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SPIRITISM IN SECULAR TURKEY

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SPIRITISM IN SECULAR TURKEY, 1936-1969:  
THE RUHSELMAN CIRCLE BETWEEN  
RELIGION AND MODERN SCIENCE

A Master's Thesis

by  
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Ankara  
December 2019



*To Sane*

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AND MODERN SCIENCE

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

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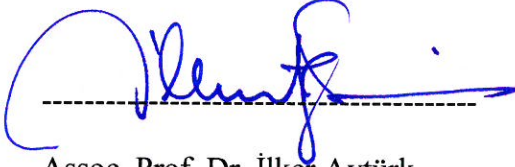
HATİCE SENA ARICIOĞLU

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of  
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THE DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC  
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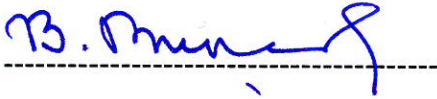
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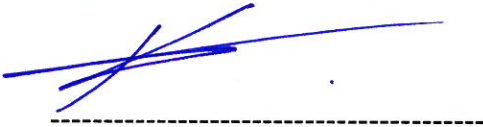
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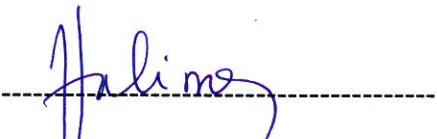
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## ABSTRACT

### SPIRITISM IN SECULAR TURKEY, 1936-1969: THE RUHSELMAN CIRCLE BETWEEN RELIGION AND MODERN SCIENCE

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Spiritism, established by Allan Kardec claims to study an immaterial world through scientific methods, proposes a doctrine of reincarnation and derives knowledge from communication with spirits. In contrast to its depiction in popular culture invoking scary and ominous imagery, communication with spirits was a serious venture for spiritists. This thesis examines Turkish spiritism, spearheaded by Bedri Ruhselman, between 1936 and 1969 in an effort to reveal why a group of intellectuals were interested in a supernatural and transcendental practice such as spiritism. To answer this question, the study examines the history of spiritism in Turkey and provides an in-depth analysis of its spiritist, scientific and moral teachings. It also offers a group biography of Turkish spiritists through a dataset based on prosopographical analysis and contextualizes spiritism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Turkey by explaining its reception by political/bureaucratic elites and its impact on the society. The results of the study demonstrate that Turkish spiritism was an attempt to construct a hybrid scientified spirituality that negotiated and reconciled modern science and religion and an attempt to provide a solution to the moral gap observed within republican reforms. This attempt thus challenged the antagonistic depictions of the relationship between modern science

and religion. It also questioned monolithic portrayals of progressive and conservative intellectuals by introducing an unnoticed layer of republican elite. This study thus offers a more complex understanding of both Turkish modernization and of Turkish modernizers. In the process, the dissertation also traces the changes in approaches to modern science throughout Turkish modernization.

**Keywords:** Alternative Spirituality, Religion, Science, Spiritualism,  
Turkish Spiritism

## ÖZET

### SEKÜLER TÜRKİYE’DE RUHÇULUK, 1936-1969: DİN VE MODERN BİLİM İKİLEMİNDE RUHSELMAN GRUBU

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Aralık 2019

Allan Kardec tarafından kurulan Ruhçuluk, maddi olmayan ruhani bir dünyanın bilimsel yöntemlerle incelendiği reenkarnasyona dayalı bir doktrin izleyerek, ruhlarla iletişimden bilgi edinilebileceğini varsayar. Popüler kültürdeki ürkütücü tasvirlerin aksine, ruhçular için ruhlarla iletişim ciddi bir girişimdir. Bu tez, Bedri Ruhselman tarafından sistemli bir hale getirilen Türk ruhçuluğunu 1936 ve 1969 yılları arasında inceleyerek, bir grup entelektüelin neden ruhçuluk gibi doğa ve deneyüstü bir sisteme ilgi duyduğunu ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu soruya cevap bulmak için, bu çalışmada ruhçuluğun Türkiye’deki tarihi ve ruhçu, bilimsel ve ahlaki öğretileri derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Çalışma aynı zamanda prosopografi yöntemine dayanarak Türk ruhçularının grup biyografisini çıkaran bir veri seti oluşturmuş ve Türk ruhçuluğunun siyasi/bürokratik elitler tarafından nasıl karşılandığını ve toplumda nasıl bir etki bıraktığını inceleyerek konuyu 20. yüzyılın ortasında bir bağlama yerleştirmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, Türk ruhçuluğunun, hem bilim ve dini birleştirip uzlaştıran bilimselleşmiş bir maneviyat kurma çabası hem de cumhuriyet reformlarında gözlemlenen ahlaki boşluğa bir çözüm getirme çabası olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çaba, bilim ve din arasındaki ilişkiyi zıt ve düşmanca bir zemine oturtan tasvirlerle karşı çıkmaktadır. Yeni bir cumhuriyet elitinin varlığını göstererek de, entelektüellerin ilerici ve muhafazakâr olarak yekpare gruplara bölünmesini de



sorgulamaktadır. Böylece, bu tez hem Türk modernleşme sürecine hem de bu süreçte yer alan aktörlere dair daha sofistike bir anlatı sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda da, Türk modernleşme sürecinde bilime olan yaklaşımlardaki değişimlerin de izini sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alternatif Maneviyat, Bilim, Din, Ruhçuluk, Spiritüalizm

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In one breezy evening sometime in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, four men and a woman are sat around a table conversing with the spirit of Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, statesman, jurist, historian codifier of Islamic law (the Mecelle) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire. Three of these four men are lawyers asking questions to the spirit about the Ottoman civil code and they receive answers through the medium, a female chemist. We learn about this spirit-summoning incident thanks to the records of the man, a public accountant, who directs the medium. The medium is talking in Ottoman Turkish filled with legal terminology even though she does not have any knowledge on either Ottoman Turkish or law. After receiving these answers, the lawyers are cross-checking the validity of what the medium says, going through the books of the spirit, i.e. Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, written while he was still alive (A. Kayseriliođlu, 1970a). Sometime later, the same medium finds herself among a group of musicians and physicists who are trying to bring a scientific explanation to the meters of Ottoman classical music. In that evening, it is a different spirit who is put to test by this group (A. Kayseriliođlu, 1970a). At around the same time, in 1947, a group of doctors are also sat around a table at the apartment of an Afghan Prince in İstanbul, they all have their hands on the table as they watch it levitate and hang in the air (A. Kayseriliođlu, 1969b; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950c). This incident called ‘table-turning’ or ‘table-tournante’ is followed by an actual conversation with the spirit of the dead, and one specific doctor asks various questions to the spirit with the hope of receiving informative answers (İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950c).

These anecdotes are only a few among the countless other spirit-summoning séances conducted in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey (Ayverdi, 2005; Sardađ, 1991; Zarccone,



2014). However, in contrast to its depictions in popular culture, the spiritist scene was not limited to séances conducted by small friend groups for entertainment purposes. Instead, it was a serious initiative with spiritists establishing various associations, issuing numerous publications, organizing conferences and weekly meetings, offering healing services and even conducting hypnotic surgical operations at hospitals. “The science of the spirit” (*ruh ilmi*) as they put it had captured the hearts and minds of a large number of intellectuals and they were fully committed to this spiritist path (Zarcone, 2014: 171).

In this study, I have set out to narrate and investigate the story of a group of Turkish intellectuals and their spiritist movement that claimed to offer a complete ‘scientific’ understanding of the cosmos (Koss, 1976: 42) with answers for everything from questions of spirituality to functioning of the mind, from moral codes to the ideal political and social order in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I attempt to demonstrate their reaction to the process of modernization and secularization that culminated in the founding of the Republic of Turkey. I, thus, aim to shed light on the relationship between modern science<sup>1</sup> and religion. Why were a group of educated republican intellectuals interested in a supernatural practice such as spiritism? What did it mean for them to talk about spirits in an era of consolidation of the new republic? What did they mean when they talked about science? What does the presence of spiritists tell us about Turkish modernization?

Seeking answers to these questions, if one is to look into the depictions of the history of Turkish modernization in transition from an empire to a republic, it is possible to see that the process is often described as a continuous battle between opposites that ultimately results in linear intellectual progress (Adivar, 1970; Berkes, 1964; Erichsen, 1998; Lewis, 1961; Şen, 2017; Sözbilir, Kutu, & Yaşar, 2012; Türkcan, 2009; Uzun, Özel, & Yalçın, 1990). It is as if there were a triumph of science over religion, reason over superstition, natural over supernatural or facts over beliefs (Erichsen, 1998; Kafadar, 2002; Özlem, 2002). The reform process is said to have

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, the discussions around science specifically refer to discussions around modern science. Therefore, even when the term “modern” does not accompany science to avoid repetition, the modern aspect is implied based on the subject matter and timeframe of the dissertation.

transferred science and technology from Europe ending the hallmark duality<sup>2</sup> of the Ottoman Empire and resulting in a thorough secularization and modernization of education and administration (Erichsen, 1998: 2-3; Geray, 2007: 129; Yücel, 2007: 153). This tale of unilinear progress inevitably leads to the caricaturization of the actors involved in the process as secular positivist progressive modernists wrestling with reactionary traditionalist forces of superstition (Hanioglu, 1987: 34). This depiction emerged as part of broader paradigms of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientism and 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernization (Knight, 1989). Described as the “disenchantment of the world” by Max Weber (1946: 139), modernization was portrayed as a process in which scientific method as the sole valid or acceptable path to the comprehension of natural cosmology replaced the practice of appealing to supernatural elements such as gods or spirits (Kumar, 2016). This disenchantment is also described as secularization, a process through which practices of science and reason substitute religion (Bruce, 2011; Renshaw, 1969; Ritzer, 2003). Therefore, within this broader framework, at first glance, spiritism may seem like a reaction against the scientism and positivism of the age or a reaction against the modernizing and secularizing project of the new republic. After all, the founder of the republic once said: “It is a disgrace for a civilized society to appeal to the dead for help” (Quoted in Papadakis, 2005: 26) and spiritists were doing exactly that.

This conviction in the process of secularization did not, however, reflect the reality and its binarism was challenged by hybrid formations that reconciled and synthesized conflicting or dichotomous value systems by refusing binary hierarchies between concepts. As one of those hybrid formations, Turkish spiritism remains as an underexplored issue in the academia. First of all, this study argues that Turkish spiritism as a case has the potential to offer a more sophisticated understanding of Turkish modernization and of Turkish modernizers. That is because spiritism is at odds with the prevailing understanding of Turkish modernization, of republican intellectuals and of the depictions of the relationship between modern science and religion in the Ottoman-Turkish context. Secondly, not only were the discussions on

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<sup>2</sup> The duality refers to a new secular education system which grew alongside the traditional Islamic schools under French, Austrian and German influences in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire (Erichsen, 1998: 2-3).

science a core element of Turkish nation and state-building processes (Burçak, 2005; Dole, 2004; Hanioglu, 2005; İrem, 2004, 2011), but it is still a relevant topic today as defining the boundaries of science inevitably leads to defining the boundaries of religion (Yalçınkaya, 2015: 12). Debates surrounding science, religion, spirituality, secularism and modernity continue to create political and social cleavages in contemporary Turkey (Akşit & Akşit, 2010; Burçak, 2005; Ecklund, Johnson, Scheitle, Matthews, & Lewis, 2016; Kadioğlu, 1998; Mardin, 1981; Stirling, 1958; Titrek & Cobern, 2011; Yavuz, 2019). Turkish spiritism has been a part of these discussions since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still present as a phenomenon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It offers an alternative perspective in the discussions on the boundaries of modern science and religion since it was marginalized by both camps. Lastly, it is not possible to explain this phenomenon with the tools of the extensive literature on spiritism. That is because no other country where spiritism was popular can be considered as a complete functional equivalent of Turkey, a modern country heavily influenced and shaped by Islam (Abdukadirov, 2017; Britten, 1884; Burçak, 2005; Mardin, 1971; Zarcone, 2014). Moreover, among its counterparts, Turkey constitutes an unusual setting in that it not only went through a significant process of modernization modelled on the West but also experienced a crisis of faith similar to the one experienced in the West (Kara, 2002: 24; Zarcone, 2014: 170).

Taking these unique features into consideration, analysing Turkish spiritism requires engaging with two separate literatures. On the one hand, there is the literature on spiritism in the world and on the other hand, there is the literature on Turkish modernization with a specific focus on the literature on the history of scientific knowledge production and the literature on Kemalism as the founding ideology. This is essential for specifying the theoretical position and arguments of the thesis. Bringing together these two literatures enables me to develop a coherent framework for my study. The review also demonstrates the novelty of the study.

## 1.1. Spiritism in the World

In simplest terms, spiritism can be described as the study of an invisible world proposing a doctrine of reincarnation and deriving knowledge from rational communication with spirits (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012; Koss, 1976; Renshaw, 1969; Sharp, 2006). Even though it was first codified by Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, a French scholar and pedagogue, under the *nom de plume* Allan Kardec in 1857 (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012; Britten, 1884; Brower, 2010; Lachapelle, 2011; Monroe, 2008; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Spence, 1920), the philosophy itself evolved out of the works and practices of numerous individuals who lived before him. Examining both foreign and Turkish spiritist publications, it is possible to notice an inclination to attribute the beginnings of spiritism to Fox Sisters in the United States. Fox Sisters claimed to have started communicating with the spirit of a man in 1848 who was murdered and buried underneath their house (Doyle, 1926; Hess, 1987; Lachapelle, 2011; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). The communication took place through unexplained tapping sounds and knocks and a technique later called ‘automatic writing’ where a medium writes messages from the spirits without voluntary action, i.e. automatically (Brower, 2010; Lachapelle, 2011; Sharp, 1999, 2006). With the discovery of a skeleton in the basement of their house, their claims of communication with the spirit of the dead gained currency. While this meant instant fame for Fox Sisters, it also meant the birth of a spirit-summoning fad with people gathered around tables all around the US (Abend, 2004; Braude, 1989; Carroll, 1997; Renshaw, 1969). The eventual confession of fraud by one of the sisters did nothing to blow out the fire of spiritism and soon, the new fad reached Europe (Abend, 2004; Sharp, 2006). Although Fox Sisters can be considered as the ones who made the idea of communicating with the spirits popular, they were by no means an inspiration in terms of philosophical and technical foundations.

It was Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and inventor, who provided the first push toward communicating with the spirits and seeking knowledge of the afterlife (Abend, 2004; Britten, 1884; Carroll, 1997; Koss, 1976; Urban, 2015). Swedenborg dedicated almost 20 years of his life to natural sciences and engineering projects before he started having a series of dreams and visions

which led him to develop an alternative theory of heaven and hell (Britten, 1884; Carroll, 1997; Urban, 2015). Considered by some as the first modern spiritualist, he was a major point of inspiration for Kardec (Koss, 1976: 26). While Swedenborg was a philosophical influence, the operative force and methods that lie at the heart of Kardec's spiritism are heavily inspired by and plagiarized from Franz Mesmer. Mesmer (1734-1815), a German doctor, was the father of animal magnetism, also referred to as mesmerism (Carroll, 1997; Doyle, 1926; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Spence, 1920). According to believers in animal magnetism, there is a universal fluid, a natural energy or a magnetic force possessed by all animate and inanimate objects and through the transference of this fluid, objects may influence one another physically to produce positive healing effects (Carroll, 1997; Koss, 1976; Urban, 2015). This universal fluid is also responsible for creating effects of attraction and repulsion between objects. Initially, Mesmer had used magnets to transfer this fluid however he later replaced the magnets with hand gestures that he called 'passes' (Abend, 2004; Koss, 1976; Spence, 1920). Mesmer's animal magnetism was later developed into hypnotism by James Braid, a Scottish surgeon, who claimed to improve Mesmer's ideas by infusing them with physiology and psychology (Braid, 1852: 41-42; 2009: 72).

Taking inspiration from the spiritual elements of Swedenborg and concepts and methods of mesmerism and combining them with an "eastern-influenced belief in reincarnation", Kardec codified his philosophy known today as spiritism (Abend, 2004: 509). He defended the existence of spirits and the possibility of communicating with spirits in a 'scientific' way. The main pillar of this philosophy was the belief in reincarnation (Renshaw, 1969: 5). The notion of reincarnation was partially inspired by the ideology of progress, Enlightenment thought and evolutionism that was emerging at the time. That is because it meant that the human soul would continue to evolve and progress through multiple lifetimes until it reached perfection (Abend, 2004; Moreira-Almeida, Silva De Almeida, & Neto, 2005; Noakes, 2004; Renshaw, 1969; Sharp, 2006). According to spiritists, reincarnation also established equality because it ensured that pluses and minuses in life eventually balance out through multiple lifetimes (Sharp, 2006: 59). Also, inspired by utopian socialism and reformism, it placed a heavy emphasis on the

notions of charity and solidarity to create a world where equal immortal souls strived to ameliorate the lives of others (Doostdar, 2016; Renshaw, 1969; Sharp, 1999, 2006). Under the influence of 19th century rationalism and scientism, two contradictory dynamics existed within Kardec's spiritism, namely equal emphasis on both science and religion (Doostdar, 2016; Koss, 1976; Mills, 2018; Noakes, 2004; Renshaw, 1969; Sharp, 1999). This was interpreted as a challenge directed not only at the materialism and positivism of secular science but also at the Church with its routine and invariable nature and strict structure (Abend, 2004; Koss, 1976; Sharp, 1999, 2006). On the one hand, spiritism wished to achieve unity of knowledge in science, combining the soul and the matter. On the other hand, it stood against the dogma of the Church by underlining the individuality of spiritual experience (Abend, 2004; Hess, 1987; Koss, 1976; Renshaw, 1969).

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an institutionalized version of spiritism spread all around the world and went on to exert influence in discussions on the boundaries of science (Noakes, 2004; Türesay, 2019). Between 1870 and 1890, spiritists published numerous books, journals, and established associations with the aim of conducting research (Harrison, 1880). It was at this point prominent scholars of the day started showing interest in these spiritist phenomena that could not be explained by the methods of natural sciences as they knew it (Crookes, 1874; Ferenczi, 1963; Gyimesi, 2016; Noakes, 2004; Sharp, 2006; Spence, 1920). These scholars included the biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, chemist and physicist William Crookes, Nobel prize winner physiologist Charles Richet, physician Cesare Lombroso, physicist Sir Oliver Lodge and astronomer Camille Flammarion. These scholars entered the field of spiritism to bring a natural explanation to seemingly supernatural phenomena, and therefore they focused on the physical aspects of spiritism including but not limited to telepathy, hypnotism, apparitions, hauntings, table-turning, materialization, extrasensory perception (ESP) and psychokinesis (PK) (Crookes, 1874; Ferenczi, 1963; Gyimesi, 2016; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1949; Noakes, 2004; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Sharp, 2006; Spence, 1920). With the involvement of actual scientists, scientific claims of spiritism gained more currency. Parapsychology or psychical research emerged as a field of research under the broader umbrella of psychology and psychiatry with laboratories founded in Stanford and Duke Universities in the

US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Berger & Berger, 1991; Gauld, 1968; Grattan-Guinness, 1982; Luckhurst, 2002; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Williams, 2013). Hence, the relationship between science and spiritism was well-established long before Turkish spiritists made their claims. There was continuous interaction between the two.

Throughout this process, teachings of Kardec spread to more than 30 countries and were received and interpreted differently in each country (Britten, 1884; Clodd, 1917). However, it did have common trends in terms of the factors that influenced the emergence of spiritism. Determining these common factors helped me identify which ones of these factors might have explanatory value for the Turkish case and need to be tested later on. Even though spiritism had followers in more than 30 countries, it was the most influential in Europe and Latin America with the number of followers claimed to have reached 20 to 40 million people in Brazil (Bragdon, 2004: 17-18). In Asia, Vietnam had the largest spiritist group (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012: 70) whereas Iran was the only other Middle Eastern country reported to be caught by the spiritist wave (Doostdar, 2016). Keeping this mind, I analysed the secondary literature on North American, European, Latin American, Vietnamese and Iranian spiritism and identified two overarching themes affecting the emergence of spiritism in these places.

In these countries, spiritism was, first and foremost, a symptom of a crisis of faith or meaning.<sup>3</sup> Especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the developments in modern science and with an increased emphasis on positivism and rationalism, people had begun to question the factual validity of religious narratives (Abend, 2004; Doostdar, 2016; Killeen, 2018; Monroe, 2008). This had led to either severing ties with their faith or seeking ways to tie their religious narratives to universal modern science (Abend, 2004; Doostdar, 2016; Koss, 1976; Renshaw, 1969). Moreover, the debates questioning the position and political power of the Church had opened up the path for growing religious non-conformity and demand for individualism (Abend, 2004; Sharp, 2006). Spiritism had come into play right at this

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<sup>3</sup> In the literature, different scholars conceptualize this particular crisis using different terminology such as a crisis of faith, crisis of meaning or crisis of factuality (Abend, 2004; Doostdar, 2016; Killeen, 2018; Monroe, 2008). Yet, the crisis itself always refers to questioning the validity and factuality of religious and non-scientific narratives.

point. It not only provided people with a platform to express their disillusionment with mainstream religion and criticize the position of the Church (Abend, 2004; Monroe, 2008; Renshaw, 1969; Sharp, 1999, 2006), but it also meant they could ground their moral teachings in empirical research, namely the psychical research carried out at the time (Doostdar, 2016; Hess, 1987; Noakes, 2004). While doing that, spiritism also enabled them to criticize the materialism of modern science for limiting the scope of research to observable material phenomena (Abend, 2004; Doostdar, 2016; Noakes, 2004; Sharp, 2006). This was notably the case in Europe especially in Britain, France, Germany and Spain but also in Iran where spiritism was a means of reconciling commitments to science with religious/spiritual yearnings (Doostdar, 2016: 349).

Secondly, spiritism was a source of solace in more than one way. In all countries, it was primarily linked with people's preoccupations with death and afterlife. It either provided a means for them to communicate with their deceased loved ones or consoled them with the knowledge that death was not the end (Abend, 2004; Koss, 1976; Monroe, 2008; Sharp, 2006). Furthermore, especially in the countries in Latin America and Vietnam where people felt overlooked by their governments and lacked social security (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012; Koss, 1976) but also in Europe, it was linked with the hope for social justice and communal welfare (Sharp, 2006: 204). That is because, the doctrine of reincarnation, as explained in detail above, meant that all souls regardless of their class, social status, sex or race were equal in their perfectibility and that people should strive to achieve this in reality (Bragdon, 2004; Kardec, 1924, 1986). In a similar vein, spiritism, primarily in Latin America and Vietnam, was a source of welfare as it provided healing and health services in spiritist hospitals (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012; Facchinetti & Jabert, 2018; Koss, 1976; Lambe, 2018; Moreira-Almeida et al., 2005). Therefore, in the end, spiritism was a support system people took solace in.

Another cross-cutting feature of spiritism that could be observed in all countries was the backlash and criticism it received from multiple fronts (Abend, 2004; Hess, 1987; Koss, 1976; Moreira-Almeida et al., 2005; Noakes, 2004). The critics of spiritism included the media, the regular public, scientific and religious communities along



with the state itself. Especially in France and the UK, the media played a crucial role in degrading and demeaning spiritist activities. Noakes explains that the secular media deemed it highly regrettable that the “matter-of-fact people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” would be engaged in a practice like spiritism that was considered as a disease (Noakes, 2004: 4). Spiritism was also considered as a psychopathological illness by the scientific and psychiatric communities in Brazil (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2005: 8). On the other hand, spiritism also received high amounts of criticism from the religious communities and from the Church in every country it reached. In countries such as Spain and France, the Church considered spiritism as a threat to the institution of the Church since spiritists sided with the republican anti-clerical left in debates over secularization (Abend, 2004; Sharp, 1999, 2006). Similarly, in Iran, religious authorities condemned spiritism and its heterodox teachings for corrupting Islamic principles (Doostdar, 2016: 342). In the case of Cuba, the state itself stood against spiritism defending “medical orthodoxy” against the unorthodox healing methods of spiritism (Lambe, 2018: 224). These different examples coming from different countries demonstrate that stigma followed spiritism wherever it went. Facing criticism was as much of an integral part of spiritism as finding solace was.

Having this general framework is essential to understand the position of Turkish spiritism among its counterparts and to judge its unique perspectives. Grasping why spiritism was popular and why it was criticized in other countries helps identify the similarities and differences observed in the Turkish case. Besides, the overarching themes identified above constitute a solid jumping-off point to develop the propositions of this study. It is also essential to establish the analytical categories to be used in analysing the primary sources. Having said that, understanding Turkish spiritism requires more than a global perspective. It requires a deep dive into the historical and intellectual background in Turkey to understand what kind of explanations might be found there.

## **1.2. Historical and Intellectual Background in the Turkish Context**

Spiritism in the global scene was ultimately a part of a broader discussion on the relationship between modern science and religion. This discussion was the product of the intellectual environment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seeping into the 20<sup>th</sup>. This

environment was characterized by its breakthroughs in natural science, advancements in technology and as a result, developments in social sciences and philosophy (Knight, 1989; Sorell, 1991). There is no need for repeating the entire corpus of the modernization literature. What is of value for this study is the reflections of these developments in the Ottoman-Turkish context, especially approaches to science present in this context. After all, Turkish spiritism was the product of this background. Here, the issue of science is not purely an intellectual debate, it lies at the heart of social cleavages as well as political conflicts (Yalçınkaya, 2015: 4-5). That is because the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process depended on the adoption of science as an “ideology of improvement” (Burçak, 2005: 27).

Tracing the history of scientific knowledge production in this context, it is possible to spot three prominent approaches to science leaving its mark on specific decades. Ottoman relationship with modern science was first established on utilitarian pragmatic terms in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Burçak, 2005; Şen, 2017; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999). In the face of the superiority of Europe, scientific endeavours first started to flourish in military and then spread to other administrative and social areas (Adivar, 1970; Bilim, 1984; Burçak, 2005; Dölen, 1985; İhsanoğlu, 1992; Koçer, 1974; Sayılı, 1985; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999; Ürekli, 2002). However, what was common in all these endeavours was the adoption of science as a practical tool to save the empire (Burçak, 2005: 37; Şen, 2017: 95; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999: 194-195). As explained by Burçak, the process was marked by a need to import, apply and transmit knowledge, rather than producing scientific knowledge and making contributions to the science itself (2005: 47-48). Once the initial phase was over and the authority of scientific knowledge was well-established among the Ottoman intellectuals, it gained another practical value as the source of legitimate power (Kahya, 1987; Unat, 1964; Ürekli, 2002; Yalçınkaya, 2015). Yalçınkaya explains this by saying that science was used in political power struggles amongst the elite to obtain “a place for themselves in social hierarchy” (2015: 14). This meant that having a claim to scientific knowledge was essential in acquiring a position of power in the state itself (Yalçınkaya, 2015: 96). Within this framework, as science became

the primary tool of saving the empire, it also became the determinant of who would be in charge of the administration of it.

Being interpreted as a necessary characteristic of the ruling cadre, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, science became intertwined with the discussions on how to classify the people of the empire. Through this process, the immediate utilitarian connotations of science were painted with moralistic undertones (Yalçinkaya, 2015: 100). First of all, having a relationship with knowledge heavily influenced by Islam for centuries meant that the acquisition of knowledge was strictly related to the notion of virtue (İhsanoğlu, 1992; Pekin, 1989; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999; Tekin, 2016). Hence, being virtuous and having knowledge almost meant the same thing. This mentality was applied to the new kind of knowledge as well. Not only were the holders of the new scientific knowledge expected to be morally superior but they also portrayed themselves in this light (Kahya, 1987; Uzunçarşılı, 1965; Yalçinkaya, 2015). This sparked heated discussions on the character of the men of science itself. However, these discussions were never about conflicting epistemologies or ontologies. They were about, again, using science to cultivate an efficient member of a society as well as a “virtuous ruler” (Yalçinkaya, 2015: 15). Within this framework, science and morality were intimately connected and science was considered as a source of morals beneficial for the society as a whole (Dole, 2004; Heper, 2012; İhsanoğlu, 1992; Mardin, 1983b, 2008; Şen, 2017; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999; Tekin, 2016; Yalçinkaya, 2015).

Jumping a few decades ahead, the familiarity with the European developments had increased in the empire and the intellectuals towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become further influenced by positivism and materialism (Akgün, 1988; Bolay, 1961, 1979; Hanioglu, 1987, 2005, 2010; Korlaelçi, 2002; Özlem, 2002). This is described as the “penetration of biological materialism in intellectual life” by Hanioglu (1987: 33). The impact of German popular materialism, social Darwinism, evolutionism, French positivism and scientism and positivist social theory made itself apparent in approaches to science as well (Abdukadirov, 2017; Burçak, 2005; Dole, 2004; Hanioglu, 1987, 2005; İrem, 2004; Özlem, 2002; Poyraz, 2010; Yalçinkaya, 2015). In that, science had started to be perceived as the sole foundation

of society. In the minds of some late Ottoman intellectuals, science not only determined the proper place of everything and everyone, but it was also the ultimate voice that “legitimize many kinds of action” (Hanioğlu, 1987: 34). Consequently, in a universe operating on mechanical grounds that can be observed and understood by the rational human mind, society itself was seen as no different (Akural, 2018; Güngör, 2007; Hanioglu, 1987, 2005; İrem, 2004; Özlem, 2002; Poyraz, 2010; Sayılı, 1985).

As it can be seen, in the Ottoman approach to science, the utilitarian aspect never really disappeared but the utility that was expected from science continued to grow exponentially. While at first, science was supposed to help the empire catch up with Europe in technical terms, it was soon embedded in moral discussions as a source of virtue and good morals to then become the exclusive foundation of society. This pragmatic approach to science inevitably manifested itself in practices of scientific knowledge production. İlkin and Tekeli describe these practices as merely “watching and transferring”<sup>4</sup> the developments in the West (1999: 125) meaning that these practices were not of knowledge ‘production’ but of knowledge “acquisition” (Burçak, 2005: 48). Therefore, scientific knowledge was not produced but transferred in order to serve some non-scientific purpose whether that be improving the military, deriving moral values or providing a basis for a modern society. Scientific research was thus not conducted for its own sake. Şen explains this by stating “In fact, the Ottoman empire was not after science, it was after practical knowledge with immediate uses” (Şen, 2017: 95). In the end, pragmatic and utilitarian approaches to science combined with the tendency to transfer rather than produce knowledge prevented the establishment of a scientific tradition and resulted in a lack of novel contributions to science and initiatives to establish a local science (İhsanoğlu quoted in Şen, 2017: 97). Understanding approaches to and practices of science in this context is essential in determining whether the spiritist approach to science bears any similarities to the past and demonstrates a continuity.

On the topic of continuity, another aspect of Ottoman-Turkish modernization process that left a prominent mark in the relationship between modern science and religion is

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<sup>4</sup> All Turkish-to-English translations belong to the author unless otherwise noted.

the binary oppositions (Burçak, 2005; Hanioglu, 1987; İrem, 2004; İrem, 2002; Yalçinkaya, 2015). As briefly discussed in the introduction, a narrative of antagonism surrounds the modernization literature. Apart from a few exceptional studies that aim to demonstrate the nuances, the dominant inclination in the literature and historiography is to portray the process in antagonistic terms (Burçak, 2005; İrem, 2002). Depending on the topic of the study, the content of the dichotomy may vary: science vs. religion, secular vs. sacred, natural vs. supernatural, reason vs. superstition, enlightenment vs. darkness, knowledge vs. ignorance, modern vs. traditional, new vs. old, progressives vs. conservatives, modernizers vs. reactionaries, continuity vs. rupture or even centre vs. periphery. In this regard, even efforts of reconciliation between two opposites end up being portrayed as attempts to strengthen their own position rather than seeking an actual compromise. Thus, when Abdullah Cevdet appealed to Islam (Hanioglu, 1981, 1997) or when Namık Kemal appealed to modern science (Hanioglu, 1987; Poyraz, 2010), this is often not reflected in the literature as an attempt to defend a third nuanced position but as a way to enhance the credibility of their own argument against the opposition. I argue that this framework ultimately fails to account for hybrid formations as represented by spiritism. If knowledge and reason are pitted against ignorance and superstition, we are arguably left with no explanatory tools for a group of educated intellectuals who defend rational communication with spirits. This might explain why Turkish spiritism has been overlooked for decades in the literature and presumably cast aside as another group belonging to either of the opposite sides.

### **1.3. The Kemalist Dilemma**

The last body of works that this study engages with is the literature on Kemalism. In however way it is defined, Kemalism was the dominant context under which Turkish spiritists surfaced and operated. Therefore, it is necessary to have a solid grasp of what it entailed. However, if we are to turn to Kemalism to seek explanations on why Turkish spiritism existed, we might be faced with another big question rather than an answer. That is because, despite the caricaturization and stereotypes surrounding Kemalism, its nature and content remain as a contentious issue (Heper, 2012: 139). Whether it is a set of ideals (Dole, 2004: 258; Geray, 2007: 130), an ideology

(Aydın, 2004: 55; Ciddi, 2009: 23; Kafadar, 2002: 353; Özbudun, 1997: 80), a worldview (Heper, 2012: 142) or a fuzzy constellation of pragmatic actions (İrem, 2004: 79; Zürcher, 2005b, 2005a: 5) is still a matter of debate. Once again, despite the stereotype, the actors associated with Kemalism do not form a coherent monolith either. Republican elites actively participating in the foundation of the republic included people with conservative, liberal, socialist or rationalist tendencies (Demirel, 2002; İrem, 2002). Therefore, Kemalism stands as a difficult to conceptualize term when focussed on its nature or its representatives. Moreover, looking at its content as a whole remains outside the scope of this thesis since it incorporates debates on nationalism, state, democracy, economy and more (Mardin, 1971; Özbudun, 1997; Zürcher, 1997). What is relevant, however, is Kemalism's relationship with science and religion. To examine this relationship, it is essential to consider the intellectual background informing early republican elites, the actions they took and the needs they failed to satisfy.

Different segments of the literature put varying emphasis on different intellectual influences to describe Kemalism's relationship with science and religion, both separately and in opposition to each other. Positivism, secularism, anti-clericalism, scientism, rationalism, materialism, social Darwinism, evolutionism, elitism and authoritarianism all receive varying amounts of attention (Demirel, 2002; Dole, 2004, 2006; Hanioglu, 1997; Heper, 2012; İrem, 2011; İrem, 2002; Kazancıgil, 1981; Mardin, 1971, 1983a; Poyraz, 2010; Zürcher, 1997). However, one of the most prominent opinions in the literature is that the founders of the republic sought to establish a modern society informed by reason and science that would be free of unscientific characteristics (Akıncı, 2008; Burçak, 2005; Dole, 2004, 2006; Hanioglu, 1997, 2005; İrem, 2004; Özlem, 2002). Therefore, here it is possible to observe a continuation of the late Ottoman relationship with science as the basis of modern society. Within this framework, religion and what it represented in the Ottoman-Turkish context were perceived as one of the prime examples of those unscientific characteristics that needed to be remedied (Abdukadirov, 2017; Akşit, 2005; Dole, 2004; Hanioglu, 1997, 2005; Mardin, 1981). In the end, linking modernization with science and identifying religion as somewhat of an obstacle,

there was a connection established between modernization, scientification and secularization.<sup>5</sup>

It is within this framework that secularism lied at the heart of the science vs. religion debate in the early republican era. For certain scholars, secularism in the Turkish context meant the separation of the religion from the state and limiting religion to the private sphere (Adanalı, 2008; Anık, 2012; Hanioglu, 1997; Köker, 2010), for others it meant the subordination of religion to the state power (Saatçi, 2005; Yavuz, 2019). While capturing significant aspects of secularism within Turkish context, it is possible to argue that neither of these approaches are comprehensive enough to explain the role of science in the process of secularization. To this end, it is reasonable to repeat what Berkes had proposed in his seminal work, that for the founders, the main point of secularism was depoliticizing Islam and creating an official version of it that was rational, national and scientific (Berkes, 1964: 5-7, 483, 495). Scholars such as Zürcher and Hanioglu treat this official version of Islam as a tool used by the founders in their journey to modernize and transform the society (Hanioglu, 2005: 42; Zürcher, 2005b: 17-18). Dole also argues that the point of this official Islam was to appeal to scientific-minded citizens and eradicate superstition standing against the ideals of a rationally organized society (Dole, 2015: 369). Therefore, while the popular/folk version of Islam was used as an antagonistic other to demonstrate what was not acceptable, the official version promoted a scientific understanding of religiosity that would base its moral claims on the secular, humanist culture of the Enlightenment (Berkes, 1964: 483, 495). With this project in mind, the founders of the republic did actualise a number of reforms in order to not only separate religion from state and make it a matter of personal faith but also to depoliticize and transform it. These reforms included but were not limited to the abolishment of the Caliphate and the Sharia, unification of education under secular principles, prohibition of religious orders, adoption of a new civil code, incorporation of secularism in the constitution and annulment of Islam as the official religion and obligatory translation of call to prayer and public recitals of Quran into Turkish

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<sup>5</sup> It is, however, necessary to reiterate the complex nature of Kemalism and Kemalists and early republican intellectuals and to underline that while the emphasis on secularism was a prominent aspect of Kemalism, not all early republican elites attached the same importance to secularism.

