Akademik Hassasiyetler **The Academic Elegance**
Yıl/Year: 2024 **Sayı/Issue: 25**
Cilt/Volume: 11 **Sayfa/Page: 570-601**
Araştırma Makalesi

Makale Gönderim Tarihi:17/11/202 **Makale Kabul Tarihi: 21/08/2024**

NEW AGE SUFISM AND ITS FOUNDATIONS: THE CASE OF MEVLÂNÂ CELALEDDIN RUMI IN ROGER HOUSDEN'S *CHASING RUMI*

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Abstract

Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi, a thirteenth Century Sufi mystic, has gained increasing popularity in the UK and in the USA from 1990s onwards. This study explores this decontextualised popularity through an analysis of the political and sociological factors that led individuals' interest in a form of spirituality which is out of religious context. It asserts that the insecurity capitalism and neoliberalism created in the workplace for working class people resulted in a search for a way for them to improve themselves first in the marketplace and then in the psychological and spiritual realms of their lives. In order to unpack this claim, the paper starts with brief histories of capitalism and neoliberalism from the second half of the nineteenth century and shows how political and social impact of capitalism and neoliberalism prompted the emergence of self-help publications. It then moves on to discussing the notion of governmentality and its function in the decentralised governance of neoliberal state. Through this, it offers a Foucauldian analysis of New Age movement as a technology of power. It then proceeds with a historical account of the New Age movement, it scrutinises the relationship between neoliberal governance and the New Age movement. Having established the foundations of New Age Sufism and briefly touched the historic presence of Sufism in the West, it presents a close reading of Roger Housden's Chasing Rumi as a New Age novel and discusses how values of New Age spirituality comes together with the 13th Century mystic in the belief system of the novel and shows in what ways New Age Sufism and Rumi's theosophy varies from its traditional roots.

Keywords*: Neoliberalism, Self-help, Governmentality, New Age Sufism, Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi.*

YENİ ÇAĞ TASAVVUFU VE KÖKENLERİ: ROGER HOUSDEN'IN *RUMİ'NİN İZİNDE* ROMANINDA MEVLÂNÂ CELALEDDİN RUMİ ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

On üçüncü yüzyıl mutasavvıfı Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi, 1990'lardan itibaren İngiltere ve ABD'de artan bir popülerlik kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma, bireylerin dini bağlamdan kopuk bir maneviyat biçimine ilgi duymasına yol açan siyasi ve sosyolojik

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faktörlerin analizi yoluyla bu bağlamından koparılmış popülerliği araştırmaktadır. Kapitalizm ve neoliberalizmin işçi sınıfı için işyerinde yarattığı güvensizliğin, kendilerini önce iş yerinde, sonra da yaşamlarının psikolojik ve manevi alanlarında geliştirmeleri için bir yol arayışına neden olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bu iddiayı ortaya koymak için, makale on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren kapitalizm ve neoliberalizmin kısa tarihçesiyle başlamakta ve kapitalizm ve neoliberalizmin siyasi ve sosyal etkilerinin kişisel gelişim yayınlarının ortaya çıkışını nasıl tetiklediğini göstermektedir. Daha sonra yönetimsellik kavramını ve neoliberal devletin adem-i merkeziyetçi yönetişimindeki işlevini tartışmaya geçmektedir. Bu sayede, bir iktidar teknolojisi olarak New Age hareketinin Foucaultcu bir analizini sunmaktadır. Daha sonra New Age hareketinin tarihsel bir anlatımıyla devam etmekte ve neoliberal yönetişim ile New Age hareketi arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Yeni Çağ Sufizminin temellerini ortaya koyduktan ve Sufizmin Batı'daki tarihsel varlığını kısaca ele aldıktan sonra, Roger Housden'ın Rumi'nin İzinde adlı romanını bir New Age romanı olarak yakından okuyarak, New Age manevi değerlerinin romanın inanç sisteminde 13. Yüzyıl mutasavvıfi ile nasıl bir araya getirildiğini ve Rumi'nin geleneksel köklerinden ne şekilde farklı olduğunu gösterir.

***Anahtar Kelimeler**: Neoliberalizm, Kişisel Gelişim, Yönetimsellik, Yeni Çağ Tasavvufu, Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi.*

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the practices and teachings of Eastern spirituality in the West where spirituality, subjective well-being and authenticity have become defining terms for contemporary discourses around subjectivity. A number of meditation techniques are borrowed from Eastern religions such as Buddhism as it is hoped that they will contribute to subjective well-being and individuals' discovery of their "true and authentic selves" (Bauman, 2001, p. 44). Tasawwuf or Sufism, "the mysticism of Islam", has also been co-opted to these spiritual healing methods (Arberry, 2008, p. 11). Publications on spirituality have an increasing popularity and can be seen on the bestseller list quite frequently. Among these books is James Redfield's bestseller *The Calestine Prophecy* (1994). The book provides a good example of New Age thinking and the inspirational, experimental and psychological approach towards Eastern teachings that the New Age entails. Historian of Hermetic philosophy, Wouter Hanegraaff, criticises Redfield's book for its insubstantiality and Redfield for his lack of knowledge and insight on the subject; however, he argues that this book is important and a must-read for those who wish to comprehend "what is happening to religion in contemporary western society" (2000, p. 289). It is true that the number of such publications has dramatically increased in recent decades and a quick glance at a local bookshop can provide evidence for the changing trends in religion. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead rightly argue that spirituality book stalls are growing in size while "'Religion', 'Christianity' and 'Theology' [sections are] shrink[ing]" (2005, p. 70). This reality raises questions concerning how this trend can be explained and what some of the reasons are

behind this change. Sociologists, historians and theologians have tried to come up with an explanation for the non-traditional spiritualities. Hanegraaff (2000) argues that the reason is secularisation and this has affected individuals' perception of religion. Sociologist Steve Bruce (2000) agrees with Hanegraaff but also states that this change is an outcome of modernisation which hinders the growth of traditional forms of religion. Similarly, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) agree with the secularisation theory but add that there is also a sacralisation process. Even though I agree with the secularisation theory, I think the primary reason for the recent surge in popularity for New Age spiritualities is capitalism and its contemporary version, neoliberalism, both of which have shaped the lives of individuals who are subjected to them. I believe that this trend is in part an attempt to ease the side-effects of neoliberal individualisation and I argue that self-help and New Age publications are the products of capitalism and a form of coping mechanism for the changing realities of everyday life that capitalism creates.

To provide a genealogy of New Age Sufism, this paper starts with brief histories of capitalism and neoliberalism from the second half of the nineteenth century and analyses the relevance of capitalism to the emergence of self-help publications. Then, asserting that the notion of governmentality is crucial in understanding the neoliberal state and its pattern of rule, it gives an account of how neoliberal governance operates from a Foucauldian perspective. Next, providing a historical account of the New Age movement, it scrutinises the relationship between neoliberal governance and the New Age movement, and explains why New Age is important in this mode of governance. It continues with a contextualisation of the historic presence of Sufism in the West and offers a detailed close reading of Roger Housden's *Chasing Rumi: A Fable about Finding the Heart's True Desire* (2002) as a New Age novel and elaborates how it provides an unorthodox interpretation of Rumi's Sufism.

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism cannot be discussed without elaborating on capitalism which preceded the former by more than a hundred years and laid the foundations for it. Capitalism, in its uninstitutionalised and small-scale form, dates back to as early as the late sixteenth century in England while its dominance can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Sociologist Peter Saunders (1995) traces the contemporary foundations of capitalism in England to the The Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 while economist Paul Swanson (2013) argues that in the USA the necessary legal background for capitalism was created as early as in 1787 by The United States Constitution. Both Swanson and Saunders underline the characteristics of capitalism as private property rights, a free-market economy and a quest for profit. These characteristics were predominantly economic, and their benefits were for a few members of the ruling class rather than the working class

majority of the population. However, the impact of the capitalism was not limited to those who benefit from it.

