"WE'RE ALL GONE": A POSTSECULAR ACCOUNT OF *THE LEFTOVERS*' TRAUMATIC EXISTENTIALISM AS 'RELIGIOUS GROUND ZERO'

Ilaria Biano (Italian Institute for Historical Studies)

1. INTRODUCTION

This article considers and explores *The Leftovers*' widely recognized existentialist dimension by, on the one hand, framing it within the overall postsecular narrative of the show and, on the other, suggesting both a literal and metaphorical reading of the Departure through the categories of structural and historical trauma. *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017) is one of those shows that have earned TV seriality great acclaim for its artistic dimension, infusing it with a real philosophical discourse. While examples of TV shows with a deep investment in complex narratives and philosophical messages can be found in previous periods (a prime example is *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) in the early Nineties), an acceleration of this tendency can be seen in the first decade of the 2000s—with shows like *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) and later *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) —with a definitive establishment after 2013 and the so-called "prestige television" and shows like *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-2019), *Fargo* (FX, 2014-) and *The Leftovers* itself. These series make a point to contribute to the understanding of the contemporary world and human existence by pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling, conveying a distinctive message to the audience, and actively engaging it.[1]

In this sense, this article will analyse how *The Leftovers* manages to pose profound and far-reaching questions to its audience, about the meaning of human life in the universal scheme but also in other people's everyday lives, while at the same time using the Departure as a metaphor for the human condition in the contemporary traumatic age. It has been noted that the post-apocalyptic metaphor of the Departure is particularly effective for framing our "pre-apocalyptic map of trauma," evoking 9/11, of course, but also other catastrophic events that have become part of the traumatic everyday life and era in which we live. In so doing *The Leftovers* manages "to feel both intimate and world-historical."[2] The aim of the present study is thus to show how, by bringing together reflections on the individual and cultural consequences of a collective trauma and existentialist meditations, the series realizes a journey from an "aesthetic of disorientation"[3] to an affirmative ethic of relativity.

2. CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY OF *THE LEFTOVERS* AND ITS EXISTENTIALISM

The existentialist vibe of *The Leftovers* was nothing especially new when the show first aired in 2014, at least for those who were familiar with its main author and show-runner Damon Lindelof. When, four years earlier, on May 23, 2010, the last episode of the legendary show *Lost* was watched by over 13 million US viewers, six years and 121 episodes had made abundantly clear the style and preferred themes of the man who co-created it and was the only writer to put his name on every single episode. Nevertheless, *The Leftovers* revealed itself as something somehow different from almost anything else in television, and while it never equalled the ratings of its predecessor, it rapidly became as divisive as critically acclaimed, one of the first and at the same time, one of the best examples of that era of contemporary seriality labelled as "prestige" or "fourth golden age."[4] With his adaptation of Tom Perrotta's novel, Lindelof made another step in a journey in which philosophical and specifically existentialist interrogations play a crucial role: questions about life, human existence, meaning and purpose, the role of the human being in the society, and at a cosmic, universal level. However, it is possible to establish two main frameworks related to this existentialist core of Lindelof's work and which will be here used to analyse *The Leftovers* too. On the one hand, in Lindelof's narratives existential questions and reflections are always the consequence of, or are at least inspired by, some kind of trauma and represent a way of working through it. On the other hand, these same questions often emerge in the context of postsecular narratives.

