
Afterword

The Elsewhere beyond Religious Concerns

Annalisa Butticci and Amira Mittermaier

We are all connected to multiple Elsewheres: the place(s) where we grew up, the place we would rather be, the places that haunt us, the places where the dead dwell, the sites of empire. Geographical Elsewheres can be a source of fear. In the wake of Europe's so-called migrant crisis and border-crossing pandemic viruses, a moral and racist panic feeds off the supposed collapse of those 'other places' into 'our society'. But other places can also be sites of fascination and longing. Think of the long history of travel accounts, or the long-standing desire to reach beyond the planetary horizon. The dream of a mission to Mars. Anything but the depressing here and now!

At first sight, the Elsewhere is what is *not here*. It shares certain features—and textures of longing—with utopia, which is literally the *non-place*. But, unlike utopia, which is often set off in the future and is not necessarily locatable, the Elsewhere tends to be intimately connected to the present and to have a place, albeit one that might exceed the boundaries of the worldly and the visible. Rather than suggest spatial boundedness, however, the Elsewhere, like utopia, is an invitation to think about the *more*—the ways in which the here and now is connected to, disrupted by, and enlarged through those elusive *Other* spaces. We are interested in what forms and shapes those Other spaces take, and in their ontological, epistemological, social, and political effects.

Access to, and from, the Elsewhere, is central to many religious traditions, but the Elsewhere is not a matter of religion alone. One only needs to think of Freud's complex architecture of the unconscious, or his remark that each dream has a spot "at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown" (1965: 143n), to sense his fascination with that other elusive space. Freud's focus on eruptions and disruptions from that other place recalls to some extent a religious Elsewhere—a resonance noted by translators of Freud's work into Arabic in the 1950s (El Shakry 2017) and by Muslim dream interpreters in Egypt in the early 2000s (Mittermaier 2011).

Eruptions from the Elsewhere are not confined to the solitary dreamer. The Elsewhere can also erupt in the affective arousal of assembled crowds marching for an ideal of justice, freedom, or democracy, or in euphoric and ecstatic crowds gathered for memorable concerts or sport events. The Elsewhere can be the result of a powerful sense of togetherness and totality that momentarily dissolves the individuality, disconnection, and anonymity of contemporary hyper-technological and fast-speed societies. Indeed, a big crowd or a small gathering can cultivate the



Elsewhere through certain rituals, practices, words, and sensations that suspend the existential and social limits of daily life.

By drawing into view how the Elsewhere goes beyond the question of religion, we want to place into a wider context the engagement with the Elsewhere that is foregrounded in this special section. As all the authors remind us, the Elsewhere carries a particular weight in many religious traditions, including those at the heart of this section: Christianity and Islam. These religious traditions, or at least certain iterations, point to other spheres, ones that might not be graspable by vision or even reason. But the Elsewhere also pierces, or folds into, materiality and theologies.

The wonderful set of articles in this special section lays the groundwork for a sustained anthropological engagement with a religious Elsewhere—not as a fixed site, but as something that is elusive, often contested, and continuously reimagined. In particular, by thinking Muslim and Christian life-worlds together, this section invites us to step outside of the silos we have come to call ‘anthropology of Islam’ and ‘anthropology of Christianity’. The articles take us to Germany, Lebanon, Norway, and Iran. Each tells a very particular story of engagements with the Elsewhere (or multiple Elsewheres). Together, they invite us to extend our ethnographic focus—at once tentatively and boldly—to those Other spaces and the ways in which they inflect the here and now. The emerging conversation is exciting and draws into view the many possibilities afforded by a turn to affect in our ethnographic grappling with the Elsewhere. The Elsewhere is not necessarily pleasant, but it is always elusive and exceeds human meaning-making.

