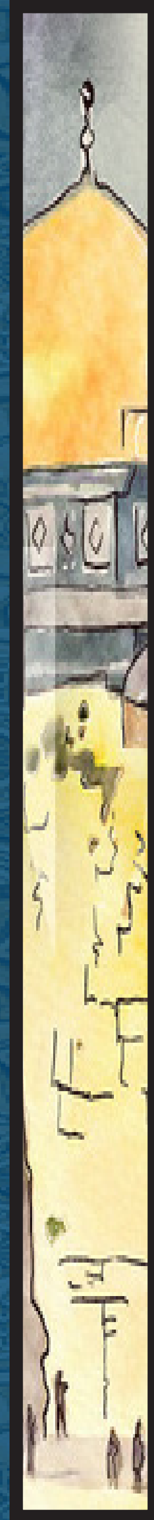

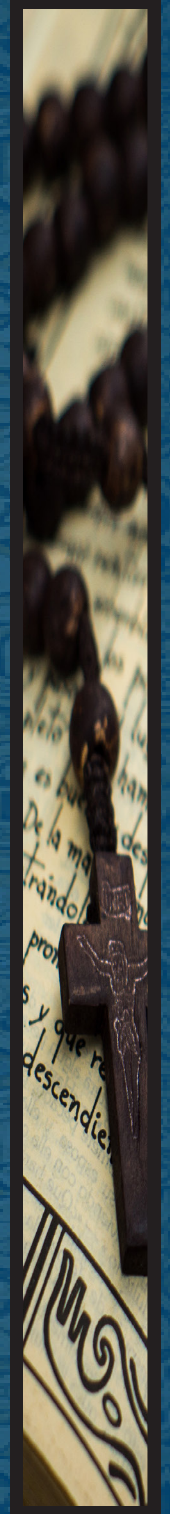

UCLA

JOURNAL OF RELIGION

2019 Vol. 3

Contents

Editorial Masthead.......... [ii]

Editors Note.......... [iii]

Conflating Impurity: Pun and Ambiguity in Lamentations 1:8-10 and Jerusalem's Multivalent Personifications.......... [1]

Olivia Rose

Sacred Maternity: Considering Piety and Fertility in Islam During The Age of Assisted Reproductive Technologies.......... [27]

Morgan Barbre

Catholic Bloggers: The Role of Blogs in Constructing Catholic Feminism, Identity and Community Among Women.......... [42]

Kristen Akey

Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.......... [62]

Zhelun Zhou

Submissions Call.......... [82]

UCLA Journal of Religion

Volume 3
2019

BOARD OF EDITORS

Emma Gillette

Corban Lethcoe

Ashley Mettias

Tucker Moses-Hanson

Elli Prinz

Zarina Wong

FACULTY ADVISOR

Ryan Gillespie

Mission: The UCLA Journal of Religion is a student-run undergraduate journal dedicated to publishing papers on diverse topics in religious studies. We aim to engage and familiarize students with the process of journal publication--a cornerstone of academic life--and provide an opportunity for them to display their research in this fascinating field. We welcome submissions incorporating all methodological and theoretical approaches, and highly encourage interdisciplinary papers. Our goal is to publish superior work regarding the academic study of religion.

CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF RELIGION

Volume 3
2019

Editors Note

It is with great pride that we introduce the third volume of the *UCLA Journal of Religion*. We have had the privilege to read an outstanding number of undergraduate research papers this year. We are tremendously grateful for the excellent writers and researchers who have granted us the chance to showcase their expertise, creativity, and dedication.

In this issue, we have selected three remarkable works that we believe both advance research in the study of religion and incorporate a number of diverse perspectives. Each work integrates the study of religion into a vast array of topics such as those of sociological, political, and philosophical perspectives. We are filled with gratitude for the scholars who allowed this publication to come to life through their work.

We give special thanks to Dr. Carol Bakhos and the Center for the Study of Religion at UCLA for ongoing support and encouragement of the journal. We express gratitude to Dr. Ryan Gillespie for his endless support and dedication to this publication. Dr. Gillespie has granted us the opportunity to gain insightful knowledge regarding the process of academic publication.

We hope you enjoy Volume 03.

Sincerely,

The Editors
UCLA Journal of Religion

UCLA Journal of Religion

Volume 3
2019

Conflating Impurity: Pun and Ambiguity in Lamentations 1:8-10 and Jerusalem's Multivalent Personifications

Olivia Rose
University of California, Los Angeles

ABSTRACT

Lamentations preserves a vivid literary testimony to the besiegement of Jerusalem, destruction of the Jerusalem temple, and Babylonian exile in 586 BCE Lamentations 1 notably personifies Jerusalem, suggesting an awareness of and appeal to the ancient Mesopotamian city-lament genre. Jerusalem's personification, too, genders the city multifacetedly, enabling the city to be metaphorized as a sexually impure woman (e.g. a whore), a menstruant, and a rape victim—to name a few. I examine the contentious word נִידָה *nydh* in Lam 1:8, paying mind to the word's homophonic connection to נִדָּה *ndh* (in verse 17) and contextual placement in the poem, leading to my conclusion that נִידָה indeed conjures the image of a menstruant—among other types of women. I argue in favor of a new methodological approach to reading Lam 1:8 that challenges the etymological approach offered by many scholars. נִידָה should be read as a pun on נִדָּה in order to fully honor the word's evocative connotations and significations. Following a line of scholarship that recognizes two overarching types of impurity presented in the Hebrew Bible, I argue that in employing such a pun, Lamentations 1 conflates ritual and moral impurity to emphasize personified-Jerusalem's shame and challenge a divine retribution theology of the exile.

Conflating Impurity: Pun and Ambiguity in Lamentations 1:8-10 and Jerusalem's Multivalent Personifications

By Olivia Rose[1]
University of California, Los Angeles

INTRODUCTION

The events of 586 BCE drastically impacted the trajectory of Hebrew literature. In 589 BCEBCE, during Zedekiah's reign in Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem. In 586 BCE, Babylon successfully conquered the city, exiling to Babylon Zedekiah and many other Judean officials. The archaeology of the eastern hill of Jerusalem has given vivid testimony to the devastation that the Babylonians brought to the city. The remains associated with the layer of destruction show evidence of a prolonged siege, including rationing and starvation. The biblical book of Lamentations preserves the most vivid description of the destruction of the city.[2] The book contains five distinct poems, each markedly eidetic. This paper will focus on Lamentations 1 and Jerusalem's gendered personification.

Lamentations 1 opens with an unidentifiable narrator whose voice assumes about half of the poem (Lam 1:1-11a, 17). Personified-Jerusalem assumes a voice in the poem as well (Lam 1:11b-16, 18-22), shifting the narrative perspective to give a notably intimate portrayal and perspective of the city's

[1] Olivia Rose graduated from UCLA in June 2019 with a B.A. in English Literature (with a concentration in Creative Writing) and Comparative Literature. Her primary areas of interest are poetry writing, literary and critical theory, and the Hebrew Bible. She intends to pursue one or all of these avenues in graduate school. This paper was adapted from an independent study with Dr. Jeremy D. Smoak (UCLA, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures).

[2] While the claim that Lamentations succeeds the exile is substantiated thematically, it is (much more importantly) substantiated linguistically by F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp's linguistic dating of Lamentations, which will be outlined in the following section.

traumatic destruction. Throughout the poem, Jerusalem is personified as specific types of women, for instance: daughter, sexual adulteress, mother,[3] menstruant. Much scholarship on Jerusalem's portrayal as a menstruant has favored etymological analyses of the word נִידָה (that doubt the word's reference to a menstruant) in Lam 1:8 and the word נִדָּה in 1:17. Recent scholarship has also maintained these analyses with a typological understanding of impurity in the Hebrew Bible. I argue that these approaches fail to do justice to the lament's conflation of ritual and moral impurity that powerfully characterizes personified-Jerusalem as a woman wholly, completely, multidimensionally abandoned and, ultimately, shamed. An analytical approach that challenges the etymological and typological approaches mentioned favorably honors the text's success in creating meaning out of the trauma of 586 and challenging a divine retribution theology for the exile.

Dating Lamentations

To allow for a historically informed analysis of the book of Lamentations, we first must date the text. Many scholars have dated the book to the period following the Babylonian exile based on the book's thematic content.[4] However, dating a poetical text on thematic grounds can prove cumbersome and inaccurate. Certainly, a key element of poetry is its often-intentional elusiveness and ambiguity. Still, such an argument proves useful in helping us analyze all the facets of the book's content.

Some scholars have argued that the book necessarily dates to the period closely following the events of 586 BCE because the poem's graphic imagery

---

[3] Admittedly, a fault of this paper is its dismissal of Jerusalem's personification as MOTHER—a personification that is notable and important; yet, the limitations of this paper do not give time for a discussion on Jerusalem's depiction as mother. In my opinion, her other personifications are more relevant to my argument.
[4] Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations," *JANES* 26 (1998):2-3.

and descriptions of the destruction of the temple simply must have been recalled by a first-hand witness of the temple destruction.[5] This, too, is a problematic and inaccurate assumption about a poet's narrative and visual limitations that seems to underestimate a poet's creativity and imagination. Why must a poet personally experience a horror in order to imagine—or potentially fabricate—details and sentiments associated with that horror?

Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp clarifies the chronological placement of Lamentations by dating the book linguistically. He identifies eighteen linguistic features of Late Biblical Hebrew in the book. However, "the total number of late features in Lamentations is far fewer than that found in known LBH [Late Biblical Hebrew] works…indicating that the language is not classically LBH."[6] He argues that Lamentations reflects a transitional period between Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH) and LBH. He thus dates the book to the sixth century. Because of the book's linguistic similarities to Ezekiel, he also argues the book must date after 586 BCE But, too, because of the book's dissimilarities to the post-exilic prophetic books (which have been linguistically dated to the end of the sixth/beginning of the fifth century), he dates Lamentations to the period between 586 and 520 BCE In summary, the book linguistically dates to the period closely following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the Babylonian exile. This dating of Lamentations suggests that the imagery of the book recalls a close memory of the devastation and exile of the city and provides the literary complement to the archaeological picture of the event. The dating proposed by Dobbs-Allsopp grounds the historical, textual, and thematic analyses I will execute in this paper.

[5] Ibid., 4.
[6] Ibid., 34.

The City-Lament Genre

Before moving into a discussion on the subject of impurity, it is necessary to establish the genre of our text. Dobbs-Allsopp's extensive work on Lamentations has regarded the city-lament genre in much detail.[7] He expands upon Delbert Hillers's identification of an Israel city-lament genre as "an abstraction made, for the sake of discussion, to refer to a common theme: the destruction of city and sanctuary, with identifiable imagery specific to this theme, and common sub-topics and poetic devices."[8] Dobbs-Allsopp examines Lamentations's generic similarities to Mesopotamian laments, identifying nine key categories of the laments' content: "Subject and Mood,"[9] "Structure and Poetic Technique," "Divine Abandonment," "Assignment of Responsibility," "The Divine Agent of Destruction," "Destruction," "The Weeping Goddess," "Lamentation," and "Restoration of the City and Return of the Gods."[10] Moderate attention will be paid to the key generic features found in Lamentations that prove relevant to my arguments.

Indeed, Lamentations displays some significant differences from the Mesopotamian city laments. Firstly, personified-Jerusalem assumes the role of the weeping goddess, who in Mesopotamian city laments would weep on behalf of the city to a more powerful god. In other words, Jerusalem pleas for herself rather than having a patron goddess represent

[7] See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993) for the most extensive overview. See also Dobbs-Allsopp, "Lamentations from Sundry Angles: A Retrospective" in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Atlanta: Brill, 2008), 13-26. For more theoretical considerations on genre, see Dobbs-Allsopp, "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments," *JAOS* 120 no.4 (2000): 625-630.

[8] Delbert Hillers, *Lamentations* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1972), 36. Hillers's statement is helpful in simplifying the tenets of the genre to focus on what are arguably most important regarding the city-lament genre—the destruction of the city *and the sanctuary*.

[9] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion,* 31-32.

[10] Ibid., 32-94.

her. Christl Maier makes note of this significant difference, and consequently translates the epithet צִיּוֹן-בַּת bt- ywn found intermittently throughout Lamentations as "Daughter Zion" rather than "Daughter of Zion"[11] to reflect the nature of personified-Jerusalem as a character who does not only represent the city, but more importantly *is* the city herself. In other words, she represents the city by being the city; she represents herself. The translation "Daughter Zion" allows the language of the text to assert a certain agency by emphasizing Jerusalem's agency in the lamenting of her own destruction. Secondly, the biblical laments both discuss the reasons for destruction and blame the city (or her inhabitants) for the destruction. [12] Maeir then identifies a third distinction regarding Lamentations's relationship to biblical prophetic laments—namely, that "the prophet is prospectively lamenting the death of his audience and the destruction of their habitation… underscor[ing] the grim prospects of the prophetic message of doom."[13] Jerusalem's destruction is retrospective, not only allowing for the genre of lament at large, but more importantly fueling the depiction of personified-Jerusalem through her carefully nuanced personifications.

JERUSALEM PERSONIFIED: A PUN ON A MENSTRUANT, A WHORE, AND A RAPE VICTIM

Personification of the City: "Daughter Zion"

The personification of Jerusalem overarches much of the poems and must be analyzed acutely in order to fully understand the text's attitude toward the destroyed city, her people, and even the issue of temple sacrifice.[14] The city is personified immediately in the first line of the lament

[11] Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 62. Dobbs-Allsopp (and other scholars) adhere to the translation "Daughter of Zion," reading the epithet as a genitive of location.

[12] Ibid., 70-71.

[13] Ibid., 71.

[14] While the limitations of this paper won't allow for further discussion of the issue of temple sacrifice, it is pertinent enough to be here mentioned.

by being described as sitting:[15]

'y kh yšbh bdd h'y r rbty 'm אֵיכָה ׀ יָשְׁבָה בָדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עָם

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people![16]

Lamentations's personification of Jerusalem, though, reaches beyond generalized personification to personify the city as woman and type-of-woman—for instance, daughter (vv.6,15), widow (v.1), princess and vassal (ibid.), mother (vv.5,16), menstruant (vv.8f?,17), and sexually-impure-woman (vv.8f?,10).

In the previous section on Lamentations's connection to the Mesopotamian city-lament genre, we touched on Jerusalem's personification as a distinctive nuance in Lamentations to the "weeping goddess" trope in Mesopotamian city-laments. We recall that this personification is emphasized and in part achieved by the epithet בַּת-צִיּוֹן that is attributed to the personified city. Maier well identifies some of the key results of the metaphor "Zion is a daughter" communicated through this epithet. Firstly, the "Zion" element of the metaphor connotes the notion of Zion as an elect location chosen by YHWH as his dwelling place.[17] More relevant to our discussion, though, is the "daughter" element of the metaphor, which Maier expounds:

> In a patriarchal society such as ancient Israel, the highest grade of protection is offered to the daughter who is not yet married. Israel shares the complex concept of shame and honor valid in ancient

[15] I can't but mention here that this simple statement is packed with more subliminal implied metaphors of its own; for instance, the city as a container. I owe all recognition of this sort of claim to George Lackoff and Mark Johnson's influential work on metaphor, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: UP, 1980). Much of my examination of metaphor will thus come from their work. Nonetheless, we will refrain from analyzing extensively the innumerable metaphors in the text at hand in order to pay due attention to the metaphors I argue are most pertinent to the discussion at hand.
[16] This paper will utilize the NRSV for all translations unless otherwise noted. "How" here could also be translated emphatically, e.g. "Ah! Lonely sits the city".
[17] Maier, *Daughter Zion,* 73.

> Mediterranean societies. Within the auspices of this notion of shame and honor, the status of a family is represented by its male head with regard to its members' reputation and conduct. Thus the virginity of a daughter and her chastity until marriage are directly related to the honor, or, in the case of its premature loss, the shame of the family and particularly its patriarch.[18]

So, in ancient Israel's patriarchal context, a characterization of "daughter" connotes the value such a woman has, which is (simply put) based on her being chaste and thus marriageable.[19]

Jerusalem's personification also allows the city to have her own voice—again, to assume the role of the weeping patron goddess and speak on her own behalf. This gives voice to her inhabitants. Jerusalem represents the inhabitants who were present during the Babylonian siege and destruction of the temple. Unlike the Mesopotamian city laments, in which the patron goddess would represent the city, Jerusalem's representing herself gives her a closer relationship of representation with her inhabitants:

<u>Mesop. laments</u>: inhabitants → city → patron goddess *protests* → head deity

<u>Lamentations:</u> inhabitants → city personified *protests* → YHWH

Similarly, the personification of the city—the conflation of city and patron goddess—puts the city at a conceptually closer distance to the divine (YHWH). Perhaps more evocatively, Jerusalem's personification cultivates a poetic voice that is intense and demands response. As Dobbs-Allsopp mentions, "The personified city in Lamentations is no passive object that can be easily ignored the reader is forced to reckon with the human consequences of the punishment...that was inflicted on Jerusalem."[20]

---

[18] Ibid., 74.
[19] Additionally, both translations "Daughter Zion" and "Daughter of Zion" offer this understanding.
[20] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (Louisville: James Knox Press, 2002), 65.

