragments of lost worlds, and reassembling what modernity has disintegrated. These links look as if they exist independent of any power mechanism to them, because the therapeutic media hides itself when mediating, just like Kay Khosrow's crystal ball.

Medical anthropologists tell us that the notions of sickness and health exceed their literal meaning and work as metaphors of order and disorder.<sup>63</sup> "In sickness the world is unmade and with healing it is remade again"<sup>64</sup> or healing transforms the world which has turned 'strange' and 'uninhabitable' into a place where one can dwell again.<sup>65</sup> For the practitioners of contemporary spirituality, healing practices are crucial tools in realizing the task of reconstructing the world as a harmonious, continuous, consistent, and secure (i.e., trauma-free) place where the individual can *safely* dwell. Healing is about assembling fragments, processes, and systems so that gaps and discontinuities between them can be 'fixed,' and they can be made into a 'whole' that is grounded upon both religion and science, mysticism and rationality — incorporating all past and present, sacred and secular forms.

### *Conclusion*

Returning to the narrative presented at the beginning of this paper, despite the sharp division between religious and secular identities in Turkey, the religious practice of *zikr* appeared in the secular habitus because it was presented within the therapeutic frame as a healing practice. Throughout the article, I described the complex relationship between the religious and the therapeutic as the remediation of old mediums by a new one. By remediation, I refer to a particular relationship between old and new, where the new refashions, repurposes, and reforms the old. In the particular case at hand, therapeutic media refashions and repurposes religious mediums through a psychologizing schema, in consequence of which practices like the *zikr* become techniques for emotional release and trauma processing. The therapeutic frame, however, does not necessarily entail a complete detachment of religious mediums from their conventional symbolic significations; rather, it opens them up to new meanings.

As a result, the old forms are no longer regarded as distinct religious practices belonging to particular traditions and geographies, but as

<sup>63</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1/1 (1987), 6–41.

<sup>64</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain: The making and unmaking of the world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>65</sup> Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996), 67–91.

*spiritual* forms that serve for the universalized cause of healing. Moreover, as the remediation process blurs the boundary between the spiritual and the therapeutic, it becomes possible to ‘rationalize’ religious practices based on their purported psychological and physiological impact upon the human body through modern scientific terminology. Therefore, by initiating new connections between different spaces, memories, systems, and processes, healing practices complicate the boundaries between not only diverse past forms but also a series of distinctions which have informed the modernist understanding of religion and spirituality – such as sacred vs. secular, religious vs. scientific, mystical vs. rational, and enchanted vs. disenchanted.

Media reifies culture by providing humans with the tools to build and inhabit their world in particular ways. Healing as a spiritual medium should also be seen as a tool for reconstructing (or repairing) the world as a harmonious *whole* in which all gaps and discontinuities are ‘fixed’ meticulously by linking diverse temporal and spatial realities. The world constructed through the medium of healing is founded upon both religion and science, mysticism and rationality, incorporating all past and present, sacred and secular forms. The compatibility of these heterogeneous elements is ensured through the therapeutic frame, which not only ‘refashions’ different religious mediums as therapeutic ones, but also makes it possible to rearticulate them with modern scientific terminology. Like all media, the therapeutic one also disappears in the act of mediation, creating the semblance that the experience it generates is not mediated through power mechanisms. In this way, participants of the contemporary spiritual milieu experience the links created by the therapeutic media between diverse phenomena and the world it constructs as real and organic.