Our Elsewheres

Both of us have grappled with the Elsewhere extensively in our own work. For Annalisa Buttici, the Elsewhere(s) are ephemeral moments of intense aesthetic perception of divine and supernatural powers. She observes how two diverse religious communities, specifically, Roman Catholics and African Pentecostals, generate and cultivate their Elsewhere(s) through embodied practices, objects, images, substances, senses, and sensations. To Catholics and Pentecostals, the Elsewhere is not a mere representation or a symbolic enactment of an extraordinary experience but a real, tangible, visible, and audible human and more-than-human co-presence and connection.

In *African Pentecostals in Catholic Europe*, her analysis and comparison of the politics of the aesthetics of Catholics’ and Pentecostals’ Elsewheres, Buttici (2016) complicates the predominant narrative about the theological and aesthetic clashes between these two expressions of Christianity. She questions the apparently radical differences that divide and oppose Catholicism and Pentecostalism and instead highlights unexplored common religious aesthetics and theological principles that shape a shared understanding and perception of the Elsewhere. Intriguingly, in Italy, the seat of the papacy and land of Catholicism, she finds that religious aesthetics are also highly political.

The African Pentecostals’ Elsewhere becomes a metaphysical site of political dissent that temporarily suspends the limits and sufferings of the peripheral existence imposed on African Pentecostals in Italy as black, non-Catholic, and working-class migrants. Interestingly, although African Pentecostals reject Roman Catholicism as a religion and as the ethnoreligious principle that governs the Italian nation-state, they nonetheless appropriate and manipulate Roman Catholic aesthetic power for their own spiritual ends. In particular, they use what sustains Roman Catholic religious power and Italian ethnoreligious identity to express their religious and social dissent.

Through the contested and unauthorized use of objects, images, dress, and spaces, African Pentecostals who live on the margins of Italian Catholic society craft their own social and religious worlds, move objects and images from the center to the margin, redefine the rules and

aesthetics of the Elsewhere, and temporarily materialize their political project of liberation from their imposed marginality and social suffering. Their Elsewhere is shaped by a radical religious and social imagination that, through objects, images, material forms, bodies, feelings, and practices, temporarily dissolves Catholic regimes of absolute truth and socio-religious hierarchies.

In the Elsewhere, Pentecostals who live on the margins of Italian society craft their individual and collective political subjectivity. Yet, as Buttici shows, African Pentecostals' Elsewhere(s) are often charged with ambiguities and contradictions that might not produce meaning, but rather deeply felt extraordinary possibilities of socio-political and religious power in a Catholic and European dominated society.

In Amira Mittermaier's work, the Elsewhere is the space from which dream-visions come to the dreamer. In Muslim traditions of dream interpretation, dreams can originate in multiple places: the dreamer's self, the Devil or *jinn*, or a metaphysical Elsewhere. Mittermaier's work traces the social, ethical, and political afterlives of divinely sent dreams in Egypt. As in Italy, the Elsewhere in Egypt, too, is heavily contested—both its nature and the question of who has access to it and how. Not all iterations of the Islamic tradition value and configure the Elsewhere equally. Particularly in Sufi communities, access to the Elsewhere is purposefully cultivated, yet this cultivation is always accompanied and humbled by the awareness that divinely sent dreams and other signs from the Elsewhere cannot be demanded but only invited. In her article "Dreams from Elsewhere," Mittermaier (2012) reflects on an ethics of passion that emerges from her interlocutors' dream-stories. As she notes, these stories not only undo the notion of a unified subject but also draw attention to the role of an Elsewhere in constituting the subject, along with elements of unpredictability and contingency. Speaking to a particular moment in the anthropology of Islam, this article probes the limits of the paradigm of self-cultivation, a concept that works well to account for religious practices that emphasize intentionality and deliberate action but leaves less room for godly dreams and other irruptions from an Elsewhere.

