



PAPER ABSTRACTS





Sacred Healing: Contemporary Pagans Transreligious Approaches to Healing and Well-Being in Portugal

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In the context of socioeconomic, environmental and health crisis, religiosity is gaining significant importance to people. Fluidly related with healing and well-being, it provides comfort before uncertainty, and offers alternative understandings of the religious, social and cultural systems that relate with religion and health. Contemporary Paganism, an umbrella term used to describe several religious and spiritual groups that revere nature and call for the necessity of care, healing, and regeneration towards the earth and among humanity, is among the movements that directly engage with healing and well-being through their religiosity. Based on ethnographic findings gathered in the context of the ReSpell Project, this paper will address how contemporary pagans in Portugal utilize bruxaria practices as a way to achieve healing. It will show how they turn to phytotherapy and herbalism, as well as certain artistic expressions such as handcrafted products, which are perceived to promote and are infused with healing properties. At the same time, it will illustrate how these practices represent transreligious ways of living in the world and challenge the various societal and structural oppressions, and crises that impact people's well-being and the planet. Through the examples presented it is possible to understand how distinctions between the individual and the collective, the religious and the biomedical, the personal and the political are questioned and creatively engaged in people's experience and the ways we research these movements.




Spiritual practices within the Cycladic backdrop: mapping modern yoga and wellness industry in Greece

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This presentation explores aspects of the contemporary spirituality industry, the way it has proliferated in the years following the covid-19 outbreak. Based on fieldwork data, critical discourse analysis and autoethnographic practices of my ongoing research, I will focus on the case study of Amorgos, an island of the southern Aegean, Greece, which has been -as many parts of provincial Greece- a site of interest for the global wellness and spirituality industry. Amorgos merges diverse spiritual travellers since it is famous not only for the Christian orthodox monastery of Panagia Hozoviotissa but also as a yoga and wellness destination -having namely being proposed as such by the municipality of Amorgos.







Additionally, the Cycladic landscape is being promoted for offering unique and pristine natural beauty, traits that have historically been associated with ‘authentic’ spiritual experiences in the travelling practices of the Global North, highly contributing to the rapid commercialization and commodification of holistic spiritual practices. The special focus of this paper lies on modern yoga as a transreligious, increasingly diversified (Jain 2015) practice with a non-linear genealogy; a mind/body practice that encapsulates many of modernity’s frictions regarding its colonial implications, together with contemporary racial, gender, class and normative tensions (Hagan 2021, Putcha 2020, Sood 2020) that call for attentive examination of local experiences that link to the global manifestations of this phenomenon. Regarding authenticity an affective knot in the way current global capitalist societies build intimacies and economies, I will use an anthropological approach employing frameworks from digital anthropology, yoga studies and decolonial methodologies. On that note, my intention is to highlight some locally produced experiences that nod towards a spiritual capital (Holladay & Ponder 2012) which relates travelling and self-identity, nature and self-realization, spirituality and authenticity in a global context.



Sustainable Religion, Spirituality and Healing: Re-Inhabiting Sacred Landscapes in southern Europe

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From religious nature-based remedies and spiritual healing performances in green spaces to conspiritual and antivaccination attitudes, there is a long range of sociocultural beliefs and practices in the (post-)pandemic field of contemporary religion, spirituality and healing, which connects it to questions of sustainability and crisis. Based on recent anthropological research in two countries of southern Europe, namely Portugal and Greece, in the context of ReSpell, the aim of this paper is to explore the complex interaction among religion, spirituality, healing, sustainability and crisis. It will do so by travelling ethnographically through the sacred landscapes of religio-spiritual healing and how they are created, inhabited and transcended, by focusing, more specifically, on two practices: first, on traditional therapeutic performances that have a strong link to religious belief and performance and can many times create sacred spaces of healing through their engagement with natural landscapes of a religious and/or spiritual character; second, on practices of the so-called holistic spiritual healing, which consists of a large variety of healthcare practices that are both spiritual and nature-related.





