Featuring essays by
Mallory Hennigar  Laura Moncion
Maxwell Lanocha  Rachel Rosenbluth
Kaitlin D’Avella  Julia Yudelman

Editor-in-Chief
Natalie Gershtein

Associate Editors
Abbie Buckman  Mallory Hennigar
James Farr  Jasmine Lefresne
Ryan Healey  Avian Tang

Design Editor
Ryan Healey
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter from the Editor</td>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gandhi’s Ramila: Interpreting an Indian Nationalist’s Political Use of the Ramayana</strong></td>
<td>Mallory Hennigar</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceiving the Body of Chinese Buddhism</td>
<td>Maxwell Lanocha</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Freedom</td>
<td>Kaitlin D’Avella</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderless Humanity: Christ as Mother in Julian of Norwich</td>
<td>Laura Moncion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting the Seeds of Change: The Jewish Framework for a Sustainable Food System</td>
<td>Rachel Rosenbluth</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory in Practice: Comparing Essentialist Ecofeminism and Advaita Vedanta as Sources of Aid for India’s Forests</td>
<td>Julia Yudelman</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Editors and Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With pride and admiration for each individual who took part in the creation of this journal, I thank you for picking up this book and welcome you to begin perusing its pages. *Canons*, the Undergraduate Journal of Religious Studies, is in its eighth edition, circulating throughout McGill University’s Religious Studies community. I am happy to report that this year’s edition has expanded in size, as the editorial team has managed to publish an additional paper, bringing this edition to include a total of six essays.

I have been a part of *Canons* for the past three years and in that time have witnessed its rising trajectory. In my first year I was told that the journal did not make it to the publishing stage. Now, four years later, not only has it remained consistent in its yearly publication, but the quality of academic work has spiraled higher and higher each year. This is in part due to the prestige and high standard set by each preceding editor-in-chief and editorial board, coupled with the ambition and proficiency of the students at McGill who submit their work year after year.

Last year we were forced to turn away many wonderful papers, publishing a total of five student-written works. With this in mind, *Canons* aimed to publish one extra paper this year, pulling together funding from various outlets available at McGill. We received the greatest number of submissions to date, totaling at around 50 papers. I could not be more sincere in expressing how difficult it was to turn down some truly well written and unique works.

However difficult it was to narrow down our selection, the editorial team was thrilled to be able to select papers among such a wide array of exceptional topics. The published papers this year scan the religious field, while simultaneously tying together many important contemporary issues.

We begin with two papers focusing on two major eastern religions: Hinduism and Buddhism. First, we showcase Mallory Hennigar’s “Gandhi’s Ramlila,” a paper that includes innovative research – never-before-done – about Mahatma Gandhi’s political twist of the epic Hindu narrative, the Ramayana. Next we move into Maxwell Lanocha’s “Conceiving the Body of Chinese Buddhism,” a nuanced paper outlining the self-immolation practices found throughout Chinese Buddhist traditions. Our third paper, “Religious Freedom” by Kaitlin D’Avella, explores religion through a macro lens, analyzing the freedom of religious choice on a global scale, both theoretically and practically.
The next two papers take a look at two western religions: Christianity and Judaism, respectively. “Genderless Humanity” by Laura Moncion draws upon a creative examination of Christ as Mother in Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*, exploring the concept of God whilst transcending categories of gender. Fourth in our line-up this year is Rachel Rosenbluth’s “Planting the Seeds of Change.” This paper thoroughly delves into the ethical and legal implications of modern-day food systems through the lens of Jewish law. Finally, we close our journal with a comparison of Essentialist Ecofeminism and the Hindu school of thought of Advaita Vedanta. Julia Yudelman’s “Theory in Practice” provides an overview of the destruction of India’s forests and hypothesizes Advaita Vedanta as a more viable option for addressing the current major eco-crisis in India.

Ranging in themes from the environment, sexuality, human rights and freedom to self-sacrifice, epic narratives and historical figures, this year’s edition of *Canons* exemplifies the diverse nature of Religious Studies at McGill University. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the editorial board and each author for contributing their efforts to making this journal the highest quality I have seen yet. It has been my honour and privilege to work with such talented, hard working and charismatic individuals.

Finally, I wish to take a moment to commend the faculty and staff within the Religious Studies department. The magnetism and passion that our instructors and professors bring to their work is truly inspiring. The FRS community has helped to make the beautiful Birks Building a home for many students, and I have no doubt that McGill’s Religious Studies program will continue to compel new students to explore the limitless investigations that can be found therein.

With warm wishes,

Natalie Gershtein
Editor-in-Chief
*Canons*, 8th Edition
GANDHI’S RAMLILA
Interpreting an Indian Nationalist’s Political Use of the Ramayana
MALLORY HENNIGAR
Gandhi’s *Ramlila*: Interpreting an Indian Nationalist’s Political Use of the Ramayana

**Abstract:** The Ramayana, a major Hindu epic that details the battle between the righteous king Rama and the demon Ravana, has been associated with South Asian politics from the 12th century. While scholars have acknowledged that Mahatma Gandhi had a particular fondness for the Ramayana, his use of the tale in his political rhetoric has largely been overlooked. By sifting through the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, this paper seeks to uncover how Gandhi was able to use the Ramayana to promote his ideologies of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and civil resistance (*satyagraha*). Despite the fact that, at the most basic level, the story does not appear to support these values, Hindu Nationalist groups use it today to successfully promote and sanction violence. Gandhi’s references to the Ramayana in speeches, published articles, and private letters effectively communicated his political agenda through methods of reenactment and embodiment of the story and its characters, thereby creating a mutually constructive relationship between the Ramayana story, the imagined space of the nation, and the citizens. Gandhi retold the Ramayana as a foundational national myth by imagining India as the land of the Ramayana, the plot as the story of nation’s road to independence, and the characters as the models of Indian citizens. Thus the Ramayana tale gains yet another life in Mahatma Gandhi’s political retelling.

As Sheldon Pollack illustrates in his seminal essay “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” the Ramayana narrative has been deeply connected with Indian politics since the twelfth century (Pollack 157). At its most basic, the Ramayana is a classic tale of good triumphing over evil, making it conducive to divisive political agendas. A contemporary example of this is the Hindu Right’s appropriation of imagery and rhetoric from the Ramayana to incite violence and exclusionary politics against Muslims. However, the Hindu Right were not the only Indian nationalists who used the Ramayana to forward a political agenda; the nationalist rhetoric of Mahatma Gandhi was saturated with references to the Ramayana. In contrast to the Hindu Right, Gandhi used the Ramayana to promote his ideologies of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and civil resistance (*satyagraha*), despite the fact that in many ways the story seems to contradict these values and is successfully used to promote and sanction violence today. Gandhi used the Ramayana to communicate his political agenda through the reenactment and embodiment of the story and its characters, thereby creating a mutually constructive relationship between the Ramayana, the imagined space of the nation, and the Indian citizen. The central aspect of this reenactment is the direction of Gandhi himself, who interprets the story and its implementation in the future nation.

The importance of the Ramayana to the formation and dissemination of
Gandhi’s politics is undeniable. Phillip Lutgendorf begins his essay “Interpreting Ramraj” with a discussion of Gandhi’s political use of the Ramayana, recognizing that Gandhi would often quote Tulsidas’ Ramcharitmanas in speeches and letters. Lutgendorf notes that on at least one occasion Gandhi said that the Non-Cooperation Movement was inspired by Sita’s resistance to Ravana (Lutgendorf 253). Indeed Gandhi proclaimed himself “a devotee of Tulsidas from [his] childhood … [who had], therefore, always worshipped God as Rama” (CWMG 83:235). Lutgendorf argues that one of the most important aspects of Gandhi’s Ramayana-inspired rhetoric was his use of the term Ramarajya (the rule of Ram) “to articulate his dream of an independent India, often equating it with or preferring it to the term swaraj (self-rule)” (Lutgendorf 253). Gandhi’s use of Ramarajya in place of the more secular term swaraj is rife with contradiction, and was opposed by other leaders of the Indian revolution (Lutgendorf 254). Gandhi’s critics questioned the productivity of using an ancient religious story as a way to imagine the future independent India, arguing that it would be more appropriate to leave the past behind and embrace a new secular future.

Lutgendorf tries to reconcile these contradictory views by arguing that though other Indian nationalists found it problematic, Gandhi idealized Ramarajya because he recognized the ability of the Ramayana to speak to the vast majority of Indians (Lutgendorf 254). While this is an important aspect of why Gandhi used the Ramayana, it only partially explains why he found it to be such a powerful vehicle for communicating his political vision. One of the most effective and consistent methods that Gandhi used to communicate his political philosophy was by physically embodying his idealistic principles. This was not a mere strategy, but also arguably a reflection of the way he understood the world to work. In his book Gandhi’s Body, Joseph Alter demonstrates how developing one’s morality and maintaining one’s health were intrinsically linked in Gandhi’s philosophy, thus explaining the importance of Gandhi’s preoccupation with his diet, exercise, and bodily functions (Alter 6-7). Maintaining brahmacharya (celibacy; self-control) and encouraging the youth to lead a life of self-restraint was a method that Gandhi used to fight for independence; as Alter says, “Gandhi pointed out that it was possible to treat a disease of the body politic only by first healing oneself” (Alter 23). Therefore, his concern for his own bodily functions and actions, as well of those of others, was synonymous with his political activity and concern for the future of the nation.

Lisa Trivedi describes another way that Gandhi sought to purify and free the nation by controlling his body, along with the bodies of the nation. Gandhi encouraged the citizens of India to participate in building and reclaiming the nation through the production and use of khadi cloth (Trivedi 21-2). For Gandhi, what

---

1 In this paper, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi will be cited using the initials CWMG followed by the volume number and the page number separated by a colon. This system is modeled after the system used in Alter’s Gandhi’s Body.
made *khadi* such a powerful national symbol was that it was “a tangible object that could bind people together through the common experience of labor performed on behalf of the nation” (Trivedi 96). Thus, like *brahmacharya, khadi* cloth became a physical manifestation of morality that people could incorporate into their bodies as a way of participating in nation-building and resistance. Gandhi communicated and understood his political concepts by physically enacting them, demonstrating the inseparability of mind and matter in his philosophy.

In order to grasp the full force of Gandhi’s use of language from the *Ramayana*, it must be understood in terms of his pattern of manifesting political ideals in material realities. When asked to describe what Indian independence would look like, Gandhi said “the independence of [his] dreams means *Ramarajya*” (*CWMG* 84:80). By equating *swaraj* with *Ramarajya*, Gandhi transformed an abstract concept into a concrete image of the future that could be shared to create, in the words of Benedict Anderson, the imagined community of the nation. However, understanding his references to the *Ramayana* as mere illustrative examples does not capture the ways in which he completely reconstructed the story to highlight how the setting, events, and characters of the *Ramayana* were reflected in India’s contemporary struggle for independence.

Gandhi’s reinterpretation of the *Ramayana* story is premised on three major points that all serve to establish his implicit argument that every citizen of India could and should work towards achieving *Ramarajya*, and thus *swaraj*, by modeling his or her own life on the examples found in the tale. First, while Gandhi denied that the events portrayed in the *Ramayana* occurred in history, he still managed to establish a link between the story and the geographical landscape of India, setting the nation as the scene for a potential reenactment. Second, he drew comparison between the contemporary state of affairs in India to those found in the *Ramayana* in order to encourage the plot of India’s story of freedom from the British to occur in the same manner as Sita and Rama’s freedom from Ravana. Lastly, Gandhi asked the people of India to ensure his vision of the future independent nation as *Ramarajya* by encouraging them to take on the roles of Sita and Rama. Thus, under his direction, Gandhi believed that India would achieve nationhood when members of the nation took their places in his *Ramlila* of national proportions.

**Setting the Scene: Geography, History, & Literal Interpretation of the *Ramayana***

A central concern for contemporary Hindu nationalists is the establishment of a sacred geography in India and its protection from foreign influences (*Bacchetta* 236). By claiming the Babri Masjid as a marker of the birthplace of Rama and therefore “an illegitimate space, [and] as a symbol of Hindu domination and thus Hindu male humiliation,” the Hindu nationalists were able to charge the site with political and religious meaning (*Bacchetta* 279).
While it is largely accepted by scholars that a historical Rama was probably not born in the present day Ayodhya, some archaeologists have nevertheless tried to establish proof that a Ramjanmabhumi temple existed before the mosque (Thapar ix-xiv). By arguing that the Babri Masjid marked the place where Rama was born, the Hindu Right promoted the belief of the Ramayana as an account of actual historical events and that Rama himself was once an actual king.

_Gandhi & History._ Gandhi did not take such a clear stance on the issues of history and geography. For the most part he dismissed the possibility of a literal reading of the Ramayana. For instance, he was unwilling to accept that a man with ten heads, such as Ravana, could have existed in reality (CWMG 10: 205; 31: 159). However, in some instances Gandhi was hesitant to outright deny the possibility of Rama’s existence, as can be seen in this letter to a disciple:

> Fiction means an imagined story. It is beyond doubt that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have less of history and more of imagination. They are both sacred books; tens of millions of people look upon them _as more than history_, and rightly. Maybe there was no brother of Rama exactly like Bharata, but there have been such Bharatas at any rate in India and that is why Tulsidas could conceive one. It is to the Bharata depicted in the _Ramayana_ that Bharavarsha pays homage (CWMG 13: 43; emphasis mine).

In this quotation Gandhi did not directly question the existence of Rama, but whether Bharata was actually his brother. Additionally, his assertion that the texts are “more than history” can be read in several ways; texts can include embellishments on real history, or they can be considered more important or relevant because they are not pure history. He presented the idea that while perhaps Bharata did not exist as Rama’s brother, men like Bharata must have existed else Tulsidas would not have known to write him that way. Thus, in this formulation, fiction must be partially based in truth for it to be valuable. Gandhi reiterated these themes later when he said,

> I am not a literalist. Therefore, I try to understand the _spirit_ of the various scriptures of the world… …I worship Rama, the perfect being of my conception, not a historical person, facts about whose life may vary with the progress of new historical discoveries and researches. Tulsidas had nothing to do with the Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his Ramayana would be fit for the scrap heap (CWMG 28: 111).
From this excerpt it would seem that Gandhi did believe that Rama existed as a historical person, but, in some ways, that this person was irrelevant. He did not wish to claim that the Ramcharitmanas was a historical document, nor did he find it important to do so: “The Mahabharata and the Ramayana… are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition” (CWMG 63: 339). Gandhi did not wish to firmly proclaim whether or not Rama existed, arguing instead that history has no effect on the power of the story.

Gandhi & Geography. While Gandhi claimed to be disinterested in the historical Rama, he did not completely reject the idea that the mythic king actually existed for the benefit of his political rhetoric. In certain instances, Gandhi chose to dehistoricize the Ramayana in order to make it applicable to a broader range of human experiences, while in others he chose to locate the story in specific geographic locations in order to inspire people to take action. By broadening the potential meanings of the story, he was able to argue against the instances of problematic morality and violence in the Ramayana that are often the subject of contentious debate. This aspect of Gandhi’s interpretation and use of the epic will be fully addressed in a subsequent section of this paper. By contrast, his opposing strategy of rooting the story to the geography of India was a way in which he utilized the potential historical reality of the Ramayana tale.

While Gandhi was much less interested in Ayodhya than the modern Hindu Right, he did refer to Ayodhya as the place of Rama’s birth on a few occasions. At a speech on Swadeshi that Gandhi gave in Nadiad, Gujarat, he said that he had “stayed in the place where Ramachandra was born, and in that place, in Bihar, and its neighborhood, where Sita grew up and played. There are many there who will not eat in a train, but fast. To be sure, it is a valuable religious sentiment which will not permit a man to eat in a train, not to speak of other places” (CWMG 15: 439). The purpose of this speech was to promote the value of self-restraint. He was trying to convince his audience of the value of fasting by highlighting that the people from Rama and Sita’s birthplace fast on a regular basis. He invested Bihar and Uttar Pradesh with a certain moral superiority while talking to a crowd in Gujarat in order to stimulate them into action. Thus he called upon Gujaratis to strive for Ramarajya in their own land. Gandhi also referenced his visit to a temple in Ayodhya that was “at the place where Shri Ramachandra is believed to have been born” (CWMG 19: 455). He did not seem to take any real interest in whether or not this was the real place where Rama was born, but instead was utterly consumed with the task of trying to convince the temple priest to dress Rama and Sita’s images in khadi. He found Ayodhya important only inasmuch as other Hindus believed it was an important location. Therefore, while he did not deny that Ayodhya could be Rama’s birthplace, he only ever mentioned it as a way to discuss other moral issues.
Gandhi located Bihar as the province where Sita grew up with her father Janaka, also mentioning that Rama and Lakshmana spent time there as well (CWMG 13: 365; 15: 439; 22: 79; 57: 100, 111, 123, 128, 177, 206, 210; 87: 75). Gandhi was particularly fond of Bihar, stating: “Bihar, the land of Janaka and Sita, the land of perhaps the most afflicted and docile people in all India…. Bihar is a province which has kept most non-violent. It has shown splendid results in most items of non-co-operation” (CWMG 22: 79). The link he made between the province as being particularly receptive to his political agendas and as the home of Ramayana characters highlights his belief that if people used his methods they would be closer to achieving Ramarajya. Gandhi made the most references to Sita’s connection to Bihar when he sought donations to aid the victims of the 1934 earthquake that devastated the province (CWMG 57: 100, 111, 123, 128, 177, 206, 210; Brown 274). Each time he made such a reference it was a very short addendum to a larger speech that covered other various topics. He began these asides by saying, “Now, a word about the land of Sita,” then going on to describe the damage that the earthquake caused, sometimes never once calling the province by its proper name (CWMG 57: 111, 123). Referring to Bihar as Sita’s birthplace would have caused Hindus to feel an immediate connection to the province and its people, a fact that most likely informed Gandhi’s rhetorical choices in this instance. He found that he could connect Indians from various provinces by reinforcing the link between the land and the shared heritage of the Ramayana. While he was careful not to use this kind of rhetoric with reckless abandon, the occasion of the Bihar earthquake was acceptable as it encouraged transnational sympathy and unity.

