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The Journal of Religion and Culture (JRC) acknowledges that our work takes place on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today. Tiohtià:ke, which has been settled as Montréal, has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst many First Nations, including Kanien'kehá:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg. This place continues to be the home of many Indigenous peoples, as well as settlers and immigrants representing different cultures, languages, and worldviews. As uninvited guests who call this place home, we respect the continued connections with the past, present, and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the community, and we are grateful for the opportunity to live here. We hope to honour the relational values that Indigenous peoples have centered in their connections with human and ecological worlds, and aim to centre consistent and persistent labour rooted in decolonial and antiracist practices while recognizing and working to change ongoing colonial practices of institutions of higher education.

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# *The Complexity of Connection*

*An Introduction by the Editor*

The Journal of Religion and Culture (JRC) is proud to be returning after an extended hiatus of five years. Like many other important student-run projects and programs, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted our capabilities. Being unable to meet, train each other, and facilitate connections between graduate students of religion meant having to put the journal on hold as we focused on other pressing social and academic issues. When we were finally able to reconvene and re-launch the journal in December 2023, we reflected on the fragility of the programs, institutions, and norms we had all previously taken for granted, but also on the incredible resilience demonstrated by all those who struggled to keep reconstituting community through such disruption. The interconnectedness that undergirds every aspect of our lives means that while one major disruption can impact every strand of our existence, so too can those connections stitch things back together.

Along with our partners, the executive committee of the Annual Graduate Interdisciplinary Conference (AGIC), we chose the theme "Interconnected Realities: intersections of religions, cultures, and contemporary social challenges" for our first volume since our last publication in 2020 to reflect the complexity of connection and disconnection that we had all experienced while living and working through the pandemic. The following volume offers insight into some of the intersecting belief systems, cultural backgrounds, and social issues of this moment.

The first article of this volume, "How Anti-Atheist Prejudice Keeps Non-Believing Clergy Silent: The Clergy Project Participants Share Their Pain," by Alexandr Zamuşinski, explores the challenges faced by clergy who undergo deconversion from religious faith, focusing on the social, familial, and professional consequences of adopting atheism or nonsupernaturalism. Using case studies from participants of The Clergy Project, the author highlights how the ability to express nonbelief is shaped by geographic, cultural, and religious factors and demonstrates that atheism remains a

marginalized identity, with many clergy members choosing to live as covert apostates to protect their social standing and emotional well-being.

The second article, "Navigating the 'New Normal': Layers of Relation in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale For The Time Being*" by Fabrizio Lacarra examines constructions of temporality and spatiality in Ozeki's work, highlighting how postquantum writing can explore various levels of relation between the text and its characters, its author, and its readers. This examination is particularly significant in the present moment of recovering from a worldwide cultural trauma in that it explores how postquantum literature allows a connectivity between the reader and the wider world that is much needed during transitional periods following great upheaval, when we are all navigating the 'new normal' of our post-COVID world.

The final article of this volume, "Art of Ethics: New Materialism and the Affect of Religion in the Post-Graffiti of Montréal" by Devan Morrell, analyzes cases of Greco-Roman style post-graffiti in Montréal, investigating how this subversive use of the "classical" art conventions demonstrates the autonomous nature of post-graffiti and how it demands a re-contextualization of the spaces in which it is created. The author posits that the use of figures of antiquity in street art reveals the complex levels of connection to and habitation of the land we call Tiohtià:ke/Montréal.

For our first volume back, we are also resuming the *In Conversation* section, where we interview contemporary scholars about their recent work and issues that pertain to their research to profile innovative and exciting research while providing an alternative way for our readers to connect to current scholarship. In this volume, we interviewed Dr. Chantal Fiola from the University of Winnipeg about her project and upcoming book, *Expressions of Métis Spirituality and Religion Across the Métis Homeland*. This interview explores the initial project designed and facilitated by Métis scholars Drs Chantal Fiola, Emily Grafton, and Paul L. Gareau, its goals of understanding and defining the full breadth of Métis spirituality/religion, and some of the ways in which religious studies and Indigenous studies may intersect and overlap with each other.

The final section of this volume is our book review section. This edition features a review produced by Jordan Molot of *The Threshold of Dissent: A history of American Jewish Critics of Zionism* by Marjorie N. Feld, and a review by Sean Remz of the book *Patriots without a Homeland: Hungarian Jewish Orthodoxy from the Emancipation to Holocaust* written by Jehuda Hartman (translated by Shaul Vardi).

Finally, I would like to thank our small but determined executive committee, who worked tirelessly to re-launch the journal. I thank Alyssa Putzer and Christian Robillard for all their hard work on this volume, and I want to give special recognition to Thomas Siebel and Jingyan Wang who not only worked on this volume, but also served as co-chairs of the Annual Graduate Interdisciplinary Conference (AGIC). We all want to express our gratitude to former editors-in-chief Joseph Brito and Alexander Nachaj who answered our questions whenever we needed their help, and extra special thanks to Lindsey Jackson (former editor-in-chief from 2019 to 2021) who recruited our current executive committee, provided us detailed training in our roles as editors, and offered incredible guidance to us as we navigated this re-launch. Thank you also to Munit Merid, who helped us with every administrative issue we came across, and to Sophie Charest, our designer, who helped us (literally) put this volume together. This publication would have been possible without the support of everyone who came together to guide us through this endeavor.

We are excited to present you with this current issue, our first since 2020, and we hope you enjoy it. Bonne lecture!

Ellen Dobrowolski
*Editor-in-Chief*

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# *Articles*

# *How Anti-Atheist Prejudice Keeps Non-Believing Clergy Silent:*

## *The Clergy Project Participants Share Their Pain*

*Alexandr Zamușinski, University of California, Riverside*

***Abstract***

This paper explores the challenges faced by clergy who undergo deconversion from religious faith, focusing on the social, familial, and professional consequences of adopting atheism or nonsupernaturalism. Using case studies from participants of *The Clergy Project* (TCP)—a community for current and former religious leaders who no longer hold supernatural beliefs—this study examines how the social environment shapes the deconversion experience. Through in-depth interviews, surveys, and analysis of over three hundred profiles, of TCP participants from more than twenty countries, this research sheds light on the prejudice faced by nonbelieving clergy. Drawing from diverse cultural contexts, including the U.S., Ivory Coast, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia, the findings reveal varying levels of social acceptance and the significant risks of discrimination faced by nonbelievers. Participants often encounter stigma, ostracism, and loss of familial and professional ties, leading many to conceal their atheism to avoid social exclusion. The study also highlights how the ability to express nonbelief is shaped by geographic, cultural, and religious factors. The paper argues that atheism remains a marginalized identity, with many clergy members choosing to live as covert apostates to protect their social standing and emotional well-being. It also calls for further research into the intersection of nonbelief, social stigma, and the unique challenges faced by nonbelieving clergy.

**Keywords:** The Clergy Project, clergy, anti-atheist prejudice, deconversion, atheophobia, social stigma, secularism

Alexandr Zamuşinski

## *Introduction*

Numerous studies indicate that atheists worldwide encounter significant discrimination and, in some cases, persecution.[1] In certain societies, they confront systemic and institutionalized discrimination. According to the *Freedom of Thought Report* 2023 by Humanists International[2] humanists are discriminated against in 186 countries across the globe. In addition to other areas of discrimination, the report specifically asserts that government figures or state agencies openly marginalize, harass, or incite hatred or violence against the non-religious in 11 countries; that it is illegal or unrecognized to identify as an atheist or as non-religious in 15 countries; that the non-religious are barred from holding at least some offices in 23 countries; that it is difficult or illegal to run an overtly humanist organization in 32 countries; that blasphemy remains a punishable offense in at least 87 countries across the globe; and that the provision of mandatory religious instruction in state-funded schools without a secular or humanist alternative occurs in 33 countries.

According to a 2014 international Pew survey,[3] 53 percent of Americans, 70 percent of Indians, 86 percent of Brazilians, 89 percent of Malaysians, 93 percent of Filipinos, 95 percent of Egyptians, and 99 percent of Indonesians, believe that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral. Despite multiple studies demonstrating that

1 See Cottee, Simon. *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam* (Hurst, 2015); Edgell, P. A., Hartmann, D., Stewart, E., & Gerteis, J. H. "Atheists and other cultural outsiders: Moral boundaries and the non-religious in the United States." *Social Forces* 95, no.2 (2016): 607-638; Gervais, Will M., Dimitris Xygalatas, Ryan T. McKay, Michiel van Elk, Emma E. Buchtel, Mark Aveyard, Sarah R. Schiavone, Ilan Dar-Nimrod, Annika M. Svedholm-Häkkinen, Tapani Riekki, Eva Kundtová Klocová, Jonathan E. Ramsay, and Joseph Bulbulia. "Global Evidence of Extreme Intuitive Moral Prejudice against Atheists." *Nature Human Behaviour* vol. 2, issue 6, (2017): 425; Zuckerman, Phil. *What It Means to Be Moral: Why Religion Is Not Necessary for Living an Ethical Life* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2019).

2 Wadsworth-Jones, Emma and Elizabeth O'Casey editors. 2023. *Freedom of Thought Report*. Key Countries Edition by Humanists International.

3 Pew Research Center. (2014, March 13). "Worldwide, many see belief in God as essential to morality." Retrieved from www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/

portraying the nonreligious population as immoral is not objective,[4] various stereotypes directed towards atheists are widespread.[5] This environment makes it exceedingly difficult and perilous to be an openly avowed nonbeliever in numerous parts of the world. A study by Penny Edgell and colleagues[6] concludes that a considerable portion of Americans perceive atheists as immoral, leading them to be inclined to believe that atheists do not align with their vision of America and to disapprove of their son or daughter marrying an atheist. As a result, the phenomenon of atheophobia–the fear and/or hatred of atheists or atheism–is widespread. Robert Nash offers a definition of atheophobia as "…the fear and loathing of atheists that permeates American culture".[7]

Among individuals who espouse by atheism or religious skepticism, there exists a distinctive category of religious professionals who, at some point in their lives, embraced a naturalistic worldview, dismissing superstitions and supernatural agencies like gods, souls, or spirits. Due to the aforementioned biases against nonbelievers, these former or current nonbelieving religious professionals also experience social isolation. As the findings of this research indicate, many of them opt to conceal their stigmatized identity.[8]

4 See Cragun, Ryan, and Jesse Smith. *Goodbye Religion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization* (New York University Press, 2024); Franz, Berkeley, and R. Khari Brown. "Race, Religion and Support for the Affordable Care Act." *Review of Religious Research* 62, no.1 (2020): 101–20; Kasselstrand, Zuckerman, and Cragun. *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society* (New York University Press, 2023); Piazza, Jared. "'If You Love Me Keep My Commandments': Religiosity Increases Preference for Rule-Based Moral Arguments." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 22, no. 4 (2012): 285–302; Saslow, Laura R., Robb Willer, Matthew Feinberg, Paul K. Piff, Katharine Clark, Dacher Keltner, and Sarina R. Saturn. "My Brother's Keeper? Compassion Predicts Generosity More Among Less Religious Individuals." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 4, no. 1 (2013): 31–38.

5 Abbott, D. M., & Mollen, D. "Atheism as a concealable stigmatized identity: Outness, anticipated stigma, and well-being." *The Counseling Psychologist* 46, no. 6 (2018): 685-707; Brewster, Melanie E., Joseph Hammer, Jacob S. Sawyer, Austin Eklund, and Joseph Palamar. "Perceived Experiences of Atheist Discrimination: Instrument Development and Evaluation." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 63, no. 5 (October 2016): 557–70; Brooks, E. Marshall. *Disenchanted Lives: Apostasy and Ex-Mormonism among the Latter-day Saints* (Rutgers University Press, 2018); Giddings, Leah, and Thomas J. Dunn. "The Robustness of Anti-Atheist Prejudice as Measured by Way of Cognitive Errors." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 26, no. 2 (April 21, 2015): 124–35; Harper, M. "The stereotyping of nonreligious people by religious students: Contents and subtypes." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 4, (2007): 539-552.

6 Edgell et al., *Atheists and other cultural outsiders*, 629.

7 Nash, Robert J. "Inviting Atheists to the Table: A Modest Proposal for Higher Education." *Religion & Education* 30, no. 1 (2003), 1.

8 cf. Abbott, D. M., & Mollen, D. *Atheism as a concealable stigmatized identity*; Yeatts, Paul, Dena Abbott, and Debra Mollen. "Development and Evaluation of the Atheist Identity Concealment Scale." *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 4 (2022): 3525-3541.

To support individuals in this situation, The Clergy Project[9] (TCP) was established in 2011. Its objective is to create a secure online community of forums comprised exclusively of religious leaders who no longer adhere to supernatural beliefs. As of 2024, it has over 1300 members from over 50 countries. Drawing on in-depth interviews and surveys with TCP participants from more than twenty countries and five continents, this research illustrates how they navigate their deconversion from faith while contending with biases against nonbelievers.

## *Atheist Identities*

As outlined in earlier work,[10] this study examined participants' preferred self-identification following deconversion, as well as their attitudes toward being labeled "atheist." Notably, only 15% of participants easily or proudly identified as "atheists," while 47% rejected the label altogether. Among the 53% who accepted the term, 60% also adopted additional descriptors, such as "Humanist," "Secular Humanist," "Agnostic," and "Non-theist." Of the 47% of respondents who were uncomfortable with the label "atheist," two distinct groups emerged: 41% expressed negative feelings toward identifying as atheists, with some rejecting the term entirely. The remaining 59% did not oppose the term itself but chose to avoid it because of the social stigma and the "baggage" it carried. They felt that many people associate atheists with negative stereotypes, viewing them as immoral or as hostile adversaries of religion.

Although Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett are regarded as the founders of the Clergy Project, TCP participants expressed a range of opinions when asked about their views on the New Atheism Movement, especially its prominent figures—Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens. 27% showed support, 40% voiced criticism and disapproval, while 33% took a neutral stance. Furthermore, even among those who had a favorable view of New Atheism, none offered an outright endorsement; every respondent who showed some support also recognized the movement's flaws. This

9 For details see: https://clergyproject.org/clergy-project-history/

10 Zamușinski, Alexandr. "Understanding the Role of The Clergy Project: Misconceptions and Realities of a Support Network for Nonbelieving Clergy." *Secularism and Nonreligion*, 14, no.1 (2025):1-14.

study thus reveals a range of approaches to atheist identity among non-believing clergy, also establishing a spectrum of perspectives on the New Atheist Movement that spans from strong approval to harsh critique. This demonstrates that the vast majority of respondents are not "militant atheists" or "anti-religious."

## *Overview of the problem – Not Worthy of Trust*

In this article, when discussing "Anti-Atheist Prejudice," I refer to it broadly as a biased and negative attitude towards atheists, agnostics, nonbelievers, and similar individuals. The idea that atheists are immoral or amoral or that atheism necessarily leads to moral degradation is a prejudice with historical precedence. In 1947, in his celebrated *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, Lucien Febvre claimed that Rabelais not only had not been an atheist but could not have been an atheist. Febvre claimed that no one could have been an atheist until Descartes made it conceptually possible. However, in *Battling the Gods*,[11] Tim Whitmarsh demonstrates that ancient historical records suggest that atheism is as natural to humans as religion. In addition, the idea of atheophobia goes at least as far back as Plato, who, in his *Tenth Book of the Dialogue on Laws,*[12] advocated draconian measures against atheists and people we would call deists. Plato's recommended punishment for atheists was death. At best, he believed that such people must be isolated from society. The philosopher considered nonbelievers to be possessed by disease and regarded them as state criminals who would provoke societal disturbance if left unchecked.

Today, nonbelievers are one of the most distrusted minority groups in the US as well as the world.[13] Cornell historians Moore and Kramnick claim, "Atheists remain the most disliked religious minority in America."[14] According to *The Freedom of Thought Report*

11 Whitmarsh, Tim. *Battling the Gods* (Faber & Faber, 2015).

12 See *Plato Against the Atheists, or the Tenth Book of the Dialogue on Laws*. Printed in 1845 by Harper & Brothers, New York. Laws 9, 10.

13 See Cottee, *The Apostates*; Edgell et al., *Atheists and other cultural outsiders*; Gervais, Will M., Azim F. Shariff, and Ara Norenzayan. "Do You Believe in Atheists? Distrust Is Central to Anti-Atheist Prejudice." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 6 (2011): 1189–1206.

14 Moore L., Kramnick I. *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic: Atheists in American Public Life* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 161.

by the International Humanist,[15] atheists in 11 countries with Muslim majority can face official punishment by death for atheism, apostasy, or blasphemy (as in the case of Pakistan). Sudan, Somalia, and Libya only recently abolished their apostasy laws. The report highlights numerous discriminatory laws, regulations, and cases against nonbelievers worldwide, asserting that nonbelievers encounter systemic discrimination in most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Africa, Asia, and Europe.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most severe biases against nonbelievers is the perception of their ethical inferiority. The equation is straightforward: if, in the minds of many people, religion is linked to morality, then irreligion is automatically associated with immorality. Based on this prejudice, various related misunderstandings can take root. For instance, nonbelievers may face discrimination and challenges when seeking employment, gaining child custody, running for office, establishing an organization or club, promoting their worldview, providing witness testimony in court, or serving on a jury. A study by Giddings and Dunn established that people's distrust of atheists is "deeply and culturally ingrained." The study found widespread "prejudice" against atheists and concluded, "Anti-atheist prejudice is not confined either to dominantly religious countries or to religious individuals but rather appears to be a robust judgment about atheists." [16]

A nationally representative survey in the US[17] found that 41 percent of atheists reported experiencing discrimination in the previous five years as a result of their lack of religious identification. Hammer et al.[18] discovered that nearly 97% of individuals identifying as atheists reported experiencing slander, while 93% faced coercion. Additionally, close to 60% reported feelings of social ostracization, almost 14% were victims of hate crimes, and nearly 84% experienced unspecified acts of discrimination. Melanie Brewster, who

15 The Freedom of Thought Report 2020: A Global Report on the Rights, Legal Status and Discrimination Against Humanists, Atheists and the Non-religious, by International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), p. 13.

16 Giddings and Dunn, *The Robustness of Anti-Atheist Prejudice*, Abstract.

17 Cragun, R., B. A. Kosmin, A. Keysar, J. Hammer, and M. Nielson. "On the Receiving End: Discrimination toward the Non-religious in the United States." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27, (2012): 105–127.

18 Hammer, J. H., Cragun, R. T., Hwang, K., & Smith, J. M. "Forms, frequency, and correlates of perceived anti-atheist discrimination." *Secularism and Nonreligion* 1, (2012): 43-67.

studies marginalized groups and examines how experiences of discrimination and stigma may shape the mental health of minority group members, claims in her 2014 work, *Atheists in America,* that the prevalence of atheophobic attitudes shapes atheists' experiences. As a result, atheists report significant discrimination in schools, at their places of employment, within the legal system, and in many other settings. In 2011, Gervais et al. found that believers distrust atheists as much as they do rapists. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that nonbelievers in America often feel socially isolated. They are not respected by their leaders or neighbors. There are organizations with an "anyone but atheists" membership policy. For example, the Boy Scouts of America openly rejects atheists while accepting members of any and all religions. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, a leading veteran's group in the US, rescinded a similar ban on atheists only in 2004. Brewster shares findings of her studies in which several thousand atheists were asked to recall how frequently they felt they were treated as if they were immoral, ostracized, made to feel ashamed, and/or asked to conceal their atheism. She concludes:

> We found that the more participants experienced this atheophobic maltreatment, the higher their levels of psychological distress and social isolation were. Thus, experiencing stigma for being atheist has real ramifications for mental health.[19]

A 2020 report, *Being Nonreligious in America*, also supports these findings.[20]

The participants in this study recounted experiences congruent with the findings delineated in the aforementioned studies. They encountered challenges akin to social ostracism from both peers and family, as well as instances of slander and coercion. Moreover, they were subjected to portrayals depicting them as ethically inferior, sinful, or potentially possessed by evil spirits. Notably, certain presumptions emerged, such as the inference that a lack of belief in God automatically implies belief in or worship of the Devil.

19 Brewster Melanie, 2021. "Atheophobia" - https://bstigmafree.org/blog/atheophobia/, accessed April 25, 2023.

20 Frazer, S., El-Shafei, A., Gill, A.M. *Reality Check: Being Nonreligious in America*. Cranford, NJ: American Atheists. 2020.

## *Methodology*

Since May 2021, I have conducted in-depth interviews with forty-one religious professionals who transitioned from belief to non-belief. These interviews were conducted online via platforms such as Zoom or Skype, or through phone conversations, with durations ranging from 1 to 3 hours. In some cases, respondents were interviewed multiple times. Additionally, eighteen participants opted to respond to an extensive interview questionnaire comprising over 30 questions. Subsequently, I followed up with many of them for further clarification and discussion of specific answers. Moreover, I had the opportunity to explore over five hundred personal profiles of TCP participants within their SafetyNet community, reviewing more than three hundred of these profiles. These profiles are structured to allow TCP participants to share their journey from faith to non-belief.

The respondents, limited to those who were interviewed or submitted written interviews, represent a diverse range of at least twenty-four countries across five continents, with participants from the U.S. hailing from over ten different states. The mean age of my informants is 53 years, with a median value of 51, with ages spanning a broad range — from the youngest at twenty-three to the oldest at eighty-six. Of the total, forty-four identified as men, eight as women, and five as non-binary. The leadership of TCP has provided me with access and made a public announcement introducing my study and my positionality as a researcher. As a result, many participants have reached out to me directly, expressing their interest in joining the project and offering to answer research questions.

## *Findings*

### *Why do people fear atheists?*

Understanding the roots of this fear can shed light on the biases and misconceptions that surround nonbelievers. Unlike those who always have been secular or indifferent to religion, this research explores intriguing perspectives from individuals who were once very religiously devout and then joined the "enemy camp". Suddenly they became perceived as traitors. Jerry DeWitt, a former

fundamentalist minister from Louisiana and participant in TCP, aptly expressed this transformation, stating, "To some people, I'm the enemy—a turncoat. Almost like an American soldier suddenly being found working for al-Qaeda." [21] These individuals, having undergone a profound reconsideration of their personal ontology and axiology, are now asked to reflect on why individuals in their immediate environment might harbor apprehensions or fears toward atheism or atheists. It is noteworthy that, not long ago, many of these same individuals viewed the world through the lens of atheophobia. Thus, the experiences of these religious professionals are particularly potent. The subsequent section delves into the reflections shared by some of these clergy.