(Heper, Öztürk-Tunçel, & Criss, 2018). These reforms were carried out as part of the comprehensive westernization and modernization program of the early republic. They were aimed at cultivating a new religious outlook in that sense.

When it comes to whether they achieved what they had wished to accomplish, things become more complicated. Evaluating the goals and reforms of the early republic, Mardin argues that the Kemalist reforms failed to provide a value system and the official religion was not able to penetrate into the daily lives of individuals (Mardin, 1971, 1973, 1990, 2004). Mardin was the first of many who would make this observation (Abdukadirov, 2017; Atay, 2008; Türköne, 2008). While some perceived this as a moral gap and crisis (Demirel, 2002: 233) or as the inability to create a new modern identity based on reason (Keyman, 2005: 48), others conceptualized it as a cultural or spiritual void born out of socio-cultural dislocation resulting from severing ties with the tradition in a radical way (İrem, 2004: 99; Kafadar, 2002). Berkes also describes this ‘moral vacuum’ by stating that the Kemalist secularism lacked a positive doctrine in that it said a lot about what religion should not be and should not do without actually providing the framework of the value system to be established (Berkes, 1964: 502). Like Mardin, Hanioglu also suggests that not only was there a gap in terms of the values official Islam promoted, but there was also a gap between the official and popular versions of Islam (Hanioglu, 2005: 89). Having made this observation, scholars use the argument of a moral gap present in modernizing reforms to explain the tensions and fault lines leaving a permanent mark in Turkish politics to this day (Abdukadirov, 2017; Dole, 2004; Hanioglu, 2005; Mardin, 1973, 1981, 1989). Therefore, the moral shortcoming of early republican reforms is used to explain the recurrent resurgence of religion as an issue in Turkish politics.

However, as it may be observed from the above-description, the issue of a moral gap in modernizing reforms is most often framed in discussions around Islam itself. Whether it is the folk version or the reformed official version, it was still Islam conceived as a solution to the gap. We may suggest that the efforts to rationalize, nationalize, humanize or enlighten religion were still carried out within the broader umbrella of Islam. It is possible to identify one exception to this situation in the



works of İrem and Sarmis on a group of conservative modern intellectuals called the Bergsonians. While Sarmis studied on the impact of Bergsonism in the pre-republican intellectual movements (Sarmis, 2009, 2014), İrem focussed on its position after the foundation of the republic. The Bergsonians sought to fill the moral gap with a “new secular religion drawn from the idealist and vitalist philosophies of Bergson” (İrem, 2004: 93). Being part of the hybrid multiplicity that made up the early republican elites, Bergsonians aimed to “transform nationalism into a moral system” (İrem, 2002: 99) and find a way to make modernity take root in a traditional Muslim setting (İrem, 2002: 88-89). This group, thus, offered an alternative solution to the moral and spiritual gap outside the discussions revolving around Islam. It is within this framework, Turkish spiritism helped me explore the ramifications of this gap for a group of intellectuals that were the product of the new republic and understand how they dealt with the issue of modern science and religion.

#### **1.4. Propositions of the Dissertation**

Turkish spiritists were a group of intellectuals engaged in what they claimed to be rational communication with spirits. On the one hand, taking into consideration the paradigms of modernization and scientism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and debates around disillusionment with science that emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spiritism may seem like a reaction against scientism, positivism and progressive modernism of the age. On the other hand, considering the inclination in Turkish historiography to paint the Turkish process of modernization as a battle between modern science and religion, spiritism may again seem like a reaction against the modernizing and secularizing project of the new republic. Therefore, it would have been easy to dismiss Turkish spiritism as superstitious and pseudo-scientific, and therefore not worth studying. However, informed by the above-elaborated points within the literature concerning the overarching themes associated with spiritism in the world, the intricacies of the scientific knowledge production process in the Ottoman-Turkish context and the moral and spiritual void observed within the modernizing project of the new republic, I tried to see what I can learn from spiritism and explored the following hypotheses and propositions:

**Proposition 1:** I expect that Turkish spiritism or neo-spiritualism<sup>6</sup> contributes to a more complex understanding of the Turkish modernization process by challenging binary oppositions and classifications concerning modern science and religion and by demonstrating the impact of alternative European currents of thought such as spiritism on Turkish elites.

**Proposition 2:** I expect that Turkish spiritism helps track the continuities and ruptures in Ottoman-Turkish approach to science by providing a glimpse into what Turkish spiritists understood from science and how their approach to science was received in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey.

**Proposition 3:** I expect that the issue of the moral and spiritual gap observed in republican reforms has explanatory value for the emergence and objective of Turkish spiritism in the personal narratives of Turkish spiritists.

**Proposition 4:** I expect that the global crisis of faith experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the support system provided by spiritism constituted a push factor toward spiritism in Turkey.

Having established the general framework and propositions of this thesis, I, now, elaborate the methodology that informed my research before delving into the body of information.

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<sup>6</sup> Turkish spiritists use neo-spiritualism to indicate the novelty in their spiritist understanding. See Concepts and Terminology under Chapter II for further details.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. Design and Elaboration of Methods

This dissertation conducts a qualitative single-case study (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Hancké, 2013b) based on configurational and ideographic analysis (Hancké, 2013a; Lange, 2013a). Turkish spiritism as a case is part of a wider phenomenon of emergent and rising alternative spiritualities with anti-materialist and individualist tendencies (Heelas, 1996; Tacey, 2004; Urban, 2015). Turkish spiritism is distinguished from other anti-materialist groups of its time due to its spiritist doctrine, scientific claims and socio-political aspirations. The methodological approach of the study is directly shaped by the type of questions it aims to answer and the ensuing causal logic (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, & Collier, 2010; Hancké, 2013a; Schmitter, 2013). My research questions aim to identify specific causes and mechanisms behind the popularity of spiritism among a group of republican intellectuals and unravel the underlying causal dynamics. As a result, the thesis follows a subtractive method of answering that identifies necessary or sufficient conditions so as to explain the outcomes in this specific case (Hancké, 2013a: 43). This means that combination of particular factors contribute to particular outcomes (Hancké, 2013a: 43). I analyse the combination of these factors within the context of spiritism in the world, history and tradition of scientific knowledge production in Ottoman-Turkish context and the moral gap observed in the modernizing reforms of the new republic. I, thus, aim to present an underexplored reaction to the Turkish modernization process. In the end, even though the case study lends itself to identifying case-specific causes, identified conditions present a framework that would hold for “similarly organized cases” and that may be tested through other studies (Hancké, 2013a: 44).

The thesis combines several methods to collect and analyse data. Conducting primarily a *historical inquiry*, I collected data through document analysis of primary sources and employed historical methods to “provide insight into characteristics of the phenomenon” (Lange, 2013b: 12). Therefore, I adopted purposive non-random sampling and a detective method of data collection (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012: 239, 241-242; Singleton & Straits, 2018: 173-174). This meant that I did not attribute all pieces of information the same importance for building an explanation (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012: 242).

Working with analytical categories, I adopted *qualitative text analysis* both in its thematic and evaluative forms as the methodological tool to organize and analyse data (Kuckartz, 2013). Within this framework, I carried out initial work with the documents i.e. the text in question, highlighting important passages and composing memos. This initial work helped me then develop main topical categories informed by my research questions. Afterwards, I used these main categories to code the available data assigning them to categories. At this point, I developed sub-categories based on the passages compiled under each category and initiated the second coding process during which a more elaborate assignment process took place. I assigned all available data to relevant categories and sub-categories. At the end of the second coding process, what I had was a structured and systematized data that could be used not only to create case-related thematic summaries, in-depth case overviews, but also to analyse the relationships between categories and sub-categories and offer verbal-interpretive analysis to help answer the research questions (Kuckartz, 2013). Details on the categories are provided in Appendix B and C.

Qualitative text analysis was essential to analyse the doctrinal and other publications carried out by spiritists groups to understand their main arguments and propositions. However, it was not enough to draw a portrait of the persons involved in these kinds of activities. Therefore, in order to investigate the common characteristics of this group of historical actors, I constructed a prosopography. A prosopography, also called “a collective biography” (Verboven, Carlier, & Dumolyn, 2007: 5) is a historical research method based on the systematic analysis of “all relevant biographical data” of a selected historical group (Verboven et al., 2007: 2). Building a prosopography entails

preparing a questionnaire, a set of “pre-defined historical questions” about a “well-defined target group” (Keats-Rohan, 2007: 6). Within this framework, I defined the target group taking into consideration “geographic, chronological and thematic boundaries” (Verboven et al., 2007: 16) and built a database based on primary sources under the guidance of the questionnaire (Verboven et al., 2007). It is possible to find this questionnaire and the detailed definition of the group along with the coding instructions in Appendix A. I, then, analysed the constructed database through inductive reasoning, synthesized it with other methods of data analysis (Verboven et al., 2007) and presented it to understand and explain who spiritists were.

Combination of several methods of data collection and analysis enhances the validity and reliability of the research (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Hancké, 2013c). This type of triangulation helped me better judge whether qualitative text analysis and interpretation of data corresponded well with the connections and patterns revealed by the prosopographical database. Throughout the process, I continuously calibrated the concepts, categories and operational definitions used in the research. That is because, I acknowledge the importance of updating my conceptual and operational frameworks to better analyse the emerging data and have a mutually-informative relationship with the data itself (Kapiszewski & McLean, 2015: 18, 22).

## **2.2. Time Frame**

The dissertation focusses on the time period between 1936 and 1969. Bedri Ruhselman<sup>7</sup> laid the foundations of Turkish spiritism during the early republican period in 1936 when he started to conduct his first regular and systematic séances with medium Hüseyin Saadettin Arel and claimed to have received the first revelatory declarations/communiqués from the spirit named *Üstat* (Master) (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960a, 1964; Özyiğit, 1972b, 1972d, 1972c; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). The information claimed to have been received from this spirit constituted the fundamental source of the main doctrinal book of Turkish spiritism, *Ruh ve Kainat* (The Spirit and The

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<sup>7</sup> Bedri Ruhselman, a Turkish physician and a violinist, is considered as the founder of Turkish spiritism or Neo-Spiritualism. Ruhselman is known for systematizing the teachings and paving the way for future generations of spiritists. The name “Ruhselman” is a compound word formed with the juxtaposition of “ruh” and “selman”. While ruh can be directly translated as “spirit”, selman indicates a meaning of being at peace and a sense of tranquillity (TDK, 2019).

Universe) spanning a total of 3-volumes and over a thousand pages (Ruhselman, 1946a, 1946b, 1946c). Prior to this period, Ruhselman's work mainly consisted of personal endeavours and did not involve any systematic engagement with spiritism (Özyiğit, 1972d; Temizel, 2014). Therefore, it is pertinent to start my analysis with the very first regular séances that contributed to the codification of Turkish spiritism.

Specifying an ending point proved to be trickier as the movement itself did not disappear or ceased to be active. The association founded by Ruhselman and his friends is still fully active to this day even after almost 70 years. Initially, I planned to limit the scope of the research to Ruhselman's lifetime and end it with his death in 1960. After all, he was the mastermind of the movement and the formulation of Turkish spiritism might have ended when he passed away. However, upon further research and in-depth analysis of sources, I have discovered that the turmoil and schism that took place within the spiritist movement following his death had a major role in defining what spiritism was and was not.

Even though Ruhselman is widely accepted as the father of Turkish spiritism, Turkish spiritists were not a monolithic group. Both before and after Ruhselman's passing, there were spiritists groups with different tendencies. Prior to 1960, the main difference was between two groups, namely scientifically-oriented spiritists and mystical Sufi spiritists. Different approaches to spiritism was represented in journals published by these groups. While *Fener* (Lantern) and *Ruh ve Kainat* represented the scientifically-oriented branch of spiritism, *İç Varlık* (The Inner Essence) embodied the more mystical, Sufi and esoteric tendencies. Despite expressing different objectives and understandings, the relations between the two groups remained rather amicable most of the time (Akay, 1951; Aray, 1951; İç Varlık, 1951a; Ruhselman, 1951a). The actual schism within the movement took place in 1962 following Ruhselman's death (Ruh ve Madde, 1962f). There was an administrative overturn within MTIAD – *Metapsişik Tetkikler ve İlmi Araştırmalar Derneği* (Metapsychic Investigations and Scientific Research Society) that represented the science-based approach to spiritism. This overturn resulted in the emergence of two main groups both claiming to be the heirs to Ruhselman. The first group took control of MTIAD and continued to publish the journal *Ruh ve Madde* (The Spirit and the Matter). The second group also published

their own journal under the name *Ruh Dünyası* (The Psychic World) and went onto get organized under a new association called DSB – *Dünya Sevgi Birliği* (World Love Association) (Ruh Dünyası, 1965d). Throughout the 1960s, both groups and other independent spiritists continued to shape and consolidate the teachings of Turkish spiritism coming up with different understandings (Ruh Dünyası, 1963a). Therefore, it became evident that limiting the scope of the research to Ruhselman’s life period would have prevented me from capturing these efforts of consolidation and struggles of authority that took place throughout the 1960s (Ruh Dünyası, 1963e, 1964b, 1965d, 1967a). After all, these rival understandings had explanatory value for what Turkish spiritism was.

1969 was the year when the DSB group terminated the publishing of *Ruh Dünyası* and started publishing a new journal called *Sevgi Dünyası* (The World of Love). With this journal, the group shed their spiritist identity, openly declaring that they were no longer spiritists (Ruh Dünyası, 1966; Sevgi Dünyası, 1969c). By doing so, they handed MTIAD the monopoly over representing Ruhselman’s spiritism. Strengthening their position as the representative of Turkish spiritism, MTIAD became rather withdrawn adopting an unwavering approach that was not open to change (Nirun, 2016: 40-41). In the post-1969 period, the two groups rarely interacted and did not experience a radical change in their teachings from the standpoint of spiritism. Moreover, the 1970s was the decade that witnessed the emergence of the New Age movement in the world that would have a major impact on reshaping esoteric and occult activities along with alternative spiritualities (Heelas, 1996, 2008). However, the influence of the rising New Age movement on Turkish spiritism remains beyond the boundaries of my research and should be the topic of other future research. As a result, taking into account both the developments within Turkish spiritism and the developments on the front of New Age, this dissertation engages with the time period between 1936 with the initial formulations of Turkish spiritism and 1969 marking the consolidation of Ruhselman’s legacy.

### **2.3. Nature and Sources of Data**

The dataset for this dissertation was constructed based on primary sources through qualitative text analysis. Due to the fact that none of the most prominent names of

spiritism contributing to its formulation are alive today, no interviews were conducted and published materials constituted the main pillars of the research. Secondary literature contributed to establishing the general framework of the study in terms of spiritism in the world, history of Turkish modernization, Kemalism as well as history of spiritism and occultism in the Ottoman Empire. However, secondary literature specifically on Turkish spiritism in the republican period has been decidedly absent. Therefore, this dissertation is practically building the literature on Turkish spiritism. For this initiative, the sources of data include:

- Life histories of spiritists, acquired principally through already-conducted interviews and memoirs
- Doctrinal, academic and other publications of Spiritist organizations
- Official documents of associations including membership ledgers
- Clippings from newspapers and magazines relating to spiritist activities
- Literary texts featuring spiritist elements.

#### **2.4. Concepts and Terminology**

Developing clear and precise conceptual definitions for the main concepts of the study is central to achieve validity and constitutes a major feature of qualitative research (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Hancké, 2013c). Qualitative text analysis mainly operates on developing categories and themes, therefore the present thesis deals with nominal categories only (Kuckartz, 2013). Below you may find clarifications on the following concepts: organized religion and spirituality, spiritualism, spiritism and neo-spiritualism, hybrid and hybridity, materialism, positivism, scientism, rationalism and anti-materialism.

In the literature, spiritism is defined in different terms, as a religion/religious movement (Renshaw, 1969: 28), an occult / esoteric cult (Koss, 1976: 24; Nelson, 1969: 153), an alternative spirituality (Sharp, 2006: xii), a doctrine of morality (Doostdar, 2016: 323) or a perennial philosophy (Aubrée & Jammes, 2012: 90; Upton, 2013: 130). These terms are sometimes even used interchangeably within a single study as if they all mean the same thing. Within this framework, it is essential to conceptualize and establish the nuances between a religion and spirituality to better understand which category Turkish spiritism belongs to.



Conceptualizing what religion means is practically a pitfall in social sciences. There are almost as many conceptualizations as there are researchers with little to no consensus. However, an *organized* religion is a more precise term with specific attributes across different conceptual definitions. Similarly, even though there is no one prevailing definition of spirituality, it is possible to identify attributes to help conceptualize and operationalize it (Mair, 2013; Sartori, 1984). The most frequently cited attributes of an organized religion include an a) official doctrine or a dogma often prescribed through a holy text, b) a hierarchical leadership structure and a central organization of clergy, c) a codified set of rules and practices that needs to be carried out externally, d) a geographic centre, e) an exclusive faith and obedience as well as d) a future-oriented mentality (Connolly, 1999; Crawford, 2002; Hill et al., 2000; Hinnells, 2005; James, 2002; Quatro, 2004; Segal, 2009; Weber, 1993; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Examples of an organized religion usually include the Abrahamic and Indian religions (Hinnells, 2005; Segal, 2009). The attributes of spirituality are a) individual and subjective truths, b) lack of hierarchy and individual autonomy, c) internal journeys rather than codified practices and worship, d) an emphasis on experimentation and exploration instead of obedience, e) a perennial philosophy of inclusivity and f) a present-oriented mentality (Dias, 2014; Heelas, 1996, 2008; Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski, & Tusting, 2005; Hill et al., 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Park, 2015; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006; Tacey, 2004).

Analysing these regularly mentioned attributes, it is possible to see that the differences between the two concepts stem from the question of structure. While an organized religion seems to be a standardized and institutionalized belief system, a spirituality is depicted as a subjective path of seeking meaning. Thus, it is a matter of form vs. essence. Different scholars seeking to define spirituality also highlighted the subjectivity in spirituality. While Vaughan defined it as “a subjective experience of the sacred” (1991: 105) Shafranske and Gorsuch conceptualized it as “a transcendent dimension within human experience [...] discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context” (1984: 231). This conceptualization is essential not only for making nuanced observations throughout the dissertation but also for

evaluating the claims of Turkish spiritism with regard to religion and spirituality. In the broader dilemma between science vs. religion, it is crucial to unpack what is meant by religion itself. Therefore, the conceptual clarification between an organized religion and spirituality helps achieve this objective. Moreover, the listed attributes provide an operational framework to judge the degree of religiosity and spirituality within Turkish spiritism.

It is also necessary to clarify what spiritualism, spiritism and neo-spiritualism mean. Spiritualism as a philosophical term is the dualist metaphysical doctrine affirming the existence of both material and immaterial realities (Britannica, 2017) and thus constitutes the “anti-thesis to materialism” (Türesay, 2019: 168). Spiritualism as a religious term refers to the Anglo-American spiritualist churches which claim that communication with the spirit of the dead is possible (Braude, 1989; Carroll, 1997; Doyle, 1926; Spence, 1920). In contrast, spiritism as previously explained in detail is the doctrine of Allan Kardec who claimed to establish a science of the immaterial world (Brower, 2010; Kardec, 1924, 1986, 2013). When it comes to Turkish spiritism, it is impossible to observe a terminological coherence throughout publications. ‘Neo-Spiritualism’, ‘Neo-Spiritism’, ‘Neo-Spiritizma’, ‘Neo-Spiritualizma’ are all used to refer to the same system of thought, namely the teachings of Bedri Ruhselman<sup>8</sup> (Ruhselman, 1952b). While what makes the teachings of Ruhselman different from Kardec’s teachings will be explored later on, it is sufficient to say that it is certain additions and omissions that makes this “new” in their eyes. In the end, spiritualism remains as a philosophical or a religious term while spiritism and neo-spiritualism both claim to be scientific. In this sense, there are other spiritualist and anti-materialist movements in Turkey but there are not any other spiritist ones. Spiritism is not, thus, synonymous with spiritualism or anti-materialism.

Another crucial term that needs to be conceptualized is the term hybrid/hybridity used in this dissertation to describe the position of Turkish spiritism within the broader dichotomies of the modernization literature. The concept of hybridity in social sciences has a complex and long history starting with its use in racial theory to its being

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<sup>8</sup> In this dissertation, Turkish spiritism and neo-spiritualism are used interchangeably and they refer to the same phenomenon. Incoherence in terminology in direct quotations stems from the lack of terminological coherence in the published works of Turkish spiritists.

reclaimed in post-colonial and globalization literatures as well as cultural studies (Mizutani, 2008; Sharif, 2016). Homi Bhabha is the most prominent scholar whose name is associated with hybridity. In *Location of Culture*, he appropriated the term as a third “liminal space in-between the designations of identity” (Bhabha, 1994: 4) reconciling cultural “domains of difference” within the post-colonial setting (Bhabha, 1994: 2). It is a concept that concerns both colonial identities and relationships of power (Bhabha, 1994; Easthope, 1998a). He claims that this refers to an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” which opens up the “possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, 1994: 4). Within this context, the term received numerous criticisms (Bauhn & Tepe, 2016; Easthope, 1998a; Mambrol, 2016; Sharif, 2016), however this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Thus, the contentious and highly contested concept of hybridity as developed by Bhabha for a completely different framework would only complicate the matter while my purpose is to seek conceptual clarity. His conceptualization concerned the question of cultural identity (Bauhn & Tepe, 2016; Bhabha, 1994; Easthope, 1998a, 1998b) whereas in this dissertation hybridity is used to refer to ideas and value systems, not to cultural composition of people themselves. Moreover, Turkey does not constitute a post-colonial setting where I could directly apply Bhabha’s hybridity.

Without convoluting the concept with complex historical connotations, I can say that Bhabha was the first inspiration for my conceptualization of hybridity but he only provided a jumping off point. With hybridity, I do not treat the term as a “simple mixture” as its lexical meaning would imply (Mizutani, 2008: 3). Instead, I conceptualize it as a strategy for negotiating and reconciling “conflicting or dichotomous value systems” (Chambers et al., 2008; Hasebe-ludt & Jordan, 2010: 3), namely modern science and religion. In this way, it provides a third independent position that does not prioritize one over the other and refuses to be one or the other. It is in this way that it rejects an imposed hierarchy between two terms most often positioned against each other. It may even be possible to suggest that hybridity is a mixing of temporalities (Dole, 2015: 373) considering it is often claimed that modern science and religion belong to different ages in historical progression. Therefore, in this conceptualization, I was inspired by Bhabha’s hybridity in terms of its refusal to

accept a hierarchy between two fixed positions and I infused it with the premise that these two positions are often depicted as opposites or in conflict. Before arriving at this specific conceptualization, I considered other terms that might be applicable in describing Turkish spiritists' ideas and characteristics as a group. However, the terms such as synthesis, reconciliation, compromise, eclecticism, amalgamation, multivalence or even bricolage, while communicating the idea of bringing unity to diverse elements, lacked the two crucial dimensions that capture the essence. These dimensions are the refusal of an imposed hierarchy / attributing equal importance and the negotiation of conflicting or dichotomous positions. This particular conceptualization is conducive to exploring Turkish spiritism's hybrid position between modern science and religion amongst other previously-mentioned dichotomies in the literature. That is because the concept, acting as an umbrella term, not only incorporates the meaning of unity but it also conveys the idea of placing equal importance to two systems/positions that are often depicted in opposition beyond a simple synthesis.

Moreover, for the purposes of this study, the terms materialism, positivism, scientism, rationalism and anti-materialism must be defined to ensure validity. Without convoluting the framework, while materialism is treated as a ontological theory about what exists, positivism and rationalism are conceptualized as part of epistemological theories on what can be known (Carswell, 2016; Feigl, 2018; Lacey, 1996). Within this context, materialism refers to a monist philosophy claiming that matter is the sole elemental substance in the universe (Lacey, 1996: 194-195). Therefore, the answer to the question of what exists is only the matter. Positivism, as theorized by August Comte, considers "positive data of experience" i.e. data obtained by way of senses as the primary system of knowledge acquisition (Bourdeau, 2018: n.d.; Feigl, 2018: n.d.; Lacey, 1996: 262) whereas rationalism holds the view that "reason is the chief source and test of knowledge" (Blanshard, 2016: n.d.). It is possible to place the emphasis on these concepts within the broader framework of 19th century scientism. Scientism refers to the promotion of science as *the* means to establish both normative and epistemological values for the society since science is the treated as the most legitimate, or valuable or authoritative source of knowledge (Hayek, 1942; Sorell, 1991; Voegelin, 2018). With this in mind, anti-materialist or non-positivist

approaches are, here, conceptualized as those considerations opposing the confinement of existence to “matter” and asserting ways of acquiring knowledge not limited to sensory experience (Koons, 2010; Lacey, 1996). Anti-materialism not only refers to metaphysical considerations within the broader umbrella of philosophy but it also incorporates religious beliefs (Koons, 2010: 282). It is necessary to acknowledge that these concepts come with a loaded historical baggage and attributing short and limited conceptualizations inevitably leads to oversimplification. However, these conceptual definitions constitute the baseline based on which the study shall elaborate how they were adopted, appropriated and transformed within the context of Turkish spiritism and therefore these conceptualizations represent the bare-minimum.

## **2.5. Limitations**

Limitations of this dissertation stem from three separate sources. The first drawback is the reach and impact of the studied group and issue of making generalizable causal inferences from this one case study. It is true that spiritism was not a social movement that reached millions of people in Turkey as was the case in Latin America or the UK (Bragdon, 2004) even though it was quite popular as a source of entertainment (Ayverdi, 2005; Sardağ, 1991). In Turkey, Turkish spiritism was primarily an elite affair. However, this drawback is also one of the strengths of the dissertation since the purpose of the study is not to make generalizations but to question them. Turkish spiritism providing access to a condensed body of data constitutes a critical case study (Hancké, 2013b: 68) that complicates our understanding of republican intellectuals. Moreover, the in-depth nature of the case study allows for developing a framework for the future studies on alternative spiritualities in Turkish context.

The second limitation is related to tracking the social and political changes and developments that took place over the course of the three-decades examined in this dissertation and analysing their impact on and interactions with Turkish spiritism. It would be erroneous to claim that the Turkish society and politics were the same in 1965 as what they had been in 1936. However, in this dissertation, I do not focus on the ramifications of such socio-political changes as democratization, migration or urbanization for spiritism. That is because in this time period, Turkish spiritists themselves clearly stayed away from commenting on both social and political issues.

It is not possible to spot socio-political commentaries in spiritist publications or observe spiritist reaction to such developments. These developments did not find a place in spiritist thought. The content analysis of spiritist publications also makes it clear that such issues were not a primary topic of interest for Turkish spiritists. They did not consider spiritism as a political or social movement but as a scientific practice. While this lack of engagement is worth noting on its own, unfortunately, it imposed a limitation on what could be presented in terms of analysing the impact of socio-political developments on spiritist discourse as the discourse itself did not change in line with these developments. In this period, the central issue of Turkish spiritism, namely negotiating two conflicting value systems, remained the same with little to no changes. As a consequence, this remains as a contextual limitation. However, to compensate for this limitation, the dissertation does incorporate a fifth chapter that contextualize Turkish spiritism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey and shows how the actual interactions between Turkish spiritists and the outside world took place.

The third and last limitation concerns the methodological approach. Qualitative text analysis is often criticized for lacking theoretical base or being too lenient in drawing inferences about the conditions and outcomes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, in this dissertation this limitation is eliminated by adopting a more directed approach to qualitative text analysis. Not only were the categories extracted from data itself but they were continuously calibrated and re-coded. It was not a process of simply listing categories from theory and attempting to fit the data into them. The process was informed by data itself along with previous research. Once again, these categories provide a framework for future studies on the topic of alternative spiritualities.

Continuing with the methodology, prosopography as a research method has its own limitations. Lack of data and accessibility of sources constitute a major issue in constructing the prosopographical database (Verboven et al., 2007). This could severely damage the representativeness of the sample. Furthermore, both the reliability of the texts themselves and the biases of the researcher may be perceived as red flags (Verboven et al., 2007). These are all issues when prosopography is adopted as the primary and only research approach. In this study, this limitation is resolved by diversifying the research strategy and using multiple data collection and analysis

techniques to achieve the objectives of the dissertation. Therefore, prosopography is only one of the adopted methods and its restrictions are alleviated by combining it with other methods to present a more holistic account of the case.

## **2.6. Chapter Breakdown**

This study is divided into 5 main chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter I builds the contextual framework informing the general trajectory of the dissertation. Spiritism, with its claims to be the science of the spirit, is part of the broader debate surrounding the relationship between modern science and religion. Thus, spiritists operate on the fault line between the two. On the global scale, spiritism was both a symptom and a product of the crisis of faith born out of the age of science. It also provided people with a support system in their attempts to reconcile the teachings of modern science and religion. At the local level, lacking a socio-political inquiry into Turkish spiritism, the chapter turns to Ottoman-Turkish historiography to directly look at approaches to modern science and to the relationship between science and religion. It becomes clear that while approaches to science functioned on utilitarian terms, approaches to its relationship with religion depicted it on antagonistic terms creating binary oppositions and dichotomies. Under the new republic, secularism was at the heart of the debates on modern science and religion. Efforts to rationalize religion in line with the ideal of a scientifically-organized modern society resulted in a moral gap experienced by both intellectuals and the public itself. Turkish spiritism stands as a hybrid formation that questions antagonistic depictions of the relationship between modern science and religion. It also reveals underexplored reactions to the Turkish modernization process and to the moral gap created by modernizing reforms of the republic. The chapter is concluded by listing the propositions of the dissertation.

Chapter II is the elaboration of the research approach and methodology of the study. Having clarified the underlying causal logic of qualitative case studies and specifying the adopted data collection methods, the chapter provides details on the two methods of data construction and analysis. While qualitative text analysis is used to build categories to analyse and interpret historical texts, a prosopography is constructed to draw a portrait of Turkish spiritists. Chapter II also details the timeframe of the study (1936-1969) and lists the sources of data. Most importantly, the chapter includes

detailed conceptual definitions informing the dissertation including but not limited to the differences between spirituality and religion, differences between spiritualism, spiritism and neo-spiritualism and the concept of hybridity.

Chapter III is the first step into the world of Turkish spiritists. The chapter first establishes the historical antecedents of Turkish spiritism explaining the kind of spiritist and occult activities taking place before the republic was founded. Even though such activities did exist under the Ottoman Empire, republican spiritists do not make any connections between themselves and their Ottoman predecessors and they do not consider themselves as a continuation. The chapter then proceeds to introduce the founder of Turkish spiritism, Bedri Ruhselman as a hybrid figure challenging the stereotypical image of a republican elite. With his education in music and medicine, his admiration for Atatürk and his sincere belief in rational communication with spirits, Ruhselman was a transcendentalist admirer of science. This hybridity is reflected in the teachings and theory of Turkish spiritism. The chapter presents and analyses the teachings under three categories, namely spiritist, scientific/philosophical, and spiritual/moral teachings. The analysis reveals that spiritism was not born out of a sense of disillusionment with the scientism of the age but it rather embraced science of the spirit as the solution to the moral gap they observed in the modernizing reforms of the republic.

Chapter IV is dedicated to exploring who the Turkish spiritists were along with their motivations, methodology, organizational features and conflicts. It includes a prosopographical analysis drawing a portrait of Turkish spirits, a motivation matrix explaining the reasons behind their involvement in spiritism, a comprehensive account of their organizational features, methods and activities along with a comparison between different factions within Turkish spiritism. The chapter wishes to demonstrate three separate findings. Firstly, hybrid teachings of spiritism came from people with hybrid characteristics embodying features often depicted as irreconcilable. Turkish spiritists were mostly educated, urban elites with white collar professions. Their struggles reveal the impact of the moral gap on a group of intellectuals and demonstrate how they reconciled their commitments to modern science and religion. Secondly, Turkish spiritists were consistent in their teachings



and methodological approaches; there was not a discrepancy between what they preached and how they formulated their methodology. They were doing more than simply paying lip service to science and they did incorporate scientific methodology into spiritism. However, this did not prevent them from being pseudo-scientific as their practices lacked empirical proof. Lastly, Turkish spiritists were not a monolith and they valued different aspects of spiritism. What was common was the desire to negotiate conflicting values and ideas. Their methodology also reveals what changed and what remained the same in terms of approaches to science within the Ottoman-Turkish context.

Chapter V takes Turkish spiritism out of its own bubble and contextualizes it in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey. Understanding the backlash spiritism received from the state, the media along with the scientific and religious communities in other countries, the chapter analyses Turkish spiritism in relation with the political and bureaucratic elites and in terms of its impact on the society. The chapter is concluded by presenting the most prominent critics of Turkish spiritism. The analysis reveals that compared to the systematic criticism observed in other countries, Turkish spiritism did not receive a large amount of criticism. The biggest criticism it received came from conservative circles and did not target its pseudo-scientific nature. The contextualization in this chapter also questions the ideas on what was considered as acceptable in approaches to ‘science’ at the time. Finally, the last chapter elaborates the findings and contributions of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM SPIRITISM TO NEO-SPIRITUALISM: RUHSELMAN AND SPIRIST TEACHINGS

*“In the face of knowledge, science and of the whole extent of radiant civilization, I cannot accept the presence in Turkey’s civilized community of people primitive enough to seek material and spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheikhs. The Turkish Republic cannot be a country of sheikhs, dervishes and disciples. The best, the truest order is the order of civilization.”*

M. Kemal Atatürk (Quoted in Samman, 2016: 111)

*“In fact, Turkish Spiritists could have ensured that the door to religious orders and sheikhs closed by Atatürk stayed closed forever, but alas, they couldn’t...”*

Ata Nirun (2016: 45)

These quotations, one from the founder of the republic and the other one from a second-generation Turkish spiritist, share a puzzling anti-sect attitude. Nirun goes as far as to attribute a mission to Turkish spiritists to continue what Atatürk started. This comes with the inevitable question of what it was about spiritism that made this person see such a potential in this movement. This chapter digs deep into the tenets and theory of Turkish spiritism to try and find an answer to this question but also to understand why it had an appeal for the spiritist intellectuals. Besides, I try to see how its outlook interacted with the bigger picture of the period and what it actually said. To this end, you will find not only an introduction to the father of Turkish spiritism Bedri Ruhselman in this chapter, but you will also read a detailed analysis of its spiritist, scientific/philosophical, and spiritual/moral teachings.