Daniel Smith-Christopher presents archeological evidence challenging the tendencies of some scholars to dismiss the historical legitimacy of the intensity of the exile for Judahites. His findings reveal that conditions were indeed dire and harsh during the exile and thus reasonably ground the historical legitimacy of Lamentations's depiction of the exile.[21] Jerusalem's personification, then, heightens the emotional palpability of the horrors of the exile by allowing affliction to be embodied. Her embodied pain connects her with her inhabitants who, being human, experienced physical affliction. Too, personified-Jerusalem enables the author to precisely communicate the destruction of the city in a manner particularly relatable. The extensive description of bodily discomfort works experientially, as all readers are persons embodied and can well imagine and remember bodily discomfort and pains. (This is also reflected in the conceptual affinity of personified-Jerusalem to Jerusalem's inhabitants just outlined.)

I have charted some of the implications of Jerusalem's personification as a woman and as a daughter—particularly, that the epithet "Daughter Zion" recalls the Mesopotamian city-lament genre and suggests an Israelite/ Judahite literary nuance to the weeping goddess trope. I have also outlined some of the ways in which Jerusalem's personification allows the literary city to speak on behalf of herself and her inhabitants. Moreover, her personification lets her embody both the affliction experienced historically by her inhabitants and the physical destruction of the city itself in the sixth century BCE However, to again be repetitive, the poem personifies Jerusalem not just as woman, but as type-of-woman. In this vein, the personifications of menstruant and sexually-impure-woman are of primary interest to my study, primarily due to the elusiveness of the word . following sections, I will outline the impurity dichotomy suggested by the

[21] Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Violence and Exegesis: The History of Exile," in *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 27-73.

1:17. In the biblical texts as studied extensively by Jonathan Klawans. I will then provide an overview of scholarship regarding Lam 1:8-10, my argument that Lam 1:8-10 should be read with a better acceptance of and appreciation for the ambiguity of נִידָה.

Impurity in the Hebrew Bible: Ritual Impurity vs. Moral Impurity

The issue of impurity and tabernacle/temple defilement pervades the Hebrew Bible. Jonathan Klawans highly influential work on impurity reads the biblical impurity laws in a binary.[22] Under "impurity," he identifies two distinct impurity categories: ritual impurity and moral impurity. The ritual impurity laws—laid out in Leviticus 11-15 and Numbers 19 (roughly)—provide both the bounds within which an individual must live in order to remain pure and the means for purification should one become impure. Impurity prevents one from entering the temple. Klawans summarizes his claims on the distinction of ritual impurity as follows:

> In general…there are three distinct characteristics of ritual impurity: (1) the sources of ritual impurity are natural and more or less unavoidable; (2) it is not sinful to contract these impurities; and (3)

[22] See Jonathan Klawans, "Chapter 2: The Sacrificial Process of Ancient Israel," in *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple* (Oxford: UP, 2005), 49-74. See also Klawans "Introduction" and "Chapter 1: Ritual and Moral Impurity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: UP, 2000), 3-42. Other sources of scholarship on impurity and sin in ancient Judaism abound: namely, Adolph Büchler's *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (Oxford:UP, 1927), Gedalyahu Alon's "The Bounds of the Laws of Levitical Cleanness" in *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 190-234, and Mary Douglas's groundbreaking *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1966). In the introduction to *Impurity and Sin,* Klawans summarizes much of the influential scholarship on impurity and sin (and the relationship between the two); he includes the previous three sources mentioned, as well as works by David Z. Hoffman, Jacob Milgrom, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and David P. Wright. All the works here mentioned ground Klawans's research, and his continuation on the topic in particular pays heed to "the fact that certain grave sins have their own distinct defiling force" (21). I must disclaim that referring to Klawans's outlook as a "binary" may be a sure oversimplification, but I believe it to be a somewhat helpful one.

> these impurities can convey an impermanent contagion to people (priests and Israelites) and to many items within close proximity.[23]

The Holiness Code (roughly Lev 17-26) addresses specific serious sins—תּוֹעֵבוֹת *twʿbwt*, often translated "abominations"—that result in moral impurity. These sins defile "the sinner…the land of Israel…and the sanctuary of God…This defilement, in turn leads to the expulsion of the people from the land of Israel."[24]

To reiterate, "ritual impurity" refers to contamination from bodily flows (e.g. menstruation), contact with corpses, etc. It leads to "temporary, contagious impurity" and can be resolved by bathing or waiting.[25] Moral impurity is caused by committing horrendous sins or offenses—namely, idolatry, sexual adultery (incl. incest), and murder (bloodshed). The result of moral impurity is the "[d]efilement of sinners, land, and sanctuary." Moral impurity is resolved through atonement or punishment; but, as the defiling force of תּוֹעֵבוֹת is so great, the ultimate resolution to moral impurity is exile from the land.[26] In my ongoing discussion, I will utilize Klawans's terms "ritual impurity" and "moral impurity" in referring to the purity dichotomy he recognizes in the biblical corpus.

Klawans's understanding of biblical impurity laws proves helpful by enabling us to better consider what Lamentations might be suggesting in the way of a theology of the exile (i.e. banishment from the land). I argue that Lamentations reflects/purports[27] a nuanced, fluid understanding of

[23] Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 54.
[24] Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism,* 26.
[25] Ibid., 27.
[26] Ibid.
[27] The language we use here has large interpretative implications. My ultimate aim and approach is literary analysis. As such, in order to honor a historically informed analysis of the text while also allowing the text to exert its own agency—and, too, to refrain from making assumptions about authorial intent—I quite intentionally explicate that the text might be reflecting a particular understanding of impurity or purporting a particular understanding of impurity. To be sure, the text probably does both. This is a simultaneous and interconnected process. Moreover, according to my acquired

typological impurity and, too, does so as a way of understanding and coping with the temple destruction and Babylonian exile. Lamentations problematizes the dissonance between ritual and moral impurity by conflating the two, [28] resultingly shifting the focus of the poem onto Jerusalem's position as a victim and undermining the motif that Jerusalem's destruction and her inhabitants' exile is warranted punishment for her abominations.

Impurity Language in Lamentations: A Menstruant and a Whore

In this section, I will address a pressing instance of impurity language in Lamentations 1:8—an occurrence that is up for much debate and defies the *lectio difficilior potior* reading of the verse. The word used, נִידָה, only occurs in Lam 1:8. It is a homophone to נִדָּה, the word used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to a menstruating woman.[29] נִדָּה is used in Lam 1:17 to characterize personified-Jerusalem. I will take into account a myriad of scholarly opinions on Lam 1:8. I will also consider the placement of the verse within the poem's eidetic, evocative, moody context—and, too, the context afforded by verse 17 with the undoubtable reference to a menstruant/unclean woman. I will continue our discussion on metaphor by extrapolating the argument of some scholars that the (possible) reference to a menstruant in

---

theoretical approach to literary analysis, authorial intent must never be valued above the text's independent agency. Certainly, a more comprehensive historical analysis might allow us to say with more certainty to what level the text reflects versus purports. Still, this would leave us in the realm of assuming authorial intent. And, however likely the author's standpoint may be, this all leads back to assumption, and remains ultimately divorced from the text itself and the text's agency.

[28] I must also clarify that this statement seems to assume that Lamentations as a text holds an understanding of impurity as being a dichotomy. (For how else could the text conflate the two categories?) Surely, the text seems to not (necessarily) hold any such understanding. In saying that the text conflates ritual and moral impurity, we necessarily utilize the language of an interpretative stance on biblical impurity laws. (For brevity, we could say that we necessarily use Klawans's language.) Our analysis of purity conflation is thus ultimately indebted to, caught inside of, language that assumes purity as being a dichotomy.

[29] I will later address the metaphorical nuance to נִדָּה that we see suggested in the word's occurrences in Ezekiel 7 and Leviticus 20:21 to refer to defiled land.

verse 8—coupled with the sure reference in verse 17—operates as a metaphor for Jerusalem's moral impurity.

The Poem[30] Punning: נִידָה *in Lamentations 1:8*

The first occurrence of impurity language in Lamentations 1 has been the subject of much scholarly debate, and will begin our discussion on the nuances of Jerusalem's gendered personification:

ḥṭ' ḥṭ' h yrwšlm 'l-kn ***lnydh*** *hyth*	הָיָתָה כֵּן לְנִידָה-חֵטְא חָטְאָה יְרוּשָׁלַםִ עַל
kl-mkbdyh hzylwh ky-r'w 'rwth	רָאוּ עֶרְוָתָהּ-מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזִּילוּהָ כִּי-כָּל
gm-hy' n' nḥh wtšb 'ḥwr	הִיא נֶאֶנְחָה וַתָּשָׁב אָחוֹר-[31]

Jerusalem sinned grievously,
so she has become a **mockery**;
all who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans,
and turns her face away.[32]

Scholars argue over the proper translation of נִידָה. As previously mentioned, the occurrence in Lam 1:8 is the only biblical instance of the word. Hillers follows the readings of Ibn Ezra, Löhr, and Rudolph who "take this [נִידָה] as [an] 'object of head-nodding,' i.e., 'object of scorn.'"[33] Like the line of interpretation Hillers holds to, Adele Berlin takes נִידָה as coming from the

[30] An affinity for textual agency imbues the arguments of this paper. As such, I intentionally refrain from claiming that, for instance, "the poet" utilizes a pun. This would miss the mark. The text—the poem—employs a pun (according to my argument). This approach is grounded in critical and literary theory, and I am acutely aware that such an approach in many ways defies an historical approach. I reserve discussion of such literary/interpretative approaches to the footnotes for, to a degree, they do not directly substantiate the core arguments of my analysis of Lam 1.

[31] Lam 1:8, my emphasis.

[32] A hyper-literal translation could read, "Jerusalem has sinned grievously so that she has become (like) a menstruant," if we read נִידָה as נִדָּה. Sufficient discussion will examine this possibility. C.f. Lam 1:21, "All my enemies heard of my trouble; they are glad [שָׂשׂוּ *ssw*] that you have done it." שָׂשׂוּ here, from שׂוּשׂ, literally means "rejoice," and could be translated as "mock."

[33] Hillers, *Lamentations,* 9. Hillers translates the verse, "Because Jerusalem sinned so great a sin, / people shake their heads at her" (2).

root נוד *nwd.*[34] She entertains a translation of נִידָה that adheres to the "menstruant" or "unclean" sense of the word, but argues against this translation on both linguistic and phenomenological grounds. She holds that, were נִידָה indeed coming from the root נדד *ndd,* we would see a spelling like נִדָּה (c.f. Lam 1:17)—specifically, without a *yod* and with a *dagesh* in the *dalet*. Adhering to the *lectio difficilior potior* reading that traces נִידָה to the root נוד*,* she argues that נִידָה gives readers the sense of a woman banished:[35]

> ... *nwd* has two meanings. One is "to move or shake [the head]" in the sense of "to mock or deride" (Jer 18:16; Ps 44:15)....A second possibility is to take *nwd* as "wanderer." Both "derision" and "wanderer" are derived from the same root by *HALOT* and by Ibn Ezra....I have chosen the idea of wandering because the consequence of sin is less likely to be derision and more likely to be banishment or exile.[36]

To say nothing of Berlin's assumption of the text's understanding of חֵטְא *ḥṭ*ʾ ("sin") and its consequence(s), she ultimately favors an interpretation of נִידָה that prioritizes the "wandering" sense of the word. (She goes on to mention the connotational connection to Cain's curse in Genesis 4:12-14.)[37] Berlin must be credited, though, for her holistic acceptance of the word: "all three associations adhere to the word, and the dominant one shifts as we proceed from line to line..."[38]

A strong substantiating argument in support of understanding נִידָה as "menstruant" is verse 8's connection with verse 17:

hyth yrwšlm ***lndh*** *bynyhm* בֵּינֵיהֶם הָיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַםִ לְנִדָּה

---

[34] Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 42. *HALOT* also traces נִידָה to the root נוד.
[35] Berlin translates the verse, "Grievously has Jerusalem sinned, / therefore she has been banished" (42).
[36] Berlin, *Lamentations,* 53.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 54. Regardless of Berlin's discussion in her commentary of the nuances of נִידָה, her *translation* ultimately does not honor the menstruant sense of the word. We enter a consideration on translation theory and the most appropriate method of translation of נִידָה...my arguments engage the Hebrew. Though considerations of appropriate translation pervade my arguments, my arguments are ultimately analysis- and interpretation-based.

Jerusalem has become
a **filthy thing** among them.[39]

In an attempt to make sense of the rare word and connect verse 8 topically with the more common homophone נִדָּה in verse 17, some argue[40] that נִידָה is a variant spelling of נִדָּה, from the root נדד *ndd,*[41] a word that refers to a woman in menstruation.[42] We should note here that both נִידָה and נִדָּה supply a sense of banishment. Klawans refers to Lamentations 1:8 in passing, claiming that both verses 8 and 17 refer to a menstruant as a simile[43] for the moral impurity of Jerusalem.[44] Notice, though, that he does accept נִידָה as referring to a menstruant. In his translation and commentary, Robert Alter brushes over the issue: “The Hebrew word *nidah,* a root that suggests banishment, is associated with a menstruant woman, considered unclean and not to be touched.”[45] Iain Provan favors the translation “filthy” for נִידָה (adhering to the “menstruant” sense of the word) and compares נִידָה with instances of נוד in Jeremiah and the Psalms: “It is not easy to see...[how this]...could mean ‘*object* of scorn’... even if it were granted that the word of itself could express the idea of ‘shaking the *head*’. In Jer. 18:16 and Ps 44:14

[39] My emphasis. Literally, “Jerusalem has become (like) a menstruant among them.”
[40] See Berlin, *Lamentations,* 42, 46, 53-55.
[41] Ludwig Kohler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 672.
[42] Cf. Lev 12:2-5, 15:19-33, 18:19.
[43] For the sake of our study, we will consider simile and metaphor to be fairly synonymous. Scholars of metaphor and simile theory debate over the fundamental sameness or lack thereof of simile and metaphor. Nonetheless, because Klawans’s statement is not extensively extrapolated and because he does not seem to intentionally be welcoming a conversation on the distinctions between simile and metaphor, I feel safe in assuming the phenomenological underpinnings of these two devices to be understood as generally “same” for the purposes and limitations of this paper.
[44] Jonathan Klawans, “Idolatry, Incest, and Impurity: Moral Defilement in Ancient Judaism,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 29, no.4 (1998): 400.
[45] Robert Alter, “Lamentations,” in *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 649. Alter’s translation of the beginning of verse 8 reads, “An offense did Jerusalem commit, therefore she became despised.” So, notably, his translation alone (apart from the note in his commentary) does not itself connote menstruation or ritual impurity.

the actual word 'head'…is required in order to define what it is that is being shaken."[46] Joseph Lam similarly refutes Berlin's interpretation:

> Despite the strong arguments that Berlin offers, on balance the menstruant interpretation remains more compelling….Given the close parallel in the phraseology of 1:8 [to 1:17], as well as the recurrence of 'there is no comforter for her'…it seems reasonable to take 1:8-9 as representing the same metaphor as 1:17, but explicated in detail. The menstruant and her impurity function poetically as symbols of shame…[47]

Berlin and Klawans both argue that the image of the menstruant in Lamentations 1 (again, undoubtedly present with verse 17) should be understood metaphorically. That is, the menstruant is a metaphor for a morally impure woman (i.e. personified-Jerusalem). Now, I do not want to fully challenge the claim that the menstruant in Lamentations 1 must be understood metaphorically. I instead challenge the implied notion that Lamentations 1 (or any text) should be read with the insistence that language has singular import. For, in their analyses on the matter, Berlin and Klawans both explicitly state the reason for understanding the menstruant as a metaphor in Lamentations 1 is because menstruation (ritual impurity) was not ground for banishment from the land.[48] We also must differentiate between pun and metaphor, which I believe may be distinctly different (and perhaps mutually exclusive) categories.[49]

If נִידָה is operating as a pun, then its two significations are derision/wanderer and a menstruant (נִדָּה). But, as a homophonic pun, the significations of נִידָה are not neutral. That is, נִידָה would have a primary and a secondary signification. The primary (wanderer/banished) signification is

---

[46] Iain Provan, *Lamentations* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1991), 44. Provan's analysis is particularly strong in refuting the use of נוד through a comparative analysis. Notably, both instances in Jeremiah 18 and Psalm 44 represent poetical instances of נוד and thus relate to our study fittingly.

[47] Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (Oxford: UP, 2016), 196.

[48] Berlin, *Lamentations,* 54; Klawans, "Idolatry, Incest, and Impurity," 400.

[49] My attention to the distinction of pun and metaphor is catalyzed by Donald Davidson's essay "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no.1 (Autumn, 1978): 31-47.

signified by both the word's orthography and phonetics. The secondary signification is signified solely by נִידָה's phonetics that mirror the phonetics of the homophone נִדָּה and thus recall the variant word. Such recollection would all the while be an encouraged association based on imageric context, as mentioned previously. (This would be opposed to a homonymic pun, in which both possible significations of a word would have the same sound and spelling. In other words, the same word would have two incongruous definitions, and any talk of the word's primary signification would be grounded by context alone rather than by the word's distinctive orthography.) As such, we would receive a type of hierarchy of significations, if you will.[50]

"Hierarchy" may prove quite problematic for us, though—and rightfully so. I will challenge referring to נִידָה's significations as a hierarchy by arguing that this hierarchy could be undermined should the connotational weight of the secondary signification be more prominent. To be specific: should the image of a menstruant better fit the thematic, imageric context of the poem, it would overwhelm the perhaps-less-specific image of a woman banished or wandering. For instance: an ancient reader might interpret נִידָה as a wonky spelling of נִדָּה, rather than interpreting נִידָה as נִדָּה only secondarily. So, to be clear, the hierarchy is not set in stone. The significations attributed to "primary signification" and "secondary signification" are debatable, pliable, and perhaps even arbitrary.