In a speech Gandhi gave to the Tamil Union in Colombo he mentioned the belief that Sita’s imprisonment took place in Sri Lanka (CWMG 35: 325). Gandhi’s reference to Sita’s imprisonment in ‘Lanka’ while in Sri Lanka was much more politically controversial than his plea for national unity in the name of charitable donation. This speech was part of his khadi promotional tour in which he tried to encourage people to take up spinning. He told the women of Colombo that if they began wearing and making khadi they would “be somewhat representative of Sita whose sacred feet hallowed this land as legend has it” (CWMG 35:325). If this choice to call upon Sita is understood to stem from the same logic of national unity that inspired the Bihar references, then it can be inferred that Gandhi also wished to include Sri Lankans in the future nation by appealing to the shared heritage of the Ramayana. Clearly, this would have been problematic to some, if not most, of the listeners. Interestingly, however, Gandhi did not refer to Sri Lanka as the land of Ravana, nor as the place where Rama fought Ravana. Instead, Gandhi chose to reference Sita, the most passive character in the whole ordeal. Therefore, while even this small gesture had the potential to create tension, Gandhi controlled the extent to which he connected characters from the Ramayana to geography in order to create intranational bonds.
It is telling that Gandhi linked geographic sites to Sita more often than he did to male characters. While Janaka and Rama were occasionally mentioned as being present with Sita, for the most part she is the only character that Gandhi located in a specific place (CWMG 13: 365; 87: 75). This could be explained by the fact that, while Gandhi had trouble thinking of Rama as a historical man due to his devotion to Rama as a god, perhaps he imagined Sita to be a more human character, making it easier for him to tie her to the land. This discussion also brings to mind Sumathi Ramaswamy’s work on the figure of Bharat Mata. Beginning in 1907 and especially prevalent after the 1930’s, the map of India was represented with or by the goddess figure of Bharat Mata, or Mother India (Ramaswamy 164). The Swadeshi movement in particular, in which Gandhi was heavily involved, promoted the image of the land of India as taking a female form (Ramaswamy 173). Therefore, linking Sita to the land would likely have invoked the image of Bharat Mata to those listening to Gandhi’s speeches. As most of the instances of Gandhi linking Sita to the land occurred in 1934, during the height of the production of Bharat Mata imagery, it seems logical to presume that Gandhi might have been capitalizing on this connection. While Bharat Mata called the sons of India to free her from the bondage of imperialism, Sita called the citizens of India to help her land of Bihar when it was in dire need.

Gandhi’s references that tied Ramayana characters to the geography of India are few, yet they reveal details about the way he read the story for political ends. While he had to be careful not to use the sacred geography of the Ramayana to exclude people from the future nation, he was also capable of skillfully implementing it to create a sense of imagined community. By paying special attention to the land of Bihar and its link to Sita, Gandhi promoted Bihar as a land of particularly high moral standards and worthy of being mimicked by the rest of India. When Bihar found itself in times of trouble, he called upon the nation’s attachment to Sita to encourage donations. By linking certain geographic locations to the Ramayana, he also linked them to the possibility of Ramarajya. When he encouraged other places to look to Bihar and Ayodhya as examples, he reminded them of the legacy of Ramarajya and the possibility of achieving it in their own land. India therefore became the stage on which Gandhi’s retooled Ramayana story would be reenacted and where Ramarajya could be achieved.

Plotting the Revolution: The Ramayana, Polarization, and the Question of Violence

Pollack argues that the Ramayana story is such an effective vehicle for political rhetoric because “on the one hand, a divine political order can be conceptualized, narrated, and historically ground[ed], and, on the other, a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned” (Pollack 159). This dichotomization is indeed an important part of how Gandhi used the Ramayana for his political agenda. In early Indian political rhetoric, the ‘Other’,
identified with Ravana or the raksasas, was most commonly cast as Muslim (Pollack 191). Gandhi, however, did not other the Muslim population through his references to the Ramayana, but instead chose to demonize the British colonizers by equating them with Ravana.

Ravanarajya as British Raj. Gandhi first began to use the language of ‘Rama versus Ravana’ to mean ‘India versus the Empire’ in the later months of 1920 (CWMG 18: 384). In his speech at a public meeting in Dakor in October 1920, Gandhi first used the term ‘Ravanarajya’ to describe the rule of the British Empire:

How are we to be rid of this Ravanarajya? By becoming evil men in dealing with evil men? … How can the men of policy among us succeed against this Empire which, by its skillful deceptions, has conquered even Europe with her cunning ways? Even if we, Hindus and Muslims, would employ cunning, we simply do not have it. If we want to kill Ravana with brute force, we should have ten heads and twenty arms like him. From where are we to get these? It is only a man of Rama’s strength who can do so. What was that strength of his? He had observed brahmacharya and he was god-fearing. His army consisted of monkeys. Have monkeys ever used weapons? During Diwali we celebrate even today the victory of Rama over Ravana. But we can truly celebrate this victory only when we destroy this monster with not ten but a thousand heads (CWMG 18: 386-7).

Gandhi’s grouping of Hindus and Muslims as facing the enemy of the Ravanarajya together is notably different from modern day nationalist rhetoric. Perhaps more intriguing is his invocation of the battle between Rama and Ravana, only to dismiss it again. In the above quotation he asserted that the only way to get anything from the British empire was to directly oppose them, as bargaining simply does not work. However, he had yet to elaborate on what direct opposition would look like. While it is clear that the Empire is taking the role of Ravana, the people of India are not taking on the role of Rama. The thrust of Gandhi’s argument is that the people of India would never be able to faithfully recreate the battle between Rama and Ravana because Rama’s army consisted of monkeys, which, in Gandhi’s rationalist opinion, means that the battle could not have literally taken place. Gandhi illustrated this distinction more clearly in a later speech:

When, however, the Government struck at the self-respect of my country, I woke up and realized that it was an incarnation of Ravana and must be destroyed. It does not mean that I claim to be the incarnation of Rama. We regard Rama to be
an incarnation of God Himself. I am not God; neither are you. But all of us are heirs of Rama. It is our dharma to practice tapashcharya and undergo sufferings like his. We should non-co-operate in the same manner in which he non-co-operated with Ravana. Since we are not Rama, we can see nothing by killing Ravana physically. We believe that this Ravana, thanks to his evil desires, assumes ever new bodies. We should, however, act upon the counsel of Valmiki and Tulsidas and dissociate ourselves from [the modern] Ravana and try to destroy his wickedness (CWMG 19: 252-3).

Thus, by denying the Indian people the role of Rama in the dichotomy, he deescalated the potential for violence. All that humans can do is practice austerities and non-cooperation – killing is an option only for the gods.

In his first speech on Ravanarajya, Gandhi finally explained how to defeat the demonic regime: “If you are men who would never cast lustful glances at chaste and devoted women like Sita, then alone will you be able to mobilize sufficient strength to destroy this Empire. If any power has succeeded in subduing Satan, it is God’s. He it was Who created Satan and He it is Who can kill him” (CWMG 18: 387). He argued that moral purity and trust in God would be the only way to defeat a demonic regime. Neither battling with brute force nor trying to cooperate with the enemy would work; changing the moral character of the people of India is the only way to defeat the enemy. Gandhi’s choice to switch to Christian language in this instance is intriguing, especially given that he was arguing for the moral superiority of Hindu and Muslim Indians over the Christian British. As Gandhi was a proponent of neo-Vedantic conceptions of the universal God, this rhetorical choice could be interpreted as a way of insinuating that Hindus exemplify Christian virtues better than the Imperial masters (CWMG 27: 434-7; 41:374). Also notable in Gandhi’s solution is his definition of how one can judge moral purity – only those men who do not lust after chaste women can defeat the immorality of the Empire. Here he is alluding to Ravana’s desire for Sita, which lead him to kidnap her. That this is the only criterion necessary to judge whether men have reached a sufficient degree of purity speaks both to Gandhi’s idealization of the chaste woman, and his preoccupation with controlling one’s body in order to benefit the entire nation (Katrick 397; Alter 7-9).

Gandhi’s use of the term ‘Ravanarajya’ was quite short lived. Between October 1920 and September 1921 he used the term quite heavily. These dates coincide with the beginning of his non-cooperation movement against the British raj and mark a time period where he “became severely critical of the raj and almost devoid of any hope that a connection between India and Britain would allow Indian equality and growth to full nationhood” (Brown 139-40). This sentiment is clearly expressed in his first use of the term Ravanarajya. By the beginning
of 1922, Gandhi had begun to solidify his ideas about *swaraj*, non-violence and non-cooperation, coinciding with the drop-off in the term *Ravanarajya* (Brown 173). It is possible to interpret this change as a concerted effort to move away from using violent language and taking an accusatory tone towards the British Raj, to being concerned with how to build *Ramarajya* from the inside out. From this point onwards, instead of using language of defeating *Ravanarajya*, he used language of building *Ramarajya*.

_Ramayana as Justification for Non-Violence._ This early but brief use of the language of the Ramayana in Gandhi’s politics demonstrates how easy it is to slip into divisive and demonizing rhetoric using the model of the story. As Pollack illustrates, this pattern is lived out over and over again throughout history. Perhaps the more interesting question is how Gandhi was able to use language from the Ramayana story to promote _ahimsa_ and _satyagraha_, and whether this strategy was effective. Gandhi argued that the Ramayana supports non-violence and civil resistance, as seen in his address to a group of students:

> It never occurs to [millions of readers]...whether they might not kill their enemies as Rama killed Ravana. Even when face to face with enemies, they pray for Ramachandra’s protection and remain unafraid. Tulsidas, the author of the Ramayana, had nothing but compassion by way of a weapon. He desired to kill none. He who creates, destroys. Rama was God; He had created Ravana and so had the right to kill him. When any of us becomes a God, he may consider whether he is fit to have the power to destroy (CWMG 14: 137).

Gandhi argued that whether or not one sees someone as his or her enemy, it is never in one’s power to take someone’s life. Echoes of these same themes can be found in his declamations against the British *Ravanarajya*, but his argument for non-violence became more convincing when he ceased to employ demonizing language. Instead, he chose to focus on how one should be devoted to Rama, perform austerities, and rely on the gods to defeat the British for them. Gandhi argues that the only recourse available to humans is developing and promoting morality.

Gandhi interpreted the battle between Rama and Ravana as an allegory for the battle between good and evil that is played out daily within the mind of every person: “Ravana as _maya_ continues to exist today and Rama’s devotees, those whose heart is His abode, are every day destroying Ravana” (CWMG 26: 309). His proof for this allegorical interpretation was based on the fact that he found it impossible to interpret many parts of the story literally: “What is the meaning of Rama, a mere human being, with his host of monkeys, pitting himself against
the insolent strength of ten-headed Ravana surrounded in supposed safety by the raging waters on all sides of Lanka? Does it not mean the conquest of physical might by spiritual strength?” (CWMG 18: 133-4). Here Gandhi did choose to align human beings with Rama’s character in the story. When he did this, he was sure to divest Rama of all of his divine physical strength in order to emphasize his moral purity as the only advantage that he had against Ravana. In a personal letter, Gandhi reaffirmed this interpretation: “In the account of Rama’s exploits, I have found nothing to show that he gained victory through physical strength” (CWMG 25: 326). By making the dichotomy between Ravana and Rama a battle between physical versus moral strength, he was able to use the story to argue in favour of his own position regarding how Indians should overthrow Imperial power.

The progression of Gandhi’s public interpretation of the Ramayana’s portrayal of violence corresponds with developments in his relationship with the British raj. While he always found the Ramayana to be a moral guide for how to conduct oneself in the face of adversity, the skill with which he was able to use the story to justify his own political ideology improved with time. Gandhi was fully aware of his ability to use the story to create enemies, and thus he learned to deploy Ramayana imagery with caution and much explanation. While Gandhi’s allegorical interpretation of the story may not have been clear to all, he argued for his own reading of the Ramayana by pointing out the illogical literal readings. In this way he was not only able to highlight the similarities between the Ramayana story and India’s struggle for independence, but between the Ramayana and the struggle for personal liberation as well. He then conflated all of these elements by arguing that the only way to free India from British rule was through the moral purification of every individual citizen. Thus, Gandhi planned India’s liberation by overlaying the plot of the Ramayana onto his contemporary circumstances.

**Casting and Costuming: Embodying Ram & Sita**

A major aspect of contemporary Hindu nationalist imagery and rhetoric in reference to the Ramayana is a focus on violence, specifically concerning Rama’s weapons (Davis 47). A particularly apt example of this was the Rath Yatra procession of 1990 where L.K. Advani of the BJP, dressed as Rama - complete with bow - processed around India in a Toyota truck made to look like a chariot in order to rally for his party and the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Davis 27-9). Gandhi’s interpretation was strikingly different from that of the Hindu Right. In direct contrast, Gandhi depicted Rama as specifically lacking a chariot, in fact attributing chariots to Ravana: “When Vibhishana asked Shri Ramachandra how unarmed, unshod, without any armour, he was going to defeat the heavily-armed and mighty Ravana with his chariots, Rama’s reply was that it was faith and purity that would win the battle. His bow was his self-control. His victory was the victory of good over evil” (CWMG 85: 414-5). Gandhi had absolutely no interest in glorifying weapons; the only weapons he ever attributed to Rama were
so-called “spiritual weapons” (CWMG 21: 515; 62: 98). As previously discussed, Gandhi did not believe physical strength aided Rama at all in his defeat of the demon king. These two conceptions of the ideal Rama as put forth by Advani and Gandhi are clearly quite distinct - the former idealizing an armored, muscular body and the latter a simple, unadorned one.

As Joseph Alter illustrates, Gandhi believed that the inner body and the outer body were reflections of each other (Alter 6-7). As such describing the outer appearances of both Rama and Sita was an important part of his mission to purify the bodies of the nation. Gandhi was quite insistent that Rama and Sita did not wear fancy brocade silk clothing, but instead wore khadi cloth (CWMG 18: 393; 19: 455; 20: 114, 199; 28:179, 340; 35:11, 148; 39: 447). Interestingly, Gandhi appealed to historical ‘fact’ to argue that Rama and Sita would have worn khadi: “You should bear in mind that, in the days of Shri Ramachandra, neither rich nor poor used any foreign cloth and the khadi produced in the country was in the general use of all” (CWMG 28: 179). While it is unclear where he got this information about “the days of Shri Ramachandra,” clearly Gandhi was projecting his vision of what the Indian nation should look like back onto Rama’s kingdom. Trivedi points to this kind of reimagining of the past as a modus operandi of the Swadeshi movement as a whole, arguing that part of the effectiveness of the movement was its call to return to tradition (Trivedi 43). While, as Trivedi points out, the universalized national community built from the khadi movement clearly broke with tradition, Gandhi managed to imagine Rama’s Ayodhya as an egalitarian society in which everyone dressed the same, regardless of class or caste. While he claimed this as historical fact, it is actually a projection of his wish for the future nation of India. Gandhi attempted to build this vision by playing on Indian people’s nostalgia for a Golden Age of Rama.

In his discussions of both khadi and the Ramayana, it was much more common for Gandhi to mention Sita over Rama. As Ketu Katrak points out in her essay on Gandhian nationalism and female sexuality, Gandhi gendered the national symbols of khadi and the charkha (spinning wheel) “through his evocation of mythological figures like Sita, Draupadi, and Savitri which embodied roles for women in the nationalist struggle” (Katrak 397). An example of this can be found in an excerpt from a 1927 speech at a women’s meeting in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu:

Sita was pure in heart and pure in body. I think and it is my opinion, that most of you, the vast majority of you, defile your body with foreign cloth. Not so did Sita Devi. Don’t suppose for one moment that Sita Devi went in for or sent out for foreign finery to decorate her body. On the contrary, we know that in Sita Devi’s time, Sita Devi and all the women of India sat spinning and wore cloth woven by the men of India. And that was beautiful (CWMG 35: 148).
Gandhi’s distinction between impure foreign cloth and pure handspun cloth corresponds with his assertion that the women of his day were impure, whereas Sita represented a ‘purer womanhood’ of the past. Gandhi asserted that simply by changing the way they dress themselves, women would be purifying their bodies, their minds, and the nation. In this quotation, Gandhi redefined beauty in order to convince the women to wear khadi cloth. While he implicitly admitted that perhaps handspun cloth is not the most eye-catching product, the meaning behind the cloth is what endows it with beauty. The implication that Indian women wore the cloth that Indian men made for them, showing their dependence and support on ‘their’ men rather than ‘Other’ men, reinforces the link between individual bodies and the nation. The morality of the disciplined body of the man at the charkha is proudly displayed by the body of the woman adorned in khadi. Thus, there are clear linkages between clothing and outward appearance, the moral purity of the nation, and the independence of the nation from British rule.

While in the previous quotation Gandhi insinuated that men make cloth, spinning was a major way that Gandhi envisioned women participating in the national liberation movement (Katark 397). He tried to convince women to take to the charkha by arguing that even a queen like Sita used to sit at one. In a newspaper report of a women’s meeting at which he spoke, he is quoted as saying that “Sita also spun on her own charkha which might have been bedecked with jewels and probably ornamented with gold, but all the same it was still a charkha” (CWMG 28: 295). More than just making the charkha appealing to women, Gandhi was also sure to emphasize that if women wanted liberation from the British raj it was absolutely necessary for them to spin:

[I]f you want swaraj or Ramarajya in India you have to become pure as Sita. Sita was pure in body and mind. When she was put through the ordeal on her return from Lanka, the flames did not even touch her. Why? Because she was pure not only in body but also in mind. No cloth was imported from England at the time, English cloth was not worn. All women plied the charkha and wore khadi…. Only a woman who keeps body and mind pure can be worthy of our reverence (CWMG 32: 538).

Discussing the highly contested moment of Sita’s agni pariksha as a female ideal is clearly problematic. Gandhi suggested that the female body walking through fire would burn in English cloth, whereas the female body dressed in Indian homespun would not. It is interesting that his appeal to logic and non-literal readings of the story did not come into play when the female body was at stake. By using this example he idealized the willful suffering of women on behalf of a national cause. He placed the onus on Indian women to ensure that every home had a charkha in it so that Ramarajya could be achieved through the purity of
their bodies and minds.