***Possessed by Demons or Devil worshipers***

Joey Fire Lame Deer, a spiritual leader within the Lakota-Sioux tribe, held roles such as a medium, seer, interpreter of dreams, and ceremonial instructor. After watching multiple videos with Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Matt Dillahunty, they[22] became an atheist and, as they put it, "a vocal, proselytizing nonbeliever." Joey notes that misconceptions arise, with some people presuming that, by disavowing belief in a god, Joey must adhere to a belief in the Devil. This assumption perplexes Joey, who clarifies their non-Christian background and disassociation from the concept of the Devil. They add:

> I've met people who think I'm a shitty person for not believing in a god as if I'm insulting the idea of a god by not believing in one and thus hurting the feelings of their god. I think people fear anything they can't understand, and people who are theists don't understand atheists.

Similarly, several respondents have pointed to such association with the Devil or Satan. As one TCP member from Michigan expressed, they are sometimes viewed as the "emissary of the Devil"

21 Interview with Washington Post,Nov. 21 2013, "From Pentecostal pastor to atheist organizer" https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/onbackground/from-pentecostal-pastor-to-atheist-organizer/2013/11/21/01389602-52e2-11e3-a7f0-b790929232e1_video.html Accessed on Jan. 24, 2024.

22 Prefers they/them pronouns.

Jane, who is a seminary graduate and a chaplain from Wisconsin, also noticed that some people associate non-believers with Devil worshippers. Jane even had to educate someone because they thought if Jane is not a believer, then they[23] believe in the Devil and put curses on them. That person believed that everything bad that happened to her was because of Jane, and she spread such rumors about Jane. As a result, some people who knew Jane started avoiding them, occasionally even crossing the street. When asked what they lost as a result of their deconversion, Jane responded that they lost family, friends, and financial security.

Steve, a former Wesleyan pastor from Ohio also noticed that believers "fear atheists because of the stigma that is spread in the past, especially through churches, that atheists are evil and following Satan, as if we sacrifice children." According to Steve, this negative portrayal has persisted for generations, and it highlights how deeply entrenched misconceptions about atheism are, often making it difficult for former believers to be accepted in their communities.

Mihaylo, the son of a pastor and who was a worship leader at a local Adventist church in Ukraine, conveyed the significant challenges he faced upon revealing his disbelief to his mother. The disclosure evoked intense emotional distress in his mother, leading to tears and an eventual proclamation that Mihaylo was purportedly possessed by malevolent forces, specifically the Devil and evil spirits. The profound difficulty she experienced stemmed from an inability to reconcile with the notion that her son had adopted atheism. This manifestation of prejudice, wherein disbelief is erroneously associated with Satanism, Devil possession, or Devil worship, proves to be a notable and consequential phenomenon for individuals navigating the complexities of deconversion from religion. The studies by Brewster and Cottee[24] confirm this prejudice. In some instances, respondents in Brewster's study reported being called "Satan",[25] while Cottee shares stories in which his respondents were taken by their family members into a mosque so that an imam could perform an exorcism on them to cast out the Devil.

23 Prefers they/them pronouns.
24 Brewster Melanie E. *Atheists in America* (Columbia University Press, 2014); Cottee, *The Apostates*.
25 Brewster, *Atheists in America*, 214.

***Immorality: "You just cannot be an atheist, you are such a nice person"***

John Compere, a fifth-generation Baptist minister, a founding member of The Clergy Project and its vice-president, who also headed its screening committee, reminded the case when his mother told him: "You just cannot be an atheist, you are such a nice person." In other words, in her mind atheist was a bad person. John added that people much too often make the mistake of equating ethical morality with religious belief — an assumption secular humanists are hard at work to disprove. Željko a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor from Croatia acknowledged that most people think that atheists are unethical. Charles, who is a retired Episcopal priest from Utah, stated:

> Even some very progressive Christians feel that it is permissible to disparage atheists. I have been surprised by that more than once. I attribute the origin of that to hundreds of years of the Church insisting that atheists are evil and dangerous and that only theists have the potential to live loving, moral lives.

This quote echoes the findings of Melanie Brewster, who attempts "to debunk the myth that atheophobia is restricted only to the Bible Belt."[26] Describing her personal story, Brewster mentions how she suddenly realized how stigmatized atheists are in the United States:

> This stigma runs so deep that even in a large, public university amongst psychology doctoral students – who are, by the way, notoriously liberal and open-minded – it was completely acceptable to believe that being nice and being atheist were mutually exclusive identities to hold.[27]

Amir, a former Muslim religious leader from Saudi Arabia, noticed that within the Muslim community, people often associate atheists with very foolish individuals who simply follow their lust. Steve, a former Wesleyan pastor from Ohio, has observed a recurring pattern in interactions with believers upon the revelation of his

26 Brewster, *Atheists in America*, 21.
27 Brewster Melanie, "Atheophobia."

atheism. He notes that believers occasionally pose inquiries such as, "How do you determine what is good or evil?" or express skepticism, questioning why they should heed his perspectives since he does not adhere to the Bible. Steve contends that this enduring stigma persists largely due to the historical suppression of atheist voices. Therefore, he advocates for a proactive approach wherein atheists openly embrace the label "atheist." Steve believes that by doing so, individuals can contribute to dispelling the unwarranted stigma surrounding atheism, fostering a more informed and nuanced understanding of atheist perspectives.

***Godless Communists***

Some respondents linked atheophobia to the times of the Cold War and period of geopolitical tension between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, so-called 'Godless Communist Bloc'. Among them is Luke, who in his early thirties, made the transition to church planting and served as a national adviser with both the Association of Life Giving Churches (ALC) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Recognized for his close association with Ted Haggard, he quickly gained prominence and was named one of the "Top 300" influential evangelical pastors in America. Currently Luke is a TCP member and during the interview he attributed the stigma against atheists to the government, specifically pointing to the historical association of atheists with godless communists by the American government.[28]

Benjamin, from Washington state, who grew up in the Jehovah's Witnesses church and later was appointed as an elder in the church structure, shared that:

> The term atheist has become a dog whistle like socialist... I think people fear atheists the same way they fear homosexuals, which is to say, they really don't. They've been taught to hate atheists because they represent an existential threat to their belief system. If the entire infrastructure of your existence (sense of self, family, church, community, country,

28 See also Moore and Kramnick, *Godless Citizens*; and Kruse, Kevin. *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

> etc.) is founded on a singular belief, and all someone has to do to undermine everything is not believe, that's a precarious position to be in.

In the following section, I present examples of how the biases mentioned above, as well as other biases, are manifested among the family and community members of the respondents in this research.

***Family***

Numerous studies underscore the pivotal role played by the transmission of religiosity from immediate family members to subsequent generations.[29] Research on deconversion and apostasy reveal the myriad challenges individuals face when divulging their loss of faith to family members.[30] Brooks, in his examinations of the crisis of apostasy within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons), underscores the pervasive belief among church members in the enduring nature of familial bonds, stating, "families are forever".[31] Consequently, he concludes that this strong emphasis on family significantly amplifies the difficulty of leaving the church.[32]

This research of TCP participants affirms the heightened burden associated with disclosing disbelief to family members, particularly parents.[33] Certain religious traditions instill the belief that familial

29 Baker-Sperry, Lori. "Passing on the Faith: The Father's Role in Religious Transmission." *Sociological Focus* 34, no 2 (2001):185–98; Bengtson, Vern L., Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris. *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bader, Christopher D., and Scott A. Desmond. "Do as I say and as I do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behaviors Upon Religious Transmission." *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 3 (2006): 313-329; Kelley, Jonathan, and Nan Dirk De Graaf. "National Context, Parental Socialization, and Religious Belief: Results from 15 Nations." *American Sociological Review* 62, no.4 (1997): 639–59; Martin, Todd F., James M. White, and Daniel Perlman. "Religious Socialization: A Test of the Channeling Hypothesis of Parental Influence on Adolescent Faith Maturity." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 18, no. 2 (2003): 169–87.

30 Altemeyer, B. and Hunsberger, B. *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith & Others Abandon Religion* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997); Brewster, *Atheists in America*; Brooks, *Disenchanted Lives*; Cottee, *The Apostates*; Fader, Ayala. *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Swann, Daniel. *A Qualitative Study of Black Atheists: "Don't Tell Me You're One of Those!*" (Lexington Books, 2020).

31 Brooks, *Disenchanted Lives,* 169.

32 Brooks, *Disenchanted Lives,* 169.

33 cf. Cottee, *The Apostates*; Hendricks, J.J., Hardy, S.A., Taylor, E.M. and Dollahite, D.C. (2024), "Does Leaving Faith Mean Leaving Family? Longitudinal Associations Between Religious Identification and Parent-Child Relationships Across Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 63: 23-41.

bonds endure eternally in the afterlife. Consequently, becoming an apostate may be perceived as a threat to salvation, leading to separation from one's family in the hereafter. For instance, Erick, a former Pentecostal youth pastor from Wisconsin, experienced a profound impact. The day Erick hinted at the potential loss of his faith to his father, his father suffered a heart attack, later attributing it to their conversation that day. Erick even assumed that his parents might react more positively if he were to tell them that he is gay or that he has a problem with drugs. Consequently, he approaches discussions with caution, being mindful not to exert undue pressure, particularly with his parents and grandparents.

Gary, a retired minister formerly associated with the United Church of Christ in Wisconsin, expresses apprehension about jeopardizing relationships that he does not have to lose. At the age of 67 during the interview, Gary, cognizant of his less-than-optimal health, articulates a preference for avoiding unnecessary struggles and emotional stress, motivating his reluctance to take risk of sharing his disbelief.

Cindy, a former Salvation Army officer from Illinois, notes another pattern in her observations. She shares her experience of concealing her deconversion from her grandmother to spare her feelings. According to Cindy, younger individuals exhibit less surprise upon learning of someone's nonreligious stance, whereas older individuals often struggle to reconcile the idea that a nonreligious person can be virtuous. This phenomenon aligns with the earlier-discussed experience of John Compere and others.

William, who is still actively involved in a Pentecostal church in South Africa, encounters challenges in disclosing his disbelief to his mother. Some TCP members openly admit that they would refrain from openly declaring their nonbelief while their parents are still alive. Ricardo, currently an Assistant Pastor in a Baptist church in Texas and the son of a pastor, exhibits considerable caution regarding the prospect of disclosing his nonbelief to his family. Given the potential for negative repercussions, he remains apprehensive about their possible reactions. Ricardo is acquainted with accounts from participants in The Clergy Project who have

faced adverse outcomes upon revealing their nonbelief. Moreover, his circle of friends includes individuals who, upon disclosing their atheism to their parents during their late teens, found themselves compelled to leave their parents' homes. Subsequently, they had to navigate independent living due to strained familial relationships. Considering these experiences, Ricardo harbors apprehensions that his family and friends may struggle to comprehend his perspective. His concern is heightened by the presence of three children, amplifying the perceived risks associated with such a revelation.

Simultaneously, the study brought to light narratives of individuals who opted to disclose their nonbelief to immediate family members, often resulting in profound and deleterious consequences. Such individuals encountered divorces and the dissolution of relationships with cherished family members. The research reveals that biases against atheists are so deeply entrenched that they lead to ostracism and rejection of family members who have lost their faith. The disclosure of such loss may be interpreted as an act of betrayal.[34] Brooks discusses how "ex-Mormons are often told or made to feel that they deserve to be suffering [for their apostasy] ... Losing faith is seen as a result of spiritual laziness or rebelliousness, and former members are considered failures."[35]

Steve, an Evangelical worship leader and psychological counselor from Michigan, shared a poignant account of the profound losses he experienced following the revelation of his disbelief to his wife. Speaking of his family members and people in community Steve stated:

> No one is going to choose me over their God or their belief. In order to maintain that their God is good and their belief is good… they have to reject me. People … reject their own family members over these things, and that's what I've experienced. My life partner is afraid of who I've become; she thinks that I've radically changed who I am as a person, which is not true. I'm still a caring, and compassionate, and kind, and honest person, and authentic, and genuine. But the irony of maintaining my integrity about this

34 Brewster, *Atheists in America*, 45.
35 Brooks, *Disenchanted Lives,* 119.

> is exactly what is getting me rejected. As it turns out, having integrity and coming to terms with the truth is what gets me called a phony, a fraud, and a deceiver.

Steve recounted that one of the most agonizing aspects of his experience was the estrangement from his elder son, who had previously regarded him as a hero. Before this revelation, Steve would always receive Father's Day and birthday cards. However, now, Steve's attempts at communication were met with silence. His wife and father-in-law allegedly informed the children of Steve's atheist stance, further deteriorating their perception of him and resulting in a loss of trust and respect. Despite repeated efforts to reconcile with his son, Steve encountered rejection on multiple occasions. Even his closest friend rejected him when he attempted to share his inner struggles. The shift in Steve's beliefs resulted in a negative and confrontational reaction. All this is causing profound social and emotional hardships. Thus, many prefer not to come out even to their family members. As Fader reports in her study of hidden apostates within the Orthodox Judaism: "The fear of divorce, which was stigmatizing to entire families for generations, kept many double lifers, but especially women, in the heretical closet."[36]

Another poignant case is exemplified in the experiences of Jerry DeWitt, a former evangelical preacher from Louisiana. Following his disclosure as a nonbeliever, DeWitt not only endured the dissolution of his marriage but also faced ostracism within his community. In his book, *Hope after Faith*, DeWitt elucidates the final catalyst for his wife's decision, citing the pervasive religious atmosphere in their small Louisiana town, where rumors circulated about her union with an atheist:

> "We can't move," I told Kelli. "Every preacher who comes out as an atheist shouldn't have to move five hundred miles away. We've invested our lives in this community." To me, moving felt like pleading guilty to a crime or like being a convicted child molester who is forced to leave the community. I also believed that my coming out as an atheist had already cost my

36 Fader, *Hidden Heretics,* 93.

> family so much that giving up our home was a price I was unwilling to bear. And I hoped that if anyone could overcome the struggles of a life as an atheist in a deeply religious community like DeRidder, it could be me.[37]

Despite his resolute determination, DeWitt ultimately found it necessary to depart from his hometown. The intolerable humiliation he endured during routine visits to local establishments such as Walmart, the post office, or a bank prompted a reconsideration of his position, compelling him to relocate from DeRidder. This transition segues into the subsequent section, delving into the biases and ostracism that nonbelieving religious professionals may encounter due to the social context in which they reside.

***Community, Society***

In the case of Jerry DeWitt, the influence of the social environment is notably evident. Had he been a pastor in a metropolitan area like Los Angeles, managing his deconversion might have been considerably smoother. However, DeWitt hails from DeRidder, a small town with a population of approximately 9000 situated in the Bible Belt. In his circumstance, the moment his deconversion occurred, many people in his town became aware of his transition to atheism. Therefore, the ease of navigating such a transformation is significantly contingent upon the prevailing social and national context. In certain regions of the world, identifying as an atheist poses minimal challenges.[38] In the course of this study, TCP participants from the UK, Germany, Sweden, and Finland affirmed that openly declaring atheism in many European countries poses no problem. Conversely, respondents from other parts of the world often asserted that openly declaring atheism in their social context would jeopardize a significant portion of their social capital and relationships.

37 DeWitt, Jerry with Ethan Brown. *Hope after Faith: An Ex-Pastor's Journey from Belief to Atheism* (Da Capo, 2013), 207.

38 See Zuckerman, Phil, Luke W. Galen, Frank L. Pasquale. *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 103-104.

An illustrative case is that of Mohamed, a former Muslim leader from Ivory Coast, who currently resides in the United States. Mohamed highlights the value of living in the U.S., where he can assert his own voice, take control of his life, and pursue independence. In contrast, he reflects on the challenges he would face if he remained in Ivory Coast, attributing the difficulty to the prevalent dependence on community ties in his home country. Mohamed posits that in such a cultural setting, the process of adopting a non-believer identity would be more arduous, and if undertaken, it would likely necessitate concealment from others.

Similarly, Faraz, hailing from Pakistan and the grandson of a renowned Islamic Scholar, presents a compelling narrative. As a Quran hafiz entrusted with leading prayers in the local mosque, he elucidates on the societal dynamics in Pakistan, where individuals born into the Muslim faith cannot reject Islam. The societal fabric is structured in a manner that exerts pressure on individuals to adhere to Islamic beliefs and observe Muslim traditions and rituals, encompassing daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and animal sacrifices, among others.

Fardad, a Zoroastrian priest originally from India now residing in the US, disclosed that within his community, trust is predominantly placed in individuals who exhibit strong religious commitment and engage in frequent prayer. Conversely, those lacking religious adherence find it challenging to earn trust. Following a prolonged internal struggle, Fardad chose to reveal his disbelief to his wife, hoping for understanding. Regrettably, she did not keep his secret confidential and, despite Fardad's request, shared it with relatives and friends. Consequently, the revelation disappointed many, including Fardad's parents, leading to a diminished standing within the community. Now perceived as less ethical, Fardad must actively demonstrate his trustworthiness to regain the community's confidence.

Amir, a former Muslim religious leader from Saudi Arabia, made the difficult decision to leave the country, forfeiting a successful career in his own law firm due to concerns for his safety. He expressed the fear that if his loss of faith were to become public knowledge, it could lead to imprisonment or even execution. Observing the reactions

of some friends and his wife, who divorced him upon learning of his disbelief, Amir opted to keep this secret from his mother. In his words, "perhaps I don't want her to hate me or discontent her relation with me." He further explained that within the Muslim community, there is a strong aversion to atheists, as they are viewed as enemies of God, which contributes to the negative perception and treatment of those who do not adhere to religious beliefs.

Pepper, hailing from Malaysia, shared the numerous challenges faced by atheists in his country. Not being a Muslim himself, Pepper's journey took him through Rhema Bible College in Australia. Upon graduation he returned to Malaysia and worked in full-time ministry for five years. Subsequently, he actively served as a lay pastor in the children's church and youth group of the Methodist church until he experienced a loss of faith. Pepper highlighted that, due to his non-Muslim status, he enjoys the freedom to openly share his disbelief and even runs a blog where he occasionally expresses atheistic ideas. However, he emphasized that he refrains from being a militant atheist due to the significant threats he would face. In Malaysia, individuals are required to declare their religion on official documents, and changing one's religion is prohibited by law for Muslims. The discovery of a Muslim's lack of faith could lead to reporting to authorities, potential orders to divorce, and children remaining with the believing parent. Pepper is acquainted with nonbelieving ex-Muslims who maintain a low profile, quietly socializing with non-Muslims and embracing a secular lifestyle (e.g., consuming pork or alcohol) while pretending to be Muslim when questioned. Moreover, Malaysia imposes restrictions on the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men, while Muslim men face no such limitations. Additionally, registering an official atheist or humanist organization is impossible in Malaysia. Pepper cited an example where a humanist conference was canceled, and participants faced attacks and death threats.

Hence, within certain national contexts, the extent of discrimination and social exclusion is influenced by factors such as one's family background and the religious beliefs they held before renouncing them. Subsequent examples will illustrate that organizational policies toward apostates may also play a significant role. Ben, who dedicated

over 15 years as a pioneer and nearly 20 years as an Elder for Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia, elucidated the challenging dynamics within his church. He described a tradition of severe disfellowshipping, to the extent that family members are prohibited from communicating with the affected individual. Potential ostracism caused significant internal struggles for Ben, who feared for the strength of his marriage. The fear of potential fallout led him to withhold this information from his wife, uncertain about the resilience of their relationship. After candid discussions with elders in the church, Ben eventually chose to resign. His departure was publicly declared as apostasy, resulting in the estrangement of even close relatives, such as his sister. What proved more distressing was the subsequent ostracization of his wife by church members, despite her continued belief in and attendance at the church. According to Ben, to many within the church she is now also regarded as an apostate.

Matt, a former leader within the Jehovah's Witnesses church from North Carolina, recounted the profound pain of being shunned by friends and family. Despite being a dedicated member of their community and having served as a missionary in several Latin American countries, Matt found himself abandoned by friends and family alike when they learned about his loss of faith. At the age of 38, with all his contacts tied to the Jehovah's Witnesses church, Matt faced the daunting task of rebuilding his life from the ground up. He expressed the considerable difficulty of forming new, trustworthy friendships at such a stage in life. Thus, it becomes clear that the level of individual autonomy, especially in matters of belief, is significantly contingent upon the national and cultural context, with one's geographical origin and background exerting substantial influence.[39]

### *Employment*

Gervais et al. (2011) reported that atheists in the United States have lower employment prospects. The survey on distrust of atheists demonstrates that respondents significantly preferred

39 cf. Inglehart, Ronald. *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Kasselstrand, Zuckerman, and Cragun. *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society* (New York University Press, 2023); Streib, H., Hood, R. W., Keller, B., Csöff, R.-M., & Silver, C. *Deconversion: Qualitative and quantitative results from cross-cultural research in Germany and the United States of America* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

religious candidates to the atheist candidate for a high-trust job (as a daycare worker), conversely, participants marginally preferred the atheist candidate to the religious candidate for a low-trust job (as a waitress).[40] Another report suggests that this is especially relevant for atheists who are residents of "very religious" communities.[41] In their 2012 study, Hammer and colleagues explored the experiences of atheist individuals facing discrimination in the US. They found that overt and severe discrimination, comprising denied employment or educational opportunities, was reported by 9% of the participants. *American Atheists* also reported employment discrimination "in the name of religion" in 2019.[42] Various cases also reveal that if their nonbelieving identity is discovered after being hired, they may face discrimination, potentially resulting in job loss. Two prime examples are Richard Mullens in 2009 in Texas[43] and Abby Nurre in 2010 in Iowa,[44] both of whom are teachers. This study of nonbelieving religious professionals identified similar challenges and patterns.

A TCP participant Jane, is a seminary graduate and a chaplain from Wisconsin. They emphasized that despite openly disclosing their sexual identity subsequent to their deconversion from faith, their sexuality has not posed any challenges in their role at the hospice. Jane freely expresses their gender identity by wearing a badge stating "They/Them pronouns." However, in stark contrast, Jane reveals that their belief system significantly impacts their professional life, necessitating the concealment of this aspect of their identity. They stated:

> I dislike the fact I am going back into hiding for this position. I don't know how I am going to prepare the services for advent and Christmas, at alone all the other weekly services I will need to do.

40 Gervais et al., *Do You Believe in Atheists?* 1200.

41 Survey: Atheists face discrimination, rejection in many areas of life, by Pamela Manson. May 11, 2020. https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2020/05/11/Survey-Atheists-face-discrimination-rejection-in-many-areas-of-life/2081589218869/. Accessed September 22, 2024.

42 American Atheists Opposes Employment Discrimination in the Name of Religion. Sep 16, 2019. https://www.atheists.org/2019/09/department-of-labor-religious-discrimination/. Accessed September 22, 2024.

43 Paul Z. Meyers. Feb 5, 2009. "It must be tough to be an atheist in Texas." https://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2009/02/05/it-must-be-tough-to-be-an-athe. Accessed September 22, 2024.

44 "'No God' comment adds up to no job for fired math teacher." *USA Today,* May 29, 2010 http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-05-29-fired28_st_n.htm. Accessed September 22, 2024.

