

Chapter 15

Beyond the Secular, the Religious and the Spiritual: Appreciating the Complexity of Contemporary Worldviews



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Abstract The chapter brings together the main insights from the Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) study, as presented in the current volume. It starts by discussing the sample used in the study and in the chapters of the volume; after this, the findings about worldviews are explored, and the chapter concludes with some observations pertaining to methodology. Throughout the chapter, the focus is on the need to challenge the often taken for granted categories and perspectives that are projected onto the world in the Study of Religions, and it is suggested that there are important methodological implications involved in meeting this challenge.

Keywords Cross-cultural · Cross-societal · Mixed-method · Study of religions

15.1 Introduction

The Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) study explored the diversity of worldviews among contemporary young adults in 12 countries, and this volume has brought together some of the main findings. One of the important

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contributions of the volume is the heterogeneity among those nations, which it documents. Young adults from across the world took part in the study: North America, with the U.S. and Canada; South America, with Peru; Africa, with Ghana; Asia, with India, China, Israel, Japan and Turkey; Western Europe, with Finland and Sweden; and Eastern Europe, with Poland and Russia. The young adults identify with many of the major religions: Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and the growing no religion segment. This volume displays the wealth of topics and cultures, which the YARG study covered and the unique research design it employed. The volume tells many stories, all worth reading carefully, since they all have relevance for and challenge how we comprehend worldviews today. Bringing together a study with this multinational and cross-cultural scope is not easy. While providing answers and observations, the chapters in this edited compilation also pose questions and ponderings for future research.

What are thus our main insights, how has our project been able to contribute to the theoretical reflections brought up in the introduction to this volume and underpinning the study as a whole, and where do we go from here? In the following, we would like to provide some tentative observations with regard to these questions. What have we learnt about our participants, about what they have in common, and about what separates them? What does our study bring to a discussion of religious, spiritual and secular identities and worldviews? Methodologically, how have we been able to navigate between, on the one hand, universal or global patterns, and on the other, individual and contextual variations? We start by discussing our sample, after which we turn to findings about worldviews, and we end by some observations pertaining to methodology. Throughout this brief chapter defined by the aim to address some central insights from the YARG study, we focus on the need to challenge the often taken for granted categories and perspectives that we project onto the world in the Study of Religions, and suggest that there are important methodological implications involved in meeting this challenge.

15.2 Young Adults, a Heterogeneous Group

Who were the young adults that took part in our study? The focus on college and university students that we pursued in the YARG study means that the study is not representative of all young people. Nonetheless, it does allow us to explore this population in depth. Our participants were aged 16–30 at the time of the survey, and all of them attended either college or university. As indicated in Chap. 2 of this volume, being a university student can still entail different things depending on context. In some settings it means being in your late teens or early twenties, with few caring responsibilities. These are the young adults to which the concept ‘emerging adults’ can best be applied (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014). They are no longer adolescents, but also not grown-ups. However, in some contexts explored in this study, university studies come later in life and are combined with responsibilities for others and more consequential life decisions. Being a student might for

these individuals, too, entail being in a state of transition and dealing with many uncertainties, but it is less of a self-focused time.

Turning to university students for a study is relatively easy; they are usually just outside our doors as academic scholars, but there are other factors too that make university students a useful object for research. Focusing on university students rather than the general population eliminates sources of variability such as age and education level, which makes it easier to isolate nationhood as the variable of interest in determining similarities and differences between subjects. In many of the countries in the study, the fact that our participants are university students placed them among the elite. However, even though being able to study on a university level can be an indication of privilege, this is far from being always the case for our participants. Still, for future research, stepping out of the university setting will be called for, despite the further complexities which this of course entails. Looking more into the internationalization and possible standardization of higher education can also be useful for future research, to highlight for example recurring ideas that young people are taught today, independent of setting. However, the setting cannot be ignored.

A starting point of YARG was that we saw university students as representatives of the so-called ‘millennials’ or ‘digital natives’ who have grown up with expanding global horizons, consumer culture and digital media and therefore also are harbingers of societal, cultural and religious change (Beyer, 2019; Keysar & DellaPergola, 2019; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Possamai, 2009). A cursory look at the survey data also suggests that apart from being university students, the young adults in our sample only really have one thing that seems to describe almost all of them: they are avid Internet users. Are we then able to at least call them all digital natives? This is a tricky but crucial question. The concept indicates that digital media has a profound impact on many aspects of a person’s life, but our findings do not necessarily provide enough material for a conclusive answer. Rather, previous research (Gunkel, 2014) and other material coming out of YARG suggest that among our sample, too, media use is complex, with both active users, outspoken sceptics and critical media consumers (see Moberg & Sjö, 2020).