(I must also note that the primary significations of נִידָה are not in themselves clear, as Berlin succinctly outlines. Namely, we have two options suggested by the root נוד—"derision" and "wanderer." For the sake of simplicity and brevity in my analysis, I favor Berlin's adherence to the "wanderer" sense of

[50] I must again clarify that, when I speak of נִידָה operating as a pun, I do in fact mean how it operates in the text, not necessarily how the author intended. My primary concern is with literary interpretation, not authorial intent. Yet, if a pun is indeed operating in the way I argue, this would be a quite sophisticated and admirable employment on the poet's part. Nonetheless, in my arguments, I will disregard speculation about authorial intent.

the word as the pun's primary signification. Still, I must emphasize that the nature of this pun can be challenged from multiple directions—here, in its primary significations. The pun could and should be further problematized beyond what this paper offers.)

It is for these reasons that I favor an interpretation of נִידָה that understands it as a pun on נִדָּה. This understanding honors both lines of scholarly interpretation traced thus forth (menstruant/root נדד vs. wanderer/derision/root נדד) without undermining the diligence in argumentation on any viewpoint. Moreover, with the understanding of the pun's signification hierarchy I have laid out, we see its significations are nonetheless contentious and, thus, an acceptance of the pun still allows room for fruitful discussion on the nuances of נִידָה. In recognizing נִידָה as a pun, we better see the literary nuances of the word that Berlin's and Klawans's etymological and typological approaches do not allow. The image of a menstruant is present in verse 8, even if the etymology of נִידָה does not seem to suggest it. And, the image of the menstruant is conjured in order to depict Jerusalem's shame.

נִידָה /נִדָּה ***Read in the Context of*** טָמֵא

I have thus established the benefit of reading נִידָה as a pun. Present in the pun is the image of a menstruant. This image is arguably furthered in verse 9. Though I challenge it, Berlin's interpretation of verse 9 behooves us as she makes clear note of the (perceived) dissonance between ritual and moral impurity, claiming that the two types of purity are incongruous and necessarily should impact our reading of verses 8-9:

... kl-mkbdy hzylwh ky-r'w'rwth	... ראוּ עֶרְוָתָהּ-מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזִּילוּהָ כִּי-כָל
gm-hy'n'nhh wtšb 'hwr	הִיא נֶאֶנְחָה וַתָּשָׁב אָחוֹר-גַּם
ṭm 'th bšwlyh l' zkrh aḥryth	בְּשׁוּלֶיהָ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ טֻמְאָתָהּ
wtrd pl'ym 'yn mnḥm lh	וַתֵּרֶד פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ
r'h YHWH 't- 'nyy ky hgdyl ' wyb	עָנְיִי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב-רְאֵה יְהוָה אֶת

...all who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans,
and turns her face away.

Her **uncleanness** was in her skirts;
she took no thought of her future;
her downfall was appalling,
with none to comfort her.
"O LORD, look at my affliction,
For the enemy has triumphed!"[51]

The Hebrew word טֻמְאָ *ṭm*ʾ ("uncleanness") can be used in both ritual and moral impurity contexts.[52] If we appreciate the menstruant sense of נִידָּה, the "uncleanness in her skirts" provides vivid imagery of menstrual blood in Jerusalem's skirts. As Lam notes, "The menstruant and her impurity function poetically as symbols of shame, and the visibility of the impurity on her skirts prompts rejection from her neighbors."[53] Along Berlin's line of thinking, though, the reference to uncleanness in personified-Jerusalem's skirts is not a reference to menstruation (or menstrual blood), but a reference to sexual immodesty. She derives this claim by cross-referencing other biblical instances of the unveiling of skirts (here, שׁוּלֶיהָ *šwlyh*, lit. "her skirts") that refer to sexual immodesty. Thus, "[Jerusalem] is not a menstruant; she is a whore."[54] Her ultimate argument, though, is underlined by her explication that "a menstruant is ritually, but not morally, impure; menstruation is not a sin....If the intended image is a menstruant, ritual impurity *must* be interpreted as a *metaphor* for the moral impurity of which Jerusalem was guilty by virtue of her unfaithfulness to God."[55] In making this claim, Berlin represents a line of scholarship that too readily assumes an organized or clear-cut understanding of the exile on behalf of the poet. (But, as previously outlined, Lamentations dates to a period quite

[51] Lam 1:8b-9, my emphasis.
[52] Klawans, "Idolatry, Incest, and Impurity," 395.
[53] Lam, *Patterns of Sin,*196.
[54] Berlin, *Lamentations,* 54.
[55] Ibid., my emphasis.

close after the exile and destruction of the temple. The text's grappling with the exile would, then, be barely retrospective. We should expect the text to be confused and conflicted when it comes to a theology on the exile.) Berlin's assumption then bleeds into an assumption about the understanding of the text. That is, according to Berlin, the text exerts an organized understanding of impurity and the exile. But, as this paper argues, Lam 1 indeed does not reflect or purport an organized understanding of impurity and the exile. So, in such an assumption of the poet, Berlin (and other scholars) mistakenly overvalue authorial intent and miss the text's precise method of meaning-making.

Aside from what we should expect, we nonetheless see this in the text. In identifying נִידָה as a pun initially, we can converse about the ways the text employs interplaying iterations of women shamed in order to depict Jerusalem's horrific shame. The interplay is continued in verse 9. Jerusalem is both a menstruant and a whore. Rhetoric that connotes a menstruant carries over into verse 9 (namely, "Her uncleanness was in her skirts"), even if just a mere remnant. While verse 9 taken independently would likely not suggest a menstruant, the verse in context suggests varying images. Jerusalem is both ritually and morally impure—if we insist on assessing purity as a dichotomy. Now, I must admit, in identifying the simultaneous suggestions made possible by the text's ambiguity, I might be doing an injustice in not paying mind to the text's elusiveness, which Dobbs-Allsopp nicely identifies:

> That is, all the details surrounding the exposure of the city's 'nakedness' have been suppressed, and as a result, the image swells with potential connotations, perhaps referring to the prophetic motif, but maybe calling attention to the shame or disgrace that the exposure of the naked body triggers in many cultures, including that of ancient Judah.[56]

[56] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations,* 64.

Indeed, Jerusalem's nakedness alone conveys her shame. The amalgamation of the naked woman, menstruant, and sexual adulteress heightens the palpability of Jerusalem's shame. The poem gives us multiple iterations of a woman shamed, ensuring that Jerusalem's shame is recognized and appreciated. Pathos and sympathy are evoked more forcefully because the ambiguity of the image allows for multiple points of contact.

Now, we enter murky waters by claiming menstruation (perhaps more generally, ritual impurity) was shameful. I do not intend to argue that ritual impurity at large was viewed as shameful. We might question whether menstruation carried a connotation of shame more so than other bodily conditions that caused ritual impurity—perhaps due to the inherent sexism in ancient Israel's patriarchal culture. As the limitations of this paper do not allow for a proper discussion on the shaming of a menstruant, I do call us to recognize the likelihood of communicated shame suggested by the text. Whether or not menstruants were shamed in ancient Israel, whether or not menstruation could at times be viewed as shameful, the text nevertheless places the image of a menstruant, twice, in the context of shame. While the use of the menstruant image may or may not suggest an existing connotation of shame, the use of the menstruant so closely with clear depictions of shame (e.g. personified-Jerusalem's nakedness) associates the menstruant in the poem—be it even a miniscule association—with shame.

Further Consideration of נִידָה *in Light of a Rape Metaphor*

I have heretofore substantiated an argument of reading נִידָה as a pun on נִדָּה. I have also explained how the ambiguity of נִידָה in verse 7, with an emphasis on the image of a menstruant, affects our reading of verse 8. I will culminate our discussion on Jerusalem's personification as a menstruant by contrasting verses 8-9 with Lam 1:10:

ydw prs ṣr 'l kl-mḥmdyh
ky-r' th gwym b 'w mqdšh
'šr swyth l' -yb' w bqhl lk

מַחֲמַדֶּיהָ-יָדוֹ פָּרַשׂ צָר עַל כָּל
רָאֲתָה גוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ-כִּי
יָבֹאוּ בַקָּהָל לָךְ-אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה לֹא

Enemies have stretched out their hands
over all her precious things;
she has even seen the nations
invade her sanctuary,
those whom you forbade
to enter your congregation.

The rhetoric of Jerusalem's sanctuary being invaded holds sexual connotations. The invasion of the sanctuary metaphorizes the invasion of a woman's body. Jerusalem is being (metaphorically) raped.[57] Dobbs-Allsopp identifies a shift in perspective from Lam 1:8-9 to 1:10. He notes that the poet/poem may be "tap[ping] into the motif's cultural symbolism" in verses 8-9 that, within ancient Israel's patriarchal culture, would permit a certain level of sexual violence or shame against a woman as a punishment for her infidelity.[58] He continues this line of thought in regards to verse 10:

> What is most remarkable, however, is how the common subject matter and their immediate juxtaposition of 1:8-9 and 1:10 compel the reader to identify the two incidents, the net effect of which is to further problematize the already blurred relationship between assault imagery and guilt. The reader cannot help but notice that what is partially evoked as right judgment in 1:8-9…is viewed far more negatively in 1:10, where the intent would appear to be to arouse God's vengeance for the violation of Zion.[59]

Dobbs-Allsopp elucidates the very outcome of the tension the text exhibits over ritual/moral impurity and a theology for the exile. Up through verse 8 and lingering through verse 9 is the explication that Jerusalem sinned with the implication that her downcast state is therefore warranted. Verse 10, though, offers the implication that Jerusalem's punishment is unjust.

---

[57] Ibid., 66.
[58] Ibid., 63.
[59] Ibid., 66-67.

Jerusalem's violation is sexual and sacred—the metaphor used references Deut 23:3-4, emphasizing the heinousness of the crime.[60] Jerusalem's sexual impurity is thus brought to a place where Jerusalem is utterly victimized. The interplay of verse 10 with the preceding verses resultingly places emphasis on Jerusalem's shame and horrific state rather than her guilt— conflictedly. The text appears to be grappling with the biblical trope of framing Israel's/Judah's present or past state as a punishment, evident in the language that blames Jerusalem (e.g. "Jerusalem sinned grievously") and contrasts with, for instance, her depiction as a rape victim. To return to the beginning of our discussion on Jerusalem's personification, her victimhood is, perhaps, simultaneously emphasized by her characterization as a daughter. And, Jerusalem's characterization as a daughter carries the potential to communicate her shame as a daughter who is no longer sexually pure. To be repetitive yet again, with verse 10, Jerusalem's sexual purity is challenged by rape. She is simultaneously devalued and victimized. To conclude, we see through the text the atrocity of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon that overwhelms the sentiment that Jerusalem deserved what befell upon her. The presentation of this overwhelming horror is made possible through the Jerusalem's nuanced personifications—as daughter, menstruant, whore, and rape victim.

SUMMARY

One of the aims of this paper was to argue in favor of a new methodological approach in understanding elusive words like נִידָה. In challenging exclusively etymological and typological approaches in translating נִידָה, I argue that נִידָה's nuances and ambiguity must be appreciated. Understanding נִידָה as a pun on נִדָּה enables and enhances this appreciation.

[60] Deut 23:3: "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD…" Berlin notes, "Not only are the Babylonians equated with Ammon and Moab, but their invasion of the temple is made to seem even more religiously reprehensible because it belies a divine command" (Berlin, *Lamentations,* 55).

Furthermore, נִידָה and נִדָּה both operate in the poem to personify Jerusalem as a menstruant. This, in combination with repeated references to Jerusalem's sinning and guilt, challenges a stark dichotomy of ritual and moral impurity. In turn, Jerusalem's shame is depicted holistically and forcefully. Moreover, the supposition that Jerusalem's destruction is a punishment for her sinning is undermined. The poem characterizes Jerusalem as a daughter and then utilizes the image of the menstruant (only complicated by נִידָה's potential to depict a sexually impure woman) in verse 8, shifting to the depiction of a rape victim in verse 10 to problematize a divine retribution theology for the exile and suggest that Jerusalem's outcome was ultimately unjust and, perhaps, unwarranted.

BIBLIOGRPAHY

Alon, Gedalyahu."The Bounds of the Laws of Levitical Cleanness" in *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud*, 190-234. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977.

Alter, Robert. "Lamentations." In *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. Vol. 3, 643-672. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Berlin, Adele. *Lamentations: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Büchler, Adolph. *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century*. Oxford: UP, 1927.

Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 3rd ed. Oxford: UP, 2007.

Davidson, Donald. "What Metaphors Mean." *Critical Inquiry* 5, no.1 (Autumn, 1978): 31-47.

Dobbs-Allsopp, Frederick W. "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments." *JAOS* 120, no.4 (2000): 625-630.

———. *Lamentations*. Louisville: James Knox Press, 2002.

———."Lamentations from Sundry Angles: A Retrospective." In *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, edited by Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, 13-26. Atlanta: Brill, 2008.

———. "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 26 (1998): 1-36.

———. *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1966.

Hillers, Delbert. *Lamentations*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.

Klawans, Jonathan. "Idolatry, Incest, and Impurity: Moral Defilement in Ancient Judaism." *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 29, no. 4. (Leiden: Brill, 1998): 391-415.

———. *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*. Oxford: UP, 2000.

———. "Pure Violence: Sacrifice and Defilement in Ancient Israel." *The Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (2001): 133–155.

———. *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*. Oxford: UP, 2006.

Kittel, Rudolf, Paul Kahle, Otto Eissfeldt, Hans Bardtke, Hans P. Rüger, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, Gérard E. Weil, and D W. Thomas. *[Torah, Nevi'im U-Khetuvim] = Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1968.

Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. "נדד." *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Lackoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: UP, 1980.

Lam, Joseph. Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept. Oxford: UP, 2016.

Maier, Christl. *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Provan, Iain. *Lamentations*. Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1991.

Smith-Christopher, Daniel. “Violence and Exegesis: The History of Exile.” In *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 27-74. Minneapolis: Augsborg Fortress, 2002.

UCLA Journal of Religion

Volume 3
2019

Sacred Maternity: Considering Piety and Fertility in Islam During The Age of Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Morgan Barbre
North Carolina State University

ABSTRACT

Recent advancements in assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) provide women with new ways to address infertility—both presently felt and anticipated. Qur'anic paradigms of women, while not technically requiring procreation, point to the sacredness of maternity, and other narratives in the tradition imagine barrenness as a condition that is alleviated by God, often as a response to demonstrated piety. New technologies, however, force women experiencing infertility to decide whether to utilize ARTs as extensions of the divine, infertility-relieving hand or accept their condition as willed by God. This paper examines those responses to infertility for Muslim women and communities, taking into account Qur'anic narratives, legal tradition, theology of illness, and the pressures of bionormativity and genetic relatedness that surround reproduction.

Keywords: Assisted reproductive technologies, infertility, Islam, motherhood, piety

Sacred Maternity: Considering Piety and Fertility in Islam During The Age of Assisted Reproductive Technologies

By Morgan Barbre[1]
North Carolina State University

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advancement of medical technology, there are now ways to overcome, at least in part, the body-as-destiny paradigm to which humans have until now been captive. This, too, is the case with infertility, as assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs)—particularly *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)—now theoretically give persons hoping to procreate the opportunity to do so, regardless of their experience with (in)fertility.[2] That being said, the presence of these technologies, to say nothing of their accessibility, drives women, predominantly, to choose whether to utilize alternative ways of "making a baby" or to resign themselves to their bodies, thereby accepting their infertility as an extension of God's divine and creative hand.[3]

This paper analyzes the way those decisions come to pass, taking into account Qur'anic (and otherwise scriptural) narratives of mothering and reproduction, legal discourse around IVF use and other fertility-preserving

---

[1] Morgan Barbre graduated from North Carolina State University in 2019 with her bachelor's degree in religious studies. Her research interests include reproduction and infertility, ritual theory, and embodiment and embodied knowledge. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in religious studies and a career in academia.
[2] For the sake of this paper, when referring to infertility I am specifically referring to medical infertility, or that which is experienced by individuals whose reproductive organs or gametes prevent conception, as opposed to social infertility, that which is experienced by same-sex couples and single adults. See Kimberly Mutcherson, "Reproductive Rights without Resources or Recourse," *Hastings Center Report* 47, no.6 (2017): S13.
[3] Marcia Inhorn, *Local Babies, Global Science: Gender, Religion, and In Vitro Fertilization in Egypt* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 102.

or fertility-enhancing methods, and social pressures that privilege biogenetic relatedness in striving for procreative success. Undergirding the whole discussion is a certain level of gender analysis, examining the ways in which the procreative work is consigned to women, as well as how the fertility of a marital dyad functions as a metric of the female partner's piety and identity as a woman, mother, or not-yet-mother.[4]

PARADIGMS OF WOMANHOOD AND MOTHERING

The Qur'an presents four major paradigms of womanhood in Islam: Mary, the wife of Pharaoh, Khadīja, and Fāṭima, all of whom the *ḥadīth* calls the "best among women."[5] While not all of these women bore children, and all mothered differently, their elevated status as women in Islam has inherently established ideals of motherhood and expectations of mothering—and, arguably, fertility—for women. Kathryn Kueny's text, *Conceiving Identities*, offers analyses of these archetypes using medieval exegesis and Qur'anic literature.