Mentioned above, Faraz from Pakistan contends that he has encountered employment discrimination due to his beliefs. Notably, he observes a societal tendency to accord additional respect and support to individuals who overtly manifest religious devotion. In Faraz's perspective, maintaining authenticity in his behavior becomes challenging, as he is disinclined to feign religiosity. This authenticity, he asserts, has had repercussions on his professional life, contributing to his forced resignation from at least two positions. Faraz attributes these outcomes to the perception among colleagues and workmates that he lacks genuine religious fervor, thereby complicating his professional engagements.

Another respondent, John, spent many years working as a missionary in China. However, upon returning to Canada and openly identifying as an atheist, he encountered some unease. This often resulted in confrontations and debates, leading to John being perceived by many as an enemy. He further elaborated:

> I currently work as a corporate consultant, and I have had times when companies have chosen not to work with me because, when researching me on social media, they've seen that I'm an atheist, and have chosen not to hire me purely because of that. However, this has only happened a few times.

At the same time, respondents agreed that, in most cases, it is harder to identify someone's religious beliefs than it is to identify their race or gender, making the experience quite different from racial or sexual discrimination. Beliefs cannot be 'seen' in the way behavior can be. A study by Cimino and Smith states that, "no external markers or signifiers announce someone as an atheist, making it easier for atheists to avoid any social stigma by keeping their nonbelief to themselves."[45]

Joey Fire Lame Deer, a spiritual leader within the Lakota-Sioux tribe, also notes that form of discrimination against atheists stands apart from other instances as it remains concealed until disclosed unlike more visible markers of identity. They state:

45 Cimino, R., and C. Smith. 2015. *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism & Community in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 63.

> It's only different from all the other experiences of discrimination I've had in that no one can see I'm an atheist when they look at me. They don't have preconceived notions until I tell them that I'm an atheist. Then, it's just like discrimination for anything else...it's ridiculous, hurtful.

Hence, as reported by Abbott and Mollen, who apply concealable stigmatized identity theory to atheists and nonbelievers, atheists frequently choose to conceal their personal religious views.[46] Certain TCP participants, particularly those in their 50s and 60s, have shared that they opt to delay revealing their nonbeliever status, at least until their retirement. For many, being a religious professional constitutes their sole career, involving special education and a lifelong commitment. Disclosing their nonbelief would entail forfeiting both the material and social support associated with their profession. Consequently, many choose to maintain silence. Many TCP participants also reported fearing ostracism and neglect even after retirement, leading them to prefer not disclosing their nonbelief to those around them.

## *Conclusion*

The findings of this research reveal that clergy undergoing a loss of faith in supernatural assumptions encounter stigma and ostracism, particularly within their immediate family, community, and employment spheres. Consequently, some are compelled to relocate, leaving their homes, cities, and even their countries. These challenges hinder many from openly expressing their nonbelief. Fearing the prospect of social rejection and stigmatization, they often opt for a clandestine existence, concealing their true identity and living as covert apostates.

The key findings of this study are:

1) Prejudices against nonbelievers exist, varying based on geographical context, religious background, and surroundings. The Clergy Project participants reported

46 Abbott, D. M., & Mollen, D. *Atheism as a concealable stigmatized identity*; see also Yeatts et al., *Development and Evaluation of the Atheist Identity Concealment Scale*.

diverse forms of discrimination, drawing parallels with biases identified in previous studies.[47] Those who come out as atheists often face ostracism and stereotypes related to anti-atheist prejudice, such as being perceived as lacking morality and being ethically inferior, thus deemed untrustworthy.

2) Many clergy without belief choose to conceal their stigmatized identity as a coping mechanism against discrimination. Yet, maintaining a concealed identity comes with its own set of challenges, causing significant internal discomfort and stress.[48]

3) The findings support Dennett and LaScola's observations[49] that clergy deconversion has serious consequences for clergy, their families, and communities.

4) Hidden apostasy presents a challenge for scholars to identify and measure such individuals, as they remain hidden from researchers.

I must acknowledge some limitations of my findings. Although I was unable to establish any significant contrast between clergy who remain in the ministry and those who have left, many of those who have departed still conceal their nonbelieving or atheistic identities due to widespread social prejudice and stigma against nonbelievers. This finding in itself is noteworthy, but future studies could explore different angles. Specifically, future research might investigate how former parishioners or ex-believers handle anti-atheist prejudice compared to nonbelieving clergy. Additionally, examining whether there are significant gender differences in this context could provide further insights.

47 Brewster, M. E., Velez, B. L., Geiger, E. F., & Sawyer, J. S. "It's like herding cats: Atheist minority stress, group involvement, and psychological outcomes." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 67, no. 1 (2020): 1–13; Cragun, R., B. A. Kosmin, A. Keysar, J. Hammer, and M. Nielson. "On the Receiving End: Discrimination toward the Non-religious in the United States." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27, (2012): 105–127; Hammer, J. H., Cragun, R. T., Hwang, K., & Smith, J. M. "Forms, frequency, and correlates of perceived anti-atheist discrimination." *Secularism and Nonreligion* 1, (2012): 43-67.

48 cf. Cottee, *The Apostates*; Fader, *Hidden Heretics*.

49 Dennett, Daniel and Linda LaScola, "Preachers Who Are Not Believers," *Evolutionary Psychology* 8, no.1 (2010): 122-150; Dennett, Daniel and Linda LaScola. *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind* (Pitchstone Publishing, 2013).

Previous studies have indicated that men are more likely than women to reject religion or identify as atheists, and that this gender gap is not primarily a result of biological differences but rather important social differences that overlap and reinforce each other.[50] Furthermore, studies consistently show that nonreligious and atheist individuals often have better social standing: they are typically well-educated, higher-income males, primarily white. In other words, these individuals are less likely to experience oppression and thus may not require the support that religion or religious communities often provide.[51] Edgell et al. argue[52] that it is social risk, rather than existential risk, that explains why non-religion, and particularly atheism, are more socially risky for women and other marginalized groups. They contend that when both men and women make socially stigmatized choices, women encounter greater risks than men for making the same choices. In other words, women are more likely to face social consequences for adopting non-religious beliefs, identities, and practices. Future studies would benefit from examining this aspect within the context of nonbelieving clergy.

The creation of organizations like The Clergy Project demonstrates a demand, evidenced by its growing membership despite a policy against active proselytization or advertising[53]. Expanding TCP into different languages (currently existing only in English) could attract and support more nonbelieving clergy worldwide. The research findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the negative perceptions of atheists and the various forms of anti-atheist discrimination they face. It reveals that, in many parts of the world, atheists must conceal their views to avoid hostility. This study underscores that the nonbelieving population, particularly clergy, occupies a marginalized status and requires increased attention from both scholars and society.

50 Trzebiatowska, Marta, and Steve Bruce. *Why Are Women More Religious Than Men?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

51 Brewster, M. E. "Atheism, gender, and sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism,* ed. S. Bullivant and M. Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 511-524; Mahlamäki, Tiina. "Why Are Men More Likely to Be Atheists Than Women?" in *Atheism in Five Minutes,* ed. Teemu Taira (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing. 2022), 105–108.

52 Edgell, Penny, Jacqui Frost, and Evan Stewart. "From Existential to Social Understanding of Risk: Examining Gender Differences in Nonreligion." *Social Compass* 4(6) (2017): 556– 574.

53 Zamușinski, *Understanding the Role of The Clergy Project*, 6.

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# *Art of Ethics:*
## *New Materialism and the Affect of Religion in the Post-Graffiti of Montreal*

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***Abstract***

This article explores the recent flourish of Greco-Roman style post-graffiti that has recently become increasingly common in the Montréal. As the classical Greco-Roman style has historically in Europe and North America represented, what some might identify, as the pinnacle of artistic aesthetic achievement, I argue, through analysis of four case studies, that post-graffiti artists utilize this style strategically, incorporating and appropriating iconic elements of the style in order to comment on the ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism that serve as the foundations of both the fine art world, and other far-reaching institutions of social, cultural, and political power. My analysis of these images centres a new materialist approach to this public art practice by studying the medium of graffiti, the autonomous nature of the post-graffiti work after its completion in the city, and the artists' open access calls to decolonial action. I suggest that these artists aim to subvert the original messages of the Greco-Roman art tradition, instead issuing challenges to include interpretations and interventions that museum spaces have often rejected, overlooked, forgotten, or erased. This contextual subversion allows for audience participation in the creation of the artworks' meaning. Through collaborative interaction with other post-graffiti works by Indigenous artists, the juxtaposition of the Greco-Roman style with works based on traditional Indigenous art styles that comment on historic and contemporary colonial practices, brings awareness to the complex layers of habitation on this land we know as Montréal. The goal of the paper is to show how these figures of antiquity bring new life to the city of Montréal, presenting how power relations between people, things, and land are always in flux, and guiding us live more ethically with care for the world and for one another, if only we take the time to stop and look around.

**Keywords:** Post-graffiti; New Materialism; Land; Affect; Audience Interventions; Thing Power; Open Access

Devan Morrell

## *Introduction*

The category of the western canon is made up of what European and North American cultures consider highly valuable forms of literature, music, philosophy and art. The criteria for this category, also known as "high culture," has standardized, and romanticized, the incorporation of Greco-Roman mythological figures throughout Europe since the second century CE[1] and throughout North America since the fifteenth century.[2] The images of these once religious figures have been filtered down from the "high art" world to "low culture" scenes, such as comic books, websites, music videos, video games, advertisements, and other media. Thus, many people living in the western world today know the names of figures from classical mythology such as Aphrodite, Apollo, and Artemis, to name a few. These figures and their characteristic attributes are integrated into society through cultural references, to the point where people can identify these deities, often without having a formal education in classical studies.

Street art is one example of how the western canon has been adapted by artists and their audiences, utilizing and engaging with Greco-Roman figures in order to comment on contemporary issues. Street art is a difficult term to define; some claim that street art is an umbrella term for all art that is in the public sphere, be it present in the news, in the realm of commerce, or outdoors.[3] For others, it is a deliberate form of public political protest.[4] Additionally, street art provides a public platform for artists who are often excluded from the mainstream.[5] Greek and Roman representations are part of a recent sub-set of this urban art practice. Some may postulate that the incorporation of these icons of the western canon into street art serves to, in a sense, gentrify public art through the reinforcement of western colonial standards of artistic expression, but the inherent

1 Due to the growth of the Roman Empire under the emperor Constantine.
2 When European invasion and colonization of North America began.
3 *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City*, Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilim- pounidi, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 104.
4 Donna "Don" Haden, "Art and Activism: 10 Street Artists Using the Power of Art as a Catalyst for Change," *GraffitiStreet*, August 17, 2022, https://www.graffitistreet.com/art-and-activism-10-street-artists-using-the-power-of-art- as-a-catalyst-for-change/.
5 Haden, "Art and Activism," 105.

flexibility of this medium allows for artists to engage these symbols in ways that challenge the western canon, invoking their cultural capital to advocate for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) and other marginalized communities in Canada. Through its medium, accessible nature, and collaboration with other artworks in the street, Greco-Roman post-graffiti provides a means of dismantling the colonial views of the western art canon. This paper presents four cases studies of Montréal-based street art that demonstrate how a new materialist approach to Greek and Roman post-graffiti street art of Montréal can bring marginalized identities to the forefront of public art by highlighting the affect produced by creative subversions of Greco-Roman art styles and iconography.

## *History and Politics of Graffiti*

The expressive medium of graffiti demonstrates how, in many ways, there has been significant continuity within the western art world since the era of antiquity. While innovative styles have developed over centuries, ever challenging the previous era's norms of artistic expression, many foundational elements of how art is defined and experienced have remained consistent. One persistent pattern of definition art pertains to the creation of distinctions between legal and illegal forms of art. In ancient Greece and Rome, wall murals (along with floor mosaics) were commissioned by wealthy patrons, who paid a specific studio of artists to paint or assemble the buyer's desired works. While domestic architecture was thriving in upper-class circles as a public display, graffiti was, by contrast, an anonymous practice that obscured the all identity markers of the artist, including gender and class. The word "graffiti" is the plural form of the word "graffito" which comes from the Italian word *graffio* meaning "to scratch" or "incise" a text or image into a surface.[6] According to Peter Keegan, graffiti, in antiquity, was a practice of "communicating… non-official… ideas about self and society."[7] This definition is equally accurate today, as graffiti is still often used to directly confront the socio-political agenda of the dominant culture.

6 Scott H. Decker and Glen D. Curry, "Graffiti," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., May 6, 2020), https://www.britannica.com/art/graffiti-art.

7 Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2016), xiv.

Another continuity, from antiquity to the present, is the diverse and wide-ranging techniques of graffiti that can be employed to deliver a message. This includes, "text, drawings and geometric figures, numbers and dates, and simple series of down strokes."[8] Historically, graffiti had two main objectives in antiquity: 1) to express the artist's objects of desire and a plea for it to be actualized, or 2) to demonstrate the artist's qualms and displeasures in the form of curses. Keegan mentions that graffiti encapsulated power; these creative channels were known as apotropaic devices, with graffiti being used as a method of warding off evil, protecting the artists and their loved ones and communities from suffering and corruption.[9]

Graffiti proliferated in many city-states in the ancient world.[10] Despite its pervasive presence, graffiti had a negative reputation, with critics associating the art style with filth, backwardness, and immorality. As such, figures of authority persistently implemented initiatives to deter this type of art, categorizing it as criminal. A proclamation from Rome and Pompeii not only advised against the vandalism of a piece of public property: "Gaius Julius Anicetus, at the behest of Sol, requests that no one inscribe or scribble on the walls or *triclia* [covered, porticoed chamber]," but also cursed the desecrator by noting that, "if someone writes something here, may he rot and his name be pronounced no more."[11] As a result of its continuous negative connotations throughout history, graffiti remains stigmatized. It is apparent that European and North American views of graffiti mirror the way Greek and Roman religious stories are also perceived as inconsequential and devalued in society.

Polytheism and graffiti shared similar connotations; they both threatened the structures of authority within ancient society. Early Christianity was a persecuted tradition; it was a religion that deviated from much of the practices of the past, but it also appropriated various elements of already existing traditions and assimilated them for their own purposes.[12] That said, once it became the dominant

8 Keegan, *Graffiti*, xiii.
9 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 125-34.
10 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 4-5.
11 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 5.
12 Richard King, "Disciplining Religion," *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 36.

monotheistic religion,[13] Christianity considered all forms of polytheism to be heretical, thus reducing them to being known as *paganus*, a Latin term meaning "rustic" or "of the countryside."[14] The word "pagan" also signified people who were not culturally civilized enough to understand the true path to salvation, for they were, and possibly still are by some, said to be too preoccupied with falsely worshipping idols instead of God.[15] Considering that the expression "pagan" was a derogatory term that connoted inferiority, the people of the ancient world did not identify themselves as such. This discrimination created a distinct divide between the majority religion and the minority religion, which in turn established a clear divide between how they saw themselves and how the majority defined them. There were those who were deemed acceptable in society, and the others, who were considered outcasts.

## *Post-Graffiti and Greco-Roman Art*

The cities of Philadelphia and New York saw revitalization of graffiti practices in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Graffiti writing during this time was linked with new ideas surrounding hip-hop; they "render a similar energy and impulsiveness as…battles in hip-hop denote lyrical, musical, or physical competitions with cheap and expressive instruments or sound…while [graffiti] writers battle with spray-paint."[16] The same adolescents, who initiated graffiti to some extent, were the founders of hip-hop and breakdancing as a way to distinguish themselves from the disco movement. Graffiti became closely associated with the musical genre of hip-hop, as both forms of creative expression emphasize spontaneity and fluidity of motion.[17] These groups, often associated with gangs, wanted a visual language of expression that was a form of protest against racial oppression in a way that was anonymous and could be used as a source of personal or group empowerment.[18] Graffiti, to this day, has

13 Groups who believe in the notion of the rule of one God.
14 Owen Davies, *Paganism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.
15 Davies, "Introduction," 3.
16 Anna Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art,* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 56.
17 This, of course, is an overly simplified association of gangs, graffiti, and hip-hop, as these topics are far more complicated than that. Graffiti has always been practiced by a diverse group of nationalities, classes, and a variety of counter-cultural waves of "disenfranchised and rebellious youth." (Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 57.)
18 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 43.

an infamous reputation because of its association with gangs and territorial conflicts, but in reality, it is only one aspect of the global public street art scene in the contemporary world.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, a new form of public street art emerged. This style, known as post-graffiti, is what some see as an intentional move away from graffiti writing. It is distinguished by less of an emphasis on the style and lettering, and more of a focus towards involvement within the city landscape by creating site-specific figures, abstractions, and symbols by combining graffiti materials with "fine art," otherwise known as high culture techniques.[19] Since post-graffiti became more palatable due to its ability to communicate ideas to a wide audience, it was paid for by companies or private business owners to deter illegal forms of graffiti. Consequently, post-graffiti differs from Greek and Roman frescoes, since the location of many of these artworks have been transferred from the interior of a domestic space for the elite to the exterior of local shops and apartment buildings, which can be viewed and admired by everyone. The examples examined in this paper will explore Greco-Roman themes in the streets of Montréal to decipher semiotic hints that strive to unsettle authority and ignite interests in the spectator.[20]

One reason these artists were compelled to depict such characters could be because they were directly exposed to the high art world, and wanted to emulate these classical pieces. However, they were depicting these works in a way that derides or parodies the idealized characters. This is done through the artists' disproportionate dimensions, the conflation of their composition making their works look atypical of the classical style, or through their use or lack of colour. Another reason is that artists encountered these personifications over a number of years through the process of mass media filtering high art into their daily lives. New modes of displaying art objects that were once romanticized are now debasing the value of such canonical images.

19 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 30.
20 Although, Greco-Roman themes in street art have become a global trend.

For this reason, street art, as a channel for popular cultural images, is more likely to be regarded as an activity that is considered kitsch and not valued as art. According to Modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, "the avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similar or originals."[21] In other words, the colours, shapes, textures, and applications of art should be rendered for their own sake, and without any deeper significance or meaning behind them. A good example of the art to which Greenberg refers is abstract art.[22] On the one hand, to him, avant-garde art that is speculative and open to interpretation maintains the spark of art and its discourse. On the other hand, kitsch is art that explicitly demonstrates its content and meaning. It involves mass-produced assembly line formulae and is apparently devoid of any real experience or emotion because it is common and remains stagnant over time. This idea of the "everyday" experience is perceived as harmful by Greenberg – because it does not provoke new thoughts, it is something "true culture" never is and never will be.[23] In the same way, street art, of any kind, borrows and distorts popular culture references to secure its presence and holds the favour of the public in the everyday world.[24] According to Greenberg, such references to popular culture are culturally regressive. Likewise, because Greco-Roman art was used as a subject matter for artworks since antiquity, it now accommodates the likes of the ordinary person. However, I argue that post-graffiti imbeds itself and is taken over by the landscape, thus making it aesthetically valid. As such, it should not be looked down upon for being a part of the everyday for it too shapes our experiences and colours our daily lives. Why must we always look towards the sacred, the sublime, and the avant-garde for pleasure and inspiration? I suggest that we do not need to do so as joy and stimulation already populate our "everyday" world. Additionally, not all post-graffiti is intelligible nor is it always clear in meaning, therefore as per Greenberg's definitions, it satisfies his categorical conditions as *both* avant-garde *and* kitsch.

21 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, 1939, 6.
22 Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 4.
23 Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 10.
24 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art,* 47-48.

Some suggest that Greco-Roman themes in street art demonstrate the ideals of post-graffiti in practice by combining artistic skill with traditional high art techniques. While it is true that many post-graffiti artists pose an active turn away from the signature graffiti styles of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s[25] that revolved around tags,[26] throwies,[27] and pieces,[28] post-graffiti is still influenced by the graffiti style that came before it, and the values associated with graffiti still apply because of its association with counterculture. As Marshall McLuhan famous stated, "the medium is the message,"[29] which, when applied to street art, demonstrates how, when creating a piece of art, the choice of media is an extension of the human psyche. The colours, materials, and techniques used to create the piece of art are instruments of proficiency, both in terms of artistic skill and the knowledge of the social and political issues they present. For many, the medium relays to the spectator the creative and economic status of the artist. Post-graffiti artists often use a combination of conventionally cheap graffiti materials and the avant-garde skills that many of them received through their higher-educational training in the arts. Markers, spray-paint and spray-can nozzles (known as 'tips' or 'caps') can be used and mixed with "oil and acrylic paints, charcoal, posters, stencils, mosaic tiling and even open-source technologies involving lights and projectors," and represent just some of the graffiti materials used in post-graffiti art.[30] Artists may even use craft materials, such as oil-based chalk, stickers, and yarn. The use of such materials prompts some critics to question whether it is possible to make a great piece of art with insufficient means and low standards.[31]

25 During these two decades, graffiti was a form of counterculture for the youth of America.
26 Rapidly completed, invariable presentation of a person's name.
27 Larger, styled, and polychromatic versions of tags.
28 Highly elaborate and impressive tags that are placed in ostentatious locations that take a great deal of time and subject the artist to considerable risk of being caught.
29 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 1.
30 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 19-20; 32.
31 Heather Mac Donald, "Graffiti Is Always Vandalism," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/11/when-does-graffiti-become-art/graffiti-is-always-vandalism.

***Materiality and the Decolonization of Things***

The materiality of post-graffiti harnesses new materialist principles. Materialism, according to the French philosopher René Descartes, implies that the senses seem reliable in allowing humans to discern the truth about the world. However, the senses must be questioned for they occasionally deceive people into experiencing false sensations.[32] In the Enlightenment era, materiality was intended as a secondary vehicle to rationality and intellect for finding spiritual truth. However, the application of these ideals is fundamentally compromised by the reality that human beings are an aspect of the material world which produce the material culture that consumes them and which they consume.

Neo-materialism, now better known as new materialism, was a term first coined in the 1990s by Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti, coincidentally and independently of one another.[33] New materialism is now used as a way to re-read and interpret old texts and artworks in order to create a new and radical form of philosophical thinking.[34] Essentially, new materialism strives to equalize the power dynamics between humans and all other living and nonliving things, including organic and inorganic matter. In other words, instead a hierarchal order that prioritizes the importance and superiority of living things, new materialism orders the value of all things on an identical scale.[35] Therefore, in terms of Greco-Roman post-graffiti, the power of these images allows for the expression of their autonomous nature. According to Bill Brown, objects have no intrinsic value on their own; it is only once they have a use and function that they become *things*.[36] A *thing* is an object with agency and therefore, art (in this case Greco-Roman post-graffiti art in Montréal) has agency because each piece has the ability to transform itself and the space around it. For example, graffiti and post-graffiti is often located in and affected by the rodent- and insect-infested streets, with human and animal

32 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, originally published in 1641, trans, and ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

33 Rick Dolphijn and Iris Van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 19, 38.

34 Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 13.