Gandhi was even more insistent that Rama and Sita - especially Sita - never wore jewelry or lavish ornamentation. This is in clear contradiction to the usual depiction of Rama and Sita as a divine royal couple. In a letter in which he tried to convince a female relative that it was against Hindu tradition to wear nose rings and earrings, Gandhi wrote: “That the poets have described Ramachandraji, Sitaji, and others as wearing jewels seems to me to be suggestive of the custom prevailing at the time [they wrote]. Otherwise I cannot imagine the benevolent Ramachandraji or the deeply devout Sitaji carrying even a particle of gold on their bodies” (CWMG 10: 397-8). Again, he appealed to a sense of history in order to claim that he had a clearer understanding of what Rama and Sita would have worn than the poets, as they were supposedly blinded by their own customs and traditions. Later on while the Swadeshi movement was in full force, Gandhi proclaimed this view at the many women’s meetings he attended. At one such meeting in Sonepur, Gandhi tried to convince women to give up their jewelry because it not only showed the impurity of their minds, but also because jewelry literally attracted dirt:

Think of Sita. Do you imagine she went about with Rama in his 14 years’ forest wanderings with heavy ornaments like you? Do you think they add to your beauty? Sita cared for the beauty of her heart and covered her body with pure khaddar. The heavy ornaments you wear are not only ugly but harmful inasmuch as they are the permanent receptacles of dirt. Free yourselves of these shackles and relieve the poverty of people who have no clothes, much less ornaments, to wear (CWMG 32: 570).

In addition to these interesting views of jewelry as unsanitary, Gandhi also equated jewelry to taking away food and money from impoverished people. He played on women’s sympathies, trying to convince them that wearing jewelry was shameful when there were so many starving people in the country. Thus, his denunciation of jewelry was another way that Gandhi controlled women’s bodies, placing them in service of the nation.

While Gandhi is praised by many Indian feminists, including some contemporary feminists, for his incorporation of women into his movement, his use of Sita as an icon of femininity illustrates his conservative views regarding women’s social roles and sexuality (Katrank 400). He praised Sita for her devotion to her husband and for the bravery of her decision to follow him into isolation, and encourages women to do the same by following their husbands into the liberation movement (CWMG 35: 39). He did allow women to join his movement for national liberation without the express permission of their husbands, but only because he claimed that Sita would have done the same as she was self-reliant and
not a “slave of Rama” \((CWMG\;31:511)\). Gandhi saw Sita, and women in general, as symbolically helpful to his political agenda, as he believed that women were “the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge” (quoted in Katrak 398). While perhaps these dangerous stereotypes that promoted women’s suffering as an ideal allowed women to access the public sphere, the full scope of Gandhi’s liberation of Indian women is not unproblematic and requires critical examination.

Through Gandhi’s rhetoric the bodies of Rama and Sita became the ideal bodies of the men and women of the nation of India. By insisting that these two mythological figures dressed themselves in \textit{khadi} cloth, he attempted to garner support for his own vision of the \textit{khadi}-clad nation. He used the Ramayana story to appeal to a sense of tradition and history that he himself created in order to help the nation return to a more ‘Indian’ way of life. By teaching people to wear \textit{khadi}, spin on the \textit{charkha}, and reject finery and jewels, Gandhi hoped to purify the minds and spirits of the nation and thereby create the independent India that would bring his version of \textit{Ramarajya} to life.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Gandhi used the Ramayana story to narrate both the past and the future of India. By constructing the ideal Indian nation on the pattern of \textit{Ramarajya}, Gandhi hoped to inspire Indians to work towards recreating his Ramayana story in order to gain and sustain nationhood. Gandhi was able to deploy the Ramayana to create a sense of imagined community throughout the disparate reaches of the subcontinent. By imagining India as the land of the Ramayana, the plot as the story of the nation’s road to independence, and the characters as the models of the Indian citizens, Gandhi retold the Ramayana as a foundational national myth.

While there is still so much more that could be said about Gandhi’s interpretation of the Ramayana, this paper has tried to present one framework for understanding his political deployment of the story. As shared ground between the ‘nonviolent’ Gandhian nationalism and modern Hindutva, analyzing the place of the Ramayana story in each of their political agendas helps to illuminate why Indian’s felt and continue to feel such strong connections to both ideologies. The ability of the story to be used by both Gandhi and the Hindu Right demonstrates that the Ramayana is anything but a stagnant textual tradition that simply recalls an ancient past; it is a vibrant and fluid body of cultural texts that continues to affect real change in people’s lived experiences through constant reinterpretations and retellings, whether that be from politically driven sources or otherwise. Gandhi’s version of the story is yet one more addition to the constantly evolving tradition of the Ramayana.
Works Cited


Conceiving the Body of Chinese Buddhism

Abstract: Since the death and cremation of Sakyamuni Buddha, the veneration of bodily relics has been an integral part of Buddhist practice. Upon Buddhism’s introduction to China, such practices melded with indigenous Chinese philosophical and cultural notions. In the modern era, the maintenance and worship of relics (sheli) has evolved into the unique practice of preserving full-body relics (roushen pusa) from the corpses of venerated masters. Revealing a tension between the central Buddhist notion of impermanence and the need for physical reminders of inspiring holy figures, the use of sheli and roushen pusa in Buddhist practice holds a distinctive place in the practice of Buddhism in China.

Among Gautama Buddha’s most essential teachings are the related doctrines of no-self (anatman) and codependent-origination (pratiyasanutpadā). These philosophical notions frame Buddhist cosmology as a mass web of constituent parts (dharma)—themselves composed of ever smaller dharma—in the constant flux of time such that it is impossible to isolate any essential identity in a multi-layered universe united by emptiness (sunyata). Texts such as the “Middle-length Discourses,” known as the Majjhima-nikaya in Pali, Madhymagama in Sanskrit and the Zhong anhanjing in Chinese, emphasize the implications of such cosmic principles on one’s own life and encourage monks to contemplate their physical composition and corporal existence. When these Indic philosophies reached Chinese territories, they integrated with the Taoist notion of gangying (“stimulus-response” or “sympathetic resonance”) and Confucian ideals of filial piety. In this environment, the graphic physical sacrifice exemplified in Jataka tales of the Buddha’s prior lives, and stories of advanced bodhisattvas became ideals to be matched in one’s own practice. The proliferation of self-immolation and full-body relics in Chinese Buddhism, though they can be traced back to earlier Buddhist relic worship, was also greatly influenced by the compounding of Indic and Chinese philosophies and has been utilized as an effective tool of upaya-kaushalya, or skillful means, to spread Dharma. Although the veneration of suicidal practitioners and their physical remains appears to clash with ingrained Buddhist notions of non-violence, non-attachment and no-self, it can be shown that such practices are indeed within the doctrinal and traditional bounds of Buddhism.

The Pali Majjhima-nikaya is a prime example of the type of Buddhist text that instills both revulsion and reverence for the physical human form. In Of the True Body: The Famen Monastery Relics and Corporeal Transformation in Tang Imperial Culture, Eugene Wang claims that the text “paints an anatomical horror” in its vivid descriptions intended to aid “the meditative practice of ‘visualizing the impure body’… [which] is supposed to make one yearn for a bodiless state of purity and transcendence” (83). Such meditation guides provide
the reader with biological descriptions of the human body in its many parts, “so
detailed that some scholars credit members of the early Buddhist monastic order
(sangha) with a decisive role in the development of ancient Indian anatomical
theory” (Wilson 64). Directing the reader-monk to contemplate his corporal self
from the soles of his feet to the crown of the head, the Majjhima-nikaya describes
the human form as:

...surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean
things: ‘In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails,
teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart,
liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines,
gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-
oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine’... Furthermore, as
if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one
day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, & festering, he
applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature,
such is its future, such its unavoidable fate’ (Bhikkhu 1).

However, anatomically detailed descriptions of the physical self and decomposition
processes need not be met with the “horror” that Wang suggests, and such reactions
are in fact contrary to the purpose of body-mindfulness contemplation.

What the Buddha would trace to a deluded attachment to a unified self,
cultural theorist Julia Kristeva identifies as a response to the “abject.” The abject
is defined as that which is identified as “being opposed to I” in recognition of one’s
physical separation from the world at large (Kristeva 156). Something intended to
reveal the essential truth that one’s body is composed of interdependent particles
within a larger environment and universe is met with revulsion rooted in a basic
human instinct to purge the other. As one’s bones, heart, hairs, etc. are not a
significant part of general self-identity, when faced with their status as the self
they are regarded with the same repugnance as “refuse and corpses [that] show
me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this
defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the
part of death” (Kristeva 157). This fundamental component of human functioning
is simply mapped onto the Majjhima-nikaya’s earnest attempt to explicate the
impermanence (anitya) and sunyata that define existence, with no intention of
instilling a repulsed aversion to the body in the monastic. Indeed, such descriptions
should inspire “neither attraction nor revulsion but indifference” toward the true,
definable self and any “disgust for the body should ideally give way to a more
neutral attitude” (Wilson 64). Once this conception of the body is fully realized,
and deluded attachment to an “abject” interpretation fades, acceptance of anatman
is sure to follow. This is the ultimate goal of body-mindfulness meditation.

Along with other texts and practices, body contemplation guides made their
way from the Buddhist “Western Regions” into China as the two cultures collided through traveling merchants along the Silk Road and wandering monastics. With various “texts” of the same basic story memorized in the Vedic oral tradition, countless tales of the Buddha were translated in disparate styles and formats across different regions of China. As such, it is rare to find written texts in Pali or a dialect of Sanskrit that can be identified as the direct source for a given Chinese jing (scripture). Reportedly translated by Gautama Sanghadeva at Dongting Monastery in approximately 398 CE, the Zhong ahanjing is a transmission of the Madhyamagama, a Sanskrit version of the Majjhima-nikaya, although it must be acknowledged that the two are not identical (Radich “Middle Length Agama Sutras” 1). For his translation efforts and lectures on Abhidharma, Sanghadeva became a well known monk during his time in Jiankang (Nanjing) and his legacy remains significant for his import of these essential Buddhist notions of the physical self into the philosophical dialogue of China (Radich, “Gautama Sanghadeva” 1). Through this process of cultural diffusion, Buddhist ideology came face to face with the conception of ganying, understood by Taoists as “the mechanism through which categorically related but spatially distant phenomena interact” (Sharf 83). Defined by Robert Sharf in literal terms as “stimulus-response,” or in the more explanatory form of “sympathetic resonance,” ganying is distinct from the familiar cause-and-effect understanding of karma (83). The concept of ganying posits that, as all objects and beings are various manifestations of the universal substance known as qi, that constructs all reality (implicitly evoking pratityasamutpada and sunyata), there is a connection between similar physical instantiations of qi. In this understanding of the cosmos, “objects belonging to the same category or class spontaneously resonate with each other just as do two identically tuned strings on a pair of zithers” (Sharf 83) such that any two humans will have a stronger “resonance” than, say, a human and a tree, while two humans from the same genetic background will likewise be even more susceptible to the effects of one another’s actions.

Ganying, as the underlying principle to explain the interaction between the apparently discrete entities that compose reality, had a place in nearly all facets of Chinese culture, according to Sharf. As ganying is utilized as a means to explain “celestial portents, moral retribution, ritual efficacy, natural and astronomical cycles, political upheaval” and more, it is unsurprising that it might “similarly influence the Chinese understanding of Buddhist cosmology, philosophy, and monastic practice”, such that Chinese practitioners more readily move beyond attachment to the abject elements of Buddhist scripture (Sharf 101). The notion, as found in the Zhong ahanjing, of the human body as a constructed matrix of compositional elements forming an apparent whole, served to reinforce the indigenous Chinese conception of ganying, in a localized application of a concept fit to describe the entirety of the cosmos. However, with such an esoteric description of the idea, there is no understanding of the implications of these
ineffable notions on the daily life of the Chinese people. As with nearly every component of Chinese culture, ganying was inescapably worked into traditional and practical Confucian rituals and as an important factor in filial piety. The bodies and actions of relatives are seen to resonate so effectively as one’s physical body is gifted by one’s parents and is composed of the same constituent elements, which thus encourages one to maintain and propagate one’s physical being as a sign of respect and gratitude toward one’s parents. Indeed, the concept of ganying is so central to filial piety that if one’s parent falls severely ill, the proper response is to prepare medicine from the flesh of one’s thigh. Known as gegu, this practice is considered one of the most efficacious and dutiful acts a child can perform (Mann 137). The illness is believed to be cured due to the flesh’s miraculous powers of resonance with the parents’ own body. In this way, ganying can be seen to hold an important place in defining Chinese conceptions of the body as something transcendent of one’s own identity with the capacity for miraculous and tangible interaction with the rest of reality.

Likewise, ganying is very much responsible for the consistent phenomena of self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism. Even in an environment with two-fold social restrictions on the harming of one’s own body (Confucian filial ideals emphasize the body as a vessel of piety that should not be harmed or destroyed, and the Buddha’s First Precept to abstain from violent actions), the idea of a universal unity expressed through ganying was able to take precedence and resulted in bodily sacrifice as a common, though by no means uncontroversial, occurrence. Although the idea of violence to one’s “self” may appear contradictory in a tradition that maintains the non-existence of such an easily definable notion as identity, as a part of the infinite dharmakaya, any instantiation of reality (including one’s conventional body) is ultimately a component of a larger supra-mundane self and thus deserving of non-violence. Furthermore, the Mahayana Buddhist understanding of skillful means, or upaya-kaushalya, allows for practitioners and spiritually advanced beings to breach specific facets of Dharma if their purpose in doing so is for a higher cause, such as the wider proliferation of Buddhist thought or compassionate assistance to sentient beings. It is this conception of upaya that allows the Buddha to repeatedly surrender his body in various exceedingly violent and graphic episodes in the Jataka tales in which, according to James Benn, the flesh of one’s thigh “was a favorite offering of the heroes” (Benn 30).

The Buddha-Chinese landscape that developed from this cultural interaction was ripe for the production of self-immolators. The Buddhist precedent for self-inflicted and sacrificial violence that was set by Sakyamuni’s own past lives had combined with the Chinese understanding of the resonant capacity of all dharma, due to their mutual impermanence. As such, it became an established ritual to relinquish, at least in part, one’s physical body as the ultimate devotional act self-immolation thus proliferated among Chinese Buddhist practitioners. Although the term is most often understood to refer to autocremation, Benn points
out that practices such as ritual starvation, drowning, feeding oneself to forest animals or insects, or throwing oneself from a precipice can be understood as forms of devotional self-immolation. Even if these practices do not ultimately result in death, “they were still classified as heroic examples of ‘abandoning the body’” (2004, 758). Furthermore, instances of actual cremation need not consist of the entire body—burning incense on the skin or burning off fingers, toes or entire limbs remains in practice today. The story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King’s aut cremation in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra (Lotus Sutra) provided the model for many later self-immolators. Devotion to the Sutra itself was often cited as a reason for the practice of self-immolation. The Medicine King is depicted donating his “internal wealth” to the buddhas of the universe, drinking and anointing himself with oil before lighting his body in a symbolic display of spreading the light of Dharma throughout the world (Benn 58-9).

The impetus for mimicry of such religious fanaticism extends from a multitude of sources, identifiable on a case-by-case basis, ranging from personal spiritual cultivation and the production of merit to charitable acts of compassion. However, regardless of the purpose, from the perspective of a strict scriptural interpretation, a violent act on the physical body should restrict immolation rituals from inclusion in “Buddhist” practice. Drawing on Albert Welter’s investigation of Yanshou’s Tonggui ji, Benn argues that “for Yanshou self-immolation was primarily a manifestation of dana (charity), and that as the ultimate expression of this paramita (perfection) the gift of one’s body is an act of li as opposed to shi, which is to say that it takes place at the level of the ultimate truth rather than the level of conventional phenomena” (112). Under this conception, self-immolation, while conventionally a “violent” act, does not break the First Precept as those who undertake such an action “had awakened to the fact that life is temporary” (Benn 99) and, ultimately, “there is no self to immolate” (Benn 89). Similarly, in the Song gaoseng zhuang (Further Biographies of Eminent Monks), “Zanning recognizes that suicide is technically an offence, but says that this really only applies to those who commit suicide with the wrong intention of escaping Samsara” (Benn 114). Beyond such abstruse doctrinal loopholes, ganying plays an important role in establishing self-immolation as a Buddhist practice. According to Sharf, as early as the Chou and Han Dynasties, the success of rainmaking rituals “was understood in terms of resonance between things of like kind,” which implies a Chinese understanding of the human body as a reflection of the world around it resides within (Sharf 87). Similarly, “the link between ritual self-cultivation, on the one hand, and the power to transform others and affect cosmic harmony, on the other, is precisely the principle of resonance” (Sharf 92). This indicates a shared quality in all things that can be tuned into and affected. Thus, the Chinese principle of ganying helps explain the tension that exists within the Bodhisattva ideal, predicated on both selfless aid toward others and intense personal practice to realize one’s compassionate goal. Under this conception, the two are one in the
same, the exterior world reflecting and resonating one’s interior peace.