As pointed out multiple times in the chapters in this volume, context and life circumstances matter. There is a “contextual historical and ideological template that continues to inform” how what we think of as religion emerges in our studies, and this should be taken seriously (Bender et al., 2013b, p. 287). This is not only in relation to the university experience, but to other aspects as well, such as religious, political and cultural settings that unfold throughout the analyses in this volume. The narratives expressed by students in the interviews illuminate, for instance, the challenge young adults around the world face in a university setting, which for many of them is more secular than the homes in which they were raised. The university setting often exposes students to liberal attitudes. In the United States, many young adults on campus are on their own for the first time. One student recalled, “This campus is very atheist [...] no one else was religious [...]. So I just was with everyone else” (YUSTP040). Nonetheless, other university experiences, as well as other contexts and stories overall, are marked by other forms of encounters. There

is thus a need today for recognition of diversity within the research of young people and their secular, religious and spiritual worldviews (Shipley & Arweck, 2019). In line with previous research, we suggest that many factors contribute to how one's position as religious or non-religious is experienced during university (Hill, 2011).

Many concepts through which we approach a group such as university students or young adults provide meaningful lenses to the object of study. Still, as illustrated above, university students are far from homogenous populations. From applying a cross-cultural design based on including national and cultural variations, we can see that many concepts and categories have limited application in light of the heterogeneity we encounter in our research. Our study shows that we always need to be critically aware of whom we study and why, and of the assumptions we risk bringing into our research.

15.3 Who 'Believes' in What?

The shared preoccupation of social scientists – anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists – involved in the Study of Religions can be expressed as a rather simple question: who believes in what and with what consequences for the individual, social institutions and society at large? However, beneath this verbal simplicity lies bottomless complexity associated with each component in this question. How can we conceptualize 'believing' and, ultimately, would it be adequately expressed by the term 'religion' that is central to our study area? (e.g. Bender et al., 2013b). How can we identify empirically the 'Who' and the 'What'? And how can we proceed from the personal level of analysis to that of society to infer the consequences of 'believing' and 'religion' in all their varieties, including non-religious worldviews?

Many contributors to this volume point out that YARG's findings confirm key conclusions from the previous research on religion among young people, including 'generation Y'. This includes, for example, the trend towards the lack of engagement with religious institutions, divergence from family and community traditions and preference for self-defining as 'secular' or 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' (see Roof, 1999; Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2010; Vincett & Collins-Mayo, 2010). This is evident both when we look in the direction of recurring patterns of worldviews and when we investigate basic value profiles (Schwartz, 1992, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012). Understanding the determinants of young adults' attitudes and behaviors helps us to foresee shifts observed in the overall population. A generational secularization process is evident across cultures in the YARG study. Globally the rise of the Nones is led by the so-called millennial generation, many of whom were raised and socialized by parents who identify with a religious group (Kosmin & Keysar, 2006; Pew, 2018). Our finding also confirms that we need to account for spirituality as a separate cultural category that challenges the dichotomy between being either secular or religious (Huss, 2014). Older generations, especially in North America and Europe, are replaced by younger generations who are less active religiously, and therefore we can expect decreasing participation during the coming

decades (Sherkat, 2014). Respondents in this study evaluate their own religiosity as being lower than the religiosity of their childhood homes (with one exception: Japan). The largest gaps are found in a variety of dissimilar countries: India, the United States, Poland and Peru. This does not necessarily equal a straightforward secularization. Rather, this volume identifies the relevance of being attentive to a continued differentiation of the (non-)religious landscape.

In the YARG study, we have addressed important patterns, resemblances and connections among our participants and these indicate that we need to account for a more diverse reality than what a mere religious, secular and spiritual taxonomy allows for. Both in regards to the variations and recurring themes, this study has a lot to tell. We identified five distinct worldviews among the young adults; our use of the Faith Q-Sort (FQS) allowed us to extract shared patterns of views, practices and attitudes called prototypes. These global prototypes we called: (1) The Secular Humanist; (2) the Active Confident Believer; (3) the Noncommitted Traditionalist, (4) the Spiritually Attuned, and (5) the Disengaged Liberal (see Chap. 3). It is important to notice that our findings include two distinct ways of being ‘religious’, whereas the spiritual worldview is not essentially religious and instead shares a lot with the Nones. The Disengaged Liberal is also significant on a general level. To some extent, persons of this prototype present an outlook that is situational and elusive, and detaches itself from our efforts to categorize and essentialize worldviews. Once again, we come across the fact that a secular or non-religious worldview is very salient in our results, both when we take a bird's-eye view and when we look at each country separately. There is rightly a growing interest in the rise of the Nones, i.e. those who profess no religion. According to Pew Research Center's global prediction, in 2040 there will be around 1.2 billion people who do not affiliate with a religion (Pew, 2015). As a group grows numerically so does its diversity, not only demographically but also in beliefs and practices. Some YARG respondents who define themselves as non-religious are active humanists; others are spiritual pluralists; some even display openness to religion or spirituality (see Chap. 8).