Mary, the mother of Jesus and understood by medieval scholars as "the quintessential mother," conceived her child through divine intervention, chosen by God "to receive God's word, spirit, and/or prophet Jesus outside the normal course of human sexual intercourse."[6] She had guarded herself and her body from the advances of men, but when God's messenger decreed that her conception was part of the divine will she surrendered and allowed

[4] This paper deals primarily with the ethical dialogue around the use of ARTs to address medical infertility in Muslim women, but it does not consider the stratified experience of infertility along socioeconomic class lines. Given how resource-exhaustive (and bodily taxing) IVF can be, and how available fertility clinics may or may not be in different regions of the world, it cannot at all be assumed that access to ARTs is anywhere close to equitable. This adds a different thread to the narrative as well: to what extent are Muslim women obligated to incur debt or buck cultural norms in order to utilize ARTs, even without guarantee of a successful conception?

[5] Kathryn Kueny, *Conceiving Identities: Maternity in Medieval Discourse and Practice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 81.

[6] Ibid, 84-85.

her body—her womb—to be used as the carrier of God's "sign unto the people and a Mercy from [God]."[7] In doing so, she undoubtedly opened herself to the stigma given to unwed mothers and unchaste women. When she gave birth to Jesus against "the trunk of a palm-tree," a voice called to her, comforting her in her anguish and calling her to shake the dates down from the tree and eat them.[8] In both the conception and birth of her son, Mary showed obedience to divine instruction and depended on divine provision. Further, though her narrative "casts into sharp relief the ordinary female body that, unchosen, must engage in carnal practices with men—rather than the divine breath—who now command a woman's reproductive fate."[9] With a reproductive experience entirely decentered from sex, Mary puts forth a maternal and female paradigm of purity and obedience.

While Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, was not a biological mother, she "resists her husband's tyranny, rejection of God, and physical abuse to rescue, nurture, and rear a future prophet."[10] When she found the baby Moses floating on the river, she called her husband to "slay him not" and brought the boy into her house, unaware of his destiny to be "an enemy and a (cause of their) grief."[11] Mention of Āsiya in the Qur'an is certainly brief, but her act of defiance against her husband and willingness to protect and shelter a strange baby—especially a future prophet of the faith—ensure that she is remembered well.

Khadīja, the prophet's first wife, mother to his genealogical line, and first convert to Islam, "forges the link between belief in God, service to his prophet, and a prolific womb, even in old age."[12] Whereas Pharaoh's wife

[7] Qur'an 19:21 (Translated S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali).
[8] Qur'an 19:23-25.
[9] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 86.
[10] Ibid, 82.
[11] Qur'an 28:8-9.
[12] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 82.

and Mary were divinely chosen and destined to rear prophets, Khadīja's "dedication to the prophet came out of her own understanding and recognition of who he was and what his message represented."[13] Barbara Stowasser writes, "While [Āsiya's] and Mary's merit is established on the basis of the Qur'an (66:11-12), Khadija's merit is seen in her support of the Prophet from the day they met to the day she died."[14] She was purportedly the only of the prophet's wives to bear him children, and for that she is certainly lauded, but what made her remarkable as a maternal paradigm was incredibly ordinary.

Fāṭima, the last of the four "best among women" and daughter of Muhammad and Khadīja's union, bore the Prophet's grandchildren and descendants and took over "as surrogate mother to Muhammad after Khadīja died."[15] Kueny writes that while Fātima is remembered in Sunni and Shiʿi sources "for her willingness to suffer grief and pain [over the death of her father], and to sacrifice her own body to bear and support the prophet's grandchildren," Shiʿi tradition emphasizes her role as the mother to the Imams and martyrs for the faith. Twelver Shiʿi sources "transform her body into a purified vessel, even more so than Mary's, that is protected from the vagaries of a flawed human nature."[16]

Notably outside of the four "best among women" is ʿĀ'isha, the prophet's most beloved wife after Khadīja and "mother of the believers." Kueny posits that this exclusion

> may have to do with her sterility, a bodily imperfection that in her case—contrary to the Qur'ān's depiction of the prophet's wives' barren righteousness—is equated with impiety, jealousy, and her own claims to authority, power, and wisdom within the tradition. These "facts" embroidered into her biological narrative, at least to

[13] Ibid, 99.
[14] Barbara F. Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 59.
[15] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 103.
[16] Ibid.

> the outset, do little to contribute to the maternal ideal envisioned by the elites.[17]

However, while ʿĀ'isha's childlessness and presumable infertility might land her outside the male-construed ideal of the maternal, it also fashions her into a more accessible model for Muslim women to emulate. That she remains lauded, at least among Sunni Muslims, despite being outside of the four "best among women" means that perhaps childlessness—both biogenetically and adoptively—has a legitimate precedent in Islamic history and tradition.

INFERTILITY: DISEASE OR DESIGN?

In addition to Mary, the narratives of Sarah and the wife of Zachariah offer some assistance in situating involuntary childlessness—and unlikely, miraculous conception—in the framework of Islamic thought and tradition. Ayesha Chaudry writes that Sarah, the elderly and barren wife of Abraham, encounters an angel similarly to Mary, and "the 'good' news of a son is offered…without her having asked for it."[18] She does not react with joy, but rather with worry over her capabilities and physical frailty, for which she is rebuked by the angel.[19] Zachariah's wife, who remains unnamed in the Qur'an, conceives a child as a result of her husband's supplication.[20] Chaudry notes that in another narration in *sūra* 21, God replies by saying, "So We responded to his prayer and We granted him Yahya: We cured/corrected his wife for him."[21] This language of curing or correcting her childlessness suggests that her infertility was, in fact, a kind of disease or disability—something to be fixed, if able, and deviant from the normative,

[17] Ibid, 83.
[18] Ayesha S. Chaudry, "Unlikely Motherhood in the Qur'ān: Oncofertility as Devotion" in *Oncofertility*, ed. T. Woodruff et al. (Boston: Springer, 2010), 291.
[19] Qur'an 11:69-74.
[20] Qur'an 19:3-7.
[21] Chaudry, "Unlikely Motherhood," 291-292.

patriarchally-read, expectations of the female body. However, that these stories frame "having children, despite natural biological impediments such as old age and barrenness," as miraculous and inherently good presents a useful framework for understanding the contemporary use of ARTs.[22] That being said, looking to members of the prophet's family as examples of righteous living, we find women who did not become mothers, biogenetically or otherwise, so there also exists a model for women who cannot conceive children to find themselves, in their infertile state, represented in that family.

Rumee Ahmed approaches the issue from a legal and ethical perspective, primarily using the principles of necessity (*darūrah*) and "no harm, no harassment" (*lā dirar wa lā dirār*) in relation to medical technology and intervention.[23] He writes, "if a medical procedure was deemed necessary for the patient's well-being—regularly defined in terms of functionality and quality of life—and did not cause harm to the patient or others, then the procedure was deemed legally licit."[24] He is writing specifically in reference to oncofertility—the practice of employing ARTs to secure the reproductive futures of cancer survivors that would otherwise be endangered by chemotherapy or radiation therapy—and reasons that the practice would likely be deemed valid under Islamic law given that it "is necessary to maintain the reproductive functionality of a cancer patient." [25] This reasoning frames infertility as, primarily, the result of treating a serious disease, but also as a disability in and of itself, as it threatens a bodily function that is deemed normal. Therefore, if infertility—in whatever way it is experienced—can be sufficiently defined as a disability, it opens up the possibility for rulings on the permissibility of ARTs.

[22] Ibid, 292.
[23] Rumee Ahmed. "Sacred Bodies: Considering Resistance to Oncofertility in Muslim Communities," in *Oncofertility*, edited by T. Woodruff, L. Zoloth, L. Campo-Engelstein, S. Rodriguez (Boston: Springer, 2010), 280.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

However, regardless of whether or not oncofertility practices—and, by extension, other ARTs—are legally and ethically sound, "Muslim women might feel that by choosing to engage in fertility-enhancing technology, they are demonstrating a lack of trust in God and that they are not 'submitting' to His will in the matter of their infertility."[26] To borrow Daniel Sulmasy's terms, the two options these women experiencing (or anticipating) infertility have—to use ARTs or not—speak to two different stories about the source and purpose of infertility. Her decision hangs on the *mythos*, the "underlying myth," she ascribes to her condition.[27] If she understands her infertility as the result of God removing the possibility for children through disease or dysfunction, then she might view the utilization of ARTs to overcome that childlessness as a kind of "playing God."[28] But if she believes biogenetic motherhood to be critical to her identity as a woman or mother, and her infertility to be mere pathology that is not directly caused by God's design, then she might view ARTs as extensions of the same divine hand that facilitated the unlikely conceptions experienced by Mary, Sarah, and the wife of Zachariah.

SUNNI AND SHIʿI LEGAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS

On March 23, 1980, Al-Azhar issued the first *fatwa* on assisted reproduction, "only 2 years after the birth of the first IVF baby [Louise Brown] in England, but a full 6 years before the opening of Egypt's first IVF center."[29] In the more than thirty-five intervening years, the *fatwa* has been reissued and adapted several times. At present, the Sunni *fatwas*, including the original 1980 Al-Azhar *fatwa*, have been "very permissive in granting

[26] Chaudry, "Unlikely Motherhood," 290.
[27] Daniel P. Sulmasy, "Every *Ethos* Implies a *Mythos*" in *Notes from a Narrow Ridge: Religion and Bioethics*, eds. Dena S. Davis and Laurie Zoloth (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 231.
[28] Chaudry, "Unlikely Motherhood," 290.
[29] Marcia C. Inhorn and Soraya Tremayne, "Islam, Assisted Reproduction, and the Bioethical Aftermath," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 424.

the use of ARTs to Muslim IVF physicians and their patients," allowing most forms of ARTs to be used insofar as the gametes involved in the creation of the embryo come from the married couple and not from third-party donors. Interestingly, Sunni *fatwas* have even allowed uterine transplants, "in which a healthy uterus is transplanted from a willing [and live] donor to another woman who is lacking a competent uterus" in order to give women with absolute uterine-factor infertility the chance to conceive. The practice is wildly controversial, as some argue that the transplant process actually involves three medically unnecessary surgeries and a regiment of immunosuppressant drugs throughout gestation.[30] Others might claim that this extraordinarily risky and resource-exhaustive procedure merely illustrates the extent to which we cling to the idea of the biogenetically normative family. Inhorn and Tremayne write,

> Islam is a religion that can be said to privilege—even mandate—heterosexual marital relations. As is made clear in the original Al-Azhar fatwa, reproduction outside of marriage is considered *zina*, or adultery, which is strictly forbidden in Islam. Although third-party donation does not involve the sexual body contact ("touch or gaze") of adulterous relations, nor presumably the desire to engage in an extramarital affair, it is nonetheless considered by most Islamic religious scholars to be a form of adultery, by virtue of introducing a third party into the sacred dyad of husband and wife. It is the very fact that another man's sperm or another woman's eggs enter a place where they do not belong that makes donation of any kind inherently wrong and threatening to the marital bond.[31]

Here, the desire to stay within the bounds of *halal* marriage imposes a boundary on the possibilities couples, particularly women, have to overcome involuntary childlessness. In such cases, the couple must decide whether or not to privilege their dedication to a religiously-sound marriage over their desire to bear children, which might also have religious motivations. To overcome this tension, "husbands sympathetic to their

[30] A. Taneja et al, "Uterine Transplant: A Risk to Life or a Chance for Life?" *Science and Engineering Ethics* 25, no.2 (2019): 635-642.
[31] Tremayne, "Islam, Assisted Reproduction," 426.

wive's [*sic*] infertility problems" will "sometimes [engage] in *mut'a*, or temporary marriages, in order to undertake egg donation within the remit of a temporary polygynous marriage."[32] Further, the permissibility of uterine transplants, which allow a woman to gestate a pregnancy through a donor uterus with, potentially, a fetus that is genetically related to her, combined with the general impermissibility of third-party gamete donation (setting aside the temporary marriage concept) reiterates not just the importance of fertility but the necessity to be biogenetically related to those children. Whether this is more the result of Islamic thought and law or Islam read through a patriarchal framework is difficult to decipher, but these pressures remain relevant to the conversation.

Shiʿi clerics have largely agreed with the Sunni view with regards to restricting third-party gamete donation; however, in the 1990s this began to shift to allow for donor gametes to be used, particularly donor eggs. In 1999, Ayatollah Khamane'i, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued a *fatwa* "effectively permitting both egg and sperm donation to be used."[33] Employing *ijtihad*, the clerics decided that the inclusion of donor gametes does not count as adultery, and therefore does not negate or destabilize the marriage dyad.[34] Rather, the non-biological parents of the resulting child—as in, the parent or parents who did not contribute genetic material to the embryo but intend to rear the child—are treated as adoptive parents.[35] Issues of inheritance are managed in such a way that the child has the right to inherit from the biological parents, thereby avoiding, or at least deflecting, the issue of patrilineal belonging.

---

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Soraya Tremayne, "The 'Down Side' of Gamete Donation: Challenging 'Happy Family' Rhetoric in Iran" in *Islam and Assisted Reproductive Technologies: Sunni and Shia Perspectives*, ed. Marcia Inhorn and Soraya Tremayne (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 131. Cf. Zohreh Behjati-Ardakani et al, "Embryo Donation in Iranian Legal System: A Critical Review," *Journal of Reproduction & Infertility* 16, no.3 (2015): 130-137.
[35] Tremayne, "Islam, Assisted Reproduction," 427.

According to the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Khamane'i, the donor gamete technologies are seen "as a 'marriage savior,' preventing the 'marital and psychological disputes' that would otherwise arise from remaining childless indefinitely." [36] Tremayne challenges this notion, stating that the legitimization of donor gametes in ARTs by Shiʿi—particularly Iranian—clerics "did not address the long-term impact of the donor child on the dynamics of family relations, between the child and the parents, between the spouses and genders, and on the larger social group."[37] In other words, to legitimize third-party gametes for the purpose of cementing familial ties or strengthening feelings of belonging ignores the psychosocial implications on the resulting child, who effectively becomes a pawn in family politics.

Another way to read the implications of the Shiʿi openness to donor gametes is in the context of post-war Iran. Given the casualties of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, especially among Iranian forces, it would logically follow that the need for population replenishment would potentially lead to greater comfort with third-party donations.

MUDDYING THE WATERS: ARTS AND LIVED ISLAM

Regardless of the legal permissibility or impermissibility of the use of ARTs in Muslim married couples, that so much anxiety still exists around these technologies and ways of "making test-tube babies" reveals that there is more to be unpacked and understood in this conversation.[38]

While legal opinions have been more or less positive about the use of ARTs, jurists who sanction their use generally rely on the principle of bodily inviolability (*ḥurmah*), and that "unless there is a dire need that cannot be

---

[36] Ibid.
[37] Tremayne, "'Down Side' of Gamete Donation," 133.
[38] Marcia Inhorn, "Making Muslim babies: IVF and gamete donation in Sunni versus Shi'a Islam," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 30 (2006): 431.

met through any other method, medical procedures should not alter the body in any way."[39] This stems not only from the notion that humans are loaned their bodies, and that they are mere custodians over them, but also the Qur'anic narrative that "To allow for a physical trial, God will restore the dead their bodies and they will literally stand in judgment concerning how their bodies were utilized."[40] At that trial, "the limbs and organs will speak to the extent to which their host, to whom they were given as a trust, used them in fidelity with and in defiance of God's guidance and the internal moral compass." To irreparably alter the body or its organs would be understood to be "violating the order of the universe and being unsure of the testimony of their organs on the Day of Judgment."[41] Therefore, if medical interventions interrupt that bodily integrity and damage the organs—as would be the case with practices associated with oncofertility, and gamete donation more generally, which typically involve the removal of ovarian or testicular tissue in order to harvest gametes for future use—then there would be understandable anxiety associated. Those who deeply value bodily inviolability and cling to the necessity for one's organs to advocate on one's behalf during the final days would likely be more hesitant to undergo ARTs that threaten that value, regardless of whether Islamic legal sources permit the practice.

