



Call for Papers

New Repertoires of Spiritualities and Challenges for Fieldwork

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PRESENTATION

The lexical extension of the notion of spirituality, as well as related terms such as spiritual and spiritualism, has expanded substantially in recent years, raising questions within the social sciences. This terminological inflation is reflected in a significant increase in references to spirituality in recent scholarship across a wide range of contexts, in turn expanding the need to redefine the meanings and uses of “spirituality.” As a classic buzzword, spirituality is also championed by ideological movements and cultural modes that have expanded its legitimacy to such domains as personal development, technologies of well-being, neo-orientalist and neo-magical movements, spiritual diets and nutrition, and soft or alternative therapies, to name but a few.

As its social resonances expand, the meanings of the term spirituality are subject to redefinition, particularly in light of advances in research revealing its considerable semantic plasticity [Hill et al., 2000]. These developments appear to call for theoretical consideration of what makes “spirituality” or “the spiritual” so singular by exploring the current scope of work in this area. This includes the growing popularity of “spirituality” in an ever-increasing number of religious and non-religious domains of contemporary societies. In the academic fields, it also encompasses the prevalence of the concept of spirituality in specific fields of study, academic journals (*Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, *Spirituality Studies*), and networks (including the *International Network for the Study of Spirituality*). Several disciplines have long featured “spirituality” (such as History), whereas it has been discovered by others more recently (sociology, political science, anthropology) and in others very recently (psychology, science of management and economics, less expected in the domain), all of which currently contribute to this broader critical and discursive field.

Spirituality was initially associated with the Christian genealogy of *spiritualitas*, a theological framework in which it represented a discreet, subjective, emotional, and even transient mode of experiencing religious feelings that was an integral aspect of existing traditions [De Certeau, 1987]. Early sociological reconsiderations subsequently saw “spirituality” as expressed through certain by-products of modernity, in the wake of the metamorphosis of religion, such as alternative or New Age movements that sought to distance themselves from established—normative and alienating—traditions and include new



conceptions of the sacred for that are more sensitive to private, individual experience and subjectivity [Wood, 2010]. Spirituality has thus attained the status of a new horizon of the sacred for post-industrial societies within the context of globalization, as argued by Heelas and Woodhead [2005], who view these developments as a true “revolution” of both the form and content of beliefs. A similar notion also came to represent a residual form of religiosity after “Man’s exit from religion” [Gauchet, 1985] while also assuming a more anthropological meaning. These new meanings have in turn paved the way for the exploration of the moral geographies that spirituality traces between the West and the rest of the world, [Obadia, 2013], in particular the East (or the Orient, a label with which it is frequently associated), by referring to an “inner” form of sacredness and cosmic experience [Van der Veer, 2009].

From this perspective, a key question that traverses the entire field of “*Spirituality Studies*” is whether spirituality remains a dimension of religion? Indeed, not only is the “spiritual” appearing within and reinventing itself within the boundaries of (evolving) religions, but it also enacts new ways of engaging with the meaning of life and the intimate, affective or subjective dimensions of cultural experience, independently of religious tradition or reference to the sacred. In other words, spirituality was historically an ingredient of religions, followed by a pseudo-religion, before becoming something other than—and independent of—religion. It is this perspective that seeks to constitute the theoretical framework of this special issue of *Ethnologie Française*.

Significant historical models tend to view spirituality as a brand-new expression of the sacred within a generative model of history that endeavors to understand “the religion after religion” that was once conflated with New Age movements and its hypermodern derivatives. Because of its semantic density, spirituality has become a catchword at a time (i.e., Modernity) characterized by global shifts among religion the world’s religions. At first glance, the meaning of “spirituality” is captured by the slogan “the sacred, minus religion” and already influences more than one theoretical model (sometimes antagonistic--see Conte-Sponville, [2008], an advocate for “atheist spirituality”). In this form, however, spirituality is somewhat difficult to grasp because it has been absorbed by elite ideologies as well as the popular cultures of modern societies, not only in the most recognizable “exotic” alternative forms (neo-Oriental, for example), but also via more “extreme” movements such as sects, apocalyptic cults, and minority religions [Knoblauch, 2008]. Through such modes of expression, spirituality continues to be defined in contrast to standard models such as religions, i.e., essentialized forms of “religion,” in order to distinguish it from alternative forms. A spirituality independent from tradition, however, remains still more elusive, despite its powerful societal resonances: its contents and contours remain indistinct, and it is defined by ideological underpinnings that ensure that spirituality represents an ideal of modernity [Teasdale, 1999]. As a consequence, spirituality may typify one element of a “soft,” ostensibly individualistic, hypermodern religiosity that conforms to the values of modern culture and free will and—without apparent contradiction--is aligned with the growth of global capitalism, contributing moral support for economic production and even functioning as an object of marketing and consumption [Christus, 2013].

Conversely, spirituality is no longer fully identified with “religion” (often reduced as a matter of fact, to monotheistic systems) that represents the *hard* face of modern sacredness,



because it is conflated with collectivism, normativity, an ideological system of traditional ideas that imposes obligations that seek to domesticate modernity and resist the market economy whose values are contradictory with those of the divine and sacred.