Mittermaier finds that the Elsewhere is not opposed to the here and now; instead, it is in a continuum with it. While dream-tellings in Egypt often involve other spaces—the Prophetic Realm, the *barzakh* (the in-between space where the souls of the dead dwell until Judgment Day), or what Ibn al-'Arabi called *'ālam al-mithāl*, the imaginal world—dreams can have visible social afterlives. Divine agency does not end in the subject. Rather, divinely sent dreams spill over into waking lives with observable effects. This interconnectedness is also central to Mittermaier's (2019) work on an Islamic ethics of giving where the Elsewhere directs people in the here and now. In *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times*, she shows how pious volunteers distributing food in Cairo's slums are guided by their hope for a place in paradise. It is that *other place* that directs them in the here and now. It is paradise that drives them into the slums.

What Is and Where Is the Elsewhere?

The Elsewhere is not a physical location in which we can do fieldwork in the classical sense of 'participant observation.' It is the elusive, the invisible, the unknown that enfolds, disrupts, or reframes the visible world. It is not the here and now in a material sense. But it is very much *here*. And it is very much *now*.

The Elsewhere is made of a combination of material and immaterial elements, bodily practices, emotions, sensations, and imaginations. As the articles show, the Elsewhere can be made of pictures, colors, flowers, peculiar lights, smells, and sounds that enhance individual and collective religious emotions and socio-political passions. The Elsewhere(s) described in the articles are indeed here-and-now metaphysical sites of non-ordinary dialectical relationships

between bodies and things. Being the fruits of radical creativities, they irrupt in various styles, hierarchies, intensity of the senses, and engagement with often sophisticated and heterogeneous material worlds. The Elsewheres can change over time, and can include or exclude new objects and subjects, bodily gestures and sensations.

Nor is the Elsewhere fixed in one place. For the Nigerian Pentecostals in Berlin whom Mattes writes about, the Elsewhere is God and the Holy Spirit. For the Sufis in Germany in Selim's contribution, the Elsewhere is located in the body, inner life-worlds, and emotions. Selim, along with her interlocutors, extends the meanings of the Elsewhere by collapsing the space between a divine Elsewhere and the self. As noted above, the Freudian unconscious can easily be read as a secularized Elsewhere. Along the same lines, the German Sufis remind us that the line between secular and religious does not hold in a context where affect itself can become the site of the divine. Indeed, the Elsewhere's play in the here and now can blur the lines between inner/outer, material/immaterial, and earth/heaven. In Chavoshian's study of an Iranian martyr cemetery, gravestones, dreams, and photographs are interwoven, creating a mode of intimacy with the martyrs and a way to tap into an Elsewhere. As a man speaking at a particularly saintly grave-stone put it: "A stream from heaven passes under this stone!"

While the meanings and locations of the Elsewhere are necessarily fluid and shifting, the articles invite us to think about particular aspects of this elusive space. One recurrent theme revolves around *relationships* between the Elsewhere and our human interlocutors. Writing about a Lebanese Shi'i mourning gathering, Marei speaks of attempts to craft an imagined community "that spans the this- and other-worldly." He highlights how the young men's attempts to tap into the Elsewhere help them transcend linear space and time. Present-day Syria *becomes* Karbala. Recalling plights of the past allows for a reframing of current politics, fueling a timeless battle against injustice. Writing about early-twentieth-century missionaries in Norway, Hovland highlights a similar collapsing of space, a convergence of multiple Elsewheres. She details how missionary women cultivated a responsiveness to the Elsewhere with the hope of bringing heathen women in Madagascar into the fold of Christianity. The Elsewhere here is both God *and* a geographical Elsewhere, and the two are intertwined. Bringing this insight to bear on the other research contexts, we could ask how various renderings of difference affect imaginings of a metaphysical Elsewhere.