The magical world of 'transreligiosity' in northern Greece: popular rituals as acts of decolonial pilgrimage pray, sensorial, embodied and material cosmo-ontology


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With the end of the pandemic and through harsh and long lasting Greek economic crisis, performed popular rituals of transdressing and commensuality, sacrifice, dance and pray at the occasion of a pilgrimage, become more and more popular events at the northern Greek provincial borderlands. As momenta signing and celebrating seasonal passages, could not be enough to see them either as exotic phenomena, or pure folklorism. Complementary/supplementary to the Orthodox formal ritual of faith and under the auspices of an ethnocentric amateur folklore for the revival of tradition, these praxes of 'transreligiosity', revived in the mid of constant economic crisis, precarity, absence and abandonment at the periphery and the borderlands, work as acts of decolonial pilgrimage pray ontology, replying to existential aporias, re- conceptualizing faith in its cosmo-social sense. Through specific and selective examples/case studies we will see how this magical world of material, tactical and sensorial -thus far from being only spiritual- 'transreligiosity' at the provincial lands of Northern Greece, can motivate a decolonial ontology of faith. Through specific acts, these pilgrimage pray rituals, performed in more cosmological and sense of communitas, a collective imaginary of symbols and meanings speaks contradictory, in performative, corporeal, Dionysian and disobedient ways, outlining a topographical mental and relief magical map of gendered and species embeddedness and/or embodied pilgrimage sensorial disobedience of believing to good life at the present. Ironically, but not paradoxically, the above re-engraved acts of material, tactical and sensorial transreligiosity go through requests for these rituals to be recognized as 'unique' in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage archive, at the national and global level, and in spite of intra-regional multiple colonialities of division and antagonism.




Spiritual assemblages in a transreligious world: The case of hip-hop

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Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage talks about fluid, elusive and rhizomatic arrangements which contain processes of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization affecting bodies, contexts and materialities of expression. In this presentation I argue that contemporary spirituality can be seen through the frame of assemblage theory especially through the lens of a transreligious approach. Vignettes from agents of hip-hop culture in Greece will inform the presentation which will focus on the conjunctions of new age and ethnic religious practices with hip-hop spirituality and hip-hop knowledge. What is more and under this vitalist perspective, the relationship between gender, hip-hop dance and spirituality will be explored.





The Worship of Dr Sousa Martins: Spirituality and Health in Portugal

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This paper delves into the worship of Dr José Tomás Sousa Martins in Portugal, tracing his transformation from a 19th-century atheist physician into a revered lay saint and healer. Dr Sousa Martins emerges as a 'transreligious' (Roussou and Panagiotopoulos 2023) figure, drawing devotees from diverse backgrounds, including Catholicism and Spiritualism, thus bridging the realms of spirituality and biomedicine while eluding dogmatic appropriation by institutional religions. Exploring the material manifestations of devotional practices through objects, places, images, and senses, this paper reflects on how to address 'miraculous healing' in times of health-related crises, challenging the methodological constraints of emic and etic categories. By mapping his trajectory, this paper aims to capture Dr Sousa Martins' expansive impact on contemporary religious practices in Portugal, transcending conventional boundaries of faith and healing.



Umbanda in times of crisis: impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on Umbandists in Portugal

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This communication aims to share some impressions of an ongoing ethnographic study about the impacts of COVID-19 on Umbanda religious practices in Portugal. Since pandemics have implications for different aspects of social life, which gives rise to a multiplicity of possible paths of analysis, I will seek to focus my attention on one of the most indispensable elements for maintaining the Umbanda religious experience: the relationship with spiritual entities. Using qualitative methodologies (participant observation, interviews and analysis of digital social networks) I seek to understand how periods of confinement and social isolation, which includes the closure of religious temples, affected and/or still affect Umbandists and Umbanda supporters in Portugal. What impacts did this period of crisis cause? I understand that focusing on the relationship between Umbanda and consultants and spiritual entities will allow me to move between important aspects of the interaction between COVID-19, crisis, health and Religion. The research focuses on three terreiros located in Portugal. In short, I seek to understand which possible new ways of relating to spiritual entities, including digital, guarantee the maintenance of the Umbanda religious experience in the pandemic context, as well as influencing their physical, mental and spiritual health.