As *Lost* fans became aware with the final, extremely divisive episode, answers are not a major concern for Lindelof. Even if some may have had doubts at the time of *Lost* finale, with *The Leftovers* Lindelof made it clear that this is not a form of shallowness or deliberate lack of comprehension, but a specific *Weltanschauung* (worldview). If in *Lost* the catalyst event was the plane crash, in *The Leftovers* the Departure of 2% of the population is at the same time a huge mystery and a shattering trauma. Lindelof is definitely more interested in thoroughly exploring the latter dimension. Answers are not particularly relevant in the storyline: the characters do search for them, but it is this quest that interests Lindelof more. A quest that has the power and potential to resonate with the audience, with everyone's everyday life. A quest that at the same time may vehiculate fundamental questions and suggest the idea that it is possible that, in effect, there are no answers. Or there are many. Or maybe that is not really the point. Thus the central feature of Lindelof writings lies precisely in the dramatization "of the grandest of philosophical notions and existential mysteries" that deal with structural aspects of human life "like the origins of maternal love and loss,"[5] posing front and centre the traumatic nature of life itself but also specific historical and punctual traumas.[6] The plurality and equal validity of multiple stories, answers, and worldviews thus become a crucial feature of Lindelof's narratives and it is in this sense that they can be labelled as postsecular. According to John McClure, a postsecular narrative is one in which the characters feel "the urgent need for a turn toward the religious [not] leading back into the domain of conventional religious dwelling and organized community [but] into zones where characters must learn to

reconcile important secular and religious intuitions."[7] Lindelof's characters are definitely on such a path. Their lived experiences are often extreme and absurd, but in the end those situations make them face universal questions of meaning and how to find a way through life. It is in the development of this quest that Lindelof's narratives fully realize their existentialist core. Thus the existentialism of Lindelof's narrative is not a Sartrean, secular one, but at the same time, it cannot be considered as strictly religious.

3. *THE LEFTOVERS*' POST-SECULAR-RELIGIOUS EXISTENTIALISM

Many authors have emphasized the specific religious dimension of *The Leftovers,* or its role in the television landscape as a game-changer in the representation of and, particularly, the attitude toward religion. [8] However, as noticed above, it is not possible to confine the series to the field of religious/nonreligious narratives. Its postsecular dimension is not only a matter of plot or language; it is the show's specific philosophical, existentialist message that is framed as a postsecular or, using Dressler and Mandair terminology, post-religious-secular one. It is articulated around a resistance to interpretations of the world and reality that are either exclusively secular or dogmatically religious, in a sort of "abandoning-embracing religious and secular epistemes as mutually contaminated and contaminating."[9] Not only do secular and religious ethics and tentative explanations stand side by side in society, but the categories themselves of *secular* and *religious*, seen in separate and impermeable ways, no longer seem to fit reality.

In the words of Perrotta and Lindelof, the Departure is "a foundational event," in consequence of which characters live "in a religious ground zero."[10] An event of that magnitude has indeed the power of shattering the deepest texture of the community and individuals. If "old religions don't make sense"[11] then everything seems impossible, but anything is also possible. Indeed, this is exactly what we witness especially through the first two seasons: a myriad of new cults and communal forms of life; enclosed communities like Jarden-Miracle, the spared town setting of the second season with its out-of-world existence; in some occasions a collapse of the laws of civil life; broken families; new forms of bonding; lawless men; orgiastic cults venerating a lion. People "are forced to create new religions,"[12] looking for new ways of life, elaborating entirely new worldviews. The characters find themselves living in a condition that is at the same time both extremely material and concrete in the way they must experience it (the holes left by the Disappeared full of regrets and absences, but also the embodied strategies many adopt for coping with the event), and completely immaterial in its implications. If there are no answers, but only different interpretations, in the end those interpretations are not really competitive or alternative. Yes, the Guilty Remnants—the nihilist cult whose main goal is a perpetual mourning of the Departed enacted via cruel and violent performances—represent the more 'integralist' side, but they are on a spectrum of positions that face both the practical and moral issues raised by the event by embracing grey, creative areas in experience and existence.