35 Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things," *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

36 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), 4.

waste, garbage, left objects, extreme weather conditions, and are often associated with gangs, homelessness, and other markers of poverty and violence.[37] Ironically, post-graffiti is also used as an attempt to clean up the streets by beautifying the community through their vibrant colours, narratives, and messages. Seeing these images in real time demonstrates not only the dual realities of the city of Montréal, but also their vitality as active agents in the world, which can often raise awareness to societal issues.

Observing post-graffiti in their outdoor environments enables the audience to see the ephemeral quality of the materials through the slow organic decay or through immediate interventions (be it human or otherwise). Furthermore, Montréal itself serves as an art piece; the city adds character to the images in play with its visual, aural, olfactory perception, and tactile interactive elements. The city also serves as their bearer, and thus takes the brunt of any and all consequences of the images' destruction, either through passive means such as litter, or via active protests by viewers. The evolution of these art pieces will continue to produce an effect as they take on these various transformations of wear, tear, and decay. New materialism demonstrates that art objects can self-organize and evolve autonomously in ways similar to humans. This process communicates how the art piece transcends the artists' goals and attempts to eliminate the gap between human beings, other sentient beings, and objects to create an egalitarian society in which art objects play diligent roles.[38]

Some of the persuasive force behind a new materialist approach for Greco-Roman post-graffiti art may be located in affect theory. Jane Bennett, like Brown, claims that objects when imbued with agency have "thing-power," a vitality that encourages affect (creates emotional influence) through the discharged feelings of shock and insight.[39] It comes as no surprise that people have a strong connection to the objects they encounter on a daily basis. Thus, whether superficial or profound, Greco-Roman post-graffiti in Montréal imposes emotions

37 It is important to note, neither gangs nor unsheltered people equate to the former listed materials or behaviours; these are harmful stereotypes used to justify graffiti and post-graffiti as being destructive and detrimental to the value of neighbourhoods.
38 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 11.
39 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

on people by invading the senses through material, colour, and narrative. These manipulated public happenings, in turn, create an emotional connection or repulsion within the spectator, and lead to responses that are conscious or unconscious, verbal or silent, and physical or non-physical. Sara Ahmed states that when people analyze objects, the emotional response draws the body towards or away from it – a physical response to how the object in question has pleased or dissatisfied them.[40]

Materiality helps the subject to create and engage in a practical yet aesthetic event that demonstrates who people are and how they project themselves, both as individuals and as a collective. On an individual level, viewers may relate with one or more of the artworks' or artists' characters, paralleled circumstances, or living conditions. On the other hand, people may collectively identify with the imitative effects of the art in general, as these pieces are both a model for, and reflection of, the ways in which society bridges the gap between the past and the present, the conventional and the non-conforming. While, to many, post-graffiti will always be stigmatized as outsider art, these artists have made efforts to prove that they aim to incorporate inclusivity through open accessibility and through popular culture as their artworks display integrative ways of demonstrating respect for the natural cycle of an urban environment.

## *Case Studies*

Though post-graffiti is controversial, it is nevertheless a powerful means of bringing people's awareness to the streets and commanding the attention of the world around them. This is done by skillfully engaging with colour, texture, and subject matters with which they are familiar yet take for granted in their everyday lives. As a result, the future of post-graffiti practices rely on the current generation of artists to identify with the movement and the people of their city. According to Jason Botkin of the street art collective *En Masse*, these artists will take action in new and creative ways to respond to and confront serious issues within the public sphere.[41] To this end,

40 Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 30-31, 35.

41 Jason Botkin, "Guest Lecture," *Graffiti and Street Art*, Lecture, Concordia University, Montréal, April 6, 2017.


***Figure 1.*** Dodo Ose - Ashop Collective. *Inclusion*. 2017.

some notable artists are already using unconventional methods to revitalize the cityscape and give fresh meaning to the term street art. Dodo Ose, Mathieu Bories, and Rubén Carrasco along with Damien Gillot are innovating their art by incorporating Greco-Roman themes in their works. While these artists' images share common themes, they are created for their own unique purposes and goals according to the artist's design decisions.

The subject of my first case study ***(fig. 1)*** is the piece entitled *Inclusion* (2017) by French artist Dodo Ose, a member of the *Ashop* and *K6A* "crews." To elaborate on this term, Anna Wacławek states that "crews are loosely organized and function as a peer group of friends who paint together in order to share ideas and innovations, and to aid each other in the field. It is not uncommon for a writer [graffiti artist] to be associated with multiple crews."[42] Born in Lyon, Ose currently resides and practices in Montréal. His interests lay in both the worlds of graffiti and high art. As a teenager, living in Southern France, he acquired a fondness and expertise in graffiti while receiving his education in "Fine Arts in Cannes."[43] He made a name for himself here through exhibitions in established gallery spaces. When he relocated to Canada in 2010, Ose began experimenting with different media to form a unique blend of spray paint and watercolours.[44]

Ose's *Inclusion* is a dramatic piece of art. The audience first encounters two reined, hyper-muscular, winged horses. They are either pushed forward in an act of urgency and support, or held back as a sign of restraint, demonstrating a fear of instability by a male figure in a red garment. The horses are toppling down a fluted Greco-Roman column. The background is bursting with vibrant colours including blue, green, pink, orange, red, and yellow. Theuse of yellow invokes the breaking of a new sun after a time of darkness. The light in the background hints to the audience that the male figure is the sun god Apollo. Here, Apollo is shown with his chariot, bringing the dawn of a new day to the human world. The composition of the piece displays elements of both Realism and Naturalism. It is Realistic because the spectator is clearly confronted with horses and a human body that both appear as they would in the real world, but is also Naturalistic, as the proportions are exaggerated for idealistic and aesthetic purposes.[45] This is demonstrated through a magnification

42 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 26.
43 "Dodo Ose Portfolio," *ASHOP Productions*, accessed May 27, 2020, https://www.ashop.ca/dodo-ose.
44 "Dodo Ose Portfolio," 2020.
45 Steven Stowell, *Medieval Art and Architecture*, Lecture, Concordia University, Montréal, Quebec, September 17, 2015.

***Figure 2.*** *Apollo.* West pediment of the Temple of Zeus. Mid-fifth century BCE.

of both animal and human anatomy, while the grey hue of the bodies imitates ancient marble sculptures, which originally in Greece would have been painted in bold and bright colours.

Apollo was an especially beloved god within the Greek and Roman cultures. He was the god of the sun, music, healing, archery, disease, shamanism, and plagues.[46] While in the Greco-Roman period, Apollo was considered the "aristocratic ideal of vigorous manhood," he was also a protector of women, as is seen in the epic story the *Iliad*.[47] Here, Apollo places a plague on the Greeks for kidnapping the daughter of the Trojan priest, Chryses.[48] Another example is displayed at the temple of Zeus: where a statue of Apollo halts a centaur from abducting and raping women, with his outstretched arm ***(fig. 2)***. Additionally, as Apollo was the god of shamans, he was said to possess both male seers and female mediums. The most famous people he possessed were the *Pythia*, female virgins who became the prophetesses at the Oracle of Delphi.[49]

46 Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth* (Harlow: Pearson, 2015) 168-169.
47 An epic poem in iambic pentameter which is attributed to the bard Homer around the year 800 BCE.
48 Powell, *Classical Myth,* 169.
49 Powell, *Classical Myth,* 177.

*Inclusion*, situated at the streets Décarie and MacDonald, does not directly indicate a decolonial perspective, but the Saint Laurent district, in which it is exhibited, is an area associated with intersectional activist groups and communities, especially those most impacted by and fighting against climate change, housing, and mobility crises.[50] The title of the piece, along with the destruction of the temple column, reinforces the message behind it.[51] As the ancient *mouseion* was the inspiration behind the structure of museums in art, it is not surprising that construction of modern museums (18th century to present day) commonly utilizes Greek and Roman temple structures and decorative motifs for inspiration. While it is true that European empires in the Imperial Age, such as France and England, saw themselves as civilizations marked by progress, they also heavily romanticized and appropriated the achievements of the Greco-Roman past, much like the Romans did with Greek culture.[52]

Basing their own buildings on Greco-Roman architecture accomplished two main goals for European society. First, it elevated the aesthetic perception of the present by emulating the highly-praised styles and techniques of the past. As Europe entered the Industrial Revolution, the rise of material culture, commerce, and consumption brought with it many anxieties around the purchasing and use of worldly goods. Class differences posed a threat to Victorian sensibilities. Initially, museums were spaces made to minimize the hysteria that was thought to come with bourgeois tendencies of acquisition, and became repositories of goods for the European nation, elite or otherwise, since they were accessible to all for public consumption. Museums, therefore, were used to rally and educate the poor; with the working population given access to public museums on weekday nights and weekends, the museum became a moralizing tool to avoid social turmoil or upheaval, and to bring harmony between the classes.[53]

50 Trans. Josée Lafrenière, *On a Just Feminist Ecological Transition in Montréal* (Montréal, Quebec: Conseil des Montréalaises, 2022). Here, I understand the use of the term women to include BIPOC and transgendered women.

51 One could read that the column Ose depicted in this mural is meant to symbolize the museum as an institution.

52 Suzanne Zeller, "Classical Codes: Biogeographical Assessments of Environment in Victorian Canada," *Journal of Historical Geography* 24, no. 1 (1998), 20.

53 Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 25, 27.

The second goal that European appropriation of Greco-Roman museum architecture accomplished was that museums effectively reduced the authority of the church by creating a public place for all denominations to enjoy.[54] Art was, and continues to be, understood as a vessel of beauty and truth that facilitates cathartic release.[55] As society became increasingly secular, museums became a constructed microcosm of universal secular splendor, knowledge, and certainty.[56] Through their grandiose architecture and curious artifacts to connect the heavenly with the earthly realm, museums became places where people could experience the spiritual away from the church. Of course, as England and France invaded and colonized new territories (including North America, and by extension the Montréal area), the peoples of those lands were also subjected to temple architectural aesthetic models of classical antiquity, with their iconic columns, friezes, and decorative motifs. It is important to note that these peoples' cultural, spiritual/religious, and artistic items were also forced into relationship with the imperial museum, as these "exotic" items were stolen or looted by colonizers and sold to museums for display. These items, imbued with cultural and often religious meaning, became fragmented displays of travel and wealth, devoid of their original religious context.[57]

Over time, art objects in the museum became sources of exclusivity and envy. It is because of this shift in priority that museum authorities began changing their policies by limiting public access, creating entrance fees, hiring security, and, in stricter cases, concealing objects and even entire collections from the public all together. The job of the curator became more about the preservation and care of the delicate objects rather than the education for, or contribution by, the audience.[58] As the value of art increased, the public's access to museums became ever more limited and classist. Museum spaces, increasingly, came to be seen as inaccessible for those who "did not have the good fortune to be white, middle class,

54 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 107-8.
55 McClellan, *The Art Museum*, 21.
56 Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 8.
57 William Ryan Chapman, "Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition," *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 22-23.
58 McClellan, *The Art Museum*, 156.

or male."[59] While marginalized and/or racialized individuals were not granted access to these spaces, art produced by those communities remained cherished collection items, demonstrating the "history of colonialism that locates such material almost exclusively in anthropological museums and ethnographic collections."[60] By separating the works from the still-living communities that produced them, museums continued to investigate traditional forms through the Salvage Paradigm, an "anthropological term that describes the notion that it is necessary to preserve the so-called 'weaker' cultures from destruction by the dominant culture."[61] Through this paradigm, Europeans justified their claims to various lands and resources by stating that the natives were lower on the cultural and evolutionary scale. Therefore, Indigenous peoples were considered unqualified to manage their own affairs and, effectively, their own cultural heritage. European paternalism dictated that non-Europeans needed someone with greater knowledge to preserve their culture for them.


***Figure 3.*** Chief Lady Bird and Aura. *Hoop Dancer*. 2017.

59 Linda Nochlin, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews.com*, November 18, 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/.

60 Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, eds., *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization 2002*)*, xiv.

61 Janice Gurney, "The Salvage Paradigm," *Panya Clark Espinal*, 1990, http://www.panya.ca/publication_salvage_paradigm_introduction.php

Ose's work suggests that the Greco-Roman post-graffiti of Montréal can be used to promote artistic multivocality, and as such, can be a useful tool for decolonization when used in tandem with other post-graffiti created by artists of Indigenous descent. Chippewa and Potawatomi artist Nancy King (Chief Lady Bird)[62] and Oneida artist Monique (Mo) Aura Bedard (Aura)[63] ***(fig. 3)***; Red Bandit[64] ***(fig. 4)***; Kanien'kehá:ka artist Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde,[65] Wolf Clan and Tagé Cho Hudän artist Lianne Charlie,[66] Métis-Saulteaux-Polish artist Dayna Danger,[67] Anishnaabe (bear clan) and Sagkeeng artist, Jessica Canard[68] ***(fig. 5)***, and Ojibway First Nation artist Cedar Eve Peters[69] ***(fig. 6)*** are some of the many artists who have created decolonizing post-graffiti in the city of Montréal that speak to Indigenous issues, such as: the epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people[70], historical truth telling, expression of spiritual and cultural practices (such as hoop dancing) and healing, and solidarity with non-Indigenous peoples in creating non-violent modes of resistance and recognition.[71] This plethora of female and Two Spirit[72] Indigenous artists are ritualizing the very landscape by urging people to take notice and invest in the art and the cityscape around them. Métis (*otipemisiw iskwew*) scholar, Zoe Todd, from Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), Alberta, suggests that "material as bridge - between people and non-human agents" creates mutual understanding as one encounters

62 "Chief Lady Bird (Artists) - Strong Nations," *(Artists) - Strong Nations*, accessed April 15, 2021, https:// www.strongnations.com/gs/show.php?gs=6&gsd=6494.

63 Monique (Mo Thunder) Bedard, "About ," MO THUNDER, accessed February 13, 2025, https://mo-thunder.com/about.

64 Laurence Desmarais and Camille Lavirée, "Take Back the Streets," *Canadian Art*, October 30, 2017, https://canadianart.ca/features/take-back-the-streets/.

65 "Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde," *Pacific Opera Victoria*, accessed April 15, 2021, https:// pacificopera.ca/per- son/lindsay-katsitsakatste-delaronde/.

66 Aubryn O'Grady, "Session 4: Keynote," Yukon School of Visual Arts, accessed February 13, 2025, https://yukonsova.net/session-4-keynote.

67 "About," *Dayna Danger*, accessed April 15, 2021, https://www.daynadanger.com/.

68 "April Art Jam: Show and Tell," *Mentoring Artists for Women's Art*, accessed April 15, 2021, https://mawa.ca/ groups/view/april-art-jam-show-and-tell.

69 Alexis Walker, "Cedar-Eve Peters - EncycloFashionQC - McCord Museum," *McCord Stewart Museum - EncycloFashionQC*, February 1, 2019, https://encyclomodeqc.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/entry/cedar-eve-creations/.

70 The social crisis of this systemic violence is often referred to as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit people (MMWIG2S) phenomenon.

71 Lorenza Mezzapelle, "Indigenous Representation through Street Art," *The Concordian*, December 10, 2019, http://theconcordian.com/2019/12/montreal-toronto-street-art/.

72 Indigenous-created umbrella term of identification for historic and contemporary gender diversity and variance.


***Figure 4.*** Red Bandit. *No Silence While My Sisters Suffer*, 2014.


***Figure 5.*** Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde, Jess Sabogal, Elizabeth Blancas, Melanie Cervantes, Swarm, Lianne Charlie, Dayna Danger and Jessica Canard. *Aikako;nikonhraién:ta'ne*'. August 2015.

***Figure 6.*** Cedar Eve Peters. *Honouring My Ancestors.* 2014.

another's enlivened spirit.[73] Post-graffiti reaffirms the vital properties of emotional attachments that help form relationships with, and create interventions in, the urban and natural world. Thus, art and the outdoor environment mingle together like instruments in a musical score to create a symphony between the people and all other non-human natural and human-made agents.[74]

Situated on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation, the island of Montréal is known as Tiohtià:ke in the Kanien'kehá:ka language, and the land has historically been a meeting place for many First Nations peoples.[75] The western art canon, used by settlers since the earliest phases of colonialism, projected their own culturally specific ideals onto Indigenous peoples, lands, customs, and sacred objects. While some may interpret analysis and critique of street art as a continuation of the traditions of the western art canon, many who value and study this medium of artistic expression ground their analysis in explicitly anti-colonial frameworks that

73 Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environment and Epistemology*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (Open Humanities Press, 2015), 248.

74 Unceded Voices, "Decolonizing Street Art," *Art/iculation*, April 7, 2018, http://www.articulationmagazine.com/ decolonizingstreetart/.

75 "Territorial Acknowledgement," *Concordia University*, accessed January 25, 2021, https://www.concordia.ca/indigenous/resources/territorial-acknowledgement.html.

identify the land itself as collaborator in the creation of these artistic expressions. Similarly, our analysis acknowledges that it is only through demonstrating the harm done to the land through graffiti and post-graffiti that we can begin to alter this narrative, and to tell the whole story of Montréal and Canadian history.

While it is beneficial to know the artists' point of view and intentions, in that it encourages the audience to be in tune with the artist's objectives, the role of the audience is to draw their own conclusions about the pieces in question. All forms of visual culture allow for multiple interpretations, and audience interpretation often deviates from the artist's intention by reconstructing the piece's narrative in a way that was neither considered nor intended. This reinvention of the narrative does not render these interpretations less accurate or authentic that the author's original intention. Rather, it brings new insights to the image, and to a narrative that was otherwise thought to have been fixed. Reclaiming narrative through symptomatic (unintentional) and adaptive (altered) readings provides humanity with new models of thinking to demonstrate the dynamics of power, accomplishment, and progression. This authorizes innovative forms of self-representation that Indigenous and other marginalized peoples were denied in the past.[76] Put another way, Greco-Roman post-graffiti artists command recognition from the "high art" world due to their great skill and depth of historical knowledge, and yet, these artists also utilize fine art tropes to critique elitist art institutions. This not only shows that, over time, art loses its value through mass production, as Walter Benjamin proposed,[77] but also that these art forms are no longer on display exclusively for members of elite society. Audience members who would not be able to see such pieces are now being exposed to them. On the one hand, this may invite positive reactions, such as joy, enthusiasm, gratitude for free and open access to these great feats of innovation, scale, and aptitude. While on the other hand, it may also conjure feelings of the opposite effect for the marginalized and settled alike, by imposing feelings of loss, rage, guilt, or fear.

76 H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 98, 99, 101.

77 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) [orig. German version, 1935].


***Figure 7.*** Mateo. *La pomme du savoir.* 2017.

Greco-Roman post-graffiti art provides a hope for new global opportunities, such as supporting and helping to facilitate other polytheistic figures and themes from around the world that have been suppressed. These post-graffiti projects affirm the impact nature and art have on one another and demonstrate the transformative qualities of the landscape. They also highlight the histories and identities of both the artists who created these pieces and residents, in whose communities the art has been created and displayed. As such, Greco-Roman and Canadian Indigenous post-graffiti art perform in tandem to express the complex historical context of the city.

The second post-graffiti piece under consideration, *La pomme du savoir* (2017)[78] is a mural painted by Mathieu Bories ***(fig. 7)***. Born in France in 1985, Bories, who prefers to be acknowledged by his street-art name Mateo, received a Master's degree in Fine Arts in the city of Toulouse. He then immigrated to Montréal where he found work as a graphic designer. Upon his arrival, he decided to pursue art

78 Translated as "The Apple of Knowledge" in English.

as a full-time career, balancing his time between the street art scene and studio spaces.[79] *La pomme du savoir* depicts a monochromatic, statuesque, white female figure with an ancient hairstyle that is curled and attached behind her head. She is wearing a semblance of a *stola* and *palla*, a traditional garment worn by Roman women after the 2nd century BCE. In her left hand, she holds a red apple with an arrow through its core. The background is a mixture of textured patterns and solid colours of purple, black, yellow, gray, and turquoise. The patterns are reminiscent of traditional carpet and silk designs historically made by women.[80] Stencilled, coloured leaves and books are scattered around the central figure. The female figure is a possible nod to Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom[81] since her presence rationalizes the books in the background and relates the piece back to its namesake. However, none of Minerva's attributes, such as her war helmet or owl, are there to distinguish her from her fellow gods. She may, however, also represent the Roman goddess, Venus, through the association with the golden apple that was awarded to her by the Trojan prince, Paris, for being the most beautiful goddess in the world. This narrative is the precursor to the tale of the Trojan War – in exchange for the apple, Paris was promised the most beautiful woman in the world as his prize. This would have been successful if the woman[82] he was guaranteed as a prize was not already married to another man.[83] An additional mishap committed by Paris was his violation of the Spartan-Trojan bond of *Xenia*,[84] that was formed upon Paris' arrival, in Sparta, to claim his reward.[85]

According to the *Religio Romana* (Roman religion), Venus is the goddess of love.[86] The neoplatonic Renaissance scholar and philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, was of the opinion that she is not the goddess of lustful

79 "Biography & Statement," *Mateo Wall Painter*, accessed May 28, 2020, http://www.mathieubories.com/biography.
80 "Biography & Statement," *Mateo Wall Painter,* 2020.
81 Known as Athena in Greek.
82 Helen.
83 Menelaüs.
84 Guest-host relationship made between travellers and locals in exchange for protection in foreign lands.
85 Powell, *Classical Myth*, 551.
86 The Greek equivalent of this goddess is Aphrodite.


***Figure 8.*** Mateo. *La pomme du Savoir*. 2017.

love,[87] but aristocratic love and *humanitas* – the Ciceronian formula for ideal oration. Humanist thinkers believed that their scholarly pursuits maintained a variety of virtues that were satisfactory for both an active public life and domestic private life.[88] Ideally, to embody Venus, a woman would have to be a faithful and obedient life partner to her husband, and provide healthy offspring to increase the wealth of her new family. The association with Venus in this manner could be read as the artist wishing the Jean Talon market well as he brings forth new expressions of prosperity for the city's streets.

The Jean-Talon outdoor market, where *La pomme du savoir* is located, is in the neighbourhood known as Little Italy. The location of the market in relation to the Roman image could suggest that the vendors make daily food offerings to the deity with the laying out of their fresh produce every day. Both Minerva and Venus, with their own narratives and reputations, may be common knowledge for the Italian residents of the neighbourhood, perhaps imbuing a sense of pride in the neighbourhood's cultural heritage. A further explanation of this work is to see the image simply as an allegory for knowledge itself. In this case, it would not be a Greco-Roman

87 This was the domain of her son Cupid, or Greek Eros, after her sexual union with Mars, or Greek Ares. Although Cupid's (Eros') lineage is contested; some claim that Eros in Greek mythology was a primordial god born out of Chaos. Meanwhile, others say he could also be the son of Jupiter (Zeus), or Mercury (Hermes), depending on the source.