Before delving into the doctrine of spiritism, however, it is necessary to elaborate the history of spiritism in the Ottoman Empire to be able to trace the journey from spiritism to neo-spiritualism. It is widely acknowledged that it was with the works of

Dr Bedri Ruhselman that the spiritist current in Turkey started to be formulated in a more systematic fashion and was transformed from a mere trend into a movement in the first half of the 20th century (Nirun, 2016; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Temizel, 2014). That being said, this does not mean Ruhselman was the first of his kind and it would be a mistake to disregard certain events and figures that left significant marks in the history of Ottoman/Turkish occult activities. Failing to address the antecedents of Ruhselman would result in a false impression of rootlessness and would limit our capacity to trace the continuities and ruptures in the process. The works of Dr Bedri Ruhselman did not materialize out of thin air. His séances were not the first ones to be held in Ottoman-Turkish lands. His books were not the first ones written on the matter.

### **3.1. Ottoman Spiritism and Occultism**

Occultism or secret sciences existed in the Ottoman Empire for long centuries (Akat, 2007; Sariyannis, 2013; Türesay, 2019; Uluğ, 2016; Zarccone, 2013, 2014). However, it was contained within the boundaries of folk beliefs and practices along with Sufism and other spiritual trends including but not limited to Shamanism, Ismailism, certain Shiite sects and “syncretistic Muslim religions” (Uluğ, 2016; Zarccone, 2013, 2014: 152). Therefore, its sources were strictly eastern, local and religious. Zarccone limits the content of esoteric and occult activities in the Muslim world before the 19<sup>th</sup> century to “alchemy, making of amulets [...] and magic or the evocation of spirits” (2014: 157). In her work on the occult in the Ottoman Empire, Uluğ also elaborates on the existing occult practices and beliefs such as magic, sainthood, djinns, fortune telling, talismans and charms along with talisman shirts (Uluğ, 2016). Zarccone considers these activities as “traditional occult sciences” separate and sometimes in opposition to the Western influenced spiritual movements (Zarccone, 2014: 165). It is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that we see the first introduction of Western esotericism in the Ottoman lands as it would be expected considering its resurgence in the West during this time period (Türesay, 2019; Zarccone, 2013, 2014). The earliest account of spiritist activity recorded in the Ottoman Empire is in 1854. Relayed by Emma Hardinge Britten, one of the most renown advocates of spiritualism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this incident involves a British author who attended spirit-summoning and

table-turning séances in Constantinople (Britten, 1884: 421). Following this, there are other accounts of similar activities in early 1860s in the same city (Britten, 1884). Looking at this, as Türesay argued in his article on Ottoman spiritism, it is possible to say that the first introduction of the spiritist wave was through “European and Levantine communities” of the Empire (2019: 168). There were several publications on spiritism in the Empire throughout 1860s including a piece by Calouste Constant on magnetism (Constant, 1863). Nevertheless, any reference to this early period is decidedly absent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish spiritism.

When it comes to publications in Ottoman Turkish, the earliest reference to Ottoman spiritism by neo-spiritualists is to a book by Besim Ömer [Akalm], a well-known physician, called *İpnotizm yahut tenvîm ve tenevvüm* (Hypnotism or tenvîm and hypnosis) published in 1890 (B. Ö. Akalm, 1890; Nirun, 2016). From the period, this book is the only one taken up by republican spiritists. Even though a second-generation spiritist Gufran Erkılıç claims that the author of this book was sent to Paris by the Ottoman sultan to participate in the first conference on spiritism (Nirun, 2016: 90-92), this claim is highly dubious considering the fact that “ispiritizm” i.e. spiritism was one of the prohibited words under the Hamidian rule (Türesay, 2019: 178). The book incorporates sections on hypnotism, magnetism and methods used by prominent names of the field. However, the most striking aspect of the book might be author’s emphasis on spiritism as a *science* progressing consistently (Akalm quoted in Nirun, 2016: 92). This shows that even before Ruhselman took to the stage, scientific aspect of Kardec’s spiritism had attracted attention. Zarcone also argues that there were two kinds of spiritualism in the Ottoman Empire one being scientific, experimental western-inspired and the other one being more traditional and local (Zarcone, 2014). He even suggests that spiritism had a strong influence on the Ottoman elites since they interpreted it as a “new science and also a philosophy that can surpass the positive sciences” (Zarcone, 2014: 171). This supports the conclusion that the concept of scientific spiritism had already entered the Ottoman Empire in the 1890s.

The real bridge between Kardec’s classical spiritism and Ruhselman’s neo-spiritualism is the boom in spiritist publications in the 1910s. As explained in detail

by Türesay, 1910s saw the growth of debates surrounding spiritism thanks to the liberal environment experienced in publications following the Young Turk revolution in 1908 (2019). A wide range of books, articles and journals were published both in favour and critical of spiritism. Spiritist publications in this period came with different emphases. Some were purely experimentalist; some were more of an amalgam combining western trends with local practices and some were merely encyclopaedic accounts (Türesay, 2019). Regardless of their content and style, all spiritist publications were met with negative reactions and criticism coming from not only materialist/positivist circles but also from anti-materialist figures (Türesay, 2019; Zarcone, 2014). While the materialists accused the spiritists of being mentally ill, anti-materialists attacked them for corrupting the tradition and religion (Türesay, 2019: 189). From this period, republican spiritists only ever refer to a book by Hasan Merzuk titled *Cinlerle Muhabere: İspiritizm, Fakirizm,-ta'rif, Tarihi Ma'lumatı Umumiye* (Conversations with the Djinns: historical information on and characteristics of spiritism and fakirism). This was a two-volume book that Bedri Ruhselman read when he was only 12 years old and it apparently changed his life introducing him to occult sciences (Nirun, 2016: 99; Temizel, 2014:11). However, the reference to this book is strictly limited to Ruhselman's relationship with it and republican spiritists do not concern themselves with the content of the book.

Jumping a couple decades ahead, Ragıp Rıfkı makes the last pre-Ruhselman contribution to the spiritist debate with his book titled *İspiritizme Tecrübeleri, Ahretle Nasıl Konuşulur?* (Spiritist Experiments, how to communicate with the afterlife?) published in 1930. In this book, Rıfkı analyses Kardec's teachings and explains that he conducted his own 'experiments' (1930). He combines them to formulate eight basic rules of spiritism, establishes the primary aim of it and provides instructions on how to contact spirits anywhere by following certain simple steps (Rıfkı, 1930). Religious and moral connotations sprinkled throughout the book set it apart from previous accounts. Until this point, there were either purely experimentalist or traditional approaches to the matter. This is the first time a third approach is adopted. The author puts repeated emphasis on the fact that spiritism is a science which leads people down to the right or true path and works for the betterment of the mankind (Rıfkı, 1930). Ragıp Rıfkı uses the term "fen (modern

science in Ottoman Turkish)” (1930: 32) to refer to spiritism despite the fact that the term usually signifies “physical sciences or natural sciences” (TDK, n.d.). The synthesis of the notion of science and morality demonstrates how the concept was interpreted in a novel manner. Furthermore, along with its antecedents it indicates that the “scientific” and “moralist” pursuit of Ruhselman was the continuation of a deeper pattern within spiritism in the Ottoman/Turkish context.

Despite the listed thematic continuities that an outsider may observe between Ottoman and republican spiritism, it is impossible to know whether republican spiritists followed Ottoman publications since it seems as if they specifically refrained from mentioning any publications from this period. Moreover, even if republican spiritists may have read Ottoman spiritist publications, they only refer to European sources in their own publications. They do not establish connections with Ottoman spiritism and they do not consider themselves as a continuation. This may indicate that Turkish spiritists severed their ties with the Ottoman empire and chose to directly go to the source in Europe, especially in France. This situation may provide an insight into how this group of intellectuals perceived the empire as a thing of the past showing that despite continuities, a fabricated discourse of rupture was also present in spiritist narrative. Turkish spiritists may have also wished to separate themselves from the practices that were taking place under the Ottoman Empire to avoid negative connotations and to have a better chance of being taken seriously. It also paints a picture in terms of the sources that cultivated Turkish spiritism. Overall, republican spiritists only ever refer to Ottoman spiritism and occultism as historical tidbits making a point of emphasizing the European origins of spiritism in their own publications (Bayatlı, 1970; Kardec, 1986; Ruhselman, 1949, 1951c; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Sarıkaya, 1978; Temizel, 2014). This helps us understand their position with regard to the empire as a group of republican intellectuals and how their intellectual ties with the empire was ruptured. For them, it does not seem like Ottoman spiritism was a source of inspiration or legitimacy but merely a part of history.

### 3.2. Bedri Ruhselman

Bedri Ruhselman was a medical doctor, a professional violinist and the leader of Turkish spiritism or experimental neo-spiritualism as he put it (BAM, 1981; Nirun, 2016; Özyiğit, 1972b, 2007; Sarıkaya, 1978; Temizel, 2014). His followers describe him as follows:

The perfect specimen of a man of mind, reason and heart... (Özyiğit, 2007: 53),

An extraordinary idealist whose high mission and value will be better understood when Turkey's history of ideas is written down one day... (Doksat, 1960b: 6-7),

Above all, he was a man of science with great insight. He was a man of science because he always told his entourage and his readers that acting under the guidance of principles of reason was the only solution to everything. He never even once fell into metaphysics and sacrificed clarity. He was a virtuous man of science and a metapsychic philosopher... (Arıkdal, 1964: 3).

These quotations demonstrate that Ruhselman's charisma in the eyes of his followers stemmed from the belief that Ruhselman was a principled virtuous man with a mission. The details of his life is passed down by Refet Kayserilioğlu, one of his closest colleagues and a fellow spiritist. According to Kayserilioğlu, before Ruhselman passed away, he sat his friend down and narrated his whole life story to Kayserilioğlu (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960b; Özyiğit, 1972b). Therefore, in all their publications, spiritists relay Ruhselman's life story based on Kayserilioğlu's statements and an unpublished book titled *Büyük Vazifeli Dr Bedri Ruhselman* (Dr Bedri Ruhselman: A Great Man of Duty) written by Feridun Tepeköy, another prominent spiritist and a close friend of Ruhselman (Tepeköy, 1980). Here, I provide a general framework of who Ruhselman was, based on the information that prove to be consistent throughout all of these publications. Therefore, it is necessary to note that the information provided below comes from spiritists themselves and that any other non-spiritist independent source, which might have verified the details, was not readily-available. However, the spiritist version of Ruhselman's life is not important for merely conveying facts but is essential to show how Ruhselman reinvented himself in telling his own life-story and how his story continued to be reinvented by his followers as well.

İsmail Bedrettin Efendi was born in 1898 in İstanbul into a family of Circassian origins. His father was a military doctor. Ruhselman started receiving violin lessons from the age of 10. After completing his high school education in Kabataş, he started his medical training in 1916 however he dropped out of medical school when his musical talent was discovered by an Egyptian princess. Receiving financial support from this princess, he went to Prague to attend a conservatory and completed his education in music. There is no further information on which conservatory he attended in Prague. It is also claimed that Ruhselman performed at concerts in Dresden, Germany with Kurt Striegler, a German composer and conductor of the state opera. However, before he could complete his training in becoming a violin virtuoso, he found himself in a financially unstable situation and had to return to İstanbul in 1926. Between 1926 and 1934 Ruhselman worked as a music teacher in various towns of Anatolia. In 1935, he decided to take up medicine once again and this time, he completed his medical training becoming an internal diseases specialist or an internist in 1938. After serving in the military between 1940 and 1941, he started working as a doctor. In 1943, he went to Afghanistan and served as the head physician for 3 years. After returning to Turkey in 1947, he started working as a cruise ship doctor and held this position on and off until 1958. In the meanwhile, he also served as a doctor in the Maritime Academy and Yıldız War Colleges Command in 1952. His health swiftly deteriorated after suffering an infarction and he passed away in 1960 at the age of 62 in İstanbul. Ruhselman never married (Arıkdal, 1964; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960b, 1961a, 1964; Nirun, 2016; Özyiğit, 1972b, 1972d, 2007; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Temizel, 2014). These details are a collection of what has been passed down by his followers.

Ruhselman's spiritist career started very early on. It is said that he organized his first séance when he was 15 however there are no details as to what happened exactly in this séance (Nirun, 2016: 99; Özyiğit, 1972b). Even though he encountered spiritist books in İstanbul that captured his attention, his first proper introduction to the concept of spiritism took place in Prague at the hostel he was staying as a paying guest. He regularly participated in séances and as someone who could speak French, English and German, he started reading the prominent names of the spiritist field including but not limited to Allan Kardec, Gustave Geley, Léon Denis, Charles



Richet, William Crookes, Oliver Lodge and D.D. Home (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960b; Nirun, 2016; Özyiğit, 1972d, 2007; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Temizel, 2014). Training himself in theoretical spiritism and learning the specifics of hypnotism, he began his first experiments with hypnotism in the early 1930s after returning to Turkey (Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 366). Between 1931 and 1933, he conducted hypnotic experiments and compiled information on reincarnation in Adana (Özyiğit, 1972d; Ruhselman, 1952g; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 366). His first séance where he claimed to have received *systematic* information was held in 1936 with the mediumship of lawyer and musicologist Hüseyin Saadettin Arel (BAM, 1981; Nirun, 2016; Özyiğit, 1972b, 1972d, 2007; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). During this séance, as the operator i.e. conductor of the séance, Ruhselman claimed to have established communication with a discarnate being called *Üstat* and this communication continued culminating in the publishing of his three-volume book *Ruh ve Kainat* in 1946 (Ruhselman, 1946a, 1946b, 1946c). From 1936 to the day he died, he regularly claimed to have communicated with around 10 spirits<sup>9</sup> and used the information he received to publish 5 books,<sup>10</sup> several reports and 2 journals (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960a, 1964). While he was involved in the publishing of 2 journals *Fener* and *Ruh ve Kainat*, he wrote articles for a wide range of journals.

In 1950, he and his four friends established the first spiritist association in Turkey under the name MTIAD (MTIAD, 1962). He gave speeches in İstanbul and Ankara Universities and it is even claimed that he wrote and submitted a report in 1952 titled *Deneyisel Spiritualizm Hakkında Rapor* (Report on Experimental Spiritualism) at the request of the Ministry of National Education (Nirun, 2016: 112; Ruhselman, 1952b; Sarıkaya, 1978; Temizel & Tarlacı, 2015; Zaim, 2008). In 1957, he resigned from the association he helped founded and started working with a special group he called *Vazife Grubu* (Mission Team) (Bayer, 1963: 5; Özyiğit, 1972c). With the help of this group, he prepared one last book before he passed away. This book was locked away by notary to be published by one of the three trustees ‘when the time was right.’ The

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<sup>9</sup> The names of these spirits were: Üstat, Kadri, Mustafa Molla, Akın, Şihap, Kemal Yolcusu (Traveller on the Road to Maturity), Rehber (Guide), Meşale (Torch), Önder (Leader) and C İstasyonu (C Station).

<sup>10</sup> These books are *Ruh ve Kainat* (1946), *Ruhlar Arasında* (Amongst the Spiritists) (1949), *Allah* (1950), *Medyomluk* (Mediumship) (1952) and *Mukadderat ve İcabat* (Destiny and Requirements) (1953).

book titled *İlahi Nizam ve Kainat* (The Divine Order and the Universe) was published 54 years later in 2013 when two out of three trustees passed away leaving only one person with access to the book (Ruhselman, 2013; Yılmaz, 2014a, 2014b). According to his followers, Ruhselman paved the way for scientific exploration of spiritism and metapsychic sciences and lay the foundations of neo-spiritualism (Aray, 1962; Arıkdal, 1964; Doksat, 1960b, 1960a; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1961a, 1964; Omay, 1995; Onbulak, 1956, 1958; Özyiğit, 1972c). They consider him as an “insightful” and “anti-dogmatic” man with “positive thoughts” who “provided humanity with meaningful and rational knowledge” (Aray, 1962: 81). There is no information to suggest that Ruhselman was a medium himself but he is almost exclusively attributed the role of *conductor* of séances and compiler of information received during those séances.

In the narrative of Ruhselman’s life, there are certain anecdotes and turning points that give more insight into who he was more than any encyclopaedic record. The first one of these incidents concerns Ruhselman’s relationship with the new republic and Atatürk. All narratives surrounding Ruhselman’s life tell the story of an encounter between Ruhselman and Mustafa Kemal during World War I. According to this story, as a high school student, Ruhselman enlisted in the army to go fight in the Dardanelles Campaign and to (hopefully) die a martyr. Learning this, his family started seeking a way to reverse the situation and their path crossed with Colonel Mustafa Kemal who helped undo the enlistment and who taught Ruhselman a life-lesson by encouraging him to serve his country as an enlightened individual (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960b; Özyiğit, 1972b, 2007; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 365; Temizel, 2014: 12). It is irrelevant whether this encounter actually took place or not because even if it is mere fabrication, it still demonstrates the adoption of Atatürk’s life-lesson as one of the bases of Ruhselman’s teachings. Moreover, incorporation of the figure of Atatürk into the mythos of Ruhselman may point to an effort of legitimation.

Two other incidents concern the mental health of Ruhselman and raise questions on how this may have affected him in engaging with spiritism. When he was in Prague, he was apparently forced to stay in a mental asylum for over a week. Spiritists argue

that this hospitalization incident was a result of a conspiracy against Ruhselman by an enemy who stayed in the same hostel as he did (Özyiğit, 1972d; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Regardless of whether this is true or not, it is significant to keep in mind that Ruhselman stayed in a mental asylum for a short period. Another concerning incident takes place after he returned to Turkey from Prague. Feeling lost and depressed for reasons not clearly specified, Ruhselman came close to attempting suicide. As he considered throwing himself into the sea, he was saved by a mysterious man who taught him a life-lesson saying he had a great potential much like what Atatürk is claimed to have done years prior to this instance (Özyiğit, 1972d; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). In the end, he finds solace and purpose in spiritism.<sup>11</sup>

While these personal stories are used by spiritists to construct a mythical image of Ruhselman who was kept alive by the mysterious forces of the universe to be able to fulfil a mission (BAM, 1981; Nirun, 2016; Özyiğit, 2007; Sarıkaya, 1978), they also give us clues into the personality and thought of Ruhselman beyond spiritism. He was a man who was educated in the finest schools of İstanbul, who had a refined taste and talent in music, who had extensive knowledge of human anatomy and years of medical experience, who admired Atatürk attributing him a crucial role in his own life-story and openly declaring commitment to the Six Arrows representing 6 pillars of Kemalism (Fener, 1938d), who had experienced mental and emotional turmoil, who believed in rational communications with the spirits as a scientific pursuit and who has been repeatedly described as an enlightened man of reason. Even on the surface, it is clear that he does not fit the stereotypical image of a republican elite. He was neither a dedicated materialist/positivist modernizer nor a traditional conservative reactionary. He was a transcendentalist admirer of science. This identity is an unexplored result of Turkish modernization. It is important to keep these layers

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<sup>11</sup> Spiritism's association with solace and peace is a recurring theme both in Ruhselman's life and in the personal narrative of his followers. It is also possible to observe this connection in Ruhselman's surname as well. That is because after the adoption of the Surname Law of the Republic of Turkey on June 21, 1934 (Soyadı Kanunu, 1934), he must have taken the surname "Ruhselman" which is a compound word formed with the juxtaposition of "ruh" and "selman". While *ruh* can be directly translated as "spirit", *selman* indicates a meaning of being at peace and a sense of tranquillity (TDK, 2019). Within this context, it is possible to contemplate this as an indication of searching for peace and tranquillity in the spirits or being at peace with the spirits. However, this remains as an intriguing speculation.

in mind while trying to understand why he was interested in spiritism. As I analyse the details of his thought, how he and his friends negotiated conflicting value systems will become more clear.

In the next sections of this chapter, the details of neo-spiritualism are provided. I present and analyse the teachings under three categories. These three categories are constructed through the qualitative text analysis of all source material including not only the works of Ruhselman but also other spiritist publications and journals relevant to the time period. I choose not to limit the scope of Turkish spiritist theory to the works of Ruhselman because even though he was the father of the movement, he was in no way the only one contributing to its theory.

### **3.3. Spiritist Teachings**

#### **3.3.1. Definitions**

Bedri Ruhselman laid the foundations of Turkish spiritism, namely neo-spiritualism in 1946 in his three-volume book *Ruh ve Kainat* (1946a). In this book, he detailed all aspects of neo-spiritualism based on the communiqués of the spirit *Üstat* and established 40 fundamental principles of neo-spiritualism (Özyiğit, 2007; Ruhselman, 1946c, 1962a; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Ruhselman denies having a part in his books other than being a compiler of information, therefore he attributes the role of an intermediary to himself (Ruhselman, 1949, 1951c, 1952f). Not all 40 of these principles concern the spiritist teachings directly, thus in this section, I will focus on the relevant ones. Here, I do not analyse spiritist teachings from the point of view of an insider but from the perspective of an outsider looking for patterns. Therefore, I do not present technical details on spiritism itself. Instead, I concentrate on overarching themes and discuss what they mean for the position of Turkish spiritism in the modernization process. Over the years, different spiritists defined neo-spiritualism differently with varying emphases. However, it is pertinent to start with Ruhselman's own definition. He defines it as:

a positive scientific, philosophical and moral path that not only deals with the unexplored sides of subtle natural events and human soul but also explains and analyses the knowledge, acquired through inspiration and enlightenment since the beginning of time, in a clear way that appeals to the modern human

intelligence and scientific understanding through objective and subjective methods and by conducting experiments (Ruhselman, 1946a; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 404).

As it can be seen, neo-spiritualism is considered as an exhaustive movement that tackles every issue under the sun from material/natural to spiritual and provides not only scientific but also philosophical and moral guidance. Salt and Çobanlı address the exhaustive nature of this movement in their comprehensive encyclopaedia on occult issues by defining it as:

It is the type of spiritualism that examines and classifies spiritual phenomena experimentally and inquisitively, factually proves the existence of communication with spirits through experiments and provides informative explanations on the existence, universe and God in the light of the facts reported by the spirits. All other natural sciences fall under the scope of experimental spiritualism (Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 404).

Both of these definitions provide an insight into how spiritism is conceptualized in the minds of Turkish spiritists. It is not simply about communicating with a spirit and learning about the future or the past. It is considered as a scientific, philosophical and moral approach to whole of existence. It, thus, becomes clear that Turkish spiritists embraced spiritism for providing a complete cosmology (Arıkdal, 1961; Bayer, 1963; Erman, 1963b; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950e; Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1963h; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952a, 1952c; Ruhselman, 1938a). For them, scientific, philosophical and moral approaches were not separate or contradictory but one and the same. This is clearly a hybrid approach to epistemology reconciling otherwise conflicting sources of knowledge.

### **3.3.2. Differences from Classical Spiritism**

The above-definitions do not, however, indicate what is special about neo-spiritualism in particular. It is possible to find similar definitions for the Kardecist brand of classical spiritism (Bragdon, 2004; Kardec, 2013; Nirun, 2016; Ruhselman, 1962b). Therefore, these definitions are not sufficient to understand what was special about Turkish spiritism. First, let us look into how Ruhselman separated his teachings from classical spiritism. I must say up front that his efforts at distinguishing neo-spiritualism remain vague at best. According to him, what is presented as neo-spiritualism starts as an expansion of classical spiritism and evolves

into a separate movement based on the synthesis of the east and the west (Bilge, 1964e, 1964a; Ruh ve Madde, 1963g; Ruhselman, 1953e). Some of the later interpretations of Turkish spiritism hold onto this line of thought and attribute its novelty to the amalgamation of western ideas with the ‘heart and soul’ of Turkish lands (Temizel & Tarlacı, 2015). However, considering the eclectic nature of Kardec’s own spiritism borrowing ideas from eastern philosophies (Abend, 2004; Heelas, 2008), it is a stretch saying it was purely ‘western.’ Therefore, this first attempt at distinguishing the new aspects of neo-spiritualism manages to say nothing but that Turkish spiritists adopted and localized spiritism infusing it with their cultural heritage. This line of argument merely says that Turkish spiritism was new because they were Turkish, it does not put forward anything new on the content of neo-spiritualism.

Another way Ruhselman attempted to distinguish Turkish spiritism is by first criticizing classical spiritism for being “primitive and elementary” reflecting the narrow framework of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ruhselman, 1953e: 3-4). Accordingly, he claimed that the novelty in neo-spiritualism rests with the new and higher quality information it provides concerning the new realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ruhselman, 1953e, 1954f). He acknowledged that they were at first unable to establish the distinct features of neo-spiritualism beyond its name. However he then argued that Turkish spiritism pushes the door to a new reality wide open whereas the door was only cracked slightly with Kardec’s spiritism (Ruhselman, 1953e, 1954f). The gist of this argument is that their communications with the spirits provide new information and therefore, this is ‘neo’-spiritualism.

Failing to consolidate the distinctions of neo-spiritualism, they then try to define it through what it is not. “Neo-spiritualism is not a religion” (Ruh ve Kainat, 1952b, 1953e; Ruh ve Madde, 1962a; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001), “Neo-spiritualism is not a philosophical doctrine since it depends on the knowledge of sublime reality obtained through experimental methods” (Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 268), “Neo-spiritualism is neither a religion nor a dogma. It is not a path offering absolute truths. It is not a sect that guides and forces people to choose certain paths through the promises of rewards or punishments”(Salt & Çobanlı, 2001: 268). However, as you can see a negative

definition is not enough to answer the question what neo-spiritualism was or what was special about it.

The most elaborate answer comes from Dr Sevil Akay, one of the co-founders of MTIAD and the founder of TPK – *Türkiye Parapsikoloji Kurumu* (Turkish Institute of Parapsychology). He argued that different countries picked and chose a different side of Kardec’s spiritism. He said:

In England, they study it from a religious perspective. In a way they are trying to prove Christian dogma as a spiritualist church. [...] In Latin America, they never managed to look beyond experimental and applied spiritualism to develop a philosophical aspect. For this reason, they fail to provide a new way of life and worldview to humanity. [...] Turkey is very different. In Turkey, we had Dr Bedri Ruhselman who studied experimental spiritualism and philosophized it without being under the influence of any dogma (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969c: 14).

As it can be seen, Akay argues that with neo-spiritualism, Ruhselman created a new worldview that combined and synthesized experimental and philosophical aspects of spiritism. For this reason, he calls Ruhselman “the first synthesizer”(A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969c: 14). The emphasis on synthesis will become more prominent as we dive deeper into the teachings and theory. Akay was indeed pointing to the right direction because Turkish spiritism was neither an attempt at proving Islamic principles nor was it purely focussed on the healing and parapsychological aspects as was the case in Latin America (Arıkdal, 1961; Bayer, 1963; Erman, 1963b; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950e; Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1963h; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952a, 1952c; Ruhselman, 1938a). Despite all these attempts at clarifying what neo-spiritualism entails, I think it is more reasonable to look at its contents and let the content speak for itself.

The most basic tenet of both spiritism and neo-spiritualism is the existence of a spirit or a soul. Ruhselman defined the spirit as a conscious entity with the ability to influence the matter (Ruhselman, 1946c) and argued that this spirit evolves through reincarnation (Ruhselman, 1928, 1946c, 1949, 1952h, 1954b, 1954j). Moreover, he maintained that this reincarnation is progressive and does not process backwards (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969a; Ruhselman, 1938b, 1946c). A spirit reaching the human level never goes back to being an animal spirit. Until this point, Turkish spiritism does not

seem to be saying anything new. What is new in their conceptualization of reincarnation is that they believed that human souls evolve from animal souls while Kardec had argued human and animal souls are not transitory (Ruhselman, 1953c; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Moreover, they thought the spirit never reaches perfection and evolution continues for eternity whereas Kardec believed in the achievability of perfection (Ruhselman, 1953l). Ruhselman stated that as a spirit goes through the unavoidable process of evolution, constantly influencing and getting influenced by other spirits (Ruhselman, 1954g), its consciousness, willpower and imagination grow creating the differences between animals and humans (Ruhselman, 1946c; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). One more important addition Turkish spiritists brought to Kardecist spiritism is the detailed explanation of spirit's relationship with the matter.

According to Ruhselman, spiritual evolution does not signify a disengagement with the matter. Therefore, as a spirit evolves it does not sever its ties with the material world. In fact, Ruhselman makes a point of saying that there is no spiritual realm and that all realms are material and a spirit can evolve only through attaching itself to the matter (Ruhselman, 1952a, 1953c, 1975). Within this framework, the afterlife is conceptualized as a material realm called the *spatyom* (spatium) where spirits are engaged with another state of the matter that is unknown to us (Ruhselman, 1975).

These differences may seem like unnecessary details at first glance. However, they actually provide an insight into what Turkish spiritists wished to separate themselves from, namely their main adversary Islamic mysticism or Sufism along with other religious orders and cults (Bayer, 1963; Ruhselman, 1953d). Turkish spiritists were quite straightforward in their disapproval of mysticism and/or Sufism claiming that it is an unscientific path that solely focusses on the spiritual side of existence leading to a passive and selfish lifestyle (Bayer, 1963; Ruhselman, 1953j). They rejected the possibility of perfection as they saw it as a path that leads down to the belief of *vahdet-i vücüt* or unity of existence where humans become one with the creator, and thus the creator itself (Bayer, 1963; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950b; Ruhselman, 1946c, 1953l, 1953b; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Another reason why they reject the possibility of perfection is because they think this will lead to creation of dogmas claiming to have the ultimate truth whereas Turkish spiritists consistently argue that there is no ultimate truth but constant change (H. Akalın, 1960; Arıkdal, 1963b; Bayer, 1963;



Ruhselman, 1975). The emphasis on the omnipresence of the matter is another jab at mysticism for suggesting that humans must separate themselves from material and worldly attachments to ascend. That is because Turkish spiritists believe isolation and disengagement from the matter prevents people from seeking knowledge of the actual world (Akkaş, 1951; Ruh ve Madde, 1961f; Ruhselman, 1952d, 1953j). Lastly, they used the animal-to- human spirit transition in order to consolidate their commitment to the theory of evolution and once again, distinguish themselves from the creationist approach of mystic and religious orders (Ruhselman, 1953e).

As previously explained, both in the world and in Turkey, there was a battle of different epistemological approaches with rationalist, positivist, intuitionist and religious perspectives claiming to have the upper hand. Turkish spiritism was envisioned as a hybrid new path that negotiated these conflicting approaches. Moreover, their repeated emphasis on science and their clear efforts to distinguish themselves from mysticism demonstrate that Turkish spiritists did not neatly fit any previously drawn box. The position of Turkish spiritism vis-à-vis the original version is also clear. In that, it is clear that it is a vague at best. The novelty in their teachings stemmed from the historical and cultural context that motivated Turkish spiritists to separate themselves from Sufi traditions/orders possibly to have a chance of being taken seriously. The most that can be said is that neo-spiritualism was a 20<sup>th</sup> century iteration of 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritism and it was known for not choosing one aspect of it but synthesizing both scientific and religious aspects.

### **3.4. Scientific and Philosophical Teachings**

#### **3.4.1. Philosophy of Science**

In all these talks of ‘science’, it is imperative to clarify what they meant when they referred to science. As it can be observed in their definitions of spiritism presented above, Turkish spiritists had complete confidence in the scientific validity of their path. They were not using the term simply because they thought it would bring legitimacy to their approach but they actually were convinced that spiritism was a science. Even in their earliest publications in 1938, they argue that spiritist issues were no longer at the hands of charlatans but were adopted by “positive-thinking veritable scientists” (Fener, 1938b: 89). In one of his articles Ruhselman again

asserts that “advocacy for experimental spiritualism gains traction all around the world especially among scientists” (Ruhselman, 1953k: 8). In later years, it is possible to find even more assertive statements such as “Establishment of spiritism as a science occurred at the second half of the last century [19<sup>th</sup> century]” (Tuncer, 1963: 16) or “Spiritism is the science of talking with the spirits” (Ruh Dünyası, 1963b: 45) or even “The criterion in measuring the accuracy of information is not religious laws but science. Because metapsychic research, parapsychology or spiritism as a science relies primarily on evidence” (Ruh ve Madde, 1962a: 35). Therefore, the phrase ‘science of the spirit’ is not used in as a hyperbolic play on words since they did *believe* that it was a science.

When they were faced with criticism or backlash from the scientific community itself, they considered it as an instance of gatekeeping and people in positions of power not wanting to bring their authority into question (H. Akalın, 1960; Aray, 1962; Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1964e; Ruhselman, 1951a, 1953k, 1954c; Tuncer, 1963). What gave legitimacy to spiritism as a science in their eyes was the combination of prominent scientists working in the field, numerous publications on the subject, establishment of spiritist academies, associations and societies, observational evidence from séances and the fact that all these were happening in the West (Aray, 1962; Fener, 1938b; Gören, 1954a; Onbulak, 1958; Ruh Dünyası, 1963i; Ruh ve Madde, 1962g; Ruhselman, 1953k). As early as 1938, Ruhselman summarized this perspective by writing “The original cases and incidents that constitute the basis for our ideas may not yet be available in our language but they have been examined and verified by foreign scientists” (Ruhselman, 1938c: 36). In almost every issue of their journals, they made a point of mentioning some foreign developments taking place in the West to basically strengthen their position (Fener, 1938b; B. Kayserilioğlu, 1963; Ruh Dünyası, 1964c; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952c, 1953b, 1953a; Ruh ve Madde, 1960b, 1960a, 1960e, 1963d; Ruhselman, 1938c).

Now that their belief in the science of the spirit is demonstrated, I also want to underline the value they attributed to science itself. For spiritists, science was the only legitimate path to knowledge. The following is one of many statements displaying this approach:

There is only one true path to explain and prove this fact. This is the enlightened path of real science and knowledge that is free of all passions. Everything shines only under the light of science and the door to all facts may only be opened by the reliable and positive key of science that cannot be captured by greedy hands (Ruh ve Kainat, 1952c: 9).

As I have already said, this is one of many praises for science. However, they did more than simply praising science in itself but also glorified it for the advantages it provided:

- 1) Science provides us with more effective means in our studies to reach our goals.
- 2) Since it both expands our horizons and boosts our abilities, it enriches and enhances the type of goals we can choose from and actualize.
- 3) Lastly, as our goals will have greater and more extensive impact, they would gain significant importance for the for the fate of humanity (Ruh ve Kainat, 1954: 10).

In this quotation, they acknowledge the importance of scientific methods for achieving their goals and for having a generalizable lasting impact on humanity. Therefore, they not only had confidence in spiritism being a science but they also had complete faith in science in itself.

Looking at this situation, it is reasonable to ask whether they knew what science and scientific methods were. Separate from the science and methodology of spiritism, every now and then, spiritists published detailed pieces on what the scientific method itself entailed. These pieces all offer very similar takes on the scientific method. In an article titled the *Ruh İpotezi* (Spirit Hypothesis) published in *Ruh ve Kainat*, Prof Dr Çetin Cansoy, a theoretical physicist, explains the intricacies of the scientific method and the ways to construct hypotheses and scientific laws (1953). He starts by explaining the principle of causality and indicates that scientific laws are established when the causal relationship can be proven through experiments and when the requirements for causality are met (Cansoy, 1953). He then goes onto describe the process in detail:

In science, there are three steps to establish a scientific law. Observation: In this stage, natural events relevant to the matter at hand are observed and investigated thoroughly. Hypothesis: In this stage, the observations are tried to be explained and the most appropriate explanation is determined. Experimentation: the explanation is subjected to experiment. If the hypothesis

can be directly proven through the experiment, then it is called a scientific law. However, in certain situations, it is impossible to carry out the necessary experiment and in these cases the explanation remains as a hypothesis. However, a hypothesis must not be in conflict with the already-established scientific laws and it must bring a new explanation not provided by the previous law (Cansoy, 1953: 8).

Following this detailed explanation, which was not contradictory to the scientific understanding of the period even though it remains simplified, he goes onto explain the ‘spirit hypothesis’ and how neo-spiritualism is as scientific as any other established branch of science (Cansoy, 1953). Similarly, Dr Sevil Akay published a similar article elaborating the stages of the scientific method (1951). In this article, he set the stages in French as *observation, étude, analyse, synthèse and jugement* (Akay, 1951). He explained the process as follows:

We first examine the case carefully. We repeat this process multiple times. We investigate whether the same outcome is observed in each repetition. ... We then collect all the scattered information and classify the ones that are similar to one another. We establish the relationship between the groups with a law and reach a conclusion or judgement (Akay, 1951: 78).