Working class people need to adapt to the changes that capitalism brings to their lives. The changes and effects of capitalism cannot be limited to the economic domains. While employers and higher social classes are pleased with capitalism and the profits it brings, this new competitive economy puts an immense pressure on working class people in several domains in their lives. Sociologist Richard Sennett rightly emphasises that the emergence of the need to look closer at the self-started with industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century when the "public realm [began] to lose legitimacy and coherence" (1993, pp. 19-22). Industrial capitalism, the introduction of machinery to the workplace, has jeopardized the employment of the working class for whom work is the most important means of sustenance. As a result of the decrease in employment rates, the working person is subject either to losing their job or to vying with other workers for it. Thus, the competitive structure of the workplace has directed workers to improve their personal skills apart from their work-related abilities. Both Christopher Lasch (1982) and Micki McGee (2005) stress the effect of the competitive workplace on the reliance of self-improvement. In the nineteenth century, improvement literature focussed primarily on the examples of self-made men and how they reached their goals by means of features such as hard work and persistence. Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help: with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* is one of the first instances of these books where he suggested that self-help is possible as long as it is from within and that governing one's self is the way to success. Started with the insecurity of people in the labour market; however, the notion of self-improvement has gone far beyond the workplace in the successive centuries.

Though publications on personal improvement were present in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a delay in its popularity until around the last quarter of the twentieth century. There may be a correlation between the popularity of self-improvement literature and the rise of neoliberalism in the UK and the USA since "the number of self-help books more than doubled" from 1972 to 2000 (McGee, 2005, p. 11). In the interval between the emergence of personal improvement literature and its popularity, there was an embedded liberalism which necessitated that:

> The state should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends (Harvey, 2007, p. 10).

Welfare provisions in a number of areas such as health care and education in both countries lightened the pressure on the labour class to a certain extent. Keynesian monetary and fiscal policies which aimed to guarantee employment for the working class rather than serving the needs of business corporations were observed especially after the Second World War

and these programs were effective and resulted in economic growth until the end of 1960s (Harvey, 2007, pp. 10-11). Though these policies, along with nationalisation of big industries, were advantageous for the majority of the population, they were criticised by the media who claimed that such policies put limitations on individual freedom (Harvey, 2007, pp. 56-57). With the help of the economic crisis of the 1970s, which had a its negative effect on the value of money and an increasing number of unemployed people, the end of the decade became "a revolutionary turning point in the world's social and economic history" (Harvey, 2007, p. 1). A new version of capitalism - neoliberalism - emerged with the Thatcher and Reagan governments.

Neoliberalism can be defined in basic terms as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). Even though the economic or market-related aspects are familiar, there is a much-intensified focus on individualisation in neoliberalism. One of the prominent characteristics of neoliberal governments is that they encourage and defend freedom of choice and a limited form of government (Foucault, 2009; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rimke, 2000). David Harvey emphasises how the ideals of freedom and dignity helped the success of the neoliberal way of thinking since these ideals "were threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose" (Harvey, 2007, p. 5). What neoliberalism achieved, compared to its predecessor, liberalism, was "the proliferation of networks, the fragmentation of the public sector and the erosion of central control" (Bevir, 2011, p. 459). These changes resulted from the discarding of Keynesian policies as well as welfare provisions; for example, industries which had been nationalized in liberalism were once again privatised. Harvey defines the neoliberal turn as a "creative destruction" since this new capitalism dismantled every domain in individuals' lives such as "divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart" (Harvey, 2007, p.5). The new state was no longer the centre of power and it withdrew from many spheres and decentres itself. However, this, by no means, suggests that there was no government. Instead, the decentred state made use of "other organisations to secure its intentions, deliver its policies and establish a pattern of rule" (Bevir, 2011, p. 459). So, a neoliberal government does not intervene directly but controls in different ways. Contrary to the withdrawal of the neoliberal state from many areas, it increased the burden of individuals by means of creating and imposing "an individualisation of responsibility" (Bevir, 2011, p. 465).

2. GOVERNMENTALITY AND HOW IT WORKS

The notion of governmentality is indispensable to an analysis of how neoliberal government operates while promising individual freedom. Coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault, the word "governmentality" refers to the indirect regulation of people. Foucault underlines the meanings of the verb "to govern" prior to its political connotations in the sixteenth century and this genealogy clarifies his idea of governmentality. According to him, in the pre-sixteenth centuries to govern denoted the "movement in space, material subsistence, diet, the care given to an individual and the health one can assure him, and also to the exercise of command, of a constant, zealous, active, and always benevolent prescriptive activity" (Foucault, 2009, p. 122). Alongside the generally accepted meaning of governance — a superior-inferior, ruler and ruled, relationship — this historical meaning underlines the provision of health, care and well-being for every citizen. The concept of well-being has many dimensions in neoliberal governments since the interpretation of achievements and lack thereof is understood with regard to "entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings" (Harvey, 2007, p. 66). Thus, individuals become neoliberal agencies who are responsible for their deeds and well-being and are supposed to perform their individual duties. To reach this, individuals become neoliberal agencies and craft themselves towards neoliberal ideal of selfhood by improving the self and increasing its market value. This necessitates constantly working on the self whether it is on the grounds of physical, mental or spiritual well-being.

Neoliberal governmentality includes "the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other" (Foucault, 1997, p. 300). It sheds light on new modes of governance in which the government is no longer dependent on hierarchy and dominance. In this new way of governance, power is not exercised by means of the "crushing of subjectivity in the interests of the control" (Rose, 1990, p. 257) of the government and "getting subjects to obey the sovereign's will" (Foucault, 2009, p. 72). Instead, governance becomes the organization of populaces by means of "the naturalness of their desire, and of spontaneous production of the collective interest by desire […,] completely the opposite of the old ethical-juridical conception of government and the exercise of sovereignty" (Foucault, 2009, p. 73). One might question how subjective desire can be collective. Here, governance requires the involvement of the technologies of power.

Institutions, networks, organisations and experts are among the technologies of power which act as bodies for information gathering. They observe and collect information on the populace. Since neoliberalism is "both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance" (Larner, 2000, p. 6), the governmental rationality of neoliberalism makes itself "operable" (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 16) in society through its technologies. These technologies

serve as mechanisms to change, form and standardise the practices of human beings within a society.

For the sake of clarity, it is appropriate to draw an analogy between the technologies of neoliberal governmentality and Google advertisements since both of them operate by similar principles. When individuals browse the web, they reveal information about themselves such as their preferences and interests. This disclosure provides Google with ample possibilities to personalise its advertisement suggestions. Similarly, neoliberal governments collect information about their citizens by means of their technologies of power. Questionnaires, academic studies, statistics, and polls are among the resources that divulge information. They give details of lifestyles, world views, degrees of religiosity and inclinations of any kind. Once information is gathered, possibilities and tendencies are calculated and necessary precautions are taken. In other words, if the majority of the population consumes alcohol, a neoliberal government does not prohibit this act since it is against individuals' freedom of conduct (but may set a minimum age for purchase to prevent youth exposure to alcohol). Instead, relevant organisations — in these instances health institutions such as the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism— research population, collect data, produce action plans, and design and launch campaigns to create public awareness. Rather than pressurising people by laws, regulations and rules, a neoliberal government comes up with alternatives that individuals would be eager to choose in the same manner that Google suggests advertisements according to browsing histories but does not force anybody to click on the recommended link.

At this point I will offer a more concrete example of some research and findings on spirituality in order to clarify the importance of knowledge of the population. In an article published in 1985, American pollster George Gallup Jr shared his findings on how Americans rate spirituality and religiosity. He stated the importance of understanding the figures on American religiosity and spirituality by claiming that "any exploration of the nature and direction of U.S. society would be woefully incomplete without knowledge of the role that religious convictions play in shaping our opinions and behaviour." (Gallup, 1985, p. 170). Dividing participants of a survey into four categories according to their commitment to spirituality, Gallup (1985) concluded that those who are of a highly spiritual make-up are much more contented with their lives - regardless of possibly having low incomes - and have a tendency to be more tolerant towards people of other cultures, races and religions when compared to other participants. Research of this kind provides institutions with concrete first-hand knowledge of the populace. However, there is a lack of studies on religion in academic studies on governmentality.

