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## **From Socialization to Individualization: A New Challenge for Portuguese Religiosity**

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## **From Socialization to Individualization: A New Challenge for Portuguese Religiosity**

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*Abstract:* Catholic Christianity, the official religion of Portugal, has always played a central role in the formation of Portuguese religious identity, offering a medium through which people could express their beliefs collectively. In the last decades, however, and especially during the recent socio-economic crisis, Portuguese religiosity is going through a process of individualization, where new forms of spirituality have become an active part of people's everyday religious practice. Based on ethnographic field research in Lisbon, this article investigates the new challenge Portuguese religiosity has to face, while it gradually becomes disengaged from religious tradition, namely Catholicism, as it is learned through core social institutions (family, school), and moves towards non-denominational trajectories. It furthermore shows how, through this process of individualization, traditional religious webs and ties are rendered obsolete, while a novel form of spiritual socialization is developed.

*Keywords:* individualization, spirituality, Portugal, anthropology

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## Introduction

Taking the concepts of socialization and individualization as a point of theoretical and analytic departure, this article aims to offer an anthropological account with regard to the new challenges that contemporary Portuguese religiosity has to face at present, as individuals move away from their learned (through family, school, other organizations and social norms) official religion, that is Catholic Christianity, and are potentially attracted by and follow non-denominational forms of spirituality. Religious socialization is approached here as a dynamic process between ‘tradition and transformation, knowledge and skills, and religious and other institutions for symbolic communication in society’ (Lövheim, 2012, p. 151). My intention is not to present a linear and static schema of how Portuguese religiosity has passed from a stage of socialization to one of individualization, nor do I want to claim that religious socialization has been substituted by spiritual individualization. Instead, and far from seeking to create an antithesis between socialization and individualization and between religion and spirituality, my aim here is to show the complex routes of transformation in the context of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, to the extent that I managed to observe them during my field research in Lisbon; to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between Christianity and new forms of spirituality in Portugal<sup>1</sup>; and to attempt to answer the question of whether religion in Portugal is facing erosion (Knoblauch, 2003), losing its tight

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<sup>1</sup> I need to be clarify that throughout the present contribution I am using the terms ‘new forms of spirituality’, ‘New Age spirituality’, and ‘alternative spirituality’ as synonymous. Although I am aware of the complicated character of the terms, especially that of ‘New Age spirituality’ (see for example Wood 2007; Fedele & Knibbe 2013), these terms describe the varying character of the alternative, non-religious, non-Christian, and more individualized spiritual paths that people in Lisbon follow in the course of their everyday lives and which I have studied. Influenced by Shimazono’s (1999) ‘New Spirituality Movements and Culture’, I utilize ‘spirituality’ as a term that ‘in a broad sense implies religiousness, but it does not mean organized religion or doctrine. Rather, it is used to mean the religious nature expressed by an individual’s thoughts and actions’ (Shimazono, 1999, p. 125). And, following Bender, I consider ‘spirituality’ as ‘*entangled* in social life, in history, and in our academic and nonacademic imaginations, agreeing with her that ‘it is necessary to engage spirituality, historically, institutionally, and imaginatively without pulling it completely together into a single thing’ (Bender, 2010, pp. 5-6, original emphasis).

bond with the Portuguese main sources of socialization, and Portuguese religiosity is going through a process of individualization.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aim, the rest of the article is divided into five main parts. After a summary of the principal theoretical concepts placed at the centre of the analysis, I will offer a brief account of the research methodology used, as well as a general contextualization of contemporary Portuguese religiosity. Followed by a theoretico-analytic discussion before the concluding remarks, the fourth – and perhaps most important – section of the present paper will be dedicated to the empirical research findings that constitute the heart and basis of my argument. In this section, I will pay attention to the role of Catholic Christianity in Portuguese society, so as to analyze the meaning of religious socialization in present-day Portugal, while also focusing on the pluralistic landscape of religious practice in Lisbon. Through a few ethnographic personal stories of religious experience, this part will be dedicated to the creative agency with which people in Lisbon individualize their religiosity, while observing – equivalently to the complicated character of socialization – the internal forces of socialization within individualized practices of new forms of spirituality, eventually arguing for the existence of an individualized ‘spiritual socialization’ in contemporary Portugal.

### **Theoretical Discussion: Conceptualizing Socialization, Individualization and Agency**

#### *Socialization*

Socialization, the concept that captures the processes through which individuals learn the skills and patterns that transform them into social beings, has long been valued by social scientists. In their classic work *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann recognize two forms of socialization: first, there is the primary socialization, namely ‘the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150); the other form of socialization is what they call ‘secondary socialization’, which refers to ‘any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In these two phases of primary and secondary

socialization, religion has proven to play a considerably important role. Indeed, as an ‘interactive process through which social agents influence individuals’ religious beliefs and understandings’ (Sherkat, 2003, p. 151), religious socialization constitutes a central and vital part of an identity formation process that influences, moulds and in many cases transforms the beliefs and religious practices of the individual. Ultimately, through religious socialization, the individual can either conform to the parental, organizational and general societal rules and follow the religious values and ideas set by these conscious social agents; or s/he can break free of predetermined religious beliefs, and – either incorporating them along the way or dismissing them altogether – follow alternative spiritual trajectories.