In addition to the Jataka tales, accounts of Siddhartha Gautama’s death and funeral ceremony provide a template for later practitioners to adopt and perhaps explain the prominence of autocremation as the preferred means of immolation in the Chinese setting. Through Jonathan Silk’s examination of several scriptural retellings of the events surrounding Buddha’s death, it is revealed that there are a number of similarities that emerge between the funerary rites of the Buddha and Chinese self-immolation traditions. Although not an exclusively Buddhist postmortem ritual, cremation was “almost entirely unknown” in pre-Buddhist China and it was not until the Song Dynasty that it became a common practice (Silk 78). According to some versions of the tale, “the Blessed One’s pyre caught fire of its own accord,” engulfing the Buddha’s entire form such that (in what brings to mind a body-contemplation guide) “no cinder or ash of the outer skin, inner skin, flesh, tendons, or oil of the joints could be discerned. Only the relics remained” (Silk 10). This is an important feature to highlight as spontaneous combustion came to be viewed, at least doctrinally, as the result of highly cultivated practitioners in an advanced state of meditation, as opposed to meditators simply igniting their own bodies. This imagery of fire painlessly consuming meditators from within can be seen as an illustration of the emptiness of all dharma. The body’s ability to destroy itself results simply from its status as an impermanent entity. Benn contends that this kind spontaneous immolation was often viewed as the natural end for those who had developed a “mastery of the samadhi of fire” (Benn 164). Such a conception is directly invoked in Fonian’s Chinese translation of the Antararabha-sutra, in which the Buddha is said to have “entered into the Fire Contemplation and abandoned his shen-sheli to dissipation” (Silk 46). This quotation raises a further complication through its combination of the two terms shen, generally translated as “body”, and sheli, usually understood as spiritual relics, often left by self-immolators and cremations. Both Chinese words translate to the Sanskrit sarira, which can refer to either one’s physical self (the body) or the mystical remains left after a cremation, originally referring to those of the Buddha. Silk observes “sheli being used as an honorific term for the uncremated body of the Buddha by certain individuals, while others refer to the very same body” with the more mundane shen or ti (Silk 42). Relics are extraordinarily important in both Indian and Chinese contexts and sarira-puja (relic worship) and the erection of stupas (mound-like structures that traditionally house relics and serve as places of worship) remain well-established traditions. As Sharf explains, relics have “contributed to the success of Buddhism as a missionary religion… and legitimized the Buddhist appropriation of indigenous religious centers throughout Asia, transforming the landscape into a sacred Buddhist domain” (167). Although relics could include any bodily remains, sarira usually referred to those found in the ashes of funeral pyres.

Prior to Buddhism’s introduction of cremation and water burial, Benn
claims that the only means to dispose of dead bodies used by the ancient Chinese were earth burial and “exposure of the corpse” (Benn 101). Without cremation, the concept of finding body relics within the ashes of a pyre was likewise foreign to the Chinese people. As the practice proliferated as a funerary rite, the round *sarira* found in the ashes of pyres (arguably magical “proof” of the deceased’s heightened spiritual attainment or the congealed remains of bone, flesh and bodily fluids that are not entirely consumed by the wood fire) came to be revered in China just as they were in the Western Regions. Heralded as proof of the Buddha’s existence, as well as of the continued efficacy of his teachings, relics became important tools for disseminating the *Dharma* and recruiting new converts to the faith among a people for whom “the need to dispel their uncertainty concerning the existence of a god of a distant land and time had an additional urgency” (Wang 81). There was an important debate, however, that developed over time as to whether Buddhist relics—the True Body of the Buddha—were to be understood as formless objects of “‘auspicious’ luminance” (in representation of the Buddha’s ultimate transcendental qualities) or as literal body parts, such as fragments of bone or cremation remains, in acknowledgement of his “true” existence as a human being (Wang 86). To the Western scholar, both options present a conundrum. A conception of *sheli* as ethereal light deviates from a view of Buddhism as a “rational” philosophy devoid of superstition, while the worship of the physical remains of a dead spiritual leader illustrates a lack of conviction in the Buddhist ideals of non-attachment and the understanding of transient phenomena. In order to resolve this dilemma, the issue of relic worship must be investigated further.

The production and dissemination of relics became an important facet of Chinese Buddhism and, as illustrated by Benn, self-immolators hoped to use their deaths as a means of propagating the faith. In this respect, “to die effortlessly seems to have been accounted sufficient, although to leave behind [relics] was always appreciated and to use one’s own death as a means of preaching the *Dharma* was clearly considered ideal” (Benn 184). Although the hagiographic accounts of different self-immolators’ deaths vary from salvation attempts at rebirth in a Pure Land, “which was not infrequently named as a destination for late imperial auto-cremators” (Benn 175), to compassionate “public act[s] of atonement for the perceived misdeeds of the *sangha*” (Benn 174) or prayers for rain or other natural phenomena (Benn 176), the ultimate benefit appears in every case to be the furthered proliferation of *Dharma*. This was most effectively conveyed through the enshrinement of relics, most commonly cremation *sarira* or the more rare *roushe pusa* (full-body relic) that are sometimes produced. These unique Buddhist artifacts are often referred to as “mummies”, although they are not prepared and preserved in the same manner as their Egyptian counterparts, but rather are seen as illustrious beings who have achieved the ideal of “attaining the way in one’s flesh-body” (Gildow 101).

Purportedly created simply by virtue of the practitioner’s extremely
advanced state of spiritual cultivation, *roushen pusa* can be found in China and Taiwan, and many were produced in the latter half of the twentieth century. The first known examples of *roushen pusa* in the Chinese mainland began in the late third century and all are instances of mountain ascetics whose disciples did not intentionally create relics from their respective master’s corpse. Heluojie was the first recorded instance of these full-body relics, recorded in 298 CE. He reportedly died in a meditative posture, in which stance “his disciples attempted to cremate him” to little avail “after several days on the pyre” (Gildow 88-9). These auspicious circumstances were taken as a sign of Heluojie’s spiritual attainment and his remains were placed in a cave for veneration. In the latter half of the fourth century, several other mountain ascetics, in an area far removed from Heluojie, left similar full-body relics (Gildow 89). These reclusive monks set the precedent for later full-body relics, though these did not appear until the middle of the Tang Dynasty over two hundred years later. However, these early examples are unique in that they are “accidental” with no (recorded) artificial means taken to preserve the bodies, although the frugal diet of an ascetic may have facilitated natural preservation.

By 627 CE, accounts in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (Further Biographies of Eminent Monks) appear that discuss the intentional steps taken to create full-body relics. Still an ascetic monk, Daoxiu’s corpse was found to resist decay and was “covered with lacquer-soaked cloth” in order to be enshrined (Gildow 89). Later in the Tang Dynasty, more monks reportedly became full-body relics. Though various methods were undertaken and the details are not always presented in full, “lacquer seems to have been involved as a final protective measure” in most cases (Gildow 89). It is a striking fact that examples of this phenomenon can be seen throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism up to the present day and continue to be worshiped as local deities with numinous power. *Roushen pusa* itself, “the most commonly used Chinese term in Taiwan” for a full-body relic, literally translates as “flesh-body bodhisattva” (Gildow 95). This illuminates the extent to which these beings were worshiped, as indicated by the fact that their presence in monasteries and shrines became a profitable draw. As communities donated monetary offerings and prestige built around temples that housed masters who believed to have the power to “grant favors and interact with people by sending dreams” (Gildow 90), the influence of the temple increased.

The evolution in Chinese politics throughout the 20th century resulted in the division between the communist People’s Republic of China and the government-in-exile on Taiwan. This has created an environment where established religious institutions are in a dual state of repression on the mainland, and rejuvenation in the diaspora. In Taiwan especially, this development has been bolstered in part by the increase in the emergence of charismatic Buddhist leaders, many of whom have left *roushen pusa* to contribute to Taiwanese Buddhism’s prestige and allure. Cihang, the first Taiwanese monastic to become a *roushen*
pusa, died in 1954, whereupon his body was placed in two sealed earthenware tubs filled with charcoal and lime (Gildow 92). His disciples buried his urn for three years, as per his instructions. At such time, they opened the sealed urn and found his body intact to be gilded and placed in the temple alongside standard statues of the Buddha and cosmic bodhisattvas. This format for burial and enshrinement, requested by Cihang, set the precedent for later Taiwanese monks, and one nun belonging to a Tibetan tradition, who would likewise be made into roushen pusa (Gildow 95). Although there have only been six recognized Taiwanese roushen pusa, all were enshrined between 1954 and 2000, indicating a remarkable succession after Cihang’s death. Of these six, only that of the mountain ascetic Puzhao (d. 1983), about whom little is known, is not encased in bronze or gold leaf (Gildow 94). These bodies-cum-statues serve as idols and are perceived to still actively teach Dharma and grant blessings. Though recognized as human beings, these masters appear to have so transcended their flesh-bodies that they “could easily be mistaken for just another Buddha statue” (Gildow 105).

Appearances can be deceiving however, as it is clear that these idols have been artificially produced. Aside from the uncertain circumstances surrounding Puzhao’s enshrinement and the full-body relic of a Mongolian lama, the Kanjurwa Khutughtu, which was reportedly the “accidental product of an ineptly staged cremation” (Gildow 93), all of Taiwan’s full-body relics have followed Cihang’s model and requested enshrinement from their followers. For all the affirmations that these masters were able to remain in this world as “flesh-body bodhisattva[s] due to [their] spiritual attainments” (Gildow 115), every circumstance entails some process to preserve the body, often an active attempt with lacquer or naturally-occurring chemical preservatives, and it is readily apparent why the charred body of the Kanjurwa resisted decay after its failed cremation. The further steps taken in many cases to encase corpses in heavy metals plainly illustrates that these roushen pusa can be explained as illustrations of man’s conscious effort to impede the natural processes of decomposition. Yet, as evidenced by the fact that roushen pusa need “to undergo ‘maintenance and repairs’ which… involves applying additional gold leaf” every decade (Gildow 111), the laws of nature and the Dharma remain true and neither gold nor flesh is free from anitya (impermanence).

While these attempts to circumvent natural decay may appear to be in contention with Buddhist doctrine and tradition, the precedence for such activities stretches back to Sakyamuni himself—historically an important component for establishing the “legitimacy” of any ritual in Chinese Buddhism. According to several of Silk’s translations of accounts of the Buddha’s cremation ceremony, Sakyamuni was placed inside a golden casket and the wood pyre was extinguished (by various miraculous or conventional means) before it had burned down to embers (Silk 34-5). This is significant as it illuminates the mysterious fact as to why the Buddha’s body left so many relics to be disseminated in stupas.
throughout Asia and establishes a tradition of manipulating the burial process to ensure the production of relics. Although Mahakasyapa and the sangha had no intention of turning the Buddha’s body into a roushen pusa, they allowed for such practices to be arguably justified in tradition.

In tracing the lineage of full-body relics back to the Pali canon, one is still no closer to the answer of why sheli, including full-bodies, have continued to be worshiped throughout the history of Buddhism. Prior to the Buddha’s death, he reportedly instructed Ananda (the Buddha’s cousin and closest disciple) to be unconcerned “with the worship of the Tathagata’s body” and instead to “strive for the true goal, be committed to the true goal, live being zealous, ardent, and resolute toward the true goal…” (Silk 9). Relic worship would then appear from the outset to be discouraged by the Buddha as a deluded attempt to cling to the past and conventional existence. And yet, the physical remains of any human being are incontrovertible proof of the transitory, empty nature of existence and thus of the transcendental capacity exemplified by the Buddha. Sakyamuni’s “True Body” is thus not his corporal construction as proof of his past existence in this realm, but rather the fact that he is entirely transient—in death, all are pure and transcendent and thus, any and all human remains illustrate the “True Body” of the Buddha and his worldly teachings. Invoking the language of Kristeva’s abject, Sharf claims “the worship of relics exemplified the newfound otherness of Buddhism, for it would seem to involve the sanctification of that which is utterly profane and loathsome—the corporal remains of the dead” (165). But in their physical presence, relics illustrate that not even the Buddha himself is free from the cycle of impermanent existence, a point reinforced by the fact that another common Sanskrit term for relic is dhatu: a term that “is also used to refer to the fundamental or constituent element(s) of the universe itself” (Sharf 171). The ultimate goal is to move past one’s delusions of the abject and perceive the supreme teaching embodied within it.

Of course, one must also concede that relics have consistently served as an effective tool for spreading Dharma, garnering donations and support for monasteries and establishing a strong spiritual community. During recent politically contentious times for religion in China and the diasporic community, roushen pusa have allowed monks to capitalize on the conventional benefits of housing relics and expand upon the well-established mystical draw of sarira. According to Sharf, the reason why such religious objects are able to generate such fervor is because “they confront us in the starkest possible way with our irreducible ‘thingness’ and at the same time with the puzzle of life itself” (181). Roushen pusa and self-immolators further demonstrate the proper manner in which one is to meet the inevitable end that is evoked and embodied in these artifacts. Benn points out that “a notable trope that came to dominate later biographies [of self-immolators] was the focus on the moment of death and the importance of the ideal posture as life ends” (157). Combined with the trend of
monks preaching and even composing “death verses” while burning, to die in full-meditation stance without pain is promoted through the accounts of self-immolators as the preferred and proper way to meet one’s end. The message is thus that Buddhist practice develops the acceptance and comfort with the concept of one’s transience in this world. Taiwanese roushe\n pusa exhibit this same quality as they have all been preserved and displayed in a meditative stance that demonstrates to worshippers that they met their death calmly and in meditation. Indeed, it is a common occurrence for their hagiographies to purport that these masters predicted their own deaths (Gildow 98). Though seemingly opposed to one another, masters who self-immolate and leave sheli or become roushe\n pusa all convey the same message to practitioners: both instill an acceptance of death and ultimately illustrate that all humans, even those of a highly advanced spiritual state, are subject to the laws of Dharma.

Although the Buddha’s teachings on the true nature of the physical self are explicit in their depiction of transient dharma, his followers have found many methods to express this teaching. Chinese practitioners found unique ways of combining indigenous philosophical understandings, such as gan\nying, into a Buddhist ritualistic framework that draws inspiration from early Buddhist scripture as it was transported across geographic and linguistic boundaries. As a foreign religion struggling to gain a foothold in a new land, Buddhism has had to adapt to the ever-changing Chinese cultural climate and use innovative and often controversial methods of exhibiting “signs that the highest awakening could still take place on Chinese soil, even in a time and place far removed from the Buddha or the great Chinese sage-monsks of the past” (Benn 182). Throughout the contentious debate over what constitutes an “authentic” Buddhist practice, upaya-ka\nshalya remains significant, giving rise to the various branches of practice and ritual that constitute the whole of Chinese Buddhism. The continued presence of body-centered practices such as relic worship, self-immolation and the active production of full-body relics illustrates the extent to which the Buddha’s explication of the transitory body resonated with the Chinese people as a significant draw for Buddhist converts.
Works Cited


Religious Freedom

Abstract: The pertinent, controversial and vulnerable nature of religious freedom in the wake of secularization demands a conceptual re-examination of its significance and impact. Through an exploration of the theoretical definition of religious freedom and its practical applications in an international arena, this paper will attempt to elucidate the need for a paradigm shift in discourses on religious freedom. Case studies of the failure of the United States International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) and the potential for a new Office of Religious Freedom in Canada will point to the pressing need for a new approach to religious freedom that protects religious freedom from a pluralistic perspective.

I. What Is Religious Freedom?

“A valuable but ambiguous expression” - Jay Newman, 
On Religious Freedom

Many philosophers of the Enlightenment predicted the decline of religion in the public sphere. Some of the minds most foundational to the Western academic tradition – Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud – anticipated the eventual disappearance of the practice of religion in a process of secularization. However, this “secularization hypothesis” has failed. The reality remains that religion has survived as an impactful and persistent dimension of both international and local communities. This persistence of religion in the public sphere has amplified the need to examine the questions and preservation of religious freedom.

Religious freedom has garnered an indispensable place in discourse on liberalism, democracy, foreign affairs and human rights. Two immediate examples in current affairs in the United States lend themselves to this proposal. In his famous Cairo speech in 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama stressed the crucial importance of religious freedom in both international affairs and his own administration as the world becomes increasingly interconnected (Obama 2009). In June of 2011, the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights in the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing prioritizing internationally religious freedom as an integral component of U.S. foreign policy (Smith 2011). As religious freedom takes centre stage in both theoretical and political discourses, it is essential to take a step back and explore what the concept of the freedom of religion realistically entails.

Much ink has been spilled in an attempt to reach a thorough and holistic definition of religious freedom. An authority on liberalism, Maurice Cranston acknowledges the difficulty of this matter, but arrives at the conclusion that religious freedom entails both a freedom (from the state) for religious institutions, and also a freedom (for individuals) from religious institutions (Cranston 14).
Many foundational rights documents of liberal states enshrine the concept of religious freedom as the basic individual human right from which all others stem. The Magna Carta and the Constitutions of the United States and Canada explicitly ensure the freedom of the church as an institution distinct from the state; a move which arguably lays the foundation of liberalism. This historical entrenchment of secularism as a call for liberty implies that the right to religious freedom instills a unique respect for the individual which predicates the concept of a body of human rights ideally guaranteed to all individuals. Denial of this dignity reduces the capacity of the individual; and thus rejects liberty.

This proposal is echoed in present day in the work of Martha Nussbaum. In *Liberty of Conscience*, she asserts that respect for individuals to choose their religious beliefs is at the core of democracy (Nussbaum 3). This equal liberty entails a healthy respect for religious difference, as well as for the right of the individual to maintain autonomy. Accordingly, it has been argued in historical rights documents as well as in academia that religious freedom is an ideal at the very core of liberty and democracy.

However, the right to religious freedom cannot be approached from a unitary standpoint. Doing so would foster a binary paradigm in which one must be for or against the maintenance of religious freedom. In order to avoid such polarization, the concept of religious freedom must be approached from a pluralistic standpoint. By envisioning religious freedom as a pluralistic ideal, Steven Smith suggests that “progress toward the achievement of more complete religious freedom” will surely occur (Smith 12). Accordingly, different kinds of religious freedom may be discerned.

In relation to the aforementioned theoretical dilemma, Arvind Sharma presents various conceptual challenges associated with understandings of religious freedom in his book, *Problematising Religious Freedom*. Religious freedom certainly entails the freedom to practice any religion. It also includes the freedom *not* to practice a religion (Sharma 74). This freedom to choose one’s belief or lack thereof extends beyond the individual. The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Constitutional Act of 1867 demonstrate that religious freedom can include the freedom of the individual as well as the freedom of the religious institution. Iain Benson notes that these texts “do not show a priority of individual rights over group rights. Both are recognized as important, and cases support this” (Benson 123). Accordingly, many different approaches to the protection of religious freedom exist, and religious freedom must function as a pluralistic, fluid ideal within the liberal state.