In addition to concerns over bodily integrity, the issue of marriage prospects for unmarried women and marriage security for couples without children puts pressure on the use of ARTs. Ayesha Chaudry writes, "Islamic law considers offspring of men and women a basic marital right. For this reason, husbands and wives are permitted to divorce each other for infertility and impotence, respectively."[42] Therefore, if a woman suffers from ovarian cancer before she is married and does not take preventative measures to

[39] Ahmed, "Sacred Bodies," 280.
[40] Ibid, 282.
[41] Ibid, 283-284.
[42] Chaudry, "Unlikely Motherhood," 290.

secure her reproductive future before treating her disease, then she might have a more difficult time securing a legitimate marriage partner down the line. If a couple cannot conceive on their own, then the husband—given that the social pressure and blame associated with infertility often lands on the side of the woman—has the grounds to dissolve the marriage. Kecia Ali writes that a woman has the ability to pursue divorce if her husband is impotent and cannot consummate the marriage, but there does not appear to be a way for women to divorce on the grounds male-factor infertility, outside of general impotence.[43] In such cases that threaten a woman's marital future or destabilize her present marriage, a woman might be more likely to seriously consider employing ARTs to overcome infertility, perhaps even traveling to destinations that are less controlled by Islamic legal courts.

Marcia Inhorn's ethnography of IVF use in Egypt, *Local Babies, Global Science*, provides some evidence for how these theological and interpersonal tensions are hashed out. She describes that the women and men experiencing infertility whom she studied had resigned themselves to their childlessness, willing to accept that if God wanted them to have a child that their attempts at "making a test-tube baby" would be successful. One infertile woman remarked,

> If we don't have a baby, we are not going to take it against God's will [e.g., through adoption or third-party donation]. We may try to make a test-tube baby, and still we don't have a baby, because this is God's will. But we have changed our opinion a little: It's God's will, but we have to do our best. That is what made us try [IVF] this time. There's a proverb: "Allah told us to try, and we will do our best."[44]

This would suggest that the pursuit of conception and struggle against one's infertility would be an act of piety, one that proves one's willingness to struggle in the pursuit of something that pleases God.

---

[43] Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2016), 13.
[44] Inhorn, *Local Babies, Global Science*, 102.

In all of these scenarios, the decisions an individual might make about ARTs, and the relationship between that choice and their religious belief, hinges on the narrative told about the nature of her condition and of God's hand in that struggle. To this point, Ahmed writes, "Being comfortable with a medical procedure, it would seem, has less to do with having a juridical ruling authorizing the procedure and more to do with having a comfortable narrative within which to couch the procedure."[45] Not only do these narratives come from self-told stories and theodicies that address the presence of suffering, longing, or discontent, but the paradigms provided in the lives of Qur'anic women also give women models to follow in depending on God to sustain and provide.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, Rumee. "Sacred Bodies: Considering Resistance to Oncofertility in Muslim Communities." In Oncofertility, edited by T. Woodruff, L. Zoloth, L. Campo-Engelstein, and S. Rodriguez, 278-286. Boston: Springer, 2010.

Ali, Kecia. *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2016.

Behjati-Ardakani, Zohreh, Mohammad Taghi Karoubi, Alireza Milanifar, Roudabeh Masrouri, and Mohammad Mehdi Akhondi1. "Embryo Donation in Iranian Legal System: A Critical Review." In *Journal of Reproduction & Infertility* 16, no. 3 (2015): 130-137.

Chaudry, Ayesha S. "Unlikely Motherhood in the Qur'ān: Oncofertility as Devotion." In *Oncofertility*, edited by T. Woodruff, L. Zoloth, L. Campo-Engelstein, S. Rodriguez, 287-294. Boston: Springer, 2010.

Inhorn, Marcia C. and Soraya Tremayne. "Islam, Assisted Reproduction, and the Bioethical Aftermath." *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 422-430.

Inhorn, Marcia C. *Local Babies, Global Science: Gender, Religion, and In Vitro Fertilization in Egypt*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

[45] Ahmed, "Sacred Bodies," 184.

Inhorn, Marcia. “Making Muslim babies: IVF and gamete donation in Sunni versus Shi’a Islam.” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 30 (2006): 427-450.

Kueny, Kathryn. *Conceiving Identities: Maternity in Medieval Muslim Discourse and Practice*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013.

Mutcherson, Kimberly. “Reproductive Rights without Resources or Recourse.” In *Hastings Center Report* 47, no. 6 (2017): S12-S18.

Stowasser, Barbara F. *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York, Oxford: University Press, 1994.

Sulmasy, Daniel P. “Every *Ethos* Implies a *Mythos*.” In *Notes from a Narrow Ridge: Religion and Bioethics*, edited by Dena S. Davis and Laurie Zoloth, 227-246. Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999.

Taneja, A., S. Das, S.A. Hussain, M. Madadin, S.W. Lobo, H. Fatima, and R.G. Medezes. “Uterine Transplant: A Risk to Life or a Chance for Life?” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 25, no. 2 (2019): 635-642.

Tremayne, Soraya. “The ‘Down Side’ of Gamete Donation: Challenging ‘Happy Family Rhetoric in Iran.” In *Islam and Assisted Reproductive Technologies: Sunni and Shia Perspectives*, edited by Marcia Inhorn and Soraya Tremayne, 130-156. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.

UCLA Journal of Religion

Volume 3
2019

Catholic Bloggers: The Role of Blogs in Constructing Catholic Feminism, Identity and Community Among Women

By Kristen Akey[1]
Barnard College, Columbia University

In an age where nearly every American is online, the internet provides individuals with an autonomy unlike that offline. The ability for individuals to express their own opinions on social media and create blogs based on their own ideas and interests with the internet counters that of the hierarchical authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This sense of autonomy the internet gives individuals applies particularly to Catholic women, who are often perceived as under the institutional patriarchy of the Church. In this paper, I explore how Catholic women today understand Catholic feminism, reconceive their identities as Catholic women, and engage in an online community through blogging.

First, I present an overview of digital religion and address why blogs,[2] specifically the three I will be analyzing—The Catholic Woman, FemCatholic, and Blessed Is She—act as an important medium for Catholic women today. Next, I contextualize Catholic feminism by providing a brief synopsis of the movement's history. I then examine specific posts from each of the three blogs in order to understand how Catholic women make sense of feminism and their role in the Church. Despite the distinct differences among the three blogs, I also analyze how all three of these websites facilitate an online community for these women. The internet plays a large part in most people's lives today, and thus, it is both interesting and

[1] Kristen Akey, Barnard College class of 2020, is a double major in Religion and Political Science. She is interested in studying the intersections of religion and media, popular culture, and politics.
[2] I use Angela Meyer's definition of a blog, which is a channel to share personal stories, news, links, pictures and can take form in a multitude of genres, such a personal journal. See Angela Meyer, "Embracing the Medium: What Makes a Successful Cultural Blog?" *Literary Minded*, June 12, 2009, https://blogs.crikey.com.au/literaryminded/.

necessary to understand the role of internet blogs in constructing Catholic women's own narratives and ideas of Catholic womanhood and feminism.

The presence of Catholic women online and their engagement with blogs—or websites—is not separate from that of their offline religious experiences.[3] Rather, these online spaces for religious groups are part of what Heidi Campbell calls "digital religion." Digital religion is the integration of online and offline religious spheres in technological and cultural spaces; it can be thought of as "a bride that connects and extends online religious practices and spaces into offline religious contexts, and vice versa."[4] When Catholic women—or any religious group more broadly—use the internet, their online experience is informed by their offline practices. But by engaging online, these online experiences inversely reshape their offline perspectives and experiences. An individual's online experience is therefore not independent from their offline practices, but an extension of them. Digital religion is not an isolated entity or concept, instead, it is deeply connected to one's everyday lived experiences and practices.

The internet in itself is distinct in the experiences it provides individuals online compared to those of individuals' offline practices. Online, authority shifts from being solely in the hands of traditional authority structures—such as the structural hierarchy of the Catholic Church—to that of individual laypeople.[5] Anyone, regardless of their position within the Catholic Church, has the ability to create a social media account or website, post articles, add comments and share their life in pictures. Individuals have the power to choose how they spend their time online, and how, where, and with whom

---

[3] I use blog and website interchangeably due to the general consensus that blogs are a type of website. Cf. Mary Garden, "Defining Blog: A Fool's Errand or a Necessary Undertaking," *Journalism* 13, no.4 (September 2011): 487.
[4] Heidi A. Campbell, "Introduction. The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion" in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3-4.
[5] Heidi A. Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 80, no.1 (March 2012): 74.

they engage. The Catholic Church, which I will call the Church or institutional church,[6] maintains a strict hierarchical authority offline; online however, this structural authority somewhat dissipates due to the individual authority the internet provides people.

Knowledge online becomes decentralized: the institutional church is no longer the only authoritative source of knowledge. Forum moderators, webmasters, and bloggers acclaim power online through recognition and popularity of their websites or posts and consequently by being framed as sources of religious knowledge.[7] Laypeople have the ability to vocalize their thoughts on the Church's teachings and theology—whether that be supporting or disagreeing with these teachings—and potentially gain the approval and respect of others online. The internet becomes a prime place for individuals—such as Catholic women—without strong voices in the hierarchical structure to gain an authority they do not have offline. The Catholic Church has been and continues to be patriarchal, and "the people and practices that embody the essence of Catholicism"—or what Henold calls "the church"—do not acknowledge its perpetuation of sexism against women.[8] As individuals, Catholic women are thus able to gain authority through the internet to affirm Catholic teachings, explore other interpretations and find or create spaces specifically for Catholic women.

Catholic blogs—such as FemCatholic, The Catholic Woman, and Blessed Is She—are designed specifically for Catholic women, and place greater authority directly in the hands of these women. FemCatholic describes itself as both a place "Where Feminism + Catholicism meet" and "a campaign for

[6] I use Mary Henold's definition of institutional church which is "the global or national structure of the Roman Catholic Church, including the governing hierarchy." See: Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 7.
[7] Campbell, "Religion Online and Offline," 74.
[8] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 2-7.

the promotion of women."[9] The website's homepage features the most recent published blog post, and as the website visitors scroll down, they see the entries immediately preceding it. Each entry includes the tags—or categories for which the post belongs in such as motherhood, vocation, feminism, lessons in faith, among forty others—the title of the post, and a professional stock picture, usually of women. Published posts often include in-text links to previous blog posts that relate to or may answer a specific line in the entry. At the end of the full-length article, readers learn about the author in a short, italicized paragraph. They also receive the titles and links to other similar posts and the ability to reply to the blog post with a comment. All the posts published on the website are entries that are submitted by Catholic women from all over the county. Catholic women can submit posts that are either Catholic feminist commentary on women's issues, reflections on Catholic teachings, or a "Dear Edith" question and answer style columns with the intention to "Educate, Encourage, or Empower" other women.[10]

Similar but distinct from FemCatholic is The Catholic Woman, a platform where Catholic women over nineteen years old can submit short, hand-written letters—no more than fifteen-hundred words—on a "transformative moment" in their lives.[11] The letters accepted for the website are typed out into Roman text, titled and posted as individual entries. So, while FemCatholic is strictly online in that women digitally type and submit their post to the blog moderators, The Catholic Woman requires submissions to be in the form of a physical, hand-written letter. The original letters themselves are then photographed as images and uploaded to go along with the post published to the website. As one reads an entry, quotes selected as

[9] "Our Mission," Mission Statement, FemCatholic, http://www.femcatholic.com/about/our-mission/.
[10] "Submissions," Blog Submissions, FemCatholic, http://www.femcatholic.com/about/submissions/.
[11] "Letter to Women," Letter Submissions, The Catholic Woman, https://thecatholicwoman.co/write-a-letter-to-women/.

being memorable are enlarged again for emphasis and also act as paragraph breaks.

The author of the letter, her picture, and a biographical paragraph about her is included at the bottom of the letter. The biographical paragraph provides readers with background information on the author such as her age, where she is from, if she is a mother, her profession, and what her passions and hobbies are. The information on the author is much more detailed and informative on The Catholic Woman compared to the few sentences provided in FemCatholic posts. The emphasis on spotlighting the author of The Catholic Woman letter acts to remind readers that these are everyday Catholic women. Their experiences and moments of struggle are ones that the blog readers can learn from and relate to precisely because these are ordinary women. As readers scroll down further, they are introduced to four new letters that are recommended based off of the one they are currently reading. After being presented with the ability to sign-up for The Catholic Woman newsletter—which notifies recipients about new letters—there is a comment box where guests or those with an account can add replies to the letter.

FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman, as blogs, give Catholic women an authority they do not normally have to craft and express their own narratives through blogging. Elizabeth Bucar examines the role of print media in the lives of U.S Catholic women. She states “the women’s press creates new public spaces for women’s political engagement through the writings. It also thereby shifts the production of ethical knowledge from exclusively religious institutions to a wider lay community.”[12] The internet and these two blog websites, similar to the effect of press, allow women to engage in a space separate from the institutional church. These blog posts

[12] Elizabeth M. Bucar, *Creative Conformity: The Feminist Politics of U.S. Catholic and Iranian Shi’i Women* (New York: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 153.

from women and their engagement with these websites transfer an offline authority that is typically only in the hands of the hierarchical authority of the Catholic Church into the hands of Catholic women. FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman allow for women to produce what Bucar calls “ethical knowledge,” or a legitimate source of religious knowledge, by using these blog sites as their medium of sharing. The digital space of the internet therefore allows Catholic women's voices to hold greater weight than they would under the hierarchical authority of the Catholic Church offline.

Blessed Is She is “a Catholic women’s community committed to deepening a life of prayer starting with daily Scripture devotionals and supportive sisterhood.”[13] The website includes a newsletter that will send subscribers daily prayer and scripture readings, links to regional Blessed Is She Facebook groups, a shop with liturgical planners and study series, and a blog. The blog webpage presents three postcard-like boxes, similar to that of a pinned Pinterest object, with the title of the post. These rectangular blocks act as links to the full blog post, which itself often includes links to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ bible chapters and quotes. Similar to FemCatholic, a short-italicized blurb on the author’s age, residence, and hobbies and interests is included below the post.

Unlike the other two blogs that allow women to submit their own entries, Blessed Is She has a team of approximately thirty-five writers who create and publish blog posts for the website. Blessed Is She emphasizes that the blog creators “are women, just like you. We are single, married, mamas, and grandmamas too.”[14] This indicates to the blog’s readership that the everyday experiences and voices of women are still being reflected in the posts and content of the website, despite the inability of readers to submit their own

[13] “About,” Mission Statement, Blessed Is She, https://blessedisshe.net/about/.
[14] Ibid.

personal entries. Visitors of the blog are able to add comments to a blog post that, once approved by the site's moderators, are posted for everyone to see.

This distinction between who is able to submit an entry—anyone or only a select group—is a critical difference between these blogs. It highlights that while individuals are given an authority online that they do not have offline, there remains an unsettled line between individual authority and structured authority online. All three of the websites' moderators—but in particular, the team of Blessed Is She blog writers—function as an authority structure online. They have more control than the average individual in deciding what is posted and when, the topic, and the particular narratives presented. It is thus the moderators of the websites, and specifically the writers and team of Blessed Is She, who have control over their blog's agenda.[15] So while Catholic women do gain an authority to write and create their own narratives—particularly on websites that allow them to submit posts like FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman—there remains a structural authority above them that controls what is actually published to these websites.

With that, there remains important similarities between all three blogs. All of these blogs were created between 2014 and 2017, have the overarching theme of dignifying and promoting the identities and roles of Catholic women in the Church, and also hold a relatively strong and active following. FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman have approximately five thousand and seven thousand followers on Facebook respectively; Blessed Is She, the oldest of the three websites, has approximately fifty-five thousand followers.[16]

[15] Heidi A. Campbell, "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies" *The Information Society* 21, no. 4 (2005): 312.
[16] As of June 2019.

While FemCatholic is the only explicitly Catholic and feminist blog, all three of the blogs address either feminism or women's roles in the Church. The newness of these blogs may suggest Catholic feminism is only just becoming popular now, however, this is not the case. Similar to the larger feminist movement,[17] Catholic feminism goes back many decades in American history. The presidency of John Kennedy finalized Catholics mainstream presence in American cultural and political life. This period allowed for one to both critique one's country and Church but still be a 'good American' and 'good Catholic.'[18] From this, it became possible for Catholics to identify as both Catholic and feminist.

It was not until the first half of the seventies, however, that the majority of Catholic feminist organizations—those who identify with an integrated commitment to the struggle for women's liberation and to their Catholic faith—formed. Their formation occurred in conjunction with the larger second-wave feminist movement.[19] Catholic feminists remained relatively isolated from the larger feminist movement due to liberal and radical feminists opposition to institutional religion and its teachings—particularly the Catholic Church's position on abortion and contraception—during this time.[20] In contrast to liberal or radical feminists, Catholic feminists' identities as feminists were intrinsic to their identities and beliefs as Catholics. Henold notes for "these activists, feminism itself was founded in their faith, not just applied to it…many feminists asserted a causal relationship between their faith and feminism."[21] These women were feminists because they were Catholic, and their feminism was grounded in the Catholic teachings of the Church. These Catholic feminists used their

---

[17] I use Henold's terminology of "larger feminist movement" to mean America's national feminist movement. See Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 7.
[18] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "American Catholic Feminism: A History" in *Reconciling Catholicism Feminism? Personal Reflections on Tradition and Change*, eds. Salle Barr Ebest and Ron Ebest (Notre Dame: University Press, 2003), 8.
[19] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,* 1-14.
[20] Ibid, 17.
[21] Ibid, 6.

commitment to gospel to mandate liberation, social justice, and radical equality, and would point to scripture, rituals, the sacraments, and social teaching as means to explain their feminism because it was a Christian principle to them.[22] Catholicism and feminism were thus seen as entirely compatible from the beginning of the feminist movement, and for Catholic feminists, it was something motivated by and inherent to their faith. Like the larger feminist movement, the Catholic feminist movement carries on today. These three blogs provide an important avenue into seeing how Catholic women and self-identifying Catholic feminists understand Catholic feminism and their role in the Church today.