2.1 Governmentality and Religion

The notion of governmentality has been analysed and developed by many Foucauldian critics and applied to several interdisciplinary studies. Yet

governmentality and its unique understanding of power relations has not been adequately examined in terms of its conjunction with religion. There are two main reasons for this lack of studies. The first is that Foucault (2009) did not provide a detailed analysis of religion, even though he based his definition of governmentality on Christian pastors and claimed that the Christian pastorate formed earlier forms of governmentality in its viewing of people as a flock and taking care of them. He pointed out the authority of the Church – its pastoral power – and how this power monitored people in every sphere of their lives by promising them salvation. The second reason for the absence of studies in this area is that individuals' views of religion and belief have been altered by secularisation. The term "secularisation" here does not refer to a strict separation of religion and politics. Instead, it relates to "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and, frequently, not the easiest to embrace" (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). Thus, secularity represents the freedom of choosing from various available belief systems or embracing unbelief. Since a great number of religions, religious movements, sects and cults have become available, regulating people by means of a single religious institution has become almost impossible. In the context of the USA, considering the fact that the country is made up of people with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural origins, its population is one of "multiplicities" (Foucault, 2009, p.12). In such heterogeneity, it is challenging to govern individuals by means of any nationalist, religious and ethnic premises. Indeed, the best way to standardise and construct ideal citizens is to do so on an individual level, without any affinity to cultural diversities within the population. Neoliberal governance sets individuals free from the constraints of liberal governance by diminishing the responsibility of the state for its citizens. In this way, the state holds its citizens responsible for their successes and failures. Therefore, individuals embark on seeking help to survive in a "Darwinian neoliberal world" (Harvey, 2007, p. 157). Individuals begin to scrutinise aspects of their lives for betterment. How-to manuals and the New age spiritualities accompany their searches for improvement. Rose observes the individualising effect of neoliberal government in following words:

> "Our authorities, in pursuing social objectives, have found it necessary and desirable to educate us in the techniques for governing ourselves. The modern self has been constituted through this web of practices of power, meaning, and virtue that have addressed it." (Rose, 1990, p. 217)

New Age as "the zenith of individualism", focusses on the psychological aspects of traditional religions and create multiple spiritualities out of these traditions as consumable remedies (Bruce, 1995, p. 122). Offering a novel idea of secular religiosity by emphasising and facilitating subjective experience and positioning the self at the centre of religious experience, the New Age movement directs its adherents toward neoliberal subjectivity. This

is carried out under the guise of faith and practice: an important facet of everyday life.

3. NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

Heelas (1996) and Campbell (2007) note that the term "New Age" was used for the first time in the context of spirituality by Alfred Orage and Holbrook Jackson as the name of their weekly published paper in the first decade of the twentieth century. In subsequent decades the extent of the New Age movement has been so broadened that it may denote a broad range of practices such as "gnosticism, women's spirituality, channelling and spirit possession, astrology, the Tarot, the I Ching, humanistic and transpersonal psychotherapy, alternative medicine, yoga, prosperity consciousness, environmentalism, ecofeminism" (Campbell, 2007, p. 119). However, the characteristics of New Age movements which are discussed in this paper have been generated by the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Mark Sedgwick acknowledges these years as "the major cultural and intellectual turning point of the Western twentieth century" (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 207). For the sake of clarity, this paper uses the word 'movement' in singular form and refers particularly to those New Age movements which are related to spirituality.

There has been much debate over the New Age phenomenon and it has been addressed under different labels such as "New Thought" (Cushman, 1996; Schmidt, 2012), "Alternative Spirituality" (Bowman & Sutcliffe, 2000), "Self-Help" (McGee, 2005) or simply as "New Age" (Bruce, 1995; Bruce, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Hanegraaff, 2000; Heelas, 1996) and critics hold divergent opinions as to whether it is a single movement or separate movements, a form of spirituality, or something occult. However, they agree that the New Age movement has gained increasing popularity in the contemporary era. While its characteristics will be discussed in detail later, New Age can be broadly described as a manifestation of "the spirituality which lies within the person" (Heelas, 1996, p. 2), as paths "away from the old 'religions of authority' into the new 'religion of the spirit'" (Schmidt, 2012, p. 7), and as a search for individualistic spiritualities "outside the context of a formal religious organization" (Fuller, 2001, p. 4) in order to "free the inner self and empower the individual" (Bruce, 1995, p. 100). This compound definition suggests that the movement rejects the authority of religious institutions and favours individual freedom regarding what to believe and how to practise. New Age author Roger Housden observes this as the possibility of subscribing to "any one of the spiritual traditions of the globe, to several of them at once, or even to one of our own making" (Housden, 1990, p. 25). Zen meditations, Yoga practices and Sufi dances are on offer in the "spiritual marketplace" (Bowman, 1999, p. 181) for New Agers to try. A combination of such practices is also welcomed. Considered within this context, New Age appears to be a personalised religion and a search for a "deeper and more authentic

experience" of the immanent life (Wexler, 2000, p. 2). However, the New Age movement serves a much deeper purpose than subjective experience. It is a technology of power benefitting neoliberal governmentality. New Age performs the role of intermediary to convey neoliberal ideas and (re)produce its ideals. It frames, supervises and standardises the opinions, aspirations, habits and (some) acts of human beings according to the needs of governmental rationality (Bevir, 2011). Neoliberal governance focusses on individualisation and holds individuals responsible for their successes and failures and for their well-being. The New Age and self-help publications target "reflexive human beings who are always in a process of becoming, which means that their goals and preferences like all other parts of their identity are mouldable and capable of continuous change" (Bang, 2004, p. 168).

What makes the New Age movement so powerful today is that it does not pose a threat or challenge to already existing forms of religion. Unlike established religions, it does not expect its adherents to follow a particular path. With its absence of strict rules and recruitment policies, it does not try to defeat organised religions and take over their followers. Instead, it tries to create a collectivist spirituality based on universal values of humanity. Guy Redden underlines the collective characteristics of the New Age movement by defining it as "at once a movement and marketplace, materialistic and spiritual, individualistic and bent on collective transformation" (2011, p. 650). To view this movement as nothing but spirituality underestimates its collective power.

Since the 1950s, the New Age movement has been popular for people who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (Fuller, 2001, p. 4) because it positions the self at the very centre of religion in the same manner as neoliberal governmentality, which views the self as "an object of knowledge and a subject/object of governance" (Rimke, 2000, p.68). While psychologist Phillip Cushman does not necessarily focus on either New Age or neoliberalism, he puts forward the notion of how the character of the self is peculiar to any era in which it is constructed and how this production is monitored by indirectly setting goals for the individuals (1996, p. 332). Here, Cushman emphasises the creation of the self by its surroundings and views the individual as a product of social construction.

The primary reason why neoliberalism places such importance on the self is in order to lessen the burden of government by individualising and holding individuals responsible, and to create more freedom for markets to operate. Individualisation of responsibility is an authoritative stimulus for increasing the potential of citizens. Since the majority of people need to live by working and their necessities are not subsidized by the government, individuals are left with no option but to look after themselves on spiritual, physical and mental grounds in order not to lose their jobs and become redundant. As their desire to be employed is evident and there is a risk of

losing their job, individuals are concerned with practical solutions in the immanent world. Thus, those who need help and who focus on well-being give their consent to becoming "governable, predictable, calculable, classifiable, self-conscious, responsible, self-regulating and self-determined" citizens (Rimke, 2000, p. 63). Similarly, New Age attaches importance to the self in the immanent world and suggests "techniques for improving the 'self'" on a spiritual level, which is contrary to Abrahamic religions (Bruce, 1995, p. 95). Neither the neoliberal ideal of citizens nor the importance given to the self is welcomed in monotheistic religions. Organized religions such as Christianity and Islam reject the pleasures and desires of self in the immanent world and prepare their adherents for an afterlife which is viewed as a better place than the earthly one. However, New Age provides solutions for the immanent life and its "world-affirming" nature promotes the construction of a better life and a better self in this life (Bruce, 1995, p. 98). Similarly, according to Hanegraaff, the New Age movement is born out of a lack of satisfaction with "certain aspects of contemporary culture and society" and advanced itself a kind of "folk religion" that makes people of all walks of life interested in (2000, pp. 289-90). While in neoliberal rationality "there is a technological fix for each and every problem", improvement and spirituality literature provides individuals with ample possibilities of tailored spiritualities to consume (Harvey, 2007, p. 68). Therefore, the views of self in both neoliberal governance and New Age complement each other.