The Departure is thus a metaphor, a sort of "Armageddon for a generation making peace with its doubts,"[13] a grotesque fairy-tale for grown-ups who still can't figure out where they are in the world (meaning almost anyone in the 21st century). Different kinds of attitude, explanation, interpretation—ranging from the scientific to the religious, spiritual, and nihilistic—all cohabit and complement each other within the narrative, embodying both a general demand for spirituality, various nonreligious choices, and different paths toward meaning. What is collapsing with the Departure is the structure of meaning in which anyone is inscribed; not just one system of meaning, but all of them. If in *Lost* there were not any answers, in *The Leftovers* it is the questions that have lost their significance: humanity has lost the ability and the means of formulating and thinking them. But that is just the beginning of the journey: for Lindelof, the whole point is precisely that when rules, laws, and traditions have no longer any explanatory power, people must build their own quest.

We can see this approach at work especially in the narrative arcs of the two main characters, police chief Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux) and Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), a woman who lost her husband and two kids in the Departure. "The Book of Kevin" and "The Book of Nora" are not only the evocative titles of the first and the last episodes of the third season but reflect these two apparent polar opposites that—after the Departure and throughout the different paths of the universal, human journey embodied in the storylines of the characters—become or reveal themselves as strictly connected and entangled. At the end of that part of their journey that we witnessed through the seasons, Kevin has gone through his experiences of deaths, resurrections and visions: a messiah-like path that, in a way, provided him and those who believed in him with a narrative and a structure in which to reframe their existence. Nora, the rationalist, and broken soul, tests the only kind of explanation that could ever convince her: science can in the end provide, if not an answer, at least the means of finding what she was searching for—her family—in some sort of parallel dimension. It is exactly at that point that she finds out that that wasn't exactly what she was looking for, or what she really wanted. Nora and Kevin rejoin one another midway, just like everyone else. Including the audience. We, as viewers, can choose who and what to believe: is Nora's story real? Are the Kevin's deaths, resurrections and visions revelations or delusions? Similarly, two other characters realize two seemingly opposite journeys between the poles of belief and unbelief: the Reverend and modern Job Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston) and John Murphy (Kevin Carroll), a sceptical resident of Jarden-Miracle. Which is more truthful?

Christian and biblical references are everywhere in *The Leftovers*, beginning with the title and the core event; the intent is clearly to create a story that can be easily recognized in the references that ground it when it takes a surreal direction; but, in effect, the series subverts the rules and puts the human being at the centre of this worldly life.[14] It is only in this context that the multiplicity of what remains of all the previous master narratives and different stories can stay together. Framed like that, the Departure then takes on the contours more of a *counter*-foundational event: it does not provide any basis on which to build something unique and new, be it a single, specific faith, a new scientific branch, some form of societal organization. Rather the Departure has a sort of Nova Effect—using the fascinating image

suggested by philosopher Charles Taylor—that explodes and rearranges all previous beliefs.[15] All the master narratives lose, if not their significance, at least their claim to exclusivity; and at the same time, all are relativized and become potentially equally truthful. *The Leftovers* posits itself, in this sense, as a metaphor of the modern era: on the one hand, with an over-scale event and its social and existential consequences, it amplifies the human condition in a world in which the search for meaning seems at the same time pointless and necessary; on the other hand, it leads the audience on a journey during which it suggests that there are still a number of ways of coping with this situation. Staying with the Taylorian parallel, with its Nova Effect, the Departure does not create an Immanent Frame any more than it does realize a religious or spiritual one.[16] It does not suggest there is the need to discover a meaning that is always already present in the world, but neither does it try to convey a pessimistic message by suggesting that there is no meaning at all. Rather, the different characters arcs represent both the possibility of finding meaning in meaninglessness and of embracing meaninglessness itself as a completely fulfilling place in life.

In this sense, it is possible to define *The Leftovers* as an expression of traumatic existentialism. Existential questions and criticalities faced by the characters or throughout the plot are not only derived as a consequence of the trauma lived by the characters but are intrinsically connected with the nature of the trauma itself in its complex nature: it is at the same time a catastrophic event and one that is connected with the deepest convictions and existential fractures of every individual in their specificity. It is a cognitive dissonance for both the humanity in the show and the humanity in front of the screen. It is an apocalyptic event that counterintuitively leaves humanity to confront a world that must in any case go on. An event that is framed in some traditional religious—Biblical—way but that triggers a completely different set of consequences. A world now full of signs that cannot fully express their meanings, and symbols that have lost their significance.