Transreligiosity and Religious Revitalization in Modern Greece: Creating Community on the Margins

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This presentation examines the revitalization of the ancient Greek religion in modern Greece and the way some of its adherents create community. This religious movement challenges the dominant religious discourse in modern Greece by claiming legitimacy through indigeneity, while making important arguments regarding the perceived spiritual and value crisis in their culture. At a time that right-wing extremisms and fundamentalisms are rising globally, this religious movement places emphasis on worldview and imagines a kind of citizen who engages with universal ideals while maintaining a strong connection to a unique ethnic identity. Ethnikoi Hellenes, as they prefer to be called, create community through a variety of activities that reiterate certain themes, one of which is the distinction between the ancient religion and Christianity. Importantly, Greek religion is conceptualized as 'natural' and logical' while Christianity as 'manufactured' and 'irrational'. By making 'logos' or reason central to their theology, Ethnikoi Hellenes challenge prevailing understandings of religion. They regularly challenge the association of Indigenous religions with 'irrationality', while pointing out the inconsistencies and irrationalities of monotheistic religions, which they consider responsible for the widespread "cultural" crisis facing humanity. The example of one group's engagement with geom mythology will be discussed to demonstrate that they do not conceive religion and science as contradictory but complementary, thus exhibiting transreligiosity.

After the Buddha: Tradition, Authenticity and Innovation in Italian Buddhism


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Religious and spiritual traditions are not monolithic. As they develop, following processes of transnational diffusion, inclusion and adaptation to new cultures, they also impact and influence the new social cultural contexts in which they spread. In this contribution, we start from the understanding of Italian Buddhism as a hybrid between traditional religion, contemporary spirituality and therapeutics, so as to analyse the complex interplay between the contested notions of 'tradition', 'authenticity' and 'innovation' in Italian Buddhism. We advance Weber's classical insights on the routinization of charisma and its impact within religious organizations in the light of Buddhism's positioning at the intersection of the religious, spiritual and the therapeutic fields.




More specifically, our analysis will depart from three interrelated focal points which help to theorize about the nexus between religious authority and the progressive conflation of the practical-discursive registers of health and salvation in Italian Buddhism: first, the role – or lack thereof – of charismatic religious figures (such as the current Dalai Lama) capable to embody the authority of Buddhist teachings across contexts of practices and traditions; second, the birth and development of religious institutions such as the European Buddhist Union (and its national branches) which are primarily based on the routinization of charisma within bureaucratic structures; and third, the ways in which traditional forms of authority change as Buddhism progressively develops and institutionalizes itself as an accountable religious reality also outside of its traditional contexts of practice in South-East Asia. In so doing, we aim to contribute to discussions about the concept of transreligiosity, with a particular emphasis on the boundaries-making processes between religio-spiritual and therapeutic frontiers in Italian Buddhism.



Between Biomedicine, Psychology, the Qur'an and Magic: Remedies for Mental Suffering among Minority Women in Rhodope

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This paper aims to investigate (a) how minority women with mental health issues perceive and are related to traditional healing techniques and (b) to delineate the problems that the patients bring to the healers, the methods used by the healers, the healing process, and the outcomes of healing. It has been demonstrated that Turkish-origin/Turkish-speaking women in the prefecture of Rhodope suffering from anxiety and/or depression turn to pharmaceuticals and/or psychotherapies; yet, little is known about the application of traditional (religious/spiritual) therapeutic practices. Minority women appear to approach the hodja (instructor) first for advice on medical matters or when biomedical treatment proves to be inadequate. To qualify as a proper adviser, the hodja needs to be an imam, possess knowledge of the Qur'an, or have successfully finished their theological studies. Allah's teaching requires that people seek refuge in Him by avoiding malignant sorcerers, jinns, and the evil of delusions in the Felak (the 113th) and Nas (the 114th) suras. Sorcery is considered "harām" within Islam since there is no mediator between God and humans. Despite Islam's prohibitions, some folk healers –also known as hodjas–use spiritual techniques in order to cure women's "sick" souls from evil jinn possession (urama), evil eye (nazar), or black magic (büyü). In this context, there is conflict between different knowledge and belief systems (biomedical/spiritual healing, orthopraxy of Islam, pre-Islamic practices, etc.). The data was collected via semi-structured interviews with minority women, and healers. Research findings demonstrated that the usage of traditional healing practices includes herbal remedies, amulets for the evil eye, exorcisms, recommendations from hodjas, as well as religious and spiritual therapies.