In neoliberal governmentality, "problematisation" is considered to be the first step towards change (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 12). Sociologist Mitchell Dean defines problematisation of the government as "a calling into question of how we shape or direct our own and others' conduct" and explains how problematisations are created "on the basis of particular regimes of practices of government, with particular techniques, language, grids of analysis and evaluation, forms of knowledge and expertise" (2010, p. 38). Problematisation in this context stands for any aspect of individuals' lives that is suggested by experts or institutions as problematic and which has already existed but has been considered by these individuals to be normal. Certain aspects of the life and behaviours of individuals are introduced as problematic by various platforms and better versions of existing behaviours are recommended (Rose, 1990; Salmemniemi & Vorona, 2014). Individuals begin to question their identities after they are exposed to these problematic or recommended habits, and they act to change them by their free will. By means of problematisation, the individual is made aware of his/her problematic conduct and acts on it. In the process of governmentality, problematisation creates the background for any norm that society needs to embrace. Individuals are brought into contact with an ideal self in one or more of the mass media platforms. While in neoliberal governmentality problematisation can be created for any aspect of individuals' lives, New Age focuses primarily on spiritual life. Thus, while it might be interpreted that individuals reshape their behaviours and spiritual lives according to their free

will without the direct intervention of an authority, since they act according to the problematisations created by the institutions and expertise of neoliberal government, they are creating a neoliberal self.

Apart from the importance of the self and the problematisation of everyday life, both New Age and neoliberal government support individuals' freedom of choice. Both of them consider the liberation of the individual from authority as an important step towards the construction of the ideal person and the ideal citizen respectively. New Age does not promote one form of religion over others and gives "little guidance as to which new revelations of esoteric knowledge to accept or, in terms of behaviour, how to conduct oneself in a particular setting" (Bruce, 1995, p. 119). It provides westernised versions of spiritualities across religions and gives prominence to perennial philosophies and universal values that are present in several religions. In this way, New Age permits individual interpretations of these philosophies and strengthens the freedom that is suitable to neoliberal governance.

Another similarity between neoliberalism and New Age is that both are egalitarian. It is true that neoliberal governance provides a restoration of power for a small number of elites (Harvey, 2007). Yet the promise of individual freedom creates room for individuals to move up the social scale. If this does not happen, it is considered the responsibility of individuals since they have not fulfilled the requirements for upward mobility. Also, neoliberalism opposes earlier modes of governance such as autocracy and monarchy and provides a decentred alternative to these dominations where active ruling mechanisms give way to indirect forms of rule. These changes in governmental structure necessitate "new forms of personality, new modes of socialization, [and] new ways of organizing experience" (Lasch, 1982, p. 50). Therefore, the decentred power of neoliberalism establishes itself within society and supplies itself with knowledge of that society and its practices and traditions. Similarly, New Age religiosity is far from being institutionalised, so much so that the number of New Agers is unknown. Structured spiritual devotion in organised religions - such as Christianity and Islam - is available to a small number of monks or Sufis who are prepared to devote themselves completely to religion. New Age, on the other hand, offers spirituality to any individual regardless of their level of devoutness. Also, New Age lacks a clear pattern of organisation. Both its circulation and its influence on people are provided by means of diverse apparatus including one-day seminars, workshops, retreat centres, DVDs and publications as well as more recent platforms such as YouTube, Vlogs and blogs (Bruce, 1995). People who are seeking worldly spiritualities prefer to answer the existential questions they have outside the domains of religious authority since organised religions do not encourage self-centred spiritualities. New Age gives these people the opportunity to experiment with their spirituality on a personal level and encourages them to exercise their freedom to choose without any commitment. Before proceeding to analyse the contradictory relationship

between Sufism and the New Age, it is expedient to provide some historical information on the emergence of Sufism in the West.

4. SUFISM IN THE WEST: THEN AND NOW

The presence of Sufism in the West can be traced back to the arrival of Hazrat Inayat Khan in the US in the first quarter of the twentieth century and of Idries Shah in the UK in the second quarter of the century (Hermansen, 1998; Lewis, 2008) In the second half of the century, Sufism was practised by a growing number of people in myriad forms. Currently, there are several American Sufi movements and orders such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqani and Qadiri-Rifa'i Orders. Hermansen (1998) observes that while some of these orders strictly follow the path of Islam and Sharia, others are moderated to adopt universal themes, thereby moving away from the origins of Sufism.

Sufism cannot be easily categorised since it consists of many movements and most of them follow diverse leaders and teachings. Hermansen divides the Sufi movements in the USA into two broad categories, referred to as perennials and hybrids according to their adherence to Islam and the *Qur'an*. Hybrid Sufi movements, including "The Halveti-Jerrahi Order" and "the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship", are generally guided by leaders who were born in Muslim countries and these movements "identify more closely with an Islamic source and content" (Hermansen, 1998, p. 158). She argues that perennial Sufi movements, such as "The Sufi Order" and "Society for Sufi Studies", are based on the idea that "there is a universal, eternal truth which underlies all religions" (Hermansen, 1998, p. 155). She claims that these movements do not require their adherents to adopt Islam, practice ritual prayers or dress according to the Islamic teachings even though Sufism belongs to the Islamic tradition. On the other hand, Jean-Louis Michon disagrees with Hermansen. He argues that perennial Sufis do not renounce the observance of Islamic teachings even though they accept the existence of a single, universal truth. Instead, he portrays the Islamic foundations of perennial Sufism as a "testimony of faith" to Allah, following the habits of the Prophet Muhammad and the "practice of invocation" (Michon, 2006, pp. xxi-xxv). This paper adopts neither Hermansen's binary division of Sufism nor Michon's definition of perennial Sufism. Even though both approaches are useful in analysing Sufism within the context of religion, they have weaknesses in identifying the place of Sufism in the spiritual marketplace. This paper focusses primarily on the popularity of Sufism outside its religious context. Therefore, rather than following the views of Hermansen and Michon, it argues that there is a new version of Islamic mysticism which is New Age Sufism.

There are a few theories that might explain both the recent revival of spirituality and the changing nature of Sufism in the West. Sociologist Colin Campbell argues that, from the mid-1940s onwards, the West, which has been westernising the East for centuries, is now undergoing an Easternisation

process whereby what belongs to the East is now imported to the West (Campbell, 2007, pp. 3-40). If there were, as Campbell claims, an Easternisation process, the West would have been expected to adopt what belongs to the East in its original form. However, what happens in the case of Sufism is that the West selectively borrows some of its elements while leaving the rest unmentioned. Historian Mark Sedgwick (2013), on the other hand, reasons that Sufism has been subject to "localisation" in order to meet the expectations of the target culture of countries with a dominant Christian population. This is a more plausible idea considering the denouncement of the Islamic foundations of Sufism. British sociologists Zygmunt Bauman (2001; 2008) and Anthony Giddens (1991; 2000) assume another position by arguing that the twenty-first century is an era of ambivalence and insecurity as a result of the negative outcomes of the late/high/liquid Modernity of the 1990s. Bauman (2007) suggests that ambivalence and insecurity create divisions within society, separating people from "community", and "solidarity" and leading them towards interests such as spirituality that are more "self-oriented". Regardless of the theories behind the popularity of spirituality and changes in the nature of Sufism, this new version of Islamic mysticism is becoming increasingly prevalent on the New Age shelves in bookshops.

The teachings of Sufism have been passed from one generation to another through literature, especially poetry, which has always been an important medium for Sufi Masters. Similarly, its post-1990 revival in the West is reflected in the number of Sufi-themed novels as well as translations of Sufi masters' poetry including Rumi and Hafiz. Yet the content of Sufism has changed so much that in the popular culture and contemporary novel it has become a label deprived of its foundation, the *Qur'an*, defined by Arberry as "the supreme authority to which the Muslim mystic looks for guidance and justification" (2008, pp. 12-3). One of these poets Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi has been especially under the spotlight so much so that he became a best-seller in America in 1997 (Marks, 1997) and appeared in several contemporary novels written in English as a character. Indeed, the remainder of this paper focuses solely on Rumi's recent decontextualised popularity through an analysis of Roger Housden's *Chasing Rumi: A Fable about Finding the Heart's True Desire* (2002) that is one of the novels that best exemplifies this new trend.