88 David Chambers, "A Sophisticated Programme for Botticelli? Letter for Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, c. 1477," *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 97.

image at all, but instead an image that takes familiar iconography from popular culture. The artist is possibly equating an apple with the fruit from the Garden of Eden that provided the first humans in Biblical history (Adam and Eve) with knowledge of good and evil, possibly commenting again on the value, and perceived danger, of intellectual pursuits.

In February 2020, *La pomme du savoir* was altered slightly, not by Mateo himself, but by a graffiti writer who took the liberty of writing "V8" and some other indistinguishable markings in brown spray paint across the lower portion of the image ***(fig. 8)***. The significance of these signs is unknown, but it is clear that that this disruption of the original piece upset many and became all the more urgent as the original mural is a temporary mode of art. Reasons for the destruction or covering up the artists' work can vary. Street art is subject to harsh weather patterns in Montréal, which tarnish or erode it. Often a mural is destroyed due to construction or cleaned away by maintenance workers of the city. Sometimes it is vandalized by other members in the street art world, who sense the work and method of payment is a "way of selling out" to authority. These other members might also want to be seen by the public and associated with street artists' work, though they could also put their signifiers on the wall beside the official piece rather than on top of it. Instead of deterring graffiti writers from writing on the walls, post-graffiti ultimately does the opposite by encouraging it. However, that does not suggest that all additions to street art is collaborative, as some graffiti writers may viewed commissioned street-art murals as acts of invasion, taking up space and the stealing the territory of the local writers – the legality of the commissioned piece throwing into stark relief the "otherness" of non-sanctioned forms of street art. The graffiti writers are, then, enriching the piece by incorporating local marginal voices, adding messages of both repression and resistance to the legal street art, transforming it from a piece that takes up space to a piece that provides space for participation. As of August 2020, *La pomme du savoir* was restored by Mateo, removing all traces of vandalism. It is interesting to note how the artwork had transformed without the artist's intervention, and to hypothesize how much the city around the piece will transform again in the future.

***Figure 9.*** Mateo. *La Nature Sauvage D'Artémis*. 2018.

*La pomme du savoir* is meant to be juxtaposed with another of Mateo's pieces called *La nature sauvage d'Artémis* (2018),[89] which is located in the alley behind the corner of Casgrain and Castelnau (***fig. 9***). Artemis[90] has a sprig of Myrtle wrapped around her right leg. Myrtle is associated with the goddess of the moon and symbolizes her power to both cause epidemics and source healing.[91] She is shown holding her bow tautly, but her arrow is the one that Minerva, Venus, or the allegorical figure holds in her hand. This is why Mateo suggests that these two images should be considered together – not only to create a scavenger hunt in the city to find and bring these two pieces of the puzzle together, but also to show the balance between global disasters that can lead to food insecurity and malnourishment.[92] Someone without the knowledge of Greco-Roman imagery, who walks along the street, meanwhile, may see this image as a warrior woman defending and protecting the natural world. That said, no interpretation is automatically wrong or invalid, even if it deviates from the artist's original intention.

89 "The Wild Nature of Artemis."
90 Artemis is the twin sister and complementary counterpart of the god Apollo. She is the goddess of the moon, hunt, and fertility. Her Roman equivalent is named Diana.
91 "MATEO - Outside Work," *Mateo Wall Painter*, accessed December 13, 2019, http://www.mathieubories.com/ outside#/mural/).
92 "MATEO - Outside Work," *Mateo Wall Painter*, 2020.

It is easy for market goers to (likely unintentionally) benefit from and/or promote settler-colonial conventions of overconsumption, as the market itself promotes a fantasy of abundance without highlighting the labour that produces this fantasy. It is not widely discussed in Canada that a slave market existed in this land for over 200 years. Before the height of the transatlantic slave trade, Indigenous peoples of the Americas were enslaved, forced to convert to the Catholic religion, and were bought and sold by French and English settlers. It was French colonizers who asked King Louis XIV to authorize the enslavement of Africans in New France in the late seventeenth century, as they were already doing so unofficially since the beginning of 1600s. Free manual work was performed both domestically (through cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children), as well as outdoors in fields, forests, mines, and on ships. Many were even forced into trades and craft professions, always at the will of their masters.[93] The systemic racism of the early colonial period continues in the present-day, as demonstrated by rates of food insecurity that disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous families in Canada.

In 2022, according to Food Banks Canada, "39.2 per cent of Black households, and 33.4 per cent of Indigenous households (not including Northern Canada)" were living in food-insecure households.[94] This food insecurity is a consequence and feature of systemic racism in Canada, wherein government and social institutions establish policies, practices and procedures that legally manufacture, make allowances for, and memorialize rampant inequity and injustice that disproportionately affects BIPOC people(s) and communities. [95] These communities are further dispossessed via unfair and unsafe labour conditions in Canada, some of which have been compared to modern-day slavery and/or indentured servitude. Canada has recently come under scrutiny by the United Nations (UN) for the treatment of temporary foreign workers from Mexico, Guatemala,

93 Slavery in Canada was only abolished in 1834. Natasha Henry-Dixon, and Celine Cooper. "Black Enslavement in Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 16, 2016. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-enslavement.

94 "Welcoming Racialized Communities," *Food Banks Canada*, March 20, 2024, https://foodbankscanada.ca/welcoming-racialized-communities/.

95 Corey Mintz, "The History of Food in Canada Is the History of Colonialism," *The Walrus*, March 27, 2020, https://thewalrus.ca/the-history-of-food-in-canada-is-the-history-of-colonialism/.


***Figure 10.*** Carrasco, Gillot, and et. al. *Philopoemen Blessé*. 2016.

and Jamaica who work in the agricultural sector. It has been said that not only do migrant workers fall into debt coming to Canada in order to participate in these work programs, but once they arrive, they experience unsafe and abusive work conditions (including sexually harassment), their wages are often reduced without explanation, and they are subjected to other forms of exploitation.[96] Often the most vulnerable communities, such as migrant workers, refugees and newly settled immigrants, are the communities most likely to experience food insecurity, and so it is possible that *La pomme du savoir* is visually rebuking the market-goers for the abundance of reasonably-priced food that locals and tourists alike can buy from local farmers when as local community members go hungry.

96 Leyland Cecco, "Un Envoy Calls Canada's Use of Migrant Workers 'Breeding Ground for Slavery,'" The Guardian, August 13, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/13/canada-foreign-workers-un-report.

Finally, the piece entitled, *Philopoemen blessé* (Wounded Philopoemen) (2016) is located on Chemin de la Côte-Saint-Paul in the St. Henri district. This mural was created by Mexican artist, Rubén Carrasco, and French artist, Damien Gillot (***fig. 10***). As a child, Carrasco's mother enrolled him in art classes. He had extensive art training in Mexico, where he joined the Visual Arts Institute and the Anahuac University of Cancún, and in Montréal, where he studied at Dawson College and McGill University. The artistic polymath has "worked as a tattoo artist, set designer, muralist, photographer, graphic designer, and digital artist."[97] Fellow artist, Damien Gillot, was born in northern France, and he studied at the Institut Saint-Luc art school in Belgium. Upon arriving in Montréal in 2008, he began to showcase his artworks in various art galleries where he met and worked with a number of Québec artists.[98] Gillot joined the *IPAF Collective,* which is based on Saint-Ambrose Street. This is how Gillot and Carrasco became acquainted.[99] As part of their initiative to give back to the St. Henri district, the neighbourhood in which they both resided, the two artists created this mural in collaboration with the program of the *Carrefour jeunesse-emploi du Sud-Ouest* (CJESO), an organization that holds workshops for the youth of Montréal from ages 16 to 29 in finding employment.[100]

This image shows a male figure with shoulder-length hair and facial hair, with a stylized helmet on his head. Like all the other Greco-Roman images described and analyzed in this article, the figure is painted monochromatically to resemble an aged marble sculpture.[101] Unlike the previous works mentioned, the background of this image exposes the rusty red and brown brick wall. Organized in two rows of four, the only colour featured is the vibrant turquoise used to highlight the rosettes that adorn the face of the figure. A reason for the mural's absence of colour is likely because it is painted on a three-story apartment building. A piece on a building

97 "About Ruben Carrasco," Ruben Carrasco, accessed May 30, 2020, http://rubencarrasco.com/about/.

98 "Biographie," *damiengillot*, accessed August 31, 2020, https://www.damiengillot.com/bio.

99 Justine Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," *Journal Métro*, July 17, 2018, https://journalmetro.com/local/ sud-ouest/1669000/nouvelle-murale-a-saint-henri/.

100 Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," 2018.

101 Aged marble is the neutral color of the marble as it was presented upon acquisition. As time went by, the brightly coloured paints that often covered the sculptures faded away, this is how people see them today.

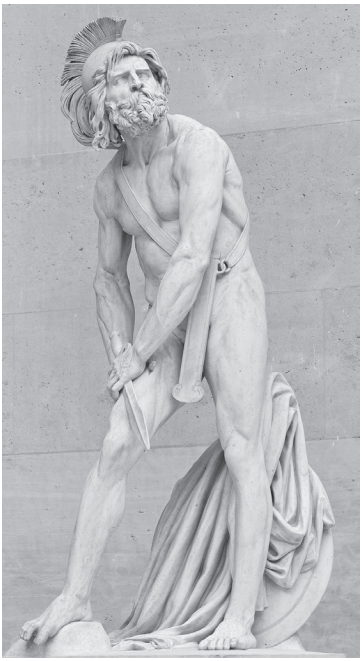

***Figure 11.*** David d'Angers. *Philopoemen*. 1837.

of this relatively small size has likely been commissioned privately by the building's owner, or funded through a group donation made by the residents of the building. The location of this image, suspended above the speed limit street signs, suggests easy access for community members and pedestrians who can encounter the mural on a leisurely walk through the neighbourhood. Pieces like *Philopoemen blessé* have often been commissioned with the intent purpose of dissuading graffiti artists from spray-painting the wall with tags and other graffiti styles. In the graffiti subculture, there are a number of unwritten rules and codes of ethics with which most artists comply. In this subculture, writing over someone else's work is seen as an act of aggression or "war," as the act of covering another artist's work questions the skill and integrity of the other artist. Therefore, murals that cover the entire wall strive to create a more palatable alternative in theory, if not always in practice.[102]

This piece represents Philopoemen, the Greek military strategist of the Achaean League and democratic freedom fighter. Carrasco and Gillot were directly inspired by David d'Angers' *Philopoemen*, which was sculpted in 1837 and now resides at the Louvre (***fig. 11***). As Gillot states, "Au combat, Philopoemen reçoit un javelot en pleine cuisse, mais se relève et y retourne. C'est un peu ce qui se passe avec la gentrification, qui repousse ceux qui ont fait l'âme du quartier. Il leur faut beaucoup de force et de courage pour continuer à se battre."[103]

102 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 27.

103 Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," https://journalmetro.com/local/sud-ouest/1669000/nouvelle-murale-a-saint-henri/. English translation: "In combat, Philopoemen received a javelin to the thigh, but he got up and kept going. This is a bit like what happens with gentrification which pushes back those who made the soul of the neighbourhood. They need a lot of strength and courage to keep fighting."

Thus, as Gillot suggests, this post-graffiti art is meant to encourage a sense of belonging and dignity for the youth of the St. Henri streets. In getting young people to actively participate with the establishment of their neighbourhood through art, the hope is that this will give them a sense of power, and help to nurture an environment built on democratic freedom, power of choice, and the ability to revitalize their neighbourhood. To get their message across, Carrasco and Gillot decided to only paint Philopoemen's head. This decision brings the figure's suffering to the forefront while reinforcing a fervent resolution to continue fighting against oppression. Hence, Philopoemen's heroic actions of continuous battle in life deified him after death. Similar to the Greco-Roman heroes of mythology, his immortal spirit has lasted throughout history, connecting people through shared experiences of suffering and resistance, and inspiring young folks to take action, promoting a sense of personal, intellectual, and emotional growth.

Anti-racism work in the post-graffiti scene is not only the responsibility for BIPOC communities to carry out, as settlers too have a role to play. Without the vocal support of settlers, progress is significantly slowed as money is not raised, change is not seen, and equity is not delivered.[104] Without white voices, transformations that need to happen cannot be done systemically. While settler artists implicitly understand and often participate in their dominant culture, many allied artists have shown that settlers do not have to perpetuate damaging elements of this dominant culture. The style highlighted in this article, this alternative approach to classicism, aims to encourage innovation and experimentation and promotes participation in creating new public narratives. Audre Lorde famously stated that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"[105] and while some may firmly identify Greco-Roman figures and aesthetics as symbols and tools of colonialism, I argue that these case studies use the language the white majority are familiar with in order for the message to be better absorbed by the masses. The strategic use of these artistic styles and images aims to reduce power

104 Nneka Allen, *Anti-Racism in the Workplace* (Lecture, Vancouver: University of British Columbia, July 15-21, 2024).

105 Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 1984, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 1.

imbalances between street artists of different backgrounds through the elimination of competition, and the facilitations of greater contact between dominant and marginalized groups.

## *Conclusion*

Streets are the pathways that direct people and shape the movement of their lives. While streets are just one piece of the urban environment, they are loaded with social and political power. Streets are, in some cases, signifiers of advanced technology, wealth, convenience, and consumption, but also sites of poverty, exploitation, and crime. Classical street art in Montréal displays this complexity of meaning by bringing the pomp and repute of the high art world of the museum into the ordinary lives of the average person. It has become a platform to critique concepts of "high art/culture," and it raises socio-political awareness in the city, spotlighting the needs of the local inhabitants and marginalized communities. These post-graffiti images have allowed street artists to express their thoughts and concerns about issues of social exclusion, economic disparity, and contemporary movements of decolonization to all city residents. In doing so, the art allows for the opening of discussions that at once engage with a global audience and unify local urban dwellers.

Nothing in the artistic landscape of city of Montréal is neutral; its architecture is dominated by Art Deco, Gothic Revival and Brutalist architecture, and other French and English colonial styles that, through banalization, continue to propagate the assumption of Euro-American cultural supremacy. Post-graffiti comments on the banality of the art forms that the dominant culture lauds as setting universal standards of beauty and function, manipulating these "classic" forms to provide new meaning. While Greco-Roman culture was, and continues to be, revered by Euro-Americans, the original religious and societal context has been stripped from these figures and art forms, changing the original meaning to now common assumption that these situated, culturally and religiously specific, figures and forms are now the western canon, the "common heritage" of the West. Religious or not, their power today is valid, authentic, and felt by many by its supporters and critics. Street

art showcases a bottom-up organizational structure[106] and a new universalist approach through artist-artist, artist-audience, and artist-land solidarity through its materiality.[107] Pieces of street art are unique bursts of energy that take the viewer out of their mundane routine, and give them something to be enthused about as we, the viewers, help facilitate and alter its meaning and significance. Street art gives me hope for a more holistically-informed and ethical future as it attempts to unite the world by igniting, or reigniting, a shared love of art, humanity, and the environment in which we all live.

106 This is an open, participatory approach where every inhabitant (no matter how different an opinion or position in life) has a say in the goals of any given society.

107 Boris Groys, "Towards a New Universalism," *E-Flux*, no. 86, November 2017, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/ 86/162402/towards-a-new-universalism/.

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# *Navigating the 'New Normal':*
## *Layers of Relation in Ruth Ozeki's A Tale For The Time Being*

*Fabrizio Lacarra Ramirez, Concordia University*

***Abstract***

Ruth Ozeki's A Tale For The Time Being is a meditation on many things, but most central to the novel's critique of Western epistemological hegemony is its consideration of temporality and spatiality. In the telling of the story itself, Ozeki's narrative bends the rules of time and space, offering the text's characters and the reader an alternative understanding of both real and imagined worlds. Derek Lee examines this aspect of the novel in the article, "Postquantum: A Tale for the Time Being, Atomik Aztex, and Hacking Modern Space-Time". As a piece of speculative ethnic literature, Lee argues, Ozeki's novel "recognizes the influence of classical and quantum mechanics on cultural conceptions of time and space, but it refuses to accept them as the only valid paradigms for representing reality." He refers to Ozeki's text and other work that similarly resist the dominance of Western physics in narrative as the "postquantum novel." It is through the work's status as a postquantum novel that enables Ozeki to explore various layers of relation, those being the relationships between text and its characters, its author, and its readers. Ozeki's work changes and is changed by the real and fictional individuals that engage with it, and provides an illuminating approach for navigating the 'new normal' of our post-COVID world. Coming off the worldwide cultural trauma that this global pandemic has delivered onto us all, this article explores how postquantum literature allows a connectivity between the reader and the wider world that is much needed during the transitional period of recent years and the years that come ahead. The social challenge addressed in this article is that of becoming accustomed to this 'new normal' of our post-COVID world, and how this is aided through postquantum literature.

**Keywords:** Postquantum Novel; Speculative Literature; Epistemological Hegemony; Quantum Mechanics; Zen Buddhism

## *Introduction*

The COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to harm us and our world, ranging from physical damage such as long-term illness to social damage that impacts the way we interact in-person.

Following the crisis, social distancing, public masking, and regular vaccinations became the 'new normal' of our post-COVID world. However, it soon became apparent the linear, capitalistic timelines of the pre-COVID world were still being followed, demanding an "end" to the 'new normal' we have experienced since the pandemic began, and returning to the ways of pre-pandemic. The world we live in now requires radical revision of traditional ways, practices and skills, and, in this presentation, I will present how the genre of postquantum literature encourages such a revision.

Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale For The Time Being* is a meditation on many things, but most central to the novel's critique of Western epistemological hegemony is its consideration of temporality and spatiality. As the title suggests, this narrative offers a message that remains relevant throughout the shifting social and cultural moments of our world. In the telling of the story itself, Ozeki's narrative bends the rules of time and space, offering the text's characters and the reader an alternative understanding of both real and imagined worlds. Derek Lee examines this aspect of the text, arguing that Ozeki's novel "recognizes the influence of classical and quantum mechanics on cultural conceptions of time and space, but it refuses to accept them as the only valid paradigms for representing reality".[1] He refers to Ozeki's text and other work that similarly resist the dominance of Western physics in narrative as the "postquantum novel". It is through the work's status as a postquantum novel that enables Ozeki to explore various layers of relation, those being the relationships between text and its characters, its author, and its readers. Ozeki's work changes and is changed by the real and fictional individuals that engage with it, and provides an illuminating approach for navigating the 'new normal' of our post-COVID world.

Coming off the worldwide cultural trauma that this global pandemic has delivered onto us all, my essay explores how postquantum literature allows a connectivity between the reader and the wider world that is much needed during the transitional period of recent years and the years that come ahead. The social challenge

1 Derek Lee, "Postquantum: A Tale for the Time Being, Atomik Aztex, and Hacking Modern Space-Time," *MELUS* 45, no. 1, (2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlz057.

addressed in my essay is that of becoming accustomed to this 'new normal' of our post-COVID world, and how this is aided through postquantum literature.

## *A Tale For The Time Being* as Postquantum Novel

Before beginning our discussion on the various relationships to the text, I would like to better establish Lee's concept of the postquantum novel. In a continuation of its description, Lee states that the postquantum "views premodern, nonmodern, and non-Western philosophies as equally legitimate systems for interpreting the unfolding of space and time across material and fictional landscapes alike".[2] *A Tale For The Time Being* does this by contrasting the logic systems of quantum mechanics with Zen Buddhism, requiring an acceptance of both in order to thoroughly understand Ozeki's narrative.

While the novel's relationships to quantum mechanics and Zen Buddhism are too complex to summarize neatly, an indicator of Ozeki's value of these logic systems can be observed in their placement within the book's appendices. *Appendix A: Zen Moments* introduces the Zen Buddhist concept of the "moment"[3] as posited by Zen Master Dōgen, using it to illustrate the constant state of change experienced by the universe and everything within. *Appendix B: Quantum Mechanics* follows, briefly detailing how matter and energy behave differently at and below the scale of atoms, and imagining how Zen Master Dōgen might have appreciated quantum mechanics.[4] Chronologically, Ozeki prioritizes an introduction of Zen Buddhism to the reader by having it as the appendices' foremost entry. Although Appendix B advertises supplementary context on quantum mechanics, Ozeki delivers the information through a Zen Buddhist lens, transcending the restrictions inherent to the rules-heavy logic system.

2 Derek Lee, "Postquantum: A Tale for the Time Being, Atomik Aztex, and Hacking Modern Space-Time," *MELUS* 45, no. 1, (2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlz057.

3 In the section titled *Appendix A: Zen Moments*, Jiko Yasutani explains the concept to Ruth in a dream: "*A moment is a very small particle of time. It is so small that one day is made of 6,400,099,980 moments.*" Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 407.

4 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 409.

This is not done with the intention of diminishing the value of Western science; on the contrary, Lee describes Ozeki as offering both logic systems "as equal and entangled approaches for representing space-time. Her goal, clearly, is not to attack Western science but to broaden our field of vision, to recognize its position within a far larger epistemological economy."[5] The intention, it seems, is to establish epistemic diversity, a state that is sorely lacking in contemporary academia's ubiquitous and seemingly uncontested Eurocentric framework.

Researchers like Aaron M. Pallas see epistemic diversity as far enough removed from the norm that they expect novice researchers will have trouble adapting to this broadening of the knowledge landscape. Accepting other epistemes is, of course, not impossible and indeed valuable in expanding our view of the world. *A Tale For The Time Being* asks the reader to be inclusive of both Western and non-Western intellection by assigning equal value to the knowledge of Zen Master Dōgen and the likes of Martin Heidegger, Erwin Schrödinger, and Hugh Everett. Through epistemic diversity, Ozeki's novel meshes two space-time systems which usually oppose one-another in order to make sense of her world.

Shown throughout *A Tale For The Time Being*, unification of these epistemologies allows for a narrative style and structure that could not be explored as well through the exploration of a single system. As a postquantum novel, the narrative is simultaneously influenced by and influences the characters within it, the author of the text itself, and the reader of the text.

## *Characters' Relationship to Text*

As we explore the relationships of Ozeki's characters to the text itself, I would like to establish a naming convention to differentiate between the character and the author. *A Tale For The Time Being* is told through the eyes of the character Ruth, functioning as a self-insert for the author, a crucial factor we will spend more time discussing in the next section. The text operates in unique ways

5 Derek Lee, "Postquantum: A Tale for the Time Being, Atomik Aztex, and Hacking Modern Space-Time," *MELUS* 45, no. 1, (2020): 12, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlz057.

depending on whether the level of relation involves the characters within the text or the actual author of the text. As such, and in much the same way as Schrödinger's cat is both alive and dead before opening the box, Ruth (character) both is and is not the same as Ruth Ozeki (author). To facilitate this distinction, I will hereby refer to the self-insert character as Ruth while referring to the author of the novel exclusively as Ozeki.