I begin my analysis of the content of these blogs by examining a post on FemCatholic titled "Catholics: Don't Be Afraid of the Word 'Feminist.'" Founder of FemCatholic, Samantha Povlock, explains to women why it is okay, and necessary, for Catholics to be both Catholics and feminists. She starts her post by stating:

> Don't worry: nothing that follows will be anti-Catholic, un-orthodox, or contrary to Church teaching. In fact, I'm going to use only support from Pope's, Saints, or official Church documents to make my point. Promise.[23]

Povlock feels she must convince Catholics that being a Catholic and a feminist is okay, prefacing with "Don't worry." Before diving into what she means exactly by Catholic feminist, Povlock begins with a disclaimer that what she is going to say will not go against anything the Church teaches; her post will only be supported by official Church proclamations and documents. Povlock does not want anyone to question the sources she uses as her base for Catholic feminism. This is not only for this blog post but for the entire ideology behind the FemCatholic website. She then elaborates on

[22] Ibid.
[23] Samantha Povlock, "Catholics: Don't Be Afraid of the Word 'Feminist,'" *FemCatholic*, November 20, 2017, http://www.femcatholic.com/.

why she feels the need to begin her post on Catholic feminism in this manner. She says:

> I understand why "Feminist" is a frightening word to most Catholics. Because most of the time when we hear that particular "F-word" it's describing women who are advocating for things like abortion or contraception – which yes, the Church opposes… Catholics have our own version of feminism – yes, feminism – that we are called to promote. The Pope said so…Don't let modern secular feminists, or ill-advising Catholics prevent you from advocating for Catholic Feminism. The Pope is calling us to action – it's time to answer the call!

Povlock notes Catholics general aversion to feminism is due to the larger feminist movement's rejection of Catholic theology surrounding abortion and birth control. This difference in position on abortion causes Povlock to distinguish between Catholic feminists and what she calls "modern secular feminists." This distinction between feminists, however, is not something original to Povlock's description of Catholic feminism. This reflects the greater separation between Catholic feminists and the larger feminist movement that has been in place since the 1960's.[24] Tracing Catholic feminism back to its origins, it is not entirely surprising for Povlock to draw a clear line in this introductory post between the two categories of feminists she describes.

Further, she does not only advise against "modern secular feminists" but also "ill-advising Catholics" when it comes to understanding Catholic feminism. By ill-advising, Povlock suggests Catholics who identify as Catholics but do not follow Church teachings. In other words, individuals who identify as Catholic but also support abortion are not part of her definition of Catholic feminism. In order for feminism to be Catholic feminism according to Povlock, it must ultimately be rooted in Catholic teaching. Therefore, Catholic identification is not enough, but rather, feminism is part of the institutional teachings of the Church.

---

[24] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist,*14.

This explains Povlock's emphasis on grounding feminism in the word of the Pope. She highlights Catholic feminism as something that should be advocated for precisely because of the institutional authority supporting it. If the Pope is encouraging of Catholic feminism, then Catholics too should be a part of this movement. Povlock's attention to Church authority and teaching similarly relates back to the origins of Catholic feminism; like earlier activists, Povlock regards feminism as an extension of Catholic teachings and beliefs. In all, church teachings and the proclamations of Church authority are essential parts of the Catholic feminism described by Povlock.

Emily Archer takes a similar perspective on Catholic feminism in her post "Catholic Feminism: Both / And" on FemCatholic. She states:

> Catholicism is often described as "both/and." For instance, Jesus is both human and divine. Mary is both virgin and mother.... Feminism is a matter of love and truth. It's a matter of social justice...Properly integrated with my faith, however, feminism is a particular perspective on injustice that isn't just about me – it's about other women, it's about men, and it's about following God's will and loving my neighbor.[25]

Feminism is intrinsic to Archer being Catholic. She offers the examples of Mary as both mother and virgin and Jesus as both human and divine to showcase that concepts that seem to contradict each other can simultaneously be true. This applies also to Catholic feminism: two concepts that do not seem compatible, but Archer argues ultimately are. Catholic teaching calls for people to help and care for others,[26] and Archer explains feminism as being part of her Catholic beliefs in social justice and addressing the injustices others face. In all, Archer understands feminism

[25] Emily Archer, "Catholic Feminism: Both / And," *FemCatholic,* September 24, 2018, https://www.femcatholic.com/.
[26] "Social Justice" in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c2a3.htm.

as being inherent to Catholicism, despite the initial incompatibility the two may present.

It is important to recognize this consistency in the ways Povlock, Archer, and early Catholic activists understand their identities as feminist. Povlock and Archer still advocate for a traditional definition and lifestyle of Catholic feminism despite the platform and authority they gain from the internet. The medium of the blog does not change how these particular women understand Catholic feminism. Rather, for Povlock, Archer, and others on FemCatholic, this blog acts as a tool to allow for a greater dispersion of this understanding of Catholic feminism. Further, FemCatholic provides women with an accompanying sense of agency in accepting this ideology of Catholic feminism. The women who engage with FemCatholic are choosing by their own desire to visit the website. The internet and the autonomy it gives these women allows readers the choice to legitimize Povlock and Archer's definition of Catholic feminism. In other words, the internet allows the women engaging with FemCatholic to choose in an agentic fashion to validate Catholic feminism as being rooted in Catholic teachings. The institutional authority of the Church does not have control over the messaging of Catholic feminism these women produce in these internet spaces, instead, it is Catholic women who choose to promote and legitimize this traditional conception of Catholic feminism.

Writer of Blessed Is She, Kendra Tierney, approaches feminism in a somewhat different way than Povlock and Archer in her post titled, "Don't Label Me, Bro." She begins with two passages from the Gospel of Mark, which she uses to tie into her larger argument on what labels, or defining someone by a particular title, does to one's relationship with others and with God. She states:

> It was true then, and it is true now: labels get in the way of relationships. And that is what Jesus wants from us: a relationship with Him, and a relationship with each other. Conservative, progressive, racist, feminist, anarchist . . . whatever. All of these

> labels can serve to remove a person's humanity and replace it with a set of assumptions.[27]

For Tierney, labels act as barriers to relationships. She pushes back against the need to be titled in a particular way because these labels are a hindrance; identifying as a feminist comes with a set of assumptions that do not allow individuals to connect with everyone to their fullest abilities. These labels, whether given or self-identified, come with baggage. If one says they are a feminist, people have a preconceived notion of what a feminist is. Tierney is not necessarily advocating against the ideals backing any of the titles she names, but she does not think the labels themselves are useful in facilitating relationships. Feminism, or identifying as a Catholic feminist, in this sense is an impediment to living out a Catholic lifestyle of focusing on cultivating relationships with others. It does not matter what title an individual has or has been given, but by being a person, one deserves a relationship and connection with others. Tierney does not want individuals to base their treatment of others on their labels. Rather, individuals, just by being human, should be respected regardless of the labels they hold.

The Blessed Is She blog does not directly address Catholic feminism in the way Povlock and Archer of FemCatholic do, but Tierney's discussion showcases the other ways in which feminism is considered by Catholic women. Neither Tierney nor the Blessed Is She blog explicitly support Catholic feminism. Instead, the label of being any kind of feminist—whether that be a Catholic, liberal, or radical feminist—is not of real importance. For Tierney and Blessed Is She, the feminist movement creates titles that get in the way of "what Jesus wants from us: a relationship with Him, and a relationship with each other."

---

[27] Kendra Tierney, "Don't Label Me, Bro," *Blessed Is She*, January 19, 2017, https://blessedisshe.net/devotion/.

In contrast to both Blessed Is She and FemCatholic, the letters posted on The Catholic Woman blog do not explicitly address feminism at all. However, the site includes a category specifically on the identities of women in the Church. The post "The Strength That Comes from Knowing the Truth About Who We Are - Letter from Katie Hollcraft" explores this question of what it means to be a woman in the Catholic Church. Hollcraft explains to the blog's readers—whom she addresses as "sisters"—how being told "you are dangerous" during prayer has impacted her outlook of women's roles in the Catholic Church. She says:

> We, as women, are dangerous to the kingdom of this world, the strongholds and principalities of the enemy. Who we are in the Lord is dangerous because when we know the Truth of our identity, God can do marvelous things to advance His Kingdom through us…Your identity is dangerous…Your femininity is dangerous… Being a woman is powerful. In the face of our strength and dignity as Daughters of God, the enemy can only shrink and flee.[28]

She emphasizes to the Catholic women reading her letter that their role in the Church and advancement of God's kingdom is one that is "dangerous"—or active and impactful. Her letter not only acts to inform women of the power in their identities as women in the Church, but it is also motivational. She tells women "Your identity is dangerous…Your femininity is dangerous." She wants these women to know being a Catholic woman is not something to be looked down upon or diminished. Rather, there is a dangerous power in being a woman. She is encouraging other women to own their "dangerous" identities because they are dynamic, influential, and play a critical role in the kingdom of God.

Hollcraft uses this letter to reconcile, change, and relate her idea of womanhood in the Church to that of other women. She understands her identity within the Church using Angela Coco's concept of "self-relating-to-

[28] Katie Hollcraft, "The Strength That Comes from Knowing the Truth About Who We Are - Letter from Katie Hollcraft," *The Catholic Woman,* November 9, 2018, https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/.

others;" this is the process of discovering one's needs, roles, and behaviors in relation to the Church by connecting with a "like-minded group," strengthening "an existing sense of autonomy…within the parameters available in their immediate community."[29] For Hollcraft, this like-minded group is other Catholic women. She is able to share and connect her own revelation in understanding her role within the institutional Church to that of other women through The Catholic Woman website. Hollcraft is not limited to relating to only the women in her immediate, local parish, instead, the internet and The Catholic Woman blog act as mechanisms that allow Hollcraft to reach more women all across the country and potentially the world.

By sharing her letter in the digital space of the internet, Hollcraft is empowered also with a greater sense of autonomy. Not only is Hollcraft able to articulate her story, relate and motivate others with her narrative, but due to the internet, she can become seen as a source of what Bucar describes as "ethical knowledge;" Hollcraft's narrative has the potential to be viewed by other women as a source of legitimate knowledge that should be respected. In all, Hollcraft's ability to connect with other women by using the platform of the blog amplifies her voice and empowers her with a greater authority than if she had not shared her narrative online.

While the posts from these three websites all take a slightly different approach in understanding feminism and womanhood in the Catholic Church, due to their medium as blogs, they all manage to facilitate a sense of community among Catholic women. This community is not solely a feeling accompanying the platform of a personal blog website, but rather, it is what Heidi Campbell calls an online community. She defines online communities as those that "involve people gathering around a specific topic

---

[29] Angela Coco, *Conflicts and Choices: An Exploration of Power Relations in the Catholic Church* (London: Routledge, 2014), 216.

or purpose, with some level of commitment to that topic or purpose and each other" on the internet and "is appealing because it creates behaviors that allow members to identify with others, both on an individual and a group level."[30] The internet provides spaces that allow people to center around a common interest as well as connect and identify with people from this commonality. In the case of these blogs, Catholic women are able to relate and create an online community centered around being Catholic women.

In the FemCatholoic post "Dear Edith: Do I Have A Place in the Catholic Church?" the author, Jena, exemplifies this sense of an online community that Campbell describes. She begins her post by stating:

> When I first came upon this website, I was happy to see that there was a forum of women who were dedicated to supporting, deepening, and inspiring the lives of other women called to a life filled with Spirit. A feminist Catholic Blog? Yes! *We need these spaces*.[31]

Jena highlights the need of having a space specifically for Catholic women. Not only is FemCatholic a Catholic feminist blog, but it is a site in which engaged members are "dedicated to supporting, deepening, and inspiring the lives of other women." The website facilitates an environment centered around feminism and is specifically for Catholic women. These women do not know each other from meeting in-person, but through these blog posts and replying and engaging with comments, the people and the blog content come to be personal to members. The connectedness the women feel from sharing the same identities as Catholic women trying to navigate what it means to be a feminist and the role of women in the Church bonds them. This sense of community is the result of the blogs being online and having specific missions dedicated to Catholic women.

[30] Heidi A. Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We are One in the Network* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005): 44, 146.
[31] Jena, "Dear Edith: Do I Have A Place in the Catholic Church?" *FemCatholic*, March 18, 2018, http://www.femcatholic.com/.

Similar sentiments are shared by writer Christie Peters of The Catholic Woman. She explains:

> In some ways I'm writing the letter that I always wanted to read. I've had the sweetest moments when wonderful and brave women have gone before me and shared those hidden stories and thinking "oh praise Jesus I'm not the only one." Isn't that an incredible feeling? Hearing others speak their truth has enabled me to deal with mine.[32]

She experiences an exhilarating feeling from being able to hear from and relate to other women through The Catholic Woman blog. The blog has created a community so inviting and encouraging that she feels she is able to share her own story, the letter she has "always wanted to read." While Peters ultimately praises Jesus as the source for this sense of community, the medium of the blog itself plays a critical role. In all, members from both FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman express sentiments of gratefulness for the ways in which the blogs construct a community where Catholic women have a space to connect and relate to others like them.

As noted earlier, Blessed Is She's mission is explicitly to create a community for Catholic women. Not only does the blog do this in similar ways to that as FemCatholic and The Catholic Woman, but the website promotes offline meet-ups through Blessed Brunches, Community Groups, and retreats. Blessed Brunches "turn online relationships into real life friendships" through members willingness to open their homes to host a potluck gathering for other Blessed Is She members.[33] After members host one of these lunches, they are encouraged to begin a Community Group by downloading a free study guide and submitting a form online for assistance from a Blessed Is She team coordinator to lead an offline bible study group. The final way in which Blessed Is She offers members the opportunity to take their online community offline is through regional retreats in

---

[32] Christie Peters, "Who I Am When I'm Alone - Letter from Christie Peters," *The Catholic Woman*, November 30, 2018, https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/.
[33] "Connect," Blessed Is She, accessed December 2018, https://blessedisshe.net/community/.

Washington D.C. and Dublin, Ireland, which occur annually in the fall. The community Blessed Is She builds both online and offline showcases the need to analyze religious agents in both online and offline spaces. The women's practices do not end when they go on the internet or when they close out of Blessed Is She for the day. Their experiences transfer from offline to online and vice versa.[34]

In all, Catholic women use the internet—and specifically blogs—as outlets to articulate, reformulate, and understand Catholic feminism and what it means to be a woman in the Catholic Church. The internet provides these women a greater authority that they do not necessarily have offline within the institutional hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They have the autonomy to write posts based on their own questions and interests, and through the decentralized nature of the internet, their blog entries have the potential to be seen by others as legitimate sources of religious knowledge. The institutional hierarchical authority of the Church has no direct control over these women or what they present in these online spaces. While individuals are granted greater authority online, the women are also ultimately limited by the agenda of each of the site's moderators. Thus, even the narratives constructed by these women on each of these sites must be understood within the context of the limitations of each website. Further, the writers of FemCatholic, The Catholic Woman, and Blessed Is She—all websites that focus on promoting and dignifying Catholic women—highlight the multitude of ways in which women approach the role of women in the Church and feminism. While there are apparent differences in both the focus of discussions and the perspectives presented on each of the three blogs, they all foster a sense of community among Catholic women. The internet and blogs play a crucial role in giving Catholic women voices, space, and community. Thus, these digital sites should continue to be examined in

[34] Campbell, "Introduction," 3-4.

order to have a greater understanding of the perspectives of Catholic women and other laypeople without institutional authority.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archer, Emily. "Catholic Feminism: Both / And." *FemCatholic,* September 24, 2018. https://www.femcatholic.com/catholic-feminism-both-and/.

Blessed Is She. "About." Mission Statement. https://blessedisshe.net/about/.

——. "Connect." Accessed December 2018. https://blessedisshe.net/community/.

Bucar, Elizabeth M. *Creative Conformity: The Feminist Politics of U.S. Catholic and Iranian Shi'i Women*. New York: Georgetown University Press, 2011.

Campbell, Heidi A. "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies." *The Information Society* 21*,* no.4 (2005): 309-315.

——. *Exploring Religious Community Online: We are One in the Network*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005.

——. "Introduction. The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion." In *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, edited by Heidi A. Campbell. New York: Routledge, 2012.

——. "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society." *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 80, no.1 (March 2012): 64-93.

Coco, Angela. *Conflicts and Choices: An Exploration of Power Relations in the Catholic Church*. London: Routledge, 2014.

FemCatholic. "Our Mission." Mission Statement. http://www.femcatholic.com/about/our-mission/.

——. "Submissions." Blog Submissions. http://www.femcatholic.com/about/submissions/.

Garden, Mary. "Defining Blog: A Fool's Errand or a Necessary Undertaking." *Journalism* 13, no.4 (September 2011): 483–499.

Henold, Mary J. *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Hollcraft, Katie. "The Strength That Comes from Knowing the Truth About Who We Are – Letter from Katie Hollcraft." *The Catholic Woman,* November 9, 2018. https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/.

