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Editorial

Spiritual Elasticity and Crisis: From Non-Religiosity to Transreligiosity—An Introduction

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1. Introduction

From the socio-economic and political crisis in southern Europe during the last few decades, to the more recent global healthcare crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, contemporary societies have faced and are still under the impact of considerable sociocultural change. The domain of religiosity has certainly not remained unaffected at the level of institutional, vernacular religion (Bowman and Valk 2012) and lived religion (McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2021) and of religious "belief without belonging" (Davie 1994) or "believing in belonging" (Day 2011). One of the most prominent consequences with reference to the shifting boundaries of contemporary religiosity, for example, is the rising popularity of non-denominational forms of "holistic" (Sointu and Woodhead 2008) and/or "New Age" (Heelas 1996; Sutcliffe and Gilhus 2013) spirituality.

With such a framework of sociological and anthropological, mostly, contextualization of religion and spirituality as a starting point, the aim of this Special Issue is to expand upon the above-mentioned themes and examine the spiritual elasticity with which contemporary religiosity is practiced today, in direct relation to crisis. We perceive the boundaries of crisis open: it can refer to socio-economic, political and global health/pandemic crisis in society at large, and/or to personal critical instants at a more individualized level. We also consider the contexts within which spiritual elasticity can occur open: non-religion, conversion, secularization, and transreligiosity can all serve as vehicles of investigating the elasticity—or lack of—in and of contemporary religiosity. How do the boundaries of distinct or similar religious and spiritual traditions, between religion and spirituality and/or between spiritual belief and belonging adapt during and after a crisis? Do they stretch, break, become more elastic, become less flexible? What kind of transgressions can we witness in the process? These are some important questions that the Special Issue aims to tackle, from a variety of perspectives, be it ethnographic, theoretical, or analytical.

What follows is an analysis of the principal themes on which our Special Issue and its articles are based. We explain in more depth the significant relationship between spiritual elasticity and crisis, taking into consideration the diversity of contemporary religiosity and its flexible contextualization that ranges from non-religiosity to transreligiosity. In-between, there lies a wide spectrum of practices, attitudes, beliefs, performances and identities, which is creative, frequently transformative, in some cases rigid, in other contexts distinctly elastic. It is this field of religion and spirituality that we aim to explore; consequently, in the section that follows, we offer paradigms of different types of elasticity and clarify the above-mentioned spectrum better.

2. Identifying Elasticity, Conceptualizing Elasticities

Elasticity, we argue, can offer a crucial lens through which we can view, perceive, understand, think about and analyze contemporary religiosity. Let us think about the

vast array of different forms, beliefs and identities of denominational religion, lived and vernacular religiosity and holistic/New Age spirituality that exist in world: each one has its own performative regulations, belief aspirations, ritualistic actions and levels of openness to diversity and proneness and/or openness to conceptual and/or practical dialogue and potential amalgamation. Consequently, each one allows or denies a certain amount of elasticity in its core, depending on the sociocultural, economic, political, and global circumstances, changes and, perhaps most drastically, crises; because a crisis serves as a checkpoint of rupture between what was, is and will be in society, culture and religiosity at large. Independently of whether it is a socioeconomic crisis, as experienced for example by the southern European countries over the last decades, or a global healthcare crisis, as the one brought by the pandemic of COVID-19, a degree of transformation, which can be rigid, creative, or both, occurs, and elasticity is brought along with it.

When it comes to religion and spirituality, more precisely, thinking through the concept of elasticity can provide us with a valuable tool for observing and understanding how spirituality behaves when a force is applied to it, as is the case during a crisis. It becomes apparent that spirituality can undergo stretching and transformation in response to stress or it may try to withstand it. Accordingly, religious boundaries can become elastic and stretch as far as they can reach; then bounce back, loosely hanging yet incorporating novel spiritual amalgamations and revolutions; bounce back minimally unchanged and return to rigidness; and/or only show a minimal trembling and reject any creative tendencies; or break altogether. As a result, we can identify four main levels or degrees of elasticity, each reflecting a unique manner in which spirituality reacts to a crisis, which we shall develop further below.