Nao and Ruth exist in the novel as entities linked by quantum entanglement, altering each other's realities. Nao is a Japanese American living in Japan and Ruth is a Japanese American living in Canada, both experiencing a similar mourning of their previous geographical location. Nao's grief regarding her displacement from her hometown of Sunnyvale is shared by Ruth in her growing desire to return to New York City; as Jiko[6] would say, same, but different. This entanglement is established when Ruth finds the journal, intimately linking the two characters through Nao's authored text. In this quantum linking, Nao and Ruth reach through space-time to change the other's world through text. Nao's diary begins with the young girl wondering who her reader(s) will be, making a series of 'guesses' about their life, identity, and location that all end up coming true for Ruth: "Do you have a cat and is she sitting on your lap? Does her forehead smell like cedar trees and fresh sweet air?"[7]

At the novel's climax, while Nao is waiting at the train station, Ruth finds the last twenty pages of the journal blank, alluding to the young girl's successful suicide. "It made no sense. She knew the pages had once been filled because on at least two occasions she had checked, riffling through to see if the girl's handwriting had persisted to the end of the book, and indeed it had. The words had once been there, she was sure of it, and now they weren't. What had happened to them?"[8] It is through Ruth's restructuring of Nao's narrative that the story is able to continue.

6 Jiko Yasutani is Nao Yasutani's 104-year-old great grandmother and a Zen Buddhist nun. She serves as a philosophical influence on Nao and Ruth throughout the novel, offering perspectives on time and being that help them better understand their relationships with each other and with existence itself.

7 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 3.

8 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 343.

Unsatisfied with this possible end, Ruth enters the realm of the unconscious through dreaming. Ruth is able to explore the dream lucidly, making the changes necessary to save both Nao and her father. Ruth meets with Haruki #2[9] in a park and convinces him not to kill himself, telling him where Nao is and to support her through Jiko's death. As the scene shifts, Ruth places Haruki #1's notebook in his empty remains box. She awakens the next morning to find the previously blank pages of the journal dense with writing. In dreaming up an alternate reality for Nao, Ruth literally rewrites the conclusion to the young girl's story. Upon reading these 'new' pages, she witnesses the fruits of her labor; Haruki #2 is still alive, having abandoned the idea of suicide in support of his daughter, he is able to find Nao with the information Ruth gave him, and the once-empty remains box of Haruki #1 now contains the journal Ruth placed inside it. Since Nao's journal is a true record of her life, Ruth is not just editing the young girl's story: she is restructuring the narrative to create a reality where the conclusion of Nao's life is satisfactory for Ruth as a reader, for Ozeki as the author, and for the audience of the novel itself.

While this entanglement between Nao and Ruth is vital to the influencing of each other's reality, this relationship is not an exclusive one. Ruth initially perceives an exclusivity between herself and Nao as she begins developing a sense of attachment and urgency towards this young girl and her life. In a very "finders, keepers" manner, Ruth believes that, as the one responsible for the journal's discovery, she must be the ideal reader of Nao's text. The character of Ruth spends much of her arc believing that she is the absolute recipient of the young girl's truth – that Ruth is the 'you' Nao is writing for. This perception is shattered by Oliver[10], however, when he informs Ruth that, through the unintentional circulation of the journal's existence throughout the island, and her intentional requests for others to help

9 Haruki is a name shared by Jiko's son, Nao's great-uncle, and Jiko's grandson, Nao's father. To distinguish between the two, Nao refers to her great-uncle as Haruki #1 and her father as Haruki #2. This distinction is significant in how it exemplifies Nao's regard for both these men, connecting with her great-uncle's bravery at the hands of bullying and disregarding her father for his depression and inability to support the family.

10 Oliver is a fictionalized characterization of Oliver Kellhammer, an environmental artist and Ruth Ozeki's husband. He functions as a support system in Ruth's narrative, guiding her towards terrestrial ways of thinking and serving as a discussion partner on the complicated subject of Nao's journal.

with translating the letters and notebook belonging to Haruki #1, the entire community of people living in and around Desolation Sound have taken part in the reading of Nao's life. Oliver says, "I care about her, too, you know…I've listened to you read the diary, so I think I qualify as part of you by now. And besides, 'you' can be either singular or plural, so how do you know she wasn't referring to both of us from the beginning?"[11] Ruth is not the only 'you'; in truth, every person who contributed to the research, translation, and exploration of the mysterious contents of that freezer bag[12] is the ideal reader of Nao's journal. Any character who engages with Nao's text in some capacity deserves the title of ideal reader just as much as Ruth does.

This entering of the dream world to save Nao and her father is not just one of heroic selflessness or desire for proper closure, but an act of self-preservation too. When Ruth reaches what seems like the end of Nao's writing, Oliver, fully understanding the implications of Nao and Ruth as quantumly entangled beings writing each other's realities, comments on this as a possible end for them as the readers. Oliver states, "It calls our existence into question, too, don't you think? … I mean, if she stops writing to us, maybe we stop being, too."[13] This notion in particular is one that transcends the layers of relation to the text. On the level of characters within the novel, this fear of an untimely end helps convince Ruth to take up her dream quest as we discussed earlier. Oliver helps her understand that her tale is tied to the young girl's, and if Ruth wants a satisfying end to both their stories, she needs to save Nao. What is easily missed in the scene where Ruth keeps Haruki #2 from suicide is the profundity of her plea to him: "She needs you. And we need her"[14] By use of the word 'we', Ruth is obviously referring to the people living in her reality, but in the same way 'you' became an address to many people, 'we' refers to all the readers of Nao's story, including the person reading the novel and Ozeki herself. In a metafictional way, Ozeki as author of *A Tale For The Time Being* needs Nao to survive long

11 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 344.
12 Ruth comes into possession of the freezer bag at the novel's beginning, initiating her strange connection to and obsession with Nao and her life. The freezer bag contains Nao's journal, a packet of letters, and a wristwatch.
13 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 344.
14 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 352.

enough so that she can write a fulfilling conclusion to the novel. To the same extent, the audience also needs Nao to continue living until the author has a chance to deliver a satisfying end to her story.

## *Author's Relationship to Text*

Consideration of *A Tale For The Time Being* as a piece of autofiction[15] is critical to understanding the novel's thesis. Details such as Ruth sharing her name with the author are quite obvious; despite no mention of the character's last name, it is safe to assume her status as a characterized version of Ozeki. However, depending on the version of the text one chooses, and the reader of the text themselves, the vitality of Ozeki's authorial presence may not be so readily apparent. The 2013 Penguin Canada paperback version of this novel makes vague reference to the autofictional on its half-title page, naming British Columbia as one of Ozeki's two domiciles, but avoiding reference to the novel's true setting. Other versions of the novel obscure this detail, refusing acknowledgement of the book's Canadian location, noting the imprecise location of an island in the Pacific Northwest, or framing Ozeki's divided Canadian/US homelife without provincial specification.

It is clear some work is being done to shroud the author's presence within the text. While this is likely a publisher stratagem meant to channel the autofictional as a surprise for unaware readers, the novel's truth is unveiled soon after one begins reading. On page 8, introducing the first section told from Ruth's perspective, the author includes some information regarding Ruth's location; "People were finding them up and down Vancouver Island, washed up on the sand. One had been found on this very beach,"[16] suggesting that either Ruth lives on the named island or the surrounding area. A few pages later, the author narrows the location a bit, adding that Ruth and Oliver moved "to a remote island in the middle of Desolation Sound."[17]

15 'Autofiction' is a form of fictionalized autobiography. *A Tale For The Time Being* falls under this category through the author's insertion of herself and her lived experience into the text, which a fictional narrative is then constructed around.

16 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 8.

17 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 11.

Despite references to these geographical locations throughout, the novel refuses to acknowledge the domiciliary locations of character Ruth and author Ozeki as one and the same.

With such emphasis put towards the actuality of the author's location and time of writing, it is apparent that Ozeki has threaded significant aspects of her lived reality into the text. One such thread key to the complete structure of the narrative is the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, and the tsunami it caused, ultimately responsible for delivering Nao's journal into the hands of Ruth. The novel repeatedly interrogates the speed of this delivery, such as when Oliver says, "All that stuff from people's homes in Japan that the tsunami swept out to sea? They've been tracking it and predicting it will wash up on our coastline. I think it's just happening sooner than anyone expected."[18] In reality, larger objects with high windage could be pushed above the water and began to arrive on the British Columbia coast during the Winter of 2011. According to one report by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), most of the debris from the tsunami consisted of low to moderate windage, which "is transported more slowly and expected to approach the coast of North America during the second half of 2012, through the first half of 2013."[19] Responding to a question about the debris expected to reach Canadian shorelines, the report stated that "most of the low windage tsunami debris will remain in the ocean for many years and collect within an area of the Sub-tropical Convergence Zone referred to colloquially as the "North Pacific Garbage Patch". It is unlikely that debris caught in the Garbage Patch will subsequently reach the coast of British Columbia."[20] While it is unlikely that Ozeki herself found items of a similar size as the journal washed up on the beach at her time of writing, the inspiration for this motif can be recognized plainly in the ocean's transportation of objects across coastlines post-disaster.

18 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 14.

19 Government of Canada, "Transport of Japan tsunami marine debris to the coast of British Columbia: An updated review," Department of Fisheries and Oceans (2013), 1-2, https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.576521/publication.html.

20 Government of Canada, "Transport of Japan tsunami marine debris to the coast of British Columbia: An updated review," Department of Fisheries and Oceans (2013), 2, https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.576521/publication.html.

What does transparent authorial presence achieve for the author? In one capacity, there is a blurring of the lines between Ruth as character existing in a fictional world and Ozeki as author existing in the real world. Ozeki does not simply thrust her personality or mere likeness into the text, but molds much of her fictional world to replicate a large chunk of her own lived reality. It does not take much digging to find documented proof that Ruth's life as depicted in the novel is authentic; an obituary recounting the life and death of anthropological linguist Floyd Glenn Lounsbury reveals that the man left behind a wife named Masako and a daughter named Ruth, the long bio available on her official website, ruthozeki.com, details her marriage to "the German-Canadian environmental artist Oliver Kellhammer,"[21] and even mentions her split residency between New York City and Cortes Island in British Columbia, a part of the Desolation Sound referenced in the novel.

Nao's journal initially seems like a Shishōsetsu, or 'I-novel', in its identity as a piece of confessional literature that features events corresponding to events in the author's life. On further inspection, one might ask, is *A Tale For The Time Being* actually Ozeki's Shishōsetsu? Some may resist this hypothesis, stating that Ruth as depicted in the novel is not exactly the same as the Ozeki of our tangible world. Ruth is not a Sōtō Zen priest, while Ozeki is. The author never found a plastic bag containing the journal of a suicidal Japanese American teenager and the writings of her war hero great uncle (at least to my knowledge), but Ruth does. To this resistance, I ask, how much is required to satisfy you? To what degree shall we scorn the novel's departures when we could instead scrutinize the value present within divergence? To disregard the significance of this notion when the text is built entirely around the frameworks of autofiction and metanarrative is to refuse to interact with the novel on its own terms. As a postquantum novel, *A Tale For The Time Being* inherently resists limited epistemologies.

Approaching Ozeki's novel as a Shishōsetsu presents us with a text that is both fictional and nonfictional (another Schrödinger's cat). As a result, Ozeki is able to fabricate an alternate reality

21 "Yale Anthropologist Floyd Lounsbury Dies at Age 84." *YaleNews*, May 19, 1998. https://news.yale.edu/1998/05/19/yale-anthropologist-floyd-lounsbury-dies-age-84.

that is at once same and different, manifesting the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics through the text itself. In contrast to metanarrative's typical allusion to the artificiality of a work, this text asks the reader to consider its own authenticity, including the possibility that although this fictional world may not resemble our own, it may bear resemblance to some other currently inaccessible truth.

To continue our discussion of the text as autofiction, there is much to say regarding the dual authorship shared by the text's actual author and her self-insert character. Ruth's authorship begins after finding Nao's journal, where Ruth becomes a part of Nao's story, crossing the metaphysical boundaries between herself and the young girl to effect various changes. Ozeki's authorship of the novel begins in a very similar way, as detailed in an interview with PBS Books. She explains her consideration of space-time for an extended period, and that this meditation "somehow, over time, sort of expressed itself in the voice of this young teenager, Naoko Yasutani, who suddenly–and I remember this, it was in 2006–she suddenly started talking to me."[22] Ozeki elaborates by referring to Nao as an embodiment of "the muse" and how the process of writing encourages this muse "to start to speak."[23] Ozeki's personification of the fictional character of Nao fits within the many-worlds theory shared by the novel, especially when she describes the process of understanding this character: "It was almost as though, you know, she was kind of coming through the ether, somehow, and trying to make contact…so I was there to catch her when she came through."[24] What Ozeki is referring to here is inspiration, but one that manifests as a character who aids in the construction of the narrative. Ozeki's creative process for approaching the writing of this text involved the characterization of these complex theories through Nao Yasutani, making them more tangible for both writer and reader. In having a believable

22 Rich Fahle, host, "Ruth Ozeki on 'A Tale For the Time Being' at the 2016 AWP Book Fair," posted April 2, 2016, by PBS Books, YouTube, 2:38-2:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwO2ZQS5L1Y.

23 Rich Fahle, host, "Ruth Ozeki on 'A Tale For the Time Being' at the 2016 AWP Book Fair," posted April 2, 2016, by PBS Books, YouTube, 4:02-4:05, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwO2ZQS5L1Y.

24 Rich Fahle, host, "Ruth Ozeki on 'A Tale For the Time Being' at the 2016 AWP Book Fair," posted April 2, 2016, by PBS Books, YouTube, 4:44-4:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwO2ZQS5L1Y.

character exist as a demonstration of Zen Buddhism and quantum mechanics, the text is able to cut through the abstract limits of the metaphysical to present both these concepts as realistic and valid epistemologies. In a reversal of her self-insert's authorship, Nao is pulled into Ozeki's reality and provides a foundation to author the novel around. Of course, Ozeki wields complete agency over what happens within the novel, operating as author, self-insert, and all the characters she creates. However, the author has no control over what happens outside of the novel, and these real world occurrences have the potential to drastically change the weight of the events in the novel, prompting alteration of the narrative.

The Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011 were a key factor in the narrative restructuring of *A Tale For The Time Being*, originally written and prepared for publication before the tragedy. As Ozeki states in the PBS Books interview: "it just became very difficult to write about Japan because the Japan of…the pre-earthquake, pre-tsunami, pre-meltdown of Fukushima Japan no longer existed."[25] The earthquake had broken the real world, but it also broke the fictional world within the book. The draft of *A Tale For The Time Being* written before the tragedy featured Nao as a central character but was absent of Ruth, Masako, Oliver, and all the other aspects representative of the author's truth. For Ozeki, the broken state of these two worlds, real and fictional, demanded an approach that repaired these fragmented realities by their unification. Through an autofictional approach, Ozeki is able to reach back through the ether as Ruth and make contact with Nao, as she originally did for the author. This manifests in the novel as Ruth rewriting Nao's story in-text while Ozeki rewrites Nao's story in-reality.

Robert Scholes gives an illuminating proposal in his article on metafiction, detailing how "the order of fiction is in some way a reflection of the conditions of being which make man what he is."[26] There is an intimate connection between the forms and ideas that are the core of fiction and the existence and essence associated with being. By this metric, Ozeki's text reveals itself as metafiction

25 Rich Fahle, host, "Ruth Ozeki on 'A Tale For the Time Being' at the 2016 AWP Book Fair," posted April 2, 2016, by PBS Books, YouTube, 7:10-7:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwO2ZQS5L1Y.

26 Robert Scholes, "Metafiction," *The Iowa Review* 1, no. 4 (1970): 101, JSTOR.

through its incorporation of the author's writing process (an experience of being) into the narrative itself (the work of fiction). With the knowledge that she struggled in the writing and rewriting of *A Tale For The Time Being*, it is clear the depiction of Ruth's authorship is a repurposing of the author's reality. Ruth struggles to make progress on her own novel due to factors such as writer's block and a preoccupation with Nao's story. Whenever she does indulge in research related to Nao's life, Ruth feels a dreadful guilt from the lack of work she gets done. She also describes the strange experience of time feeling different when writing, how time just goes by, and the next morning, she finds all this text she does not remember writing. Even the mechanisms of conscious and unconscious inspiration function in the novel through Ruth's desire to make changes to Nao's story, manifesting as dreams where she is, at different times, either in control and out of control.[27] The inclusion of Ozeki's authorship experience in the narrative makes the novel a work that proudly displays its troubled poiesis as deserving acknowledgement. In the authoring of this text, Ozeki's being informs her fiction and, thus, the experience of existence becomes the varied forms the novel is built upon.

Being that the novel's narrative and stylistic structure is dependent on these different layers of relation all operating simultaneously, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to examine the novel's use of perspective. At first look, *A Tale For The Time Being* seems to be a text of two parts: Nao, the writer, and Ruth, the reader. As we explored earlier in this section, however, the text becomes more complicated as we pay more attention to what Ozeki is performing through these varied perspectives. By nature of writing her own experience in her journal, Nao's section is told from the first-person point of view, while Ruth's section is told from the third-person limited point of view as she puts together the pieces of the young girl's story. While these two sections correspond clearly to these two characters, this is not the case when considering the more subtle, structural sections that exist on the novel's periphery. The quotes that accompany each new Part in the narrative (I-IV) are placed there by the author to give context to what the reader

27 Explored on page 5 of this article.

will encounter in the upcoming pages, but to whom do the countless footnotes that populate the text belong? These footnotes appear regularly throughout Nao's section, providing descriptions to words in Japanese, elaborations on complex topics and overall fulfilling the role of the typical footnote. However, these footnotes break the divide between Nao's and Ruth's divergent perspectives by presenting Ruth's voice in the first-person.

# Part I

An ancient buddha once said:

*For the time being, standing on the tallest mountaintop,*
*For the time being, moving on the deepest ocean floor,*
*For the time being, a demon with three heads and eight arms,*
*For the time being, the golden sixteen-foot body of a buddha,*
*For the time being, a monk's staff or a master's fly-swatter,*[1]
*For the time being, a pillar or a lantern,*
*For the time being, any Dick or Jane,*[2]
*For the time being, the entire earth and the boundless sky.*

—Dōgen Zenji, "For the Time Being"[3]

1. Jpn. *hossu*—a whisk made of horse tails, carried by a Zen Buddhist priest.
2. Jpn. *chōsan rishi*—lit. third son of Zhang and fourth son of Li; an idiom meaning "any ordinary person." I've translated this as "any Dick or Jane," but it could just as well be "any Tom, Dick, or Harry."
3. Eihei Dōgen Zenji (1200–1253)—Japanese Zen master and author of the *Shōbōgenzō* (*The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*). "For the Time Being" (Uji) is the eleventh chapter.

The audience can deduce that, as a reader of Nao's text, Ruth is creating these footnotes as a way to expand her understanding of the story, coincidentally helping the reader of Ozeki's novel. But is it really Ruth leaving these footnotes behind, or could it be Ozeki? There is evidence to support both possibilities. The initial lack of footnotes in Ruth's section is strong proof that Ruth is the author of these footnotes as it would be impossible for her to provide information through a third-person perspective. However, as the novel marches on, these footnotes begin to appear in Ruth's section as well. The information relayed in these footnotes indicate a different authorship as they often reveal pieces of knowledge possessed by Ozeki but not shared with Ruth. Most notable is the footnote's reference to the novel's appendices, exhibited in the footnote that reads: "161. For more on the Schrödinger's cat thought experiment, see Appendix E."[28]

The appendices exist within the structure of *A Tale For The Time Being* as a book, and yet, despite this postquantum narrative routinely shattering the boundaries of Western space-time, Ozeki's characters never become aware of the fact they exist within a world of text. Ruth interacts with Nao through her diary, and Nao with Ruth by the same means, but the self-insert doesn't reach through the ether to contact the audience the way Nao does with her reader (Ruth) and her author (Ozeki). As a result, Ruth's lack of knowledge regarding the existence of appendices makes it impossible for her to be the one writing these footnotes. Indeed, Ozeki is the author of the novel's footnotes, and this deception of the audience as to who these footnotes belong serves as another blurring of the lines between character and author.

## *Reader's Relationship to Text*

The reader of *A Tale For The Time Being* is involved in Nao's story in a different way than they're involved in Ruth's story, and different still from their greater involvement in Ozeki's narrative as a whole. Being that Ruth also functions as a self-insert for the novel's reader, the extent of our involvement in her story is in experiencing this fictionalized reality vicariously through her. Nao's story, on the other

28 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 396.

hand, is far more metaphorically captivating. In much the same way as Ruth is pulled into Nao's story through her conscious address of the reader, we are pulled into the text and become a part of Nao's 'you' – her collective ideal reader. By engaging with both Ozeki's text and the text existing within it, the reader joins the ranks of Ruth, Oliver, and all the other people who collectively consume, translate, and interpret Nao's journal.

These two avenues of involvement between the dual primary narratives present in Ozeki's text are distinct from the third avenue: how the reader is involved with the novel as a whole. *A Tale For The Time Being* exists as the culmination of Nao and Ruth's primary narratives while also containing the comparatively shorter but undoubtedly rich secondary narratives that fill the space between. These secondary narratives include the quotes that frame each new Part, sections presenting the translated letters and notebook of Haruki #1, and the appendices that provide insight and context for the novel's more obscure concepts.

Ozeki's entire novel functions as an act of epistemic resistance, using the narrative to take us through their epistemological critique. In viewing the work as a whole, the novel presents two (or more) narratives offering similar but ultimately different perspectives which are equally valuable to the integrity and structure of the text. Just as Ozeki makes equal space for Zen Buddhism and quantum mechanics to coexist, so too does she promote this epistemic diversity through the sharing of narrative space between Nao and Ruth. This request of the reader to see as valid both knowledge systems, to see as valid both Nao and Ruth's stories, is a request for the epistemic justice Lee is talking about. The author implores us, the readers, to consider the legitimacy of more than just the default, widely-accepted Western paradigms concerning space and time.

Ozeki's epistemological critique is presented to the audience through the novel as a proof of concept. It would be a different thing entirely for Ozeki to publish an article advocating for epistemic diversity in contemporary literature without also providing an example of this diversity working to benefit the narrative in any way. By presenting us a narrative whose critical and commercial success is

made in part by a marriage of epistemes, and whose epistemological critique is tethered to the very soul of the narrative, *A Tale For The Time Being* stands as a novel that attempts to persuade its audience to expand their personal body of knowledge.

This layer of relation between reader and text is notably more complicated than other previously discussed relations as each reader brings a unique subjectivity to the novel's reading. This is the case for the relationship between every text and its reader, but is particularly relevant here as Ozeki's postquantum tale puts so much emphasis on the status of the reader. The novel's title is indicative of this importance; as Nao describes it, the Time Being is a being that exists within time, a definition which encompasses all beings that have existed, do exist, or will exist in our reality.[29] Since every reader is also a Time Being, then this novel is a tale *for them*. We are all part of both Nao and Ozeki's 'you', their collective ideal readers. Just as Nao faces uncertainty as to whose hands her diary will end up in, Ozeki has no certain way of knowing who will end up reading her book or for what reasons. Despite that, I cannot help but feel there is something special in my encountering of this novel.