Indeed, the Elsewhere is deeply entangled with the ordinary world. It emerges from everyday preoccupations, needs, desires and aspirations, and from religious aesthetics and bodily sensations internalized through social experiences in a given socio-historical context. But the Elsewhere can also shape the ordinary world. It can erupt in the individual and collective life of people nurturing particular subjectivities and ways of beings. The Elsewhere often has an afterlife in the people and communities that experience it. New senses of self and community power, new visions of social and political possibilities, new ways of healing, and new social and spiritual connections are some of the aftermaths of the Elsewhere that can affect the inner and social worlds of people. As the articles show, the Elsewhere can retune individual and collective emotions and turn anguish into hope, isolation into belonging, discrimination into emancipation, and suffering into healing. In some cases, it opens up a space of subversion, pushing back against state regulations of saintliness and sacredness. Of course, such retuning does not necessarily affect the structures of power and politics of violence and oppression that upset people's ordinary worlds. But as both Butticci and Mittermaier argue in their work, one should not overlook the ethical and political dimensions of such moments of liberation from the limits of ordinary life. To be sure, what goes on in nightly dreams or behind closed doors of churches or mosques *does* matter, even if it does not take place on a public stage.

As noted, the effects of the Elsewhere on the inner and social worlds of people are not necessarily pleasant. They can also be more ambivalent, such as when religion itself becomes a source

of anxiety, isolation, or discrimination, or when the Elsewhere places demands on a believer or community that are difficult to fulfill. The Elsewhere can be a burden as much as it can be uplifting. The effects of the Elsewhere are elusive yet pervasive.

While decentering the public, the collection of articles in this special section also raises questions about scale and collectivity. The Norwegian missionaries are small groups of women, moving from the private spaces of their homes into a church space. The Iranians gathering at the martyr cemetery come in small groups, too, and seem to interact more with a scented gravestone than with each other. The Shi'i ritual ceremony in Beirut, by contrast, draws together a vibrant crowd of 400 young men, which crescendos into a thundering sonic and collective ecstasy. How might collectivities and crowds relate to the Elsewhere? How are its affective resonances distributed across people and bodies?

Cultivation and Excess

Across the articles, we see attempts to act upon the Elsewhere and a simultaneous *being acted upon*. The Norway missionary women sought to affect the Elsewhere by tuning into it. The Shi'i participants in the mourning ritual attempt “to cultivate imaginal engagements with the otherworldly.” Marei carefully takes us through “sensory-affective states of collective lamentation, excitement, and enthusiasm.” Writing about a Nigerian Pentecostal church in Germany, Mattes highlights material-sensorial arrangements enabling believers to connect to an Elsewhere, and Selim takes us through a six-day workshop structured around what she calls an “affective pedagogy” aimed at helping participants to feel “unknown affects emanating from the Elsewhere.”

But many of the articles also point to an element of excess—the ways in which the Elsewhere can never be fully contained despite all attempts at cultivation and control. Indeed, as Butticci (2016: 134) states in her work, the Elsewhere is “sensuously undisciplined and often lyrically anarchic” and tends to dwell in the irreducible tension that withstands authorities, doctrines, and dogmas. Being the result of excesses of life, or energy, as Hovland writes in her article, the Elsewhere is governed by uncanny unruliness where human and divine agency powerfully intermingle. In Chavoshian’s article, the scent emanating from the gravestone cannot be contained by the Iranian state. The scent points to, and connects visitors to, alternate imaginaries of martyrdom. As such, a focus on the Elsewhere in these various contexts helps us see that it is never a matter of either/or—human *or* divine agency. Rather, in moments of heightened engagement with the Elsewhere, these two forms of agency are best conceptualized as intertwined. In fact, the Elsewhere is not inherent in any space, form, object, sense, or emotion. It is the result of human agency expressed through religious practices, emotions, and aesthetics. And yet, once it becomes tangible, visible, touchable, and sensuously perceivable, it acts upon the people who create or cultivate it. Like a sensuous statue of a Catholic saint, a night dream, a healing space within us, the Holy Spirit touch, or the martyrs’ presence, the Elsewhere touches those who generated and shaped it.