4. STRUCTURAL TRAUMA AND WORKING THROUGH MEMORY FROM MAPLETON TO AUSTRALIA

As we have seen, the philosophical dimension of *The Leftovers* is entrenched not only in the story it tells and in its overall construction, but also regards the relationship that it develops with the audience: what it offers, and what it demands. This can be perceived even more in the traumatic nature and dimension of the Departure and the ways in which, through it, the authors echo some of the core elements of the experience of being human. All the different characters or groups of them represent different ways of coping with trauma and with different kinds of trauma; at the same time, different forms and different roles of memory are also embodied by different characters. Trauma and memory represent two subjects strictly related to one each other: it is in the recollection of the event, in its belatedness, that trauma hits the victim, but it is also through a meditated and re-elaborated form of memory that one can differentiate between past and present and work through trauma. Also, memorialisation is a constitutive part of the

remembrance and collective re-elaboration of traumas involving a community. In this sense, the series not only shows different ways of working through some form of trauma but also how in certain cases, not all traumas can be worked through, while at the same time positing itself as a form of working through, as a cathartic viewing experience for the audience. The traumatic event of the Departure and the religious ground zero it determines is indeed handled by different characters and groups differently: the kind of questions raised, the kind of reactions more than answers, are strictly connected with the previous experiences and beliefs of individuals and affect the ways in which trauma hits them. The Departure indeed contains in itself different kinds of trauma: individual, historical, and also structural. The disappearance of millions of people is an event on a global scale but has a more personal level with the loss of a loved one. At the same time, it also represents, as already mentioned, the loss of the structure of significance. There is a sort of inevitable conflation here of what Dominick LaCapra defines as absence and loss as central dimensions of structural and historical traumas.[17]

Historical trauma refers to specific events of different entities and intensities hitting one, but more usually a group of people, and potentially, as witnesses affected by some form of vicarious trauma, a larger part of the population. Historical trauma is not however the event *per se*, but the experience of the event on the part of the people involved, an experience that hits in a subsequent moment. Trauma is not the traumatic event, but its later repetition in forms such as nightmares and hallucinations. This is a relevant aspect, "the elusiveness of the traumatic experience", that may induce an identification of the historical trauma with some kind of structural trauma, the latter being, instead, "not an event but an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization."[18] If historical trauma often implies some form of loss, structural trauma is an existential condition related to the concept of absence as applied "to ultimate foundations" especially on metaphysical grounds: "The passage from nature to culture, the entry into language, the traumatic encounter with the 'real,' the alienation from species-being, the anxiety-ridden thrownness and fallenness of *Dasein,* the inevitable generation of the aporia, or the constitutive nature of melancholic loss in relation to the genesis of subjectivity."[19]

But in the world of *The Leftovers,* how can we interpret the Departure? What is that it generates: losses or absence? One would say, both. LaCapra warns about the risks, in historical as well as in fictional literature about trauma, of conflating historical and structural trauma and the dimensions of absence and loss. However, he is thinking primarily of literature on the Holocaust and other "limit events." In *The Leftovers*, as we already said, the Departure is undeniably a limit event, but it functions also, in the general structure of the narrative, as a metaphor; and it does so, in a way, also for its characters. It is in this sense that historical and structural trauma inevitably conflates in the show. Not every character is directly affected by the Departure by losing a loved one, but everyone in the world depicted by *The Leftovers* is directly traumatized by the historical event and also involved in a sort of reified structural trauma, experiencing not necessarily the *loss* (of someone but also of the meaning-making convictions), but almost unavoidably the *absence*, in terms of the establishing of a different kind of "condition of

possibility" generated by the Departure. There is no real "vicarious or surrogate victimage" because even those that did not lose anyone had to deal with an inexplicable, catastrophic, disruptive event.