5. KEEPING SUFISM WITHOUT ISLAM IN ROGER HOUSDEN'S *CHASING RUMI*

Roger Housden is a British-American novelist whose works mostly consist of poetry and travelogues. He has published more than twenty books so far and most of his titles offer capsule remedies for specific topic as in the case of *Twenty Poems to Bless Your Marriage and One to Save It* (2012). The title of this section indeed alludes to one of his works entitled *Keeping the Faith Without a Religion* (2014) where he applauds the accessibility of

previously secluded spiritual practices of religions in the contemporary world without confining into their doctrines and encourages the practices of secular spiritualities. Even though, he does not identify himself with New Age movement in any of his publications, his approach to spirituality is without doubt influenced by it. His only novel *Chasing Rumi* is no exception as it exemplifies the New Age thinking which problematises the everyday life, promotes religious freedom and spirituality without a commitment to religious authority and unhinges esoteric dimensions of organised religions from their religious authority in order to point out their common values.

Chasing Rumi is a quest novel and the story is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. In précis, it tells the story of two intertwined journeys the Greek protagonist Georgiou undertakes. One of these journeys is a geographical one that leads Georgiou first to his homeland Greece, and then to Türkiye while the other journey is a spiritual one that he embarks on within himself. This novel exhibits a number of the characteristics of New Age movement towards religiosity and specifically it portrays Rumi's teachings and Sufism differently from their traditional context. The protagonist interprets these teachings selectively and creates his individual version of Sufism which, hereafter will be referred to as New Age Sufism to compare the version of Sufism depicted in the novel with the mysticism of Islam.

The title of the novel's first edition is *Chasing Rumi: A Fable about Finding the Heart's True Desire.* The choice of title is controversial. The first half of the title suggests that in the novel a character, possibly the protagonist, is meant to attain the Sufi way of life Rumi has lived. However, the second part of the title indicates that the novel is about the feelings of that character as well as the realisation of his desire. It also signifies that this story is a fable, which suggests that there is a moral lesson to learn in this story. Yet, the title does not give a hint about the nature of this desire or the moral message. However, the subjectivity of desiring something, as well as selecting the word 'desire' rather than a more positive connotation of it in a Rumian context, is problematic. As "annihilation of the self" is one of the Sufi concepts that necessitates "the effacement or dissolution of the concupiscent or selfish self in the ocean of God's attributes", Sufis reject the idea of subjectivity and any form of dualism (Lewis, 2008, p. 23). While Housden chooses this title in order to affirm that the protagonist follows Rumi's footsteps and way of living, there is no room for subjective desires in Rumi's theosophy. In his magnum opus, *Masnavi* (c. 1268), Rumi underlines the link between hell and desires, and states that "[p]aradise is compassed about with the things we dislike (to do); the fires (of Hell) are compassed about with our lust" (Nicholson, 2023b, p. 187). Here, Rumi emphasises the malicious nature of desires and how they pave the way for punishment in hell. Also, Rumi considers desire as evil and an obstacle to faith in the following lines:

> "Refresh thy faith, (but) not with talk of the tongue, O thou who hast secretly refreshed thy (evil) desire. So long as desire is

fresh, faith is not fresh, for 'tis this desire that locks (against thee) that gate." (Nicholson, 2023a, p. 107)

Considering Rumi's view of desire in both examples, the title of the novel is paradoxical. Maybe that is the reason why Housden preferred to amend the first part of the title of the novel in 2013 while launching the kindle version of the book where Rumi's name is removed, and the title is altered to *Chasing Love and Revelation.* It is necessary to note that the publishers of these editions are different. In 2002, the novel published in HarperOne and in 2013 on Bookbaby. However, publishing with the latter was not the reason for the author to amend the title as titles of literary works are not included in the copyrights according to Copyright Law of the United States. Therefore, this change is not a result of switching to another publisher. Instead, the author either must have realised that the protagonist does not follow the example of Rumi or he must have preferred to widen his readership by removing the Islamic connotations of Mevlânâ altogether.

In the novel there are implicit references to the political history of Türkiye which highlights the importance the novelist places on the historical accuracy. Georgiou attends *sama* performances in Türkiye in the 1950s. If the author had decided to set the novel earlier than that date, it would not have been accurate, as *sama* performances were not allowed prior to that date. The reason for this is that there were many Kemalist reforms to adopt a "French concept of laicism" and to create "a break with the political, social and cultural symbols of *ancient regime*" of the Ottoman Empire in the years following the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (Tank, 2005, p. 6). Islam and the Caliphate had been powerful in the Ottoman Empire while Kemalists viewed it as an obstacle to westernisation. Therefore, in 1924, the government took Islam under state control and abolished the Caliphate (Tank, 2005). Limitations on the Islamic dress code, closure of Sharia courts, changing alphabet and calendar were among the measures taken by the newly founded republic to modernise and westernise the culture and people. A year later, the parliament gave consent to "the abolition of religious lodges and cloisters (tekke ve zaviyeler)" and hence the performances and gatherings of dervishes were banned (Tekelioğlu, 2001, p. 93). The shrine of Rumi was the only exception and it was opened again to visitors as a museum in 1927 (Lewis, 2008). However, this exception did not include the gatherings of Mevlevi dervishes. For this, they needed to wait until the 1950s Democratic Party Government which was "more sensitive to the Islamic sympathies of the populace" and "made an approach to religion" (Tank, 2005, p. 7; Stone, 2012, p. 160). During its governance from 1950 to 1960, the party moderated some of Kemalist reforms of 1920s and 1930s such as dervish performances. In 1953, the government approved Mevlevi *sama* performances for the first time in thirty years (Lewis, 2008). Considered in this light, the temporal setting of the novel overlaps with the politico-historical context of the 1950s' Türkiye. Also, one of the characters in the novel, Hasan Shushud is portrayed as a Sufi

master with whom Georgiou is initiated. Indeed, Shushud was a Turkish Sufi master who was an active teacher in the 1950s (Lewis, 2008). Considering these historically accurate details and references, the novel can be seen as the product of an in-depth research and implies that the depiction of Rumi and Sufism in a certain way in the narrative is not a result of the novelist's ignorance of the facts but rather his deliberate choice.

Georgiou reads a poem by the thirteenth-century poet Rumi and feels an urge to set off to see the country and the city –Konya– where the poet died centuries ago. On his way to Konya, the Georgiou character meets several monks and hermits in Greece and Sufis in Türkiye. Georgiou left the comfort of his home behind in order to answer the questions that make him restless. Hence, the author starts the novel with a problematisation of everyday life. The Georgiou character is leading a good life in Italy at the beginning of the novel yet he is not happy with it. The narrator points out the restlessness the character feels in the following way:

> "For a lover of beauty, of art, of ideas, such as Georgiou, there were few better places to be than the city he lived in. Yet from time to time, and for years now, a strange melancholy, a dissatisfaction, would come over him, and in this mood the fine light of Florence became oppressive to the young painter." (Housden, 2002, p. 12)

The narrator suggests that the protagonist Georgiou is trapped in his conventional life. Though he may have anything he wants, his dissatisfaction is not beyond his daily routine but what he feels is missing in this routine is subjective experience of the world. Similarly, Hanegraaff (2000) shows the presupposition and problematisation of the New Age which suggests that in public life subjective experience is not valued and allowed. In a comparable vein, Housden (2014) argues that neither science nor religions provide room for subjective experience in life and he prefers to experience what he names as secular spirituality by rejecting the religious dogmas. Since fulfilling this need pertaining to personal experience cannot be achieved within the public domain, individuals need to satisfy their urge in the private realm. Thus, everyday life is problematised by the dissatisfaction it gives to the individuals and individuals are supposed to act on this problem by focusing on their selves and their feelings. Also, the narrator in *Chasing Rumi* clarifies that if the Georgiou character does not manage to concentrate on his desires he would eventually "suffocate in the civilized air of Florence" (Housden, 2002, p. 13). For that reason, Georgiou acts on his problem by setting off on a spiritual journey within.

In the novel the problematisation of daily life brings about the focus on the self. Housden agrees with the New Age ideas which reject any form of religious authority apart from the self and which sacralise the self. He redefines the meaning of sacred in the context of secular life and views it as any form of activity which "sensitizes the individual to the deeper realities of

his own being and of the world about him" (1998, p. 3). Thus, he gives priority to intuition rather than to religious teachings and proposes that spiritual awakening is possible provided that individuals follow their intuition rather than the authority of a religion. In the novel, the narrator shows the reader how Georgiou follows his instincts in his redefined sacred journey. The character is advised to concentrate on his dreams and to listen to his inner voice more than any other thing. The author complements the importance given to the self by his depiction of Sufism as a New Age spirituality in the novel.