Sharma additionally notes different constraints on religious freedom that are evident within the context of globalization and liberalism. Political, denominational, and at times parental authority all place constraints on the otherwise absolute right to religious freedom (Sharma 74). In this way, the right to practice freely one’s belief may be trumped by a variety of outside influences.
which have authority over the individual. For example, a young child’s religious freedom may be limited by the decision of the parents. Winnifred Sullivan asserts that the legal limits to religious freedom are “often expressed by rhetorically set boundaries that are strangely unhelpful when it comes to actually cases” (Sullivan 155). He envisions limitation of religious freedom as a spectrum, in which a religious group is bound by local and practical police safety regulations on one end, and, “the horror of human sacrifice” on the other (Sullivan 155). However, between these extremes, the power of religious freedom within the greater context of society is often unclear and requires a case-by-case analysis. As the exploration of the concept of religious freedom deepens, it becomes increasingly evident that religious freedom is, as declared by Jay Newman, a “valuable but ambiguous expression” (Newman 12).

II. Religious Freedom: A contentious issue

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) asserts the freedom of religion as a foundational human right. It states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public and private, to manifest his religion in teaching, practice, worship and observance (UDHR).

Intending to enshrine the right to religious freedom as a global ideal, Article 18 serves as an appropriate symbol of the greater controversy over religious freedom. Arvind Sharma eloquently explains that Article 18 is “fully cognizant of [the freedom to change from one religion to another], and equally oblivious of [unrestricted access to the other religions without the need for undergoing such change]” (Sharma 76). As such, it is often argued that the current “universal” conception of religious freedom contains a bias in favour of Western missionary religions and against Asian non-missionary religions.

To elucidate this point, a brief and general exploration of Western versus Asian religious ideals is in need. A speech delivered by F. Max Müller in 1873 sets the framework for an ongoing dichotomy within religious classification. Müller placed Judaism, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism within the non-missionary category, as they do not actively seek converts. Christianity, Buddhism and Islam were categorized as missionary traditions which welcome conversion, a practice evident in the translation of sacred texts into other languages, as well as the flourishing of these traditions in new regional groups (Müller 1). Sharma develops Müller’s significant proposition, identifying it as “an enduring trope in the study of religion, even if the classification occasionally seems to fray around the edges”
(Sharma 175). Indeed, this classification can in no way be deemed rigid or absolute, as each of the aforementioned “non-missionary” religions now accepts converts. The classification of religions into missionary and non-missionary as categories is not holistic, but typifies the historic nature of Western versus Asian religions.

Typically Western Abrahamic religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam are deemed by Sharma as “missionary” traditions because they actively seek converts. Furthermore, Western religious traditions are primarily characterized by “exclusive religious identity, and represent the perspective of the proselytizing religions” (Sharma 255). Conversely, the spiritual environment of Asia has fostered a medium which often does not demand that the individual adhere to one religious tradition exclusively. It is difficult to locate a word in many indigenous Asian languages which corresponds to that of “religion” in Romance languages. As such, it is possible to belong to multiple religious traditions in Asia simultaneously. Thus, in contrast to Western religious traditions, the Asian religious environment is characterized by the “possibility of multiple religious identities, and presents the perspective of non-proselytizing religions” (Sharma 255).

Religious freedom cannot be disentangled from religious identity and the freedom to choose one’s religion(s). If religious freedom is truly a universal right as claimed in the UDHR, it follows that multiple religious identity as evident in Asian communities should be preserved in addition to unitary religious identity. This infers that “the conversion to a religion should not involve the abandonment of the other” (Sharma 101). However, the rhetoric employed in Article 18 of the UDHR through the use of the phrase “freedom to change his religion or belief” indicates a commitment to the Western-centric ideal of singular religious identity and encourages proselytism. In this way, it can be argued that the current legal discourse on religious freedom favours those who subscribe to Western religious traditions.

The Western bias of religious freedom legislation fits well within the greater Western-centric human rights debate. Charles Taylor has spilled much ink attempting to illuminate the one-sided nature of human rights discourse. In ‘Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights,’ Taylor isolates philosophical ideals and specific words and then locates their distinctly Western-Christian origin. The term “human dignity” is identified as “a favourite term in the Western philosophical stream” (Taylor 337). Using terminology which has a distinctly Western connotation inhibits the process of creating a pluralistic, international discussion of human rights. The current state of global rights talk, he asserts, is “something that has roots in Western culture” (Taylor 337). To establish a more polyvalent\(^1\) and truly global approach to human rights, Taylor suggests a paradigm shift in which a shared ethical foundation is identified and a new dialogue is then built.

\(^{1}\) The term ‘polyvalent’ will herein be used to describe the particular approach to human rights proposed by Charles Taylor in ‘An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights’; one which takes into account a variety of perspectives and worldviews.
The constructive suggestions of Charles Taylor can be applied specifically to legislation addressing universal religious freedom. By identifying a common ground between Western and Asian religious traditions in the shared desire to practice religion freely, a new understanding of religious freedom can be built which recognizes those who adhere to singular and/or multiple religious identities; those who seek to convert and those who seek to avoid forced conversion. Sharma suggests a consensus of this nature in changing Article 18 of the UDHR to read as follows: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes the freedom to choose [not change] his religion or belief...” (Sharma 210). In this way, a polyvalent approach to religious freedom is taken, and a universal consensus on religious freedom can be achieved.


It is evident from a theoretical standpoint that a singular approach to the preservation of religious freedom proves globally ineffective. A case study of the Christian-centric implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in the United States will help to expound the truly ineffective nature of a purely Western-centric discourse on the right to religious freedom. The blatantly Christian bias taken in the United States with regard to international religious freedom has caused backlash overseas, perpetuating what Taylor deems “the inability of [...] Westerners to see their culture as one of many,” (143) and the perceived impossibility of a truly polyvalent human rights discourse (143).

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) was born “in response to the growing pressure from religious and civil society groups regarding the persecution of Christians in several authoritarian states” (Danchin 38). Proclaiming the preservation of the right to believe, or not believe, whichever one chooses, IRFA called for the appointment of an Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom to operate within the State Department, and the establishment of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a body to monitor the state of religious freedom around the world. However, IRFA, which Danchin explains is deeply rooted in Christian bias, continued on its unilateral pursuit of the protection of the practice of Christianity around the world.

A prominent religious freedom advisor and former member of the Office of International Religious Freedom at the US Department of State, who wishes to remain nameless, laments the unfavourable impression of Western promotion of religious freedom abroad. In a personal commentary on the implementation of IRFA in Saudi Arabia, the advisor shared that:
In my meetings with Saudis, I often got the sense that there was [an] unexpressed sentiment that served as the basis for their complaints about our work. What they would actually say, though, is that they did not find it appropriate for the United States to try to force American values on them. They found the whole notion of having to be evaluated annually by the IRF Office on the basis of the religious freedom they accord their citizenry to be deeply offensive, and all the more so when the standard against which they are being measured is one concocted by an imperialist Western country that is really out to undermine their religion and way of life (Personal Interview 2011).

The advisor’s personal account of backlash in Saudi Arabia reinforces claims made by Charles Taylor that human rights cannot be Western-centric if they are to be universally implemented. By attempting to force “American values” (read: Christian values) in societies not born out of Christian roots, IRFA has perpetuated a broad dissatisfaction with the notion of religious freedom internationally, thus inhibiting its original goal.

Arvind Sharma elaborates on this proposal, suggesting that the monitoring of international religious freedom has the potential to allow for “any attempt to restrict Christian missionary activity [to be] regularly identified as a restriction of religious freedom” (Sharma 222). Sharma’s claim is supported by the utter lack of diversity in the body of commissioners created by IRFA to monitor religious freedom. The body of USCIRF commissioners has been composed almost entirely of Christians, with only one Hindu, one Muslim, and one Jewish commissioner to date (Shuka 1). Suhag Shuka of the Hindu American Foundation has illuminated USCIRF’s blatant disregard for the religious persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Malaysia, despite its thorough reporting on the mistreatment of Christians around the world (Shuka 1). A plausible argument can thus be made for the favouritism of Christians in United States’ quest to preserve international religious freedom.

Reflection on the floundering global reputation of the International Religious Freedom Act has become increasingly commonplace as Canada debates the creation of a new office for the protection of religious freedom. By fostering a polyvalent approach to religious freedom, Canada has the potential to encourage a new era in human rights discourse, which encourages plurality and diversity.

IV. Looking Forward: Canada’s new office for religious freedom

Canada is currently in the process of creating an Office for Religious Freedom as a part of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Spearheading
the campaign for this new office is Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird. In his September address to the United Nations General Assembly, Baird pledged:

This office will be created to promote and protect freedom of religion and belief, consistent with core Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Most importantly, it will demonstrate that Canada truly is a free society (Baird 2011).

In order to remain consistent with Canada’s professed core values of multiculturalism and human rights, it is paramount that Canada’s new Office for Religious Freedom (hereinafter the new Office) learn from the aforementioned failures of its American counterpart. The new Office must entrench the ideal of pluralism by cultivating a new Western understanding of religious freedom that does not favour Christianity, but rather, actively protects those who practice any, all, or no religion(s). In order to do so, it is essential that the new Office reports thoroughly on instances of religious persecution around the world, and employs a diverse body of commissioners.

Steven Wales asserts that a shift away from Western-centric ideals in the discourse on religious freedom can only occur when practical change is enacted in the form of extensive international reporting on the state of religious freedom. “Few countries welcome the evaluation required by the reports, and many resist the arrogant powers who sit in judgment over other nations,” he asserts in a similar fashion to the previously quoted advisor. “But a thorough, well-written report, supported by appropriate press releases and attention from nation leaders, will make sure the world hears” (Wales 642-3). Accordingly, the new Office must report on the state of religious freedom from an unbiased, polyvalent approach, and accompany it with appropriate publicity. In doing so, Canada’s new Office for Religious Freedom will thoroughly and effectively uphold its value of pluralism and succeed in its mission to protect fundamental human rights.

In accordance with the implementation of a pluralistic report, Canada’s new Office for Religious Freedom must employ a diverse body of commissioners to monitor the state of religious freedom around the world. The body of commissioners must reflect the multicultural nature of Canadian society. Furthermore, a plurality of religious traditions, as well as non-believers, must be represented in order to achieve a neutral perspective. As Sharma explains, this means missionary and non-missionary religions must be represented to avoid a potential arena for the encouragement of proselytism and the spread of Western religious values.

These seemingly small, practical steps towards building a new Office for Religious Freedom in Canada will induce a paradigm shift in the greater human rights discourse away from Western-centric values, and towards a more polyvalent approach to religious freedom and human dignity.
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to elucidate the supreme importance of religious freedom from a theoretical and then a more practical standpoint. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected in a process of globalization, the protection of religious freedom is paramount. Although an ambiguous term, religious freedom has certainly garnered a negative reputation in regards to the encouragement of Western values abroad. A case study of the perceived shortcomings of the International Religious Freedom Act exemplifies this failure. In order to truly protect the right to religious freedom, a shift in discourse is necessary to create a neutral environment for all believers. The creation of a new Office for Religious Freedom in Canada with a pluralistic perspective serves as an opportunity to induce this shift and embody a new discourse on religious freedom; planting the seeds of a truly polyvalent approach to human rights.

Works Cited


Personal Interview. 29 Nov. 2011.


GENDERLESS HUMANITY
Christ as Mother in Julian of Norwich

LAURA MONCION
Genderless Humanity: Christ as Mother in Julian of Norwich

Abstract: This paper explores the image of Christ as mother in Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*, and its implications for her theology of salvation. Furthermore, this paper will elaborate on a conception of God, which fuses and transcends gender categories.

Western Christianity hinges on the essential concept of Jesus Christ as simultaneously human and divine. After the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, orthodox doctrine asserted that Christ was “truly God and truly man... consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood” (“ Creed of Chalcedon”). Christ’s humanity was—and continues to be—at least as important to Christian faith as his divinity; yet there is a tension between the two, the classic philosophical tension between the body and soul; the need to reconcile physical requirements with spiritual striving. This tension becomes especially important for mystic writers, who endeavour to elevate the spirit while enclosed within the body. This effort could lead to radical debasement of the body, to which many stories of self-flagellation, drinking the pus of lepers, and “holy anorexia” can attest—but not all mystics necessarily considered humanity as something to be overcome. Among the most powerful images of Christ are those that fully embrace his humanity as well as his divinity, and speak to the divine in humanity. One such image is that of Christ as mother, both in the human sense of bodily bleeding and suffering in order to give life, and spiritual in that the life which Christ delivers is of the soul, eternal and heavenly. Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century English anchoress and theologian, elaborates and expands on this conception of Christ in the Revelations of Divine Love. The image of Christ as mother is central to Julian’s theology, especially since the concept of mother’s love undergirds her thoughts on salvation. Additionally, Christ as mother demonstrates the fusion of male and female in one person, in order to speak of a God who is beyond these human categories. Thus, the mystic not only *can*, but *must*, transcend the categories of gender in order to fully achieve the goal of union with this genderless God.

Although Julian’s version allows us to relate both male and female aspects of Christ’s two natures to the greater glory of the Godhead, the image of Christ as mother was originally conceived under somewhat different circumstances, and with different implications. Only some aspects of motherhood were ascribed to Christ, and only in particular circumstances. The likes of St. Anselm (c.1033-1109), William of St. Thierry (c.1075-1148), and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) used maternal imagery to speak of the nurturing qualities of Christ, especially in connection to breasts. Bernard’s famous sermons on the Song of Songs treat the verse “For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the
best ointments” (Song 1:1-2) as an image of spiritual suckling:

When she [the Bride] said, then, ‘Your breasts are better than wine,’ she meant: ‘The richness of the grace that flows from your breasts contributes far more to my spiritual progress than the biting reprimands of my superiors’ (Bernard of Clairvaux qtd. in Bynum 128).

The ideas of gentleness and femininity applied to Christ generally stop here in terms of Cistercian theology, but go on to play an active role in the life of the Cistercian community. Interestingly, monks—including Bernard himself—refer to themselves as women and wives in order to express their total dependence on God, and abbots speak of themselves as mothers in order to line the harshness of monastery discipline and “biting reprimands” with the gentler idea of maternal love (Bynum 166).

Julian extends the idea of a mother’s unconditional love beyond the relationship of abbot to monk, ascribing it instead to the relationship between God and the world. She sees the world as “a little thing, the size of a hazelnut… [which] lasts and will last forever because God loves it; and in the same way everything exists through the love of God” (Julian 179). Since everything is dependent on God’s love, it follows that this love must be eternal, unconditional, all-encompassing—and for Julian, it is. God’s love is the very cornerstone of her theology, and she couches it in maternal language: “we are redeemed by the motherhood of mercy and grace and brought back into our natural dwelling where we were made by natural love; a natural love which never leaves us” (Julian 201). The one who makes this love tangible is Jesus, to whom she ascribes:

[T]his fair, lovely word ‘mother,’ so sweet and so tender in itself that it cannot truly be said of any but of him… to the nature of motherhood belong tender love, wisdom, and knowledge, and it is good, for although the birth of our body is only low, humble, and modest compared with the birth of our soul, yet it is he who does it in the beings by whom it is done (Julian 203).

Julian goes well beyond the Cistercian concept of Christ’s motherhood—rather than simply breastfeeding, Christ “can familiarly lead us into his blessed breast through his sweet open side” (Julian 202). She reframes the Passion in terms of childbirth, portraying Christ “in labour for the full time until he suffered the sharpest pangs and the most grievous sufferings… And when it was finished… he had born us into bliss” (Julian 202). The vivid physicality of these images speaks to the importance of Christ’s humanity; yet Christ’s motherhood is above all spiritual. In our spiritual birth, Christ “gives us some degree of knowledge
and love of his blessed Godhead, with awareness through grace of his precious Manhood and his blessed Passion, and with courteous wonder at his great and surpassing goodness” (Julian 203).

This goodness, and the powerful concept of God’s unconditional love for all creation, allows Julian to somewhat subversively solve certain theological problems, especially that of salvation. Julian has trouble with the tension between the idea of a loving God who affirms that “all manner of things shall be well,” and the Church’s teachings that devils, heathens, and heretics are condemned to the fires of Hell. While God’s immediate reply is enigmatic, -- ”What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall keep my word in all things and all things will be well” (Julian 190). -- Julian, a consummate theologian, cannot stop herself from working out the problem of sin and salvation, and she does so in terms of a mother’s love. God allows humankind to sin as a mother allows her child “to be beaten to break down vices so that the child may gain in virtue and grace” (Julian 203). Thus, life on earth may be difficult and wrought with sin, yet God repeats the comforting mantra of “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” (Julian 186-7). This reassurance, supporting her conviction in the unconditional, endless, motherly nature of God’s love, leads Julian to carefully endorse the notion of universal salvation. While she does not reject Church teachings, she, through direct communication with God, lays claim to a mystic freedom, which allows her to bypass them (Bynum 265).

Rather than seeing herself as elite, however, Julian is quick to stress the democratic essence of God’s love. As the ideal mother loves all her children equally, God’s love is equally directed towards and encompasses all of us. Thus there is an inclusive language found in her work, as well as the tendency of modern feminist theologians to read her as one of their own. There is much to be said about the positive effect of Julian’s “motherhood theology” on Christian women’s spirituality. The fact that she considers the love between a mother and child to be the most accurate metaphor for the love, which God extends towards the world, says a lot about not only Julian’s idea of God, but also her idea of mothers (Heimmel 50). By portraying Christ as a mother that is both physical and spiritual, as well as God’s love for the world as maternal, Julian implicitly revalues the mothering role in Christianity beyond that of the Virgin Mary. Although the cult of the Virgin Mary was immensely popular in the Middle Ages, this trend does not necessarily translate into a swell of female spirituality. The cult of Mary, like the Cistercian portrayals of Christ as mother, spoke largely to men of a feminine ideal, which was not necessarily linked to or based on actual women (Bynum 67). Nor did women mystics necessarily have a special connection to the Virgin Mary or see themselves as emulating her; it is telling that, while her biographers systematically compare Clare of Assisi to the Virgin Mary, in Clare’s own writings she compares herself to Christ (Bynum 153). In her treatment of Christ as mother, Julian connects the feminine ideal to women themselves, “by insisting on the relevance
of human motherhood to the spiritual motherhood of Christ, and by expanding motherhood to include emotional as well as physical experiences” (Williams 126).