How to Study the Elsewhere

All the articles offer methodological reflections. What kind of approach is needed when we turn our attention to how the Elsewhere is evoked in, or irrupts into, material, social, affective worlds? How might we think about the Elsewhere anthropologically? How can we capture it ethnographically? What kinds of sensibilities do we need to cultivate in order to be able to grapple with the

Elsewhere? What kinds of affective and aesthetic strategies do we need to employ? Attention to materiality, mediation, and modes of responsiveness, to affect, sound, and smell, to relationalities and imagined communities opens ways for engaging with the Elsewhere. Ethnographic engagement with the Elsewhere needs to begin with careful listening (and seeing and smelling and touching)—the kind that does not presume to know in advance what is real and what is not. It also means engaging with our interlocutors' terms—a point most forcefully brought home by Mattes who had to literally negotiate the wording of his manuscript during a memorable wintery discussion on a park bench. At the same time, the Elsewhere can be grounded in and mediated through long-standing textual traditions. We see an example of this in Chavoshian's reflections on Iranian dreams. Understanding these dream-worlds would be impossible without connecting them to broader Shi'i conceptualizations of the imagination where the imaginal world is ontologically real and the imagination is a "privileged locus of experience, transformation, and relation." A familiarity with textual traditions, then, can be an important piece of the toolkit for ethnographies of the Elsewhere despite the fact that everyday engagements with the Elsewhere sometimes push back against established orthodoxies and hierarchies.

Finally, an ethnographic engagement with the Elsewhere also needs to involve careful writing. We find that the Elsewhere is best evoked rather than captured. The anthropologist's own relationship to the Elsewhere (however conceived) comes in and out of sight in the articles. Selim describes herself as a "dual apprentice of Sufism and anthropology." She courageously discloses her positionality, perhaps leaving the reader eager to know more about her own experience of the Elsewhere. But this is tricky terrain for the 'vulnerable ethnographer', to paraphrase Ruth Behar's (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer*. Behar reminds us about the risk of pretending to be absent in the fieldwork and forgetting about the presence, body, and sensations experienced while observing and studying our research subjects. She also is very much concerned about anthropology's drive to rescintize the discipline, which confounds positionality with lack of rigor. How far should ethnographers go with regard to describing their accidental experiences of their interlocutors' Elsewhere? Will the ethnographer's disclosure of her own experience of the Elsewhere make the ethnography less 'scientific'?

In their work, both Butticci and Mittermaier share glimpses of their Elsewhere and bring to the surface their puzzlement and challenge in giving sense or meaning to their experience. In *Dreams That Matter*, Mittermaier (2011: xv) describes her own experience: "I wake up and what I have witnessed stops making sense. How can one see more with one's eyes closed or turned inward? I guess I understand these things better when I'm asleep. Maybe I've been in the field for too long." Similarly, Butticci (2016: 60) writes: "I could not make any sense of what happened and I could only remember what I felt, perceived, heard, and smelled. There was no story to listen to nor a particular sight I could stare at. There was no space in my mind to find a meaning for what had happened to me. I could only go beyond meaning and remember that intense indefinite moment that Mattijs van de Port calls 'the rest of what it is', or the 'absurd', for our world view to make sense." As discomfiting as it can be, writing about those experiences in the field might be a valuable way to disable the power imbalance that shapes the relationship between anthropologists and their research subjects.

But one does not need to see, experience, or even believe in the Elsewhere in order to do it ethnographic justice, nor does one have to force a rapture or go native as Clifford Geertz (1973) would say, or even use drugs as William James ([1902] 1985) did in his study on the transcendental. James made extensive use of nitrous oxide (a hallucinogen later called 'laughing gas') to feel with his body and sense the experience of the beyond. To study the Elsewhere, one probably does not need to go that far. Indeed, it might rather come down to an *unlearning*, a suspension of disbelief, a bracketing of one's certitudes about ontological matters, and ultimately also to writing.