LaCapra's warning is due to pressing historical, political, and social concerns related to the risks of, on the one hand, extending the status of victims beyond the limits of the directly traumatized and in so doing diminishing the validity itself of the trauma, and on the other hand, detracting from the responsibility of perpetrators or those responsible for the trauma by deriving the specific trauma from an inevitable transhistorical condition. But involved in the conflation is also the danger of making any kind of working through and narrative closure impossible.[20]

However, by using the metaphor of the Departure, *The Leftovers* is not so much indulging that kind of conflation (the event is in a way comparable to 9/11 or other historical tragedies, but its inexplicability and the insistence on the irrelevance of an explanation made it a sort of out of-history-event) as directing the attention of the audience towards exploring the nature of our own structural trauma as a society and as a "generation," relativizing it, and looking for the many possible ways of working through it.

In this sense, the stories of Nora, Kevin, Matt, John, the Guilty Remnants, and the others inevitably appear as a kind of parable in which historical trauma, structural trauma, and memory interact in different ways. Matt, the man of faith; Laurie, the rationalist; Kevin and Nora, family people affected in opposite and yet similar ways; Jarden/Miracle citizens as secular 'born again'; John Murphy, the Doubting Thomas; the Guilty Remnants, true believer nihilists. Nora is haunted by memory (quite literally, becoming one of the targets of the cruel attacks of the Guilty Remnants), but she also embodies the transformative power of memory both with her personal story (she is the symbol of Mapleton's losses and source of inspiration for the memorialisation during the first season) and with her job at the Department for the Sudden Departure, working with the recollections of people who have lost their family members. Memory is what makes her suffer (and also look for suffering) and lose faith in a meaningful life, but memory is also what in the end pushes her to find her path toward an ultimate search (and another one after that). Nora spends most of her after-Departure life dealing with grief but, most of all, guilt: for surviving, for being happy again. But she is able to overturn this feeling in willingness: for her, there is no other way if not the one she finds: knowing. At the same time, the seemingly erratic path of Laurie (Amy Brennman), Kevin's ex-wife who left her family to join the Guilty Remnants, is in actual fact quite coherent: she is a scientist and a rationalist and continues to be so throughout her conversion, her subsequent work with cult exiters, and in her suspicious following of Kevin and the others in their messianic journey to Australia in the last episodes of the show. Laurie's structural trauma reverberates in all her choices: she joins the Guilty Remnants and then she leaves them for the same reason, because she cannot decide if life is worth living. The Guilty Remnants too are nihilists of a strange sort. As their leader Patti Levine (Ann Dowd) states "We are living reminders of what you so desperately try to forget" (S1E8). Whether or not they are right about the fact that everyone else wants to forget (after all they are quite integralist in their beliefs), they do believe in something: memory. They enact violent performative practices in order to move the other people.[21] Patti herself is a sort of prod for Kevin. They choose a

biblical name, but they do not follow any other rules but their own. But they have a purpose: strongly believing in meaninglessness may too be a purpose.

And then of course there are two opposite figures: Matt, the Job who has everything to handle even if he has no guilt and so much faith, and Kevin, who despite all his weakness and ignorance is the recipient of various forms of grace and heavy but rewarding tasks. Matt knows—in a way—what is going on (or at least he knows what is not: the Rapture) but that does not really bring him any satisfaction. Kevin does not understand a thing of what happens to him and still, he always finds a way to get through every situation. At the end, both have to give up something (Matt the certainty of some of his convictions, Kevin Nora) in order to find peace, but not in the form of another loss but coming to terms with their structural absences. Kevin is constantly challenged in his perception of the world; he is in some way our own eyes in the show. His way to work through his trauma is not so much by going through the tasks that his devotees ask him to, but eventually by finding his way back to where he belongs: Nora, again.