2.1. High Elasticity: Practicing Transreligious Porosity and Creativity

The first and perhaps more open and creative level of elasticity is the one we perceive as "high elasticity": in this case, spirituality displays a high ability to stretch and adapt to changing circumstances without reaching the point of break and modifying itself in the process by taking new forms. As a matter of fact, this highly elastic spirituality is also highly porous, meaning it can easily absorb and incorporate many different elements. Moreover, this level of elasticity also allows spirituality to transgress boundaries while stretching.

One characteristic example of high elasticity is the so-called holistic and/or New Age spirituality and healing, which refers to "the variety of 'holistic' or 'mind body spirit' phenomena (...) body practices like yoga, tai chi and ch'i kung; (...); and forms of healing positioned as either 'alternative' or 'complementary' to biomedical healthcare, from Reiki to homeopathy" (Sutcliffe and Gilhus 2013, p. 3). New Age is considered to be a spiritual movement that became popularized in academia since the 1980s (ibid.), and has been studied extensively by sociologists, anthropologists and religious scholars throughout its rising popularity over the last decades. It has been characterized as "a diffuse social movement of people committed to pushing the boundaries of the self and bringing spirituality into everyday life" (Brown 1997, p. vii), being, as Heelas (1996, pp. 1–2) argues, "an eclectic hotch-potch of beliefs, practices, and ways of life". Despite receiving a great amount of criticism as a term, being thought that it has been "optional, episodic and declining overall" (Sutcliffe 2003, p. 197), its usefulness as a term has continued to be recognized, for, as Chryssides (2007, p. 13) has asserted, being a "theoretical concept" does not "undermine its usefulness or employability".

New Age spirituality, therefore, together with the practices of holistic healing that is usually connected to, can be regarded as highly elastic in the important sense that it involves a high degree of eclecticism. Its practitioners have a total freedom to choose from a variety of ideologies, beliefs, therapies, performances; they can in turn adapt their personal spirituality in a grand variety of ways, adopt a specific religious identity, reject another one, and ultimately be expansively creative with their spirituality. Even in times of crisis, the boundaries of the New Age and holistic eclectic practices are porous: they can easily be inter-penetrable, form novel practices out of old ones, disappear or reemerge. And all this

porous spiritual mobility takes place in an elastic manner, transgressing and transforming spiritual boundaries, rather than creating and solidifying them. This is an internal form of elasticity, which is porous, flexible and mobilized, it can be stretched and balanced back but always in a transformative, non-static, and transreligious manner.

2.2. Low Elasticity: Towards a Hesitant Spiritual Fluidity

Spirituality characterized by low elasticity is capable of returning to its original form once a crisis has passed, without undergoing significant deformation. Vernacular or lived religion, with its inherent flexibility and adaptability, is an example of such low elastic spirituality, as it can dynamically respond to crises without excessively modifying its core identity.

Practices of contemporary religiosity that are lived and performed in the realm of the quotidian, which are more often than not also connected with institutionalized religions, are popularly placed analytically under the concept of "vernacular religion" (Primiano 1995; Bowman and Valk 2012; Valk and Bowman 2022) and "lived religion" (McGuire 2008). In those forms of vernacular religiosity as it is lived through everyday practice, creative amalgamations often occur between institutionalized religions, such as Christianity, and New Age or holistic forms of spirituality (see, for example, Roussou 2021; Cornejo Valle 2013; Palmisano and Pannofino 2017). A more hesitant elasticity is then produced, which may not reach the more intense vigor of high elasticity, yet it demonstrates creative instances of porosity and spiritual fluidity, where practitioners follow active and diverse itineraries of vernacular and lived religion, adapting them according to their needs.

2.3. Hyperelasticity: Spirituality Reaching Extreme Breaking Points

In the case of hyperelasticity, spirituality is characterized by a constant stretching and adaptation to cope with the crisis at hand. However, if the force applied to it becomes too great, it can ultimately result in a breaking point. Spirituality will then be unable to return to its original form and, in such cases, non-religiosity and/or atheism may emerge as alternative responses to the crisis, as spirituality is no longer able to accommodate the changes in the external environment. When a crisis occurs, those who already identify themselves as non-religious or atheists may also experience changes in the level of elasticity of their non-spirituality. They may either demonstrate non-elasticity, reaffirming their fundamental beliefs and remaining unchanged in their non-spirituality, or exhibit low or high levels of elasticity, leading to a potential shift towards various other forms of religiosity.