As I am suggesting, the most subjective aspect of Ozeki's metanarrative is the way in which the novel, through postquantum means (ex. Ruth finding Nao's journal washed up on shore in a freezer bag), finds its way into the reader's hands. One could call this unintentional and I could not argue against that, because it is the truth. Ozeki has no intention of delivering the novel into the hands of any specific reader. Like with Nao's journal, the text found its way into the gyres of the literary world, coincidentally happening to drift out of that gyre at the precise time for me to find it, washed up on my metaphorical beach. As such, the reader's relationship (and indeed, *my* relationship) with Ozeki's *A Tale For The Time Being* mirrors Ruth's relationship with Nao's diary.

This novel was presented to me during a course at Concordia University focusing on American Immigrant Narratives, and although our discussion of the text did not explicitly engage with

29 "A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be." Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale For The Time Being* (Penguin Canada, 2013), 3.

its potential for post-COVID healing, my approach to navigating the world was fundamentally changed through this acceptance of diverse epistemes, helping me process the damage of disconnection I experienced as a result of the pandemic. Despite this book's composition taking place a decade ago, and inspired by different types of disasters, the lessons taught to the reader are still relevant in our post-COVID era. It is only natural, then, that Ozeki's post-COVID writing acknowledges her experience of the pandemic through the same epistemically diverse perspective shared in *A Tale for the Time Being*. In a post for online literary magazine, *The Millions*, Ozeki speaks of how the pandemic has affected her process of time and has "smeared discrete experiences into an undifferentiated blur."[30] This post-COVID perception of time bears close resemblance to the depiction of time within the novel, which shifts towards the metaphysical as Ruth internalizes the teachings of Zen Master Dōgen found in Nao's journal. In an article for *The Guardian*, Ozeki shares how mirror zen meditation helped initiate her journey to healing from facial defamiliarization caused by masking and heavy Zoom use. She describes looking beyond one's face to experience their original nature, detailing her technique as she writes, "I turn my attention inward. Little by little, I reconstruct my face, but from the inside: directing awareness to my forehead, my temples, my eyes; becoming conscious, from the inside, of my cheeks, my jaw, my mouth. Breathing and softening all the little muscles, until my face finally relaxes, rests, and rejoins my body, and I start to feel somewhat whole again."[31] *A Tale for the Time Being* emphasizes meditation as a tool for navigating one's reality, and this meditation on the face, an aspect of the self that is essential to social function, serves to aid in traversal of the social landscape resulting from the 'new normal'. We are not being asked to abandon everything we knew before, but our success in navigating this post-COVID reality hinges on our understanding of different epistemologies, different ways of thinking, acting, being, as equal and relevant.

30 Ruth Ozeki, "A Year in Reading: Ruth Ozeki," *The Millions*, December 20, 2021, https://themillions.com/2021/12/a-year-in-reading-ruth-ozeki.html.

31 Ruth Ozeki, "It's been a year since I've been close to a stranger's mouth – can I recover from 'Zoom face'?" *The Guardian*, March 5, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/mar/05/its-been-a-year-since-ive-been-close-to-a-strangers-mouth-can-i-r ecover-from-zoom-face.

## *Postquantum Novel in the Post-COVID World*

As a genre, postquantum literature encourages a level of connectivity much needed post-COVID. *A Tale for the Time Being* arrived on my metaphorical beach through certain circumstances, but not everyone is assigned this text. As such, my presentation of this text to you can be considered the washing up of a freezer bag onto your own beach, endorsing epistemic diversity as a means of healing from and adjusting to our post-COVID world. Proper traversal of Ozeki's novel is impossible without accepting more than the most dominant, Western epistemes, just as proper traversal of our post-COVID world is impossible without accepting the 'new normal' we live in. Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* functions as a reassuring lesson, teaching us new ways to engage with the world and be social, so we are not so lost.

Ozeki attempts to break the mold of what we understand as 'coherent' storytelling and expand our horizons of valid epistemes. By representing a narrative inclusive of both Western and non-Western intellection, the author is able to create a rift between real and fictional worlds, allowing the novel's characters, its authors, and its readers to engage with the text in varied and valuable ways. The marriage of different epistemologies, predominantly Zen Buddhism and quantum mechanics, is exhibited through the relationship between Nao and Ruth, the autofictive presence of the author within the text itself, and its potential to participate with its readership in a way that reinforces its artistic effect. While dominant, Western intellection still has a place in the post-COVID era, knowledge systems like Zen Buddhism give followers and readers tools to navigate our world during these difficult times. The value of other knowledge systems is not in their complete overthrow of Western epistemes; rather, utility comes from using premodern, nonmodern, and non-Western philosophies in conjunction with the currently dominant perceptions of reality and communication.

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# *In Conversation*

# *In Conversation*

*Dr. Chantal Fiola, University of Winnipeg*

Dr. Chantal Fiola is Red River Métis with family from St. Laurent and Ste. Geneviève, Manitoba; she is a citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation. Fiola has previously written two books, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality* and *Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities*, that explore Métis practices of religion and spirituality. She, with Drs. Emily Grafton and Paul L. Gareau, is currently working on the Expressions of Métis Spirituality and Religion Across the Homeland research project. This project, in collaboration with the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR), and in partnership with three historic Métis communities (St. Laurent, Manitoba, Lebret, Saskatchewan, and St. Albert, Alberta), brings together Métis researchers and Knowledge Keepers from across the Métis homeland to share their knowledge, experience, and expertise with each other in order to more fully explore the full breadth of Métis religiosity and spirituality.

*Participants:*
*Dr. Chantal Fiola (University of Winnipeg)* [CF]
*Ellen Dobrowolski (Concordia University* [ED]

[ED] *Please tell me about the ongoing project Expressions of Métis Spirituality and Religion Across the Métis Homeland. How was this project formed?*

[CF] Expressions of Métis spirituality and religion across the homeland is phase three of a larger research program I have been undertaking over the last 15 years. During the first two phases, I focused on Métis relationships with traditional Indigenous ceremonies, such as sweat lodge, Sundance, Midewiwin, smudging, mainly in the province of Manitoba. Our relationships with ceremony, up until recently, have been an understudied and misunderstood topic, even among many Métis themselves. It is an aspect of our

collective history, culture, and identity that has suffered greatly due to colonialism – I have sought to shine a light on the topic and encourage, especially Métis folks to take a closer look.

In this third phase, I wanted to broaden my focus from Métis relationships with ceremonies to include our relationships with institutionalized religion, and our efforts to make this our own. I also sought to broaden the geographic focus from Manitoba to the larger Métis homeland, concentrating on the three prairies provinces.

To form the project, I first reached out to Dr. Paul L. Gareau to ask whether he'd be interested in collaborating on a study. At that point, we hadn't met but I was familiar with some of his work and knew he explored Métis relationships with religion, especially Catholicism. I was right in thinking we'd be a good match and could bring a balanced view to this complex topic. Also, he's at the University of Alberta, and I'm at the University of Winnipeg, so we could lead teams in these two provinces. That left Saskatchewan. After a couple false starts, we were finally joined by Dr. Emily Grafton who is at the University of Regina and has married into the Métis community of Lebret, SK. She has been a wonderful lead for that province.

With our provincial leads in place, each of us relied on existing relationships to connect with a historic Métis community and ask whether they would be interested in collaborating on this study. We have been blessed to partner with St. Laurent, MB; Lebret; SK, and St. Albert, AB. The communities are represented by a Knowledge Carriers Council comprised of two Métis Elders or Knowledge Carriers connected to each community. We have also been working with a Métis Community Liaison connected to the community. We have three partner universities in the institutions where the provincial leads are employed (noted above). We have also been joined by Métis graduate students as a Research Associate and Research Assistants. Finally, we have also been collaborating with the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research in AB. I should also note, our wonderful colleagues from the religious studies units at each university.

[ED] *The project included partnering universities hosting symposia in locations across the Métis homeland. Can you tell me more about the significance and importance of these symposia?*

[CF] That's right; we hosted one-day symposia at the Universities of Winnipeg, Regina, and Alberta. For the symposia, our Métis team collaborated with colleagues in religious studies units in each partner university, namely University of Winnipeg's Department of Religion and Culture, University of Regina's Luther College, and University of Alberta's Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life.

The symposia were opportunities to invite Métis from the focal communities to join with Métis scholars conducting research on this topic or with an interest in learning more about it. Before the symposia, we held community gatherings and encouraged those who participated to also join us for the "academic" gathering. I put quotation marks around "academic" because we purposely push the boundaries of that concept in this project in an effort to build bridges with Métis communities. For instance, we have privileged Métis community involvement throughout the study in an effort to acknowledge and uplift local expertise and knowledge and decision-making.

The robust Métis teams, outlined previously, collectively selected who would be invited to deliver presentations from the responses we received to the Call for Presenters we issued broadly. Together, we determined how to format the symposia, including ceremonial elements such as smudging, feasting and spirit dishes, the presence of wellness workers trained in counselling as well as traditional medicines and ceremony, and, at UW, a designated wellness room should participants want a quiet space to take a break, reflect, smudge, or drink their tea.

While the symposia were open to the general public, only Métis could be presenters. Métis community members, scholars, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, artists, educators, elders, and knowledge carriers generously shared their knowledge and experience. The range of topics was also diverse from scholarly research studies involving considerations of historic and contemporary Métis

spirituality and religion, to harvesting as spiritual practice, to the creation of community-facing programming involving a resurgence of Métis spiritual ways, to narratives on personal spiritual journeys, to a conversational panel of Métis elders and knowledge carriers from different faiths.

Afterwards, a call for chapters was circulated to everyone who presented at the symposia and the community gatherings for an edited collection we will publish. We also hired a local Métis film crew in each location to film the symposia and community gatherings and plan to create a short film on this beautiful project.

[ED] *Can you tell me more about the corresponding gatherings held in Métis communities (St. Laurent, Lebret, St. Albert)?*

[CF] As I mentioned, the symposia were preceded by a two-day gathering in a historic Métis community: St. Laurent in MB, Lebret in Saskatchewan, and St. Albert in Alberta. As with the symposia, the provincial Métis teams were responsible for organizing the gathering in their province. A Call for Participants was physically and electronically circulated in each community in advance of the event. The Knowledge Carriers Council, together with the Métis Community Liaison (who is connected to the community either by residence or kinship), the research assistant students, and the provincial lead decided how to structure the two days, who the presenters would be, and engaged local Métis caterers and entertainers.

The St. Laurent gathering happened first and began with an optional traditional pipe ceremony and eagle fan brushing ceremony led by Kookum Barbara Bruce, a Métis Elder from St. Laurent. It was held on the shore of Lake Manitoba and was attended by a good 40 Métis participants, some for whom it was their first time participating in such a ceremony, and others who are themselves pipe carriers. This ceremony helped us invite our ancestors and Spirit to join us for the gathering but also to seek blessings for the project in its entirety so that the outcomes may benefit the Métis. In an effort to promote balance, Day 2 began with an optional mass at the St. Laurent Catholic church where a homily was delivered by one

of the project Knowledge Carriers, Michael Thibert, a Catholic Métis reverend, who wore a Métis sash visible under his cassock and held an eagle feather in his hand, and introduced himself with his spirit name and clan. Again, we incorporated smudging, feasting, spirit dishes, tobacco ceremonies, and sharing circles.

Topics of presentations varied from community to community, including history of the community, genealogical and familial community research, Elder and Knowledge Carrier panels, storytelling, open mics, and even two community book launches by local Métis authors. There were also cultural workshops on fish filleting, bannock making, Red River cart construction, beading, jigging, medicine walks, and tours of the community, including the cemetery where, inevitably, we found family names across each of the communities, reminding us of the history of mobility of our people along cart and trade trails. Our team noted that our project, which took us from St. Laurent and Winnipeg, to Lebret and Regina, then to St. Albert and Edmonton, was a contemporary reenactment of trails our Métis ancestors would have traveled. Indeed, one hope of our project was to re-ignite those historic relationships between Métis communities.

The community gatherings also had opportunities to participate in research activities such as film-recorded interviews, talking circles, and questionnaires. These sought to gain a better understanding of local Métis experiences, knowledges, and relationships with religion and spirituality. When the events concluded, the provincial Métis teams continued to engage with the stories and knowledge shared across these platforms, looking for patterns and points of significance. Like my previous studies, a prominent theme across the communities is the extensive historic relationship between Métis and Catholicism, including the presence of Catholic infrastructure – like churches, grottos, and the stations of the cross. This strong relationship continues today for some Métis participants; however, another pattern that emerged is an intergenerational decrease in attendance at church and in religious practices with many participants indicating they do not identify as Catholic. Syncretism is another theme, whereby participants discuss their faith as a blend Catholic and traditional ceremonial beliefs and practices. Another

important theme is the increasing number of Métis who describe their faith as primarily involving the ceremonial practices, like sweat lodges or Sundance.

[ED] *Your previous books,* Rekindling the Sacred Fire *and* Returning to Ceremony*, use a unique Métis-specific and community-centered methodology in examining actual lived practices and expressions of Métis religiosity. Can you tell me about how you developed this methodology and why it was so integral to the work you wanted to conduct?*

[CF] My first book, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire*, resulted from my doctoral research 15 years ago. At that time, I struggled to find any Métis-specific methodologies; what I did find were First Nation specific examples, or pan-Indigenous examples. I tried to craft my own approach that I called a "Métis Anishinaabe methodology." It was a weaving of Métis and Anishinaabe world view, teachings, values, and ethics - including the Seven Fires Prophecy, relational accountability, and ceremonial components, such as beginning with a fast, and use of tobacco protocols - with some elements of Western research practices I found useful - such as thematic coding using NVivo qualitative research software.

In my second book, *Returning to Ceremony*, I sought to strengthen a collaborative and community-centred Métis research study and methodology. I focused on six historic Métis communities in Manitoba and hired six Métis community researchers directly connected to those communities by residence, kinship, and/or marriage; some were graduate students and others were community members unaffiliated with academia. I provided some training to ensure we were all on the same page and everyone felt comfortable, for example, interviewing. I passed each of them tobacco and gifted each of them a smudge bundle with shell, sage I harvested, matches and a cloth drawstring bag. They helped design the study, the research instruments; they helped with the fieldwork and analysis, as well as with the presentation of findings in the communities. Through that process, I realized the valuable insight that Métis methodologies can utilize traditional medicines and ceremonies in their own right.

In that study, I adhered to the national criteria for citizenship in the Métis Nation and sought to include participants that met that criteria, are connected to at least one of the six focal Métis communities, and who participate in ceremonies. I also obtained ethics approval from the University of Winnipeg as well as the Manitoba Métis Federation through their Manitoba Métis Community Research Ethics Protocol (MMCREP) which involved, for example, meeting with the Vice Presidents of the regions impacted by my study, their suggestion of an individual for one of the Community Researchers, and their help circulating invitations to attend the presentations of findings, thereby increasing attendance.

It is important to me that my research is grounded in Métis perspectives and community collaboration and that the goals include direct and indirect benefits for the Métis. I have sought to offer examples of Métis research design and methodology and encourage other Métis researchers to also ground their work in Métis-centred approaches. For too long, Métis weren't considered experts in our own knowledges and were excluded from scholarly knowledge creation. Métis centred approaches privilege our culture, values, and goals which can help to strengthen the Métis nation, especially during these volatile historic times.

[ED] *Your current project,* Expressions of Métis Spirituality and Religion Across the Métis Homeland*, seems to employ a similar methodology, though I imagine there are significant differences given the scale of the project. Could you tell me about how this current project differs from your last two books and how you and your team considered and developed this new methodology?*

[CF] The idea for this study took shape during my previous study which focused on Manitoba Métis communities. With the new study, I sought to expand the geographic boundaries from Manitoba to the larger Métis homeland (focusing on the three prairie provinces), and from a focus on Métis relationships with ceremonies (like smudging, sweat lodge, Sundance, and Midewiwin), to also consider Métis relationships with institutionalized religion.

I spoke earlier about how the team was formed and the historic Métis communities were selected, and that the 20-member team of Métis knowledge carriers, community liaisons, research associate/assistants, and provincial leads are the decision-makers for the study. We drafted a Memorandum of Collaboration that each partner university signed acknowledging the Métis leadership and decision-making of the study, and that the university partners agreed to support the study, including with resources.

Unlike my previous study, after careful deliberation, the Métis team decided not to involve any Métis provincial governments, including seeking ethics approval from them. Reasons for this included MMF President Chartrand's public denial that Métis spirituality includes ceremonies, and the fact that, at that time, the Métis governments were suing each other. Our team decided that the safety of our participants was paramount and that it would not have been safe to expect these bodies to collaborate.

Importantly, we nonetheless have taken utmost care to prioritize our ethical responsibilities. In addition to obtaining ethics approval from all three universities, we understand that the Métis Knowledge Carriers Council and the Métis Community Liaisons, who represent the partner Métis communities, help our project to proceed in ways that centre relational accountability. The provincial leads also take direction from the team; we mobilize and facilitate their guidance. We have kinship and relational responsibilities to these communities that persist beyond the conclusion of the study – for example, St. Laurent is my mother's community. I will always be a descendant of that community and want to do right by my relatives; indeed, I have dedicated my life to serving my nation.

[ED] *Could you comment, in general, about why the development and use of Indigenous-specific theory and methodology is important to the study of religion?*

[CF] Like most fields of study in academia, the study of religion has historically been developed by Europeans (then European-descendants) and has excluded Indigenous people,

perspectives, and knowledges. Just take a look at the established canon of literature and publications in this field. My own scholarly background is in Indigenous Studies; unlike my colleague Dr. Paul Gareau, I am not a "religious studies scholar." From the little I have seen of that discipline, it retains a "Western" focus, for lack of a better term, and does not center Indigenous knowledges or scholars. Some disciplines have been better than others in making space for Indigenous ways of knowing and scholars. I'm not sure if Religious Studies can claim to be among the disciplines who are actively prioritizing this. I am grateful that my colleague and friend Paul has been so diligently offering his knowledge, expertise, and efforts to this and uplifting Métis perspectives on Métis religiosity. He has a Métis heart of gold and prioritizes kinship and relational accountability above all else. I hope his discipline is listening and learning from him.

[ED] *Similarly, could you comment on how religious studies, as a field of study, can be employed to support and strengthen expressions of Indigenous nationhood/peoplehood and sovereignty?*

[CF] The discipline of religious studies would do well to acknowledge it was built largely upon white settler colonial perspectives and these remain dominant within it. The discipline could also be honest about the ways in which these patterns continue to be replicated and privileged in the field of study in the present date. Take stock of how many religious studies scholars identify as Indigenous, how many courses in these departments are dedicated to Indigenous perspectives and are taught by Indigenous people. Religious studies departments and scholars can ask themselves what they are doing to make space for Indigenous perspectives? What resources are being dedicated to nurture and uplift emerging and established Indigenous religious studies scholars? What does the culture of religious studies units look like today – who are the decision makers and what values and goals are centered? What do relationships between religious studies and Indigenous communities look like? Are reciprocal relationships being built and maintained?

Religious studies scholars and departments could also actively acknowledge that non-Christian religious traditions and spiritualities are valid in their own right and that Christian religions *are not superior* to any other traditions. Endeavouring to understand and be honest about the ways in which the discipline has participated in epistemic violence against Indigenous knowledges and spiritual traditions is also important. How does this continue today? What efforts is this field of study undertaking to make amends, to reconcile, to step aside so that Indigenous scholars can lead the way in terms of Indigenous knowledge creation and promotion. This is not a free pass for settler religious studies scholars to not participate and expect Indigenous scholars to do all the heavy lifting and assume all the emotional labour of decolonizing the discipline of religious studies. We need settler scholars who put their hands to this work in supportive ways (that don't try to take over) and aim to be allies.

Collectively, these efforts could go a long way to support Indigenous knowledge creation and sovereignty, and strengthen Indigenous spiritual traditions and resurgence.

[ED] *Could you discuss the role and importance of studying religion in Indigenous studies?*

[CF] I'd first ask what is meant by "religion." Is it meant to encompass Indigenous spiritualities? Or does it focus specifically on institutionalized religions and Indigenous peoples' experiences with them? In our present study, we explore *spirituality and religion* and do our best to avoid a binary by recognizing that Métis experiences, resistance, adaptation, intergenerational transmission and evolution, and syncretism all complicate these core concepts and relationships.

In my view, Indigenous studies would do well to welcome and encourage these topics in all their complexity while prioritizing the views and experiences of Indigenous people and communities. Something similar could be said about Religious studies. Indigenous scholars and researchers should be prioritized in teaching, research, and publication in these areas. Comparatively, there are still so few Indigenous scholars in academia that non-Indigenous faculty

members and contract academic staff end up teaching Indigenous spirituality courses, sometimes for a decade or more. And while some might be wonderful allies with a decade of participation in ceremonies, student course evaluations still indicate (at least the ones I've received) a preference for Indigenous topics to be taught by Indigenous scholars. If a majority of Indigenous courses in an institution are taught by non-Indigenous instructors, much is lost in terms of authenticity, nuance, and lived experience. It also means non-Indigenous instructors are making money off, and sometimes building a career on, Indigenous knowledge and experience, when those privileges aren't being accessed by Indigenous people.

I'm not suggesting non-Indigenous folks shouldn't engage with Indigenous topics; I'm encouraging individuals, departments, and institutions to consider the dynamics noted above and take steps to ensure Indigenous voices are being privileged whenever possible.

Of course, the topics that any given department can teach and research will be limited by the number of instructors, contract academic staff, and regular academic staff they have, as well as the area of expertise these individuals possess. Being honest about present limitations is a good idea, as is developing a plan to address the limitations. I may have gone on a tangent with this question but it's what came to mind!

[ED] *Is there anything else you'd like to share about current projects, and/or the relationship between Indigenous studies and Religious Studies?*

[CF] A year and a half ago, I began serving in a senior administration role at the University and the demands on my time have been nearly all-encompassing. I've had to get creative to find time to continue working on my current (beloved) study and a few other existing commitments, like evenings and weekends. I don't want my life to consist only of work – I also have family, community, and ceremonial commitments. I continue to strive for balance. Sadly, it has meant I must decline most

public speaking invitations, and limit my efforts at publication. Perhaps when my current cross-provincial study gets closer to completion, I'll have time and energy to dream up my next project.

[ED] *Do you have any messages for Indigenous scholars who want to research their own religious traditions?*

[CF] Religion and spirituality, especially in one's own communities, can be pretty sensitive topics for a number of reasons: the legacy of colonization; historic outlawing of Indigenous ceremonies and consequences that continue in the present day; differing opinions by various Indigenous individuals, including Elders and Knowledge Carriers, about which topics are appropriate or not to study in academia, and who should be studying them. Depending on which topics are being pursued, the potential for spiritual consequences and repercussions should also be considered.