The message of *The Leftovers* is essentially a message of hope, but a kind of hope that does not come free: it is reserved for those who have the courage to go all the way down the road that they have chosen. The show has been defined as "radical pessimism," "a series with no solace,"[22] but a full understanding of both the postsecular attitude of its authors and of the complex nature of the Departure traumatic metaphor allows us to reframe pessimism as mourning, hopelessness as working through, grief as memorialisation. The metaphorical, catastrophic trauma confronts everyone with the necessity of making a choice while at the same time giving the possibility to choose freely, to build freely. All that is required is willingness. *The Leftovers* begins as a story of implicit or explicit scepticism, and ends as a merciful acknowledgment of the plurality of forms of existence that are available to humankind. It is actually a thought-experiment that dares the audience to test various beliefs, cosmologies, mythologies, worldviews, not to disprove some and validate others, but as a lived experience of rethinking one's own attitude toward life. But in the end, it is not an individualist message: the quest, whatever it is, must be personal, but the endgame is being truthful to oneself and to others, (re)creating a condition of possibility that enables real connections with the self and the other "leftovers."

---

[1] See Luca Bandirali and Enrico Terrone, *Filosofia delle serie TV. Dalla scena del crimine al trono di spade* (Milano: Mimesi, 2012).

[2] Emily Nussbaum, "Depression Modern. The existential risk-taking of *The Leftovers*," *The New Yorker*, November 2, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/02/depression-modern.

[3] Spencer Kornhaber, "The Dizzying, Surreal Journey of 'The Leftovers'," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/tv-gets-metaphysical/528681/.

[4] Aside from the general critical acclaim that each season has gained, the show has been widely recognized as the best TV show of the decade, see Alan Sepinwall, "50 Best TV Shows of the 2010s," *Rolling Stone,* December 4, 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/tv/tv-lists/50-best-tv-shows-of-decade-2010s-914737/46-new-girl-914777/; Caroline Framke and Daniel D'Addario, "The 25 Best TV Shows of the Decade," *Variety*, December 20, 2019, https://variety.com/feature/best-shows-decade-2010-2019-tv-1203440398/; Hanh Nguyen et al., "The Best TV Shows of the Decade, Ranked," December 3, 2019, https://www.indiewire.com/feature/best-tv-shows-decade-2010-2019-netflix-hbo-1202148573.

[5] Nussbaum, "Depression Modern."

[6] The aim of this article is to consider how the philosophical aspects related to trauma are treated in *The Leftovers* overall message and worldview, in its character arcs, and in its author's voice. Therefore there won't be any articulated reflection on the narrative aspects of *The Leftovers* as related to trauma and trauma theory, nor we will discuss whether the show is a trauma narrative or not; and, if it is, what kind. For further readings on trauma narratives see Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge 1991); Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2004); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge 2008).

[7] John McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2007), 4-6. 'Postsecular' has been a controversial concept since its birth in very different contexts and meanings, sometimes opposite, and even more after the widespread success gained with the use made by Jürgen Habermas. This article conceives it as an approach to contemporary global society that tries to recuperate the core validity of the secularization theory as differentiation, while relativizing other aspects such as privatization and decline, while at the same time being aware of the constructedness of the categories of religious and secular and the strict connections and blurred boundaries between the two; see Rosi Braidotti, "Conclusion: The Residual Spirituality in Critical Theory: A Case for Affirmative Postsecular Politics," in *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, ed. Rosi Braidotti et al. (Basinsgtoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014), 249-272; Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (eds.), *Secularism and Religion-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Besides the work of McClure, many interesting approaches in the field of literary theory and comparative literature have emerged in the last decade, contributing a great deal to the development of theoretical and empirical postsecular studies and postsecular criticism; see Michael Kaufmann, "Locating the Postsecular," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 3 (autumn 2009): 68-73; Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman, "Introduction: After the Postsecular," *American Literature* 86, no. 4 (2014): 645–54; James Hodkinson and Silke Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular: From Conceptual Beginnings to Cultural Theory," *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): 317–326. For studies on postsecular tele/visual aesthetics see Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu, *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema. The Postsecular Constellation* (New York: Routledge, 2014); John Caruana and Mark Cauchi*, Immanent Frames Postsecular Cinema between Malick and von Trier* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018); James Hodkinson, "Returning Again: Resurrection Narratives and Afterlife Aesthetics in Contemporary Television Drama," *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): 395–416.