We may consider the so-called "conspirituality", namely the "hybrid of conspiracy theory and alternative spirituality" (Ward and Voas 2011, p. 103), as an example of hyperelasticity. Conspirituality regained popularity and reemerged as an analytical concept during the pandemic of COVID-19 (Parmigiani 2021), pointing to the complex negotiations between spirituality, conspiracy theories and the recent pandemic, with particular reference to New Age and esoteric practices. It has also become a popular attitude among religious practitioners of Christianity, who deny the efficacy of vaccines, connecting them to the Devil. In these cases, those alternative spiritual practitioners and those Christian practitioners who adopt a conspirital stance move from one side of elasticity—the high or low elasticity of practicing religiosity more openly—to another—that of inelastic behavior (see below) that leads to rigid beliefs in conspiracy theories.

Whether we speak about believers in conspirituality, who, due to facing a personal or collective crisis, restrict their more flexible vernacular religio-spiritual practice, belief, performance and move to an inelastic conspirital extreme, or we speak about crisis-affected individuals who subsequently adopt atheism or non-religion, abandoning their creative practice, equivalently, for the sake of non-practice and non-belief, hyperelasticity remains central. It is those sudden shifts in-between extremes, or at least in-between opposite stances, triggered by moments of crisis, which stretch the elastic religio-spiritual boundaries to the point of becoming hyperelastic, facing the possibility of fully breaking.

2.4. Inelasticity: Spiritual Rigidness Reclaimed

In the case of inelasticity, spirituality resists the stress of a crisis by trying to maintain its original form and structure. In doing so, it becomes even closer to its original core, strictly adherent to its fundamental principles, without any room for transformation or adaptation. This approach is often observed in religious fundamentalism, where the core beliefs and practices are strictly maintained and any deviation from them is considered unacceptable.

Examples of inelasticity can be found not only in monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, but also in some of the so-called new religious movements, as becomes clear when analyzing the case of the Japanese Aum Shinrikyō movement, founded by Asahara Shōkō in 1984. In the 1990s, the failure of Asahara's political efforts and the rise of an anti-Aum movement increased his perception of being rejected by society, which, contrary to Asahara's expectations, did not accept and embrace his message of salvation but, on the contrary, opposed to it. This led the leader to a radicalization of his teachings and a further closure of the movement that resulted, in 1995, in a terroristic attack in the Tokyo underground (see, for instance, Baffelli 2018).

Fundamentalist movements, more often than not, imagine and strive for a world in which religion permeates all aspects of social and political life. With a high and, thus, inelastic degree of moralism (purity vs. pollution), dogmatism, and centralization, the transgressiveness of borders—namely, "transreligiosity"— in this case, makes its appearance due to the fact that religiosity seeks to encompass all, or as many as possible, aspects of life (see, for instance, Dumont [1966] 1972).

3. Discussion: Transreligious Nostalgias and Utopias

Observing and following the varying degrees of elasticity of spirituality in response to crisis, as identified above, can provide valuable insights into the dynamic and complex nature of contemporary religiosity. By closely examining the ways in which spirituality stretches and adapts, or resists and maintains its original form, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role that religion plays in everyday life, particularly in relation to change. These observations can provide us with valuable information on the ways in which individuals and communities respond to crises, as well as the factors that contribute to the resilience and adaptability of religious and spiritual practices. Having identified and proposed the different kinds of elasticity in the previous section, we proceed here with the discussion concerning the novel term of "transreligiosity" (see Panagiotopoulos and Roussou 2022; Roussou and Panagiotopoulos 2022, 2023), which permeates the contributions of this Special Issue, in relation to elasticity and crisis. Apart from condensing vital points raised so far, especially in "moments" of crisis, personal or collective, in which religio-spiritual elasticity is particularly active, here we offer both a single term and a broad analytical perspective. A broad understanding of "transreligiosity" could be the elastic stance in which borders—among various religio-spiritual constellations and between what may be conventionally or officially perceived as "religious" and what is not—may be transgressed.