On his journey to Türkiye, Georgiou meets a number of abbots and hermits in the monasteries of Greece, and Sufis in Türkiye. In the narrative, similarities that the characters of the novel share, regardless of their religious affinity, are pointed out. In the following excerpt the narrator provides one of Georgiou's interior monologues where he deliberates over his friends: "He thought of Andros, in Florence, and even of Dimitri on Athos; how they, too, in their own ways, lived in the spirit that Mohammed had spoken of; from their deepest truth rather than from any prescribed rule." (Housden, 2002, p.97).

Here, while comparing his friends who have different beliefs, Georgiou highlights the similarities between New Ager Andros, who searches for spirituality without reference to religious institutions, Andros's brother – Father Dimitri—who lives in a secluded monastery, and a Sufi disciple, Mohammed. Moreover, he asserts that they are living in the same spirit even though their paths are different. These comparisons bear a telling resemblance to New Age and its cross-cultural ideas. Similar to the New Age characteristic of selectively borrowing from Abrahamic religions, in the excerpt above Georgiou does not pay attention to the doctrinal differences between religions. Instead, he discards the fundamental teachings of religions, values only the spiritual elements of religious traditions, and focuses, primarily, on the common experiences of friends. As discussed in the previous section in detail, this view is one of the main characteristics of New Age. Fuller defines this movement as "unchurched spirituality": a search for individualistic spiritualities, "private reflection and private experiences" without the prescribed teachings of an organised religion which is according to New Agers "the major enemy of authentic spirituality" (2001, p. 4). Both characteristics shed light on Georgiou's approach to organised religions. Also, the concept of deepest truth, to which Georgiou alludes in the excerpt, is perennial philosophy. Both Heelas (1996) and Bruce (2000) draw attention to the perennialist nature of New Age. However, it is important to state that the perennial ideas of New Age differ from perennial philosophy in that New Age incorporates some ideas of perennial philosophy but renounces the rest. The advocates of perennial philosophy (such as Michon, Nasr, and Burckhardt) argue that mysticism is the inner truth and that it is present in every institutionalised and organised religion; they assert that this inner truth can only be achieved by means of following rules defined in the holy book of the

religion in question. In other words, they view mysticism as the peak of the mountain which could be climbed by means of diverse religious paths. However, they hold the view that trying to reach the inner truth without committing to the rules of a holy book is impossible. Though New Age accepts the perennial idea that mysticism exists in every religious tradition, the fact that it does not limit the fulfilment of this inner truth to any doctrines differs from perennial philosophy. There is a pick and mix approach in New Age's "spiritual marketplace" (Bowman, 1999) and that permits individual interpretations while perennial philosophy favours the selection and observance of a single doctrine. Similar to New Age thinking, when Georgiou refers to the deepest truth in the novel, he points out Andros's ability to reach the same truth without any of the doctrines that Dimitri and Mohammad observe. The same view is reflected in a conversation that Georgiou has with Father Dimitri. As Georgiou contends that it is possible to reach the deepest truth without any doctrine, he utters that he does not "see why you need to wear a monk's habit, or be celibate, to follow your breath down into the heart" (Housden, 2002, p.59). That is to say, Georgiou thinks that it is possible to reach spiritual awareness without behaving in accordance with religious teachings. This statement clarifies Georgiou's position on orthodox religions. Father Dimitri gives the impression that he agrees with Georgiou, as he views celibacy and monastic life as "external things" and asserts that "the true renunciation concerns [their] attention" (Housden, 2002, p. 59). However, he places great emphasis on the importance of renouncing the world while Georgiou cherishes it. In this regard, their views are completely different.

In the days Georgiou spends in the monasteries of Greece, he is a mere observer, rather than a participant, in religious ceremonies. Before he sets off on this spiritual journey, the narrator underlines that this journey is regarded as a "pilgrimage" (Housden, 2002, p. 23). However, Georgiou is not a pilgrim and there is not an areligious pilgrimage in the strict sense of the word. Even though his journey includes visiting and staying at sacred spaces such as Megalo Meteora and Mount Athos, his motive is not to achieve a better knowledge and apprehension of God since he does not aim to "set [his] sight on the next [world]" (Housden, 2002, p. 66). Instead, Georgiou travels as he has "questions hoping for answers in fresh terrain", due to his "thirst for wild adventures", and as the title of the novel suggest he intends to find his "heart's true desire" (Housden, 2002, p. 14). The narrator emphasises that Georgiou does not feel "confined to the belief and practices of traditional church" even though he is Orthodox (Housden, 2002, p. 29). This declaration implies that Georgiou views organised and Abrahamic religions as a limitation and restriction. In order to retain his freedom, he avoids the guided practices of a church. As stated earlier, the rejection of the authority of religious institutions and approval of individual freedom regarding what to believe and how to practise are key characteristics of New Age. Georgiou's attitude to organised religions in the novel echoes these New Age characteristics.

In the novel, Georgiou attends Sufi gatherings in both Edirne and Istanbul. At the latter, he meets Hasan Shushud, the Sufi master of the lodge, and regularly attends *sama* performances. After a while, he starts to practise it. As Rumi's teachings in actual life conflict with Georgiou's New Age ideas, Sufism as treated in the novel is closer to Georgiou's New Age views. Contrary to Abrahamic religions which prepare their adherents for an afterlife which is viewed as a better place than the earthly one, Georgiou's belief system focuses on immanent life. A similar view is presented in the portrayal of Sufism in the novel. Georgiou is initiated into the Mevlevi Order which was founded by Rumi The character joins the Mevlevī order which is one of the sufi orders that is currently present in the West, however, it is known as the Whirling Dervishes in this setting (Michon, 2006; Schimmel, 1975).While there are several other Sufi orders present in Türkiye, the author chooses this one since it is famous for its form of practice called *sama*. This practice is represented as a form of dance and referred to so in the novel. This practice is defined by orientalist Annemarie Schimmel as a form of mystical dance practised by some Sufi orders in order to reach an ecstatic state (1975, p. 179). It is important to set *sama* apart from the common current understanding of dance as a form of entertainment, as the goal of this performance is to reach a better understanding in relation to God. Traditionally, there are several requirements of *sama*. People who wish to participate are expected to avow the doctrines and observe "ritual practices particular to the order, as well as those of the Sharīa" (Michon, 2006, p. 163). Georgiou's attitude in the Sufi lodge in Istanbul is similar to his approach in Greek monasteries and he views *sama* as an artistic performance in isolation from its Islamic roots. Contrary to his attitude to the ceremonies in Greek monasteries, Georgiou participates in *sama* performance and learns to dance. However, the performance of *sama* and the involvement of the book's main character in this practice is presented as an artistic performance rather than a religious participation. The following is a depiction of one of the Sama performances Georgiou attends in Istanbul:

> "The men in the felt hats and white skirts formed a long line, and one by one they shuffled, heads bowed, arms crossed over their chests, to the chair where Hassan was sitting. They bowed low before him, then turned to bow to another man in a white hat, the dance master, who was standing quietly, solemnly, in the middle of the hall. Slowly they began to turn, their left foot for an axis, their eyes closed. As they spun, their arms opened wide, the right palm offering itself to the heavens, the left facing down to earth." (Housden, 2002, p.88)

This depiction is full of rich aesthetic details. The movements, the colours of the clothes and even the fabric of the hats are foregrounded. Describing actual sama, Michon asserts that the performances "open with a song in praise of the Prophet, the *naat-i sherif* by the composer Itrí, whose solemnity, reminiscent of Byzantine psalmody, plunges those attending into a

state of recollection which prepares them to perform the whirling dance" (2006, p. 173). However, in the New Age Sufism of the novel, there is no reference to the Prophet or any other Islamic preparations for the practice. In his book entitled *Sacred Journeys in a Modern World*, Housden gives an account of his travels to several parts of the world, including Türkiye, and observes a number of the practices of religions. In Türkiye, he attends a tour given by a Sufi master. Throughout the tour he witnesses "*zikr*, the recitation of God's name", master and disciple relationships, and the tight knit between Islam and Sufism (Housden, 1998, p. 161). Though this tour provides him with the background for Georgiou's experiences in Türkiye, his portrayal of Sufi life and rituals in the novel does not bear a resemblance to what the author experiences in Türkiye. It is evident that he intentionally depicts Sufi practices outside the doctrines of Islam since the New Age promotes personal spiritualities without a commitment to religious institutions. The narrator of the novel is also aware of the conventions of the Sufi lodges and the initiation process as Sufis inform Georgiou about "the way of the dervishes" and "how they had entered the order through their fathers" (Housden, 2002, p.95). Also, they underline the importance of the devotion for the dervishes and how "the dance was an empty performance that would serve no one" without devoutness (Housden, 2002, p.93). Even though Georgiou learns about Sufi tradition, his attitude towards it does not change. This awareness and Georgiou's preference of not being true to Sufi teachings is a representation of Georgiou's New Age views.