Jena. "Dear Edith: Do I Have A Place in the Catholic Church?" *FemCatholic*, March 18, 2018. http://www.femcatholic.com/.

Meyer, Angela. "Embracing the Medium: What Makes a Successful Cultural Blog?" *Literary Minded*, June 12, 2009. https://blogs.crikey.com.au/literaryminded/.

Peters, Christie. "Who I Am When I'm Alone - Letter from Christie Peters." *The Catholic Woman*, November 30, 2018. https://thecatholicwoman.co/letterstowomen/.

Povlock, Samantha. "Catholics: Don't Be Afraid of the Word 'Feminist.'" *FemCatholic*, November 20, 2017. http://www.femcatholic.com/.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "American Catholic Feminism: A History." In *Reconciling Catholicism Feminism? Personal Reflections on Tradition and Change*, edited by Salle Barr Ebest and Ron Ebest, 3-12. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

"Social Justice." In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c2a3.htm.

Tierney, Kendra. "Don't Label Me, Bro." *Blessed Is She*, January 19, 2017. https://blessedisshe.net/devotion/.

The Catholic Woman. "Letter to Women." Letter Submissions. https://thecatholicwoman.co/.

UCLA Journal of Religion

Volume 3
2019

Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius

Zhelun Zhou
Colgate University, Hamilton, NY

ABSTRACT

A new wave of traditional Chinese cultural revival movements resurged in China after the turn of the millennium. Activities such as "Guoxue re," (national learning) and "Confucianism Revival," (ruxue fuxing) are frequently reported. Among them, the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius is one of the most televised, state-initiated activities that is held annually in China. Using the online video footage of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, this paper focuses on the ritual activities of this ceremony. Borrowing ritual theoretical frameworks from religious scholars such as Talal Asad, Anne M. Blackburn, Michael Puett and Saba Mahmood, this paper illustrates how rituals re-actualize religious canons, shape participants' bodily movements, right dispositions and self-cultivation, and to recreate and reimagine a religious space to engage the humans with the ancestral spirits. The paper hence calls for an eclectic combination of ritual theories in comprehending these ritual activities in ceremonies.

Keywords: China, Confucianism, Rituals, Ritual theories, Memorial Ceremony

Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius

By Zhelun Zhou[1]
Colgate University, Hamilton, NY

After the 2000s, mainland China witnessed a resurgence of traditional Chinese culture revival movements. These movements include a list of activities, such as "national learning" (guoxue re, 国学), "Confucian Revival," (ruxue fuxing or ruxue re, 儒学复兴/儒学热), the China Central Television programmed lecture series *Lecture Platform* (baijia jiangtan, 百家讲坛), and the more controversial "Women's Virtue Schools" (nüde ban, 女德班), which emphasizes women's unconditional submission to husbands and male patriarchy.[2] These different movements add complexities to China's social narratives and Chinese people's search for their identity. They serve as potential counters to the Western ideologies and religions such as capitalism, liberal democracy, and Christianity. Moreover, unlike many Western critics' assumptions, these movements are not entirely initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); rather, they are initiated by grassroot organizations and public intellectuals.[3] This complicates the discourse of Chinese religious studies.

In this paper, I will focus on the Confucianism Revival movement and its activity in mainland China after 2010. Particularly, I will focus on the

---

[1] Zhelun Zhou, Colgate Class of 2020, majors in Philosophy & Religion Joint Major and History. He plans to apply for the Watson Fellowship and pursue a graduate degree in history. Within the Philosophy & Religion Joint Major, he is interested in religious rituals, the intersection between secularization and religion, the contemporary issues of Chinese religions, and Asian religions in general. This paper was adapted from his term paper of course RELG 352: Theory and Method.

[2] "Inside China's 'Virtue Schools' for Women," *BBC News*, December 13, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-42305137. This led a new wave of debate on what should be treated as "authentic national learning."

[3] John Makeham, "The Revival of Guoxue: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Aspirations," *China Perspectives* 2011 no.1:15-20; Xie Shaobo, "Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity," ibid: 40-43. Also see Lizhu Fan and Na Chen, "The Religiousness of 'Confucianism,' and the Revival of Confucian Religion in China Today," *Cultural Diversity in China* 1, no.1 (January 2015): 27-43.

rituals practiced in the Confucianism Revival. To explain the rituals in the movement, I will analyze the annual Confucius Veneration Ceremony (jikong dadian, 祭孔大典) from both 2016 and 2017.[4] Through my analysis of the ceremony's ritual spaces and activities, I argue that the ritual activities in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius can't be explained by one single ritual theory. Instead, the ritual activities in the ceremony require an eclectic effort to combine the different ritual theories to explicate them.

To carry out my argument, several caveats need to be made. I am not making a new argument on the debate of whether Confucianism is a religion or not. I am not theorizing the interplay between state politics and religion in the Confucianism Revival here. Nor am I discussing the philosophical ideas of Confucianism.[5] I am researching ritual activities of the Confucianism Revival after 2010 in the occasion of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. There has seldom been any literature on the study of those public ceremonies, and most Western scholarly works on Confucianism have not touched on the Confucianism Revival after Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2013.[6] Hence, my research intends to fill this gap in the existing literature and provide a reflection on China's contemporary ritual practices and ritual theories.

---

[4] Jikong dadian (祭孔大典) can also be translated as "Memorial Ceremony for Confucius." The 2016 and 2017 Ceremonies can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-6E0jvgjrU and https://www.sohu.com/a/195240451_688831 [accessed December 18, 2018], respectively. Both videos are filmed in Mandarin. Henceforth, the ceremonies will be cited in-text as (year, hour:minute).

[5] On how Confucianism was incorporated as a world religion in history, see Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton: University Press, 2014). On how politics and religion intersect in China, see Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005). For a quick overview of Confucius' philosophical ideas and system, see Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998).

[6] For research on Confucian Revival in China, see Sebastien Billioud and Joel Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); cf. Lizhu Fan and Na Chen, "The Religiousness of 'Confucianism.'" Billioud and Thoraval conducted fieldwork on Confucian Revival movements between 2005 and 2013. Anna Sun's work focuses on the individual ritual practices in the Confucius Temple, not state-initiated rituals.

The paper's main body will be divided into three parts: I will first introduce the background information on the annual Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, including the Confucius Temple in Qufu. Second, I will list and describe the ritual activities enacted in the Memorial Ceremony, following its chronological procession. Third, I will selectively analyze some ritual activities in the ceremony by employing the ritual theories from theorists Talal Asad, Michael Puett, Anne M. Blackburn and Saba Mahmood.

The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius happens annually on September 28th, the birthday of Confucius, organized by the state since 2004.[7] The Chinese name "Jikong Dadian," (祭孔大典) literally means "Sacrifice to Confucius Ceremony." It resembles the ancestral sacrifice that Chinese families hold annually.[8] In ancestral sacrifices, the participants present their tributes such as food and clothes to the deceased ancestors' spirits and ask them for blessing over their descendants. Similarly, the Ceremony for Confucius includes participants presenting tributes and asking blessing from the deceased Confucius' spirit.

The most spectacular Confucius Ceremony is held in Qufu, the renowned birthplace of Confucius. The Confucius Temple in Qufu is one of the largest and most renowned in East Asia. It is regulated by the Chinese state. The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius in Qufu is indicative of the state's goals. After Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, he emphasized the use of Confucian values to tell the "Chinese Dream" story (Zhongguo Meng, 中国梦) and to incorporate those values with the fulfillment of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi, 中国特色社会主义).[9] His frequent visits to Qufu from 2013 to 2018

---

[7] To be clear, as a Chinese Mainlander, I have participated in almost every family ancestor sacrifice annually as the eldest son and the eldest grandson. I also have travelled to Qufu's Confucius Temple, and during my travel I have been informed of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. Hence, I see myself quite acquainted with the ancestor sacrifice and Confucius Ceremony.

[8] These sacrifices are usually held on early April, coincided with the Qingming Festival (清明节) or "Tomb-Sweeping Day."

[9] Selusi Ambrogio, "Moral Education and Ideology: The Revival of Confucian Values and the

solidify the ceremony's status as an educative project for Chinese citizens. The state then broadcasts the ceremony on television for the nationwide audience. During the ceremony, participants perform the reinvented Confucian rituals[10] based on *The Analects of Confucius*,[11] a collection of sayings and ancient Chinese ritual manuals recorded by Confucius' disciples.[12]

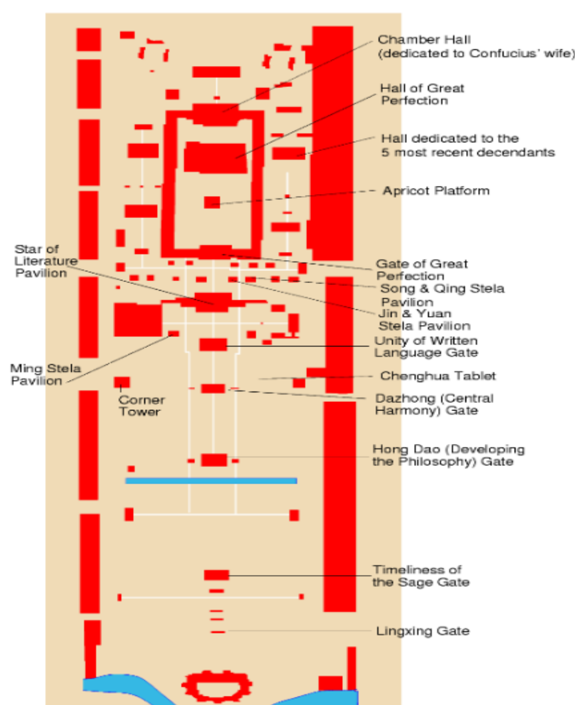

Fig. 1, The Structure of Qufu Confucius Temple

Before I begin to describe the Memorial Ceremony fully in the next paragraph, it is essential to mention first how frequently the evocation of the Confucian canons features in both the volunteers' beginning

Harmonious Shaping of the New Chinese Man," Asian Studies 5, no.2 (2017): 114-121, 128- 129.

10 By "reinvented rituals," I mean that the rituals performed in the Memorial Ceremony are adapted from the Confucian canons and examples from the previous dynastic ceremonies. The Chinese state recreates the ceremony's rituals from those sources.

11 The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation, trans. Robert Eno (2015), http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2015).pdf. Sections of classical Chinese literature are hereafter cited as Title book:passage.

12 Anna Sun, Confucianism as a World Religion, 89-92, 171f. Also see Yong Chen, "Renewing Confucianism as a Living Tradition in 21st Century China: Reciting Classics, Reviving Academies, and Restoring Rituals" in Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World, ed. Giuseppe Giorda and Enzo Pace (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 76-77.

reading session and the final funeral oration (including broadcasters' interpretation and analysis throughout) read by the leading participant of the ceremony, and also how dance performances and musical instruments are incorporated into the ceremony. I also include a structure of the Qufu Confucius Temple to demonstrate the ceremony's progression (fig. 1).

The Memorial Ceremony for Confucius proceeds with two ushers, wearing traditional Han Chinese official robes, leading the following a group composed mostly of municipal and provincial leaders, as well as officials from Qufu and the greater Shandong province, to walk towards the Confucius Temple (2016, 0:07-0:16). In the background, there are volunteers, from primary school students to college students and local company staffs, reading the excerpts from the Confucian canons, mostly *Analects*. Those excerpts address Confucius' teaching of personal conduct and the importance of learning, friendship, and virtue such as humaneness and propriety (ibid). Those readings are exemplified as ideals for listeners to emulate.

Fig. 2 Volunteers reading classics during the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius (On the left). The host and Chinese Professor Bao Pengshan (鲍鹏山) serve as interpreters for the live broadcast program.

Fig. 3 A bird's eye view of all the different volunteer groups reading classics during the ceremony.

The ceremony includes two opening rituals in its procession. As the guests walk through several entrance doors, they arrive at the front of the Confucius Temple. Here, they perform the "opening temple ritual" (kaimiao yishi, 开庙仪式), in which the guests are required to straighten their dresses (zhengyiguan, 整衣冠) and stand upright as to show respect and present their best visage to Confucius. After this ritual, the Confucius Temple is officially opened (2016, 0:17). The guests then proceed further into the Confucius Temple. They arrive at the Gate of Great Perfection (dacheng men, 大成门), the entrance to the Hall of Great Perfection. Here, the guests perform the "inception ritual" (qihu yishi, 启户仪式), which marks the official beginning of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. In this ritual, the traditional Chinese drum is rolled for three rounds (yushi tiandirenhe, 喻示天地人和) as a metaphor for the harmony between heaven, earth, and humans (2016, 0:26-0:30). After this ritual, the guests enter the main center of the Confucius Temple and the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius officially starts.

Next, the ceremony proceeds with a series of performances. Afterwards, the guests move to the Apricot Platform (xingtan, 杏坛), the reputed

teaching podium for Confucius and his disciples, and face the front of the Hall of Great Perfection. Here, they present their bouquets to Confucius and bow to Confucius' statue three times (2016, 0:36-1:10). Meanwhile, the dancers, also in traditional Han Chinese robes, perform choreography based on the traditional eight ranks dance form.[13] In their dance, they carry the corresponding dance apparatus (feathers yu, 羽 and moon guitar yueqin, 龠琴,) as well, based on the ancient ritual manual. The ancient musical instruments used during Confucius' time are introduced and played on this occasion. These dance performances and instruments intend to make the ceremony atmosphere appear as if it were occurring in Confucius' time and that Confucius is present to view these performances. Later the broadcast program flashes back to clips of dance rehearsals, in which the dancers are required to bend their bodies to certain degrees to demonstrate their respect to Confucius both in their movements and their hearts. Their bodily movements resemble every Chinese character in the accompanying dance songs (2016, 0:45-0:48). Dance performances serve to bring up the last rituals of the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.

Fig. 4 The Eight Ranks Dance (八佾舞), viewers can see visibly eight lines of dancers. Each line has eight dancers. They carry the feather yu (羽), and the ancient musical instruments yue (龠) during performances. The two instruments are employed by dancers to show their propriety and decorum in the performance (0:53).

[13] This is based on *Analects* 3:1. The Eight Ranks Dance Form (八佾舞) was a funeral dance traditionally reserved only for kings during Confucius' time. As Confucius was entitled posthumously as King by the later dynasty rulers in China, the Eight Ranks Dance Form is considered an appropriate ritual and performance for Confucius during the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.

Fig. 5 The Rehearsal of the Eight Rank Dances. The Choreographer accentuates to the dancers how to bend their bodies in order to demonstrate their deference fully in performance (0:46).

Fig. 6 The broadcast explains that every movement in the Eight Rank Dances represents every lyric of the songs in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius (0:46).

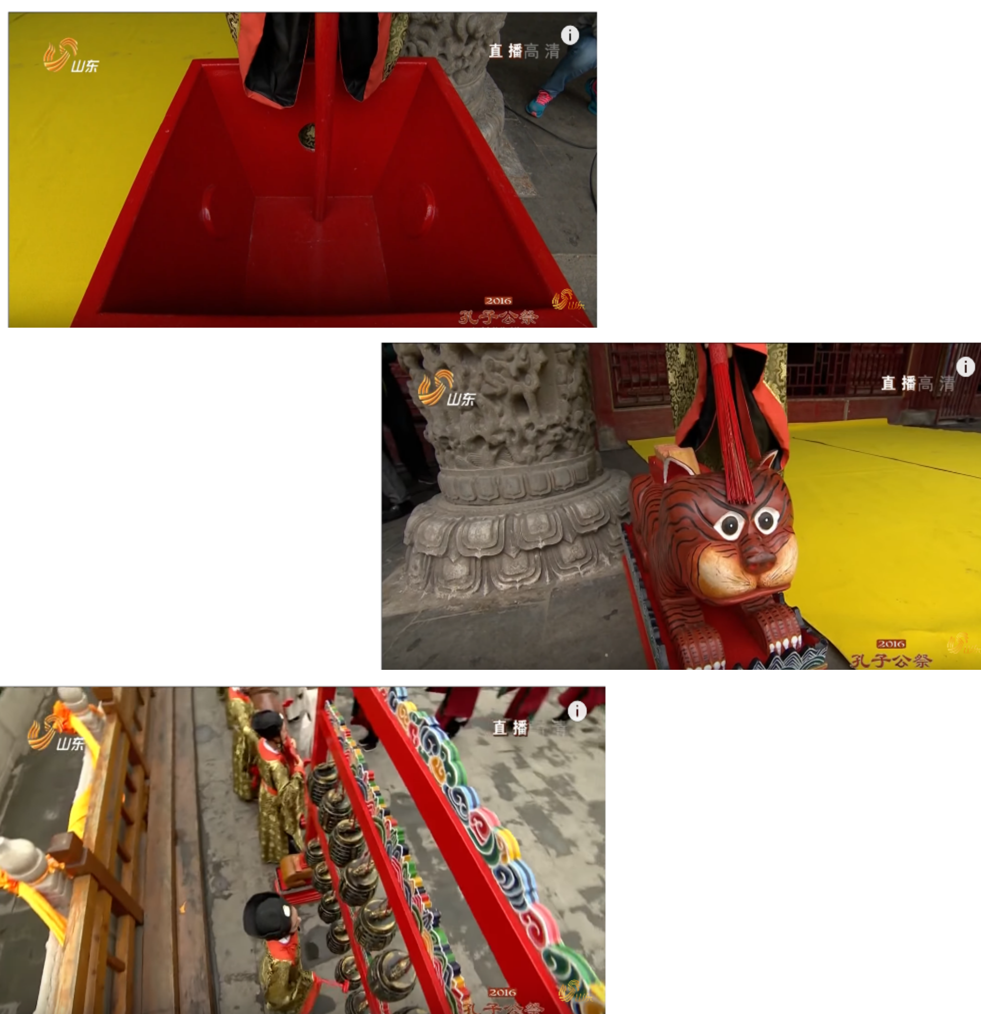

Fig. 7 (0:37), 8 (0:41), and 9 (0:44). The traditional musical instruments employed in the ceremony. All three instruments can be traced back to the age of Confucius.