Hare Krishna for Everyone: Plurality in ISKCON Lisbon Temple

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The Hare Krishna movement, or ISKCON, is a religious institution, representing a traditional devotional lineage of Hinduism, namely Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It was founded by the Indian master Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the 60s and was soon included around the world, forming followers in different countries. In this work, I seek to demonstrate how the ISKCON Lisbon Temple has become a plural community in recent years, where various nationalities coexist and practice the same religion in a harmonious way. Most of those who attend and are responsible for the Temple are immigrants, coming from countries such as Brazil, India, Nepal and Russia. Even coming from different social, cultural and political contexts, individuals are able, through religion, to find in that sacred space a safe environment for socialization and expression of their faith. Soon, the temple becomes a place where immigrants of different nationalities feel safe to be who they are and interact with other members. This results in several support networks being created, where attendees and leaders help each other. My hypothesis is that this occurs due to a symbolic structure of religiosity. Even though it has its origins in India, there are important elements of this belief, which interact with the different variations of Western Christianity. This ends up attracting people from different contexts who, because they have their beliefs and because they are in a vulnerable situation as immigrants, see the religious community as a way of creating their bonds and emotional bonds. To illuminate these issues, I use the ethnographic method, doing fieldwork in the Lisbon Temple and dialoguing with its adherents, in order to understand their motivations and focus on this religiosity. This work is part of my PhD research in the Anthropology course at ISCTE, which is still in progress.




Contemporary Spirituality in Catholic Italy: Nature, Well-Being, and Mystery

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In this talk I present the main findings of an empirical study about contemporary spirituality in Italy begun in 2017 by reasoning about the analysis of twelve case studies which are particularly eloquent concerning the different spiritual worlds emerging in Catholic Italy. I argue that three main narratives—the spirituality of nature, wellbeing, and mystery—are useful to synthesize the heterogeneousness of groups, communities, festivals, and organizations engaged in the Italian ‘holistic milieu’. In order to address this reflection, firstly I will trace the international sociological debate that has accompanied the concept of contemporary spirituality and the relationship between spirituality and religion in the light of ‘transreligiosity’. Then, I will extend the analysis to the concept of the secular, examining the intertwining of the spiritual, religious, and secular spheres.



After illustrating the landscape of contemporary spirituality in Catholic Italy more broadly, I shall focus on the case studies taken as examples of the spirituality of nature, the spirituality of health and wellbeing, and the spirituality of mystery. I shall raise some fundamental questions that the study of contemporary spirituality poses for the sociology of religion with reference to secularisation, one of its most classic and yet contested paradigms. I shall claim that future research paths could further contribute to strengthening the idea, raised in this article, that secularisation can also be understood not only as an antithetical force to religion but as the process in Western history that has led to the emergence of a secular social space in dialogue with the religious sphere.

Attending to the demand for spirituality in post-secular Catholicism. Dialogues at the religious-spiritual frontiers.


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Karl Rahner, a Jesuit and one of the greatest theologians of the last century, is credited with a famous phrase that paraphrases the words of André Malraux: 'The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not be a Christian'. These words, pronounced by Raimundo Panikkar, highlight the relevance of mysticism today, where society is marked by this search for personalised spiritual experiences. In this context, since the end of the last century, we have witnessed a 'pentecostalisation' - with an opening towards therapeutic spirituality within Catholicism (Gower 2006, cited in Cornejo-Valle and Blázquez-Rodríguez 2016) and a 'novaerisation' (Steil 2013) of Catholic practices. In the specific case that I present here, I examine the casuistry of the 'Arrupe Centre', a space managed by the Society of Jesus in which, for many years, a whole series of spiritual practices and alternative therapies coexisted in a constant dialogue between Christian and post-Christian spiritual practices (Houtman and Aupers 2007). Similarly, and after four years of my autoethnography on the 'Journeys of the Experience of God' - an adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)- this process of hybridisation with the new age -and others new spiritualities- could be observed, in a shift of certain sectors of Catholicism towards the democratisation of the link with God, the suppression of hierarchies, or the end of abstract and elitist theologies, proposing on the contrary personalised ways of linking, anchored in individual and subjective experience, in accordance with the 'return of mysticism'.


Ritual elements of Benzimentos in Portugal.

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Employing an anthropological lens to unravel a phenomenon in the analytical context transreligiosity, the present paper focuses on the practice of benzimentos (blessings) in Portugal.