#### *Individualization*

Modern studies of religion have also drawn attention to the individualization of religion, as well as the challenges it invokes upon traditional forms of religious authority and religious institutions (Ammerman, 2003). Individualization is a social development that suggests the ‘gradual disappearance of the traditional authority of social institutions and relationships like social class, the church, the family, or neighbourhood’ (Vermeer, 2010, p. 106). As Vermeer (2010) suggests, the Durkheimian idea of socialization as the transmission and internalization of societal norms with a view to reproducing society is no longer considered adequate or valid. Although Durkheim recognized that socialization entails personality development, he saw the relationship between society and the individual as submissive, namely ‘only in terms of internalization of and adaptation to societal structures’ (Vermeer, 2010). Nevertheless, social theorists today are critical of such an approach, and instead view socialization in relation to pluralism and especially individualization (Vermeer, 2010). As a result, ‘modern socialization theory no longer stresses individuals’ “passive” adaptation to the social system, but instead considers *individuation* to be the core of socialization’ (Vermeer, 2010, p. 107).

#### *Practice: Social Agency as Creativity*

Within the discussion about socialization and individualization, two genres of practice seem to emerge: first, practice as structure; second, practice as agency. Bourdieu is evidently one of the most prominent advocates of a theory of practice. The epicentre of his famous theory rests

on the idea of habitus: a system of individual and social predispositions inculcated and reinforced by the cultural environment where social subjects grow up (Bourdieu 1990, p. 131; 1999, pp. 16-21, pp. 72-86). Bourdieu attributes people's practices and actions to their habitus, their socially constructed nature (1990, p. 10). As he asserts, by acting in the social arena through their practices, social subjects are players in a social game (Bourdieu 1990, p. 10). In order to keep up with their fellow players, they develop personal strategies, 'ways to direct the practice; a practice, which is neither conscious nor intentional, but a product of the feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 22). During this process, people produce somatic hexis, that is, bodily techniques which are learned through socialization and are embodied through habitus (Bourdieu 1999, p. 78-87). This idea of habitus has been known to bear the problem of stasis: no matter how much people act, they will never be able to escape the influence of their social environment. That is, they will never escape the social structures they have learned to embrace. But, as Ortner (1989, p. 13) explains:

Habitus is, at one level, structure in the Levi-Straussian sense; yet, at the same time the image of structure in habitus is profoundly transformed by its theoretical linkage with practice. Thus, it is structure that is doubly practised: it is both lived in, in the sense of being a public world of ordered forms, and embodied, in the sense of being an enduring framework of dispositions that are stamped on actors' beings.

Habitus, therefore, is about both structure and practice. Actually, practice is considered to emerge from structure, and people's actions transform structure with their active practice (Ortner, 1989, p. 12). A strictly perceived structuralist approach would not engage subjective practice in the reformation of structure. Instead, it would assume that structure is reproduced unchanged, independently of individual practices. The structure in the context of practice theory 'forms "personality" and "society" simultaneously – but in neither case exhaustively: because of the significance of unintended consequences of action, and because of unacknowledged conditions of action' (Giddens, 1979, p. 70).

It is people's actions that determine whether a structure remains unchanged or enters a process of socio-cultural metamorphosis and/or extinction. Giddens recognizes the historical processes that shape structure and practice. He admits that 'every process of action is a production of

something new, a fresh act', while carrying its past to the social present and future (Giddens, 1979, p. 70). The same approach is followed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who argue for the need to 'reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past, but also oriented toward the future and toward the present' (Emirbayer & Mische., 1998, p. 963). According to their theorization of practice, social actors need to be looked at in the temporality of their experience; that is, in the way in which they engage the past, try to foresee their future practices, and adjust their actions in situations emerging in the present (Emirbayer & Mische., 1998, p. 1012). Consequently, they define human agency as 'the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations' (Emirbayer & Mische., 1998, p. 970).

Agency in/as subjective practice has been criticized. It has been assumed to incorporate an irony: people's action is unintentional, and any type of social or historical change that derives from that action is only rarely produced by the actors (Ortner, 1984, p. 157). Ultimately, as Ortner (1984, p. 14) argues, the problem of practice theory is 'the question of how actors who are so much products of their own social and cultural context can ever come to transform the condition of their own existence, except by accident'. Laidlaw (2002, p. 315) proposes the concept of freedom instead of that of agency. He makes the point that, even though agency picks out the effectiveness of action and raises the question of whether people act freely, it ultimately is 'pre-emptively selective. Put most crudely, we only mark them down as agency when people's choices seem to us to be the right ones' (Laidlaw, 2002). Whether individuals produce agency by accident or not, what mainly matters is that their actions are dynamic. By acting in the social arena, they manage to transform social structures and reconstruct or newly create cultural practice. I agree with Ortner (2005, p. 34) that subjectivity is the basis of agency. Subjective agency, furthermore, is creative. Creativity has been defined as 'activity that produces something new through the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices or forms' (Liep, 2001, p. 2). It is linked to human agency 'as the capacity to respond imaginatively to new experiences – and thereby to find the ontologically new' (Liep, 2001, p. 43). When it comes to matters of religiosity, in particular, 'individuals have considerable agency to reject

socialization pressure, and to choose which connections guide religious preferences' (Sherkat, 2003, p. 151). Most importantly, their agency allows individuals to be creative when choosing their paths – which can be religious, spiritual, or both – and accept or reject official religion and non-denominational spirituality according to their personal needs.