There is always a danger that some interpretations may overemphasize “woman consciousness” and “gynocentric imagery” to the point of anachronism, one such instance being the almost knee-jerk reaction of equating the blood flowing from the crucifix’s head (Julian 178) with menstrual blood (McAvoy 189). Although her writings can be seen in many ways to provide a way to Christ through female experience, the implications for any sort of female spirituality are largely incidental. Julian, as a mystic, was not primarily concerned with creating a particularly female religious path, but with emulating Christ, a goal devoid of gender distinction (Bynum 155).

On the other hand, it would be equally wrong to ignore all femininity, and its affective, physical associations, and to overemphasize the intellectual, abstract, masculine nature of Julian’s thought. To notice that the physicality of the bleeding crucifix prompts Julian to theological, abstract, ‘masculine’ thought, rather than a wholly emotional, ‘feminine’ response, is one thing, but to conclude from this observation that her abstraction “actually prevents any affective identification” (Aers and Staley 89) is quite another. Furthermore, to deem her writings essentially masculine because of this tendency towards abstraction, attempting to plug her into the equation of “men/manhood/reason versus women/feminine/flesh,” (Aers and Staley 97) is to neglect the inclusive, universal nature of her thought. There is no reason to believe that Julian considered the distinction between emotional and intellectual, physical and spiritual, (or for that matter, male and female) to be set in stone. The episode of the bleeding crucifix demonstrates exactly this. The sign of blood signifies the physical suffering and spiritual redemption of Christ, and ultimately of mankind:

I suddenly saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown of thorns, all hot, freshly, plentifully, and vividly, just as I imagined it was at the moment when the crown of thorns was thrust onto his blessed head—he who was both God and man, the same who suffered for me… with this sight of the blessed Passion, along with the Godhead that I saw in my mind, I saw that I, yes, and every creature living that would be saved, could have strength to resist all the fiends of hell and all spiritual enemies (Julian 178).

The “sight of the blessed Passion” and the divinity of the Godhead are not distinct in Julian’s theology; that the affective and intellectual experiences of God go hand in hand is perfectly natural.

The synthesis of male and female in the image of Christ as mother follows in a similar vein, demonstrating in particular the fluidity of gender categories in
the face of an all-being, all-encompassing God. The melding of genders in a god is, again, not an original idea of Julian’s, or even of Christianity’s: the motif is present in several pagan religions, most notably in Graeco-Roman polytheism. A fourteenth-century translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, moralized and Christianized by Bersuire, equates Hermaphrodite, the double-gendered son of Hermes and Aphrodite, with Christ, in that he “represents the union of the masculine nature of God and the feminine nature of humanity” (Silberman). However, unlike Hermaphrodite, Christ’s whole is greater than the sum of his parts, a figure combining divinity and humanity in a unique way. All human categories are fluid in Christ; hence the arguments and schism over his divinity versus his humanity in the patristic period, and the ease with which Julian fuses male and female in Christ. This fusion is apparent in the way she describes Christ parenting the soul: “he fires our understanding, he directs our ways” (Julian 203) with the authority and wisdom of a father figure, yet he also “eases our conscience [and] comforts our soul,” (Julian 203) demonstrating a mother’s gentle compassion. Because of this fluidity, and because Christ’s humanity was in fact male, the figure of Christ as mother is not a wholesale feminization, but a blurring of gender distinctions. By ascribing motherhood to Christ, Julian expands the meaning of his humanity, in order to better grasp the infinitude of his indescribable divinity.

Caroline Walker Bynum’s study of the use of female imagery in mediaeval religious texts reveals that “women tended to fuse male and female images more than did men… a sharply defined sense of the male as superior was unimportant in women’s writings and visions” (Bynum 169). Women mystics did not necessarily see themselves as inferior to their male counterparts, perhaps because they thought of themselves primarily as human beings in relation to God. This can certainly be said of Julian, who, by using the language of motherhood to speak of God’s love for creation, addresses all humanity with the warm assertion that this love is unconditional and eternal, that God “is our clothing, wrapping and enveloping us for love, embracing us and guiding us” (Julian 178). In the role of mother, Christ’s hitherto masculine humanity is balanced out by the addition of the feminine, and, once fully inhabiting both genders, becomes, in a sense, genderless. The humanity of Christ, in the face of his divinity, is representative of all humanity in the face of God. In the final analysis, as Bynum puts it, “images of male and female alike [are] insipid and unimportant in the blinding light of the ultimate asymmetry between God and creation” (Bynum 179). This creation is the humanity, which must strive for God beyond superficially didactic categories. This is the humanity in which Julian situates herself when she writes,

If I look solely at myself, I am really nothing; but as one of mankind in general, I am in oneness of love with all my fellow Christians, for upon this oneness of love depends the life of all who shall be saved; for God is all that is good, and God has made all that is made, and God loves all that he has made (Julian 181).
Works Cited


PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE
The Jewish Framework for a Sustainable Food System
RACHEL ROSENBLUTH
Planting the Seeds of Change: The Jewish Framework for a Sustainable Food System

Abstract: This paper explores ethical and legal systems rooted in Judaism to illuminate the Jewish framework for a sustainable food system. The paper discusses global food insecurity and its influences, and provides a brief outline of the history and role of sustainable agriculture in responding to food insecurity. Within that context, the paper explores biblical and rabbinic sources regarding four aspects of Jewish law: agriculture laws, food ethics, and social and environmental responsibility. Through the analysis of Jewish law, the paper demonstrates how Judaism promotes justice, sustainable agriculture techniques, and a consciousness shift (limiting egocentrism), which collectively contribute to a sustainable, secure and equitable food system. The paper then highlights contemporary implementations of the Jewish food system that is rooted in ancient tradition, and provides a brief critique of the framework.

Food is a basic necessity, yet it is among the most paradoxical aspects of the contemporary global system. Food sustains human kind and is central to identity and culture, yet a shocking proportion of the world’s population lacks sufficient provisions. Since the conventional food system is among the many determinants of global food insecurity, this paper investigates an alternative framework as an agent for change: the Jewish food system. Responses to food security are paramount, and Judaism plays a role in galvanizing people in the promotion of ethical values and actions. Embedded within Judaism are ancient and contemporary laws, values and ethics, which provide a theoretical and practical framework for promoting a sustainable and equitable food system.

In this paper, an analysis of Judaism’s ethical and legal systems reveals that the two inherently uphold justice, sustainable agricultural techniques, and the consciousness shift necessary for an equitable and sustainable food system, which, together, act as a proxy for promoting food security. More specifically, the paper analyzes four aspects of Jewish law (Halachah): agriculture laws, food ethics, social and environmental responsibility. Subsequently, it demonstrates how the four aspects of Halachah collectively promote three components that are necessary for establishing a sustainable and equitable food system: sustainable agriculture techniques; social justice; and a paradigm shift (limiting egocentrism).

In doing so, the paper (1) discusses global food insecurity and its influences by focusing on the unsustainable implications of the conventional food system; (2) discusses alternative food systems, which promote social responsibility and environmental sustainability; (3) provides a detailed analysis of Biblical and Rabbinic Jewish agricultural laws and food ethics and assesses the implications for promoting sustainable and equitable food systems; (4) discusses broader Jewish
values of social responsibility and environmental stewardship, which establish the context for specific laws; (5) describes the contemporary implementation of the Jewish food system; and (6) provides a brief critique of the framework.

**Working definition:**

In should be noted that this paper uses ‘sustainable and equitable food system’ as a proxy for food security. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defines food security stating, “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO). Food security involves three aspects: availability, access and utilization. A sustainable and equitable food system inherently promotes all three aspects: in being ‘equitable,’ the food system ensures food access, and also promotes equitable food quality. In being ‘sustainable,’ the food system ensures the long-term availability of sufficient and nutritious (quality) food through mutually promoting environmental and human health and well-being. This corresponds with the Brundtland Commission report to the United Nations on sustainability, which defines sustainable development as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (“Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future”).
(1) Global Food Insecurity and Industrial Agriculture

While for some of the world’s citizens food is constantly abundant and available, for a large number of people, scarcity and hunger are rampant. Food insecurity exists as a startling reality for millions of people in developing countries, as well as developed countries, prompting what is considered a Global Food Crisis (“The Global Food Crisis”). Food insecurity has a number of determinants across various temporal and geographical scales including climate change, politics, poverty, global trade, land grabbing, bio fuels, industrial agriculture, peak oil and land degradation. Among the diverse causes of food insecurity in both the developed and developing world, and of particular relevance, is the conventional food system: industrial agriculture. The conventional food and agriculture system is highly industrial, technological, corporate and standardized; it is based upon neoliberal economics and is designed to produce as much as possible for the lowest cost (Hinrichs and Lyson 20). Improvements in technology have led to genetic modification, monoculture farming, factory farms, and cheap transportation. In addition, the food system is based on economies of scale, favours quantity, efficiency and cost over quality, sustenance and the environment. Industrial agriculture, or agribusiness, posits a number of environmental, social and health risks to local communities including huge fossil fuel emissions, unsustainable water and topsoil use, soil erosion, air and water pollution, biodiversity reduction, heavy use of toxins, as well as unjust labour wages and conditions, animal cruelty, cultural erosion, and food insecurity. It dramatically undermines equity and sustainability, thus threatening food security on local and global levels. “To transform today’s dominating power, which is a multi-national food system fed by depletive farming systems, powered by exploitative labor, causing climate change and loss of biodiversity on an unprecedented planetary scale,” (Seder Zari’im L’Zemananu Haggadah, 1) alternative systems and paradigms must be promoted, to allow for local and global food security, and a just and sustainable world.

(2) Sustainable agriculture / food systems

A number of alternative systems have emerged in recent years, challenging the wisdom of conventional agricultural production in the hope of remaking the food system in a sustainable and equitable way. These systems, often classified as sustainable agriculture, involve a variety of technical, theoretical and ideological shifts, which are, collectively, critical in the promotion of sustainable and equitable systems. These systems assume holistic approaches that view food production and consumption as interdependent systems, value human rights and social equity, and promote environmental health. Sustainable agriculture, including agroecology, permaculture and community supported agriculture, unlike industrial agriculture, mimics ecological patterns and cycles to support
human populations and preserve the environment at the local level. Congruent with the sustainable agriculture movements, is Judaism’s approach to food. The Jewish approach provides a framework that is rooted in ancient tradition, yet has enormous relevance and value for contemporary society. This framework, with its practical, theoretical, and ideological principles, corresponds with and supports modern sustainable agriculture movements, which has the potential to galvanize people in support of sustainable agriculture.

**(3a) Jewish Agriculture Laws**

Jewish Agriculture Laws (3a), and the food ethics (3b) which will be discussed below, are rooted in Biblical law and developed through Rabbinic commentary, which illuminates how embedded the food system framework is throughout a long history of tradition. Agricultural laws are dispersed both throughout the books of the bible, as well as in *Seder Zeraim*, a Mishnaic chapter written between the second and fifth centuries CE dedicated to agriculture laws. This section highlights a number of the laws to demonstrate their multifaceted significance in promoting a sustainable and equitable food system through sustainable agriculture techniques, social responsibility, and a paradigm shift involving limits to egocentrism through a human-God relationship.

*Shmittle*, meaning ‘release’, is one of the most intricate and significant agriculture laws for promoting sustainability and equity. It is a Biblical commandment referring to the Sabbatical year, which commands one to let the land lie fallow every seventh year. The Bible states, “And six years you shall sow your land, and you shall gather in its produce. And the seventh year you shall release it from work and abandon it, and the poor among your people will eat” (Exodus 23:10-11). And, “For six years you shall sow your fields and for six years you shall prune your vines and you shall gather in their produce. And in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath for the Lord…” (Leviticus 25: 1-5). Lastly,

… every creditor shall remit any debt owed by his neighbour and his brother when God's Shmittle year comes around… If there be among you a needy man, one of your brothers, within any one of your gates, in your land which the lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart and you shall not shut your hand from your needy brother. But you shall surely open your hands to him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks (Deuteronomy15:1-8).

There are three major implications of the commandment of *Shmittle*. Firstly, as an agricultural technique, allowing the land to lie fallow is an opportunity for the
land to rejuvenate the nutrients that have been taken up through farming practices. Maimonides, or Rambam in Hebrew, the renowned Torah scholar and philosopher of 12th century Spain stated in the Guide for the Perplexed 3:39, “The land will also increase its produce and improve when it remains fallow for some time” (Manela 2010, 63). This promotes the sustainability of the land, because during the fallow year, microorganisms break down the soil, providing air and restocking its nutrients for continued productivity.

Secondly, Shmittah involves acts of social justice, including feeding the poor and releasing debts. The laws “imply sympathy towards our fellow men, and promote the wellbeing of mankind… [Debt releases] serve to secure people a permanent source of maintenance and support” (63). They also inspire generosity, “since none is more than he who gives without any prospect of compensation” (64).

In addition, the Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Lunschitz asserts that through the suspension of private ownership, “this is undoubtedly a primary factor in promoting peace since most dissension originates from the attitude of ‘mine is mine’… and ‘it is all mine’… But in the seventh year all are equal, and this is the real essence of peace” (64). Therefore, during the Shmittah year there is equality between rich and poor, and an emphasis on social justice.

Thirdly, the implications of Shmittah on a cosmological level are significant since they promote the paradigm shift necessary to create a food system that values the long-term health of humans and the earth. Shmittah establishes the relationship between God and human by undermining egocentrism and by serving as a reminder that humans are tenants on God’s land, and that they cannot limitless use the land for their own individual good, as it is said, “Shmittah is a catharsis, a disengagement and a purification from acquisition and civilization” (65). Other Rabbis stress that Shmittah is a necessary liberation from complete preoccupation with materialism, and provide a time for spiritual and intellectual growth (studying Torah) (“Jewish Farm School” 18). Rav Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine in the early 20th century, poignantly described the need for Shmittah in reorienting the anthropocentric worldview as:

A year of solemn rest is essential for both the nation and the land, a year of peace and quiet without oppressor and tyrant… It is a year of equality and rest, in which the soul reaches out towards divine justice, towards God who sustains the living creatures with loving kindness. There is no private property and no punctilious privilege but the peace of God reigns over all in which there is the breath of life. Sanctity is not profaned by the exercise of private acquisitiveness over all this year’s produce, and the covetousness of wealth stirred up by commerce is forgotten (19).
Thus, it is evident that Shmittah promotes sustainable agriculture techniques, ethical values, and a reorientation of human egocentrism, all of which contribute greatly to a more sustainable and equitable food system, which stands in stark contrast to the current system.

Pe’ah is another agricultural law, which refers to the instruction for leaving the corners of one’s field, as well as the gleanings from the harvest, for the poor. Not only is the earth experienced as a living organism, but humans are an intrinsic component of the living earth biosystem. In addition to ‘feeding the soil’ through the use of compost, manure, cover cropping, rotation and fallow practices, ‘feeding the community’ was required for the land to be fruitful (Seder Zari’im L’Zemananu Haggadah 5). Pe’ah illuminates the role of social justice as being inherently linked to food systems, as Pe’ah is an example of a Biblical commandment that promotes food justice, which contributes to the creation of an equitable food system. As stated in the Bible, “When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow… Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing” (Deutoronomy 24:19,22). Additionally, “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10). This commandment specifies responsibility for the stranger, orphan, and widow, thus emphasizing the need to address those who are particularly marginalized in conventional systems. In addition, it promotes a system that requires that people take responsibility for the poor, which is an important response in coping with current global food insecurity. The commandment contextualizes the instruction for social justice by reminding the Jewish people that they too were once slaves and strangers, which should motivate them to be especially sensitive and take responsibility for ensuring the welfare of others. “In the first volume of the Mishnah… the Elders explain guidelines on blessings, and practices to ensure that all of the community is provided with food and dignity through tithing and gleaning. The ancient Israelite knew that by feeding the people, all the people, the earth would in return provide its bounty to all” (Seder Zari’im L’Zemananu Haggadah 6). Social justice is thus seen as a requirement since it is ethical - it is rooted in the community’s collective memory of past oppression - and because Ancient Israelites believed that soil fertility was based on food justice.

Orlah is the agricultural commandment that asserts that one should leave the fruits on the trees for the first three years of growth. The Bible states, “And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as forbidden; three years shall it be forbidden unto you; it shall not be eaten” (Leviticus 19:23). The significance of this commandment is that it establishes the need for restraint over one’s production
and wants, which mirrors the theme that people are tenants on God’s land. This commandment is considered “kodesh hilulim”, or a reflection back to God, which asserts that use or production, must involve the recognition of and gratitude towards God. “The Jew waits three years before he enjoys the fruit… he strips himself of the rights of property before God… practices restraint and self control” (Manela 2010, 79). This commandment minimizes excessive egocentrism, asserting greater worth to God’s command than human desire, and establishes a limit to dominion over God’s creations. Human entitlement and consumption has its limits, and the commandment establishes restraint, perspective, and mindfulness, thus promoting an orientation of ego that is a critical aspect of creating a sustainable system.

Other agricultural-related laws include Kilayim (forbidden mixtures), which asserts that combinations of diverse seeds, animals, and certain materials are prohibited; the Bible states, “do not interbreed your cattle; do not sow your field with two kinds of seed; and do not wear a garment made of two kinds of material mixed together” (Leviticus 19:19). This law exposes certain discrepancies in Jewish agricultural techniques. On one hand, Kilayim seems antithetical to sustainable agriculture techniques of diversity and intercropping. Nevertheless, the specific Mishnaic commentaries of the law describe permissible ways to mix species in intercropping, for example, with enough space between them to prevent leaching, with visible boundaries between plots, etc (Kilayim Misha 3:1). It is thus clear that the Rabbis do not promote monocultures; rather they offer many techniques for growing plants together, without compromising individual species, thus promoting both intercropping and biodiversity.

Additionally, contemporary thinkers understand the commandment as prohibiting hybrid seeds, and thus GMOs, which is an important topic in the contemporary discourse of food sustainability (Wolff). While this law, at first glance, contains some discrepancies, it illuminates the interesting concept of interpreting commandments ‘within the spirit of the law’, rather than within the strict letter of the law. This is a principle that asserts that ambiguities should follow the overarching values of the law, such as saving a life, social justice, and fixing the world, which will be discussed in greater detail.