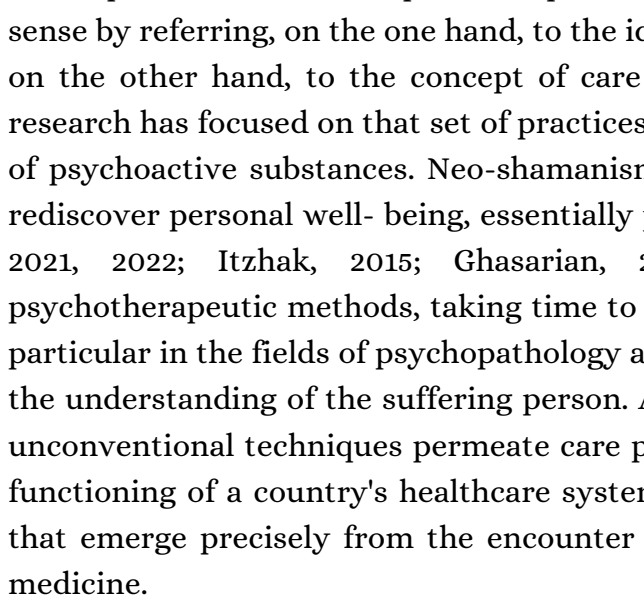

Benzimentos is a broad term that includes different rituals and religious sources, often recited by healers or family members, encompassing a diverse range of prayers, formulas, and invocations intended to cure ailments, protect from misfortune, and recover well-being. Drawing on ethnography with audiovisual methods and using ethnographic data collected in the context of the project ReSpell, the paper will explore the multifaceted nature of benzimentos: it will examine the components such as herbs, gestures and words found during fieldwork and how these practices, their transmission across generations and their role in shaping local belief systems can be connected with current biomedical knowledge. Concomitantly, it will further explore the social contexts in which benzimentos are performed, considering the dynamics between healers and those seeking aid. The data presented are part of my doctoral research, still in progress, entitled: Mystic of Healing - A visual ethnography of benzimentos in Portugal.



Is the use of unconventional therapies in the field of mental health and disability in France a sign of a crisis in the health system or is it the cause of the crisis in the health system itself?

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Illness is also made up of looks and practices directed towards the suffering person; it is made up of attention and care. This lecture will be an opportunity to present data from my most recent fieldwork in France that allowed me to understand how CAM is or is not integrated within the care pathways proposed by the social workers of an association operating in the south of France and supporting children, adolescents and adults with disabilities. During my years of field research in Europe, I have observed how alternative therapies are increasingly present in the care pathways of those interfacing with mental health problems. The concept of care pathway is understood in its socio-anthropological sense by referring, on the one hand, to the idea of itineraries, therapeutic pathways and, on the other hand, to the concept of care trajectory (Massé, 1997). In particular, my research has focused on that set of practices defined as neo-shamanism without the use of psychoactive substances. Neo-shamanism sessions in France enable participants to rediscover personal well-being, essentially psychological and physical (Lombardi, 2023, 2021, 2022; Itzhak, 2015; Ghasarian, 2006). Faced with the multiplicity of psychotherapeutic methods, taking time to reflect critically on the basis of care, and in particular in the fields of psychopathology and psychotherapy, can shed unique light on the understanding of the suffering person. At the same time, understanding how these unconventional techniques permeate care practices allows us to better understand the functioning of a country's healthcare system and perhaps highlight the characteristics that emerge precisely from the encounter between conventional and unconventional medicine.



Constellations of familiarity, unfamiliar revelations: transreligious techniques between wellbeing and crisis.


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Departing from research conducted in Spain and Greece in sessions called 'family constellations', this presentation examines the elasticity and transgressiveness of borders between contemporary spirituality and alternative wellbeing, namely, transreligiosity. Within a broader context of 'crisis', especially evinced in countries of Southern Europe, in which mistrust to established institutions is increasingly on the rise, people find themselves on an almost constant existential quest for a kind of disturbed and highly distressing equilibrium in their lives, through an experimental search for 'hidden' biographical details which are meant to contribute to the recuperation of such disturbed equilibrium. Sessions such as 'family constellations' are meant to reveal such hidden biographical elements which can, nevertheless, be equally distressing. Thus, both within the sessions and outside of them, counter-techniques are also sought and developed, which move towards a seemingly opposite direction, that of neutralizing individuality, biographical depth and contextual contingency.