### **Methodology**

The ethnographic data presented here come from an eleven-month extensive, anthropological, qualitative research, which has been conducted for the needs of my postdoctoral project that focuses on everyday religious pluralism and spiritual creativity in the capital of Portugal, Lisbon, and its periphery, through the lens of new forms of spirituality. These data were collected during three periods of ethnographic research: the first period lasted five months and was conducted between January and May 2012; the duration of the second period was three months and was conducted between September and November 2012; and the most recent fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2014 and lasted three months. The classic methods of qualitative research, namely participant observation, formal and semi-formal recorded and informal interviews made up the bulk of my research methodology during fieldwork.

During the eleven months of field research in Lisbon and its periphery, I have managed to have in-depth interviews and conversations with a diverse group of approximately forty men and women, aged between thirty and sixty five years old, who primarily but not exclusively belonged to a middle class, and included, among others: teachers of the so-called New Age spirituality who range from yoga teachers and tarologists to reiki healers and energy therapists; practitioners of New Age spirituality; and Catholic believers who also practise alternative spiritualities. Furthermore, given the popularity of new forms of technology in the exchange of views on spiritual practices, I have also conducted extensive participant observation in relation to the above mentioned interlocutors through their personal websites, their pages in popular social media such as Facebook, and their various forms of communication with others in this extensive web of internet social interactions with regard to contemporary Portuguese religiosity.

Out of the forty individuals I talked to, twenty five were women and fifteen were men. The large majority of my interlocutors were practitioners of non-denominational religiosity, either assuming the role of New Age spiritual healers or being active seekers of various alternative spiritual practices. Almost all of the healers and practitioners of new forms of spirituality I had conversations with were born and raised Catholic Christians. Yet, at some point in their lives they decided denominational religion had nothing to offer them in terms of belief and ritual performance and so they turned their attention to alternative forms of spiritual belonging. Having relatives and friends in their inner social circle who still consider themselves as Christian believers, my informants managed to identify themselves in relation to their social environment and to present the broader challenges they – as non Christian believers – and their close social contacts – as Christian believers – face as they negotiate their spiritual identity independently and in relation to each other. The smaller group of people I conversed with mainly identified themselves as Christian, while simultaneously actively practising New Age spirituality. Within this group, the tension between (their) Christian and alternative spiritual identity was particularly evident during their everyday practice of amalgamating Christian and alternative spiritual performances. If one adds the fact that my non-Christian interlocutors used Christian symbolisms, icons and figures in their alternative practices, all of the individuals I extensively engaged with during fieldwork demonstrated a particularly strong pluralistic view on practising religiosity.

The afore-mentioned interlocutors were chosen principally due to their active engagement and role in the alternative spiritual scene of Lisbon, given that this was the focal topic of my anthropological research. Some of them were targeted specifically, through common social contacts and the snowballing method, whereas others were chosen more randomly and/or were encountered by chance. The general aim of my fieldwork was to encounter practitioners of new forms of spirituality, and observe and participate in their everyday spiritual routines, but at the same time I wanted to leave the boundaries of the ethnographic research open to other directions. The main analytic topics encountered in the field did revolve at the end around the practice of new forms of spirituality, the pluralistic landscape of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, and the creative social agency with which people in the Portuguese capital handle their religious and spiritual identity. These emergent analytic themes during my

ethnographic research can offer a more particular yet important contribution to the study of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, especially during these times of socio-economic crisis in southern Europe that does not leave belief and spiritual practice unaffected.

### **The Context of contemporary Portuguese Religiosity**

Before continuing with the presentation of ethnographic evidence in regard to socialization and individualization in Lisbon and its periphery, I will offer a brief contextualization of Portuguese religiosity at present, so as to locate my specific research within the general framework of how religion and spirituality is perceived and practised in Portugal today. Catholic Christianity is the official and predominant religion of Portugal. The relationship between Portuguese identity and Catholic faith has been consolidated ever since the fourteen century (Dix, 2008, p. 73), and today more than 84% of the Portuguese are members of the Roman Catholic Church (Dix, 2009, p. 183). However, about 60% out of the above percentage 'declares that they do not actively, or only rarely, participate in religious activities' (Dix, 2009, p. 183). It has already been observed by many social scientists that the Portuguese religiouscape has become largely pluralistic. Within this more open field of contemporary Portuguese religiosity, Catholicism has been practised hand-in-hand with Afro-Brazilian religions (Saraiva, 2010), transnational African religions (Saraiva, 2008; Blanes 2007), and Islamic religious traditions (Mapril, 2007), among others. However, and with the exception of just a few references on the subject (see, for instance: Bastos, 2001; Dix, 2009; Vilaça, 2012) the growing significance of new forms of spirituality in Portugal has remained surprisingly unstudied.