[8] See Kristen Donnelly, "Forced Devotion vs. Acceptable Doubt," in *HBO's Original Voices*, ed. Victoria McCollum and Giuliana Monteverde (New York: Routledge, 2018), 115-124; Antonio Lucci, "Religious Seriality: Reflections On The Problem Of The Religion And Religiosity In Television Seriality, Starting From American Horror Story-Cult, The Leftovers And American Gods," in *Seriality across narrations, languages, and mass consumptions*, ed. Alfonso Amendola, Barone Linda and Troianello Novella (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2019), 120-134; Charlotte E. Howell, "Religion as Unreality," in *Divine Programming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 127–53.

[9] Dressler and Mandair (eds.), *Secularism and Religion-Making*, 19.

[10] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers', Show Creators Embrace Ambiguity And The Unknown," December 2, 2015, https://www.npr.org/2015/12/02/458143133/from-lost-to-leftovers-show-creators-embrace-ambiguity-and-the-unknown?t=1590852469785.

[11] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers'."

[12] NPR, "From 'Lost' To 'Leftovers'."

[13] Sarah Jones, "*The Leftovers*: confusion and doubt mirrors my religious journey," *The Guardian*, July 14, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/jul/14/the-leftovers-hbo-depiction-religion.

[14] In this respect, although the parallel between *The Leftovers* (book and series) and the series *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins easily comes to mind, various substantial differences subsist between the two. First of all, the 'positive' mark is not on those who disappeared, but those who remained are the focus of attention: they are not the damned ones, although of course they go through a lot of suffering. The frame of the *Left Behind* series is an explicitly Christian one, in which the unsaved are left to face catastrophic events that challenge them to convert and be saved themselves. *The Leftovers* is in this sense a (post)secular version and a sort of response to the series; see Charles Joseph and Delphine Letort, "Tom Perrotta's *The Leftovers* in Textual Seriality: Trauma, Resilience... Resolution?," *TV/Series*, 12 (2017): 1-19.

[15] Charles Taylor in his opus magnum *A Secular Age* defined as having a Nova Effect on the society the appearance of a secular worldview that he labels 'exclusive humanism' as an alternative to conventional religious beliefs and the multiplication of beliefs, religious and nonreligious positions that arose from that appearance; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[16] For Taylor, the Immanent Frame is the main feature of modern society with respect to its secularity: a condition in which believing in God is no more unchallenged and unproblematic, but "one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace"; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

[17] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[18] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81-82.

[19] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 50-52

[20] As LaCapra notes "the preemptive foreclosure of any and every modality of closure is as doctrinaire and open to question as the quest for definitive, totalizing closure"; LaCapra, *Writing History*, 194.

[21] See Cason Murphy, "Augusto Boal Is Alive and Well and Living in Mapleton: The Guilty Remnant in HBO's 'The Leftovers'," *Journal of Film and Video* 68, no. 3–4 (2016): 104-114.

[22] Sarah Hatchuel and Pacôme Thiellement, *The Leftovers, le troisième côté du miroir* (Levallois-Perret: Playlist Society, 2019); Emmanuel Taïeb, "'The Leftovers' et le choix du pessimisme radical," *Le Point*, October 28, 2019, https://www.lepoint.fr/pop-culture/the-leftovers-et-le-choix-du-pessimisme-radical-28-10-2019-2343846_2920.php.