Bikurim commands one to bring the first fruits of the harvest as an offering to God. As stated in the Bible, “… you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you; and you will put it in a basket and will go to the place which the Lord your God will choose…” (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). This establishes one’s relationship with the earth as a tenant and steward, which prevents the liberty to misuse it and mitigates a sense of entitlement. Three holidays that are central to Judaism are Pesach, Shevuot, and Sukkot, which prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, warranted visits to the Temple, are harvest holidays for barley, wheat and summer crops respectively. Thus, bringing the harvest as an offering is extremely
important. While the Temple no longer exists, and thus offerings are not made, the holidays are still celebrated as harvest holidays. These holidays promote the paradigm shift of limiting egocentrism by showing gratitude to God for sustenance, which is a necessary aspect for shifting the food system to incorporate sustainability and equity.

Additionally, Rabbinic parables promote biodiversity preservation (various plant species), which is integral in sustainable system for promoting soil health, companion planting (acting as natural pesticides, fertilizers, nitrogen fixing etc.), as well as ensuring nutritious diets. Nachmanides, or Ramban in Hebrew, the 13th century Biblical commentator in Spain, stated, “The Torah does not permit a killing that would uproot a species, even if it permitted the killing of individuals in that species for food. And here, the one who kills the mother and the child on the same day, it is as if that person has made that species extinct” (Regarding Deuteronomy 22:6, Seder Zari’im L’Zemananu Haggadah).

As well, “Even those things that may appear superfluous to Creation such as fleas, gnats or flies -- even these are part of the web of Creation. G-d’s purpose is carried through everything, even through a snake, a scorpion, a gnat and a frog” (Genesis Rabbah 10:7). Thus, the promotion of biodiversity is an essential value and a sustainable agriculture technique, which is another Biblical contribution to the promotion of sustainable and equitable food production.

Lastly, there is Rabbinic reference to the valuing of local food, which is a critical aspect of sustainable food production for the environmental benefits of reduced food miles, the promotion of local economies, and intimate connections to, and thus awareness of food production. Commenting on those who do not grow their own produce, Rabbi Ahai ben Josiah said,

He who buys grain in the market, to what may he be compared? To a child who is cut off from his mother, and although it is taken to homes of wet nurses, it is not satisfied. And he who buys bread in the market, to what is he compared? To a man who digs his own grave - a wretched, precarious existence. But he who eats of his own produce is like a child reared at his mother’s breast (The Fathers According to Rabbi, Nathan 30:6).

Additionally, it is said, “It is forbidden to live in a town where there are no vegetable gardens” (Rabbi Yose Ben Bun, Talmud Kiddushin 4:1). Once again, Jewish law supports sustainable agriculture techniques, thus contributing to the promotion of sustainable and equitable food systems.

It is evident that specific agriculture laws promote sustainable agricultural techniques, social justice, or a paradigm shift. However, understood collectively, they promote the alternative food systems that contribute to food security.
(3b) Jewish Food Ethics

Food ethics deals with the nature of consumption within a food system as well as people’s attitudes toward the food they eat. Jewish food ethics promote a food system based on connection, awareness, and gratitude for food. Additionally, a number of the traditional dietary restrictions demand ethical production and consumption. Contemporary Jewish movements have expanded upon these laws to mitigate problematic elements of modern food systems. Together, these ethics contribute to producing equitable and sustainable food systems.

One of the central aspects to food in Judaism is the aspect of sanctifying or blessing food. In the Talmud chapter of Masechet Brachot, the Rabbis taught, “it is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a blessing, he commits sacrilege” (Savage et al. 2). Blessings are made over any type of food prior to eating it through a recitation - for example, “Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, the One who brings bread forth from the earth” (Savage et al. 6). The blessings promote gratitude, humility, appreciation and increased awareness of food, which minimize an attitude of entitlement. A major challenge of the contemporary food system is the ignorance about the system and the disconnect that has arisen between people and their food. The enormous scale and anonymous nature of the food system has contributed to irresponsible behaviour at the expense of human and environmental wellbeing. In contrast, taking time to bless food promotes conscious eating and an awareness and mindfulness of the origins of the food (eg. “fruit from the tree”), as well as processes involved in bringing the food to one’s table which establishes a connection between a consumer, the food and the system. Upon finishing food, gratitude is again expressed through a blessing called ‘Birkat Hamazon’ which asserts that one eats because of God’s goodness and gives thanks to God, which further reduces entitlement and promotes conscious consumption. The blessings sanctify food, establishing the obligation to produce food ethically and treat food respectfully, as it is holy.

In addition to blessings, Jewish food ethics are embodied in Kashrut, the Jewish dietary law. Kosher laws include the prohibition of eating flesh with its life-blood in it, avoidance of mixing milk and meat for it is disrespectful and inhumane to mix the source of life and death, eating only specific animals (eg. those that chew their cud and have split hooves), and performance of a particular method of slaughtering animals, designed to reduce suffering and be as humane as possible (Genesis 9:4, Deuteronomy 12:23-24). In the Guide for the Perplexed 3:18, Maimonides says, “it is directly prohibited in the Law to cause pain to an animal… we should not assume cruel habits, we should not uselessly cause pain to others; that, on the contrary, we should be prepared to show pity and mercy to all living creatures.” The stringent traditional laws incorporate health concerns and the ethical treatment of animals, as well as establishing limits to the human
domain, allowing them to eat, but with constraint. The discipline and particularity of the strict food laws also promotes an awareness and understanding of the food systems, which is rare in the contemporary anonymous agribusiness. Being strictly Kosher entails not only following the guidelines, but also only purchasing food that has a seal of *Kashrut*, thus promoting intentional and conscious consumption. In addition to traditional practices, “A movement has grown in recent years to overlay onto traditional *Kashrut* the concepts of carbon footprint, food miles, and resource use, forming a new practice called ‘Eco-Kashrut.’ Foods that meet the eco-kosher standard follow traditional kosher laws and are produced sustainably, as measured by resources used during food production, carbon footprint, and distance travelled from farm to fork” (Waskow 117). Kashrut has thereby become a practical way to integrate values such as food ethics, spirituality, environmental concern and social equity into daily dietary practice.

Additionally, throughout the centuries of biblical commentary, there has been discussion as to the promotion of vegetarianism into Jewish food ethics. Vegetarianism is often considered important for feeding the world’s population, as much of the water and energy that could go directly to feeding people, is used to grow animals for meat production. Recently, a few movements are promoting vegetarianism as the ideal “Eco-Kosher”. Traditionally, there were rabbis that promoted meat consumption only for special occasions. In the biblical diet, meat was only eaten on holidays (Seder Zari‘im L’Zemananu Haggadah 6), whereas Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, a renowned Torah scholar and influential Rabbi, went so far as to state that when the Messiah arrives, the whole world will be vegetarians, elevating vegetarianism as an ideal. He said, “then human beings will recognize their companions in Creation: all the animals. And they will understand how it is fitting from the standpoint of the purest ethical standard not to resort to moral concessions, to compromise the Divine attribute of justice with that of mercy [by permitting mankind’s exploitation of animals]... Rather they will walk the path of absolute good” (Savage et al. 27). Vegetarianism, however, is not promoted as a requirement or a norm in Judaism. Thus it is evident that combined with blessings and *Kashrut*, like the agriculture laws, Jewish food ethics promote sustainable production techniques, justice, and a paradigm shift conducive for an equitable and sustainable food system.

(4a) **Social Responsibility: Charity, Justice, Tikkun Olam, and Environmentalism**

To understand the full scope of the Jewish framework, which promotes equity and sustainability, the overarching values of social and environmental responsibility, must be discussed. Interestingly, Nachmanides asserts that one can keep every law of the Torah, but still be a scoundrel with the Torah’s permission, “*naval birshut hatorah*” (Kirschenbaum 105). Strict observance of the ‘letter of
the Law’ is not sufficient on its own, but must be accompanied with meaning, intention, or holiness (‘kedushim tihiyu”), which accounts for the spirit of the law as well. Understanding the laws requires an incorporation of the law, as well as the spirit of the law. Thus, laws that may seem to have ambiguous ethical implications must be assessed holistically, by taking into account the spirit of the law. Because of this, the specific agricultural and food laws must be contextualized within the greater spirit of the law, which includes values for holiness, social justice etc.

Central to Jewish values is the notion of social responsibility. Tzedakah, or charity, is a fundamental Jewish obligation (not a voluntary act), as well as Tzedek, meaning justice. The Torah commands one to give between a tenth and a twentieth of one’s income as Tzedakah, and the Passover liturgy commands all individuals to “let all who are hungry come eat” (Halachma Anya, Passover Hagaddah). The Torah also commands one to pursue justice, and to help the widow, orphan, and stranger. The Jewish collective memory of oppression also serves as a reminder to bring justice to the world, as it is stated, “Justice, Justice, You Shall Pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20). In Ethics of the Fathers it states, “it is not your duty to complete the work but neither are you free to desist from it” (Ethics of the Fathers, Mishna, 2:21). Additionally, Tikkun Olam, or repairing the world, is both an ancient and contemporary Jewish value, which applies to ethical, legal and spiritual frameworks. Lastly, the value of ‘Pikuach Nefesh’, or saving a life, is one of the few commandments that is elevated above all others, where one is commanded to save a life even if it entails breaking other commandments. These social values are integral to Judaism and undeniably correspond with a food system that is sustainable and equitable, rather than the conventional system.

(4b) Environmental Values

In addition to values of social responsibility are underlying Jewish environmental values. As established in Genesis, humans are the stewards of God’s world. The instruction for human dominion is limited by the instruction to “till and keep the land” (Genesis 2:15), which suggests that humans can use, but not misuse the land, establishing environmental responsibility and stewardship, as “all are tenants on God’s land” (Manela 2010, 25). Throughout creation, the physical world was created as “good”, which reveals an inherent worth to the environment and its beings. Jewish teachings instruct people to use the world with care, and to sustain it for future generations. “In the hour when the Holy One, who is blessed, created the first human being, God led the human past before all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said: ‘See my works, how fine and excellent they are! Now all that I have created, for you have I created it. Think upon this and do not destroy and desolate My World, For if you corrupt it, there is no one to set it right after you’” (Midrash on Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:28). This also reflects the Jewish notion of ‘L’dor V’dor’, meaning from generation
to generation, establishing sustainability of the natural world for future use. A Rabbinic story provides an example:

One day Honi Hamaagal was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him: How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then asked the man: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me, so I too plant these for my children (Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Ta’anit 23a).

The Jewish environmental ethic is also seen in the commandment Bal Taschit, “When, in your war against a city, you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down – Are the trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?” (Deuteronomy 20:19). Bal Taschit involves sympathy for the natural world. It has become a quintessential Jewish environmental ethic, interpreted as a prohibition against waste or wanton destruction.

Lastly, the Sabbath, a day of rest, acts as an environmental value. The Jewish Sabbath prohibits creation, work, and the use of electricity, among many other things. As Abraham Joshua Heschel, a leading 20th century American theologian, philosopher and Rabbi, stated:

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money… is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath? (“Jewish Farm School” 12).

Environmental ethics are thus integral values in promoting an equitable and sustainable food system, in promoting the inherent worth of the natural environment, and the role of humans as environmental stewards.

The Jewish food system is comprised of agriculture laws and food ethics, and is strengthened by social and environmental values. These components support social justice, sustainable agriculture, and the necessary paradigm shift. While those aspects are not individually sufficient to form an alternative food system, collectively they promote a sustainable and equitable food system that
allows for food security, in stark contrast with conventional food systems.

(5) Implementation: Jewish food/agriculture movements today

This intentional and comprehensive Jewish framework, rooted in an ancient tradition, is particularly relevant to and useful for contemporary society. It has been implemented and has shown great success as part of a growing sustainable food movement. The framework has been implemented through educational farms centers, Jewish farms participating in Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), and permaculture communities - both as uniquely Jewish institutions, as well as in collaboration with other sustainable agriculture institutions. Founded on a religious framework, the Jewish food system has become a social movement in Israel and North America, galvanizing and educating people to contribute to the thousands of participants in sustainable agriculture. Beginning with its influence on the agricultural societies within Israel’s Kibbutz movement, modern day prominent North American (and Israeli) organizations include: Hazon (meaning vision), runs programs (bike rides, CSAs, food conferences and tours, curriculums etc.) to create healthy, aware, and sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond (“Vision and Mission”); Jewish Farm School and its partner, Kayam Farm, an environmental education organization whose mission is to practice and promote sustainable agriculture and to support food systems rooted in justice and Jewish traditions (“Who We Are”); Shoresh, which runs Jewish environmental programs in Toronto, along with its farm educational center and CSA, through Kavannah Garden (“Canadian Soil, Jewish Roots”); Permaculture network, which includes more than 30 permaculture farms in Israel that are open to volunteers and serve as educational training centers; Jewish CSAs, which are farms that provide organic and local food to nearby cities; Adamah (and Urban Adamah), an organization that connects people to the land, community and Judaism to build a more sustainable world, integrating physical, social, spiritual, Jewish and ecological realms to create a life of service to the community and the earth through educational programs and farming experiences (“Adamah”); Teva Learning Center, a farm and educational center that transforms Jewish education through experiential learning, fostering Jewish and environmental sustainability (“Teva Learning Alliance”). In addition to these religious/social organizations, the Jewish Religious denominations in North America encourage Eco Kashrut, through such institutions such as Magen Tzedek and Uri L’Tzedek.

(6) Critique

While the Jewish framework has and continues to provide an approach to a Jewish sustainable food system, one of its weaknesses is that it does not outline a complete and comprehensive instruction for a sustainable food system. Rather,
one has to actively draw upon different aspects of the law to create a system, which leaves room for ambiguity as well as apathy. As well, sustainable food movements are criticized for the lack of accessibility. While there are a number of movements throughout North America, they are largely in major cities, thus leaving few options for many Americans and Canadians. Additionally, sustainable food systems are often criticized for the high cost of food, which occurs because there are no hidden environmental and social costs, unlike the conventional system. Lastly, while the movement is growing and entering into Jewish formal and informal educational curriculums, it remains a fringe or niche movement, and has a long way to go to be thoroughly implemented in mainstream Jewish education throughout Jewish communities worldwide.

Conclusion

The Jewish framework, along with other sustainable agriculture movements, are together transforming the conventional food system from the ground up, influencing global sustainability and food security. As Thomas Lyson said, “No longer taken for granted or viewed in isolation, food can and should be connected to community vitality, cultural survival, economic development, social justice, environmental quality, ecological integrity and human health” (Hinrichs and Lyson 7). Thus, both rooted in the ancient, and still extremely relevant for contemporary society, Judaism provides a theoretical and practical framework for supporting sustainable food systems and thus food security. While the conventional system is not likely to undergo a sudden radical transformation, thousands of people are participating in contemporary food movements; they are literally chewing on the roots of change. There is rich potential in the ability of people to organize and reshape the food system from the grassroots up. The book Food Fears articulates the importance of food and its place within the larger realm of sustainability well: “Ultimately, what sustainability requires of us is change in global society as a whole… To start the global task to which we are called, we need a specific place to begin, a specific place to stand, a specific place to initiate the small, reformist changes that we can only hope may some day become radically transformative. We start with food.” (Blay-Palmer 1). Bitay’avon! For a sustainable and equitable food system!

A special thank you to The Jewish Farm School for providing invaluable resources for the research and completion of this paper.

---

1 Hebrew for Bon Appétite
Works Cited


THEORY IN PRACTICE

Comparing Essentialist Ecofeminism and Advaita Vedanta as Sources of Aid for India’s Forests

JULIA YUDELMAN
Theory in Practice: Comparing Essentialist Ecofeminism and Advaita Vedanta as Sources of Aid for India’s Forests

Abstract: The systematic destruction of India’s forests is an issue that can no longer afford to be overlooked. In an attempt to find sources of relief for these biodynamic entities, this essay constructively compares the Hindu school Advaita Vedanta to the essentialist branch of ecofeminism. Due to its monistic philosophy and sympathy towards devotional knowledge, Advaita Vedanta is ultimately shown to be a more viable option for answering this mass eco-crisis than the dualistic, first world principles of essentialist ecofeminism.

The forests of India have been hailed around the world as the most vital natural resource of the country. As self-sustaining, biodynamic, and harmonious entities, the forests are regarded not only as sacred, but as one of the organizational principles guiding Indian civilization. Yet despite their significance, they have been systematically exploited and destroyed since the days of British colonialist timber mining. In Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India, Vandana Shiva explains the effects of the so-called “scientific management” of forests: “By ignoring the complex relationship within the forest community and between plant life and other resources like soil and water, this pattern of resource use generates instabilities in the ecosystem and leads to counterproductive use of nature as a living and self-reproducing resource” (Shiva 63). Such destruction also denies the rights of those peoples – mainly women and tribal groups – that depend on the diverse resource functions of the forests for their survival (Shiva 63). With still very little action directed toward the protection of the forests today, time is running out. Thus, this essay will look to some potential sources of aid for this eco-crisis. As a radical movement that is centrally concerned with alleviating the systematic oppression and exploitation of women and nature, essentialist ecofeminism will be compared constructively to Advaita Vedanta, a subset of the Vedanta school of Hinduism that is primarily concerned with the liberation of beings. Through an examination of both systems, this essay will show that Advaita Vedanta’s monistic philosophy and sympathy towards devotional knowledge makes the tradition better equipped to deal with the Indian eco-crisis of forest destruction than the dualistic, first world principles of essentialist ecofeminism.