In an article describing her ethnographic research in a street of Lisbon more than a decade ago, Bastos (2001) observed how New Age paraphernalia were sold alongside Catholic objects, in a central space of the Portuguese capital where multiculturalism and globalization had evidently influenced social and religious practice, allowing esotericism to make an appearance. More recently, Saraiva (2010, p. 269) has made the point that the esoteric field in Portugal has gained popularity over the years and is currently well present in the country. During her fieldwork on Afro-Brazilian cults in Lisbon, the anthropologist met many individuals who

utilize New Age materialities along with practising their Afro-Brazilian religion. In her own words (Saraiva, 2010, p. 269):

Nowadays, what is listed in the Portuguese newspapers and Internet advertisements as the 'esoteric' field is only one of the visible faces of such diversity...esoteric shops named 'The occult world', 'Mystic world' or 'The Xangô warehouse', where one can find everything, from African herbs and 'magical powders' to make someone love you, candles to be lighted in veneration to a certain saint..., reiki and feng-shui manuals, as well as many other books concerning new healing techniques of aromatherapy, gemotherapy, chromotherapy and quantic healing.

According to Dix (2008, p. 80), the amalgamation of different religious traditions, especially in urban areas, has become somewhat of a standard social practice in western societies, and Portugal is one of these countries where the tendency for 'individual "homemade" religion' is increasing. As Dix (2008, p. 80) puts it, 'a Roman Catholic mass and a Buddhist meditation are not necessarily considered contradictory'. While the individualization of Portuguese religiosity is growing rapidly, 'there is still a lack of empirical and theoretical research programs that can throw new light on religious plurality in Portugal' (Dix, 2008).

Vilaça (2012) offers one of the few comprehensive and most recently published social scientific accounts with regard to the presence of and relationship between institutional and individual religiosity in Portugal today. Based on quantitative data collected through surveys during a research project called Church and Religion in 2006, her article analyses eloquently the status of the Catholic Church in contemporary Portuguese society, while presenting some data on the presence of New Age spirituality in the country. Her main argument rests on the idea that the Catholic Church continues to be the main institution of religious socialization in Portugal, as it maintains a significant position in Portuguese society. Despite her recognition that there is an emergence of new religious groups and movements in Portugal today, she sees Catholicism as too rooted in the Portuguese socio-cultural and religious identity to allow for other forms of religiosity to play any central role in the currently diverse Portuguese religious field. Drawing on her statistical data from the Church and Religion 2006 project, Vilaça is led to the conclusion that the influence of New Age spirituality and the individualization of belief has not affected the Portuguese as much as other Europeans. Ultimately, Vilaça asserts that

new forms of spirituality do not form an active part of contemporary Portuguese religiosity and cannot threaten the authority of the Catholic Church.

Since 2006, the year when the Church and Religion project (where Vilaça bases her argument) was conducted, the socio-cultural and economic landscape of Europe, especially when it comes to its southern part, has begun to change. The presence of alternative spirituality in countries such as Italy, Spain (see Fedele, 2012) and Greece (see Roussou, 2011; 2013) has become apparent, claiming an important role within the religiouscape of these southern European countries. During the current southern European crisis, new forms of spirituality have provided an alternative to denominational religion, predominantly Christianity, for the latter has left people feeling largely unsupported and disillusioned in these difficult times. Following a qualitative methodology, my field data are certainly more limited than other quantitative researches, so it might attract some criticism with regard to offering the more generalized argument that contemporary Portuguese religiosity is going through a process of individualization. However, as explained in the methodological part, I have talked to a diverse group of people, who have in turn described at length not just their own experiences but also the experiences of their extensive social networks; furthermore, living in Lisbon since September 2011, I have accumulated information both as an individual as well as an ethnographer beyond my field site and specific interlocutors. The ethnographic evidence I have collected, therefore, a small part of which is presented in the section below, about socialization and individualization in Lisbon and its periphery is multi-leveled, providing an indicative reflection of Portuguese religiosity as it is perceived and practised at present<sup>2</sup>.