Apart from its embrace of Islam, the spiritual ritual of *sama* necessitates *faqr* as its fundamental prerequisite is the emptiness of the soul from its worldly needs (Michon, 2006). Historian H.A.R. Gibb explains the insignificance of worldly life for Sufism in following words:

> "This world is but a temporary habitation, and every gift it has to offer, power, riches, pleasure, learning, the joy of parenthood, is vanity and temptation –not indeed to be rejected or avoided, but to be used with a deep sense of awful responsibilities which they entail." (Gibb, 1970, p. 88)

Here Gibb emphasises the temporariness of life - and the need for Sufis to conduct their lives carefully - without getting lost in its enticements. Indeed, Sufis aim to observe the life of Prophet Mohammad and his *sunna* (behaviour) while Georgiou's desire is "to belong fully in this world" instead of preparing himself for the afterlife (Housden, 2002, p.66). In the New Age Sufism of the novel, the performance of *sama*, music and non-Islamic dervish culture is portrayed, and these more favourable aspects of Sufism elide the true meaning behind asceticism. In this regard, Sufism in the Islamic context contradicts the New Age values of the novel that place a greater importance on this terrestrial life - and where individuals focus more on short-term aims "for improving the 'self'", than on transcendence (Bruce, 1995, p. 95). Sufism, contrastingly,

promotes self-renouncement - *fana* - rather than self-improvement (Burckhardt, 2006, p. 2).

Georgiou's world view is also reflected in his interpretation of Rumi's poetry. However, before proceeding to elaborate on the representation of Rumi's teachings in *Chasing Rumi*, it is necessary to clarify how Rumi views Love since it is a frequently occurring theme in Rumi's poetry. The word 'Love' is intentionally capitalised in this context as a reference to transcendental love and for the purpose of separating it from worldly love which is sensual and passionate. Love, in a Rumian context, stands for the Love of God rather than that of an individual human being. However, Rumi's recurrent usage of the word, and his disciple-master relationship with Shams al-Din of Tabriz, complicate what the theme of Love denotes in the Rumian corpus. Also, the unfamiliarity of many Americans with Sufi philosophy, and with the world view of Sufis, obfuscates this further. Combined together, these complications may result in a misunderstanding such that Rumi expresses his worldly love and longing for Shams. Nevertheless, Rumi clarifies in his collection of ghazals, *Divan-i Kebir*, how the comparison of worldly and transcendental love is a fallacy in the following lines:

"The experienced veteran puts a wooden sword

In the hand of his son

Simply as a tool for training.

To love another human

Is like that wooden sword

When in ends in disaster,

Love turns toward a merciful God." (Rūmī, 1995, p.7)

In this excerpt, Rumi likens worldly love to a 'wooden sword'. In terms of their form, both a wooden and metal sword look alike. However, this external appearance is deceptive since a wooden sword offers little protection to its bearer against their opponent. In this way, this simile elucidates the impossibility of wooden sword performing the function of a real sword. Thus, a wooden sword cannot be used as a substitute for the real one just as a worldly love cannot compare to Love of God. Also, the usage of military terms in the poem refers to the ongoing battle of Sufis with their *nafs* (desires). Another example of Rumi's view of transcendental love can be found in his depiction of death:

"When you come to visit my grave,
my roofed tomb will appear to you dancing. . . .
Do not come to my tomb without tambourine, brother!
For a grieved person does not belong to God's banquet!" (Rumi,
as cited in Schimmel, 1988, p. 72)

Here, Rumi challenges the social convention of appropriate behavior in a graveyard where people mourn the deceased. Since Rumi views physical

death as a union with God in the afterlife, he suggests that once dead, he will be so happy that his tombstone will be dancing. In the same manner, Rumi wants his followers to abide by and celebrate his departure from mortal life with musical instruments. Rumi regards this union to such an extent that he and the followers of his teachings use the term wedding while referring to death anniversaries of people who are affiliated to the order. In this light, it is clear that Love stands for the Love of God rather than personal love.

In the novel, love is one of the main themes that the text treats. Georgiou sets off on a spiritual journey after reading the following poem attributed to Rumi:

> "All the particles of the world
>
> Are in love and looking for lovers.
>
> Pieces of straw tremble
>
> In the presence of amber." (Housden, 2002, p.20)

In this excerpt, the image of amber symbolises the sun and its power. Without referring to God, the poet likens the impotence of people in the presence of God's omnipotence to trembling straws when they are subject to the parching power of the sun. However, the protagonist of the novel interprets this poem differently. A few weeks after his return to Florence, Georgiou meets Flora. Falling in love with her, he declares that he realises Rumi's secret in the abovementioned poem that there is only love and he elaborates on his interpretation in following words:

> "In loving another utterly—whether it be Christ, or Shams, the love of your life, even an open flower—if every last cell in you is carried away, then nothing is left out and the earth and the sky become one." (Housden, 2002, 138)

That is how Georgiou compares the love for a prophet, a spiritual guide and worldly love for a partner, and observes how all these forms of love change the individual. However, as is explained above, and as can be understood from the straw-amber allegory, what is meant by love in Rumi's poetry is not romantic love. According to this teaching, the only power that can make people tremble is Love for God. As stated earlier, Love in the context of Rumi's theosophy is "the unity of soul with the One" (Kahteran, 2009, p. 55) rather than the affection for a single worldly being as in the case of romantic love. A development of the figuration of straw-amber in the poem is that when straws are burned by the heat of sun their colour changes as well. Straws transform into the colour of amber before they are burned out. Therefore, the statement that Georgiou unveils the secret of Rumi's love in his affiliation with Flora contradicts Rumi's ideas and provides an individual interpretation that New Age facilitates.

In addition to the representation of Sufism as a New Age spirituality,The intertextual references made to Rumi's poetry in the novel also fortify the values of New Age. The narrative refers to the translations of

Coleman Barks. Indeed, the following poem which is denoted by Barks as 'Love Dogs' among the poems of Rumi which have been previously translated into English by notable scholars including Arthur John Arberry and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson. While they translated these poems from their source language Persian, Coleman Barks loosely re-interprets these poems from the translations of Arberry and Nicholson into English. Indeed, Barks himself regards his versions as "homemade, amateurish, loose, many-stranded thing[s], without much attention to historical context, nor much literal faithfulness to the original" (2014, p.215). His translations are rightly opposed by a number of critics (such as Lewis, Furlanetto, and El-Zein) as they do not indicate which lines they refer to in the originals and, consequently, it is difficult to evaluate their authenticity. Franklin D Lewis—the author of one of the most renowned books written on Rumi— criticises "reEnglishing" and asserts that such translations misrepresent and change the meaning of Rumi's poems (Lewis, 2008, p.591). Literary critic Elena Furlanetto points out how Barks's translations are examples of "domestication, appropriation and Americanisation of the Rumi narrative" (Furlanetto, 2013, p. 204). Also, El-Zein (2000) calls translations of this kind, "New Sufism" translations, and argues that the works of translators such as Barks are generated as a "'Rumian' corpus" far from their original. El-Zein shows how the translations of this New Sufism combine the terminology of New Age and that of Sufism and form a new movement which departs from the religious tradition of Islam. In addition to these, Barks uses the strategy of visibility change and extends his presence within the text while translating by means of his extensive commentary and notes. Barks mentions his notes and commentaries and how he gives himself "lots of leeway in those [commentaries and notes], much variation in tone" and he also admits that he let his "personal life slip in" his translations (2014, p. 218).