Transreligiosity may take place in a variety of very distinct contexts, even incompatible among them, radically elastic or radically inelastic. For instance, a radically non-secular state which is tightly linked to a particular religious denomination and simultaneously suppresses or marginalizes sets of practices and beliefs perceived as *other*, is transreligious in the sense that it actively relates what in a more consciously secular context would be kept apart: "politics" and "religion", so to speak and, for that matter, one officially dominant among others. To put it graphically, in such a state the constitutional text might largely overlap with the sacred one. On a more vernacular or hidden level, alternative and antagonistic *transreligiosities* might also flourish, although publicly suppressed. In such a context there is a hyperelasticity in reference to this dominant religious form and, at the same time, radical inelasticity in reference to the rest. While in a secular context there might be a clear effort to distinguish and isolate the vital affairs of the state from religious affairs, that is, an inelastically transreligious stance, on the other hand, different

religio-spiritual practices are granted freedom and equality (on constitutional paper, at least), a freedom which might lead to transreligious behaviors, as long as they are kept within the private and/or officially sanctioned religious domain, that is, within a more or less clearly (de)limited "space"—public in the sense of visibility, recognition and even institutionalization, but not state-promoted or permitting active involvement in affairs performed by the state. A harder version of inelastic *secularism* which openly acts against religion, for instance, socialist states with a communist ideology, especially in their initial effervescent periods, can be seen to have gone against some key features of the "secular" as a simultaneous limitation and the granting of religious freedom. But here, again, this does not prevent transreligious behaviors to take place at an extraofficial, institutionally or socially marginal, but not necessarily less popular, level (see Panagiotopoulos 2017). From all this it can be gleaned that transreligiosity as an analytical lens is a comparative perspective which is mutually nurtured by an *elastic* "secular" view about the borders of religiosity, which in various micro- or macro-contexts they might be transgressed, violated, made to clash, cooperate, or even ignored in the first place. What should be noted is that we do not include in this understanding of the "secular" an outright stance against "religion", but one that strives to create a special "space" for it, delimiting its freedoms, rights, and obligations in mainly a negative fashion, that is, what a "religion" *cannot*, rather than *should*, do.

We wish to argue that there is a homology between this kind of elasticity within the secular ("trans-secularity"; as also suggested by Husgafvel and Utriainen, this issue), neither outrightly antireligious nor religiously encompassing, and a social science perspective, also symmetrical to or highly compatible with a "transreligious" one. While no fruitful social theory on the "secular" or the "religious" would argue for a direct prohibition of the "religious", equally so, it would neither openly promote an institutional merging of the "religious" with the affairs of a state which has historically and ideologically been driven by forces of instituting the separation of the two domains, precisely by treating them as domains to begin with. This is accentuated by the (recognition of the) presence of a more than one religious manifestation within a given context. Such a triangular homology among the "trans-secular", the "transreligious", and a social science *attitude* finds its highest convergence in the flourishing of religious freedom within the more personal sphere of social life. It is in this sphere that the transreligious becomes mostly compatible with the trans-secular, obviating another key and paradoxically antithetical feature of the secular as we have come to know it.

The seeming paradox of the secular *as-we-have-come-to-know-it* is that it simultaneously grants religious freedom and institutes it, that is, delimits, defines, liberates, and limits it. It puts it in its place, so to speak. To institute the religious, in this sense, is to create its public position in a relatively clear fashion, something which has historically benefited, in terms of institutional, not necessarily metaphysical, power, the most widely recognized and established religious forms, what is commonly referred to as the World Religions. What kind of *nostalgias* and *utopias*, to echo the title of this section, do we currently observe in this seeming paradox of the secular and in relation to the transreligious? Here we detect a pressing transformation, even reversal, within this paradox.

We detect a more intense atonement of the significance of the institutionally established religious forms and a parallel increase of significance of more personalized, decentralized, informal and participative forms of religiosity, even within the established ones but importantly and up to now in the margins or outside of them. These are not easily pinned down and defined, and flourish in the more private or informal spheres of social life. We observe a broad tendency of going *beyond*, not necessarily against, the most institutionalized religious forms, while what is sought is more elastic religio-spiritual fields of experience. Thus, what is sought is not a complete detachment from religiosity but more actively from a strict adherence to what is instituted and manifests itself as a dogmatic religious *whole*, in which there is a hierarchical ladder of subjects, from the lay people to a transcendent sacred force, which is vitally bridged by ritual and theological mediators. In other words, one feature of

the secular *as-we-have-come-to-know-it* is giving its place, in terms of significance, to another one, also part of the "secular", that of the freedom to create a personal and apparently idiosyncratic and fragmented relation to the "sacred".