As evidenced by these statements and many others that could not be included here, Turkish spiritists did not disregard the scientific method and empirical quality of science. They had a decent idea of what positive science was. Yet, this did not mean they were scientific. Having a grasp of what positive science and scientific methods were meant that they could make their claims and teachings appear scientific without actually providing any acceptable empirical evidence. This is exactly what they did. They published and re-published pieces on science and scientific method in their books, journals and articles. Even if it was not as detailed as presented above, three basic tenets are repeated in the majority of their publications regardless of the level of education of the author. These are the importance of empirical evidence, repeatability and principles of reason (Aray, 1962; Arikdal, 1964; Bayer, 1963; Omay, 1995; Onbulak, 1956, 1958; Yalın, 1963).

This last item brings us to the most prominent aspect of the spiritist understanding of science, namely the equal importance attributed to rationalism as well as empiricism. In one of his articles, Ruhselman stated “All our ideas and actions gain their momentum from our observations, reasoning and decision-making” (Ruhselman,

1953g: 2-3). This hints at the importance of ‘reasoning’ placed right after making observations. In one of her books, Hikmet Omay, teacher of history and a well-known medium, also wrote “Reasoning is the key to spiritual evolution” (Omay, 1995: 138). In a journal article titled *İlmi Araştırmalarda Akıl Prensiplerine Riayetin Lüzum ve Ehemmiyeti* (The Necessity and Importance of Respecting the Principles of Reason in Scientific Research), Ruhselman claimed that for research to have “a scientific value, it must be carried out based on principles of reason” (1954e: 2-3). In another article titled *Beynimiz Vasıtasıyla Olan İlmi Düşüncede Akıl Prensipleri Nasıl Kullanılır?* (How to Use the Principles of Reason in Our Scientific Thinking via Our Brains?), he reiterated that a scientific research is the one that is based on reason (Ruhselman, 1954a) These all demonstrate the central importance attributed to reason. However, it does not clarify what they meant by the principles of reason. For Turkish spiritists, the principles of reason include *causalité*, *principe de raison suffisante* and *principe d'identité et de contradiction* (Ruhselman, 1954e: 2-3). They elaborate how these principles are used in scientific research as follows

We first acknowledge that there is a cause based on the causality, the first of the principles of reason. Then we try to investigate this cause and establish the relationship between the cause and the effect. We carry out observation and experiments as thoroughly as possible. If we do all this, determine the cause and effect and if we see that the mathematical relationship between the two holds true at every repetition of the incident under the same circumstances then we understand that we established a law and that law takes its place in the literature (Ruhselman, 1954a: 2-3).

Looking at these explanations provided by the spiritists, it is possible to suggest that their understanding of science placed equal importance on empiricism, rationalism and also causal determinism.

They conceptualized this causal determinism as the existence of a chain of causes and effects that run through the whole universe and according to them, nothing can escape this chain (Ruhselman, 1946c, 1953f, 1954i, 1954g, 1954d, 1961). They argued that there are no coincidences or miracles in the nature (Gören, 1953a, 1953b). They explain their position as follows

According to us, everything, any and all activities taking place in the nature is the manifestation of a [...] law. We call the ones that we can understand

natural events and the ones we cannot comprehend and explain, miracles (Gören, 1953a: 11-12).

It is this specific approach that led them to explore psychic and paranormal activities in a ‘scientific’ way as they believed that these events must be explained within the boundaries of natural laws (Ruhselman, 1938b, 1953f). This naturalist or materialist emphasis may seem bizarre considering that they were spiritists. However, it is necessary to keep in mind their previously-explained relationship with the matter. For them, matter is the ultimate vehicle or instrument the spirit has to be able to interact with the universe (Ruhselman, 1938b, 1946c, 1952e; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). It is inevitable, necessary and in their eyes, it does not contradict with their understanding. In his book, *Mukadderat ve İcabat* (Destiny and Requirements), Ruhselman identified the natural law as “the laws of divine will” based on universal processes of cause and effect and declared that the “Absolute Destiny” of every being is to evolve (Ruhselman, 1953f). Based on this understanding, Ruhselman refused a static understanding of science (Fener, 1938b) and this might be interpreted as a suggestion that scientific principles must be in constant evolution as well.

#### **3.4.2. In Search of a Scientific Revolution**

After examining and dissecting their approach to science, it is all the more puzzling why they specifically chose spiritism among the many other already-established branches of science. The answer to this question lies in their aspiration to be part of a scientific revolution and to be up to par with scientific developments instead of chasing these developments from behind. In more than one occasion, Turkish spiritists express their desire to be part of this new and exciting development in science in real time as it was taking place instead of having to follow the developments from behind as Turkish intellectuals had to do all throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fener, 1938b; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952c, 1953b). In this respect, they considered it as an opportunity to not only bring Turkish science up to date with the latest developments but to actively contribute to these developments instead of being a mere receiver of knowledge from the West (Fener, 1938b). They highlight this goal as part of both serving humanity but also their own country as educated intellectuals (Fener, 1938b). It is possible to observe this ambition as early as 1938 in an article published in *Fener* where Ruhselman not only indicated that “Those who want our

nation, which is progressing steadily in every field, to be at the forefront of science would certainly want these topics to be included in our scientific life” (Fener, 1938b: 89) but he also wrote “As every citizen, we do not want to be the ones chasing those who are pursuing science but the ones who walk side by side with those pursuing science in every field” (Fener, 1938b: 89). Years later the same emphasis persists in *Ruh ve Kainat* where it is stated that “The intellectuals of our country cannot stay indifferent to these movements” (Ruh ve Kainat, 1953b: 8). Therefore, they considered their efforts as valuable contributions to their own country.

Beyond improving the quality of science in their own country, Turkish spiritists also believed that science itself needed to be updated. This is expressed in *Ruh Dünyası* as “In the world, there is now a need for a new renaissance – the renaissance of spiritism” (Bilge, 1964c: 13). In their minds, science was evolving and anyone who was standing against these developments were being “scientific fanatics or bigots” (Ruhselman, 1954c: 12). Time and again, they positioned themselves against “scientific dogmatism” as they put it and compared themselves with the likes of Copernicus and Galileo (Duncan, 1962: 16-17). They argued that new methods and tools were needed in order to keep up with the developments (Ruhselman, 1951b) and they thought this much-needed revolution in science needed to happen through spiritism.

In their minds, spiritism provided a synthesized complete cosmology and ‘unity of knowledge’ (Arikdal, 1961; Bayer, 1963; Erman, 1963b; İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950e; Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1963h; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952a, 1952c; Ruh ve Madde, 1960i; Ruhselman, 1938a). Since they had a dualist understanding in their approach to nature and human-beings, they think that any knowledge that focusses solely on one aspect whether that be the material or the spiritual is one-sided and deficient (Aray, 1963; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1973). Ruhselman described spiritualism as a scientific and philosophical doctrine that establishes a link between science and religion and by doing so that creates a unity and integrity of knowledge. He said:

The two facets of a human-being are inherently linked and they complement each other. Therefore, so long as secular materialism and spiritualism walk on separate paths and work alone, we cannot accept either of them as an effective approach. [...] Making distinctions between the path of science and

path of heart is the result of a subjective one-sided perspective. The path of the heart would solely lead to an ignorant sense of faith unless it is line with science. This would halt spiritual activities (Ruhselman, 1952c: 1).

The emphasis on the synthesis between the mind and the spirit or the material and the spiritual is put forward as *the* most important benefit of pursuing the ‘science of the spirit.’ They argue that the much-needed revolution in science would create a unity of knowledge only possible through spiritism. It is underlined that “people must be freed from one-dimensional knowledge” and must be introduced to “two-dimensional (both material and spiritual) knowledge” (Sevgi Dünyası, 1972: 1). In this respect, the mystic and religious approaches that deny the existence or importance of the matter and the purely materialist approaches that deny the existence of the spirit are criticized harshly for separating the two sides of a whole (Akay, 1951; Akkaş, 1951; Ruh ve Madde, 1960i, 1961f; Ruhselman, 1952d, 1953j, 1953d; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). By saying “Today branches of science continue to become more and more niche to such an extent that they seem like they might lose coordination and diverge into different paths. I think all scientific branches are in dire need of a unifying philosophy” (Erman, 1963: 14), Akay even goes as far as to suggest that spiritism in general but neo-spiritualism in particular provides an umbrella philosophy to science establishing a coherent framework in an era of hyper-specialization. In the end, all arguments attribute a unifying function to spiritism that would revolutionize science and help them be a part of the revolution.

### **3.5. Spiritual and Moral Teachings**

What did Turkish spiritists say about religion and spirituality? In this section, you will find their position toward organized religion and faith, how they reconciled religion and science and what this meant for the modernizing project of the republic. This section includes a brief discussion on the conception of a creator, moral codes, criticism of and claimed differences from organized religions and construction of a scientified spirituality.

#### **3.5.1. Attitude toward Religion**

Turkish spiritists shared a highly critical attitude towards all forms of organized religion. Not only did they emphasize that neo-spiritualism was not a religion at



every opportunity as previously explained, they also directly criticized religion itself (Ayverdi, 2005; Bayer, 1963; Gören, 1954b; Omay, 1995; Ruh ve Madde, 1961d, 1962a; Tuncer, 1963). According to Turkish spiritists, the age of religion had come and gone and now it was over. In one of their journals *Ruh ve Madde*, it is stated that “Religions emerged in an evolutionary order. As the last religion, Islam is the most developed and last religion. Because the age of religion ended and now age of science has begun” (Ruh ve Madde, 1962b: 35). A similar point is put forth in another publication that argues that the age of religion is over and we are now in the age of science and therefore “the information must be obtained through scientific methods, be open to questioning and discussion and must not be against logic” (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1987: n.d.). In her memoirs, Omay also asserts that the age of religion is over because developed and civilized societies must establish their own systems of organization (Omay, 1995). This was the underlying assumption that they shared and repeated time and again.

The idea that the age of religion was over stemmed from the spiritist doctrine that placed evolution at its centre. According to Turkish spiritists, there can never be an absolute unchangeable truth that would hold true regardless of the time period (H. Akalın, 1960; Arikdal, 1963b; Bayer, 1963; Ruhselman, 1975). They believed that all information must be updated in accordance with the requirements of the age they lived in. Moreover, any system of thought that refused to evolve and change was deemed fanatic and dogmatic (H. Akalın, 1960; Arikdal, 1963b; Bayer, 1963; Ruhselman, 1975). In this sense, it is also possible to observe the influence of Comte’s “law of three stages” on Turkish spiritist thought (1975). In a series of texts published under the name *The Course of Positive Philosophy*, Comte conceived three progressive stages of development for human societies and sciences, namely the theological, the metaphysical and the positive stages through which the domination of religion and abstract thinking is replaced by scientific thinking based on empirical observation and experiment (1975). Although Turkish spiritists do not refer to Comte directly, they embrace the logic of attributing progressive stages to history as evidenced in their approach to religion. By arguing that the age of religion ended and the age of science started, Turkish spiritists, in a way, incorporate the law of three stages in their own teachings. However, they conceptualize this idea not as positive

“progress” or *terakki* but as *yükseliş* (ascension) or *tekamül* (evolution) (Fener, 1938d; Ruhselman, 1938b). Thus, for them, as humans and societies ascended and evolved, the age of religion was left behind.

Within the above-mentioned framework, Ruhselman argued that “Religions are evolutionary paths. They present information according to the requirements of the age and environment but also the intellectual capacity of the people” (Ruhselman, 1953c: 2-3). Omay also emphasized the territorial restrictions of religions (1995). For them, religious texts were political and social books pertaining to a specific period and nothing more beyond that period (Aray, 1951; Ayverdi, 2005; Ruh Dünyası, 1963c). Thinking that the influence of a particular religion is bound within spatio-temporal limitations, they argued that religion has never been essential in human history. “Religion is not the main objective; it is simply a means to an end” (Ruh ve Madde, 1961d: 34) is the motto they adopt. It was underscored that “religion is not essential. [...] Religion existed for humans, to help them”(Aray, 1963: 6).

Reducing religion to a secondary non-essential role, Turkish spiritists considered it useless and even a hindrance now that its age was over. Ruhselman even argued that religion cannot be the source of morals anymore by stating “I don’t find religion satisfactory... Here is the East... There is nothing but misery... and what put it in this situation is religion” (Ayverdi, 2005: 142). Turkish spiritists presented multiple ways in which religion has had a hindering role. The first one is the formalism they observe in organized religions where formalistic practices are deemed more important than the essential philosophy and morals (Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1965a; Sevgi Dünyası, 1969d). The second one is the teachings that focus on loosening people’s ties with the world and strive to make them focus on the after-life. Spiritists consider this as a dangerous approach that eliminates dynamism in life (Akkaş, 1951; Ruh ve Madde, 1961f; Ruhselman, 1952d, 1953j). The third and last criticism stems from their anti-clerical tendencies (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1987; Onbulak, 1956; Ruh Dünyası, 1965a). At one point, ulama is criticized for perpetuating ignorance among the people and their instructions are described as “mind-numbing instructions preached by a group of ulema” (Ruhselman, 1938b: 6). This Turkish spiritist narrative makes it clear that in Turkey, spiritism was not adopted as a means

to reconcile Islam as an organized religion with science. They firmly believed that there was no place for such forms of religiosity in modern life informed by science. Thus, when they talked about reconciling science and religion, they were not actually referring to organized religions but to a new form of spirituality. Now let us explore what this spirituality was and why it was needed.

### **3.5.2. The Moral Gap in Turkish Revolution**

As previously explained in detail, the Turkish revolution that culminated in the founding of the Republic of Turkey envisioned a society informed by reason and science that would be free of unscientific characteristics (Akıncı, 2008; Burçak, 2005; Dole, 2004, 2006; Hanioglu, 1997, 2005; İrem, 2004; Özlem, 2002). For this reason, the Kemalists carried out a series of secularizing reforms and attempted to formulate an official version of Islam that would promote a secular, humanist and individualist understanding of religiosity (Berkes, 1964; Hanioglu, 2005; Zürcher, 1997, 2005b). However, this attempt is deemed to have been not fully successful resulting in a moral gap that prevents the official understanding of religiosity from penetrating into the daily lives of people (Abdukadirov, 2017; Atay, 2008; Mardin, 1971, 1973, 1990, 2004; Türköne, 2008). As a hybrid group of intellectuals who were dealing with issues of modern science and religion, Turkish spirits were also affected by this moral and spiritual void.

Before the moral gap created by the modernizing and secularizing reforms of the new republic was fully explored and investigated in the academia, Turkish spiritists had already identified that there was an issue by asserting that the reforms failed to satisfy the moral needs sufficiently. In *Ruh ve Madde*, this is expressed as

The period of moral decline and refusal to keep up with scientific advancements and evolution that started with the stagnation and gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire lasted until the foundation of the republic. The reforms carried out under the leadership of Atatürk and İnönü made sure to direct us towards science, civilization and progress. However, these reforms were unable to sufficiently address the moral and spiritual front due to certain historical and social requirements (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960d: 2).

In the same issue, they took their observation one step further and argued “Yes, we adopted science and civilization but we did not embrace the moral values that needed to be adopted along with science and civilization” (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960d: 3). This

demonstrates that not only did they think there was a moral gap but also this moral gap needed to be remedied by science itself. This was the continuation of the tradition that inherently linked morality and virtue with knowledge itself (Dole, 2004; Heper, 2012; İhsanoğlu, 1992; Mardin, 1983b; Şen, 2017; Tekeli & İlkin, 1999; Yalçınkaya, 2015). It also was a reflection of how science had been framed as the saviour in all areas since the beginning of the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process (Burçak, 2005).

Overall, Turkish spiritists considered the age of religion to be over, believed that as science and technology progressed, the spiritual side of existence was left behind leading to a crisis of faith (Onbulak, 1958; Ruh Dünyası, 1964f). They linked morality with science and supported the secularization project of the republic while at the same time observing its shortcomings. It is possible to observe their support for secularism in a quote in one of their later publications as follows:

Total independence may only be complete with mental and intellectual independence. For this reason, the Republic of Turkey does not allow anyone to exercise pressure over other people's minds in the name of religion or God. God and religion are surrendered to people as a matter of conscience. The new Turkish state respects human mind, free thought and beliefs. This is what Atatürk's principle of secularism entails (Bırol, 1972b: 7).

Combined with their utmost adoration of science, their position toward religion and Kemalist reforms demonstrate that Turkish spiritists were a group of intellectuals identifying with the founding ideals of the republic. Yet, they did identify an issue in the society in the form of a spiritual void. Their own statements attest to this observation. How then did this group find a solution to this moral gap in spiritism?

### **3.5.3. Neo-Spiritualism as a Scientified Spirituality**

Just as they wished to revolutionize science, Turkish spiritists were convinced that they had found a way to reform and update religiosity and spirituality to be fit for the requirements of the age. Once science was revolutionized to include the investigation of both the material and the spiritual aspects of existence, science of the spirit would provide them with the means to reform religiosity as well (Akkaş, 1952b; Aray, 1963; Arıkdal, 1961; Bilge, 1964b; Ruhselman, 1953n). In their eyes, spiritism presented answers to existential and spiritual questions in a scientific way (Ruh ve

Madde, 1961g; Ruhselman, 1952c). By scientifically and empirically investigating the spirit, they thought they could establish a universal morality based on empirical science (Arıkdal, 1963a; Bilge, 1964d; Challaye & Tiryakioğlu, 1966; Ruh Dünyası, 1964g, 1964e, 1964h; Ruhselman, 1952c, 1953m; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001).

Turkish spiritists were deriving moral principles from rational interpretation of the spiritist phenomena and from the direct communiqués of the spirits (Bayer, 1963; A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969c; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1961b; Ruhselman, 1953a, 1954l). The universality of scientific knowledge made them think that moral principles established through scientific methods would have the same generalizable validity and would be able to bring the whole of humanity together. Ergün Arıkdal, one of the presidents of MTIAD, described this universal morality as *birleştirici ahlak* (unifying morality) and summarized this thought process as:

Today, what humanity as a whole can acknowledge is the conclusions presented by science. Everywhere on earth, a principle set by science brings humans together and ensures a sense of understanding amongst them. [...] Now, if we examine scientific spiritualism, we see that it achieves what science wants to achieve by taking into consideration both aspects – the material and the spiritual. [...] The conclusions reached through rational evidence and specific methods are solid. [...] Spiritualism is an evolutionary path that scientifically establishes the spiritual connection (unifying morality) that is needed in order to bring humanity together. It is the solution to all separations that lead to conflict. It is the synthesizer that eliminates desperation and that melts the universal consoling positive science and dogmas in the same pot. It is a humanist scientific-philosophical reality that examines everything with tolerance (Arıkdal, 1963a: 28-29).

This new scientified spirituality would not only bring humanity together but it would also cure the moral gap they observed in their country. This is summarized as “As those who follow this new worldview that incorporates both morality and positive science increase in numbers, the alienation between the intellectual elites and the public will slowly disappear” (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969e: 22). That being said, they never shifted their position with regard to the nature of spiritism even though it fulfils certain religious and/or spiritual functions:

Spiritism is not a religion, it is a science and it does not fulfil the function of religion. However, there are certain parallels between the functions both spiritism and religion perform. In other words, the objective of both is to discipline and bring people to maturity. Their methods are different, religion

says you will believe this and do that without question. On the other hand, science says you need to do these things and here are the reasons (Ruh ve Madde, 1962a: 35).

This is how they conceptualized spiritism as a scientified spirituality that grounds moral principles in universal science.

I prefer to use the term spirituality instead of scientified religion because of the nature and content of the spiritist moral teachings.<sup>12</sup> One of the primary aspects of Turkish spiritism is its emphasis on individual experience and autonomy (Ruhselman, 1946c; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Turgud, 1953). In their teachings there is no external authority. Even the creator or God is conceptualized as a form of supreme intelligence that will never be understood by people and that does not interfere with the worldly happenings (Özyiğit, 2007; Ruh ve Kainat, 1953c; Ruh ve Madde, 1962c; Ruhselman, 1946c, 1955). More often than not they use the terms *nature*, *natural harmony*, *natural laws* or *divine order* to describe the concept of a creator. God is conceptualized as an absolute entity that humans can never understand or have any knowledge of (Ruhselman, 1955). Within this framework, Turkish spiritists argue that the only authority that evaluate human actions is their “conscience” or “internal moral compass” and what feeds this moral compass is knowledge obtained through scientific means (Aray, 1962; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960d; Omay, 1995; Ruh ve Kainat, 1953d; Ruhselman, 1946c, 1952h; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). When there is no external authority but conscience, there is no ‘punishment’ or ‘hell’ that awaits humans but a guilty conscience that they have to face (Ruhselman, 1946c, 1954b; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Similarly, there are no formalistic rituals that people needed to perform to appease a higher entity. Since the only guidance in life was an internal moral compass constantly informed by most up-to-date knowledge produced by humanity, Turkish spiritists defended a pluralist understanding where there is no one truth and no absolute truths but an ever-growing reservoir of human knowledge (İç Varlık, 1951b; Ruh Dünyası, 1963j; Ruhselman, 1953c). This meant that depending on people’s level of spiritual evolution they would be more inclined to believe in religions or pursue science. Moreover, since

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<sup>12</sup> Details on the differences between spirituality and organized religion are provided in Chapter II under the title Concepts and Terminology.

they thought anyone could be reincarnated into any body regardless of their race, gender, religion or ethnicity, they did not see anything that separated humans but their level of evolution (Bayer, 1963; Omay, 1995; Ruh Dünyası, 1963d). Within this framework, Turkish spiritists did not seem to notice or they must have embraced the inherent elitism in ranking people according to their ‘level of evolution’ as they did not comment on the issue. Inspired by the spiritist version of equality and influenced by the state of destruction caused by the Second World War, which was interpreted as an outcome of materialist ambitions, Turkish spiritists believed that they needed to spread bonds of love and fraternity among humans and encourage people to help each other in their evolutionary paths of seeking knowledge (Ruhselman, 1938a, 1946c, 1952d). For this purpose, the central values that they promoted were altruism, charity, compassion, tolerance, love, fraternity, active participation in life, avoiding sloth and constant pursuit of knowledge (Özyiğit, 1972b; Ruhselman, 1946c; Temizel, 2011, 2014). In line with this, they were against material ambitions, greed and losing sight of human’s moral duties. This constituted the content of neo-spiritualism as a scientified spirituality. It was an attempt to revolutionize both science and religion synthesizing them to create a hybrid alternative that would not only fill the moral gap they observed in their own society but also bring humanity together under a universal ‘scientific’ morality.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Turkish spiritists’ relationship with Ottoman spiritism, Ruhselman’s own personality and the content of their teachings reveal the spiritist perspective on modern science and religion as well as on the Turkish modernization process. Their conceptualization of science demonstrates that they were not disillusioned with the scientism of the age or with the policies of the republic that placed science at its centre. Glorification of science by Turkish spiritists suggests that spiritism was not an anti-scientific or an anti-positivist reaction on their part. It was an attempt to come to terms with science itself. They embraced the hegemony of science and reason. They celebrated science and to an extent, they understood science and its core principles. In the end, their teachings remained as pseudoscientific efforts to supposedly expand the boundaries of scientific research. Knowing the intricacies of

the scientific method enabled them to frame their teachings in a package that looked ‘scientific’ enough for them. It may even be argued that they were scientistic instead of scientific. In that, they glorified and valued science as the most beneficial source of knowledge without actually engaging in any real scientific research. This point will become clearer as I address and explain their methodology and activities. They were completely convinced that they were on a scientific path. However, as with everything else, their approach to science also had hybrid features. As they were dealing with the Cartesian problem of mind vs. body, they once again tried to negotiate and reconcile seemingly conflicting philosophies and epistemological approaches, namely empiricism, rationalism, materialism, determinism and spiritism. Accordingly, they perceived spiritism as the way to create a revolutionary synthesis of these approaches that would provide access to a hybrid unity. Moreover, spiritism presented them with the opportunity to feel part of the Western community of science and gave them a sense of entitlement in terms of representing their country.

Turkish spiritists directed their hybrid efforts to negotiate conflicting sources of knowledge and value systems on the front of religion as well. Similar to the way they wished to reform science, they also wished to revolutionize religion and spirituality. They conceptualized neo-spiritualism as an alternative scientified spirituality that would address the crisis of faith and moral gap emerging as a result of the modernization process and the reforms of the new republic. For them, spiritism was a form of personal hybrid spirituality that placed science, pursuit of knowledge and reason at its core while at the same time providing ‘universal’ moral guidelines for people. It is possible to observe the parallelisms between Turkish spiritists’ understanding of religiosity and the form of religiosity that the founders of the republic promoted. Spiritist understanding of religiosity was personal, apolitical, anti-dogmatic and placed science and reason at its centre. Spiritism was in a way implementing the ideals of the Turkish revolution to the spiritual realm and was presenting a new language in participating in the project of secular world-making. Therefore, it may even be possible to suggest that it was an attempt to forge a morality that fit the narrative of the modernizing and secularizing ideals of the republic. In hindsight, the quotations at the beginning of this chapter and the mission attributed to spiritism start to make sense. Nirun thought that Turkish spiritism could



have ensured the definitive closure of religious orders and what they represented because spiritist teachings attempted to offer a scientified spirituality that could possibly replace them. This is the potential they saw in neo-spiritualism.

Neo-spiritualism demonstrates that the antagonistic depiction of the relationship between modern science and religion did not hold true. The elements of hybridity that negotiate conflicting categories and systems are highly evident both in the personality of Ruhselman and also in the teachings of Turkish spiritism. Neither him nor his teachings neatly fit into any of the binary oppositions used to depict the Turkish modernization process. What the existence of spiritists, thus, says about Turkish modernization is that the central position attributed to science in this process seems to have led to the emergence of a movement trying to find solutions to moral questions in 'science of the spirit'. Furthermore, Turkish spiritists provide a glimpse into alternative European currents of thought and philosophical traditions that left a mark on Turkish intellectuals in the process of modernization. This spiritist current seems to have provided these intellectuals an alternative venue that helped them identify a novel solution to the issue of the moral gap outside the broader umbrella of Islam.

It is worth remarking that this particular conceptualization of science and morality bears traces of the approaches to science observed within the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process. The tendency to derive legitimacy and utility from science was once again present in this case. Even though they avoided making connections between themselves and Ottoman spiritism and wanted to frame spiritism as a science rooted in the West, they not only linked science with morality but they also continued the tradition of seeing science as the solution to all problems. Therefore, following its construction as the solution to all problems that the Ottoman Empire faced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for Turkish spiritists, science continued to hold the position of the ultimate saviour in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as well.

## CHAPTER IV

### TURKISH SPIRITISTS: A PROSOPOGRAPHICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

*“Striking is the fact that spiritualism had a very strong impact upon the Ottoman and Turkish elites, since the nineteenth century and up to the 1960s. Facing the challenge of modernity, spiritualism was interpreted by many Europeans and Turks as a new science and also a philosophy that can surpass the ‘positive’ sciences in several fields.”*

Thierry Zarcone (2014: 171)

*“We consider it as our national duty to work and remain on a positive and scientific path to avoid falling behind the European intellectuals who continue to strive for the improvement of human and spiritual sciences, which will without any doubt elevate modern science to a much higher degree in the near future.”*

Bedri Ruhselman (1938b: 89)

Both of these quotations highlight the intellectual-involvement in spiritism in the Turkish context. While Zarcone suggests that *elites* were influenced by spiritism (2013, 2014), Ruhselman himself compares the activities of his group with those of European *intellectuals* implicitly placing themselves as their counterpart. This fourth chapter is dedicated to exploring who the Turkish spiritists were, what common characteristics they had, what kind of motivations pushed them towards this path, what kind of conflicts they experienced and how they were organized. In this process, I aim to understand whether Turkish spiritists were actually a group of intellectuals or whether the attributes of some prominent figures among them were projected onto the whole group. Considering the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population was not even literate as late as 1950 with the rate of literacy remaining only at 32.5 percent (Çetinsaya, 2014: 41), the level of education and the

occupations that Turkish spiritists held are the primary indicators of whether they belonged to an intellectual elite (“Cambridge Dictionary -elite-,” 2019). This chapter attempts to show that who people are may be just as telling as what they say. The background of a person constitutes a significant basis for why they would be engaged in spiritism. Furthermore, this deep-dive into the group is necessary to avoid treating it as an unrealistic monolith category in which persons with diverse interests are lumped together. In the end, the primary objective of this chapter is to identify patterns in terms of personal backgrounds, motivations and strategies of organization and methodology.

In this chapter, I present a prosopographical analysis of Turkish spiritists drawing a portrait of the group in great detail, a comparison between different factions that existed within Turkish spiritism, a motivation matrix classifying and presenting the incentives that captured their attention in spiritism along with a comprehensive account of their organizational features, methods and activities.

#### **4.1. A Portrait of Turkish Spiritists**

Finding an answer to the big question of who Turkish spiritists were is a tricky endeavour. This particular question has two facets. It first requires locating and identifying the persons. However, beyond making a list of names it also incorporates investigating the relevant biographical data corresponding to those names.

Identifying the persons involved in spiritism proved to be difficult since spiritists in Turkey or elsewhere usually refrain from mentioning precise numbers (Sharp, 2006). Therefore, it is practically impossible to estimate how many people were engaged in spiritism in Turkey in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, the people who casually attended one or more spirit-summoning séances for entertainment or who were the passive audience to certain activities are not the ones that matter. That is because, I am concerned with people who participated in the formulation of its doctrine and adopted it as a worldview.

With this in mind, I prepared a list of 13 questions in order to identify and define the boundaries of the group. You may find the detailed list under Appendix A concerning the prosopography protocol. These questions were determined prior to

text analysis and through the process of text analysis of published material and other archival research of biographical data, they were used to construct a well-defined group for prosopographical analysis (Keats-Rohan, 2000; Verboven et al., 2007). This entailed the analysis of all available publications including books, reports, newsletters, periodicals, journals, published interviews, memoirs and membership ledgers of MTIAD and entering the data in the prosopographical database under the rubric of ‘position within spiritism.’ This resulted in a preliminary list of names including all persons who were engaged in Turkish spiritism enough to warrant a mention in these sources. This list contained roughly 200 names. Afterwards, this initial list was cut down to 94 names by systematically excluding those names who came into the picture after 1969 and whose engagement and contributions could not be proven beyond a mention of their name. It is necessary to point out that not of all of the 94 persons were as involved in spiritism in 1940s as they would be in 1950s or 1960s. There were shifts as time progressed from 1936 to 1969. The ultimate criterion for the final list has been contribution. If the contribution of a name in the formulation of Turkish spiritism is clear, they are included in the list. 94 people included in the final list participated in the formulation of Turkish spiritism in Turkey by fulfilling one of the following functions:

1. Mediums
2. Operators
3. Owners, staff, writers and translators of spiritist journals
4. Founders, heads, members and staff of spiritist / parapsychology associations<sup>13</sup>
5. Spiritist researchers

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<sup>13</sup> The associations include:

MTIAD – Metapsişik Tetkikler ve İlmi Araştırmalar Derneği (Metapsychic Investigations and Scientific Research Society)  
TPK – Türkiye Parapsikoloji Kurumu (Turkish Institute of Parapsychology)  
TPAC – Türkiye Parapsikoloji Araştırmaları Cemiyeti (Turkey Parapsychological Research Society)  
ESIAC - Ege Spiritik İlmi Araştırmalar Cemiyeti (Aegean Spiritist Scientific Research Society)  
AMC / Ankara Metapsişik Cemiyeti (Ankara Metapsychic Society) – Full Name: Ruhsal Olayları Tetkik Enstitüsünü Kurma ve Yaşatma Derneği (Association for Establishing and Sustaining the Institute for the Study of Spiritual Incidents)  
DSB – Dünya Sevgi Birliği (World Love Association)

6. Publishers and writers of spiritist books
7. Regular and Active Participants in séances
8. Close entourage of Ruhselman.

Once the boundaries of the group were defined well and clear, a coded dataset was prepared based on the prosopographical questionnaire (Keats-Rohan, 2000, 2007). This questionnaire included questions on gender, year and place of birth, education, profession, position within spiritism, their ties to spiritist associations and Ruhselman, religious, spiritual and occult inclinations, past trauma, self-proclaimed motivations, political ideology, means of introduction to spiritism and which spiritist group they belonged to. This dataset is used not only to draw a portrait of the group itself but also to analyse their motivations and organizational features. You may find the detailed list of questions and coding instructions used to code the answers to these questions in Appendix A.

What does then this prosopographical database tell us about the common characteristics of this group?

#### 4.1.1. Gender

When we look at the gender distribution of the group, we see that the overwhelming majority of Turkish spiritists were male (81 persons out of 94 or 86%) with only 13 women in their ranks. This distribution is quite unbalanced especially considering how spiritism in France and elsewhere is claimed to be a major part of women's empowerment with majority of the mediums being women. However, when we look at the mediums that worked with Ruhselman (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960a, 1964) and directly contributed to neo-spiritualist teachings, we see that one third of the mediums (4 out of 12) were women. Moreover, in numerous séance records, the medium is reported to be a woman, yet it is impossible to find any other reference to any of these women (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1950a, 1950d, 1950c; Temizel, 2014). Thus, I can say that the number of women that were involved in spiritism as mediums was arguably much higher. In addition to this, 4 out of 13 women were among the founders of different spiritist associations and institutions in Turkey (Jale Gizer with DSB, Hikmet Omay with TPK, Nezihe Bayurgil with TPAC, Sevgi Çağıl with AMC) (Nirun, 2016: 213; Ruh Dünyası, 1963e, 1964b, 1965d). Therefore, even

though the number of women involved in spiritism was relatively small, the ones who were active made a permanent and prominent room for themselves among their male counterparts.

#### 4.1.2. Age

Looking at the age distribution of the group, it immediately becomes clear that Turkish spiritists were not all members of one generation. 43 out of 94 persons were born and raised after 1920. 7 of them, born in the 1910s, were still school-age children when the republic was founded in 1923. 5 out of 7 persons born in the 1900s were under the age of 18 in 1923. Only 6 of them belonged to an earlier generation born before 1900. In order to determine the age distribution, persons have been assigned to a decade from 1880s to 1940s. When I divided and distributed the persons whose birthdate is unknown to specified decades by minimizing the deviation in the percentage distribution of those with known birthdates and without altering the ranking, the results demonstrate that around 65% of them were born in the 1920s and 1930s (around 39% in 1920s and around 26% in 1930s). One fifth of them were born between 1900 and 1920. Only around 8% of them were born prior to 1900 while the percentage of people born after 1940 is merely around 4%.

It is necessary to point out that the first wave of Turkish spiritists i.e. Ruhselman and some of his peers who were engaged in spiritism in 1930s belonged to an earlier generation born and raised under the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Ruhselman himself was 25 years old when the republic was founded while Saadettin Arel was 43. Dr Zühtü Rıza Tinel, the owner of *Fener*, which was the first spiritist publication by Ruhselman, was 42 in 1923. However, it is clear from this distribution that the big majority of the Turkish spiritists (more than 80%) were the products of the new republic. This includes all persons who were born in the republican era and who were still children when the republic was founded in 1923. This distribution is another indicator that the existence of Turkish spiritists was indeed an unaddressed consequence of the Turkish modernization process culminating in the republican reforms.

#### 4.1.3. Geographical Origins

Geographical origins in this category concern the place of birth of Turkish spiritists and do not indicate any other ethnic connotations. The most striking characteristic about their origins is that more than 70% of them came from an urban background. In terms of the size of the settlement, this urban background varied from small towns through provincial centres to metropolitan cities. Around 39% of them (37 persons) were born in metropolitan cities such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. More than a quarter of them (24 persons, or 25.5%) were born in provincial centres such as Konya, Bursa and Balıkesir with only around 8.5% of them being born in small towns such as Turgutlu and Zile. The ones born in villages and rural areas corresponded to only around 1%.