### **Ethnographic Evidence of Socialization and Individualization in Lisbon and its periphery**

Contemporary Portuguese religiosity is undergoing a process of

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<sup>2</sup> The 'ethnographic present' in this article refers to the three-year period between September 2011, when the author first moved to Lisbon, and September 2014, when the final version of the paper was submitted.

individualization (Pollack, 2008)<sup>3</sup>. As my fieldwork has indicated, people in the Portuguese capital demonstrate an inclination to release themselves from the religious socialization as imposed by the Catholic Church, and to make instead individual choices as far as their personal religiosity is concerned, choices which incorporate a variety of alternative spiritual practices and lead toward an everyday pluralism (Bastos, 2001; Saraiva, 2010). The practices that are popular among the residents of Lisbon with whom I have spoken so far are mainly yoga, feng shui and reiki; alternative healing, such as crystal therapy, energetic therapy, retreats, and holistic medicine; intuitive sciences, especially tarot; esoteric material culture; and household spirituality, such as incense burning, transcendental meditation, and the reading of mind-body-spirit books. In general terms, people in Portugal recognize ‘the importance of Eastern religious themes and their general spread into the wider culture’ (Bruce, 2002, p. 118), and have adopted those in their everyday routines. At the same time, although many of them appear to disagree with the Catholic Church, and characterize themselves as spiritual rather than religious, they are in fact re-interpreting Christianity and readapting it in creative manners that fit their spiritual beliefs and practices. In the rest of this section, I will present four ethnographic cases, based on interlocutors with whom I engaged thoroughly in the Portuguese capital, and who display a varying degree of creative agency when it comes to the socialization, individualization and development of their religiosity.

The first interlocutor is Antonio, a Portuguese man in his late thirties, with whom I have interacted extensively during my fieldwork in Lisbon. He was born and raised as a Catholic, and although his parents were not strict devotees, in the sense that they did not attend the church liturgy every Sunday, Antonio and his sister grew up to be religiously observant and believers in Roman Catholicism. Antonio began to attend church liturgies when he became an adult, and he still maintains his Christian roots and beliefs. His mono-dimensional religious journey was altered, however, when he met his long-term partner, a tarologist and active practitioner of new forms of spirituality, about a decade ago. Since then, his personal

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<sup>3</sup> According to the individualization theory, ‘individual religiosity has emancipated itself from the custody of the large religious institutions; religious preferences are increasingly subject to the individual’s autonomous choices. Churches no longer define comprehensive belief parameters; individuals instead decide on their own worldviews and spiritual orientations’ (Pollack 2008, p. 171).

belief has accommodated alternative spirituality, while at the same time he continues to identify himself as a Christian adherent. In Antonio's own words:

It started with my partner, obviously. Before that, I was interested in a more religious way, a church way. I would go to church, I would be interested in the life of Christ and all the saints in the Catholic. I was born a Catholic, and I used to go to church as a child...well, not so much...my family is more abiding...my family would go [to church] on special occasions, we are not so much observing, although my parents do go to church on Sundays now although they didn't use to...I believe it is not the religious rituals themselves but it is the intention of a ritual that is important, and the intention that generations before you put in this particular ritual.

In Antonio's case, it is socialization through close familial relationships that has formulated the primary path of his religiosity. His religious beliefs have not remained static, however, but have been moulded into a personalized trajectory of combing his Christian upbringing and his partner's alternative spiritual influences. Keeping in mind that 'modern socialization processes is the simultaneous development of both a personal and a social identity' (Vermeer, 2010, p. 107), as well as that Antonio is far from alone in experiencing religiosity in a pluralistic manner, Antonio's trajectory can serve as a common paradigm of how personal and social identity can be creatively co-developed through a process of socialization in the field of contemporary Portuguese religiosity.

The second informant I want to focus on is Fernanda, a Portuguese woman in her sixties. She and her many siblings grew up in a nominally Catholic environment. Their parents were Catholic, but at the same time, especially their mother, open to other forms of spiritual awareness. As Fernanda explained, they were a very 'telepathetic family', and used to play games of telepathy and spiritual connectivity; for example, they would think of one particular action to be performed while one of them was out of the room, and that person would then be guided spiritually to act in a particular manner. Usually, as my informant told me, these acts of collective telepathy used to be successful and they were regarding them as an exercise to raise their spiritual development. Growing older, diversity was the main characteristic of the family's religious paths. Some of Fernanda's siblings became and still are devoted Catholics, others have followed a more open and alternative spiritual trajectory. For instance, her

brother, with whom I also had the opportunity to engage, has moved out of Lisbon and into the countryside of the broader municipality of Lisbon, where he has built a retreat centre that welcomes a variety of alternative spiritual groups to use it as the basis for their practices. Fernanda has also stayed away from the Catholic Church, and although her profession is not directly connected with spirituality, she performs reiki and other types of energy healing to family and friends, and follows a non-denominational spiritual trajectory. As can be seen by the Fernanda's story, an open religious socialization within the family can influence the family members in a diverse manner. Having both Christian and non-Christian incentive by their parents, Fernanda and her siblings chose their religiosity accordingly, depending on their personal values, needs and influences. When it comes to Fernanda, as in Antonio's case above, it was also the influence of her partner, a Chinese medical doctor, who prompted her to be involved more deeply with alternative spiritual pathways.