It might also be useful to engage all of one's senses to observe, feel, smell, hear, and touch—and be touched by—the Elsewhere. This might include a peculiar retuning of the senses that questions the prevalence of seeing over the other senses. For as the authors of the articles reveal, each Elsewhere has special sounds, smells, tastes, and textures that reveal the peculiarity of the emotional, sensorial, and aesthetic regimes that shape individual and collective experiences.

Why Study the Elsewhere?

The Elsewhere is a state of knowledge, insights, and deep truth full of significance. The Elsewhere can also be unarticulated, ambiguous, and contradictory. But it is exactly in these unruly beyond(s) that one can observe the affects, emotions, and passions that define our experience of being human in our social worlds.

The articles in this special section present various Elsewhere(s) nestled in the social, religious, and political life of particular groups and communities. Such extraordinary moments of here and now are inextricable from the everyday life of the Shi'i youths, the Nigerian Pentecostal migrants, the practitioners of Inayati Sufism, Iranians faced with state appropriations of their dead, and the Christian women of Kristiania. One might even suggest that it would be difficult to fully understand these communities' emotional, social, and political lives without also studying their Elsewhere(s). Indeed, the articles show that the Elsewhere can be revelatory of unspeakable or unsayable fears, anxieties, aspirations, and desires that furtively tune individual and collective moods and orient possible actions for a better present and a brighter future.

The Elsewhere of the Shi'i youths discloses their anguish, anger, and also hope. These emotions reverberate in their Elsewhere through chants, poems, sounds of chest-thumping, and red lights. How much of that anger and frustration would it be possible to express in a public stage or in their every daily lives? And with what social and political consequences?

Selim describes the Inayati Sufis' Elsewhere as an anti-secular critique shaped by an inclusive, universal, border-free ethos that creatively includes the healing power of various religious and therapeutic traditions. This Elsewhere reveals a profound desire for religiosity that emerges from a post-secular Germany. Desire is also a crucial yet not openly disclosed element of the affective politics of the Christian women of Kristiania. Through the "never bazaar" claim and a new aesthetic of silence, these women subtly communicate the unexpressed desire to break the social conventions that define and impose on the pious women in Kristiania a certain role and place in the community. The Iranians are intimately connected with their dead through cemetery visits and dreams in ways that subvert the state appropriations. Particularly revelatory is the Elsewhere of Nigerian Pentecostal migrants. Through the tensions that emerged about its 'tellability', one can see the Nigerian Pentecostals' preoccupation and frustration about their imposed African otherness. In fact, they object to the use of words and descriptions that could vaguely recall the stereotypes that have been defining them as irrational, primitive, and savage from the time of colonial encounters to contemporary European contact zones. And so, tensions about descriptions of "affective excess," holy noises, or peculiar movements ("wandering around" versus "pacing back and forth") reveal a preoccupation that is definitively more political than theological.

The Elsewhere cannot answer all research questions. It does not provide hard data, numbers, or statistics. It escapes rigorous comparisons, predictability, and replicability. Every Elsewhere is unique in its own occurrence, elusiveness, and excess. Paradoxically, its overabundance of affects, emotions, narratives, and secret stories might leave in the shadow the grains of the extended social and religious scenarios that shape the experience of people and communities. It can reveal the unspeakable while obscuring the tensions that prevent its irruption. In fact,

the Elsewhere can also fail. It can escape, become unreachable and inaccessible. What are the circumstances that cage, dissolve, or inhibit the mediation of the Elsewhere? How can we know about its failed cultivation?