We wish to argue that there is a broad tendency which brings together the study of the "secular", the "nonreligious", the "godless", even the "atheist", with the "religious" and the "spiritual". This has to do with the notion and experience of "crisis" and, as much as it would always require sensible contextualization, further and diversified research, this does not prevent us from viewing it in its more general aspects, in the Western world to begin with, but also on a global scale. On the one hand, we detect an *institutional crisis* in relation to the way the "lay" people and civil society feel towards the institutions in general and the ability of the latter to represent them. There is a growing disappointment from the bottom-up out of a growing distancing of institutions, the State, the elected politicians, the large and highly concentrated economic interests, the juridical system, health and education, the various work environments, among others, to provide conditions of fulfilment of the "common good", but one that also fulfils personal needs, and other than purely "material". All this has its parallels with the growing distancing of the religious institutions from the lay religious subjects. One could call this phenomenon a *crisis of representation*. On the other hand, and in close relation to the previous, such distancing and disappointment also have to do with generalized feelings, not only of not being represented or being misrepresented, but also of a profound lack of participation, of decision-making, of a transparent and reliable network of information, and, on a more personal level, of fulfilling human relations and interaction. One could call it a *crisis of participation*. Technology and its dizzying development and expansion plays a key role in all this, especially in its dimension of communication, information, publicity, and of creating particular dynamics between distance and proximity, visibility and invisibility, voice and silence, "face" and anonymity, choice and unchoice, at the same time.

Speaking as socially and culturally attuned researchers, a wealth of complaints, experienced on a very intimate and embodied level, but quite common at their core, reflect a wealth of disorders, discomforts, anxieties, fears, and existential stagnations. The angst for expressing these common but largely unshared (complaints of) disorders, goes hand in hand with an equal angst for dealing with them, for wellbeing, for a healthy and balanced life, close to "nature", but also active in the "city", in being under control of one's means of life, of at least looking happy, on those very technological media that are also part of draining wellbeing out. And it is here that the transreligious and the trans-secular meet, experiment, and blend with each other. The mistrust in institutions leads many to seek an experientially customized mode of going beyond established "purifications" and delving into "hybrids" (in Latour's sense; Latour 1993), with both nostalgic (past-oriented) and utopic (future-oriented) idealizations and purifications, to shape a malfunctioning present into a positively felt experience of wellbeing. The effort concentrates on the personal experience, on how this wellbeing can be directly felt, translated into mental, emotional, psychic, affective, and sensual instantiations.

Mobility, velocity, openness, diversification, and fragmentation can provoke anxiety, while stasis, slowness, closedness, homogeneity and solidity can provoke boredom or repressive totalization. Both ends can lead to the assassination or resurrection of personality and sociality. And exactly because the line between misfortune and wellbeing is so thin, as if it were a large-scale homeopathic field of sorts, this fragility, this widespread social disorientation, seeks to find the remedy exactly where it hurts, where it is personally but vastly felt in the radical interior and in the radical exterior. Society, in this sense and as self-fulfillingly prophesized by a Thatcher or a Fukuyama, is largely bypassed in all the mistrust it has itself provoked (*instituted*?) of and for itself, and the "modern" person dives deep into the metaphysical, transreligious and trans-secular, waters of the Self and the Universe, largely unabridged by socially institutionalized intermediaries. One pertinent question arises here. What would the implications be of institutionalizing elasticity, whether

in matters of religiosity or, more generally, in the various fields of human life? Would that preserve or fetishize and freeze any kind of creativity it is meant to foster?

4. Reflections upon the Contributions

In this present section, we would like to not only offer a summary of the contributions of the Special Issue, but also come into dialogue with them and critically engage with the main concepts of the issue, such as "crisis", "elasticity", and "transreligiosity". We shall be mentioning both broad themes that emerge from the bulk of the contributions and, at times, particular points made by some of them.