This volume reveals a need to account for variety and diversity in the Study of Religions, and this is specifically evident from our cross-cultural investigation. Our use of the FQS proved to be very essential in this regard and especially its quality as a method “designed to maximize the expression of qualitative variation and to record it in numerical form” (Stenner et al., 2008, p. 218). A closer analysis shows that behind the general trends and patterns presented as the global prototypes hides a great deal of contextual variation. The five global prototypes highlight prevalent perspectives around which the local prototypes congregate. We found between three and eight prototypes in each country (see Chap. 4; appendix 2). The local prototypes thus express similarities, but also variances that cannot be ignored. This cross-cultural variation is well captured as a family resemblance in line with Wittgenstein's thinking (Wittgenstein, 1998; see also Andersen, 2000). Worldviews are thus seen as a matter of a series of overlapping shared features, where none of them is common to all of the members in a group; the taxonomies are dynamic, subject to change and open and members of a family do not necessarily need to have much in common when compared separately.

15.4 Dynamic Patterns

Earlier we mentioned the relevance of differentiation. Our findings point to a need for more elaboration on how the categories of secular, religious and spiritual are comprehended and what they entail. This need is further indicated by our observations pertaining to the multidimensional and complex configurations of worldviews, such as in Chap. 5 on religious typology. Our five distinct worldview prototypes relate to basic human values, life orientation and satisfaction, liberal social values, demographics, and culture/country. As discussed in Chap. 9 and also indicated in Chaps. 3 and 8, the prototypes brought out by the FQS-analyses are in line with previous research when it comes to gender. Religious or spiritual prototypes are more often represented by female participants and non-religious ones by male participants. Yet, our survey data does not directly confirm this. Similarly, Chap. 12 contributes to challenging simplified conclusions. While multiple forms of discrimination generally lead to lower degrees of well-being, the chapter shows that contextual variations are obvious and the need for further studies is clear. The relevance of the national context is also highlighted in the study of contemporary religion among young adults in Russia and Poland, with the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Polish Catholic Church (PCC) after the collapse of the Communist system. One of the statements of the Faith Q-Sort instrument is especially relevant: “Believes that religion should play the central role in the ruling of the nation,” which generally evoked strong negative responses among the participants, including those from Russia and Poland, where these dominant religious institutions have become tools for strengthening state authority. In the personal interviews, respondents referred to “the church” in the singular, viewing with suspicion its interference in politics.

These Russian and Polish young adults, similar to others of their generation, tend to disregard the authority of religious institutions. On the one hand, this exemplifies the similar tendency that is implied also by our investigation of value profiles, namely the preference for e.g. openness to change relying on self-direction over conservation and relying on tradition. On the other hand, the same example also makes evident that the individual level is significant. Participants’ personal understandings and reflections, including their agency as interpreting subjects, make a difference. Our data has revealed a variety of subjective refractions of various general trends and patterns among university students, as well as a range of personal worldviews that can be seen as idiosyncratic amidst the general patterns. Our cross-cultural and cross-societal sample allows gaining insight into why and how these ‘idiosyncratic’ types are shaped. Thus, comparing the data on Muslim students in Turkey and Israel points to the significance of the majority versus minority status in shaping young peoples’ religious (dis)engagements and worldviews. Moreover, our findings on these ‘uncommon’, ‘divided’ and ‘idiosyncratic’ outlooks (see Chap. 6 of this volume) are significant inasmuch as it is precisely the movements, groups and individuals motivated by ‘deviant’ beliefs that often cause conspicuous public concerns and trigger political action.