The Inner Journeys to Health: Spiritual Approaches to haleness among Tenerife's Hinduists and Truth Seekers

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This paper aims to delve into the intricate processes involved in the construction of health and illness within spiritual traditions originating from undivided India, examining their development in the context of the Canary Islands. We aim to shed light on how initiates and truth seekers intertwine their personal well-being with their relationships with God, the Universe, society, and their own actions from past lives. Challenges such as economic and health crises, close deaths, and painful departures have the potential to induce energetic or spiritual imbalance, affecting both the physical and mental aspects. Addressing such imbalances goes beyond conventional biomedical methods, requiring individual efforts to establish internal connections with oneself and with the divine. The bestowed responsibility on individuals to manage their health and illnesses introduces a moral dimension to the suffering process, adding layers of complexity. However, this responsibility can also be empowering, equipping individuals with tools to construct their futures and navigate through pain. Despite the emphasis on individualized body techniques and internal health pursuits, spiritual practices extend beyond selfish acts by isolated individuals. Inner connections and the pursuit of Truth are advocated as endeavours that transcend individual well-being, exerting a positive influence on the overall development of the world.



This impact is realized through sharing the qualities of a healed soul with the world, achieved either through meditation and yoga or through selflessly teaching techniques that aided the seeker in emerging from ‘wells of sadness.’ In summary, drawing upon ongoing anthropological and ethnographic research, this paper seeks to elucidate the diverse ways in which personal and global health is addressed through connections with God among the truth seekers and Hinduists of Tenerife



‘Native American’ medical centers in Israel - the formation of religious-spirituality and Native American therapy in Israel

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Indianthusiasm (European fascination with, and fantasies about, Indigenous peoples of the Americas) has been a widespread phenomenon in Europe since the nineteenth century. With the frequent global and local presence of socio-economic and political unrest, the threatening entrenchment of aggressive identity politics, and expressions of distrust in medical establishments, more and more people in the Mediterranean Basin and Southern Europe seek to transcend the local ethical categories of religion, spirituality, healing, and identity through the adoption of Native American Identities. Accordingly, the phenomenon of 'Native American' medical centers has dramatically expanded in Israel. In recent years, one can see more and more centers where everyday people can have experiences of spiritual and physical healing through ‘natural’ means inspired by the cultures native to America. In this lecture, we will look at the case of the ‘Jewish-Indian’ tribe (a group of Israelis in Israel who define themselves as Native Americans) and at the ‘Native American Medicine Centers in Israel’. Through this, we will discuss the formation of religious-spirituality, therapy, and an alternative transnational identity.




Healing in a Contemporary Pagan Tradition: The Case of Druidry in Quebec (Canada)

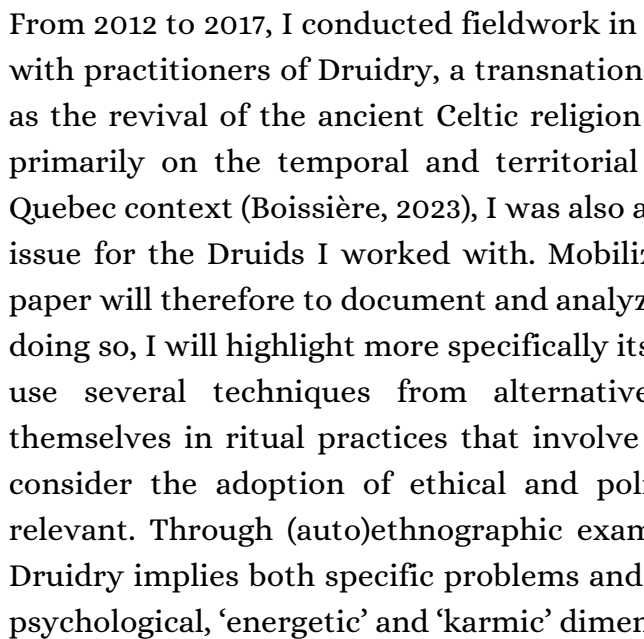
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Since the 1960s, an increasing number of Westerners have embraced contemporary Paganism, namely the ‘collection of modern religious, spiritual, and magical traditions that are self- consciously inspired by the pre-Judaic, pre-Christian, and pre-Islamic belief systems of Europe, North Africa, and the Near East’ (Doyle White, 2016: 6). For them, becoming Pagan is often perceived as a response to the many crises caused by both dominant religions and modernity, including the systemic oppression of women and LGBTQ+ people, the predominance of materialism and rationalization over spiritual needs and growth, global environmental disasters, and so on.