Apart from one contribution—by Tremlett—which is highly theoretical and methodological, the rest draw ethnographic cases from a European context. This fact, neither purely accidental nor strictly designed, is telling. As much as contexts of *crisis* in relation to the kinds and degrees of *elasticity* with which *transreligiosity* manifests itself may be gleaned in a variety of contexts, we detect a certain significance in the cases presented hereby. So much so, that one could lay claim for a broader European context, without this necessarily meaning a monolithic view of it. All aspects we shall be mentioning should not be taken at face value, as self-explanatory, as rigid causal elements of transreligiosity and its elasticity under scrutiny, or as stable vectors of it, not even for the broader context we make mention of. Perhaps, the broader context itself, just as the various cases drawn from it, are partially indicative of, firstly, a European particularity, so to speak, and, secondly, of a more generalized globalizing current, with neither of them exhausting in any sense what crisis, elasticity, and transreligiosity—and their interactions—may instantiate.

The European dimension of "crisis" presents us with several acute points, which we shall mention as a general background, even though it may not explicitly emerge from the contribution themselves, except from the COVID-19 pandemic—especially, in Cornejo-Valle and Martin-Andino. Whenever the word "crisis" appears in public discourse, private conversations, and among our research subjects, it is intimately linked to the socio-economic crisis which badly hit Europe, especially its southern countries, since the credit and financial collapse in 2008. In addition, and often interpreted as a chain-block of "events" which have come to complement and accentuate such crisis, what is also mentioned is the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as economic, migratory, and energy-related issues due to recent wars occurring in the near periphery of Europe, such as Syria's, the Ukraine-Russia and the Palestine-Israel conflicts, often viewed as parts of a complex global geopolitical power puzzle (involving Russia, the Middle East, the U.S.A. and China). A recurrent critique concerning all these otherwise global issues, is that the European Union has shown great weakness to confront them with efficacy, decisively, and for the full benefit of its peoples. In other words, the very unity of the Union itself is under critical questioning, along with global currents which are often perceived as going against more local identities and interests or the "common good"—as opposed to the interests of elite groups, apart from and beyond national super-powers, frequently seen as forming a kind of "oligarchy". As we mentioned in the previous section, all this adds up to a profound lack of trust, disillusionment, and questioning of established institutions, what we have called a *crisis of representation* and *of participation*.

On a more individual level, we detect, mostly through our respective research, our personal positioning, and expressed in public, manifestations of "crisis" as detachment from once-given collectivities and socialities, psychosomatic afflictions, cynicism or, even, rage for a state of things in which one feels unable to have a say, to actively participate or draw fulfilment from. At the same time, as an antidote, individuals constantly seek and create *counter-domains and techniques of wellbeing*, more than often radically stretching, bouncing back and forth between "alternative" virtual spaces of mass and often anonymous communication and small-scale, private, or extremely intimate socialities. In relation to such elasticity in terms of religiosity—that is, of transreligiosity—this broad mistrust for and disappointment with the State, is importantly focused in the religious and medical institutions, both for their perceived dogmatic and distant relation to the "lay" people,

and for their strict insularity when it comes to things "religious" and things "medical". One could argue that there is an expressed need to transcend strict frontiers between metaphysics and physics—what is often coined as "spirituality", denoting its distinction from both a conventionally "religious" and a "materialistic" cut—and, in the quest for wellbeing, approach them "holistically", to employ a very common term appearing in the field.

This holistic elasticity, if one could call it like that, seeks to simultaneously make more immanent a too-distant transcendence, especially of established religious forms, and more transcendent issues perhaps too immanent, as conventional biomedicine is often perceived—so immanent that they also create distances from a more holistic perception of the person and its "spiritual" dimensions and needs. As it can be gleaned from the contributions, there is a recurrent quest for such kind of wellbeing, arguably reflecting the expression of the exact opposite state-of-things, in which something is perceived as going profoundly wrong, that is, a generalized sense of crisis. Here we detect a curious phenomenon. On the one hand, the mistrust to the institutional establishment of the religious and biomedical fields, instantiates a circular going beyond from institutions and "politics" in general—circular because one goes beyond something that perceives to be going beyond him or her—, bypassing established socialities and finding more informal, small-scale, and private enclaves of expression. On the other hand, and in relation to the former, this bypassing of established and instituted socialities, create a curious link of intimacy between the Self—the afflicted individual in search of personal wellbeing—and a wider Cosmos, which is equally seen as in peril and in need for "healing". In such quest and process, a curious universality of the Self is being forged, curious, because, at the same time, a symmetrical individuality of the Cosmos is crafted.