Chapter 7 also brings this home well by presenting the particular views (based on the Faith Q-Sort statements) most often and least often found to be descriptive by our participants. A majority of our participants support individual freedom of choice in matters of faith and morality, and believe that one can be deeply moral without being religious. Many also argue that they are profoundly touched by the suffering of others and actively work towards making the world a better place to live. They also do not identify with the idea that religion should play a central part in the ruling of the nation. However, as discussed in Chap. 14, this statement can be a part of different discourses, as we assume many other statements also can. The findings of Chap. 10 on civic engagement underline that helping others is common for our participants. The chapter also indicates that if civic engagement is an essential aspect of a healthy society, the society our participants are building, or want to build, should do well enough. At the same time though, we can also see variations when it comes to volunteering and what one gets out of helping others. Our participants have also helped us to explore differences and similarities between majority and minority positions, as done in Chap. 13, highlighting again the need to take context into account when trying to comprehend aspects of contemporary religiosity or non-religiosity.

A combination of a cross-cultural bird's-eye view, local investigations, and efforts to zoom in on the individual has been central to our way of approaching worldviews of a secular, religious and spiritual nature. We can point to meaningful family resemblances of a more universal or global nature of relevance for exploring typologies in future research. But already from this perspective we have had to stress the need to go beyond simplistic notions of religious, spiritual and secular. There is, to start with, an evident need to account for variations and diversifications across both cultures and analytical levels. Our participants are not divided up along any strict cultural, religious or contextual lines, nor could we point to any other aspect and claim that that presents a self-evident single factor for future research. Rather, the multidimensional and contextual nature of secular, religious and spiritual worldviews renders them dynamic, situational, inconsistent, and ambiguous, especially in how they are expressed and lived. This is worthy of acknowledgement when the goal is to understand individual subjectivities today and how they are constituted with regards to secular, religious and spiritual worldviews.

Based on this, we claim that one needs to take seriously the question of the adequacy of the term religion and how the field of study is accordingly named (see Droogers & van Harskamp, 2014). Using terms similar to the study of religion, religious studies, comparative religion etc. can today mean a misrepresentation of what we need to account for and also what is currently emerging within the field of study. On the one hand, the current terminology can be claimed to make spiritual and secular worldviews invisible or deemed irrelevant as objects of study. However, on the other, it can also be claimed to other religion, defining religion to require explanation or investigations in order to be made intelligible. Nevertheless, the important observation we would like to make is that there is a need for a broadening that explicitly recognizes current diversity with regards to (non-)religious worldviews in a global perspective. Religious or not, all people have some kind of

worldview that is essential to them in various ways (Holm, 1996). Our conclusion is that the term worldview stands out as the best candidate in this respect whereas the methodological and theoretical multidisciplinary character that has been developed within the studies of religions over the last century provides an invaluable asset. This has not yet been developed in the narrower area of worldview studies and needs to provide the basis also for future development.

15.5 A Mobile Methodology

Young adults, as well as many other groups of people, often grapple with terms and contexts to explain their religious identity, or the lack of it. One can listen to people talk, and realize their confusion, as they use phrases such as, “I don’t know,” and “I’m not sure.” Indeed, survey results document seemingly contradictory patterns, i.e. people who profess no religion, yet believe in a higher power, or regular attendance at religious services among non-believers (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009; Chaves, 2011). The current discussion on religious change also has implications for how we comprehend and study corresponding identities (Nynäs, 2017; Gareau et al., 2019). What is the best research design to capture the religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews and behaviors of young people worldwide today? This question has been central to the YARG project, and is at the core of how we designed the methodological approach.

We designed a mixed-method approach, assembling both quantitative and qualitative data, and we employed an innovative tool, the FQS, providing young people a varied and to some extent new vocabulary to work with, as they were reflecting on their religious and spiritual beliefs, attitudes, emotions, experiences and practices. The broadness of the FQS and what is covered by the statements proved to be important in order to capture a diversity of ways or configurations of being religious, spiritual and secular. This novel research tool in combination with a survey of almost 5000 participants and in-depth interviews with about 500 of them has enriched our knowledge of what (non)religiosity entails for educated young adults around the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Many chapters in this volume bear witness to the fact that we cannot today limit our approaches to ways of believing and thinking.

The novelty in our research was first and foremost defined by the implementation of the FQS, but also how this was designed in itself in terms of the set of items. The combination of FQS with other methods was also fundamental to our methodology. Our mixed-method approach based on the survey, the Faith Q-Sort and the interviews, proved to be essential to our findings. The use of the FQS in combination with survey and interview material has allowed the researchers within YARG to provide important new insights that both complement and challenge each other. In his *Social Theory and Religion* (2003), Beckford suggests that engaging with the broader developments in social sciences will help us understand how social trends shape religion (‘thinking about religion’), while focusing on religion would reveal

not so obvious or nascent social trends ('thinking with religion'). The methodology that underpins this volume's analyses enables unique insights into the 'Who' and 'What', thus enriching both our 'thinking with religion' and 'thinking about religion'. It has provided a multidimensional snapshot of subjectivities of believing among university students across a range of societies at a particular juncture of global history.