From its origins, essentialist ecofeminism has housed a strong sub-movement founded on maternal principles. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein speak to this model in Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism. In the book’s introduction the authors write, “Through the social experience of caretaking and nurturing, women become attentive to the signs of distress in their communities that might threaten their households” (Diamond and Orenstein 10). Diamond and Orenstein’s interpretation of an innate connection between women
and nature clearly appeals to a strong conception of the maternal. The scholars go on to argue that such a connection exists on a material level, as well as a symbolic one. For instance, Diamond and Orenstein write that “because of women’s unique roles in the biological regeneration of the species, our bodies are important markers, the sites upon which local, regional, or even planetary stress is often played out” (Diamond and Orenstein 10). Carolyn Merchant expands on this very physical, innate connection in the chapter “Gaia: Ecofeminism and the Earth” of her book Earthcare. Here, she speaks specifically in terms of pollution: “when radioactivity from nuclear power-plant accidents, toxic chemicals, and hazardous wastes threaten the biological reproduction of the human species, women experience this contradiction as assaults on their own bodies and on those of their children and act to halt them” (Merchant 7). Like Diamond and Orenstein, she appeals to the woman-as-mother. As seen especially with Merchant’s explanation, this strand of essentialist ecofeminist thought focuses on the real, tangible effects felt from the nature-women connection. From such a perspective, it is only natural for a mother to advocate against the toxins that are harmful to her children, and thus also concern herself with the fight for a healthy environment.

The issue lies in the maternal characterizations that are so fundamental to these arguments. Although many of the women affected by the destruction of India’s forests may indeed be mothers, theorists have questioned the extent to which this strand of essentialist ecofeminism actually empowers women. Andrea Campbell provides a brief summation of one common objection to this model. In New Directions in Ecofeminist Literature she writes, “Nature is seen in opposition to culture, and represents female, nonhuman characteristics while culture consists of male, human representations. A culture/nature dualism is closely related to the human/nonhuman dualism with women, animals and nature falling on the same side in each case” (Campbell 13). Although the arguments put forth by Merchant, Diamond, Orenstein, and other ecofeminists of the essentialist movement may strengthen the bond between women and nature, they do not solve the problem of how such a bond will overcome the oppressive forces of patriarchy. As shown by Campbell, under this logic women are grouped together with all that is non-human, essentially lowering their place in the overall hierarchy of beings. Crucially, ecofeminism defines itself precisely by recognizing that the same patriarchal ideologies oppress both women and nature. Thus, if the essentialist movement cannot debunk the forces that oppress women, it cannot extend much relief to nature either. Such essentialist lines of thought then do not prove to be particularly useful in alleviating the oppression that plagues India’s forests.

Another line of critique towards essentialist ecofeminism speaks to the movement’s distinctly Western roots. Laura Wright sees the previously examined motherhood argument as stemming directly from a totalizing first-world perspective. In “Prophecy, Motherlessness, and the Lake: Postcolonial Ecofeminism and Flora Nwapa’s Efuru,” Wright contends that constructions such
as Mother Earth imply “familial unity for all living beings that inhabit the planet, and the infantilizing rhetoric of ‘Mother Countries’ responsible for theoretical civilization, enlightenment, and maintenance of the ‘children’ that inhabited their colonies” (Wright 94). Indeed, essentialist ecofeminism runs the risk of adopting an attitude not so unlike that which justified colonialism, which of course, liberated neither women nor nature. Ideological implications aside, however, the application of a Western movement to a third world setting may also be fraught with difficulties from a pragmatic perspective.

Although ecofeminism has certainly taken root in India, the movement may not be strong enough to realistically deal with a mass eco-crisis. Bina Agarwal writes that much of the ecofeminist literature present in India romanticizes the notion of agency and therefore assumes that women are effective agents of change. By not dealing with the practicalities of women actually applying resistance, such literature “obscures the fact that women, even if not passive, may still be victims of larger processes and structures of dominance” (Agarwal, “Environmental Management” 72). Furthermore, the ecofeminist principle that women have a special relationship with nature means that policy advocates tend to gravitate toward ideas of women’s naturalized roles, rather than rights (Agarwal, “Challenge for Ecofeminism” 12). As already examined in this essay, such reductive categorization does not translate into the liberation of women. This is evident given the current status of village community forest groups, which comprise a key part of the environmental movement in India. Agarwal notes that both state-initiated and self-initiated groups are consistently male-biased and often feature only male membership (Agarwal, “Challenge for Ecofeminism” 12-13). Clearly, the denial of women’s rights is still somewhat ignored in both the feminist and environmental movements in India. Especially given the delusion that women are fully equipped as active agents of change, it may be largely unfeasible for Indian women to appeal to an ecofeminist framework. Gaining momentum and credibility from such an appeal may also prove to be impossible in India for reasons such as a lack of resources. Widespread illiteracy and poverty in India do not coincide well with a heavily textual, theory-based movement, especially when the stakes are pressing.

This essay has already examined the essentialist movement’s tendency to hold culture and nature in opposition to one another through its use of dualisms, and how this tendency serves to actually reinforce patriarchal oppression. As Campbell notes, “there is no room for negotiation between culture and nature when placed in opposition to one another” (Campbell 8). Yet such an opposition is troubling on another level, however, specifically with regard to saving the Indian forests. In “Ecofeminism: The Exploitation of Nature and Women,” David Kinsley cites Susan Griffith’s claim that “the male tendency to think in terms of hierarchy leads to exploitation of both nature and women and that a new morality of interrelatedness is needed” (Kinsley 206). Once again, one sees the opposing culture-nature duality at work, and like many essentialist
ecofeminists, Griffith goes on to propose a new cultural system organized on
tirely different principles. Central to this argument is Griffith’s implicit critique
of hierarchical societal structures, which is a particularly troubling argument in
an Indian context. Of course, an overwhelming amount of the Indian population
is Hindu. To speak in Griffith’s terms, one can say that the religion is organized
“hierarchically” through concepts such as karma theory and reincarnation. Thus,
with such systems of “hierarchies” personally and religiously informing the
lives of so many Indians, a generalizing critique of cultural hierarchies strongly
implies a critique of Hinduism and its adherents as well. Griffith’s appeal for
“a new morality” only further suggests that the current system of morality must
be done away with, this system being Hinduism for many Indians. Since this
essay is concerned with combating the forces that have exploited the forests and
oppressed the Indian people, a view that implicitly but inherently criticizes the
cultural-religious system of those peoples is not desirable.

Rather than advocating for a new structural system of culture altogether,
as many essentialist ecofeminists have done, one should look to the ecologically
relevant principles that already exist within a given culture. On an ethical level, this
type of approach makes an important step toward eradicating the colonizing attitudes
that have dominated relations between the West and the East throughout history. On
a pragmatic level, implementing an entirely new cultural order simply takes much
more time than appealing to cultural principles that have already been recognized
as valid; in the case of India’s rapidly perishing forests, time is of the essence.

The tradition of Advaita Vedanta has adherents across India and around
the globe. The religious tradition is one of the two main developments of the
larger Vedanta tradition, which scholar Gavin Flood has referred to as “the most
influential school of theology in India…the philosophical paradigm of Hinduism
par excellence” (Flood 238). Significantly, as a philosophical theology that
is highly revered around the world yet unmistakably Indian, Advaita Vedanta
provides a rich set of diverse cultural principles that are constructively relevant to
the matter of protecting India’s forests.

As seen, many of the critiques against essentialist ecofeminism stem
from the movement’s problematic subscription to dualism. Advaita Vedanta is
immediately more beneficial to the case of deforestation because of its refusal
of dualism. The term advaita translates to “non-dual” and is indicative of the
absolute monistic philosophy taught by the tradition’s founder, Shankara. This
philosophy holds that,

Spiritual ignorance (avidya) or illusion (maya) is caused by the
superimposition (adhyasa) of what is not the self onto the self.
All knowledge is distorted by superimposition or projection,
which prevents us from seeing our true nature as the self’s
(atman’s) pure subjectivity, ontologically identical with the
absolute (brahman) (Flood 241).
Put simply, all reality is one, with no distinctions. Liberation is achieved through the realization that the self, or atman, is one with the absolute Brahman.

Such a teaching is at once affirming for oppressed groups, since from the absolute perspective of Advaita Vedanta, any perceived difference between peoples is the result of ignorance. With regard specifically to nature, Advaita Vedanta’s monism also does away with the culture-nature dualism that plagues essentialist ecofeminism, thus no longer holding the two in opposition to one another. Kinsley elaborates on the positive environmental implications of this philosophy by noting that such an understanding “puts one in touch with a wider world by affirming one’s identity with that world” (Kinsley 63). One is inherently connected to nature in this view precisely because no difference exists between oneself and nature. This connection, Kinsley asserts, creates a sense of communion with the environment, since “protection of free nature is felt and conceived of as protection of our very selves” (Kinsley 63). To do harm onto nature is to do harm onto oneself, and vice versa, thus promoting a general ethic of care for nature. Thus, Advaita Vedanta successfully overcomes complications that arise out of dualistic thinking.

However, the tradition’s monistic philosophy does not provide a solution to all of the problems raised by essentialist ecofeminism. Like ecofeminism, Advaita Vedanta is a highly complex and abstract system of thought, a quality that greatly limits the accessibility of the tradition. Furthermore, accessibility does not necessarily facilitate comprehension, since unenlightened beings, which is to say, most people, cannot see reality from this absolute monistic perspective. Indeed, the path of knowledge is a long and tumultuous one in Advaita Vedanta. If the objective here is a widespread consciousness of India’s forests as truly connected to the self, a general unattainability of this consciousness suggests a hurdle that must be overcome by the tradition.

Yet Advaita Vedanta accounts for such a complication in a way that ecofeminism does not. Although the tradition is undoubtedly scholarly, which again raises the issue of inaccessibility, Advaita Vedanta encompasses knowledge that is beyond the level of the text. To this end, Flood notes Shankara’s concession to the idea of devotion to a personal Lord as a form of knowledge. He writes that although in its absolute form Brahman is beyond all qualities, “in its temporal mode as the Lord it has attributes (saguna), and so can be approached through devotion as an object of consciousness” (Flood 242). One must remember that in Advaita Vedanta, as in Hinduism at large, Brahman is manifest in all things, regardless of temporal and non-temporal modes.

Though he regarded it as a form of knowledge that is lower than absolute monism, Shankara evidently did consider devotion to be an important form of knowledge in itself. Flood raises the point that a number of traditions attribute Shankara with the authorship of a famous hymn to the Goddess, the Saundaryalalahari (Flood 240). Of course, Goddess worship comprises a critical
part of some Hindus’ practice and ritual. Kinsley’s discussion of the goddess Sati is especially relevant in this regard. The story of Sati recounts the goddess’s suicide, which was followed by the dismemberment of her corpse and its distribution throughout India. Kinsley writes, “all over India, shrines and temples are identified with certain parts of Sati’s body. In this way, the entire Indian landscape is concretely associated with the physical body of a goddess. The goddess’s body sacralizes the land upon which people live, and the land is therefore given reverence and respect” (Kinsley 59). Thus, a strong link exists between devotion to a goddess and devotion to the land, a link clearly recognized by the founder of Advaita Vedanta. Though some essentialist ecofeminists do lobby for the adoption of a goddess-oriented understanding of the environment, such a model is still dominated by the movement’s complicating dualistic discourse. Contrastingly, Advaita Vedanta successfully leaves room for an alternate, accessible model that does not compromise the structure of the tradition and still maintains a strong connection to eco-awareness and protection.

However, no discussion of Advaita Vedanta should go without mention of the colonialist forces that popularised the school. As Richard King asserts, there are a number of socio-historical reasons why Advaita Vedanta has received praise from Westerners. For instance, the Christian missionaries in India saw the philosophical orientation of the Upanisads and the Gita as actually advantageous to their efforts. King notes that for those missionaries,

[T]he Upanisads could also be used as evidence of an incipient monotheism within the Hindu tradition. For the liberal Christian this provided a platform for inter-faith dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism and a recognition of some commonality between faiths… For Christians with a more evangelical zeal, the Upanisads represented a way into the ‘Hindu mind-set’ which opened up the possibility of converting Hindus to Christianity (King 122).

Of course, a Hindu school that Westerners could safely deem “philosophical” would be the least likely to threaten a euro-centric understanding of knowledge. The missionaries were merely one group that sought to endorse, and indeed exploit, Advaita Vedanta for colonialist purposes; there were also many, many others. Accordingly, we should recognize that Advaita Vedanta has long been privileged over other Hindu schools and practices, and that we must not fall prey to fetishization by mistaking it as illustrative of all Hinduism(s). I have only given a brief discussion of some of the other, less privileged beliefs and practices associated with Shankara here (such as goddess worship), in the hopes of demonstrating the diversity of the tradition. More importantly, I have looked to other ways of understanding Advaita Vedanta in an attempt to ignite further
discussion about India’s eco-crisis, and the best way to answer it.

Thus, it should be noted that the aim of this essay was neither to condemn essentialist ecofeminism nor to glorify Advaita Vedanta. Rather, it was to determine which system is better suited to cope with one of the major eco-crises that currently faces India: the exploitation and destruction of its forests. This essay only briefly examined some of the reasons why the application of Advaita Vedanta would be more successful than that of essentialist ecofeminism. The latter was shown to perpetuate dualisms, which undermines the movement’s refusal of patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, the third world adoption of a first world cultural model is, generally speaking, always fraught with difficulties, both ideologically and pragmatically. On the other hand, as an already respected tradition in India, Advaita Vedanta presents a monistic philosophy with very positive environmental implications, while still leaving room for a more accessible model that maintains the tradition’s eco-friendliness. On a final note, it should not go without mention that despite their current shortcomings, essentialist ecofeminists have marked their work as clearly indispensable to ecology. To raise such a recent, radical movement to a position in which it can be compared to one of the most famous Indian philosophical-theological traditions is no easy task. As we continually face new eco-crises, the academic and activist worlds respond in new and brilliant ways. Regardless of faith, race, or gender, we can all share hope in that fact.
Works Cited


EDITORS

NATALIE GERSHTEIN (Editor-in-Chief) is a U3 student, working towards completing a Joint Honours degree in Religious Studies and English (Drama and Theatre). She has been on the editorial board of Canons for three years, and has had one of her papers published in the sixth edition of the journal. Her studies in religion have primarily focused on eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. She is also president of RSUS (Religious Studies Undergraduate Society). Outside of academia, she has largely involved herself in theatre direction and management. In the years to come she will pursue an M.F.A. in Theatre Management and Producing at Columbia University.

ABBIIE BUCKMAN (Associate Editor) is in her third year doing an Honours degree in Religious Studies (Asian religions) and a double minor in Environment and International Development. This is her third year involved in Canons: in her first year she published a paper entitled “The Rajopadhyays As Royal Priests in the Holkar Dynasty” and she has edited for two years. Her academic interests center around the intersecting questions of religion, multiculturalism, secularism, religious violence, fundamentalism, post-colonial legal systems, and human rights, especially in the context of India. Abbie is also active in Organic Campus and works as a nanny.

RYAN HEALEY (Associate/Design Editor) is a U4 Joint Honours English Lit/Philosophy guy with idiosyncrasies below. He tries not to be cute but ends up saccharine. Requisite note of discomfort in third person. I guess my ‘work’ has also appeared in Harper’s, Bookforum and I have something forthcoming in Tin House, which I need to start as soon as I finish designing this at 2:08 AM. New York bound, with all sorts of post-wedding-aluminum-cans-from-the-fender trailing close behind. I like you.
MALLORY HENNIGAR (Associate Editor) is a U3 English Literature and World Religions double major from Hamilton, Massachusetts. She plans to begin her graduate degree in the Fall where she hopes continue studying the intersection of politics and religion in India during the late colonial/early postcolonial period.

JAMES FARR (Associate Editor) is a U4 Religious Studies Honours Student. Along with his tenure at Canons, he has served as a Copy Editor for The McGill Daily and runs a music blog called Glossolalia. Farr complements his academic pursuits with music as a guitarist in several Montreal bands.

JASMINE LEFRESNE (Associate Editor) is a U3 student pursuing a double major in World Religions and Anthropology. She is particularly interested in South Asian studies with a focus on Hinduism. Other areas of interest include ethnopoetics and the role of narrative traditions in forming cultural identity.

AVIAN TANG (Associate Editor) is a U2 Honours Religious Studies student with specific interests in contemporary comparative religions and the role of multiculturalism and globalisation, as well as philosophy of religion. She also enjoys history, which is her minor, with particular emphasis on religion in Medieval Europe, and World War I and World War II history. Besides spending days reading books, she enjoys running, and tries to run about 30 kilometres every other day, especially when the weather is nice outside.
CONTRIBUTORS

KAITLIN D’AVELLA is a U3 Honours Religious Studies student with a focus on Asian religions. She is interested in the study of religion and human rights as well as Tibetan Buddhism. She is on the executive for the Religious Studies Undergraduate Society. Upon graduating, she hopes to pursue a graduate degree in human rights law.

MALLORY HENNIGAR is a U3 English Literature and World Religions double major from Hamilton, Massachusetts. She plans to begin her graduate degree in the Fall where she hopes continue studying the intersection of politics and religion in India during the late colonial/early postcolonial period.

MAXWELL LANOCHA is a fourth-year Culture Studies major, with minors in Drama & Theatre Studies and World Religions. In his Religious Studies program, he has greatly enjoyed exploring Buddhist philosophy and practice and is honored to have his work included in the RSUS journal. Though his career goals lie in the creative arts, particularly film and theatre, he hopes to continue to expand his knowledge of Buddhism and other expressions of spirituality upon graduation from McGill.

LAURA MONCION is a U2 Joint Honours History and Religious Studies student at McGill. Her research interests include mediaeval and early modern Britain, Church history, Jewish history, history of sexuality, gender and queer theory, and mysticism. When not studying, she can be found baking bread and drawing hilarious cartoons of Martin Luther.

RACHEL ROSENBLUTH is a permaculture enthusiast who is committed to Jewish environmental education. She is from Toronto and is graduating in June 2012 with a double Major in International Development Studies and World Religion, focusing on Buddhism and Judaism. She has had a number of valuable experiences volunteering on sustainable agriculture farms in Israel and in Kenya, where she developed an interest in spiritual, personal and community development.

JULIA YUDELMAN is a U3 Arts student with a major in Cultural Studies and minors in World Religions and Communications Studies. Her academic interests include film studies and production, Eastern theology, gender studies, disability studies, and media studies. Her personal interests include making music, making movies, and making jokes.
Contributors
Kaitlin D’Avella
Mallory Hennigar
Maxwell Lanocha
Laura Moncion
Rachel Rosenbluth
Julia Yudelman