A more detailed analysis of this distribution shows that more than 47 percent of them (45 persons) came from the Aegean and the Marmara regions which were arguably the most developed regions in early republican Turkey both in terms of economy and infrastructure but also in terms of intellectual integration with Europe (Zürcher, 2005a). From the rest of the country, the next most significant geographical concentration was central Anatolia with almost 13 percent (12 persons). 8 out of 12 persons were from Konya, with 5 of them belonging to the same family i.e. the Kayserilioğlu family. The rest of them came from cities such as Kayseri, Niğde, Sivas and Ankara. This analysis indicates that Turkish spiritists came from an urban background with a significant number of them being born in metropolitan centres and in the western parts of the country.

#### 4.1.4. Education

This particular category is essential in determining the intellectual characteristic of Turkish spiritists. Even though I have not been able to determine the educational background of 16 persons out of 94 (17%), the remaining group draws a very clear picture. The large majority of the spiritists i.e. more than 70 percent of them received higher education and/or university education from a wide range of higher education institutions including but not limited to the military academy, medical schools, school of law (Mekteb-i Hukuk) and Darülfünun (Istanbul University). Only 11 out of 94 people were explicitly said to have received no higher education. The

distribution openly establishes that Turkish spiritists had received or were in the process of receiving education at European-style modern secular higher education institutions. This picture is especially remarkable when compared with the higher education statistics of Turkey in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Not only were more than 65% of the population still illiterate in 1950, but also gross enrolment rate<sup>14</sup> to higher education institutions in Turkey in 1950 was only 1.3% (Çetinsaya, 2014). This figure reaches only 3.1% in 1960 and 5.7% in 1970 (Çetinsaya, 2014). In the 1950/51 academic year, the number of university students, associate and bachelor degree programs combined, did not surpass 25,000 (twenty-five thousand) in a country with a population over 20 million people (DrDataStats, 2019). Within this general context, majority of the Turkish spiritists receiving higher education indicates that they belonged to a privileged intellectual elite representing only a very small portion of the society.

At the intersection between education and gender, the situation is all the more puzzling. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, more than 80% of the female population was still illiterate (Çetinsaya, 2014). However, out of 13 women that gained a seat among Turkish spiritists, almost half of them (6 out of 13, or around 46%) had received higher education. 4 out of 13 were reported to be housewives. I was unable to find information on the educational background of one of the women.

Interestingly, Jale Gizer, who did not receive any formal higher education, was trained on the job as a translator and went to publish multiple books (N. Gürsoy, 2007). Similarly, even though Ruhsar Başkam is reported to have received education only at a school of handicrafts, she worked as a school principal and a teacher in the later years. Considering the gender gap in education and literacy in Turkey that persisted for decades (Caner, Guven, Okten, & Sakalli, 2016), the fact that a large section of female spiritists had received higher education is a striking quality.

#### 4.1.5. Profession

Based on International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) as specified by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2012), 84 out of 94 persons studied

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<sup>14</sup> Calculated based on the ratio of the number of students in higher education to the population of the country



in this prosopographical analysis had a professional career and/or an occupation fitting one of the two following classifications. These are, (1) *Professionals* including health, legal, teaching, administration, civil service, engineering, finance and social-cultural professionals; (2) *crafts and related trades* including but not limited to publishers, businessmen, and tradesmen. You may find the detailed list in Table 1. I was unable to identify the occupation of 5 persons. 4 out of 94 persons were housewives and 1 person was still a student.

**Table 1.** Professional Distribution of Turkish Spiritists

PROFESSIONALS			CRAFTS AND RELATED TRADES	
Sector	Name of Profession	#	Name of Profession	#
Health	Doctor	16	Publisher	1
Health	Dentist	2	Agent	1
Health	Pharmacist	1	Businessmen	3
Health	Veterinarian	1	Technical Draftsman	1
Health	Psychologist	1	Tradesmen	1
Legal	Lawyer / Judge	9	Electrician	2
Teaching	Teacher	6		
Teaching	Academic	3		
Administration	Inspector*	3		
Administration	Governor	1		
Civil Service	Civil Servant	9		
Civil Service	Military Officer*	3		
Engineering	Engineer	4		
Engineering	Architect	1		
Finance	Economist	2		
Finance	Banker / Manager	5		
Finance	Accountant	3		
Social / Cultural	Musician*	4		
Social / Cultural	Translator / Writer / Men of Letters	4		
Social / Cultural	Sculptor	1		
Total**		75	Total	9

\* 4 persons classified under the professional occupations had two separate professional pursuits which are reflected in the figures. Zühtü Rıza Tinel (Doctor / Musicologist); Hüseyin Saadettin Arel (Legal Expert / Musicologist); Tahsin Ünal (Teacher / Military Officer); Ziya Kayserilioğlu (Economist / Inspector).

\*\* In calculating the total number of persons belonging to the professional classification, persons who were included in one than one sector were deducted from the total number and were only counted once.

Table by author, data retrieved from primary sources

Almost 80 percent of Turkish spiritists (75 persons) held a profession and/or occupation falling under the professional classification. This meant that these persons occupied positions which required a special professional training. More than 1/5 of all spiritists included within this analysis had professional careers in the health sector with 16 doctors, 2 dentists, 1 pharmacist, 1 veterinarian and 1 psychologist. Among their ranks, there were 9 lawyers and legal experts, 9 educators including teachers and academics and 16 administrators and civil servants. More than 50 percent of these persons made their professional careers at least partly in the service of the state and even rose to highly prestigious positions such as the president of the constitutional court (Nirun, 2016: 213), administrative positions within ministries (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1969; MTIAD, 1962), civil inspector at various government institutions such as social insurance institution or the customs, bank manager and head physician at various hospitals (Temizel, 2014). Among female spiritists, there were 2 educators, 2 translators, 1 pharmacist/chemist, 1 painter/sculptor and 1 bank manager. What is striking in this distribution is that there was no one with a peasant background, no landowners or religious officials among Turkish spiritists. Not only had they received higher education but they also pursued modern professional careers, mostly in the service of the state.

#### 4.1.6. Religiosity and Spirituality

Almost all Turkish spiritists came from a Muslim family. Although it is reported that there was a person with Armenian origins among their ranks, I was unable to verify this piece of information. However, their familial background did not mean all Turkish spiritists identified themselves as a Muslim. Looking at data, it is impossible to determine a common position they assumed when it came to religion in general and Islam in particular. Yet, from what we know based on their publications and statements, those who identified themselves as Muslims mostly followed a Sufi and mystical path which fell outside the parameters of orthodox Islam (Akkaş, 1951; Aray, 1962; Onbulak, 1956, 1958). However, the data at hand is insufficient to mention any precise numbers. Contrary to what one might expect based on the binary oppositions such as reactionary vs modern, science vs religion, western vs eastern, spiritists women were also the living examples of westernized, unveiled republican

Turkish women (Nirun, 2016; Temizel, 2014). Whenever they talked about religion and spirituality, they emphasized the spiritual aspect over religion and strived to distinguish spiritism from religion.

#### 4.1.7. The Portrait

The answer to the question of who Turkish spiritists were stares right back at us from this group biography. They were a group of mostly men who were born in Muslim families in an urban environment in the Western and Central Anatolia; people educated in various higher education institutions and who went on to have professional careers that required a specific set of skills and training. They were a select group of republican elites who stood out among others in terms of the education they had and the professional careers they pursued. Even though they were mostly men, the women in their ranks were exceptional as they were also educated independent women with professional careers and they were involved in the executive and administrative affairs as well. With most of them being born and/or raised in the republican era, it is reasonable to suggest that they were the products of the republican reforms of modernization, westernization and secularization, which were the culminating point of the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process. They did not identify as part of an organized religion but were rather heterodox in their beliefs whether that be a Sufi or spiritist path. Their repeated emphasis on the apolitical nature of spiritism made it impossible to observe a meaningful pattern in their ideological positions (Fener, 1938d; Ruh ve Madde, 1960i).

These are the main characteristics of Turkish spiritists who were seeking refuge in spiritism. They do not fit any of the typically-identified groups portrayed in conflict with one another (Hanioğlu, 1987). They were neither materialist modernizers nor were they conservative reactionaries. They were a moralistically self-conscious hybrid group of republican elites. Teacher Nebahat Hikmet Omay is a good example reflecting the hybrid nature of spiritists. She was a teacher of history and she is described by one of her students, Professor Ara Altun, in the following way:

She was an excellent historian. She tried to demonstrate that history was a positive science. She used to say that social sciences especially history is an extremely important discipline for having a positive scientific method. At the same time, she would often remind us that history contributed to the

improvement of social sciences under the light of positive sciences and that history as a science progressed along these lines (Temizel, 2014: 93-94).

The woman who was described as an ardent supporter of history as a positive science was also one of the most prolific mediums receiving information from the ‘fourth dimension’ (Omay, 1960, 1995). She constitutes a useful example to depict the generally hybrid character of the group. The background of Turkish spiritists makes their involvement in neo-spiritualism all the more puzzling. The frequently-constructed binary oppositions cannot explain this portrait. That is because, in spite of all these characteristics they were spiritists; or despite being spiritists, they were urban, educated elites. This group portrait should not, however, lead to an impression of uniformity among Turkish spiritists in terms of their motivations and their approach to spiritism itself. Despite featuring common background characteristics, Turkish spiritists experienced internal conflicts and were organized under different groups. Thus, it is worth exploring the intricacies of spiritist groups in order to have a comprehensive understanding of Turkish spiritist.

## **4.2. Spiritist Groups**

### **4.2.1. Differences and Conflict**

Even though different spiritist groups carried out similar activities and had organized themselves under associations with similar objectives, there were discernible differences between certain groups. Although different factions existed prior to the death of Ruhselman, the more serious schism occurred following his death. Prior to Ruhselman’s passing, there were mainly two groups with varying interpretations of spiritism. While Ruhselman’s group represented a science-based approach to spiritism (Fener, 1938c; *Ruh ve Kainat*, n.d.), the other group placed more emphasis on mystical, Sufi and esoteric themes (İç Varlık, n.d.; Koryürek, 1949; Onbulak, 1958). Despite this difference, the relations between the two groups were not too strained in 1950s to prevent them from having amicable interactions. In fact, Ruhselman and others following his school of thought did write pieces for *İç Varlık*, a journal published by this more mystically-oriented group (Akay, 1951; Aray, 1951; İç Varlık, 1951a; Ruhselman, 1951a). The big fractioning happened within MTIAD two years after Ruhselman’s death in 1962 with an administrative overturn (*Ruh ve*

Madde, 1962f). Refet Kayserilioğlu and his friends who were in charge of both MTIAD and *Ruh ve Madde* were dismissed from their positions and their membership was terminated (Ruh ve Madde, 1962f). The overthrown group, then, went onto get organized around a new journal *Ruh Dünyası* in 1963 and established a new association, DSB, in 1966 (Ruh Dünyası, 1965d). Neither of the parties involved in this dramatic separation cite any concrete reasons other than a few vague statements about the differences in approach and methodology (Özyiğit, 1973; Ruh Dünyası, 1963k). Therefore, it has not been possible to determine what went wrong.

With this in mind, I tried to understand the differences and similarities between these groups based on the content of the journals they published. To be able to make a comparison of their content, I, once again, used qualitative text analysis to determine categories of topics and assigned each article within a certain issue of a journal to a certain category. You may find these categories for content analysis and coding details in Appendix B. The end result not only shows the distribution of topics within a certain journal distinguishing one journal from the next, but it also reveals common motivations shared by all groups.

As a result of this analysis, I determined 4 main groups of spiritists, the Ruhselman group, the Sufi group, the MTIAD group representing the association after 1962 and the DSB group representing Refet Kayserilioğlu and his friends who were expelled from MTIAD. As presented in Table 3, the content distribution of the journals published by these groups demonstrates what separated them. The table presents the top 5 categories of content in a descending order. As it can be seen, even though Neo-Spiritualism (NS) / Spiritism is listed among the top 5 content categories for all groups, the emphasis it received and the topics that accompanied it differ in a distinct way. The content published by Bedri Ruhselman himself and his friends while he was still alive matches well with what we know of their spiritist understanding. The theory of spiritism, cases and anecdotes used to support their theory and parapsychology representing the experimental corner of spiritism are the main attractions even as early as 1938 when *Fener* was published (Fener, 1938c). The fact that science, philosophy, healing incidents and general essays accompany this kind of

content once again shows how they focussed on the experimental, scientific and philosophical interpretations of spiritism.

On the other hand, the content generated by the Sufi group sets them apart immediately as their understanding of spiritism is complemented by Sufi / mystical topics, discussions on morality and occult side of spiritism. This particular side of spiritism puts less emphasis on it being a science and concentrates on supernatural forces, divination, witchcraft, conspiracies and in general, ‘secret sciences’ (İç Varlık, n.d.; Koryürek, 1949; Onbulak, 1956, 1958). Due to the nature of the content, this group was almost completely left out from the final 94 names included in the prosopographical analysis as it was highly difficult to determine whether these people would be classified as Sufis or spiritists. In addition, the content of their publications made it clear that they did not subscribe to spiritism as a ‘science’.

The last two groups are the ones that actually had a falling out. The content of *Ruh ve Madde* between 1960-62 when the groups were working together indicates that while the accompanying topics had changed somewhat from Ruhselman’s time, the main focus was still the theory of spiritism, experimental side of it along with anecdotal evidence. Morality had become a major point of discussion hinting at the moral function spiritism fulfilled for these people. However, comparing the journals published simultaneously by the two groups following the separation reveals the actual differences underlying their split. While *Ruh ve Madde* reverts back to its heavy emphasis on science, in *Ruh Dünyası* we see spiritism increasingly accompanied by moral and religious themes. This might have been what they meant when they vaguely referred to differences in approach and methodology. While the MTIAD group was more loyal to science, the DSB group had more to gain from spiritism in terms of moral and spiritual/religious needs. The DSB group continued to transform their content in their next journal *Sevgi Dünyası*. However, since they started to publish this in 1969, it remains beyond the temporal limits of this dissertation. I included the content of this later journal on the table in order to show that the differences between the groups become well-established and highly distinct from 1969 onwards showing the pertinence of the time-period set for this research.

**Table 2.** Content Distribution of Spiritist Journals<sup>15</sup>

	<b>RUH VE KAINAT</b>	<b>FENER</b>	<b>İÇ VARLIK</b>	<b>RUH VE MADDE (1962 - )</b>	<b>RUH VE MADDE (1960-1962)</b>	<b>RUH DÜNYASI</b>	<b>SEVGI DÜNYASI</b>
<b>1</b>	NS / Spiritism	Psychic Cases / Anecdotes	Sufism / Mysticism	NS / Spiritism	NS / Spiritism	Psychic Cases / Anecdotes	Current Events / Essays
<b>2</b>	Psychic Cases / Anecdotes	Parapsychology	NS / Spiritism	Parapsychology	Psychic Cases / Anecdotes	Morality	Politics and Social Issues
<b>3</b>	Parapsychology	NS / Spiritism	Morality	Science	Morality	NS / Spiritism	Occultism / Esotericism
<b>4</b>	Science	Current Events / Essays	Current Events / Essays	Psychic Cases / Anecdotes	Parapsychology	Religion	NS / Spiritism
<b>5</b>	Philosophy & Aesthetics	Healing Incidents	Occultism / Esotericism	Foreign Legitimizing Developments	Psychology	Foreign Legitimizing Developments	Religion
	<b>RUHSELMAN GROUP</b>		<b>SUFI GROUP</b>	<b>MTIAD GROUP</b>		<b>DSB GROUP</b>	

Table by author, data retrieved from spiritists journals.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible to observe the differences in the content of the journals in the sub-headings of each journal. *Fener* (Monthly Journal on Elevating Knowledge and Arts); *Ruh ve Kainat* (Monthly Scientific Moral and Psychic Journal); *İç Varlık* (Journal of Metapsychic Communiqués and Research); *Ruh ve Madde* (Official Media Organ of MTIAD); *Ruh Dünyası* (Scientific, Spiritist, Moral and Cultural Journal); *Sevgi Dünyası* (Monthly Cultural and Political Journal).

Beyond these four groups, there were, of course, others including independent researchers, members that were not directly involved in journal publications, and other associations. However, when their books and the objectives of their associations are analysed, it can be seen that they all fall within one of the below-categories in terms of emphasis; a) spiritism as science, b) spiritism as moral guidance and c) spiritism as an occult / mystical path. These categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive as the whole point of spiritism for these people was being able to synthesize and create hybrid philosophies. Moreover, this analysis helps us understand that spiritists, even though shared similar characteristics, were not a monolith group and they placed differing emphases on different interpretations.

#### **4.2.2. Common Motivations and Personal Accounts**

Despite the differences in approaches to spiritism, spiritists groups in Turkey were driven by common motivations. Having analysed the teachings and background of Turkish spiritists in an effort to understand the reasons behind their involvement in spiritism, in this section, I propose listening to their personal accounts. To this end, I compare and contrast the motivations presented in different spiritist journals in order to see whether there are any cross-cutting themes. The list of motivations presented below is constructed based on qualitative text analysis by letting categories flow from the source itself and assigning statements to these categories. Until this point, our understanding of what they found in spiritism was based on interpretations of their teachings and interpretation of spiritism in other contexts by other scholars. This is the part where I let them speak for themselves and explain their own motivations to find an answer to the question of why – why were they interested in spiritism? What were their motivations? What did spiritism offer? What were their personal accounts?

In the table below, you may find the summary of what they found in spiritism. Even though these categories were extracted from the journals (Fener, 1938b; İç Varlık, 1951-1957; Ruh Dünyası, 1963-1968; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952-1954; Ruh ve Madde, 1960-1965; Sevgi Dünyası, 1969), they were reinforced by other kinds of materials they produced. In however way they might have been put, the incentives that pushed this group toward spiritism fall into one of the 10 categories listed below.



**Table 3.** Motivation Matrix for Turkish Spiritists

<b>WHAT DID SPIRITISM PROVIDE?</b>				
<b>No</b>	<b>Ruhselman Group</b>	<b>MTIAD Group</b>	<b>DSB Group</b>	<b>Sufi Group</b>
<b>1</b>	Moral guidance, improvement and development	Moral guidance, improvement and development	Moral guidance, improvement and development	Moral guidance, improvement and development
<b>2</b>	Internal peace Solace	Internal peace Solace	Internal peace Solace	Internal peace Solace
<b>3</b>	A new synthesized understanding of science	A new synthesized understanding of science	A new synthesized understanding of science	
<b>4</b>	A new reality		A new reality	A new reality
<b>5</b>		Fraternity and unity	Fraternity and unity	
<b>6</b>		Social order		
<b>7</b>			Understanding of the divine order	Understanding of the divine order
<b>8</b>		Answers to existential questions	Answers to existential questions	
<b>9</b>		New information	New information	
<b>10</b>		A solution to the moral gap	A solution to the moral gap	

Table by author, data retrieved from spiritists journals

Even though the table itself is self-explanatory and shows significant overlap between motivations of different groups, it is necessary to elaborate some of the categories in order to better understand spiritist motivations. It is possible to observe the first two categories in all four of the groups. These benefits are related to how spiritism helped them deal with the crisis of faith and factuality that they were experiencing. Not only did spiritism provide a new moral path for them but it was also a source of solace easing their existential fears. Sevil Akay describes this function as follows:

First, it made me understand myself. Through these studies, I clearly learnt and understood what I am, why I am living, what existed before birth and what will happen after death as well as the principles of life and morality. Since I know how evolution works, I can now face all ups and downs in life with the same smile on my face (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969c: 14)

This statement demonstrates that spiritism offered a sense of solace by answering their existential questions and alleviating their fears of death. There are numerous accounts in all of the journals explaining how spiritism helped them deal with death. In one occasion, they even define their primary objective as “We examine the self through scientific methods and strive to understand and explain the objective of life on earth, the meaning of death and the nature of the afterlife” (Ruh Dünyası, 1964e: 1). As they were trying to achieve this particular goal, they also attracted an audience in search of solace. One of their readers explain this in a letter as “I learnt what death and life are. I am not afraid of death and I feel very close to spirits” (Ruh ve Madde, 1964a: 28). In the end, all spiritists were drawn to this path because of the moral guidance and solace it provided. However, this may bring up the question of “why did they choose spiritism in particular while there were other philosophies and religions providing answers for the same existential questions?”

Answering the above question requires looking into the third category on the list, i.e. the introduction of a new understanding of science that emphasized synthesis. Spiritist understanding of science has been explained in great detail in the previous chapter. Without repeating the same points, here I would like to present how individual spiritists made sense of this approach to science and what it meant for them in practice. In one interview conducted in 1948 with lawyer Baha Kayserilioğlu who served as a medium for a being named *Goethe*, he describes the influence of Ruhselman by saying:

As a child, I received a good religious education from my father. However, we encountered the materialist thought at school and university in the later years. Religion said one thing, science said another. I struggled quite a lot between the two. Thankfully, Bedri Bey came to my rescue. As he presented spiritual facts in a scientific manner, the battle of religion and science came to an end and thus, I acquired a new and solid balance in life (Özyiğit, 1972a: 22).

This statement attests to my observations until this point concerning the spiritist understanding of science. Another account by painter and teacher of literature Macit

Aray who served as a medium for a spirit named *Mustafa Molla* and contributed to the formulation of Ruhselman's two books *Mukadderat ve İcabat* and *Allah* supports this understanding (Aray, 1962). It reads:

Dogmatic beliefs passed down by family last only up until a certain age. As knowledge and experience accumulate and logic improves, spiritual matters as taught to us begin to look like a bunch of myths. There remains only two options for a young man whose belief in God and afterlife is shattered: He will either not think about these issues at all, or if he is someone who is prone to think about them, to revolt against a life with no meaning and with no future. In fact, both options result in the same inevitable way: Crisis. [...] Statements of ecclesiastics resembling mythological legends uninformed by the facts of the century or the solely materialists thoughts of the intellectuals enhance the feeling of emptiness within young people (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1970d: 11).

As indicated by this quotation, Macit Aray can come to terms with neither materialism nor religion on his own. This demonstrates that Ruhselman's concerns regarding the divisions within the field of knowledge is reflected in the thought process of his followers because Aray also implies the importance of unity in knowledge in science. Sevil Akay also describes a similar problem:

To be honest, I was an atheist during my high school years and as I studied medicine. I had no belief in any spiritual value. I only believed in the matter and five senses. [...] I considered those who engaged in such stuff as people who fooled themselves by pursuing dreams. [...] I observed a contradiction between what I was studying and spiritual beliefs and I was struggling and confused. As a result, I started working on spiritualism (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969c: 10).

This is the reiteration of a pattern observed in the 'inner conflicts' of almost all adherents. The struggle to find where their loyalties lay within the context of science and spirituality defines their pursuit of spiritism as a means of reconciliation. Güngör Özyiğit, who is a psychologist and writer of a book on Ruhselman also describes spiritism as a lifeline for intellectuals who were struggling between the science vs. religion dichotomy (Özyiğit, 2007).

These testimonies provide an insight into the motivations of neo-spiritualists. These and other accounts demonstrate the main challenge that they faced. It does not seem to be a sense of disillusionment with the scientism of the age but rather a sense of discord with the way science was conducted on materialist terms. Within this

framework, their education ceases to be a source of astonishment and becomes a point of explanation. It might be reasonable to state that this group of people pursued spiritist ‘studies’ not in spite of their education but because of their education. Their education prevented them from disregarding or discrediting science while not erasing the need to seek for more. They wanted to expand the scope of science beyond material issues to include spiritualistic ones. This becomes apparent in a quote attributed to Bedri Ruhselman and relayed by Ziya Kayserilioğlu: “Ziya Bey,” Ruhselman says, “We have been trying for a very long time yet we could not manage to transfer spiritual information to an academic ground. Today, there is only the science of the matter; is there a science for spiritualism? Spiritual issues are excluded from universities” (Temizel, 2014: 113). As it can be seen, along with other common motivations, Turkish spiritists were motivated by a desire to integrate spiritism and spiritual matters into science. However, this brings up the question: How did they practice spiritism as a ‘science’? What were the strategies and methods of the ‘science’ of the spirit beyond rhetoric? How did spiritism organize itself in Turkey?

### **4.3. Organization and Activities**

#### **4.3.1. Organizational Stages**

It is often the case that what people believe, teach and preach may not match with what they actually practice. Until this point, the teachings of spiritism and the motivations that inform these teachings have been elaborated in detail. However, it is just as essential to examine how spiritists conceptualized their methods, whether they practiced what they preached and what kind of strategies they adopted in their practices. Furthermore, understanding how one-man activity of Ruhselman conducting hypnotic séances in Turkish towns was transformed into a movement is crucial to find answers to my research questions of why and how. Therefore, in this section, I will describe and analyse the spiritist organizational features, methods and activities.

It is possible to discern two separate organizational phases at the origin of Turkish spiritism. These phases shall be designated as pre-MTIAD (1936-1950) and post-

MTIAD (1950 – 1969), and thus, the foundation of the research society may be accepted as a turning point (MTIAD, 1962; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952c). The initial years of the pre-MTIAD period is marked by low organizational capacity with no central organization, no institutionalization and uniformity. It was primarily based on word of mouth and small group organization. Until 1936, Ruhselman was relatively alone in his pursuit (Özyiğit, 1972d, 1972b; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). As previously-explained, he was in search of implementing the theoretical knowledge he learnt in Prague and he tried to master his skills of hypnotism. The first time he started to work regularly with a medium was in 1936 (Özyiğit, 1972d, 1972b; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). The backbone of the spiritist organization in this period was the séances conducted with the help of mediums (Ayverdi, 2005; Fener, 1938c; Ruhselman, 1946a). While some of these séances were exclusive to the inner circle, some of them were open to audiences. One other characteristic of the pre-MTIAD period was the regular meetings held at the homes of spiritists to predominantly discuss non-spiritist matters. Even though these meetings continued long after the foundation of the association, they constituted the main socialization environment for group members (Nirun, 2016; Temizel, 2014). Hikmet Omay describes one of these regular meetings as follows:

I learnt many subjects in these meetings, subjects which I couldn't learn in the university. Various different subjects including but not limited to history, philosophy, physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, and metaphysics were explained by authorities of the field (Omay, 1995: 16).

Omay also goes onto explain how getting the invitation to participate in these informal yet highly exclusive meetings was difficult because casual attendance was not condoned (1995). Séances and the initiation process to these informal meetings point to the characteristics of a community where the social relations between individuals were based on personal ties and information spread through those ties. However, beyond word of mouth, what enabled Ruhselman to reach larger numbers of people was the publishing of a journal and more importantly of his first book in 1946 (Fener, 1938c; Ruhselman, 1946a, 1946b, 1946c). This constituted a push for organization at a higher level and prompted the initiation for MTIAD.

Established in 1950, MTIAD was the beginning of the institutionalization of spiritism in Turkey (MTIAD, 1962; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952c). While it was the first, central and most well-known spiritist organization that is still in operation today, it was, by no means, the only organization and it had paved the way for the establishment of other spiritist/parapsychology associations. MTIAD was established as a society of “scientific, philosophical and moral unity” (MTIAD, 1962: 3) by Ruhselman and four of his friends, public accountant Muammer Bayurgil, Head of Industry Inspection Committee of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, Nurettin Özmen, Doctor Sevil Akay and lawyer bureaucrat Suat Plevne (MTIAD, 1962: 4). The official charter of the association sets its objectives as “explaining cases that cannot be explained through existing knowledge and experience,” “examining and explaining spiritist cases through scientific methods,” “preventing distorted interpretations,” “spreading high moral principles among its members,” “promoting knowledge and virtue” and “establishing mutual relations with other associations working for the same goals” (MTIAD, 1962: 3). Founded on these principles, the research society went onto undertake various domestic and foreign operations and activities (Bayer, 1963; Ruh ve Kainat, 1952d, 1953f).

Following MTIAD and possibly facilitated by the relative atmosphere of freedom created by the 1961 constitution, there were other attempts at institutionalization in the 1960s with TPK – *Türkiye Parapsikoloji Kurumu* (Turkish Institute of Parapsychology), TPAC - *Türkiye Parapsikoloji Araştırmaları Cemiyeti* (Turkey Parapsychological Research Society) and AMTİİD – *Ankara Metapsişik Tecrübeler ve İlmi İncelemeler Derneği* (Ankara Metapsychic Investigations and Scientific Research Society) founded in 1963 (Ruh Dünyası, 1963e; Ruh ve Madde, 1963e); ESIAC – *Ege Spiritik İlmi Araştırmalar Cemiyeti* (Aegean Spiritist Scientific Research Society) founded in 1964 (Ruh Dünyası, 1964b); DSB – *Dünya Sevgi Birliği* (World Love Association) founded in 1966 (Ruh Dünyası, 1965d) and AMC – *Ankara Metapsişik Cemiyeti* (Ankara Metapsychic Society) founded in 1967 (Ruh Dünyası, 1967a). Despite these attempts at institutionalization and organization, Turkish spiritism never became a mass movement or achieved high levels of organizational capacity since there was no umbrella organization bringing these

singular attempts together. They all remained as separate associations and carried out similar activities.

I included ways of initiation and introduction into spiritism as a question in the prosopographical questionnaire to get a sense of how Turkish spiritists were introduced to the phenomenon. Based on the compiled information, it is possible to see that there were two general paths, either through séances or publications. A large section of spiritists either attended a public séance or were invited by an acquaintance to a private one. Initiation of some of the core members of the movement also took place through these public séances. There exist various accounts of members describing how they heard of these spirit summoning meetings and decided to go see what they were about (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1969b, 1969d, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1970e, 1970f; Nirun, 2016; Temizel, 2014). While for some these remained solely as a source of entertainment, others became regulars of the meetings. The second path was through publications including books and periodicals. Books and journals published by Ruhselman himself were quite popular and they ensured the initiation of some of prominent names of Turkish spiritism including Refet Kayserilioğlu and Ergün Arıkdal (Arıkdal, 1964; Özyiğit, 2004; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001). Both of these names went onto becoming the presidents of MTIAD at one point. More than 70 percent of the 94 names included in this dissertation were members of one of the above-mentioned organizations and there is enough information to suggest that almost 40 percent of them worked with Ruhselman directly.

Having been organized under these different associations and societies, Turkish spiritists carried out numerous activities directed at not only promoting and publicizing their cause but also conducting research and experiments. Within the inner workings of associations, they continued to carry out private séances or informational meetings exclusive to members (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1970b; Ruh Dünyası, 1964a; Ruh ve Madde, 1960h, 1960j, 1960c). Moreover, they offered theoretical and applied classes to their members with the aim of training them on metapsychic matters (Arıkdal, 1963e; Ruh ve Madde, 1960j). In addition to such instructional activities, they also were engaged in research that they claimed to be

scientific. These included conducting hypnotic and parapsychological experiments on telepathy, telekinesis and more (Özyiğit, 1973; Ruh Dünyası, 1963e, 1967a; Ruh ve Madde, 1961b; Tahsuğ, 1960), forming research teams to investigate and report spirit-related cases around the country (Ruh Dünyası, 1964i; Ruh ve Madde, 1961h), offering healing services to those who request it (Gürel, 1963a; Ruh ve Madde, 1960l, 1961j, 1961a), conducting surveys and organizing contests on spirit-related cases (Ruh ve Madde, 1963f, 1964h) and building on the theory and methodology of neo-spiritualism through publications of various kinds books and terminology work (Arıkdal, 1963c, 1971; Tahsuğ, 1963).

Foreign operations, on the other hand, primarily concerned establishing links with spiritist research societies around the world to facilitate the flow of information and attending international conferences on spiritualism. Members of MTIAD were assigned as corresponding members of the Instituto de Cultura Espirita do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro (Ruh ve Madde, 1964c) and they organized trips to the branches of the International Spiritualist Federation. For instance, as the secretary-general of MTIAD, Reşat Bayer stayed in London for three months in early 1950s to attend and make observations at the head-quarters of the Federation (Bayer, 1963). Moreover, they invited foreign speakers to attend their weekly conferences on numerous topics. Dr H.N. Banerjee, one of the most well-known research scientists on reincarnation (Erman, 1963a; Ruh Dünyası, 1963e), British mediums Ralph Walton and his wife Joan Walton (Ruh Dünyası, 1965b), medium Maurice Barbanell who was the founder and editor of *Psychic News* of London were among their invitees (Ruh Dünyası, 1967b).

#### **4.3.2. Methodology**

As previously explained, Turkish spiritists were convinced of the scientific validity of their path in theory (Ruh Dünyası, 1963i). When it comes to practice, their methodology was mainly based on combination of “experiments” and “reasoning.” This is explained as follows:

In the book *Ruh ve Kainat*, [Ruhselman] based all the claims on human-beings on cases and experiments, examined them through scientific methods, evaluated the results through the fool-proof filter of reason and logic and in



the end, complemented them with the high-level information provided by discarnate beings (Özyiğit, 2007: 57-58).

This quotation reveals the layers of their supposedly-scientific methodology. They treated the events of séances as sensory data, and complemented this sensory data with reasoning and direct information from the spirits (Cansoy, 1953; Desterre, 1938; Eroğlu, 1962; Ruh ve Kainat, 1953a, 1953d; Tahsuğ, 1963; Tinel, 1938). Therefore, what happened in a séance is highly important.

For Turkish spiritists, there were three basic types of séances, namely informational, communicational and probative (Ruh ve Madde, 1962d; Ruhselman, 1946c, 1953h; Tahsuğ, 1963). While communicational séances (*haberleşme celsesi*) were considered to be more casual and mostly performed for entertainment, probative séances (*ispat celsesi*) were aimed at finding proofs and evidences to verify the existence of the spirits (“İspat Celseleri Hakkında,” 1962; Ruh ve Madde, 1962d). Even though the latter two types of séances were conducted fairly often, Turkish spiritists did not consider them to be as important for their cause. What they prioritized were informational séances (*bilgi celsesi*) conducted either to find answers to pre-written questions or to receive information from a discarnate being through multiple parapsychological/psychic methods (Ruh ve Madde, 1962e). The below information on how a séance would be conducted was compiled from multiple resources including the books and journals and made into a coherent whole as there was no comprehensive methodological handbook published by spiritists.

According to the spiritist code of conduct (*celse adabı*) that systematize medium-based research, the process of an informational séance starts much earlier than the actual event. Turkish spiritists insist on the importance of a preparation phase during which the participants of the séance must undergo rigorous training. They advise against attending a séance without having a deeper understanding of the theory of spiritism and of other branches of science (Ruh ve Madde, 1960k; Ruhselman, 1951c, 1952f, 1953j; Temizel & Tarlacı, 2015). They believe that ‘ignorance’ in this sense makes the participants susceptible to *obsesyon* (obsession). Obsession is their way of saying haunted by a low-level spirit and not being able to tell the difference between nonsense and quality information (Onbulak, 1958; Ruhselman, 1953i; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001).

Once the preparation phase is over, the actual séance started. Conducting the séance required the participation of at least three members, namely a medium or a subject, an operator and an observer (Onbulak, 1958). “Spiritual and material integrity of the experimenter”, “integrity of the subject” and “unknown influences effecting both of them” are cited as the essentials of a séance (Arikdal, 1963d: 36). Séances were conducted in various settings depending on the method of communication with the spirit. A typical séance would be carried out either in the building of the association in a dimly lit room or at a house. If it was a table-turning séance, the participants would gather around a table. However, if it was purely-medium based, then the medium would be in a sitting position. If it was a “writing medium”, then there would be pen and paper present for the medium to use, otherwise voice-recorders would be used to record the whole session. Once again, depending on the method, there would be pipes, microphones or other tools to project the voice of the spirit if it was speaking directly. In cases where the voice-recording was not possible, the operator or a separate stenographer would be tasked with transcribing the session (Bayer, 1963; İ. Kудay & Akay, 1950; İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1949; Onbulak, 1958; Ruhselman, 1951c, 1952f; Temizel & Tarlacı, 2015).