With the help of our mixed-method approach, the authors of the chapters in this volume could resist the temptation of over-simplification. Instead, they could look deeply into attitudes and behaviors and highlight details by utilizing complex data elements in different contexts. For example, it would be simple to observe that being female is associated with higher personal religiosity. But the regression analysis of the survey findings presented in Chap. 9 showed that the impact of national background in many cases exceeds the impact of gender in the level of self-reported religiosity. Interviews further substantiate the results of a regression analysis: context and culture matter. In Ghana, a respondent said, "Our pastor, my pastor will tell you that as a lady you have to learn how to cook because a way to a man's heart is his tummy" (FGHFB120). In Finland, in contrast, a respondent said, "I've lived my whole life from since I was little in that it hasn't mattered whether you are a man or a woman [...] So no one ever said to us at home, that a woman couldn't be something, something that men could be" (YFIKD128).

The Faith Q-Sort that originally was designed by Wulff (2019) and developed within the YARG project (see Chap. 1 of this volume; Nynäs et al., 2021) meant a decisive methodological contribution for assessing religious, spiritual and non-religious worldviews in a diverse and ever-changing world. The chapters in this volume exemplify that data from an FQS study can be used for a range of investigations. While the FQS does not provide any simple answers, it nevertheless challenges us to look closer at our perspectives and dig deeper than many previous methods have. Regarding methodology, it is specifically important to underline the emergent self-categorization feature of the FQS. It renders the FQS a reliable and valid tool for our need to de-center taken-for-granted categories and perspectives (see Bender et al., 2013a). It allowed us to zoom in on different levels, moving from a bird's-eye view and systematic analysis of global patterns to in-depth explorations of ambiguous and inconsistent individual outlooks. The findings using the FQS in combination with survey and interview material also clearly aid us in moving past the universality vs. particularism debate, questioning at the core the "world religion paradigm".

Both in education and politics worldwide, the world religions paradigm seems to remain dominant. Yet it fails to represent the variations of religious expressions within any given tradition and tends to remodel what is outside according to liberal Western Protestant Christian values (Owen, 2011). Our findings confirm the relevance of questioning the dominance of this paradigm. In particular we underline the necessity to account just as much for other categories, such as the secular and the spiritual, including the diversity that at a closer look constitute all of these categories. The world religions paradigm might provide one relevant lens to understanding societies, cultures, and individuals both in a contemporary and a historical

perspective, but it cannot anymore remain the only one. This broadening of perspectives is of course already happening in the study of religions, but it needs to gain more recognition and space in the future, both academically and societally.

Summing up the main insights with regards to method, we underline the possibilities provided by both the FQS and a mixed method design in researching religious, spiritual and secular worldviews. Q-methodology meant a novel tool for researching worldviews empirically and differently from what is the case in representative surveys and hermeneutically informed qualitative approaches. Its unique methodological design provided a more valid representation of the fluid phenomenon we call worldview by allowing the researcher to move in-between the individual, the national and the global levels in a systematic way, retaining the nuances alongside generating categories. Similarly, there is also an added value when a mixed-method design has the capacity to register the intersections that emerge from the multidimensional and complex configurations that constitute religious, spiritual and secular worldviews. An intersectional approach understood in these terms especially strengthens our methodological ability to remain attentive to the diversity, complexity or ambiguity involved and the elusiveness that may follow.

It can here be helpful to refer to the emic-etic distinction even though this is a debated issue. There is an opacity to the debate that has further been amplified through the entanglements that has been created over time, such as the insider-outsider distinction in the study of religions. In this respect we found Mostowlansky's and Rota's (2016) attempt to dissolve the dichotomy posed between emic and etic analyses meaningful. In contrast to a dichotomy they claim that both emic and etic analyses are in fact "products" of researchers; they are based on second-order observations, "that is, the observation of observations" that include "both the first-order observer and the object of first-order observation" (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2016, p. 328). Based on this they emphasize an iterative approach through which conceptualizations require a broad empirical, methodological and epistemological approach dependent on an ongoing process. The FQS and a mixed method design has in this project enabled this to some extent.