The reader of the novel is informed on the copyright page that this poem, 'Love Dogs', is taken from Barks's book *The Essential Rumi* (1995). Broadly, the poem is about a faithful believer who prays constantly. A cynic asks him whether he receives any answers to his calls. Realising that his prayers are unanswered, the man quits his prayers. In his dream, he sees a messenger from God. This messenger states that as an answer to this man's every single prayer, God filled him with longing. In the later lines of this poem Rumi refers to *the Qur'an*, especially sura *al-Kahf* (the Cave) where there is a story of a number of true believers who escape from persecution and are put to sleep in a cave for more than three hundred years by God (Dagli & Nasr, 2015, pp. 728-62). These believers are accompanied by a dog during their sleep and the following lines from Nicholson's translation are about this dog:

> "(Even) the moan of a dog for His sake is not void of (Divine) attraction, because everyone who desires (Him) is a brigand's captive—

> As (for example) the dog of the Cave, which was freed from (eating) carrion and sat at the table of the (spiritual) emperors:
>
> Until the Resurrection, before the cave it is drinking in gnostic wise without (any) pot the water of (Divine) mercy.
>
> Oh, there is a many a one in a dog's skin, who hath no name (and fame), yet is not without that cup (of Divine knowledge) in secret.
>
> Give thy life for this cup, O son: how may victory be (won) without (spiritual) warfare and patience?" (Nicholson, 2023c, p. 22)

Here, the poet reasons that even the whimper of a dog is not without a reason, that reason being God. The dog of the true believers quits its old bad habit of eating dead flesh and it is provided with drink with the mercy of God and becomes wiser. Reaching the knowledge of God, the dogs become better. So, it is apparent that the poet advises humanity to better itself by eliminating its *nafs* (desires) and hence reaching a better consciousness of Allah. While translating this poem, Barks transcreates in free verse a new poem which tailors the message of Rumi to American audience in the following lines:

> "Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
> That whining is the connection.
> There are love dogs
> no one knows the names of.
> Give your life
> to be one of them." (Barks, 1995, p.155)

When it is compared with Nicholson's translation, it is very clear that Barks localises the source text into target culture. The message of Rumi is simplified and Koranic references are removed. Also, when Barks's version is analysed in isolation, the speaker advises the reader to have virtues such as devotion and obedience to God just as a dog feels for its owner or master. This advice of devotion and submission is not problematic and Lewis (2008) points out the importance Rumi places on love and devoutness to God for reaching spiritual direction. However, in its original and in Nicholson's version of the poem, the image of a dog is first represented as an animal which has a habit of eating carcass and only after it discontinues this habit the animal becomes better. Without this reference to betterment, Barks creates an information change and the speaker of the poem advises loyalty rather than betterment. Also in Rumi's poetry, dogs and a few other animals (i.e. cows and pigs) do not symbolise the virtues that Barks attributes to them as in the example of the following lines from Rumi's *Divan-i Kebir*: The sensuality of the throat has no savor, the sensuality of sex drags you back—they are shared with the dog and the pig, they make you equal to asses and cows. (Rumi, as cited in Chittick, 1983, p. 88)

Here, all these animals are associated with ego and sensuality, their baseness, and beastliness. These characteristics are also present in Nicholson's translation since it portrays the dog as a flesh-eating beast. Considered in this light, Barks's attempt to clarify the meaning of previous translations and the essence of the poem contradicts and damages Rumi's original message. While Barks tries to convey the core of Rumi's teachings in a user-friendly manner, he actually distorts the meaning that Rumi signifies. In addition to the lack of line references and the de-contextualisation of Rumi's poems, Barks also gives titles to them. In his notes on the organisation of the poems in *The Essential Rumi*, Barks draws attention to the arbitrariness of his choices while selecting poems from *Masnavi*, and how he gives them 'whimsical' titles which are not present in their original forms (1995, pp. xv-xvii). Yet, he does not clarify his intentions as to why he tries to interpret the poems of Rumi which were already translated into English, nor his reproducing of their misinterpreted versions while at the same time simplifying their language and meaning. Considering the oppositions to Barks' translations – and the preference for making use of these simplified reproductions rather than referencing the literal translations of Rumi in the novel - highlights the New Age intentions. When the poetry of Rumi is considered, its various references to the teachings of the *Qur'an* are notable. However, the translations of New Age Sufism are deficient of these references.

Even though the narrator places at most importance to an historically accurate timeline, this accuracy is not present in its depiction of Rumi's teachings and Sufism. Rather, the novel centralises and cherishes the individual spiritual experience. Throughout the novel, the wanderer does not follow any of the teachings of the religions in question. Georgiou learns about the teachings of Sufis but he does not follow them. Conversely, when he finds the opportunity, he compares the devotees of Christianity and Islam with New Ager Andros and asserts that spirituality can be achieved without a religion. While practicing the *sama* performances of Sufism and interpreting Rumi's teachings Georgiou focusses on terrestrial realm, his feelings, and experiences rather than religious doctrines. Even though, he participates in dervish dances, he understands and practices spirituality according to New Age belief structures. Also, the selection and inclusion of Barks's translations in the narrative of the novel elucidates this belief structure of the novel. Therefore, this novel is crucial as it exemplifies how Rumi's Islamic teachings and theosophy are transformed according to the twenty-first century perception of religiosity: New Age Sufism.

Conclusion

In this paper, focussing mainly on the UK and the USA, I have tried to offer a genealogy of New Age Sufism. I have argued that both capitalism and neoliberalism –a resurged version of the former – have affected individuals in several areas of their lives, not only in the public domain but also in the private

one. They have helped alter the way people view their lives, their families, their beliefs and practices. The dawn of personal improvement literatures, I have discussed, emerged as a result of the need by individuals to cope with the changes that capitalism wrought on everyday life and to adjust to these differences. To overcome these changes and reach neoliberal salvation, an individual needs to enhance the self and increase its market value by continually working on it whether it is on the areas of physical, mental or spiritual well-being. In this process of continuous work on the self, individuals become neoliberal agencies. To justify this standpoint, I have analysed neoliberal governance from a Foucauldian perspective and adopted his notion of governmentality to give an insight into how the concept of freedom is governed. Claiming that the New Age movement is a technology of power, I have outlined its history and analysed its relation to neoliberal governance. I have argued that the New Age movement focusses on individual freedom in the same manner as that of neoliberal governance, and I have outlined some of the ways in which the approaches of neoliberalism and the New Age are similar. Finally, I have provided a background to the introduction of Sufism to the West and its Islamic origins and form of practice. Focussing on the recent popularity of Rumi and the new version of Sufism, I have argued that they are dislocated from their Islamic roots and have come to be seen as a practical solution for the New Agers to use in their search for self-improvement in the immanent world. To put these characteristics into practice this, I have focused on textual evidence of New Age characteristics in Roger Housden's *Chasing Rumi* and how these characteristics are embedded in the depictions of characters, *sama* performances and interpretations of Rumi's poetry within the text. Then I have followed on the intertextual references to Coleman Barks's translations of Rumi's poems and their criticisms and how and why these translations deviate from their originals. I have discussed that the novelist prefers to approach the subject of spirituality according to one of the twenty-first century belief systems and that he creates a fictional image of Sufism which differs from Rumi's Islamic-rooted teachings. In this New Age Sufism, the personal experience of the protagonist is prioritised.

Peer Review: Independent double-blind

Author Contributions: Pürnur Turhan: %100

Funding and Acknowledgement: No support was received for the study.

Ethics Approval: This study does not contain any human or animal research that requires ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person related to the study.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış Bağımsız

Yazar Katkısı: Pürnur Turhan: 100%

Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı: Çalışma için destek alınmamıştır.

Etik Onay: Bu çalışma etik onay gerektiren herhangi bir insan veya hayvan araştırması içermemektedir.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı: Çalışma ile ilgili herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Önerilen Atıf: T. Pürnur. (2024). New age Sufism and its foundations: The case of Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi. *Akademik Hassasiyetler, 11*(25), 570-601. https://doi.org/10.58884/akademik-hassasiyetler.1392590

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