The ceremony now moves to its finale. The ceremony's next ritual is the funeral oration (jiwen, 祭文). In this ritual, one leading top official will hold the funeral oration, framed in a way to resemble the traditional Chinese imperial edict. The official will read aloud the funeral oration to the audience in front of the Hall of Great Perfection (dacheng dian, 大成殿), the architectural center of the Temple complex.[14] The content of funeral oration consists of a straightforward narrative that in year 2016, on September the 28th, this Fall, the Shan

[14] The Hall of Great Perfection derived its name from Mencius, a Confucian philosopher active roughly 100 years after Confucius. Mencius described Confucius as "the sage of timeliness," and called him "the man of great perfection" (dacheng, 大成) in *Mencius* 5B:1, cf. *Mencius: An Online Teaching Translation,* trans. Robert Eno (2016), http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Mengzi.pdf, though Eno translates this as "the great coda."

ong provincial government officials, the Han Chinese communities in mainland China, and the Chinese diasporic communities along with their guests gather at the Hall of Great Perfection, in Confucius Temple to pay great respect to the Sage Confucius, his disciples and other Confucian sages. The oration then proceeds with a popular generalization of ancient Chinese history up to Confucius, and a summary of and praise for the thoughts and contributions of Confucius in his time and the lasting legacy Confucius endowed to the later generations of Han Chinese, including this generation. The funeral oration ends with praying to Confucius to protect the Han Chinese and provide eternal prosperity to the nation and wishing him to enjoy the tributes presented to him (2016, 1:11-1:16). After the funeral oration, the participants at the site bow three times in front of the Confucius portrait (2016, 1:17), ending the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.

Fig. 10 (1:10) The Funeral Oration. The official is reading the oration out loud.

Fig. 11 (0:43) The Confucius statue inside the Hall of Great Perfection, in which Confucius is portrayed as a king.

Although those rituals practiced in the ceremony are mostly state-oriented reinvention, they still play an important role in our understandings of religion and ritual theories. They are mostly based on the Confucian canons, an attempt to bring the foundational texts back to life. Anne M. Blackburn, a Buddhism scholar, argues that "authoritative foundational scriptures have remained central to practitioners and communities."[15] She sees importance in investigating how texts are performed. In this way, Blackburn raises our awareness of the role of texts in ritual activities and ceremony, as in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius.

The specific verses from the Confucian canons read in the ceremony by volunteers provide models for human actions and characters. Blackburn speaks of how the recitation of Buddhist texts were employed by the Thailand king to shape himself with an Asoka persona.[16] She intends to demonstrate to us how the texts inform the imagination of people who read them. In the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, the volunteers read verses from *Analects* that emphasize the self-cultivation of morality, right personal conduct, and the importance of education and virtues such as humaneness, propriety, and friendship. Lastly, the verses emphasize how junzi (君子), the perfect gentleman, acts decorously in different manners and situations. Those verses are not in vain; in fact, for both the readers and the audience viewing the ceremony, they provide the blueprint for people to reimagine the right behaviors and shape their conduct as people read, hear and see the verses. Read in a collective form, those powerful words become transformative rites for volunteers and viewers as they instill archetypes in their minds to actualize the models written in *Analects*. In this way, Blackburn's

[15] Anne M. Blackburn, "The Text and the World," in *A Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 158.
[16] Ibid., 159.

analysis informs us of how reading texts is not only a fundamental act but also an actualizing act of oneself in models.

Talal Asad, another religious theorist on ritual studies, helps us to comprehend that rituals serve instrumental roles in moral discipline. Blackburn already underscores the fact that rituals such as reading texts give the participants a model they can reimagine. Studying the medieval Catholic rituals, Asad contends that "the learning of virtues according to the medieval monastic program…took place primarily by means of imitation."[17] Texts for Asad provide the imitating subject a way to connect the "outer behavior" and "inner voice" together, so that there is no disjunction in the two.[18] From both scholars, we can recognize that, for volunteers reading the classics and people who read and listen to the funeral oration, the models in the *Analects* bridge their "outer behavior" and "inner voice," so that they, at this moment, at the Temple of Confucius, Qufu, can display their inner virtues and veneration outward in public. In this way, Confucian texts become a disciplinary model for the practitioners and an entity that can be brought to life through rituals. Thus the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius takes up the form of a mass-organized educative project for Chinese citizens, both as participants and viewers of the ceremony, to correct their conducts.

The dance performance and musical instruments serve as way to re-create a common space for both the humans and Confucius' spirit to dwell. From the outset, numerous participants (including volunteers) in the ceremony express the view that one should "sacrifice to Confucius as if Confucius is present," and see this ceremony an opportunity to have close-contact with Confucius (or his spirit, "jikong ru kongzi zai," "祭孔如孔子在," 2017, 0:20). This view is actualized further in the dance performances. As the choreographer instructs in the rehearsal clip, the dancers should bend their bodies in certain gestures to a certain degree,

[17] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 63.
[18] Ibid., 64.

so that the dancers can display their deference to Confucius' spirit. The assumption behind this instruction is that deference is a normative component of proper ritual dancing. Accompanying such performance is the playing of ancient musical instruments dated back to Confucius' time. Both the dance performance, based on the Eight Ranks Dance mentioned in *Analects*, and the musical instruments employed in Confucius' time, have been utilized to create a unique ritual space for humans and Confucius' spirit to cohabit. They assume Confucius' presence and observance.

Although the Ceremony for Confucius is a mass-organized educational project, it should be noted with a caveat that viewers of the ceremony in the above ritual space are not the intended audience. Confucius' spirit is the only de facto *intended* audience here. This claim may seem shocking, but reasonable. First, the participants' deference is not targeted at those viewers. Second, the participants in the ceremony, including guests, volunteers and the performers, are not the intended audience, as they participate in the ceremony. The only audience for this astounding ritual performance is Confucius' spirit. The human participants in the ceremony are trying to cultivate a relationship with this spirit. They are using the performance to please Confucius' spirit. The performers are bending their bodies to display deference to Confucius' spirit. Most of all, all participants perform the entire ceremony "as if" Confucius is present. Since Confucius himself passed away a long time ago, yet as the participants still think he is present in some ways, his spirit would be assumed to be the legitimate audience for viewing the ceremony. That is also the reason "Jikong Dadian" can be translated and comprehended as "Sacrifice to Confucius Ceremony," as Confucius is similar to the ancestors that are present in familial funerals and sacrifices.

Before proceeding to discuss the dance and musical instruments in depth, it is necessary to introduce one important ritual theory here. Michael Puett, a Harvard historian of ancient Chinese History and Anthropology, addresses the "as if" world theory in studying rituals.

Specializing in ancient Chinese rituals and ritual theories, Puett, impacted by Asad's work, also tries to dispel the Protestant Reformation's impact on religious studies.[19] He targets Durkheim's theory of the sacred as society in disguised forms and Eliade's theory of rituals as demarcating sacred time and sacred space in an orderly cosmology for the *homo religiosus* in particular.[20] Based on his study of Chinese ritual theories and *Analects*, Puett argues that, although rituals do create a subjunctive and a disjunct space from the everyday life, this disjunct space is not a result of orderly and harmonious cosmology as Eliade declares; rather, it is the exact opposite. The Chinese people, Puett contends, have seen the deceased ancestors and their spirits as resentful and angry. With those resentful spirits wandering in the universe, the cosmology is not peaceful and orderly. It is chaotic and fragmented. Hence, rituals for Chinese people, including the funeral rituals, were employed to forge a better relationship between the spirits and humans, and to domesticate humans into the right dispositions towards those spirits.[21] It is in this space that the participants pacify the angry spirits, transform the spirits into something relatable in the society, and cultivate participants' dispositions and virtues. This ritual space, Puett claims, is an "as if" space, in which the participants act "as if" the world created around this ritual space is a true one.[22]

Puett's ritual theory is better at illuminating how participants themselves approach Confucius in their rituals than those of Durkheim and Eliade. As people perform, they assume the presence of Confucius, even if in a spiritual form. They are presenting themselves supposedly in

[19] Michael Puett, "Critical Approaches to Religion in China," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no.1 (2015):100.
[20] See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 208; Micrea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959), 116-117.
[21] Puett, "Critical Approaches," 97-99; idem, "Social Order or Social Chaos," in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies,* ed. Robert Orsi, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 113-116, 122-127; idem, "Ritual and Ritual Obligations: Perspectives on Normativity from Classical China," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49 (2015): 544-549.
[22] Puett, "Critical approaches to religion in China," 98; idem, "Ritual and Ritual Obligations," 547-548; idem, "Social order or social chaos," 124-127.

front of Confucius. They deliver their utmost deference to Confucius through their performances and bending bodies. Meanwhile, the musical instruments used in the performance demarcate the space disjunctive from the everyday life, so human participants of the ceremony and Confucius' spirit can dwell in this space and relate to one another. The human subjects are asked to propose a relationship with Confucius' spirit in their deferential manners. Furthermore, the funeral oration prays directly to Confucius for blessing the nation with eternal prosperity and ends its words with the wish that Confucius will enjoy the tributes presented to him in the ceremony. Employing Puett's theory, we can see that the Chinese participants in the ceremony try to address Confucius as if he is really present, and that this ritual space is an "as if" world because they try their best to cultivate a relationship with Confucius' spirit, by performing the Eight Ranks Dance and presenting the musical instruments in Confucius' time as to make Confucius' spirit feel comfortable, so they can receive blessing from Confucius. Henceforth, Puett's ritual theory is indeed more illuminating than those of Durkheim and Eliade in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. In treating Confucius as another ancestor, the ceremony shapes people's cultural identity through their cultivation of deferential manner.

Bodily movements are continuously featured in the ceremony and illumines Saba Mahmood's theory of the body in ritual activities. Mahmood, an anthropologist specializing in Islam, says that the repeated *bodily acts* can train "one's memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct."[23] Focusing on the gendered bodies of female Muslim participants of the Islamic Revival movements and the mosque movements in Cairo during the 1990s, Mahmood asserts that female bodies can be employed as a way to cultivate virtues such as modesty and humility. The female bodies have an effect to project "the interiority of the individual," in this case the inner values, on the "outward behavior"

---

[23] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: University Press, 2012), 157. My emphasis.

or means to acquire these attributes.[24] Furthermore, those bodily movements are performative in that they can be employed as the medium to demonstrate the above cultivated virtues in their bodily movements.[25] Although not addressing male bodies and bodily movements specifically, Mahmood's work informs our analysis of dancers' bodily movements, male and female, during the ceremony. The group of mostly male performers bend their bodies in certain gestures to certain degrees based on instruction. In this way, they exhibit their deference to Confucius' spirit. Meanwhile, they are told to hold true respect in their hearts for Confucius. As they try to cultivate their heartfelt respect for Confucius, their bodies become the tool for them to attain this virtue. That way, the performers try to bridge their inner virtue (respect) with their outward performance towards Confucius through their bodily movements. Their bodies become the medium for them to express their inner respect as an outward performance, as viewers can find it in the ceremony. Hence, even though originally focused on the gendered, feminine bodies, Mahmood's theory can still be applied to the male performers' bodily movements in the Eight Ranks Dance.

To conclude, the ritual activities in the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius, along with broadcasters' description, explanation and participants' interviews, demonstrate ways that texts are read to actualize self-cultivation. Additionally, dances and musical instruments re-create and re-imagine the ritual space so the participants can develop the right dispositions towards Confucius' spirit through their bodily movements. The ceremony, overall, domesticates both ancestral spirit (in this case, the Confucius' spirit) and humans. Therefore, the Memorial Ceremony for Confucius cannot be fully unpacked through one ritual theory. Rather, it requires a joint effort from different ritual theories to holistically comprehend the rituals in the ceremony. For ritual activities not originating from the Abrahamic religions, it is essential to first incorporate ritual

[24] Ibid., 159-161.
[25] Ibid., 166.

theories, especially indigenous ritual theories, from different religions to get a better picture of the rituals, and second to widen our ritual analysis more on the contemporary religious activities, instead of assuming a premodern and modern society divide in religious studies.

Moreover, it is important to look at the Confucian Revival movement itself. Throughout the broadcast of the Memorial Ceremony, the host and the professor refer to Confucius as a "prophet," (xianzhi, 先知), and guests' procession as a "pilgrimage," (chaosheng, 朝圣). They also emphasize the sense of rituality (yishi gan, 仪式感), and analogize the Memorial Ceremony as "sacrificing for heaven" (jikong rutong jitian, "祭孔如同祭天," 2016, 0:15-0:20). All those terms connote religious elements. Therefore, even though people in China view the Confucianism Revival movements and Memorial Ceremony for Confucius as cultural activities, they certainly contain some religious flavors. Examining these rituals, we might have to agree with Eliade's assessment that the descendants of *homo religiosus* uphold certain pseudo- and para-religious paradigms in their lives. If so, his claim that "religion is the paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis" is realized in the Confucian Revival.[26]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambrogio, Selusi. "Moral Education and Ideology: The Revival of Confucian Values and the Harmonious Shaping of the New Chinese Man." *Asian Studies* 5, no.2 (2017): 113-135.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, Ch. 2.

Billioud, Sebastien and Joel Thoraval. The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China. New York, NY: Oxford: UP 2015.

Blackburn, Anne M. "The Text and the World." In *A Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert Orsi, 151-167. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[26] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 209-210.

Chen, Yong. "Renewing Confucianism as a Living Tradition in 21st Century China: Reciting Classics, Reviving Academies, and Restoring Rituals." In *Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World*, edited by Giuseppe Giorda and Enzo Pace, 63-84. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press, 1995.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, 1959.

Fan, Lizhu and Na Chen. "The Religiousness of "Confucianism", and the Revival of Confucian Religion in China Today." *Cultural Diversity in China* 1, no.1 (2015): 27-43.

Fingarette, Herbert. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998.

"Inside China's 'Virtue Schools' for Women." *BBC News*, December 13, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-42305137.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: University Press, 2012.

Makeham, John. "The Revival of Guoxue: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Aspirations."*China Perspectives* 2011, no.1: 14-21.

Mencius: An Online Teaching Translation. Translated by Robert Eno, 2016. http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Mengzi.pdf.

Puett, Michael. "Social Order or Social Chaos." In *A Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi, 109-129. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

———. "Critical Approaches to Religion in China." *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no.1 (2013): 95-101.

———. "Ritual and Ritual Obligations: Perspectives on Normativity from Classical China." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49 (2015): 543-550.

Sun, Anna. *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*. Princeton: University Press, 2014.

The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation. Translated by Robert Eno, 2015. http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2015).pdf.

Xie, Shaobo. "Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity." In *Chinese Perspectives* 2011, no.1: 39-45.

Yu, Anthony C. *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives*. Chicago: Open Court, 2005.

2016 Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-6E0jvgjrU

2017 Memorial Ceremony for Confucius. https://www.sohu.com/a/195240451_688831

If you are a current undergraduate student or recent graduate who would like to publish their work, the UCLA Journal of Religion is looking for you.

Qualifications

Must be an undergraduate student or alumnus who has graduated in the past year. No previously published material will be considered. Open to submissions currently under peer-review for other journals. The author must notify the UCLA Journal of Religion immediately if the work will be published elsewhere.

Submissions

- Format: Word (.doc/.docx files) or Adobe/PDF document (.pdf files) – NO INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE AUTHOR IN BODY OF THE WORK. Submissions are blindly reviewed and will not be accepted if the author's name is anywhere on the document (this includes margins).
- Title page: Should include author's full name, institution, year, major, and a history of the manuscript (e.g. course for which the paper was written, derived from senior thesis, presentation of the manuscript etc.). Note: the title page is the only place where the author's name must appear.
- Style: Any standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.) is permitted for submission, but accepted manuscripts must conform to Chicago Style with footnotes. The author must undertake this revision should it be necessary. Submissions must be in English.
- Length: Submissions should be approximately 10-15 pages, but there is no minimum or maximum length; honors theses are especially encouraged.
- Abstract and keywords: Please include a 150-word abstract and 5-7 keywords.
- Editing: If your submission is accepted, we may require you to edit it before publication, according to suggestions by the editorial board.
- Submission: When the call is open, please email your document files (submissions will include 2 documents: the main paper and separate title page) to uclareligionjournal@gmail.com. There is no submission fee. Please email questions to Professor Ryan Gillespie at rgillespie@ucla.edu. You will be notified when your submission is received, as well as if it is rejected or accepted.

For more information—including call dates and deadlines—please visit our website.

UCLA Journal of Religion Website