Both the medium and the operator had to comply with certain criteria to perform well. Spiritists listed these criteria in detail on multiple occasions demonstrating that they did not take mediumistic abilities for granted and did not trust everyone claiming to be a medium (Bayer, 1963; Ruhselman, 1952f, 1954h, 1954k). The medium is considered as a broadcasting station tuned to a specific frequency allowing them to communicate with the spirits. It was the operator that is the actual ‘scientific’ researcher (Ruhselman, 1954l). The operator was responsible for preparing the questions to be asked, performing hypnotism or magnetism on the medium to start the communication, record and direct the séance, categorize and organize the obtained information, carry out the necessary controls, make comparisons, draw conclusions, build hypotheses and present them (Ruhselman, 1954l). According to their code of conduct, during a séance, it was not condoned to ask mundane every-day questions, engage in fortune-telling, be influenced by mystic, religious or Sufi beliefs and take all information at face value (Bayer, 1963;

Ruhselman, 1952f, 1953i, 1953j). Therefore, there were rules to be followed both before and during the séance.

What happened once the communication with the spirit is over is the “phase of control and verification.” This mostly concern the “quality” of the information obtained through séances. The quality of the information had to be proven by cross-checking with already-existing knowledge. They claimed that quality information would be clear, consistent and would not simply rely on repetition. It was also required to not take the information at face value and to subject the spiritual information to analysis and synthesis with the help of already existing knowledge (Sevgi Dünyası, 1969b; Üstat, 1954). This is explained as follows

If a communiqué brings explanations to numerous things concerning the nature and human-beings, if it has a universal meaning, if it does not contradict reason and body of scientific knowledge and if it has the potential to shed light on certain problems that science has not been able to solve, that means the obtained information is valid. Moreover, inter-medium consistency is also highly important (Ruh ve Madde, 1960d: 31).

Therefore, an information séance consisted of three parts, i.e. the preparation, the actual séance and the subsequent analysis.

Contrary to the stereotypical idea of a séance invoking spooky imagery, Turkish spiritists approached it as an *experiment* within their own interpretation of science (Ruh ve Madde, 1963c, 1963b). The emphasis was not on the spectacle but on the procedures. Reşat Bayer, a medium and the secretary-general of MTIAD, explains this by stating:

There must be such a medium that, instead of providing us with perfect-spoken communiqués filled with detailed moral and philosophical information, speaks only and even one meaningless word but we can know and prove for certain and without any doubt that sole word does not come from the medium but from a discarnate being (Bayer, 1963: 85).

This is enough of an indicator of how they prioritized procedure over spectacle, at least in their discourse. Even after the passing of Ruhselman, research activities in MTIAD continued with the same emphasis. The following two quotes are from journals published respectively one and nine years after the death of Ruhselman:

For a while now, we have been conducting hypnotic experiments with a highly sensitive and valuable subject at our association. Having achieved a

greatly significant success on this front, we took the research a step further and started an *ecmnésie* (remembering one's past life) experiment that will hopefully take part in the world literature. [...] The details of the experiments recorded in magnetic tapes by our association shall be presented to public once all the controls and observations are carried out with care and rigour as required by a scientific experiment (Tahsuğ, 1960: 20-21).

[Doctor Ferhan Erkey and his group in the capital city] have been conducting séances and conferences on Tuesdays and Fridays at 20:30 in Ankara [...] The experiments are conducted publicly and they gladly allow for all types of controls. [...] The objective is to urge people to reflect on spiritual matters by demonstrating the facts through controlled experiments (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1970b: 10).

These were the types of activities undertaken by the associations on the research and training front.

The details of organization and rituals demonstrate that there was not a discrepancy between what they wanted to do and how they formulated their methods and strategies. They did not simply claim to be 'scientific' and then disregard this aspiration in the details of their methods. They remained loyal to what they thought was the scientific approach and made a serious attempt at fulfilling the scientific methods. The rules they incorporated for the acquisition of quality information and knowledge through their so-called 'experimental séances' indicate that they were consistent in their methodology to conduct scientific research. However, in the end, none of these strategies or teachings made their practices scientific. Even though they may have formulated an idealized version of spiritism as a science, they did not obtain any tangible results from their practices that would validate their aspirations. Due to lack of concrete results, they primarily relied on the volume of compiled list of reported psychic incidents/cases and on the authority of prominent names of the field along with the developments in the West to support their arguments (Batuhan, 1993; Bayer, 1963; Türesay, 2019). Even if they may have followed an entirely scientific methodology in investigating psychic phenomena, which they did not, this did not mean that they would obtain any reliable results. Scientifically exploring a phenomenon which does not exist cannot bring that phenomenon into existence. It would simply prove its nonexistence. This is what happened with Turkish spiritists. They tried to apply science to phenomena that did not exist. In the end, incorporating a scientific discourse was more than paying lip-service to the dominant paradigm of

the age because they still established their methodology in line with their discourse. Yet, the practice of spiritism remained as pseudoscientific since they claimed to use scientific methods but did not achieve any scientific results.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

This deep dive into the world of spiritists and their organizational features clarify some of the key themes and questions of this research. Hybrid ideas inherent in spiritism trying to reconcile conflicting epistemological and ontological approaches came from people with hybrid features embodying qualities often depicted as incompatible. Turkish spiritists were mostly educated, urban elites with white collar professions. Moreover, most of them being born and/or raised under the new republic, they were the products of the state and nation building processes of the republic. Yet, no matter how educated they were and how committed they were to the ideals of science, they were still experiencing difficulties in determining where their loyalties lay within the context of science and spirituality and were still struggling with the moral gap in their everyday lives. However, as they were searching for solutions, they did not exacerbate the antagonistic narrative surrounding the matters of modern science and religion. Instead, Turkish spiritists opted for a new, hybrid path.

Having underlined the importance of acknowledging the nuances and avoiding dichotomous classifications of people, it was also necessary to acknowledge that Turkish spiritists were not a monolith. They prioritized different sides of spiritism and valued different benefits they could get from spiritist teachings. Therefore, even though the group was similar in composition, their motivations and aspirations were not identical. Yet, the answer to the question of “why spiritism” was that it was a path that allowed them to reconcile these different aspirations. Their personal narratives attest to this conclusion. The impact of a crisis of faith, a moral gap and the solace provided by spiritism that negotiated and reconciled their internal conflicts are reflected in their own statements.

In terms of their strategies and methods, they were consistent in their claims to be scientific. They constructed their methodology in line with the understanding of ‘science’ that they were familiar with. It was highly detailed and provided a step-by-

step guideline on how to conduct spiritist experiments. Nevertheless, following a ‘scientific’ methodology and obtaining scientific results are not the same. They never managed to attain any scientific results and remained pseudoscientific. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, their goals and intentions matter more than their achievements since we already know that spiritism is not a science. Tracing the changes and continuities in approaches to science in the Ottoman-Turkish context, the methodology of spiritism reveals that science was still intertwined with moral discussions and was still attributed a role to solve all problems that Turkish spiritists were facing. However, even though they did not get any results, Turkish spiritists attempted to do more than simply transferring knowledge from the West. They tried to be a part of the process of scientific knowledge production. Yet, in the end, when they could not scientifically prove what they wished to prove, they still relied on the authority of the West and on the fact that parapsychology was still investigated in the West as well. This situation reveals the continuities in approaches to science that were present in the discourse and mentality of Turkish spiritists.

## CHAPTER V

### CONTEXTUALIZING TURKISH SPIRITISM IN THE MID-20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY TURKEY

*“Throughout its Victorian heyday, spiritualism was condemned as the work of Satan, a sordid commercial ‘business’, an ‘epidemic delusion’, a ‘wretched superstition’, ‘filth’, and humbug. The vehemence and frequency with which hostile remarks were levelled at spiritualism reflects its popularity in mid-Victorian Britain”*

Richard Noakes (2004: 5)

*“To be an avowed spiritist was, to open oneself to ridicule and to accusations of being ‘superstitious.’ The secular press mocked followers as credulous, somewhat silly, and very likely the dupes of fraudulent mediums. Scientists rejected the movement, despite its claims to empiricism, as unscientific, and the religious press rejected it as dangerous to the faith.”*

Lynn L. Sharp (2006: 16)

These quotations describing how spiritism was received in France and the UK point to a larger pattern that could also be applied to other contexts including the Latin America, the rest of Europe and Asia. As previously explained, spiritism always went hand in hand with stigma and it received criticism as well as attacks from not only one section of the society but from multiple fronts (Abend, 2004; Hess, 1987; Koss, 1976; Moreira-Almeida et al., 2005; Noakes, 2004). These included the media along with the scientific and religious communities. In the case of Cuba, for instance, the state itself stood against spiritism defending “medical orthodoxy” against the unorthodox healing methods of spiritism (Lambe, 2018). Therefore, within the broader context, spiritism had always been chastised and condemned. Until this point, I have analysed Turkish spiritism for what it was and Turkish spiritists for who they were. In this last chapter, I take Turkish spiritism out of its own bubble and

contextualize it in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey. Seeing how it was treated everywhere else, I analyse its relationship with the political and bureaucratic elites and examine how it was received by and represented in the media and literature. The chapter is concluded by presenting the critics of Turkish spiritism.

Contextualization is necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, it reveals whether Turkish spiritism had a similar faith with its counterparts in other countries in terms of its reception. This helps us understand the intricacies of the movement tying it to or separating it from other spiritist movements. Secondly, it is key to question the ideas on science and spirituality that was prevalent at the time. Until now, this dissertation looked into what the existence and teachings of spiritists say about Turkish modernization. However, their reception in the eyes of the political and bureaucratic elites, society and media is just as telling to get a sense of the dominant approaches to science and spirituality. Spiritist teachings had a specific approach to both science and spirituality. While these teachings affirmed a particular interpretation, they also defied the conventional understanding. When I contextualize spiritism and highlight the way it was received, I aim to do more than simply listing the criticism that the spiritists faced. The types of criticism Turkish spiritists received reveals what was acceptable and unacceptable in terms of approaches to science and spirituality.

### **5.1. Turkish Spiritists and Political/Bureaucratic Elites**

Between 1936 and 1969, Turkish politics went through periods of radical transformation. Following the transition to multiparty politics, the founding party of the republic, CHP (Republican People's Party), was eventually replaced by DP (Democrat Party) (Zürcher, 1997). This marked the beginning of the centre-right in Turkish politics. In these three decades, there were more than twenty different governments that came to power in Turkey with even a military intervention taking place in 1960 (Zürcher, 1997). Turkish politics in this period is depicted within the context of the rivalry between the CHP tradition representing the state and the official ideology and the newly emerging centre-right claiming to represent the “nation, civil politics and democracy” (Mert, 2007: 18-19) Considering this general



depiction, it may seem counter-intuitive to create a single category of “political and bureaucratic elites” and to analyse their relationship with Turkish spiritists. It would be reasonable to expect a transformation in the composition of the political and bureaucratic elites in parallel with the changes in the ruling party and its ideological position.

However, a closer inspection reveals that this was not exactly the case. That is because the centre-right primarily represented by DP in this period did not reject but rather affirmed the founding ideology and institutions of the republic by repackaging the modernization project in a new conservative cover (Mert, 2007). This meant that, emerging from within CHP, the members of the centre-right were not against the modernization project of the republic and what they wished to achieve was re-coding the modernization process in traditional symbols and terminology (Mert, 2007). This has constituted the basis of centre-right discourses since the 1950s. Mert even argues that the centre-right was not different from the political and bureaucratic elites identifying with CHP in terms of their intellectual composition and systems of value (Mert, 2007). The difference was in practical habits and visible symbols accompanying their policies. Within this context, Mert states that even though they may have differed in their policies, the political and bureaucratic elites were the representatives of the same cultural revolution sharing common “lifestyles and mind-sets” (Mert, 2007: 21). Within this framework, in this section, I use the general category of “political and bureaucratic elites” not to refer to a specific government, a group of ruling elites or members of a specific party but to designate people informed by the same intellectual sources and systems of value, people formed by the same process of modernization while acknowledging their differences and diversity.

What is striking in the relationship between Turkish spiritists and the political/bureaucratic elites is that spiritists did not receive any hostility from these elites at any point of their activities. What makes the lack of hostility striking is the general context of the modernization process in Turkey. As previously explained in detail, this process was informed by multiple sources including but not limited to the values of the Enlightenment, a particular understanding of secularism or laicism,

positivist political theory, 19<sup>th</sup> century scientism, materialism and rationalism (Kazancıgil, 1981; Özbudun, 1997). Modernization was, thus, based on the promises of a rationally organized society that had been rid of superstition and irrational authorities (Dole, 2004). Within the framework of the fight against superstition and traditional authority, there was even a law enacted: *Tekke ve Zaviyelerle Türbelerin Seddine ve Türbedarlıklar ile Bir Takım Unvanların Men ve İlgasına Dair Kanun* (Law no 677 on the Abolishment and Prohibition of Dervish Lodges and Central Dervish Lodges, of Tomb-Keeping and of Certain Titles) (1925). The law not only outlawed the activities of religious orders within the scope of dervish lodges but it also prohibited providing services related to fortune-telling, witch-craft, exorcism, practice of divination and claiming to make people's wishes come true (1925). It is perceivable how the enactment of this law would bring the cult activities to a halt. Yet, Turkish spiritists never faced any negative criticism for serving the forces of "tradition and superstition" from the political/bureaucratic elites who were operating under this particular setting. They were either ignored or tolerated. Moreover, as a movement that repeatedly claimed to be apolitical, spiritists actually had a specific political position and sought political clout to achieve legitimacy and recognition. Thus, their relationship with the political/bureaucratic elites was defined by interaction at some points and lack of interaction at others.

While Turkish spiritists remained vague and often non-descript in their political and social ideas, it is possible to observe a very clear pro-Atatürk and/or Kemalist tendency in their teachings as they interpret Kemalist principles in their own ways. As early as 1938 in Ruhselman's first spiritist journal *Fener*, they declare their commitment to the Six Arrows representing the six pillars of Kemalism by stating

We have the symbol of Six Arrows that summarizes the honourable directions of progress in definite terms much like a guidebook. [...] We want to live in the atmosphere of broad horizons that these Six Arrows point to (Fener, 1938d).

In the years to follow, in different journals, it is possible to see pages upon pages dedicated to Atatürk, his ideals and vision on special days such as May 19 the commemoration of Atatürk, youth and sports day (Bilge, 1965; Fener, 1938a; Yılmazkaya, 1966). Following the military intervention in 1960, the official journal

of MTIAD, *Ruh ve Madde* even declared support for the intervention by interpreting it as something that took place in the name of the ideals set by Atatürk and stated “The events that materialized on May 27 point to a highly critical phase in which the bitter struggle between positive and negative forces started to develop in favour of positive forces” (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960c). In their interpretation of Kemalism, they emphasize the importance of the fight against ignorance, anti-clericalism, importance of merit, secularism and intellectual independence, anti-imperialism, humanism, pacifism, social justice and women’s rights (Bilge, 1964b, 1965; Birol, 1972b; Omay, 1995; Ruhselman, 1938b; Şenyuva, 1970). They argue that Kemalist nationalism is civic nationalism emphasizing the significance of tolerance, equality and a human-based approach beyond being about any religion, ethnicity or race (Bayer, 1963; Omay, 1995; Ruhselman, 1938b; Şenyuva, 1970).

Furthermore, they allocate journal space and issues to the discussions revolving around gender equality and women’s rights. They continuously reinforce the ideal of the republican women with statements such as “intellectual, enlightened and virtuous Turkish women” (İç Varlık, 1953) or “the mothers of the nation” (Birol, 1972a). The traditional authority over the women, women’s place in the family and society are also among the topics that are discussed (Irmak, 1965). Hikmet Omay, one of the prominent women spiritists of the day, also says in her book that “In our laws, there is no difference between men and women” (1995) and that “Atatürk is the titan of humanity in the whole of world history. Nobody can compete with him. He is assigned to this field even after he passed away” (1995). They even interpret the famous line of Atatürk “Peace at home, peace in the world” in their own way stating that their mission is to establish peace not only at home and in the world but also in the inner world of people (Bilge, 1964e). As previously explained, they see spiritism as a complementary philosophy that fills the moral gap in Kemalist ideology (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1960d). As it can be seen, Turkish spiritists did not oppose the official discourse and the founding ideals of the Turkish republic. They did not identify any incompatibility between spiritism and Kemalism. Similar to the way in which Atatürk was incorporated into the mythos of Ruhselman, he was once again placed within the spiritist discourse. This situation hints at a new type of republican intellectual exemplified by the spiritists.

Beyond their discourse, there are tangible interactions between spiritists and the political/bureaucratic elites revealing more on the nature of their relationship. The earliest spiritist encounter that can be traced back to the political elites is narrated by Ali Fuat Cebesoy, one of the most prominent names of the Turkish fight for independence, military officer, politician and a classmate of Mustafa Kemal. In his memoirs, he describes an evening in 1924 during which Kazım Karabekir, Fevzi Çakmak and Cevat Çobanlı, all three of whom were political, bureaucratic and military elites that played crucial roles not only in the War of Independence but also in the building of the new Turkish state, took part in a spiritist séance accompanied by Mustafa Kemal. Despite his cynical and sceptical attitude, Cebesoy depicts the incident as entertaining (Cebesoy, 1960). Certainly, this solitary and isolated scene cannot be used to reach major conclusions, however it does give a hint as to how spiritist endeavours may have been regarded as mere entertainment.

In the early years of Turkish spiritism under the leadership of Ruhselman, the relationship between spiritists and the political/bureaucratic elites was defined by tolerance. Numerous spiritist publications all claim that in the 1940s, Ruhselman was allowed to give lectures in such platforms as the Ankara University Faculty of Political Science and Faculty of Language History and Geography, the Galatasaray High School and Radio Ankara (Nirun, 2007; Salt & Çobanlı, 2001; Sarıkaya, 1978; Temizel, 2014). These lectures might have taken place through initiatives of student organizations though there is not enough information to verify these claims. However, what supports their argument is that in his memoirs, Sabahattin Zaim, a Nakşibendi economist at Istanbul University, reveals that he attended two of those conferences in Ankara University and that Ruhselman gave speeches at Radio Ankara (Zaim, n.d., 2008). Zaim expresses his astonishment by saying,

What was remarkable was that a lecture trying to prove the existence of spirits was allowed to take place at a materialist age. [...] The fact that it was not prevented and it was organized in the Faculty of Political Science showed that the state considered it appropriate to teach such a topic to its civil servants (Zaim, n.d., 2008: 97).

Moreover, in 1952, now under a different government for the first time, Ruhselman is claimed to have submitted a report on experimental spiritism to the Ministry of National Education to explain what spiritism is and to request its inclusion in

academic curricula (BAM, 1981). Although it is claimed that the Ministry did almost include the subject, this piece of information remains to be evidenced. The efforts to establish a spiritist parapsychology institute continued after Ruhselman as well. Dr Ferhan Erkey, the lead spiritist in Ankara, describes these efforts as:

My ultimate objective was to establish an institute and introduce this field into the universities. In this way, it would gain legal legitimacy. Prof Şerif Çankal and Prof Recep Doksat were not able to convince the Ministry to accept the project despite all the efforts (A. Kayserilioğlu, 1970b: 8-12; Nirun, 2016: 189).

These are all examples of spiritists seeking recognition. This may bring up the question of whether Turkish spiritists tried to use spiritism and this ‘novel source of knowledge’ to obtain a form of capital or influence in the same way modern scientific knowledge was used by Ottoman bureaucrats to gain statist capital and authority in the administration of the Empire (Yalçınkaya, 2015). Could spiritism have been a means to an end rather than an end in itself? However, considering the discrepancy between the prestige of modern science and of spiritism, I would argue that spiritism in itself did not provide Turkish spiritists any prestige. Moreover, in spiritist writings from the period, it is not possible to observe ambitions of gaining influence over the society or attempts at being more integrated into the centre. In addition, the failure to convince the Ministry to establish an official parapsychology institute at the university level indicates that although Turkish spiritists and their activities were tolerated, the political/bureaucratic elites did not actively endorse them. This situation demonstrates that while Turkish spiritist did pursue recognition, it is highly unlikely that they were after recognition for its own sake as spiritism was not necessarily a source of prestige among political / bureaucratic elites. Gaining legitimacy and recognition was a means to spread their own teachings both in the early and later years of Turkish spiritism.

In the following years, not only were some of the prominent names of spiritism employed in government jobs as bureaucrats, there are numerous other stories, mentioning the involvement of politicians and bureaucrats in spirit-summoning sessions. Dr Ferhan Erkey describes his sessions as

The entire upper crust of society attended our séances in Ankara. Everyone from military officials to intellectuals, from members of the parliament to

ministers used to come. I vividly remember, one day, there were 9 ministers present in one of my séances. [...] Minister of State Kemal Satır, Nüvit Yetkin and others were there. [...] At the same séance, Minister of Tourism Ali İhsan Göğüş and Minister of Internal Affairs Orhan Öztrak were also present (Nirun, 2016: 188).

It is necessary to note that all the names mentioned in this quotation were members of CHP. These particular sessions were reported by Beyhan Cenççi, a well-known journalist and politician in the newspaper *Ulus* in January 1966 (Cenççi, 1966a, 1966b, 1966c, 1966d, 1966e, 1966f; Nirun, 2016: 189). Erkey also claims to have worked with İsmet İnönü regularly providing him with communiqués and information about the future (Nirun, 2016). One of the alleged members of the Ankara Metapsychic Society, İsmail Hakkı Ketenoğlu, even goes onto become the president of the Constitutional Court of Turkey in 1970 (Nirun, 2016). These accounts do show that being a spiritist or attending spiritist séances was not a hindrance in terms of members' professional careers.

However, in addition to being interpreted as a source of entertainment or fortune-telling, there are two incidents that reveal another aspect of how spiritism may have been seen by the political/bureaucratic elites. In 1964, *Ruh Dünyası* published an interview with the Minister of National Education Dr İbrahim Öktem under the government of İsmet İnönü. The title of the interview was *Milli Eğitim Bakanı "Manevi bir desteğe lüzum var" dedi* (The Minister of the National Education said: "There is a need for spiritual/moral support") and the content revolved around the moral and spiritual needs of the community (Ruh Dünyası, 1964d). The minister's answer to one specific question is quite interesting. I include the question and the answer as they were published:

Question 3 – Do you think that it is necessary to scientifically investigate spiritist matters such as telepathy, clairvoyance and hypnosis in our universities as is the case in the rest of the world?

Answer – I believe it would be beneficial to address these issues and to have academics investigate them. This might also serve as a scientific control to the need of the society. If the society is left unattended, it would seek to fill the gap in this field in primitive ways. Therefore, it is beneficial, to an extent, to cast the light of science in this direction as well (Ruh Dünyası, 1964d: 6-7).

In the rest of the interview, the Minister also declared his support for the establishment of a parapsychology institute in Turkish universities (Ruh Dünyası,

1964d). This particular anecdote is highly important to see that the spiritist mission to fill the moral gap in a scientific manner was reflected in the statements of the Minister as well. A year later in 1965, Dr Refet Kayserilioğlu, the owner of *Ruh Dünyası*, goes to Ankara to pay a visit to the “high officials of the government, party leaders and the President himself” (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1966: 14). Kayserilioğlu claims that the President Cemal Gürsel provided support for their movement by saying “I wholeheartedly approve your ideas. You are on a very auspicious path” (1966: 15). Even though it is necessary to regard these claims with caution as they were reported by the spiritists themselves, these accounts do show that spiritism was not grouped together with religious or cultic orders.

In analysing the relationship between the political/bureaucratic and spiritist elites, it is necessary to acknowledge that while political/bureaucratic elites mostly ignored or tolerated the spiritist activities, Turkish spiritists pursued political clout in order to gain legitimacy, have academic recognition and spread their teachings. On the side of the political/bureaucratic elites, at some points, they ignored the existence of spiritism altogether not paying any attention to their activities, possibly because it was considered as entertainment. At other points, they tolerated spiritism without creating any obstacles in its way and, if we are to believe spiritists claims, sometimes even providing it with platforms to spread the spiritist message. The elite composition, scientific claims and the pro-Atatürk stance of the spiritists may have had a role in this tolerance. People engaged in spiritism were assigned to prestigious positions within the state structure and people within the state structure engaged in spiritism even if it was merely for entertainment. On the side of the spiritists, they did identify with the ideals of Mustafa Kemal especially in terms of creating a rationally organized society based on science and they considered themselves as a crucial cog in the whole wheel that fulfilled a moral/spiritual function. Although it is impossible to identify the political position of each individual member, the overall discourse and publications follow this logic. Yet, in the end, spiritists formed relationships with political/bureaucratic elites to establish grounds for legitimizing their activities. Considering the backlash and harsh criticism spiritists received from the state and its representatives in other countries, this relationship defined by tolerance remains puzzling. Despite being engaged in activities that can be deemed

‘superstitious’ and similar to activities of cults and religious orders, Turkish spiritists were not lumped together with either cults or religious orders. This situation hints at the fact that there was no one type of a republican elite and that spiritist approach to science and religion was deemed tolerable.

## **5.2. Impact of Spiritism on the Turkish Society**

It is difficult to assess the overall impact of spiritism on the Turkish society. While communicating with spirits was a relatively common phenomenon as a party game, the underlying philosophy constructed by Turkish spiritists rarely accompanied those games (Ayverdi, 2005; Sardağ, 1991; Zarcone, 2014). Therefore, the fact that people were gathering around tables all around the country, with cups, Ouija boards or supposed-mediums do not signify anything on its own for the relationship between Turkish spiritists and society. When it comes to analysing this relationship, the best place to look at is their audience and their representation in the media and the literary world. Analysing their audience is useful in evaluating the scale of their impact, the kind of people they addressed and what they provided for this audience. On the other hand, their representation in the media and the literary world has the potential to explore its imagery in the minds of the wider society that was not their audience.

### **5.2.1. Audience**

While it was not easy to find information on their audience, the journals they published provided a glimpse into this issue. Some of these spiritist journals published audience interaction pages where their readers sent questions and comments and these were published usually with their name, address and sometimes with their profession. These sections existed in three of the journals published between 1936-1969, namely *Ruh ve Kainat* published by Ruhselman, *Ruh ve Madde* published as the official media outlet of MTIAD from 1960 onwards and *Ruh ve Dünya* published by the DSB group that was separated from MTIAD. In compiling the information about the readers, the objective was to get a sense of who they were and how widespread the influence of these journals were. Even though the end result is not the most representative database, it still gives us an idea.



The first characteristic that could be identified was the gender of the readers. The gender distribution is similar to the figures for gender distribution of spiritists themselves. In all three journals, the overwhelming majority of the readers were men with 70 percent in *Ruh ve Kainat*, over 88 percent in both *Ruh ve Madde* and *Ruh Dünyası*. This meant that out of the 201 readers included in this analysis, 172 were men and 19 were women. It was not possible to identify the gender of 10 readers since they either only provided their initials or they had unisex names. Moreover, *Ruh ve Madde* offered their readers the option to become honorary members since MTIAD did not have any branches outside Istanbul and they published the names of these honorary members in different issues (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1961b; *Ruh ve Madde*, 1961k, 1964i, 1964j, 1964k). Not surprisingly, the large majority of these readers were also male with over 90 percent or 27 people out of 30.

As regard to their profession, the dataset at hand was not sufficient to talk about any discernible patterns. That is because, the vast majority of the readers did not provide any details on their profession in their letters to these journals. Out of 19 people who provided information on their profession in *Ruh ve Madde*, 5 were teachers, 5 were high school or university students, 4 were civil servants of various kinds, 2 were engineers along with a dentist, a banker and an accountant. Some of the honorary members were civil servants, students, teachers, engineers and accountants. Even though the data on professions do not provide a larger pattern in terms of distribution, it is interesting to see that much like spiritists themselves, the readers, who did disclose their profession, were white collar middle-class employees.

To see whether spiritism had a wide reach, I also looked into where the readers were from. This analysis showed that almost all the readers wrote from urban areas with over 87 percent of them being from metropolitan and provincial cities. The rest wrote from small towns and townships with only 1 reader writing from a village. 91 out of 201 persons wrote from one of the three metropolitan cities. This clearly shows that Turkish spiritism was an urban movement both in terms of its sources and its audience. Looking into the regional distribution of readers shows that the Marmara and Central Anatolian regions had the largest number of spiritist readers with 74 and 43 persons respectively. They were followed by the Black Sea (27), Mediterranean

(21), Aegean (19) regions. The eastern and south-eastern parts of the country housed only 12 readers collectively. They even had one reader from Beirut, Lebanon. This regional distribution demonstrates that while Turkish spiritists reached all regions of the country with their publications, their readership was mostly concentrated in the western parts of the country.

One last point that is worth mentioning regarding their readership is what these spiritist journals offered to the readers. There were three main functions these journals served in the lives of their readers. The first and the most prominent one is mental health support. There are dedicated pages in these journals where their readers send letters explaining their mental troubles including everything from depression to social anxiety, to hysterical fits to insomnia, from tics to phobia (Atalay, 1963; R. Kayserilioğlu, 1963; Ruh Doktoru, 1963a, 1963c, 1963b, 1963d). These issues are never framed as “mental issues” but are considered to be “psychic” or “spiritual” issues relating to the “psyche” or the “spirit / soul” (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1963; Ruh Doktoru, 1963d). For example, in Ruh *Dünyası*, there are monthly columns titled “Your Spiritual Peace” and “Your Spiritual Problems” where they address readers’ questions on psychological issues providing them with advices (R. Kayserilioğlu, 1963; Ruh Doktoru, 1963a). In other journals, they publish informative pieces on topics such as psychosomatic illnesses, the consciousness and the subconscious, instincts and sexuality, intelligence and how the mind works, on personality and different psychopathological conditions (Aray, 1964; Arıcan, 1960b; Doğrul, 1964; A. Kayserilioğlu, 1964; Ruh ve Madde, 1961i, 1963a; Songar, 1964; Tahsuğ, 1961). They even provide advice on issues that would fall into the scope of developmental psychology. These include advice on how to raise children in accordance with their developmental stages and on dealing with adolescents (Erer, 1964; Z. Kayserilioğlu, 1961c, 1961a, 1961b). It is possible to observe readers seeking advice and solutions to their psychological and mental issues in the general “Q&A” sections of the journals included at the very end of every issue.

On the health front, another service provided by these journals and accordingly associations are “alternative healing” opportunities. Many readers who were faced with incurable diseases, who were disappointed in orthodox healing methods or

whose psychological problems persisted despite all efforts resorted to spiritist healing services (Gizer, 1960; Ruh ve Madde, 1960l, 1961j). These services were mainly based on methods such as acupuncture, hypnotism, magnetism inspired by the passes of Franz Mesmer (Arıcan, 1960a, 1964; Güreli, 1963a; Ruh ve Madde, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c; Tahsuğ, 1960). Spiritist doctors claimed to have gone as far as performing surgeries using hypnosis without using anaesthesia (Ruh Dünyası, 1965e; Ruh ve Madde, 1961a). These journals publicized their “success” stories and explained how they cured this or that patient, attracting readers who needed this type of services (Ruh ve Madde, 1960l; Tahsuğ, 1960). The third and last function of these journals for the readers was providing “moral guidance and support” for those who were struggling with a crisis of faith or with the loss of the loved one.

## **5.2.2. Representation in Media and Literature**

### **5.2.2.1. Media Coverage**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey between 1936 and 1969, the newspaper was still the primary mass medium along with the radio that could reach all parts of the society. The circulation numbers were high and the newspaper still evoked respect as a medium (Özçağlayan, 2014). Keeping this in mind, I turned to newspapers to observe the reception and representation of spiritism in the media. The starting point in identifying the newspapers was the monthly columns in spiritist journals where they presented a selection of news articles published on issues related to spiritism under different rubrics such as *Cemiyetten Haberler* (News from the Society). Starting here and compiling a list of all media appearances of spiritism, I observed that the relationship between spiritism and the media resembled the relationship with the political/bureaucratic elites. That is, while Turkish spiritists sought media attention to publicize and promote their teachings, the media was mostly indifferent or tolerant and even accommodating at times towards spiritist activities.

On the side of spiritists, it is possible to argue that they continuously sought media attention and presence. A group of them held a weekly radio program in İzmir Radio station (Akkaş, 1952a), Refet Kayserilioğlu had a column titled *Ruh Huzuru* (Spiritual Peace) in the newspaper *Akşam* to write on spiritist matters (Ruh Dünyası, 1963f). They welcomed media attention by giving interviews to various newspapers

and magazines including *Hürriyet*, *Akşam* and *Hayat* (Ruh Dünyası, 1963f; Ruh ve Madde, 1962h, 1964b). They organized conferences, seminars, panel discussions, exhibitions, musical performances, public séances and press conferences. On 12 August 1963, Doctor Sevil Akay attended a panel discussion moderated by Abdi İpekçi on İstanbul Radio debating Dr Memduh Eren and Dr Faruk Bayülkem (Ruh Dünyası, 1963i). DSB held an exhibit titled *Kavga mı Sevgi mi?* (Fight or Love?) that was allegedly visited by 70 thousand people in 11 days (O. Gürsoy, 1966). In 1960 and 1961, the president of MTIAD is reported to have given three separate talks in the YTÜ (Yıldız Technical University) (Ruh ve Madde, 1961e). In 1965, it is claimed that the content of the journal *Ruh ve Madde* was transferred to television with a weekly program that lasted 20 minutes and was broadcast by Istanbul Technical University Board of Television<sup>16</sup> (Ruh ve Madde, 1964e). In 1964, MTIAD launched *Ruhsal Olaylar Anketi* (Survey on Psychic Incidents) via its media organ *Ruh ve Madde*. This survey started with 12 questions on psychic incidents that was aimed at determining the “different types of psychic incidents” and the “characteristics of the mediums including gender, age, level of education and hereditary background” (Ruh ve Madde, 1963d: 18-19). They collected answers from their readers and systematically compiled data through this survey, which was reportedly published in various local and national newspapers such as *Ses in Aydın*, *Yeni Gazete* and *Hürriyet* and reported by AA (*Anadolu Agency*) (Ruh ve Madde, 1964f).

On the side of the media, spiritists, their activities and teachings were mostly reported as intriguing news items that would capture the attention of the readers (Ruh Dünyası, 1963g; Ruh ve Madde, 1960g, 1964g). The aim was to arouse curiosity and interest by talking about a group of ‘eccentric’ personalities and their unusual pursuits. To this end, it is possible to find interviews with spiritists, essays on spiritist matters and serialized translations of famous spiritist books. Examples of reporting spiritist activities as curious and miscellaneous news items include a piece on the song that was claimed to have been written by the spirit of Dede Efendi, a well-

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<sup>16</sup> İTÜ TV was a television channel broadcast between 1951 and 1971. The channel introduced television technology to Turkey and paved the way for the establishment of TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) (Yanatma, 2002).

known composer, published in *Akşam* on 27 March 1960 (Ruh ve Madde, 1960f), the pieces on the miraculous results of hypnotism published in *Akşam* on various occasions (Gürel, 1963b), a piece on somnambulism published in *Hürriyet* on 19 January 1964 (H. Akalın, 1964) or a piece on people who could see with their fingertips published in *Milliyet* on 13 January 1964 (“Parmak ucu ile gören insanlar var,” 1964). As the content of these articles suggests, these pieces did not aim to promote or condemn spiritism. They were mainly descriptive news intended to amuse the readers.

The earliest example of an interview with a spiritist was in 1948. The first ever interview with Bedri Ruhselman himself was reportedly published in the newspaper *En Son Dakika* (Breaking News) and in the magazine *Her Hafta* (Every Week) (Temizel, 2014: 35). Other examples include the interview series with MTIAD conducted by Nail Gürel for the newspaper *Akşam* in 1962 (Ruh ve Madde, 1962h), the interview series with the executive board of TPK conducted by Adnan Tahir for the newspaper *Hürriyet* in 1963 (Ruh ve Madde, 1960e) or the interview with the representatives of MTIAD conducted by Afif Yesari published in the issue 18 of the magazine *Hayat* on 23 April 1964 (Ruh ve Madde, 1964d). One of these interviews is praised and described in *Ruh ve Madde* as being “published in a highly scientific and genuine way” (Ruh ve Madde, 1962h) for being neutral in its reporting. Beyhan Cençi’s article series titled *Öbür Dünyadan Alınan Sesler* (Voices from the Afterlife) published in *Ulus* over the course of a week in January, 1966 is a good example for this type of neutral reporting. Cençi presented spiritists’ claims, arguments and activities in a matter-of-fact way without ridiculing or criticizing them. Even though he also reported the types of criticism spiritists received, the article series itself remained informative (Cençi, 1966a, 1966b, 1966c, 1966d, 1966e, 1966f). Thus, these interviews and articles, while sensationalizing the topic, were mostly neutral in their reporting letting the reader reach their own conclusions.