According to another perspective, spirituality can be defined as "the sacred beyond the sacred," whose distinctive features (the quest for meaning, an intimate desire for transcendence, inner experience, prioritizing subjectivity over normativity, the *bricolage* of beliefs and so on...) only partially or analogically resemble those of religion [Lynch, 2007]. Although the term "spirituality" is not new to the field of religious studies, its recent return to the forefront of scholarly debates is contributing to a renewal of the concept's semantic field. This scholarly effort is concomitant with the rising visibility of the distribution of the spiritual well beyond the limits of "the religious," or at least those that are included in the category of "spirituality," an infinitely flexible notion [Hill et al., 2000]. The original and interesting aspects of spiritual representations and practices is the ways in which they are inscribed-- almost completely freed from their earlier religious connotations--in secular or lay repertoires of meaning [Waschenfelder, 2011]. Of further current interest is how these representations and practices are included in aspects of modern psychic, social and cultural life in which the influence religion seems to have diminished. This conceptual and empirical spill-over from the symbolic and praxeological matrix of spirituality constitutes the theoretical framework of this special issue of *Ethnologie française*, which will focus primarily on non-sacred and post-religious expressions of spirituality.

OBJECTIVE

In an attempt to avoid the risk of essentializing the concept of "spirituality," this special issue will emphasize the processes through which spiritualities and spiritual forms (techniques, acts, practices, ideas, contexts, etc.) are socially and discursively constructed. This resolutely pragmatic perspective derives from an approach grounded in discursive poetics and the politics of spirituality that transfers considerations of spirituality to the empirical level, i.e., to the level of actors, speech acts, and behaviors, without language strategies. In other words, who talks about spirituality and how? To whom and with what intentions and anticipated effects? These will be the key questions that will drive the contributions to this special issue.

The objective of the special issue is two-fold:

1. Contribute to a rigorous and robust empirical basis for reflections on spirituality and the spiritual by presenting genuine and heuristic case studies.
2. Provide a forum in which to interrogate the emergence of new lexicons of the spiritual.



TOPICS

The special issue explores the emergence of new practical domains labelled as “spiritual” associated with the term “spirituality” or in which the term “spirituality” is used and for which it has meaning.

Because the intention is to focus on spirituality in domains other than religion, the issue cannot be limited to models of religion-by-default: it is also a model in its own right, or through an excess of something else that remains to be defined on a case-by-case basis. The notion of spirituality is indeed distributed throughout a wide variety of domains, from the healthcare sectors to economic organizations and businesses, and to education, sports, digital technologies, the economics of well-being, and the technologies of happiness. The prevalence of “the spiritual” in a broad array of empirical fields appears to confirm that we are witnessing a large-scale sociological phenomenon, conflated with modernity, involving a “spiritual revolution” [Heelas & Woodhead, 2005] or “spiritual turn” [Houtman & Aupers, 2007].

Spirituality can also be implicated in palliative care, end-of-life support, and alleviating the suffering of medical patients. It can also influence the beliefs and representations of therapists, as well as processes of healing and recovery [Meuli, Zulian, 2014]. By extension, it can involve the broad concept of “care” [Paley 2006], the market for “therapeutic goods” presented as alternatives to the official system of biomedicine [Gaillard Desmet & Shaha 2013], and as a form of resistance to official medicine [Jobin, 2011]. Spirituality is also at the heart of the vast well-being movement and informs a wide range of fields: new technologies of the body, diets, lifestyles, return to the subjective and the Self, amid a political economy of the modern subject and its psychological and affective balance. Spirituality influences the strategies of production and consumption of material goods [Camus & Poulain, 2008] and interacts with the world of ecology, both in the process of the “greening of spirituality” or through an inverse dynamic of spiritualizing ecology within the context of environmental crisis [Taylor, 2001]. Finally, spirituality is rapidly developing growing influence in economics and business and professional settings [Renouard, 2011; Duyck, 2013; Jaouën, 2014], due to the spread of processes analogous to those observed in other fields. Do the “recipes” of spirituality contribute to the emancipation of modern men and women? Or on the contrary, is spirituality normative, and contributing to alienation within the hypermodern economic and ideological system of global capitalism? In short, what purposes do practices and beliefs labelled as “spiritual” truly serve?

For each of these domains (and others that remain to be explored), the reflections included in this special issue will be empirically grounded in order to interrogate, in every situation and given the specificities of each context, varieties of meanings and uses of “the spiritual” and differences in the social and cultural dynamics surrounding references to spirituality or other elements of the spiritual repertoire. Spirituality and the spiritual therefore appear to be both heuristically rich and empirically founded theoretical operators, while also functioning as “indigenous categories” (as goes the motto in classical anthropology) or “experience-near concepts,” according to Geertz [1983]. Inspired by this perspective, contributions to this special issue will explore:



1. The field of new practices labelled as “spiritual,” their diverse forms, and the ways in which they are embodied in empirical contexts, as well as the repertoires of meanings mobilize.
2. Labeling strategies for “the spiritual,” as opposed to other concepts (religion, science, etc.) and underlying issues (i.e., ideological, political, or economic).
3. The development or application of genuine methodologies for the study of spirituality/spiritualities able to account for the complexity of the relationships between the term(s) and the empirical elements to which it/they refer/s.
4. The new models of cultural and practical experience emerging from a “spiritual” context
5. The new fields of knowledge relating to spiritualities and their respective epistemological contributions.

CALENDAR

Proposals must be received by May 15, 2021. They should mention the principal lines of discussion or demonstration as well as empirical source material (inquiries or archives) and be accompanied by author bio-bibliographic notice/s.

Proposals may be in either French or English and should include tentative titles and abstracts between 4,000 and 6,000 characters in length and bibliographical references. All submissions should be formatted according to the journal's guidelines, available at: <http://ethnologie-francaise.fr/proposer-un-variant/>

Proposals should be sent to the special issue coordinator, Lionel Obadia, at: Lionel.obadia@univ-lyon2.fr.

Authors will be informed if their proposals have been accepted **during the month of June 2021.**

Final versions (between 35,000 and 50,000 characters max., spaces and bibliography included) **must be submitted before December 15, 2021.** Publication of this special issue of *Ethnologie Française* is scheduled for **January 2023.**

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