The Elsewhere as Political

The Elsewhere and the here and now come together in different ways, including in highly political ways. The agency that emerges with and through the Elsewhere is not only a theological but also a political matter. Representations of the Elsewhere, too, can carry political weight. For the Nigerian Pentecostals in Berlin, it is crucial not to be portrayed as overly invested in affectively engaging the Elsewhere. This is a matter of political representation and belonging, and a matter of distinguishing themselves from an imagined African Other. Indeed, Mattes experienced a complex negotiation with his interlocutors that offers a window into the political stakes of our ethnographic accounts of grappling with an Elsewhere. In his case, the Elsewhere raised a clear political question: Who has the right and freedom to experience the Elsewhere without being trapped in the oppressive cage of an irreducible otherness? How do the observer's descriptions of the Elsewhere affect the people who generate it? The tensions in the politics of representations raised in Mattes's and also partially in Selim's and Chavoshian's articles clearly show how the Elsewhere directly questions the power of the ethnographer. In these cases, the Elsewhere and its human and more-than-human co-presence seem to look back at the researcher, uttering their suspicions about anthropological politics of representation, concepts, and categories.

The Elsewhere can indeed be highly political when the possibility to generate, perceive, and even describe it disrupts certain orders of things—cosmologies, temporalities, and socio-political and religious hierarchies. This happens when the Elsewhere is a site of radical existential rearrangements that spring forth from the uncompromising will to assert individual and collective subjectivities, aspirations, and desires.

The articles collected in this special section describe and analyze various realities of significantly political Elsewhere(s). In Marei's article, the Elsewhere is explicitly political. The Shi'i Elsewhere clearly shapes the idea of a possible political change infused with revolutionary fervor. The author describes the religious and political emotions overflowing from the excited bodies of the young men while their minds and spirits contemporarily inhabit the past, Iran, Syria, and an Elsewhere in which the martyrs become powerful companions of an imagined imminent social, religious, and political revolution. Yet in the Elsewhere generated by the Sayyida Zaynab congregation in Beirut, the political goes beyond the articulation of a radical idea of revolution, justice, and freedom. The political also rests in the act of reshaping the aesthetics and linearity of time and space as well as in the suspension of the separateness of worldly and other-worldly realms. The bare hall of a funerary complex, turned into a bejeweled stage of triumphant eschatological scenes, becomes the theater of the formation of a very peculiar religious and political subjectivity that allows the reconfiguration of social, political, and cosmological orders.

The description of the emotionally and sonically saturated Shi'i hall stands in sharp contrast to the silent church hall of the Female Teachers' Mission Association described by Hovland. These women shaped their boldness out of silence and stillness. Their Elsewhere was a site of a new aesthetics of listening and speaking through which these pious women molded their subjective ways of being present and co-present with and for other women in Kristiania and in faraway lands. As Susan Sontag (1969: 6) wrote in her book *Aesthetics of Silence*, silence can be "the ultimate otherworldly gesture." According to Sontag, silence has a liberatory power from the servile bondage to an imposed world. Her reflections beautifully mirror the quite radical act of the women

in Kristiania. Their silence was indeed an aesthetic choice that would eventually give them the right to speak boldly. Intrinsically political is also the healing plural Elsewhere of the Inayati Sufi seminars. Their Elsewhere is not only anti-secular but also radically open and inclusive of diverse religious and therapeutic traditions. It stands in stark contrast to the secular politics, the closing of frontiers, and the crisis of inclusion in contemporary Germany and Europe.

Conclusion

The Elsewheres described in this special section emerge from Christian and Muslim communities, but their significance goes far beyond their religious concerns. Their Elsewheres bring to the surface their ethics, politics, and social critique of the gendered, geopolitical, secular, and governmental structures of power imposed on them. They are ephemeral, elusive, and hard to capture, and yet inextricable from their religious and social reality.

As an ethnographic object, the Elsewhere pulls the researcher into a tricky terrain full of ambiguities and contradictions. But it is on that shaky ground that powerful collective narratives and affects emerge. It is not possible to provide a fixed methodology or technique to access, observe, and capture Elsewheres. Careful writing, a radical engagement with the senses, and a mind free from presumptions and assumptions are effective means to teach and learn how to encounter Elsewheres. The challenge of studying these uncertain territories is worth the effort. These extraordinary sites of knowledge, discovery, and sometimes discomfort often reveal concealed and unsayable aspirations and desires.

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