From 2012 to 2017, I conducted fieldwork in Quebec, one of the ten provinces of Canada, with practitioners of Druidry, a transnational contemporary Pagan tradition thought of as the revival of the ancient Celtic religion (Anczyk, 2014). While my research focused primarily on the temporal and territorial adaptations underpinning Druidry in the Quebec context (Boissière, 2023), I was also able to apprehend that healing is an essential issue for the Druids I worked with. Mobilizing my ethnographic data, the aim of this paper will therefore to document and analyze how healing occurs in Quebec Druidry. By doing so, I will highlight more specifically its elasticity and fluidity, since Quebec Druids use several techniques from alternative and complementary medicine, engage themselves in ritual practices that involve the help of other-than-human beings, and consider the adoption of ethical and political postures and behaviours as equally relevant. Through (auto)ethnographic examples, I will similarly show that healing in Druidry implies both specific problems and well-being, concerns the bodily, emotional, psychological, 'energetic' and 'karmic' dimensions, and applies not only to humans.



'May Our Hearts Rise Up in Prayer': Responses of Russian-Speaking Immigrant Israeli Reform Congregations to the Russo-Ukrainian War


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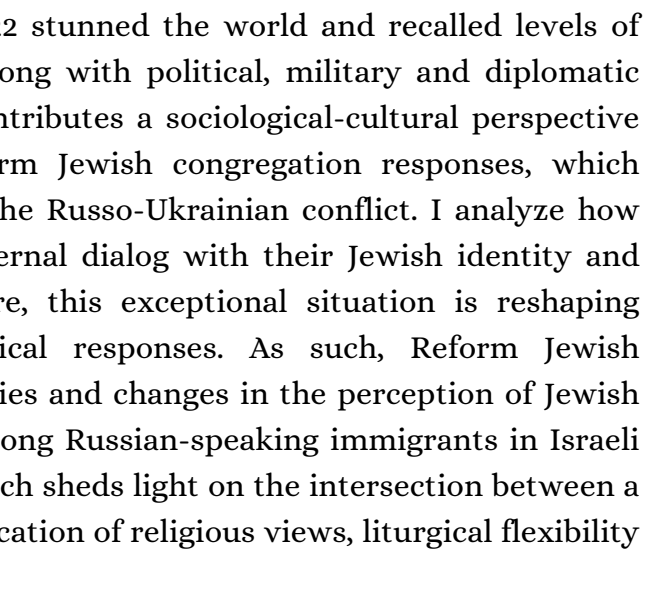
*O God,
our enemies – your handiwork –
are sinking in the sea.
However, this is no time for songs of praise.*

*For as long as the child can still smile
remembering their father's departing glance,
for as long as the mother can still instruct –
guarding her hurting heart from wrath –
draw them out by the power of your right hand
from the waters of ill will, wrath and rage.*

*We did not come into this world
to murder or avenge our enemies.
When the foe's blood spills,
our hearts ache and our tears flow...*

This liturgical response to the Russia-Ukraine War, a prayer for peace, was composed by Miriam Klimova, a Rabbinical Intern in Shirat HaYam-Carmel, an Israeli Reform Jewish Congregation intended for Russian-speaking immigrants (Olim). Klimova's prayer exemplifies the role of rabbinic leadership and the Jewish community in providing spiritual solutions for congregants in this difficult time.