Maria, a Portuguese forty-year-old woman and an enthusiastic practitioner of alternative spirituality, has abandoned her official religion, namely Catholicism. Although she was born a Christian, her parents were not adherents of the Catholic Church and as a result she did not have any formal religious socialization within her direct familial environment. This is how Maria describes her relationship to religion:

[I believe in God] in a totally different way. I was baptized, and I had the first Christian initiation, the first communion. But it was nothing like...how can I explain this? It is a little bit like our education. You learn but you don't experience. Or you don't experience 1% from what you learn. So it would resonate inside me, I liked the pictures, and to paint, and to do the exercises, but nothing like experience. Also because my parents didn't believe in anything. They didn't have faith. They are Catholic, they baptized me, but that happens to many Catholic people, they don't truly believe it, it is something they go to when they need, when they have a sin or something, but it is not in their lives, it is not experienced. And God is something that that is inside of me, inside of you, inside of all of us.

In her practice of new forms of spirituality, Maria frequently combines Christian material and ideological symbolology (for example icons of saints, the Virgin, the Archangels, the cross) with alternative spiritual discourses and material objects (for example energetic crystals, photos of shamans, sacred geometry, and Indian incense). Although, as she declares,

neither her parents nor she are adherents of the Catholic Church, she believes in the idea of god, but in a spiritual and not a religious sense; namely, she believes in a 'god within', a concept that is widespread and popularly adopted by the majority of the individuals who follow alternative spiritual trajectories. Maria, as can be ascertained from the quote above, also makes a very important point: she places emphasis on a distinction between socialization as a process of learning and individualization as process of experiencing. For her, it is individualization as and through experience that formulates a person's belief system; rather than learning how to believe (in god, in saints, in angels, in Christianity) through family, church and friends, it is crucial, according to Maria, to experience belief, for it is this empirical and individual approach of religiosity that can fortify one's religious and/or spiritual identity.

Catarina, a Portuguese woman in her mid thirties, is a yoga teacher and a practitioner of eastern spiritualities. She was born in South Africa by Portuguese parents, and when she was about eleven years old the family moved back to Portugal. As a child, Catarina went through a process of ambiguous religious socialization:

I was born Roman Catholic. My mother baptized me. All my grandparents were brought up in religious Christian families. I was sent to a Catholic convent in South Africa (between three and eleven years old). So, yes, I was baptized, and then I went to a school that was very religious, but I never really believed in it from a young age. My parents didn't really believe in it, but it was part of their culture. I remember asking a lot of questions to my teachers and I was told off for not having faith. So my questions were never answered. And I never got 'confirmed'. A lot of my friends went through 'confirmation' with their religious families...'confirmation' is your second...no, up to your first communion. I actually had my first communion, but never had 'confirmation'. And after the convent we came back here and when I was in Portugal I never went to church, or anything like that, unless of course it was to a funeral, and I got married civilly. Christian religion is not really part of my life, or my husband's life, even though we do some things out of tradition.

Catarina first came in contact with yoga when her mother began to practise it. Later, through her school social environment, she was given the incentive to start developing her spiritual side, and since then she has been following an alternative spiritual trajectory.

I first remember thinking about yoga when I was probably ten years old, and I was living in South Africa. My mother was going through a period in her life where she was quite down, she started going to yoga classes and I went with her to one of them. I remember thinking: 'I want to do that too', I was intrigued that my mother was doing something active, so I wanted to be a part of it. That was my first memory of yoga. I didn't think much about it until much later when I was in high school and I was living here in Portugal at this point. And my art teacher took me and all my colleagues to a place called Mertola, and the place has an amazing energy, and we went there to...to get in touch with our spiritual side, with art as well, and just be one with nature and our surroundings. And it was like an amazing experience for me, it was my eye-opener to the spiritual world, I really felt strong connections to the area and also to the people I was with. There was another teacher there who was teaching us a little bit about yoga, and about union. And after that I didn't touch yoga any more, but then we were introduced to Siddhartha in high school, and we read the book and I fell in love with Buddhism, or at least Siddhartha's story and that kind of made me become interested to the spiritual path-to-be.

Catarina developed her religiosity under the influence of the traditional social institutions (family and school) that usually act as agents of religious socialization. At the Catholic school in South Africa where her parents, despite not being keen Christian believers, had sent her because, to use Catarina's words, 'it was their [Portuguese] culture', she was eagerly guided towards following the official religion of her country. At her school in Portugal, she was encouraged to explore alternative spirituality, which at the end chose as her individual religiosity. Drawing on personal experience, Catarina demonstrated the creative agency to individualize her beliefs and practise her spirituality without being constrained by social norms. Through religious and spiritual socialization, she developed her own individual version of religiosity, which she follows to date.