While "crisis" can initially and discursively be detected to take place at an *institutional* level, the more palpable focus, both in its afflictive manifestations and healing remedies, resides in this curious link between the Self and the wider Cosmos, as if the "institutional", the "political", or the "social" has entered a path of no-return to be healed on its own terms. Thus, the focus becomes the Self and the Cosmos, implying that even the "social" aspects, if they stand a chance at all, this is only through the former. The transreligious socialities created in the institutional cracks, venture to align an afflicted Self and Cosmos and "homeopathically" reverse them into a holistic cosmology and experience of wellbeing. In the contributions of this Special Issue, we are offered a variety of significant examples.

In terms of direct experiences of affliction and wellbeing, a series of psychosomatic pathologized manifestations are expressed, among others and more recurrently, "anxiety", "stress", or "panic" of some sorts, as well as a general sense of having gone astray from a meaningful existence (see, for instance, Cornejo-Valle and Martin-Andino; Saraiva; Husgafvel and Utriainen; Di Placido and Palmisano). Various techniques, involving meditative and contemplative techniques, often in private, natural, or virtual spaces are developed to turn distress into calmness and a sense of transcendental connection to the surroundings, through a parallel effort of *emptying* and *presence*.

Saraiva's contribution employs the interesting term of "solastalgia", echoing Glenn Albrecht (2005), as: "'the homesickness you have when you are still at home' and your home environment is changing in ways you find distressing" (Saraiva, this issue: 2). Through shamanic walks and meditative retreats to the "magic" mountain of Sintra, in the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal, Saraiva's interlocutors "re-enchant" (13) themselves and come into contact with nature and their inner selves. Nature figures as a vital space, trope, immanent experience, and transcendent entity with which the afflicted-cum-healed self is meant to be aligned with. This kind of alignment, in its various manifestations and dimensions, ranging from a simple natural element (such as purifying water; see Cornejo-Valle and Martin-Andino, this issue) to nature as a whole (see Fotiou, this issue), and even the Universe, appears frequently in many contemporary transreligious practices.

The contribution by O' Brien-Kop presents us with a quite eclectic case study, but not for that matter not representative of transreligious currents in a Western context. Through a

relatively small group gathered around the figure of the Indian-raised Phiroz Mehta, who, in the spam of the 20th century, started to create transnational links between South Asian spiritual concepts and Britain. The small group, mainly consisted of white middle-class British citizens, various of them interviewed by the author, gathered in the 1970s and 1980s, at Mehta's private residence. Part of Mehta's attractive and erudite approach was that his particular transmission of South Asian spiritual concepts—such as Hinduism, Buddhism or Daoism, were not only combined with others, such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism—but also was not done in an explicitly doctrinal or closed way, nor pressing those present to adopt them as a strong "religious" commitment. Through the interviews and the analysis of O'Brien-Kop, what stands out, apart from this cosmopolitan eclecticism and small-group intimacy in a private space, are the subtle effects, not just transmission of concepts, Mehta had on the group. His charismatic immediacy involved contemplative moments of "silence" (this issue: 5), "quietening of the mind" (6), "lack of effort" (7) and, even, "a-contextual mysticism" (13), a kind of spiritual universality, highly beneficial to the group and its individuals, even if verging on a "flattening of Indian traditions and knowledge systems throughout the 20th century" (this issue: 13). In terms of crisis, what is mentioned by O'Brien-Kop, are recurrent themes of "existential questioning" and "institutional Christianity" (11), which the soothing and non-dogmatic or authoritative character of Mehta transmitted to the group.