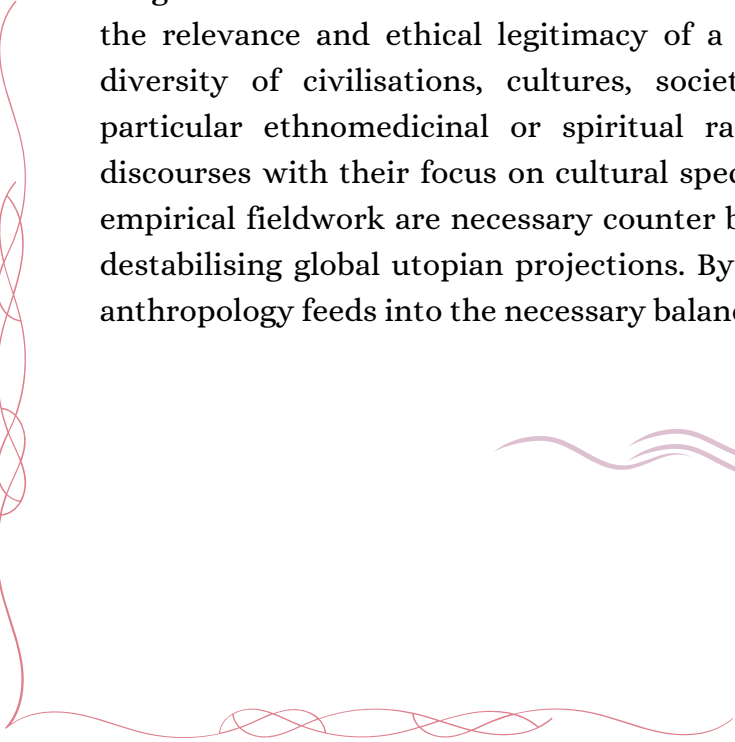

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 stunned the world and recalled levels of aggression unseen since World War II. Along with political, military and diplomatic discussions, this anthropological study contributes a sociological-cultural perspective through the examination of Israeli Reform Jewish congregation responses, which include Russian-speaking immigrants, to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. I analyze how the crisis pushed congregants into an internal dialog with their Jewish identity and Reform communal affiliation. Furthermore, this exceptional situation is reshaping rabbinical positions and creative liturgical responses. As such, Reform Jewish congregations are sites to identify tendencies and changes in the perception of Jewish identity, values and sense of belonging among Russian-speaking immigrants in Israeli society. Therefore, this ethnographic research sheds light on the intersection between a time of crisis, such as war, and the intensification of religious views, liturgical flexibility and reflexive inquiry of religious leaders.




Spiritual Wellbeing and Universal Wellbeing Concepts - a discussion

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This paper discusses the challenges of a universal concept of wellbeing and focuses on spiritual and religious perspectives as important components of Wellbeing. Spiritual concept often create visions of 'Good life' or Utopias. It will be discussed whether particular spiritual projects can be alternatives to United Nations Good Life Goals and SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). With the SDGs the premise to present a 'common good' for all humans and for the planet, a utopian better world is portrayed and imagined. The result might be that a cultural specificity of wellbeing, care and good life might be devalued and delegitimised and maybe even criminalised, if not considered congruent with the definitions of the Goals. A universal wellbeing discourse excludes the relevance and ethical legitimacy of a multitude, multicultural and multi-ethical diversity of civilisations, cultures, societies and life-models together with their particular ethnomedicinal or spiritual rationalities and therapies. Anthropological discourses with their focus on cultural specificity and particularity and the method of empirical fieldwork are necessary counter balancing and corrective elements to locally destabilising global utopian projections. By documenting local versions of a good live, anthropology feeds into the necessary balance of theoretical concepts.





Rethinking religion outside of the conceptual boundaries of anthropology: a disciplinary crisis

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In this paper I argue that an anthropology with static notions of belief, the supernatural, or religious imagination is unable to grasp the realities which are generated in religious and spiritual communities, some of which are located in darker areas of experience, of not-knowing, and of cosmic absurdity. I argue that anthropology stands to gain if its modes of apprehension can encompass forms of liminality, ambiguity, and conceptual fuzziness in its exegesis. In my articulation of a 'dark anthropology' that is able to come to terms with the not-known, or the paradoxical, I argue, with Barbara Babcock, that ethnographies where our concepts stop short of explanation provoke a sort of symbolic inversion for the anthropologist, which 'startles one into fresh views of his contemporary reality' (1975: 185). What can we take from this for a 'dark anthropology'? First, I argue, we can recognize the importance of analytically keeping phenomena in abeyance, sometimes in contradictory or paradoxical modes. That is, of recognizing and writing with paradox, not simply of paradox. Second, I argue that anthropology, to have relevance, must be transdisciplinary – it must borrow freely and creatively from the conceptual and ideological structures of other disciplines, to sustain its own structure as the philosophical 'science' of man. This connects to the conference's concept of 'transreligiosity' in that it necessarily blurs the boundaries of etic and emic. It is not just the case that religious processes elastically cross national and therapeutic boundaries, or thresholds of belonging; rather, these same processes of movement must inform our basic analytics in a way that expands the latter. What this paper brings is a discussion of the paradoxical areas of religious or spiritual knowledge (or what I have called cosmic absurdity) in relation to social processes, such as those described by the organizers of the conference through their concept of transreligiosity. I ask: can we use this disciplinary crisis to generate a 'trickster' anthropology, one that embraces paradox in its study of transreligious movement?