As can be observed by the four ethnographic stories mentioned above, Catarina, along with Maria, Fernanda, Antonio, and ultimately all of my interlocutors, display a varying exposure to religious and spiritual socialization. Whether they come from a religious, spiritual or irreligious<sup>4</sup> background, they use their agency so as to establish an individualized religiosity that steps away from social institutions and their regulations and restrictions concerning religious socialization and towards a spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of 'irreligious socialization' see Merino, 2012.

socialization that rests on subjective experience. It is this current social and individual need for experiencing religion in a more creative way and through a subjective lens that has led many Portuguese in Lisbon to opt for alternative spirituality as their main religious trajectory. In agreement with Peter Berger (2007) who sees the existence of religious pluralism as directly connected with globalization, I argue that religion in contemporary Lisbon is challenged, but at the same time reinterpreted, by being amalgamated with alternative spiritualities, due to a changing global religious landscape where new forms of spirituality currently play a central role. However, I do not wish to argue that Portugal had a homogeneous religious past, where Catholic Christianity was dominant, and pluralism was not part of the spiritual picture. As Mapril and Blanes (2013, p. 4) assert: 'In countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece religious pluralism was always present, but simultaneously obscured by hegemonic and repressive regimes with specific strategies concerning religious adherence and manifestation'. The Catholic Church has always been and still is a central part of Portuguese religiosity, and one main source of religious socialization. Yet, it has ceased to obscure the (realization of the) existence of religious pluralism in the country. Under this new socio-religious realization and development, the individualization of Portuguese religiosity is not only encouraged but also actively pursued.

## **Discussion**

It has been widely asserted that the age of religion has come to an end, and the world has entered a new age of spirituality, which is devoid of doctrinal and organized religious ideologies (Shimazono, 1999, p. 125; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Heelas, 2006; Knoblauch, 2008; Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Perhaps one of the most well-known approaches with regard to the individualization of contemporary religiosity has been offered by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) in their recent work on 'spiritual revolution'. Modern societies, according to the 'spiritual revolution' claim, are experiencing a turn 'away from life lived in terms of external or "objective" roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences' (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005, p. 5). These 'subjective-life spiritualities', as they call them, have to do with the invocation of 'the sacred in the cultivation of unique subjective-

life' (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005), their most prominent characteristic being that they rest on experience and they are experienced as sustaining life (Heelas, 2006, p. 224). These forms of subjective-life spirituality are the ones practised by my informants, who consider them a creative way to approach and individualize their religiosity through personal experience instead of social learning.

This turn to individualized religiosity can be thought to have raised an unnecessary distinction between religion and spirituality. I concord with Knoblauch (2008, p. 145) that:

Spirituality differs from religion by the stress laid on subjective experience of great transcendences by 'ordinary' people. Students of Weber may detect the fundamental change with respect to traditional religion: charisma is not restricted to virtuosi or administered by organizations, but becomes generalized and subjectivized.

Individualization and subjective experience of practising religiosity raises novel questions concerning charisma and religious power, which is now shared between 'official' and 'ordinary' representatives of religiosity. At the same time, though, 'spirituality extends far beyond that marked area that is culturally identifiable as religious and thus blurs the boundary between the religious and the non-religious' (Knoblauch, 2008, p. 146). The purpose of my argument has been far from creating tension between religion and spirituality and/or between religious socialization and spiritual individualization. My ethnographic findings have called attention to the fact that in Lisbon today the need to communicate with the sacred is moving away from collective religious impositions and is becoming a matter of individual choice. Thus, a spiritual socialization is created, a form of socialization where learning religiosity is achieved through creative agency and experience rather than structured and institutional teaching.

As far as my ethnographic fieldwork has allowed me to observe, the rate of church attendance in present-day Lisbon is far lower than it used to be. For example, none of the people I engaged with, even the most devoted Catholic ones, attends mass every Sunday or actively believes in the Catholic Church per se. What the majority of the Portuguese seem to be experiencing in the field of official religious identity is the status of 'belief without belonging', to use Grace Davies's (1994) classic concept. As Davie (2002, p. 8) has observed, 'many Europeans have ceased to connect with

their religious institutions in any active sense, but they have not abandoned, so far, either their deep-seated religious aspirations or a latent sense of belonging.’ The cultivation of Catholic aspirations and the sense of religious belonging in the Portuguese case are directly connected to the most popular agents of socialization in Portugal, and especially to that of family. Catholic faith is deeply embedded in religious learning through familial sub/conscious formation, and as such its root cannot be easily modified or removed altogether. Given the established degree of religious socialization within the usually strong Portuguese family ties, it takes a lot of creative agency on behalf of the individual to break free from this form of socialization and explore novel paths of religiosity with which s/he can identify.

Sherkat (2003, p. 151) asserts that:

People interact with a variety of different agents of socialization over the life course, and these individuals, organizations, and experiences channel the beliefs and understandings that constitute religious preferences – and these preferences help inform commitments to religious organizations. Agents of socialization influence individuals only if the source is a trusted and valued connection, and experiences can only inform religious understandings if they are salient for religious faith.

The main agents of religious socialization in the Portuguese context seem to be indeed the trusted and valued connections of the individuals. Consequently, religious socialization in Portugal, judging from the experiences of all the people I spoke to, appears to be intimately linked to the direct familial environment of the individual. Despite being influenced by these agents of socialization, however, people in Lisbon, at least the ones whom I talked to, are not simply passive recipients of religious socialization, but instead cultivate their own ‘critical autonomy’ (Lövheim, 2012, p. 152) in deciding about their beliefs and religious paths they want to follow.