I encourage Indigenous scholars to consider these angles; sometimes the historic moment or the individual's or community's circumstances might mean the time isn't right. If your desired research involves community, whether your own or another, seek to involve them (perhaps via community reps like a project council) as early as possible (like during the brainstorming stage) and during the various stages thereafter. Keep in mind that Indigenous communities are often over-researched, stretched thin (especially in the era of Indigenization and Reconciliation!), and too often exploited. Co-creating meaningful and reciprocal collaboration that works towards shared goals is paramount. So is proper compensation. If you're a grad student have don't have funding, be honest about this, and get creative with gift giving. If you're able to secure funding, offer compensation for as much as possible, not just honoraria to attend a workshop or gathering, but also for zoom participation, time spent brainstorming, and even time for email correspondence.

Other important considerations are Indigenous data sovereignty, acknowledging co-creation of knowledge and outputs, and, if possible, creating opportunities for co-publishing or co-presenting at conferences. Internal university funding and external grants need

to catch up on this, as it remains challenging to find funding sources who recognize what I've noted above instead of saying those types of expenses are ineligible. I think things are getting better in that realm, perhaps with the exception of securing funds for community collaborators to join on the conference circuit (assuming, of course, this is something they want to do). Institutions and funders still have work to do here.

[ED] *And for those who want to potentially publish that research?*

[CF] If you've done community-based research, be sure to obtain consent from them. Again, depending on the topic, there may be aspects of the topic that require more safeguards than others. Some information can be shared widely, while other information might best remain within the community – honouring their decisions is paramount. This might be made trickier if not everyone agrees – often they won't! Endeavouring to reach a consensus where everyone's integrity remains intact is also important. Be clear about intentions and expectations all the way through.

Maintaining good relationships, even after the conclusion of a study, is perhaps the most important consideration when doing Indigenous community-based research. This is true whether you are an insider or an outsider to the community you are working with. Indigenous community talks; if you behave unethically as a researcher, your reputation will precede you should you seek to continue doing community-based research. Practice humility, otherwise, community will humble you. This doesn't need to be scary or a deterrent; it's a way for community to protect itself (especially considering historic and ongoing exploitation at the hands of researchers). If you make a mistake, acknowledge it and apologize – depending on the severity of the mistake, you may need to put effort into re-balancing your relationships. Community will see and appreciate the effort you put in.

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# *Book Reviews*

# *Patriots without a Homeland:*

## *Hungarian Jewish Orthodoxy from the Emancipation to Holocaust.*

*Jehuda Hartman. Translated by Shaul Vardi. Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2023. 402 pages. USD$149.00 (hardcover) / USD$149.00 (eBook).*

How does one demarcate acculturation from assimilation? How to understand the spectrum between loyalty to the state as construed by Jewish tradition,[1] and cultural-national identification of religious minorities as part of modernity? Jehuda Hartman helps us consider these questions in his monograph, in relation to Jewish communities of Hungary and its borderlands from the mid-19th century until the sudden crescendo of the Holocaust in 1944. With his careful reading of Hungarian Jewish journalistic sources and rabbinic responsa, he reconsiders the denominational boundaries of schismatic Hungarian Jewry in light of accommodations with modernity and a contributionist sense of acculturation to the emergent Hungarian nation-state.

With reference to important works in the historiography, in the introduction Hartman parses Hungarian-Jewish history as a 'reverse whiggish' narrative, from a 'Golden Age' to catastrophe. Through his expansive definition of Hungarian Western / Modern Orthodoxy, he indicates that his argument is to reconsider the dividing line of Hungarian Jewry (especially in the realm external to religious observance proper) as being between the ultra-Orthodox and all others. In doing so he employs Shulamit Volkov's intra-Jewish delineation between "those who were willing to participate in the 'modernity project' and those who were not willing to do so."[2] Hartman revises the standard historiographical interpretations of Shimon Dubnow and Jacob Katz who draw the dividing line between Orthodoxy and Neologue assimilationists.

1 Regarding loyalty to the state as a social contract, Sean Remz, "The Hungarian-Jewish Social Contract, Its Rupture, and Jewish Death Rituals" Past Imperfect 23 (November 2021). https://doi.org/10.21971/pi29378 https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/pi/index.php/pi/article/view/29378

2 Hartman, *Patriots without a Homeland*, 14.

In the Introduction and first two chapters of Part I (on Orthodoxy and Hungarian Nationhood), the author convincingly compares the development of Jewish denominational difference in Hungary with Germany, in response to state demands of modernity. Hartman stresses that the greater demographic weight of Orthodox Jews in Hungary allowed for the unprecedented step of institutional separation of Jewish denominations as of 1868, whereas in Germany a sense of *Ahavat Yisrael* (unconditional love of one's fellow Jew) allowed for a basic unity between Modern (Neo-) Orthodox and Reform. Meanwhile, the social contract of patriotic Jewish assimilation in the Hungarian state was heightened (even in comparison with Germany) by the fact that Jews were helping Hungary modernize simultaneously. Although this was most explicit with the Neologue reformers, it parallelled the patriotism of the Modern / Western Orthodox, and even had the corollary of the ultra-Orthodox using the Hungarian language more than was necessary for survival.

Hartman notes a consistent pattern of Orthodoxy opposing new developments for Jewish civil rights (1867 emancipation, 1895 reception) only based on anxiety over the lowering of social boundaries and its corollaries for strict religious practice. After these rights—especially emancipation—were granted, Orthodox rabbis expressed post facto appreciation.[3] He is astute in parsing Chaim Sofer's nuanced, pragmatic explication of the difference between Jewish diasporic loyalty to a host state (as per *dina d'malkhuta dina*—"the law of the land is the law") and Jewish identification with its nationalism, deemed to be both ethnically based and historically contingent.[4] Chapter 2, "The Good Years of the Monarchy", addresses the myriad demands of Hungarian acculturation in this time of 'tolerant nationalism,' and how the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox rose to the occasion in creatively addressing them, especially vis-à-vis language / education policy and the liturgical honouring of Habsburg royalty. The three chapters following Chapter 2 constitute a salient thematic excursus from the otherwise chronologically structured Part I. Chapter 3 explains the denominationally distinct and intra-Orthodox variable parameters of Hungarian acculturation

3 Hartman, *Patriots without a Homeland*, 99-102.
4 Hartman, *Patriots without a Homeland*, 53-54.

based on language, name, and patriotic mythmaking at the time of the 1896 Hungarian Millennium celebrations. The subsequent chapter explores the hitherto understudied link between Orthodox patriotism towards Hungary and different forms of engagement with Zionism. Chapter 5 uses rabbinic responsa and Orthodox press to indicate their (historiographically unexpected) cordiality with Hungarian Christians. Chapter 6 describes changes in Orthodox Jewish Hungarian identification after World War I and the Treaty of Trianon, including the ascendance of Jewish and Zionist political organizing in the borderlands that was previously unthinkable given their Magyarized national symbiosis. Hartman attempts to prove that, although attenuated, Jewish patriotic identification with their Hungarian homeland remained rather stable during the interwar period, even on the cusp of World War II.

Part II is broadly concerned with the historical evolution of Hungarian Orthodoxy's responses to antisemitism, expounding upon the traditional formulation of exilic punishment ("because of our sins"), its gradual change through interactions with modernity, and a comparative portrait with Neologue liberals who consistently took great offense at any antisemitic insinuation. The formal split between Orthodoxy and Neologue also manifested in the former sometimes ascribing antisemitism to the hyper-assimilation of the latter, and Neologue questioning the patriotism of the Orthodox, who were clearly able to demonstrate their full Hungarian patriotism and acculturation. (In the years before the Holocaust, there were some resurgences of a traditional formulations of suffering in the context of patriotism, even by some Neologue and non-polarized Orthodox rabbis.) Chapter 9 makes sense of Jewish responses to Magyar antisemitism, differentiating between apologetic, activist, and "common front" approaches, while also emphasizing the end of World War I as the turning point when Modern Orthodox Jews tended to react more strongly and patriotically against antisemitic press and rhetoric. The final chapter unpacks the Orthodox institutional / press discursive strategies (invoking European Enlightenment and its hypocrisy; law and order, etc.) among its adherents as well as the wider Hungarian-Jewish / Hungarian public.

*Patriots without a Homeland* makes a major contribution in revising the 'standard' historiographical view that the Neologue and Orthodox denominations were ineluctably different in their attitudes towards the Hungarian public / nation-state. Hartman reads critically into the historiographical and Zionist-pedagogical motivations of Jacob Katz's 'standard' view, claiming that Katz may have believed that Orthodox-Hungarian patriotism was mere lip service. He provides enough evidence to convincingly argue that this was not the case, particularly for the Western / Modern Orthodox stream that Katz does not seem to formally distinguish from the Eastern / Ultra-Orthodox. Hartman is painstaking in explicating intra-Orthodox distinctions and tensions, even between the Ultra-Orthodox. But perhaps there could be more use of memoiristic evidence in doing so, and assessment of the role of class difference in mobilizing Hungarian language use and patriotism.

Sean Remz
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# *The Threshold of Dissent:*
## *A History of American Jewish Critics of Zionism.*

*Marjorie N. Feld. NY: New York University Press, 2024. 288 pages. USD$30.00 (hardcover) / USD$30.00 (eBook).*

On October 27th, 2023, during Friday rush hour, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a Jewish anti-Zionist advocacy group, organized a sit-in at Grand Central Terminal in New York City to demand a permanent ceasefire following the onset of Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Reportedly attended by over a thousand people, the demonstration made international headlines as perhaps the largest act of civil disobedience seen in the city since the Iraq War.[1] Images circulated widely of *kippah*-clad protestors raising "Never Again for Anyone" banners over the concourse, whilst hundreds of others donned black shirts with a now-commonplace "Not in Our Name" slogan imprinted on either side.[2] In response to this as well as other actions in the United States following the October 7th attacks, Jewish organizations have sought to marginalize and vilify pro-Palestine Jewish activism as unrepresentative of the (putatively Zionist) American-Jewish populace. Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), has reiterated this sentiment across numerous X (Twitter) posts and professional addresses, labelling JVP, for instance, as a fringe, radical, and extremist hate group, "the photo inverse of white supremac[y]" who "indisputably and unapologetically denigrate and dehumanize Jews."[3]

1 An estimated 400 protestors were detained following the demonstration, see: Democracy Now!. 2023. "Hundreds Occupy Grand Central Station to Demand Ceasefire in Gaza." Democracy Now!, October 30, 2023. https://www.democracynow.org/2023/10/30/grand_central_protest.

2 Haaretz. 2023. "U.S. Hits Iranian Targets in Syria; 6 Injured in Missile Strike on Egyptian Red Sea Resort." Haaretz, October 27, 2023. Accessed 1 May, 2024. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-27/ty-article-live/u-s-hits-iranian-targets-in-syria-6-injured-in-missile-strike-on-egyptian-red-sea-resort/0000018b-6ef4-d572-ab9b-7ef5e2190000?liveBlogItemId=528229512#528229512.

3 Graubert, Jonathan (@JGreenblattADL), 'Who in their right mind can watch Hamas terrorists commit atrocities, brutally murder civilians, kidnap children & elderly, & then protest Israel's right to defend itself.…', X (Twitter), 18 October 2023: https://web.archive.org/web/20231019113912/https://twitter.com/JGreenblattADL/status/1714791772860072161; Greenblatt, Jonathan. 1 May 2022. "Remarks by Jonathan Greenblatt at the ADL Virtual National Leadership Summit." Anti-Defamation League. Accessed May 30, 2024. https://www.adl.org/remarks-jonathan-greenblatt-adl-virtual-national-leadership-summit.

It thus appears, at least to the Jewish mainstream, that the very nature of Jewish life and futurity is (once again) in peril – though this time as much from within as from without. That spectral 'continuity crisis' of twentieth-century intermarriage and assimilation[4] has given way to a fracturing internal battle scene against an insurgent – and, by practically every indication, rapidly growing – political bloc grounded in a rejection (or at least questioning) of the centrality of Zionism in the construction and delimitation of contemporary Jewish life.[5] Indeed, as Marjorie Feld's brilliant new study *The Threshold of Dissent* declares, unconditional support for the state of Israel has become a seemingly incontrovertible hallmark of American-Jewish identity and political life. Yet underneath this putatively uncontested consensus in the present-day, she argues, rests a largely invisible – in fact *invisibilised* – historic genealogy of intracommunal debate and opposition on the question of Israel from even the earliest stages of the Zionist movement. Utilising an impressive range of archival sources (pamphlets, surveys, speeches, letters, minutes, and magazine articles) to limn this historic tradition from an arguably deliberate effacement, Feld demonstrates not only the breadth and diversity of anti-Zionist activities in the United States across a nearly century-and-a-half-long period, but additionally highlights its increasing censorship and marginalization by mainstream organizations seeking to unify political consensus on Israel, testing the limits of discursive acceptability (that 'threshold of dissent') and demarcating the boundaries of Jewish communal belonging.

Book sections are arranged in rough chronological order, and weave in roughly equal measure the activities of individuals within larger organizational programs. Chapter 1 focuses on the early anti-Zionist ideologies emerging within the American Reform movement in the late nineteenth century. Despite largely abandoning these principles by the 1930s, organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the American Council for Judaism maintained

4 Berman, Lila Corwin, Kate Rosenblatt, and Ronit Y. Stahl. 2020. 'Continuity Crisis: The History and Sexual Politics of an American Jewish Communal Project'. *American Jewish History* 104 (2–3): 167–94. https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2020.0017.

5 For expanded discussions of these trends, see: Magid, Shaul. 2023. *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance*. First. Brooklyn: Ayin Press; and Omer, Atalia. 2019. *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

considerable force in Jewish institutional life, articulating explicitly non- and anti-Zionist visions of American Jewish identity well into the postwar period. Though often tacitly acknowledging the value of a creating a Jewish religious and cultural centre in Palestine, these predominantly rabbinic organizations were nevertheless fearful for what a growing Jewish nationalism would spell out for American Jewry. Some figures, such as Irving Reichert, worried that an exclusive focus on Zionism would drive Jews away from religion, becoming "spiritually bankrupt" in the process of nationalist revival.[6] Other anxieties stemmed from how the explicitly nationalist contours of political Zionism sought to dominate and effectively flatten intra-Jewish communal discourse into a singular, unified voice; while others similarly questioned how Jewish nationalism would derail the considerable incorporative strides they believed American Jews were gaining as a community of faith, grounded in universal 'Judeo-Christian' ethics. As one 1919 Committee pamphlet forcefully declaimed, "America is our Palestine, Washington our Jerusalem"[7]. This early form of anti-Zionism was thus understood and envisioned as a clear and necessary expression of American patriotism; that is, as an integrative mechanism from which to transform and reposition Jewishness onto the 'right' (and undoubtedly *white*) side of the American colour line.

What emerges in this opening scene is fraught and ambivalent political terrain which ultimately foregrounds the inextricability of Jewish politics – whether Zionist or anti-Zionist, internal or external – with the politics of American race.[8] Indeed, while not explicitly mentioned in her introduction, Feld's concern with US racial history (including, as above, its more unsavoury, non-progressive instantiations) constitutes a central throughline throughout her analysis, representing an equally important and revelatory intervention of the book in tandem with her wider project of historical

6 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent,* 33-34.
7 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent*, 20.
8 See Brodkin, Karen. 1998. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press; Goldstein, Eric L. 2008. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. 3. print. and 1. paperback print. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press. For a wider focus on the historic development of Jews and race, see also Hart, Mitchell Bryan, ed. 2011. *Jews and Race: Writings on Identity and Difference, 1880 - 1940*. The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry. Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press.

recovery. Chapter 2 analyses both the anti-Zionist strains of the (perhaps to some more familiar) Jewish Labour Bund and Yiddish left[9] alongside mainstream Jewish engagements with the US Civil Rights movement. William Zukerman, a Yiddishist and journalist who in 1957 described American Jewish religiosity as "machine-gun Judaism"[10], lambasted what he saw as a terrific double-standard of their support for the Law of Return in Israel and subsequent dissent for the 1952 McCarren-Walter Act in the United States[11]: "How can the American Jewish Congress and other outspoken Zionist organizations honestly fight segregation in the South," he argued, "if opposition to integration of Jews with non-Jews is the basic principle of Zionism?... Is then religious and national segregation better than racial segregation?"[12] For this rebuke, as Feld explicates, Zukerman sustained significant ire, surveillance, and censorship from both the Israeli and American-Jewish establishment, who collaborated to delegitimize him as a dangerous fringe figure, identifying the threshold of dissent in the earliest years of Israeli statehood.

Though such strong statements may have overlooked Jews who did work in social justice, Feld explains that by the 1960s American Jewry had largely began to take an inward turn, withdrawing from a once pronounced position in US social activism as perceptions of Israel's increased vulnerability emerged following the Six-Day War. Thus Feld argues that figures like Zukerman "identified early the role that American Zionism might play in diminishing the commitments of American Jews to progressive coalitions."[13] In Chapter 3, Feld notes it was at the very moment where movements such as Black Power began to link their own oppression with Palestinian and other global, anti-imperial struggles (particularly those in Vietnam and South

9 Initially developed in pre-war Eastern Europe in the later fomented across US urban centres with a strong Jewish working class, these movements, profoundly influenced by socialist and Marxist thought, were less invested in genteel American integration so much as they sought autonomy and protections for Jews *wherever they lived* through revolutionary class struggle. This preliminary political vision, Feld notes, yielded a range of responses to the emergence of Zionism, particularly following the Shoah. On one hand, many leftists saw Israel as a potential site of Jewish worker's liberation. Others, however, strongly opposed Zionism as an extension of British imperialism, as a threat to Jewish diasporic cultural vibrancy, or as a distraction for Jews from working on justice in their own countries.

10 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent,* 79.

11 The 1952 Act severely restricted immigration from non-Western countries through the introduction of a national quota system.

12 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent,* 79-80.

13 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent,* 84.

Africa) that American Jews increasingly (and following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, overwhelmingly) accepted Zionist conceptualisations of Jewish identity, thus dissolving what had previously been a historically meaningful and robust Black-Jewish alliance.

While historical imaginations of a swift and clean fracture between these groups has been already complicated, Feld breaks new historiographic ground by focusing instead on the breadth of Jewish responses to anticolonial activism and counterculture – particularly by leftist and liberal Jewish groups like the Radical Jewish Alliance, *Jewish Currents* magazine, and the Brooklyn Bridge Collective – as well as the subsequent reactions by mainstream American Jewish organizations such as the ADL and Jewish Defense League.[14] Readers will be impressed by the sheer variety and depth of these ideological commitments (which, through a variety of communal and historical mechanisms, have been largely concealed) ranging both in their allegiances to Zionism as well as their respective understandings of Jewish cultural and religious identity.

Though many of these movements may not share the same (or even similar) political visions to today's growing Jewish anti-Zionism, their inclusion herein is nevertheless crucial in charting alternative historical pathways that move away from a presumed Zionist consensus. In other words, they are necessary precisely insofar as their marginalization helps chart out the processes and concerted efforts on the part of the American Jewish establishment to marginalize and silence criticism of alternative perspectives across a long period of time. In this sense, Feld not only writes a social history of Jewish-American anti-Zionist critique (largely through the lens of race), but crucially offers a historiography of the discursive power of modern American-Jewish institutional life. Across the entire book, Feld locates an ever-narrowing and intensely policed threshold of Zionist dissent. As Chapter 4 illustrates, this forced Zionist consensus reached its zenith by the 1980s, a period wherein Jews demonstrated a rightward political shift wherein "most American Jews…. [b]elieved Israel ensured Jewish life, safety, and survival, and

14 See Dollinger, Marc. 2024 [original 2018]. *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*. Revised edition. Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History. New York: New York University Press. See also

that Israel's survival depended on unconditional American Jewish support."[15] Consequently, groups such as the New Jewish Agenda who were heavily critical on the mainstream establishment's control over American Jewish communal life and argued for a "right to differ", nevertheless found themselves unable to explicitly engage Zionism or anti-Zionism into their respective vision. Indeed, it would take until the early 2010s until a demonstrably public Jewish anti-Zionist bloc would yet reemerge and reach its zenith.

While works on Jewish anti-Zionism are no doubt growing in number, their respective philosophical[16], theological[17], political[18], or anthropological[19] scope limit the extent to which the present (and perhaps especially the present moment) can be theorized as a historic — as opposed to mythic — development. Indeed, as Feld notes in her introduction, with a few notable exceptions[20] the history of this social-political movement has not been readily considered in American-Jewish historical study – a field which is itself largely culpable in the creation and of a historically secure and monolithic Zionist consensus.[21] Feld thus offers a crucial, path-breaking, and rigorously executed piece of historical scholarship that can only serve as the theoretical and methodological grounding for all subsequent explorations on the subject. Such future projects may pick up upon some of the spaces which are either peripheral or otherwise absent in Feld's works, including: its aesthetic expression (here one thinks of Allen Ginsberg as a supreme example), as well as queer-Jewish and Jew-of-colour anti-Zionist formations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which have increasingly struck the ire of the Jewish organizational mainstream.

15 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent*, 175. Feld attributes this shift in large part to President Ronald Reagan's support of Israel (and the subsequent majority-Republican Jewish vote in the 1980 federal elections) as well as Israel's centrality in the newly minted alliance between Jews and an emergent Evangelical Christian political bloc. See Ari'el, Ya'aḳov. 2013. *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*. The Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History. New York: NYU Press.

16 Graubart, Jonathan. 2023. *Jewish Self-Determination beyond Zionism: Lessons from Hannah Arendt and Other Pariahs. Philadelphia*: Temple University Press; Pianko, Noam. 2010. Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn. The Modern Jewish Experience. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

17 Magid 2023.

18 Beinart, Peter. 2013, The Crisis of Zionism. New York, N.Y.: Picador,

19 Omer 2019.

20 Rovner, Adam. 2014. *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands before Israel*. New York: NYU Press.

21 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent*, 4.

As Feld remarks throughout the monograph, every subsequent generation of Jewish anti-Zionist dissenters has believed themselves to be the first to question unconditional Jewish support for the State of Israel. Works such as *The Threshold of Dissent* provide a crucial and urgent historical aid to think through and reassess the present moment by placing its torrid dynamics within a complex, uneven debate characterised by varied modes of toleration, marginalization, or complete suppression across one century. Perhaps more crucially, it may reorient Jewish communal discourse toward a deeper appreciation of the breadth and diversity of Jewish life and thought. As Feld concludes, "supporting unquestioning loyalty to Israel, in part by marginalizing dissent, has, for a century, made it more difficult for American Jews to reconcile their Jewishness with political commitments to social justice… [T]his [has] ultimately weakened Jewish communal life and the prospects for Jewish belonging, particularly among younger Jews."[22] It is here, at the nexus of a dawning political horizon, from which *The Threshold of Dissent* helps orient and expound.

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22 Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent*, 209.

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