A transreligious practice does not have to be necessarily "syncretic" or "hybrid"— if this is understood as a mixture of distinct religious and ritual practices—or overtly "religious". While it may transgress certain boundaries which are conventionally thought as strict, it may also make claims of "purity", "indigeneity", "rationality", even stress more its "secular" dimensions or strive for an institutional recognition. Such are the cases offered by various contributions in this present issue, especially Fotiou's, and Husgafvel and Utriainen's. Husgafvel and Utriainen's contribution is about mental health professionals in Finland and their transgression of borders between psychology and psychotherapy, and *mindfulness*. They showcase various professionals who, in their private lives and biographies, adopt different stances towards the "spiritual" dimensions of mindfulness, which can range from more immanent and practical to more transcendental. But all tend to lean towards the more immanent ones when it comes to the complementary employment of mindfulness to their patients, stressing the therapeutic effects. This is what makes the authors propose a symmetrical concept to the "transreligious", that of the "trans-secular" (Husgafvel and Utriainen, this issue: 17), to stress the extents of elasticity we may be presented with. Whether the "secular" Self, even in its most psychologized versions, does not draw heavily from "metaphysics", this is also an open question, to paraphrase the authors' final comments.

Fotiou presents us with the case of *Ethnikoi Hellenes* in Greece, a group which makes claims of "purity" through a revitalization process of Ancient Greek religion. Taking a critical stance towards the established Greek Orthodox Church, as an instituted form of obscurantism, *Ethnikoi Hellenes* highlight in equal degrees the "mythological", "philosophical", and "scientific" value of such revitalization, what Fotiou calls "geomythology". But here, in contrast to more "New Age" perceptions of nature as a transformative and therapeutic alignment with the individual, what is at stake is a more general "societal transformation" (Fotiou, this issue: 4), which aligns a specifically—that is, national—"pure" and "traditional" identity with Enlightenment values of cosmopolitanism, liberalism, rationality, logocentrism, and ecology, while maintaining a critical stance towards Western modernity as having betrayed, so to speak, those very values, most intensely experienced in Greece's debt default and subsequent socio-economic crisis, since 2008.

Di Placido and Palmisano's paper deals with a "genealogical" approach of *yoga* in Italy. Apart from recurrent transreligious themes, such as the transgression of "boundaries between the spiritual and the corporeal and the spiritual and the material" (this issue: 6), as part of an "expansive notion of 'health'" (12), other significant points are raised too. In tandem with other contributions which cover South European countries (Cornejo-Valle

and Martin-Andino; Fotiou; Saraiva), they offer interesting ethnographic data on more contemporary transreligious phenomena. This is a welcome fact, considering that these countries have been mainly studied so far in their more established religious forms of Christianity or their waning, often rural, "folk" beliefs and practices. But even more significantly, Di Placido and Palmisano's genealogical approach in relation to yoga permits us to link it to other practices, not so new and not necessarily of recent foreign import and trend: "These processes of decentering from traditional religion were already inherent in movements such as Theosophy and Anthroposophy and earlier esoteric, occultist and spiritualist movements, not to mention Christian mysticism itself, thus shaping the deeper historical roots of today's contemporary spiritualities in Italy" (this issue: 6).

In Cornejo-Valle and Martinez-Andino's paper, we get to know about religious and ritual elasticity in terms of the adaptability responses of a wide range of non-Christian manifestations in Spain to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to have in mind, the authors imply, that elasticity in religiosity should not be fetishized as either a violently imposed condition, or as a completely self-willed one. Adaptability, as a negotiation between external factors and internal choices, neither necessarily "theodiceal" nor "secular" (this issue: 2), is often the transreligious case in which boundaries are transgressed, sometimes for a specific period of time and for concrete reasons, without abandoning altogether previous ideals and practices of ritual communities.

Finally, Tremlett's contribution creates a "mirror image" of transreligiosity as a constellation of ethnographic data and as the approach of the researcher, who in his or her turn, may opt to transgress methodological borders of what counts as ethnographic "evidence" and for what, precisely because the ethnographic subjects do so. He argues: "[M]ethods are not simply implicated in the representation of or in bringing multiple perspectives to bear on a single reality but are rather implicated in the very enactment of realities" (this issue: 1). Endorsing Tremlett's propositions, especially for the social sciences, we believe that a transgressive methodological attitude may align us with the elasticity of transreligiosity, without having to repeat rigid models of what "religion" is or is not, how much of it takes place or not, but that such matters are continuously instantiated and negotiated through the contexts themselves.

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