Other examples of media representation of spiritism included newspaper articles primarily discussing the possibility of communicating with the spirits, the nature of psychic phenomena and the scientific merit of spiritist activities. In this sense, they were similar to articles published within spiritist journals themselves. For example,

in the newspaper *Vakit*, there was a column titled *Ruh Hadiseleri – İlim Adamlarımız ve Mütefekkirllerimiz ne diyorlar?* (Psychic Events-What Do Our Scientists and Philosophers Say?). In this column, they shared the opinions of people they considered to be a ‘scientist’ or a ‘philosopher.’ On 19 November 1946, Dr Fevzi Erçinöl, the chief physician of Edirne Hospital, shared his take on spiritism explaining the three scientific ways to conduct *ispiritizma* (spiritism) (Erçinöl, 1946). On 3 December 1946, Mehmet Baha Toven, linguist and translator, was given a platform to explain how spiritism was going to be acknowledged as a science soon enough (Toven, 1946). The same newspaper had other columns dedicated to spiritist matters. Under *Ruhlar Alemi* (Realm of the Spirits), they published the translation of a book by Hannen Swaffer, a famous spiritist, in a series (Swaffer & Kanok, 1946). Under *Sürnatural Hadiseler* (Supernatural Incidents), they discussed the pros and cons of spiritism with Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, a well-known Turkish poet, intellectual, and a nationalist politician (Us, 1946a, 1946b, 1946c). A few years later, on 18 December 1949, Cumhuriyet published an article titled *Ölülerle Temas Mümkün mü?* (Is It Possible to Make Contact with the Dead?) discussing the implications of supernatural abilities such as telepathy (Kan, 1949). These articles were also rather descriptive and did not incorporate any harsh criticism towards spiritism or Turkish spiritists.

Compared to neutral and informative publications on spiritism, it is more difficult to come across newspaper articles that criticized and attacked Turkish spiritists. One example I could identify was Refi Cevad Ulunay, who was a highly controversial conservative figure and who was among the 150 personae non gratae sent to exile after the republic was founded (Heper et al., 2018). Upon returning to Turkey, Ulunay had started writing a column in the newspaper *Milliyet* titled *Takvimden Bir Yaprak* (A Calendar Page). On 5 March 1965, Ulunay wrote a critical mocking article on the DSB group and their spiritist activities. Titled *Ruhlardan İmdad* (Appealing to Spirits for Help), the article voiced Ulunay’s scepticism regarding the possibility of communicating with the spirits and went on to mock the spiritists in a rather harsh language (Ruh Dünyası, 1965c; Ulunay, 1965). Ulunay concluded his article by saying “[...] humans would only laugh at Beyti’s [a spirit] ‘unity of love’” (Ulunay, 1965). The article was quite dismissive. Its main objective was to ridicule

spiritism rather than refuting any spiritist claims. However, in the same newspaper, under the rubric *Şehir Haberleri* (City News), it is possible to find small promotions for both *Ruh ve Madde* and *Ruh Dünyası*, two journals published by the two most prominent spiritist groups of the 1960s (“Şehir Haberleri - Ruh Dünyası,” 1963; “Şehir Haberleri - Ruh ve Madde,” 1961; “Şehir Haberleri - Ruh ve Madde Okuyunuz,” 1961). In one promotional piece titled *Konferansta Bir Ruh Dinletilecek* (A Spirit Will Speak at the Conference), readers are informed about a conference titled *İlim, Din ve Dünya Birliği* (Science, Religion and World Unity) taking place at DSB (1965). Therefore, this situation indicates that anti-spiritist stance was specific to Ulunay himself and was not a policy adopted by the newspaper *Milliyet*. Reporting of Turkish spiritism by the media, especially in the newspapers, thus, remained either descriptive and neutral or mocking. In both cases, it is possible to observe that spiritism was not taken too seriously and the articles on spiritism focussed mostly on entertaining and sparking the interest of the readers. The press did not aim to form an opinion for or against spiritism. It was as if spiritism was never taken seriously enough to be worth debunking. Therefore, the treatment of spiritism in Turkey was different from other countries in the sense that Turkish spiritists were not criticized and condemned nearly as harshly as their foreign counterparts in the media.

### **5.2.2.2. Literary Depictions**

Moving away from the popular press and delving into the world of literature, it is possible to say that literature had been an arena for the clash of realist and spiritualist/spiritist ideas since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Acehan, 2011; Aslan, 2011). In literary works published in late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, spiritist elements were used to reinforce the prominence of reason and science. Authors such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi in his novel *Çengi* in 1885, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar in his novel *Gulyabani* in 1912 and Ömer Seyfettin in his story *Perili Köşk* created characters and constructed storylines to mock spiritism (Acehan, 2011). In these stories, the usual plot would consist of introducing a mystery and a character who is gullible enough to believe in spirit-involvement in this mystery, only to be revealed that it was all a big trick of deception (Acehan, 2011). Aslan, in her work on Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar and the elements of spiritualism, materialism and fantasy in his works, argues that

In his novels, there are many supernatural elements such as the jinn, fairy, devil, resurgent skeletons, returned souls etc. and the situations caused by these supernatural elements. By using these, his aim is always to prove that in the reality there are no such supernatural things and unknowable forces (Aslan, 2011: 637).

In this sense, these authors incorporated spiritism and spiritist elements into their works to promote the victory of realism and/or materialism / positivism against spiritism (Uluğ, 2016).

However, looking into the world of literature in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that this pattern had changed. Especially in the works of such authors as, Enis Behiç Koryürek, Peyami Safa and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, spiritism ceases being a straw man to be attacked. In works such as *Matmazel Norilya'nın Koltuğu* (Safa, 2018) and *Rüyalar* (Tanpınar, 1991) spiritism becomes intertwined with the element of faith or it provides elements of levity and comedy as was the case in *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (Tanpınar, 2015). An in-depth analysis of these works around metaphysical and spiritual themes is carried out by Ahmet Acehan (2011). He argues that spiritism is no longer a gimmick or a twist but an inherent element in the fabric of people's lives (Acehan, 2011). These works neither try to mock, ridicule and debunk spiritism nor do they try to support and show its legitimacy. Spiritist elements are simply a part of the world that these works were based on (Acehan, 2011). It is possible to observe the shift from ridiculing paranormal elements to treating them as part of life most prominently in the case of Enis Behiç Koryürek. This poet, who was one of the leading names of the national literature movement, claimed to have been a medium writing his book *Varidat-ı Süleyman* by communicating with the spirit of a Sufi dervish from the 18<sup>th</sup> century named *Çedikçi Süleyman Çelebi*. In this case, spiritism went beyond being an element incorporated into literary works but the book itself was a spiritist element on its own. The treatment of spiritism in this particular way by three prominent names of the Turkish literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates that the perspective on spiritism had shifted in the time period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and that spiritism was no longer attacked or ridiculed in the same way as it had been in the past.

In the end, the representation of spiritism in the media and literature in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates that it did not receive the type of harsh backlash that other



spiritists received elsewhere. Neither the state nor the society nor the media attacked spiritism in ways similar to the situations in the UK or France as previously described. Spiritism was mostly ignored, tolerated or was not taken seriously enough. Even the negative representation in the newspapers did not go beyond mockery. However, this situation should not lead us to think that spiritism did not receive any criticism at all. In fact, it was the target of numerous criticisms. In the last section, let us examine these criticisms and their implications.

### **5.3. Turkish Spiritists vs. Critics**

#### **5.3.1. Scientific Criticism**

Spiritism in the world was at the centre of an authority struggle between rival understandings of the natural world (Noakes, 2004). Beyond mockery and outright dismissal that came from the secular media, spiritism was taken as a challenge in the scientific world as it questioned what the “proper mental training, experience and scientific expertise” entailed (Noakes, 2004: 14). It was a struggle that scientists in the academia were engaged in. One of the most prominent examples of this is the famous “Carpenter vs. Crookes” debate (Noakes, 2004). William Benjamin Carpenter, an English physician, zoologist and physiologist in the Victorian era, was an avid critic of spiritist theories and he engaged in numerous back and forth arguments with the British chemist and physicist William Crookes, one of the most well-known spiritists of his day (Noakes, 2004). Their arguments were based on the nature of the force that lay behind paranormal or psychic phenomena. While Crookes claimed to have identified a new psychic force producing energy and tangible effects (Crookes, 1874), Carpenter responded by saying that the spiritist phenomena was simply the product of a mechanical force that could be explained by already-existing psychological and physiological theories (Carpenter, 1871; Noakes, 2004). Both men published detailed works attempting to prove the validity of their own position. This is one of the examples where spiritism was not simply dismissed for being “utter nonsense” but was subjected to serious scientific criticism refuting its claims one by one.

Serious scientific criticism is exactly the type of criticism Turkish spiritists did not receive. The political/bureaucratic elites with their strong commitments to science and rational organization of the society did not give Turkish spiritists a hard time. The strongest criticism they received in the media was mockery and dismissal. Dismissal meant that none of the scientific, moral or philosophical claims of spiritists were taken apart and refuted in a systematic fashion. Columnists simply pointed fingers at the ‘mad men’ who were ‘talking to the spirits.’ Observing this lack of scientific criticism directed at spiritism, I found it necessary to try and identify whether Turkish spiritists received any such criticism.

The results of this research revealed that the treatment of spiritism in the academia went through a transformation within the span of three decades from the 1910s to the 1940s. This meant that while it was possible to identify anti-spiritist scientific works in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such works were decidedly absent in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In his work on Ottoman spiritism, Türesay provides details on these works that he identifies as “positivistic and materialistic criticism against spiritism” (Türesay, 2019: 180). He cites three separate instances in which three different doctors came up with serious scientific criticism against spiritism. In the first instance, a professor of physiology and a medical doctor, Kemal Cenab published two separate articles that incorporated harsh and highly positivistic criticism against spiritism (Türesay, 2019). The second instance was a public conference by another medical professional attacking and criticizing spiritism. The last and most prominent anti-spiritist publication cited by Türesay was Mazhar Osman’s article titled “Against Spiritism” published in 1910 (Türesay, 2019). This 64-page pamphlet is described as a “ferocious positivistic attack against spiritism” (Türesay, 2019: 181) as Mazhar Osman describes spiritism as a “microbial disease” (Türesay, 2019: 188). Moreover, Şeyma Afacan in her PhD dissertation on Ottoman conceptions of soul and emotions within the framework of psychology explains that Abdullah Cevdet, one of the most prominent materialist thinkers of the late Ottoman period, criticized spiritism in the same way as Mazhar Osman did (Afacan, 2016). These are the examples of positivistic and scientific criticism targeting Ottoman spiritism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Moving a few decades forward, it is possible to observe that such scientific criticism against spiritism disappears from the academia. My search on the TMB – Türkiye Makaleler Bibliyografyası<sup>17</sup> (Bibliography of Articles in Turkish Periodicals) revealed that the large majority of the works on the topic published between 1936 and 1969 were written by Turkish spiritists themselves. The works of Prof Dr Recep Doksat titled “The Importance of Parapsychology and Paranormal Phenomena in Understanding the Consciousness” (Doksat, 1960c) and “Hypnotism, Theory and Practice” (Doksat, 1962), Prof Dr Muammer Bilge’s work “Metabiology” reconciling physiology, medicine and spiritism (Bilge, 1960), Dr Sevil Akay’s work titled “Magnetism-Hypnotism and the Art of Medicine” (Akay, 1966) or the article titled “Methodology in Metapsychic Sciences” by Suat Tahsuğ can be cited as examples (Tahsuğ, 1989). In contrast to this, scientific articles with a critical approach to spiritism were decidedly lacking. In fact, it was impossible to identify any. For example, there was an article published by the Journal of Ankara University Faculty of Medicine in 1947 titled “Metapsychic Science” (Uzluk, 1947) and an article published in Türk Yurdu in 1963 titled “Parapsychology or a Stroll through the Realm of Spirits” (Tökin, 1963). However, neither of them incorporated any scientific or positivistic criticism similar to those published in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Considering the fact that the main critics of Ottoman spiritism in the 1910s primarily consisted of medical professionals and that 1/5 of Turkish spiritists worked in the medical field, it would be reasonable to expect debates surrounding spiritism within the medical community. I was able to identify only one incident of a debate on spiritism among medical professionals. In 1963, Dr Memduh Eren and Dr Faruk Bayülkem attended a debate facing Dr Sevil Akay on İstanbul Radio (Olgaç, 1963; Ruh Dünyası, 1963i). However, the content of the debate shows that they did not have common conceptual definitions to have a discussion. Eren and Bayülkem were highly unfamiliar with spiritism to be able to bring any concrete criticism (Olgaç, 1963). The debate was not a scientific debate on the matter but a philosophical one on dualism and monism (Olgaç, 1963). However, it is necessary to keep in mind that

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<sup>17</sup> Türkiye Makaleler Bibliyografyası – TMB (Bibliography of Articles in Turkish Periodicals) is a database that complies around 1 million scientific articles from over 7000 academic periodicals published since 1923. Hosting such a rich collection, TMB was the ideal place to search for serious scientific works published against criticism in the Turkish academia.

the details of this debate are reported by spiritists themselves. Therefore, we should be wary of reaching definitive conclusions.

In addition to this singular incident, there were other medical doctors such as Adnan Ziyalar, Yıldırım Aktuna and Özcan Köknel who voiced their criticism against spiritism and psychic research. However, their criticism came after the 1980s and I was not able to identify any critical work or statement by any of these doctors between 1936 and 1969. That may be because parapsychology as a research field operated in a grey zone especially in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This meant that while the academia certainly did not acknowledge parapsychology as a valid brand of scientific inquiry, it was not completely dismissed either (Berger & Berger, 1991; Mülberger, 2008; S.Broughton, 1996). The debates on scientific validity of parapsychology still continued and parapsychology laboratories at Duke University and at Stanford Research Institute conducted research on topics such as psychokinesis and extrasensory perception until the mid-1980s (“Guide to the Parapsychology Laboratory Records, 1893-1984,” n.d.) However, by the 1980s, parapsychology had already been largely discredited (Berger & Berger, 1991; Mülberger, 2008; S.Broughton, 1996). As a result of this situation, the medical doctors mentioned above changed their position with regard to parapsychology and spiritism. For instance, Adnan Ziyalar admits to attending numerous spiritist séances and it is widely-known that he worked with Dr Ayhan Songar, who was a spiritist researcher (Nirun, 2016: 398). Ziyalar became a critic of spiritism after spiritist phenomena started to be explained through the existing tools and methods of science. While he once believed in the scientific potential of spiritism, this belief disappeared over the years. It is possible to observe the shift in his attitude in the following two statements:

I believe paranormal phenomena must be examined; through scientific methods, of course ... For something to gain scientific validity, it must be observable through human intelligence and detectable through man-made machines. Secondly, these observations must be able to be carried out by everyone. Thirdly, these observations must be reproducible (Nirun, 2016)

Until very recently, somnambulism was considered as a psychic or rather a paranormal phenomenon. However, it is now understood that somnambulism is the result of a dysfunction in the temporal and parietal lobes of the brain... (Nirun, 2016: 398).

This shift helps us understand why Turkish spiritism may have not received any serious scientific criticism at the time. The idea that there might have been something to be discovered in psychic phenomena and the fact that parapsychology had not yet been fully discredited in the West might have shielded Turkish spiritists from serious criticism between 1936 and 1969. However, regardless of the underlying reasons, it is possible to state that spiritism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century did not receive the same serious scientific criticism that Ottoman spiritists or other foreign spiritists received in an earlier period. This shift in the intensity of criticism within the academia resembles the shift in the reception of spiritism in the Turkish literary world. Both in the academia and in the literary world, the harsher criticism observed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had been replaced by a lack of serious criticism by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **5.3.2. Conservative Criticism**

Despite the shifts observed within scientific and literary communities with regard to spiritism, there was one source of criticism that did not change. The real source of criticism was not the political/bureaucratic elites, the media or the scientific community as one would have expected, but rather it was the Turkish conservatives of the time. Moreover, their main reason underlying the criticism was not lack of scientific proof. On the contrary, on more than one occasion Ruhselman's strong emphasis on science as well as his non-conventional approach to religion was what brought him criticism.

Considering the content of spiritual and religious teachings of Turkish spiritism, it is no surprise that their take on spirituality and religiosity would incite controversy and criticism on the religious front. Moreover, considering the harsh reaction of the Church in all the countries with a strong spiritist movement would lead one to predict a backlash from the religious community in Turkey as well (Abend, 2004; Hess, 1987; Koss, 1976; Moreira-Almeida et al., 2005; Noakes, 2004). However, the nonexistence of a religious establishment in Turkey that resembles the Church meant that these reactions did not come as an organized attack from a single source. I identified only a couple of instances of criticism that could be linked to the

Directorate of Religious Affairs, a state-controlled religious establishment in Turkey. In 1966, Beyhan Cenkçi interviewed Mehmet Oruç and Hamit Köseahmetoğlu, who served as the Chief Supervisor and Vice President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs respectively. Both Oruç and Köseahmetoğlu argued that spiritist teachings and activities contradicted with the teachings of Islam regarding the nature of the souls and the conceptions of the afterlife (Cenkçi, 1966b, 1966e). There was also an article written in 1971 by Süleyman Ateş, a well-known theologian who would become the President of Directorate of Religious Affairs in 1976. In the article titled “A Dangerous Movement: Spiritism”, Ateş presented his take on spiritism identifying it as the latest trend among the “high society” and explained why spiritism constituted a threat to religion as a heterodox movement (Ateş, 1971). However, between 1936 and 1969, the most prominent religious critic of Turkish spiritism was İshak Lütfi Kудay. Kудay was a graduate of Ankara University of Political Science and served as a district governor (*kaymakam*) before being expelled and incarcerated for misconduct in office (Çankaya, 1968). After being released from prison, Kудay dedicated his time to studying spiritism from a critical perspective and wrote two books on the topic with his friend Dr Sevil Akay, a well-known spiritist. The books were designed as a back and forth argument between the two men criticizing and trying to refute each other’s arguments. This partnership was not well-received by Turkish spiritists and they described Kудay as a ‘religious fanatic’ who tolerated spiritism (Temizel, 2014). Kудay also identified as a devout Muslim (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1950d). He was the only critic who attacked spiritism in a systematic fashion and he dealt with every claim of spiritism one by one coming up with rebuttals (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1949, 1950a). Kудay argued that Ruhselman’s teachings contradicted monotheistic religions and that there was no similarity between Ruhselman’s God and afterlife and the Islamic God and afterlife (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1949). Moreover, he thought that spiritism was not based on a solid foundation and philosophy and stated that “They [Spiritists] try to create an image on their audience by frequently using the terms experiment and science” (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1950d: 202). According to Kудay, spiritism was nothing but “a blatant trap and an evil tool” (İ. L. Kудay & Akay, 1950d: 202). What made spiritism extremely dangerous and evil was the promotion of “evolution” and “reincarnation” because he

thought that these were against the core teaching of Islam and they constituted a petty attempt to imitate Darwin (İ. L. Kuday & Akay, 1950d).

In a similar vein but with nuances, spiritism also received criticism from a prominent Sufi figure, Samiha Ayverdi. Ayverdi was not only a disciple and later the leader of the Rifaî order in Turkey, she was also a well-known author and a notable name for the right-wings politics in the country (Aytürk & Mignon, 2013). For Ayverdi, both reason and science were limited in discovering the ultimate truth, which referred to the divine meanings and secrets underlying the whole of existence interpreted from a religious and mystic perspective. She stated that “Science actually consists of failures, and the victory of the mind, no matter how great it is, can never unveil the ultimate truth” (Ayverdi, 2005: 63). This particular take on reason and science was the main source of contention between Ayverdi and the spiritists. In her memoirs, it is possible to read an exchange between Ayverdi and Ruhselman. On 4 March 1946, Bedri Ruhselman and Sevil Akay paid a visit to Ayverdi at her house. During their conversation, Ayverdi and Ruhselman disagreed on almost everything including the role of religion, the value of Sufism and the place of science in human life (Ayverdi, 2005). Ruhselman criticized religion and Sufism while Ayverdi criticized science (Ayverdi, 2005). They were also in a disagreement on the solution that was needed for the moral crisis they both identified within the society. The following quotes summarize Ayverdi’s approach to Ruhselman and spiritism:

He wants to swim in the oceans of the spiritual realm by using reason and he doesn’t think that he will get tired and drown one day (Ayverdi, 2005: 256),

I have no sympathy for spiritist ideas. I do not approve tampering with the invisible or stealing from the unknown (Ayverdi, 2005: 331),

Spiritism might be an opportunity to satisfy certain curiosities as a scientific branch and an academic subject. However, it can never be a vehicle of communication, understanding and love between Allah and his creation (Ayverdi, 2005: 338)

Garbis Efendi, who was a sensitive man, unfortunately had an area of activity that was harmful both to himself and to the society: spiritism (Ayverdi, 1985: 97).

Ayverdi also criticized Ruhselman for not believing in the prophet and asserted “Bedri Bey has certain misleading claims for those who aren’t yet firm on their faith” (Ayverdi, 2005: 213). This was Samiha Ayverdi’s personal take on spiritism.

However, Ayverdi's position regarding spiritism was part of the larger rivalry and tension between spiritism and Sufism. I had previously explained the spiritist efforts to separate themselves from Sufism. In Ayverdi's conversations with Enis Behiç Koryürek, it is possible to find striking statements revealing more on the relationship between Sufism and spiritism. As previously explained, Koryürek was a well-known poet but also a self-proclaimed medium communicating with a spirit from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even though it is not possible to identify Koryürek himself as either a Sufi or a conservative figure, these conversations revealed more about the relationship between Sufism and spiritism than about Koryürek's own position. In response to Ayverdi's question on the situation of Suat Plevne, who was one of the founders of MTIAD, Koryürek said: "Suat Bey [Plevne] left us; he joined the atheist group of Bedri Ruhselman. They consider me as a pathetic man who is trapped into the dogmatic cycle of Sufism" (Ayverdi, 2005: 247). Koryürek also complained that "Bedri Bey [Ruhselman] turned the spirit into a matter of laboratory (Ayverdi, 2005: 215). Ayverdi commented on the topic by stating "I think as [Suat Plevne] was trying to bind Dr Bedri Ruhselman to faith, Dr Bedri invaded him with faithlessness" (Ayverdi, 2005: 331). All of these statements uncover the divide between Sufism and spiritism. While spiritists were accused of being atheists and having no faith, Sufism was portrayed as a dogmatic path by spiritists themselves. Spiritist efforts to bring science into the matters of faith or to "turn the spirit into a matter of laboratory" was not appreciated. In the end, what really separated Sufism and spiritism was the differences in their epistemological approaches. As the examination of his doctrine made it clear, Ruhselman believed that the positivist and intuitive paths, the path of science and the path of the heart must be complementary. This was the source of contention that separated Ruhselman and spiritists from Sufism and Ayverdi, who had a preference for the intuitive path of the heart.

In terms of the intuitive path, one last criticism came from a famous man of letters and a conservative intellectual who was identified as a follower and promoter of Bergsonism in Turkey: Peyami Safa (Demirel, 2002; İrem, 2002). At one point in his life, Safa was interested in spiritism, metapsychic phenomena and parapsychology (Acehan, 2011; Ayvazoğlu, 2008; Safa, 1960b). However, his approach to the issue clashed with Ruhselman's understanding. He expressed his take on the issue in



various newspaper articles published between 1951 and 1960 in newspapers such as *Tercüman* and *Ulus*. Safa actually supported scientific research on psychic phenomena and criticized the “orthodox” science for being “stubborn” and ignoring the new developments in parapsychological research (Safa, 1959b, 1960c). He did believe that hypnotism, paranormal abilities and spiritual healing methods had started to be incorporated within the scope of modern science (Safa, 1959b, 1960c, 1960a). However, what he criticized was treating these issues as part of a “religious” and/or “moral” discourse (Safa, 1959a). Safa argued that these were scientific matters and they needed to stay scientific without interfering into the realm of *faith*, and he wrote “Our religious and philosophical beliefs are not included in this context” (Safa, 1960b). Influenced by Bergson’s ideas on intuition, Safa believed that positivist science was not the only path to knowledge and “intuition” had a great role to play (Safa, 1959a). For this reason, he argued that “While science presents facts, religion provides values. They are both paths to knowledge but in two different planes” (Safa, 1959a). Within this framework, Safa criticized Turkish spiritism for trying to bring together the two paths he considered to be separate and he thought that in doing so, spiritism failed to say anything meaningful for either science or spirituality (Safa, 1951, 1959a). The reason why he thought Turkish spiritists did not make any substantive scientific contributions was because he found the scientific methods of spiritists extremely imperfect (Safa, 1951, 1960b). Safa argued that Turkish spiritists were too eager to interpret everything as a sign from the afterlife and that they ignored the explanations that psychology provided. Even though Safa believed in paranormal abilities, he considered most mediums as people who were experiencing a “split-personality” disorder which led them to think they were speaking with a spirit (Safa, 1951). Therefore, he stated that “the lack of scholarly attention and scientific controls” led Turkish spiritists to make hasty metaphysical claims (Safa, 1951). The reason why he considered spiritist teachings of spirituality as hasty metaphysical claims is because Safa argued that secular moral teachings lacked the foundation that religious moral teachings had (Safa, 1959a). According to Safa, the element of faith that was present in religion was lacking in morals based on a secular understanding of the world (Safa, 1959a). For this reason, Peyami Safa criticized

Turkish spiritism for trying to bring these two separate paths together without properly respecting the requirements of either science or religion.

Conservative criticism of spiritism demonstrates that anti-materialist teachings of spiritism did not ensure a warm reception among other anti-materialist conservative groups in the country. In fact, spiritism was regarded as ‘too scientific’ and was harshly criticized for bringing science into matters of spirituality, morals and faith.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

Until this last chapter, the dissertation looked at the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey from the eyes and perspective of Turkish spiritists. The implications of their teachings, background, motivations, methodology, organizations and their conflicts were discussed in detail. These discussions were essential for understanding how spiritists conceptualized their role within the society. Turkish spiritists had committed themselves to the mission of constructing a synthesized approach to science and spirituality. In their eyes, this approach would solve their dilemmas and that would serve as the spiritual leg of the Turkish modernization project. They considered themselves to be engaged in scientific endeavours. However, it was not clear where this group of spiritists stood within the context of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey and how they interacted with the world around them.

The political/bureaucratic elites either did not acknowledge Turkish spiritists or they showed tolerance towards spiritist activities. Spiritist elites did not experience difficulty existing side by side with other political and bureaucratic elites and they were not grouped together with cults or religious orders for engaging in superstitious activities. Spiritists strongly identified with the founding ideals of the republic and even had their own interpretation of Atatürk’s principles. Combined with the spiritist discourse revolving around science and their elite composition, Turkish spiritists were simply another group within republican political and bureaucratic elites.

In terms of their impact on the society, Turkish spiritists attracted an audience that was similar to themselves in terms of composition and that was in search of mental and health-related support. Spiritism was not a mass movement in terms of the reach of its core teachings and philosophy. Its reception in the media and literature

revealed that Turkish spiritists were not subjected to a large amount of backlash or criticism. Spiritists in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century did not also receive much, if any serious scientific criticism in the academia. This situation sets it apart from both Ottoman spiritism and from other spiritist cases in other countries. The most significant criticism they received was conservative in nature. Turkish conservative figures criticized the heterodox nature of spiritist teachings. This conservative source of criticism made it clear that the anti-materialist emphasis of Turkish spiritism was not enough for it to be accepted within anti-materialist conservative circles.

The reception of and the general lack of harsh and serious criticism directed towards Turkish spiritism may have a number of implications. Firstly, Turkish spiritism may have not received any real backlash because it was not a mass movement that left a substantial impact on the society. However, considering how Ottoman spiritists, who constituted an even smaller movement, had been subjected to much harsher criticism, this point fails to explain why that was not the case with Turkish spiritists. Secondly, the lack of scientific criticism may be the result of Turkish spiritists not being taken seriously and this may actually be the case. However, this situation also has the potential to point out what was considered as ‘acceptable’ in terms of approaches to science at the time. Declaring a firm commitment to science, abundantly using scientific terminology, having a basic grasp of scientific methodology and relying on the legitimacy of the developments in the West seem to have been enough for Turkish spiritists to avoid being immediately classified as superstitious, dogmatic and being considered simply as another religious cult. So much as that they were criticized by conservative circles for bringing ‘science’ into the matters of faith. This points out a significant problem with what was understood from ‘science’ in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century within both secular and conservative intellectual circles.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this dissertation, I tried to impart a social science perspective to a phenomenon that remained underexplored in the academia and I aimed to establish the place and significance of the spiritist movement within the broader context of Turkish modernization. In doing so, I provided a comprehensive analysis of the teachings, composition, organization and reception of Turkish spiritists as a group that contributed to the intellectual history in Turkey by trying to revolutionize science and scientific morality. The case of a group of intellectuals gathering around tables and summoning spirits was actually part of a larger debate on modern science and religion and it revealed a new hybrid type of reaction to the process of modernization and to the moral gap observed within modernizing reforms. Turkish spiritism was a case of emerging alternative spiritualities in Turkey and it was, in a way, a proto-new age spirituality. If we dismiss spiritism as another superstitious and reactionary cult following the logic of antagonizing the relationship between modern science and religion, it would not be possible to explore this outcome of the Turkish modernization process.

The main objective of this thesis has been understanding the reasons that lay behind the emergence of spiritism among a group of intellectuals in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey and examining spiritism within the broader context of the Turkish modernization process. Spiritism on a global scale was both a symptom of and an answer to the crisis of faith that originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses of scientism and secularization along with the paradigm of modernization. Spiritism was also a part of the debate on the boundaries of modern science and on the relationship

between science and religion. Within this framework, I argue that it is necessary to review the reflections of these debates on the Ottoman-Turkish context to assess whether I could discover the historical and intellectual background that led to the emergence of spiritism in the Turkey. This inquiry provided me with a general picture of the Turkish modernization process. This process was defined by the adoption of science as a modernizing tool by Ottoman intellectuals which eventually led to the antagonistic depictions of the relationship between modern science and religion in the process of modernization. Moreover, taking science as the basis for a rational modern society, the culmination point of this modernization process with the founding of the new republic seemed to have created a moral and spiritual void. This moral gap resulted from the absence of a profound and penetrating secular value system that could serve the same function that Islam served in the lives of individuals. Within this broader picture, it was difficult to ascertain the position of Turkish spiritism and Turkish spiritists because their hybrid character did not fit the dichotomies of science vs. religion or scientific-minded modernizers vs. traditional conservatives.

Exploration of Turkish spiritism between 1936 and 1969 revealed that the reason underlying their effort to summon spirits was not a sense of disillusionment with scientism of the age or with the republican reforms that put science at its core. Turkish spiritism was an effort to negotiate and reconcile conflicting philosophies, epistemological approaches and value systems. In their eyes, by expanding the scope of science to include the study of the immaterial world and by grounding morals and spirituality in universal modern science, spiritism provided access to a hybrid unity. For Turkish spiritists, spiritism was both a science and a spirituality, namely a *scientified* spirituality. It not only allowed them to feel part of a 'scientific revolution', it also enabled them to reconcile their moral commitments with science, reason and pursuit of knowledge. Thus, Turkish spiritists attempted to construct a synthesized hybrid approach to science and spirituality. For them, this approach solved their moral dilemmas and crisis of faith on the personal level but it also served as the spiritual leg of the Turkish modernization project by implementing the secularizing and modernizing ideals of the republic to the spiritual realm. Turkish spiritists openly declared this as their mission: finding a solution to the moral gap in

science and outside the traditional boundaries of Islam and organized religion.

Reflecting their hybrid teachings, Turkish spiritists were a group of people that embodied hybrid characteristics that would otherwise be considered as conflicting. They were mostly born and/or raised under the republican regime. Coming from an urban background, a large number of them were from either metropolitan cities of İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir or were from the then most developed regions of the country i.e. Marmara and Aegean regions. More than 70% of Turkish spiritists had received a form of higher education at a time when access to university education in Turkey was extremely low. While almost 80% of Turkish spiritists had professional careers that required special training, more than 50% of them worked at least partly in the service of the state. In terms of their socio-economic background, Turkish spiritists were a group republican elites. In their political inclinations, Turkish spiritists identified with the founding ideals of the republic and made sure to incorporate Atatürk and the Six Arrows representing Kemalist principles into their discourse. However, in contrast to the often dichotomous depiction of intellectuals as either secular modernizers or traditional conservatives, Turkish spiritists were the example of a new hybrid kind of republican elite that did not reproduce the antagonistic relation between modern science and religion. They were transcendentalist admirers of science. Even though Turkish spiritists were not a monolithic group and had experienced internal conflicts, what brought them together was the desire to negotiate conflicting values and ideas through spiritism. They found not only solace in spiritism but also a solution to the crisis of faith and moral gap they identified within the society.

Their approach to science and scientific methodology demonstrated that they had an educated understanding of what science and scientific methodology was. This meant that science was not simply a rhetorical tool to strengthen their claims. They formulated their methodology in line with the requirements of science. Yet, in practice, spiritism never went beyond being a pseudo-scientific pursuit. Their approach to science showed that the tendency to derive legitimacy and utility from science, which was prevalent throughout the Ottoman modernization process, still persisted among this group of republican intellectuals. Furthermore, much like in the

past, Turkish spiritists created a link between science and morality and saw science as a solution to all problems including those that did not enter the scope of science. In terms of scientific knowledge production, there was an attempt to do more than simply transferring knowledge. Turkish spiritists wanted to contribute to the establishment of the ‘science of the spirit’ and be up-to-date with scientific developments in the West. They did attempt to produce knowledge and not simply disseminate it. However, the pseudo-scientific nature of spiritism meant that Turkish spiritism continued to rely on the authority of Western science as had been the case since the beginning of the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process. This points to the problems persisting in approaches to science among Turkish intellectuals.

However, in addition to pointing to a problematic understanding of science among Turkish spiritists, the reception of their teachings and activities revealed more on what was considerable as ‘acceptable’ in terms of approaches to science in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey. Turkish spiritists did not face any serious criticism regarding their pseudo-scientific pursuits. Despite engaging in a practice that may very well be considered as superstitious, Turkish spiritists were mostly ignored or tolerated by the political/bureaucratic elites, who were informed by the same process of modernization that placed science and reason at its centre. Turkish spiritists were surprisingly not grouped together with cults or religious orders. Their representation in media and the literary world also remained mostly neutral between 1936 and 1969. It was impossible to identify any serious scientific criticism targeting Turkish spiritism within the academia in this time period. It was only the Turkish conservative figures that criticized spiritism rather harshly for attempting to bring ‘science’ into matters of faith. This situation demonstrates that in the understanding of what ‘science’ was and what was acceptable in terms of approaches to science, there was a significant issue among both secular and conservative intellectuals. This hints at the fact that Turkish intellectuals had inherited from their Ottoman predecessors some of the issues surrounding the understanding of science and the process of scientific knowledge production.