In general, we believe that there is a need for future methodological developments in this direction; we need to emphasize "movement and connections, circulation and change" as Bender et al. (2013b, p. 290) put it. This taps into what Urry (2010) discusses in terms of a mobile sociology, and we align with his observation that "new rules of sociological method are necessitated by the apparently declining powers of national societies since it is they that have historically provided the intellectual and organizational context for sociology" (Urry, 2010, p. 348). The current cultural and societal transformation requires a methodology that generates "creative marginality" in the periphery of normative disciplines, concepts and perspectives (Urry, 2010). As Urry (2010, p. 363) writes, a "creative marginality results from complex, overlapping and disjunctive processes [...] which can occur across disciplinary and/or geographical and/or social borders". How to systematically develop this agenda is important to future research.

15.6 Finally

Mostly secular, mostly liberal and mostly helpful would seem to summarize the characteristics of our participants on one level, but it does not stop there. Altogether our study also reveals something else, namely how the notion of ‘mostly’ in the case of secular, religious and spiritual worldviews hides a central element of variation that requires differentiation in terms of concepts, perspectives and methods applied. A range of aspects and dimensions are central to comprehending the evasive patterns and family resemblances that constitute religious, spiritual and secular worldviews. We cannot generalize from the international sample of university students to the wider population. Nonetheless, our findings are revealing and generalizable conceptually and methodologically. They point out the significance of global trends in shaping worldviews and their both religious and spiritual dimensions. For example, all different socio-cultural contexts in these studies were marked by the defining influence of social media and peer groups, as opposed to the political or communal authority in forming personal worldviews and engagements with religious, spiritual and secular positions. Friends and family remain important. Thus, our findings also reveal the importance of local socio-cultural contexts in refracting these global trends as well as lived everyday experiences even on an individual level. Altogether, this as a whole enriches our ‘thinking with religion’ – and non-religion as well – as it reveals erstwhile overlooked configurations of worldviews and engagements with religion, non-religion and spirituality, which can be consequential for future theorizing on religion and society.

A central point that the whole Young Adults and Religion in Global Perspective study brings forth is the need to be brave and dare to challenge preset notions, categories and typologies. Not every study can have a global perspective. However, studies focusing on a specific context too can aim to dig deeper or broaden the horizon by incorporating and developing new methods and allowing for a multi-method approach that can offer general views, but also contribute to a significant diversification. We need to acknowledge the complexity present in a changing world, but also find ways of comprehending this and the divisions, similarities, and simultaneities that it incorporates. This goes beyond reiterating the common calls for interdisciplinary research, and involves seeking unsettling perspectives and locating oneself on the edge of dominant tendencies and perspectives (Bender et al., 2013b).

YARG researchers have a recommendation to their colleagues to replicate the three-level study: “By way of summary, we encourage future researchers to consider at least three levels of analysis of such data: The global (or transnational), the cultural (or national) and the personal (or idiosyncratic). Only by integrating these three levels can we hope to comprehend the rich and diverse range of religious subjectivities among the young adults in the contemporary world” (Chap. 7, page 155). This is an intriguing challenge to future researchers. To conduct, to manage and to complete an international study that captures the global, the national, and the personal means many things: assembling research teams from places that do not

resemble each other; administering questionnaires in multiple languages; translating in a way that respects cultural nuances; and scarce time and research resources. However, the abundance of knowledge generated by the YARG project provides good evidence of the prolific contributions of a three-level study.

The current global and cross-cultural challenge involves taking other and alternative voices seriously (see Spickard, 2017). How research is organized constitutes an essential methodological aspect of knowledge production in cross-cultural research (Långstedt & Nynäs, 2021). Breaking dominance and making space for diversity in a research project is not only about giving others the possibility to speak and engage, it is also about destabilizing power relations. How can we make people trust that their perspective or voice is relevant and that it matters? How can we define a research process that better ensures that dominant perspectives do not colonize the space, and that material and symbolic resources are distributed evenly? Being brave entails breaking boundaries, also social boundaries with regards to how research is institutionalized in so many different ways. This volume and the YARG project were rooted in the idea that good research is a community effort. YARG has aimed at bringing together researchers with varying expertise and disciplinary affiliations from thirteen countries around the globe. Thinking and talking together are essential to this, but also co-writing texts as a means to both fusion and broadening horizons. The principle of co-authorship driving the project has resulted in perspectives and analyses that no individual scholar would have been able to accomplish. Future research needs to go this way. Only when we engage with each other, challenge each other and support each other can truly innovative research come about.

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