Despite the criticisms it has received, the concept of religious literacy, which signifies ‘a descriptive part concerning knowledge about religion, but also hypotheses about the outcome of this knowledge such as ability to communicate one’s own religious values, to critically reflect on religion and to recognize the legitimacy of others’ (Dinham and Jones, 2010, referred in Lövheim, 2012, p. 164) can offer some insight here. In her study

of religious literacy in the Nordic countries and Sweden in particular, Lövheim (2012) observes that, mainly among younger generations, individuals become religiously literate through non-traditional agents of socialization. Lövheim (2012) points out that religious socialization is changing in Sweden. In spite of the fact that family and religious organizations still play a strong role in religious socialization, the younger Swedish generation is influenced primarily by school, friends and the media when it comes to the development of their religiosity rather than by their family and church (Lövheim, 2012, p. 155). The Portuguese younger generations show strong signs of distrust towards the traditional agents of religious socialization and they too are considerably influenced by their friends and the media<sup>5</sup>; yet, according to my fieldwork at least, this distrust is not limited to the Portuguese youth but there are older individuals who let go of their traditional religious institutions and experiment with new forms of spiritual practices.

I agree with Lövheim (2012, p. 157) that it is useful to think about these new processes of religious socialization in terms of religious literacy, for it is a concept which 'brings a focus on individual agency and ability rather than passive reception in the process of acquiring the ideas and values necessary for participating within culture and society' (Lövheim, 2012). The people I have encountered in Lisbon treat and challenge their religiosity with considerable individual agency. Their personal experiences in developing as well as resisting their religious literacy point towards the current processes of individualization in relation to the practice of alternative spirituality in the Portuguese capital. Consequently, these acts of creative agency and individualization of religious practice are indicative of the transformations occurring in the context of contemporary Portuguese

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<sup>5</sup> As Hess (2011) observes, digital technologies and the media play an important role when it comes to religious education. Regardless of the fact that there are no studies indicating clearly that online resources and social network sites such as Facebook, YouTube, twitter, blogs and so on radically change religion, these new technologies can 'reflect and enhance more general trends of transformations of religion in present times' (Lövheim, 2012, p. 162). When it comes to the group of people I studied, the younger and the older generations of Portuguese in Lisbon seem to be utilizing the media, especially Facebook, personal blogs, YouTube and other online resources serve as a means of communicating ideas, advertising retreats and spiritual workshops, exchanging inspirational messages, or simply communicating and sharing their experiences.

religiosity; they draw a fluent picture of how the latter shifts towards non-denominational trajectories, rendering traditional religious webs and ties obsolete, while a novel form of spiritual socialization is developed.

### **Epilogue: a new challenge for Portuguese Religiosity**

In this article, I have tried to show how the image of contemporary Portuguese religiosity has been transformed. The religioscape of present-day Portugal, especially the one in its capital Lisbon, has ceased to be seemingly and almost exclusively Christian Catholic, but has instead become pluralistic and capable of accommodating and developing a closer proximity with new forms of spirituality. Religious pluralism is of course not a novel phenomenon in the European context, nor is the amalgamation of Christianity and alternative spirituality during everyday ritual practice. As very recent anthropological works (Rountree, 2010; Fedele, 2012; Fedele & Knibbe, 2013) have shown, Christianity and contemporary spirituality have always co-existed, interacted, and continue to intermingle in the religious landscape of (southern) Europe. For the Portuguese, however, these transformations in the field of religiosity can be considered to be a challenge, for Catholic Christianity has always been closely linked to their sociocultural and ethnic identity. By denying that Catholicism, an inherent trait of their Portuguese identity, plays a central role in their lives, and adopting a spiritual identity instead, people in Lisbon show willingness to transform not only their personal but also their social identity, and hence become active social subjects that demonstrate subjective as well as creative agency.

These days in Lisbon even those who define themselves as Christian believers appear to have become disillusioned with Catholicism and do not hesitate to try alternative practices, and, more generally, become entangled with non-denominational spiritual trajectories. The people I have spoken with in the Portuguese capital, the majority of whom do not identify themselves as Catholics, seek for a 'sacred space', feeling 'the need to withdraw from the busyness and turmoil of daily life and find space to reflect and simply "be"' (Hunt, 2003, p. 164); a space that is pluralistic and spiritually meaningful, yet devoid of religious structural formats and norms. Being generally aware of the multiple processes of religious socialization they have experienced from an early age, the people I

interacted with in Lisbon prefer to adopt an individualized method of a more conscious spiritual socialization that allows them to subjectively form and transform their religiosity, without any restrictions and structured beliefs imposed on them by formal religion. Such spiritual openness and realization does not automatically reject Catholic Christianity, ignoring its contribution to religious learning, but instead can create an interactive field of Portuguese religiosity, where Christianity and new forms of spirituality fuse rather than collide.

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