In presenting these findings that corroborate the initial propositions of the study, this dissertation contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of Turkish

modernization and of Turkish modernizers. Firstly, Turkish spiritists challenge the binary oppositions and classifications regarding modern science and religion. Even though the narrative of depicting the relationship between science and religion in antagonistic terms holds explanatory value for the late Ottoman and early republican periods, this is not the whole picture. Hybrid character of Turkish spiritism reveals that there were intellectuals who refused this dichotomy. Secondly, Turkish spiritism illustrates that Turkish intellectuals were influenced by alternative sources of European philosophical traditions in the process of modernization. The impact of this alternative tradition also seems to have created a new type of republican intellectual who is equally transcendentalist and scientific. Thirdly, this thesis traces the continuities and ruptures in the Ottoman-Turkish approach to science. Both spiritist teachings on science and how their teachings were received demonstrate that certain issues persisted. These included deriving legitimacy and utility from science, linking science with morality and relying on the transfer of knowledge from the West instead of producing scientific knowledge. Lastly, both the global crisis of faith experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the moral and spiritual gap observed in republican reforms had explanatory value for the emergence of Turkish spiritism. Spiritism in Turkey was both a product of and an answer to this moral gap. What the existence of spiritists, thus, says about Turkish modernization is that the central position attributed to science in this process seems to have led to the emergence of a movement trying to find solutions to moral questions in ‘science of the spirit.’

Discussions on science and its relationship with religion were not only an integral part of the Turkish nation and state building processes, but they still continue to inform social and political issues in Turkey. It is possible to suggest that exploring alternative perspectives on the topic is, thus, essential to fully comprehend the Turkish modernization process. However, Turkish spiritism between 1936 and 1969 was only one of those alternative perspectives at a specific time period. The topics of alternative spiritualities, new religious movements (NRMs), secular ethics and new age religiosities remain mostly as uncharted territory that might potentially be explored by future studies. The boom of new age religiosities in the post-1970 period and its reflections in Turkey and the transformation of Turkish spiritism in the process are also venues for future studies. From the 1970s onwards but especially in



the 1990s in Turkey, the context and socio-political cleavages that informed the present study went through significant processes of transformation. The peak of ideology politics, the emergence of identity politics, the impact of globalization and the paradigmatic shift created by postmodernism, which completely shook the foundations of discussions revolving around positivism and scientism, brought about new types of crises and cleavages. Therefore, the framework of this dissertation informed by the question of modern science vs. religion transformed into different questions in the later decades. This provides an ample area for future studies in terms of exploring the new meanings spiritism must have gained under new conjunctures. Beyond alternative spiritualities, there are also opportunities to explore the evolving relationship between modern science and religion within boundaries of Islam in Turkey, as a mainstream organized religion. The case of scientific Muslims seeking to provide a scientific-basis to their beliefs and practices of worship may be one example. In addition, a more in-depth separate analysis by future studies of the approaches to science and to the process of scientific knowledge production in Turkey in the 20<sup>th</sup> century might complement the findings of this dissertation. Lastly, the results of this study might also serve as a reminder to rethink and reanalyse the Turkish intellectual history by taking into account the importance of diversity, hybridity of ideas and complexity of the social reality.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. THE PROSOPOGRAPHY PROTOCOL

#### THE GROUP

The following is the questions asked to determine the list of persons involved in spiritism in the designated time period. These questions were determined prior to text analysis and through the process of text analysis and other research, they were used to construct a well-defined group for prosopographical analysis.

1. Who were the prominent names of the spiritist sphere between 1936 and 1969?
2. Who did Bedri Ruhselman work with?
3. Who were the mediums contributing to Ruhselman's works?
4. Who were the operators conducting the séances?
5. Who were the founders of spiritist associations?
6. Who were the members of spiritist associations?
7. Who published spiritist journals?
8. Who made publications in spiritist journals?
9. Who published spiritist books?
10. Who published academic articles on spiritism and parapsychology?
11. Who participated regularly in systematic séances?
12. Who offered spiritist healing services?
13. Who were the critics of Turkish spiritism?

In answering these questions, the following criteria\* were used to define the group. 94 people included in the final list participated in the formulation of Turkish spiritism in Turkey by fulfilling one of the following functions:



- Mediums
- Operators
- Owners of spiritist journals
- Staff of spiritist journals
- Writers and translators of spiritist journals
- Founders of spiritist / parapsychology associations
- Heads of associations
- Members of spiritist / parapsychology associations
- Staff of spiritist / parapsychology associations
- Spiritist researchers
- Publishers and writers of spiritist books
- Participators of séances
- Close entourage of Ruhselman

\*Names are not included based on the availability of biographical information. The criterion is contribution. If their contribution is clear, they are included even if information on them is lacking.

## QUESTIONNAIRE & CODING INSTRUCTIONS

The following is the list of questions that were investigated during the construction of the prosopographical database. Under each question, the coding instructions used to enter the data are provided to offer an insight into how the database was built.

### 1 What is their **name**?

- An actor's full name is written. They are not given coded names as this list is compiled through publications that are public and available elsewhere.

### 2 What is their **gender**?

- If an actor is male, 0 is coded under the column "**gender**"

- If an actor is female, 1 is coded under the column “**gender**”
- If there is no information or a way to determine the gender of the actor, the cell is left blank.

### 3 What is their **year of birth**?

- The year of birth of the actor is written under the column “**year of birth**”.
- For actors whose birthdate is given according to the Islamic calendar, the dates are converted into the Gregorian calendar.
- If there is no information on the year of birth of an actor, the cell is left blank.

### 4 What is their **place of birth**?

- If an actor was born in a village, 1 is coded under the column “**place of birth**”
- If an actor was born in a township / county (bucak, nahiye, kasaba, kaza, ilçe), 2 is coded under the column “**place of birth**”
- If an actor was born in a city (il / il merkezi), 3 is coded under the column “**place of birth**”
- If an actor was born in a metropolitan city centre (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir), 4 is coded under the column “**place of birth**”.
- If the actor is born in a village under the jurisdiction of the three specified metropolitan cities, then 1 is coded.
- If the actor is born in a county (ilçe) under the jurisdiction of the three specified metropolitan cities, then 4 is coded.
- Coding is carried out in accordance with the status of the city at the time of birth.
  - Example:
- For those actors who were born abroad but who lack any specific information beyond the country name, the cells are left blank.

- For those actors who were born abroad and have detailed information on the place of birth, the above-specified criteria is applied.
- If no information is provided with regard to the place of birth, the cells are left blank.
- The name of the place of birth is written separately under the column “**name of place of birth**”

**5** What is their **education** level?

- If an actor holds a university degree, 1 is coded under the column “**education**”
- If an actor does not hold a university degree, 0 is coded under the column “**education**”
- If there is no explicit information on the education level of the actor but there is information on their profession, and if this profession requires having a university degree, 1 is coded under the column “**education**”
- If there is no information on either education or profession, the cell is left blank.

**6** What is their **profession**?

- The name of the profession is written under the column “**profession**”
- If there is no information, the cell is left blank.

**7** What is their **job title**?

- The name of the job titles they held is written under the column “**job title**”
- If there is no information the cell is left blank.

**8** What is their **position** within Turkish spiritism?

- Their position is written under the column “**position within NS**”

- Examples include medium, operator, founder, member of association X, regular séance participant, spiritist writer (including journals, books, articles)

**9** Were they a **member** of an association?

- If an actor is a member of a spiritist organization, 1 is coded under the column “**membership**”.
  - These associations include:
    - MTIAD – Metapsişik Tetkikler ve İlmi Arařtırmalar Derneęi (Metapsychic Investigations and Scientific Research Society)
    - TPK – Türkiye Parapsikoloji Kurumu (Turkish Institute of Parapsychology)
    - TPAC – Türkiye Parapsikoloji Arařtırmaları Cemiyeti (Turkey Parapsychological Research Society)
    - ESIAC - Ege Spiritik İlmi Arařtırmalar Cemiyeti (Aegean Spiritist Scientific Research Society)
    - AMC / Ankara Metapsişik Cemiyeti (Ankara Metapsychic Society) – Full Name: Ruhsal Olayları Tetkik Enstitüsünü Kurma ve Yařatma Derneęi (Association for Establishing and Sustaining the Institute for the Study of Spiritual Incidents)
    - DSB – Dünya Sevgi Birlięi (World Love Association)
- If an actor is not a member of a spiritist organization, 0 is coded under the column “**membership**”
- If there is no information on the matter, the cell is left blank.

**10** Did they work with Dr Bedri Ruhselman?

- If an actor worked with Bedri Ruhselman, 1 is coded under the column “**worked with DBR**”
- If an actor did not work with Bedri Ruhselman, 0 is coded under the column “**worked with DBR**”

- If there is no information on the matter, the cell is left blank.

## 11 What is their attitude toward **religion and spirituality**?

- If an actor adopted an internalized positive attitude toward Islam and religion, then 1 is coded under the column “**religion**”.
  - Their attitude is coded as positive if the person
    - makes references to Quran and other religious texts as well as Hadith
    - uses religious terminology in more than 3 of their writing pieces
    - performs Islamic worship practices
    - directly identifies themselves as “Muslim”
    - refers to Islam as their own religion
    - considers spiritism as way to prove Islamic principles
- If an actor adopted a negative and/or critical attitude toward Islam and religion, then 0 is coded under the column “**religion**”
  - Their attitude is coded as negative and/or critical if the person
    - openly criticizes Islam and religions as a whole
    - openly states that the age of religion is over
    - vehemently argues that spiritism is not a religion
    - chooses to use non-religious terminology when referring to a creator
    - openly criticizes dogma of any sort
- If there is no indicator as to what their attitude is, the cell is left blank.
- If the actor emphasizes spirituality over religiosity, then 1 is coded under the column “**spirituality**”
  - The emphasis on spirituality is determined if the person
    - overtly states the importance of spirituality over religiosity
    - treats the issue as an individual and subjective path
    - adopts a perennial attitude toward all belief systems
    - claims that there can be no permanent truths

- If there is no indicator as to what their attitude toward spirituality is, the cell is left blank.

## 12 What is their relationship with **Sufism**?

- If an actor adopted an internalized positive attitude toward Sufism, then 1 is coded under the column “**Sufism**”
  - Their attitude is coded as positive if the person
    - frequently uses Sufi terminology
    - frequently refers to prominent names of Sufi tradition
    - directly proclaims themselves as Sufi
    - directly praises Sufism as a path to acquire knowledge
    - treats spiritism as a Sufi practice
- if an actor adopted a negative and/or critical attitude toward Sufism, then 0 is coded under the column “**Sufism**”
  - Their attitude is coded as negative and/or critical if the person
    - openly criticizes Sufism
    - openly tries to separate spiritism from the Sufi tradition
- If there is no indicator as to what their attitude toward Sufism is, the cell is left blank.

## 13 What is their relationship with **fortune-telling**?

- If an actor displays a positive attitude towards fortune-telling, then 1 is coded under the column “**fortune-telling**”
  - Their attitude is coded as positive is the person
    - performs mediumistic séances in order to look into the future and provide prophesies
    - participates in mediumistic séances conducted solely to know the future
    - offers fortune-telling services
- If an actor adopted a negative and/or critical attitude toward fortune-telling, then 0 is coded under the column “**fortune-telling**”
  - Their attitude is coded as negative and/or critical if the person

- openly criticizes using spiritism for fortune-telling purposes
- openly criticizes the content and method of fortune-telling séances
- openly criticizes using spiritism for entertainment purposes
- If there is no indicator as to what their attitude toward fortune-telling is, the cell is left blank.

**14** Had they experienced a **childhood encounter** with spiritism?

- If an actor had an encounter or encounters with spiritism during their childhood and preteen years, 1 is coded under the column “**childhood encounter**”
- If there is no information on the matter, the cell is left blank.

**15** Did they experience the loss of a loved one or have an encounter with a disease before delving into spiritism?

- If an actor experienced the loss of a loved one prior to engaging with spiritism, 1 is coded under the column “**death / disease**”
- If an actor themselves or someone close to them went through a disease prior to engaging with spiritism, 1 is coded under the column “**death / disease**”
- If there is no information on the matter, the cell is left blank.

**16** What is their self-proclaimed **motivation**?

- If an actor identifies “the pursuit of science” as their primary motivation in engaging with spiritism, 1 is coded under the column “**science**”
- If an actor identifies “the search for meaning” as their primary motivation in engaging with spiritism, 1 is coded under the column “**meaning**”

- If an actor identifies some other motivation for engaging with spiritism, 1 is coded under the column “**other**” and the motivation is written next to it.
- If there is no information on the matter, the cells are left blank.

**17** What are their political inclinations?

- If an actor emphasizes the apolitical nature of spiritism, then apolitical is coded under the column “**politics**”
- If an actor is member of a political party, then the name of the party is coded under the column “**politics**”
- If an actor openly discusses and defends a political position or ideology, the name of the ideology is written under the column “**politics**”
- If there is no information on the matter, the cell is left blank.

**18** How were they **initiated** into spiritism?

- If an actor is initiated into spiritism through books, then 1 is coded under the column “**books**”
- If an actor is initiated into spiritism through periodicals, then 1 is coded under the column “**periodicals**”
  - If they contributed to the periodicals, 2 is coded under the column “**periodicals**”
  - If they were both initiated through periodicals and contributed to periodicals, 3 is coded under the column “**periodicals**”
- If an actor is initiated into spiritism through séances, then 1 is coded under the column “**séances**”
- If there is no information on the matter, the cells are left blank.

**19** Did they publish any works?

- The names of their publications are written under the column “**publications**”



**20** Which group did they belong to?

- The actors are colour-coded depending on the group they belonged to.
  - The actors who worked with Bedri Ruhselman are coded “grey”
  - The actors whose names were extracted from MTIAD membership ledgers are coded “pink”
  - The actors who were active in the Ankara spiritist scene, are coded “green”
  - The actors who primarily contributed to the journal “Ruh Dünyası” are coded “brown”
  - The actors who primarily contributed to the journal “Sevgi Dünyası” are coded “yellow”
  - The actors who primarily contributed to the journal “İç Varlık” are coded “beige”
  - The actors whose came into the picture after 1969 and whose engagement could not be proven beyond one single mention of their name are coded “white”
  - The actors who were critical of spiritism are coded “blue”

A compiled list of questions for an easier read:

1. What is their name?
2. What is their gender?
3. What is their year of birth?
4. What is their place of birth?
5. What is their education level?
6. What is their profession?
7. What is their job title?
8. What is their position within Turkish spiritism?
9. Were they a member of an association?
10. Did they work with Dr Bedri Ruhselman?
11. What is their attitude toward religion and spirituality?

12. What is their relationship with Sufism?
13. What is their relationship with fortune-telling?
14. Had they experienced a childhood encounter with spiritism?
15. Did they experience the loss of a loved one or have an encounter with a disease before delving into spiritism?
16. What is their self-proclaimed motivation?
17. What are their political inclinations?
18. How were they initiated into spiritism?
19. Did they make any publications?
20. Which group did they belong to?

## Appendix B. CATEGORIES FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PERIODICALS

The categories used in order to compare the content of the periodicals include the following:

1. Psychic cases / incidents / anecdotes
2. Healing Incidents
3. Morality
4. Religion
5. Sufism / Mysticism
6. Foreign Legitimizing Developments and Stories
7. Parapsychology
8. Politics and Social Issues
9. Science
10. Philosophy and Aesthetics
11. Occultism / Esotericism
12. Neo-Spiritualism and Spiritism
13. Current Events / Actualité / Essays
14. Psychology

These categories were extracted from the texts themselves. They were used to categorize and code each published article in an issue of a journal. The content of 6 spiritist journals have been coded following this procedure. Certain articles had more than one prominent theme which led to a degree of overlap between certain categories. Moreover, while the pairing of certain categories may not seem intuitive, they have been proved to be almost continuously interlinked in these journals as I checked and re-checked the coding instructions.

You may find the details of the coding for each category<sup>18</sup> below.

### 1 | Psychic cases / incidents / anecdotes

Articles in this category deal with one or more of the following topics:

- Haunted houses
- Cases of reincarnation
- Séances
- Mediumistic performances of all kinds
- Apparitions

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<sup>18</sup> Details provided here are designed to offer an insight into the coding process and are not exhaustive in terms of the listed topics.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cases of obsessions</li> <li>• Miracles</li> <li>• Actualization of dreams</li> <li>• Paranormal happenings</li> <li>• Cases of telepathy</li> <li>• Cases of clairvoyance</li> <li>• Cases of telekinesis</li> </ul> <p>Articles in this category incorporate a mere-account of the incidents without an analysis or theory.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p>Healing Incidents</p> <p>Articles in this category include cases and technical pieces written on spiritual healing techniques including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypnosis</li> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Miraculous cases of healing</li> <li>• Healer mediums</li> <li>• Examples from their own healing services</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p>Morality</p> <p>Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think-pieces on how to live one's life</li> <li>• How to treat other people</li> <li>• Virtues to be aspired</li> <li>• Behaviours to be avoided</li> <li>• Discussions on good / bad and right / wrong</li> <li>• Discussions on one's duties</li> <li>• Universality of love</li> <li>• General ethical and moral principles</li> <li>• Merits of spirituality and self-knowledge</li> <li>• Morality and religion</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p>Religion</p> <p>Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afterlife</li> <li>• Islam [Quran, prophet, Hadith, prayer]</li> <li>• Think-pieces on the general concept of religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Its place in modern life</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Its relationship with science</li> <li>● Meaning of life</li> <li>● Faiths and beliefs</li> <li>● Discussions on God / Allah / Supreme Intelligence</li> <li>● World religions such as Buddhism</li> <li>● Criticism of religion</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<p>Sufism / Mysticism</p> <p>Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussions on pain / anguish and its role in life</li> <li>● Quotes from prominent Sufi names</li> <li>● Discussions on prominent Sufi figures</li> <li>● Discussions on intuition in acquiring the knowledge of “truth”</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<p>Foreign Legitimizing Developments and Stories</p> <p>Articles in this category include textual transfer of technological advancements, scientific developments, activities of foreign spiritists and anecdotes published to demonstrate how spiritism is already a valid endeavour in the West. These accounts may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meetings</li> <li>● Performances</li> <li>● Conferences</li> <li>● Academic activities</li> <li>● Activities of foreign associations</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<p>Parapsychology</p> <p>Articles in this category include those pieces that fall within the experimental corner of spiritism outside mere cases, anecdotes or direct communication of revelations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussions on how to conduct experiments</li> <li>● Specifications of tools</li> <li>● Discussions on methodology, controls and methodical doubt</li> <li>● Academic works from a grey area of research as a subfield of psychology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cognitive abilities</li> <li>○ Hypnosis</li> <li>○ Telepathy</li> <li>○ Clairvoyance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- Dreams
- Telekinesis
- Vibrations
- Radiosynthesis
- Psychometry
- Theoretical discussions on spirits
- Pieces that go beyond the mere anecdotal stories and include analysis
- Life and works of famous Metapsychic researchers
- Turkish spiritists' own activities and methodology

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**8** Politics and Social Issues

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Problems observed in society
- Ideal society
- Turkey's position vis-à-vis other countries
- Advice on the betterment of the nation
- Education
- Ideal world order
- Discussions on West vs. East
- Social justice
- Citizen's duties
- Atatürk and his ideals
- Gender issues
- War
- Animal rights
- Turkish politics
- Racial issues
- Environmental issues
- Exploitation and slavery
- Religion and politics

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**9** Science

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- General discussions on scientific principles / Experiments
- Science, technology and society
- Developments in modern science for example modern physics
- Scientific mentality, dogma and doubt
- Their own understanding of science
- Materialism vs. anti-materialism in science

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**10** | Philosophy and Aesthetics

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Quotes from famous philosophers
  - Pieces on philosophers
  - Discussions on philosophical existential questions
    - What is knowledge?
    - It is possible to know?
    - What is freedom?
    - What is free will?
    - What is reality?
  - Place of art in human evolution
  - Universalism
- 

**11** | Occultism / Esotericism

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Myths and prophecies
  - Prophetic dreams
  - Meanings behind natural disasters
  - New Age
  - Tarot
  - Occult sciences
  - Primitive belief systems
  - Conspiracy theories
  - Ufology
  - Fortune-telling
  - Magic and spells
- 

**12** | Neo-Spiritualism and Spiritism

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Principles and fundamentals of NS including all topics from the existence of spirits to reincarnation
- Principles and fundamental of classic spiritism
- Revelations
- Metapsychic terminology
- Works of Bedri Ruhselman
- Works of Allan Kardec
- Mediumship
- Methods

- Theoretical discussions

The previously mentioned topics may all fall under the broader umbrella of “Spiritism”. However, what determines the category of an article is the ultimate theme consistent throughout the piece. The articles under this specific category did not have any other overwhelming theme other than spiritism itself.

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**13** Current and Daily Events / Actualité / Essays

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Various sayings/quotes/mottos
- Essays written on various daily mundane topics
- Literary pieces, both prose and poem
- Short stories and anecdotes (non-spirit related)
- Life advice
- Lifestyle

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**14** Psychology

Articles in this category dealt with one or more of the following topics:

- Psychosomatic illnesses
- Mental health
- Intelligence
- Dreams
- Hypnosis
- Subconscious
- Personality
- Child upbringing
- Urges and instincts
- Mental issues
- Freud

What distinguishes the topics included under this category from parapsychology is the lack of spiritist references and attributions. Here, the issues are elaborated without referring to spiritist teachings.



**Appendix C. SAMPLE CODING TABLE FOR QUALITATIVE TEXT ANALYSIS**

Document Name: Ruh ve Kainat

Spring 2019

Meaning unit	Issue / Page	Category	Sub-category
“Dünya yeni bir realitenin taharrisile meşguldür. Bu realite kalple beynin, ilme dayanan akıl ile hadsin el ele vererek yürüdüğü bir saha parlamaktadır.”	6/9	Synthesis	Methodological synthesis
“İlim gayelerimize erişmek için çalışmalarımızda bize daha müessir vasıtalar temin eder.”	18/10	Science	Benefits of Science
“Tecrübi spiritüalizmanın bilhassa fizik tezahürlerinin insan idrakine çarpan kabalığı ve maddiliği yüzünden bu sahadaki inançların teessüsünde ve kuvvetlenmesinde pek büyük rolü olmuştur”	18/12	Science	Spiritism as a Science
“Herkes ruh çağırabilir ancak bundan faydalı bir sonuç elde edemez. Hazırlık gereklidir.”	1/13	Science	Methodology
“Spiritizmanın ilmi icaplarını mütala etmeden, veya hiç olmazsa vukuflu bir spirit alimin tavsiyelerine uymadan mistik, dini ve bilhassa tasavvufi itikatların tesiri altında duyduğu ve düşündüğü bazı neticeleri, ruhlardan veya büyük varlıklardan ilham yolu ile alacağım diye dünya ötesi alemlerle irtibata geçmek tehlikelidir. Buna mukabil bilgi ve görgü ile hareket edilip spiritizma tecrübelerine, yolu ve adabıyla girilirse mevcut ve başka kapılardan başlamış olan bu gibi tehlikelerin de önüne vaktinde geçmek mümkün olur.”	8/15	Science	Methodology
		Religion	Criticism
		Sufism	Criticism

## **Appendix D. LIST OF METHODS USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SPIRITS BY DR SEVİL AKAY**

The below categorization is constructed by Dr Sevil Akay, one of the most prominent names of spiritism in Turkey, one of the founders of both MTIAD and TPK and close friend of Ruhselman. According to Akay, while there are multiple ways of scientifically communicating with the spiritists including hypnotism, magnetism and psychic dissociation, it is most logical to classify the methods based on the medium's reaction. Thus, he came up with the following classification:

### **1. Psycho-physiological Dissociation**

- a. Mechanical** (the ones where the medium is fully conscious)
  - i.** Direct: through direct writing
  - ii.** Indirect: by receiving information and writing them afterwards in a conscious state
- b. Isolation** (the ones where the medium is slightly dissociated from their surrounding without falling asleep)
  - i.** Spontaneous: by falling into an isolated state in one's own
  - ii.** Direct suggestion: through the prompting and suggestion of an operator
  - iii.** Indirect suggestion: through the use of a tool by the operator
  - iv.** Mixed: the combination of the above-methods
- c. Hypnosis** (the ones where the medium is put into an artificially-induced sleep)
  - i.** Spontaneous: by falling into an artificial-sleep on one's own
  - ii.** Magnetic: by being put to sleep through magnetism
  - iii.** Hypnotic: by being put to sleep through hypnotism
  - iv.** Mixed: the combination of the above-methods
- d. Complex:** the combination of the above-mentioned three methods

### **2. Psycho-physic Dissociation**

- a. Ectoplasmic** (the ones where substances exude from the body of the medium)
  - i.** Telekinesis: by prompting movements from a distance without any physical contact

- ii. Dematerialization: by altering and disintegrating the physical attributes of the matter
  - iii. Materialization: by creating matter while preserving its physical attributes
  - iv. Dédoublément (duplication): by duplicating the body
- b. **Cosmo-Perispiritic** (the ones that are more complicated than the ectoplasmic incidents)
  - i. Apports: the possibility of transporting objects from distant continents
  - ii. Vuvadirect (direct voice): creating voices out of thin air
  - iii. Fakirist: certain significant abilities of fakirs

**Appendix E. LIST OF NAMES INCLUDED IN THE PROSOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS**

Name - Surname	Gender	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Profession
<b>Bedri Ruhselman</b>	0	1898	İstanbul	Doctor
<b>Refet Kayserilioğlu</b>	0	1922	Konya	Doctor
<b>Güngör Özyiğit</b>	0	1942	İstanbul	Psychologist
<b>Hüseyin Saadettin Arel</b>	0	1880	İstanbul	Lawyer / Musicologist
<b>Macit Aray</b>	0	1910	Malatya	Teacher
<b>Ergün Arıkdal</b>	0	1936	Adapazarı	Economist / Sales Manager
<b>Ali Sevil Akay</b>	0	1907	Antalya	Doctor
<b>Prof. Dr. Recep Doksat</b>	0	1927	İstanbul	Doctor
<b>Prof. Dr. Muammer Bilge</b>	0	1927	Artvin	Doctor
<b>Ziya Kayserilioğlu</b>	0	1916	Konya	Economist / Inspector
<b>Atilla Güyer</b>	0	1939		Bachelor of Letters
<b>Turhan Olgaç</b>	0	1921	İstanbul	Architect
<b>Jale Gizer</b>	1	1927	Sarıkamış / Kars	Translator
<b>Garbis Fikri</b>	0	1907	Kayseri	Publisher
<b>Turgut Akkaş</b>	0	1897	Isparta	Banker / Manager
<b>Doç. Dr. Ayhan Songar</b>	0	1926	Balıkesir	Doctor
<b>Dr. Tahsin Ünal</b>	0	1920	Karaman	Teacher / Military Officer
<b>Baykur Bilgin</b>	0	1936	Afyon / Dereçine	Music Teacher
<b>Prof. Dr. Abidin Kayserilioğlu</b>	0	1938	Konya	Doctor
<b>Dr. Zühtü Rıza Tinel</b>	0	1881	İstanbul	Doctor / Musicologist

<b>Reşat Bayer</b>	0	1910	İstanbul	Banker
<b>Erol Sevil</b>	0	1931	İstanbul	Chemical Engineer
<b>Enver Ölçerman</b>	0	1912	İstanbul	Civil Servant
<b>Suat Tahsuğ</b>	0	1925	İstanbul	Banker / Manager
<b>Hüsrev Bilgiöglu</b>	0	1913	Çorum	Broker / Agent
<b>Feridun Tepeköy</b>	0	1920	İstanbul	Businessman
<b>Metin Sakik</b>	0	1935	İstanbul	Public Accountant
<b>Rıfat Özdoruk</b>	0			Civil Inspector
<b>Mehmet Fahri Öğretici</b>	0			Technical Draftsman
<b>Nebahat Hikmet Omay</b>	1		İstanbul	Teacher / Historian
<b>Ahmet Kayserilioğlu</b>	0		Konya	Engineer
<b>Baha Kayserilioğlu</b>	0		Konya	Legal Advisor
<b>Recai Ökten</b>	0		İzmir	
<b>Dr. Celal Yarkin</b>	0			Doctor
<b>Hasan Yusuf Başkam</b>	0	1882	İstanbul	Doctor
<b>Ruhsar Başkam</b>	1		İzmir	Teacher / Principal
<b>Muammer Bayurgil</b>	0			Public Accountant
<b>Nezihe Bayurgil</b>	1			Pharmacist / Chemist
<b>Suat Plevne</b>	0			Lawyer / Legal Advisor
<b>Orhan Ergen</b>	0		Konya / Ereğli	Law Student
<b>Hazım Akalın</b>	0			Public Accountant
<b>Ata Atalay</b>	0			Doctor
<b>Muzaffer Suar</b>	0		Tekirdağ	Lawyer / Amateur Physicist
<b>Hüsnü Gürel</b>	0			Doctor
<b>Dr. Günhan Arıcan</b>	0			Doctor
<b>Kamuran Tüzer</b>	1			Teacher
<b>Doğın Tuğcu</b>	0			
<b>Nurettin Özmen</b>	0			Bureaucrat / Civil Servant
<b>Prof. Dr. Şerif Çankal</b>	0			

<b>Erdoğan Ertürkmen</b>	0	1933	İstanbul	Electrician
<b>Hasan Remzi Yeşilirmak</b>	0	1926	İzmir	Military Officer
<b>Ali Erman</b>	0	1940	Ankara	Student
<b>Güven Eren</b>	0	1935	İstanbul	Civil Servant
<b>Mehmet Sancar</b>	0	1927	Zile / Tokat	Civil Servant (railways)
<b>Çetin Salkök</b>	0	1942	Kocaeli	Electrical Engineer
<b>Süha Fazlı Beziray</b>	0	1935	İstanbul	
<b>Turgut Sefa Özbay</b>	0	1930	Turgutlu / Manisa	Electrician
<b>Aydoğan Tuncer</b>	0	1934	İstanbul	Civil Servant
<b>Berrin Gerçek</b>	1	1930	Bursa	Housewife
<b>Erol Haras</b>	0	1936	İzmir / Boyalık	Banker
<b>Nedret Eren</b>	0	1926	Erzurum	Civil Servant
<b>Azime Nakip</b>	1	1928	İstanbul	Housewife
<b>Salih Öge</b>	0	1927	Niğde	Civil Servant
<b>Reyan Batur</b>	1	1918	İstanbul	Housewife
<b>Mediha Turgut</b>	1	1921	İstanbul	Housewife
<b>Rüstem Ercan</b>	0	1931	İstanbul	Civil Servant
<b>Hasan Malgaz</b>	0	1922	Vezirköprü / Samsun	Tradesmen
<b>Ahmet Turgut Olgaç</b>	0	1929	İstanbul	Civil Servant
<b>Dr. Mehmet Şükrü Akkaya</b>	0	1895	Sivas	Academic
<b>Doç. Dr. Selim Yalın</b>	0	1923	Bakü	Engineer
<b>Dr. Şekip Akpınar</b>	0	1921	Bursa	Doctor
<b>Op. Dr. Ertuğrul Saltuk</b>	0	1914	İstanbul	Doctor
<b>Prof. Dr. Çetin Cansoy</b>	0	1931	İstanbul	Theoretical Physicist
<b>Hüseyin Demirhan</b>	0	1927		Translator / Writer
<b>Ziya Uras</b>	0			Lawyer
<b>Muhsin Demir</b>	0			Veterinarian
<b>Raif Serin</b>	0			Military Officer

<b>Doç. Dr. Lütfi Cihangir</b>	0			Chemist
<b>İbrahim Alagil</b>	0			Businessman
<b>Feridun Bilginer</b>	0		İzmir	Doctor
<b>Abdi Sokullu</b>	0			Businessman
<b>Ferhan Erkey</b>	0	1921	Afyon	Dentist
<b>Ali Çankaya</b>	0	1920	Konya	Bureaucrat / Governor
<b>Esat Ozan</b>	0	1920	İstanbul	Dentist
<b>Sevgi Çağıl</b>	1	1927	İzmir	
<b>İzzet Akçal</b>	0	1906	Rize	Lawyer / Bureaucrat
<b>Erol Sayan</b>	0	1936	Kastamonu	Composer / Musician
<b>İsmail Hakkı Ketenoğlu</b>	0	1906	Kastamonu	Lawyer / Bureaucrat
<b>Füruzan Selçuk</b>	1	1905	İstanbul	Translator / Writer
<b>Prof. Dr. Adnan Saygun</b>	0	1907	İzmir	Musician / State Artist
<b>Sabiha Bengütaş</b>	1	1904	İstanbul	Sculptor / Painter
<b>Necla Tunçok</b>	1		İstanbul	Banker / manager
<b>Zahit Çandarlı</b>	0			Judge
<b>Sinan Onbulak</b>	0			Inspector / Civil Servant

Table by author, data retrieved from primary sources including but not limited to all issues of the journals *Fener*, *İç Varlık*, *Ruh ve Kainat* and *Ruh Dünyası*, issues between the years 1960 and 1969 of *Ruh ve Madde* and issues between the years 1969 and 1976 of *Sevgi Dünyası*. For a complete list of all the primary sources used to build the prosopographical database, please refer to Primary Sources under References.

## Appendix F. SAMPLE SÉANCE REPORT

The following is a sample séance report published in issue 14 of Ruh Dünyası in 1964 showing how a séance report was kept and who participated in this specific séance in Ankara (Ruh Dünyası, 1964a):

**TUTANAK**

Aşağıda imzası bulunan bizler, Ankara'da Cebeci Sevil Sokak 13 No.lu apartmanın 18 No.lu dairesinde 12 Ocak 1964 Pazar günü saat takriben 17.00 civarında, aşağıda anlatılan olaya şahit olduğumuzu beyan ederiz:

1 — Y.K. bir odadaki kollu sandalyelerden birine oturduktan sonra, 26 metre boyundaki eksiz bir ve diğer iplerle boynundan koltuk altlarından, ayak bileklerinden, belinden ve muhtelif yerlerinden olmak üzere iskemleden kalkamayacak şekilde bağlandı.

2 — İpin birbirine bağlandığı iki ucu, balmumu ile tesbit edildikten sonra işaretlendi.

3 — Bir film makinesi, olay öncesi ve sonrasında tesbit etti. İçerde ses alma cihazı vardı.

4 — 160 saniye sonra, Y.K. nin bulunduğu odaya, kendisinin çağırması üzerine girildiğinde, iplerden tamamen çıkmış olduğu görüldü. Tecrübe sırasında içeride kimse yoktu.

a) İplerin, iskemleye bağlı olduğu yerlerden çözülmemiş olduğu,  
b) Balmumunun işaretinin bozulmadan durduğu, müşahade edildi.

5 — Teyp dinlendiğinde, olay sırasında bazı faaliyetlerin cereyan ettiği ve Y.K. nin de, bu faaliyetler sırasında bir hayli (soluduğu) yorulduğu kolayca anlaşıyordu.

6 — Olay öncesi ve olay sonrası, hazirunun kanaati ses alma cihazına tesbit edilmiştir.

Asist. Prof. Dr. Rasih GÖVEN  
Orta Doğu Teknik Üniver. Fel. Öğrt. Ü.  
I m z a

Opr. Dr. Mehmet Edip TARIM  
Ankara Tıp Fakültesi  
Fizyoloji Baş Asistanı  
I m z a

Asist. Prof. Dr. İsmet OLCAYLAR  
Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi  
I m z a

Dr. Zekâi SOER  
I m z a

Asist. Prof. Dr. Lütfü KARASOY  
Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi  
I m z a

Bayan Blanche ULUÇAY  
I m z a

Ekrem GÖRENLİ  
Ziraat Yüksek Mühendisi  
I m z a

Erol SAYAN  
I m z a

Cevat NECİBOĞLU  
I m z a

Aslı gibidir.  
Cevat Neciboğlu Erol Sayan  
28.1.1964

**SAADETİNİZİN ANAHTARI**

Harold Sherman'ın bu meşhur kitabı, Aydoğan Tuncer'in temiz türkçesi ile dilimize çevrilmiştir.

- \* Uzulüyorsanız
- \* Ümitsizseniz
- \* Kendinize güveniniz yoksa
- \* Hayattan tad almıyorsanız
- \* İşleriniz hep aksi gidiyorsa
- \* Hayatınızı başarıya ulaştırmak istiyorsanız,

**Saadetinizin Anahtarı**

kitabını mutlaka okuyunuz. Bu kitap için her okuyan «hayatımda bu kadar şahane ve faydalı bir kitap okumadım» demektedir. Fiyatı 7.5 liradır. Sipariş adresi : RUH DÜNYASI, P.K. 140 - İSTANBUL