

**Paths into Pagan Studies:
Autobiographical Reflections**

The Pagan Studies Archipelago: Pagan Studies in a Cosmopolitan World

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“‘Who are you?’ said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I – I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then’.”²

I was mistaken for a Catholic as I was chatting about creation spirituality to a professor who also happened to be a Catholic priest. At the end of an interview with a gay man living with HIV, he flirted with me and tried to pick me up. He thought I was gay. More than a decade ago, at the end of an introductory sociology class about religion, a young Christian student asked me: “So what do you believe?” She really had no idea about my own religious practice. In my lectures I play my cards very close to my chest. In my publications, disclosures about my own religious practice tend to be tucked away in footnotes and appendices that students don’t usually read. In one way I was being honest when I hedged my answer to the student. I remain uncertain about what I believe. What I didn’t say then, but feel increasingly comfortable saying now, is that most of the religious things I do are Pagan. I guess that makes me a Pagan. But when someone asks me what I *believe*, I know that whatever I say will almost inevitably be misunderstood. Do I have a few hours to explain the

1. Douglas Ezzy is a professor of sociology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. He is president of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion and editor of the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*. His most recent book is *Sex, Death and Witchcraft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

2. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. (New York: Broadview Press, 2000), 46.

complex way I understand religion? Is the person willing to spend the time to learn a new way of thinking and doing religion so that they can understand my response with any sense of verisimilitude? It was easy enough to explain to the Catholic professor that I was not a Catholic, despite my deep admiration for Matthew Fox. It was also relatively easy to be flattered, but respectfully decline the invitation from my gay research participant. But the challenges and complexities of declaring “I am a Pagan, but I’m not sure what I believe” are much more fraught.

What is Pagan studies? And, how does one become a Pagan studies scholar? Short answers are likely to be misunderstood. Scholars’ self-understandings also change over time. The autobiographical reflections in this special edition of *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, provide a set of longer and thoughtful answers to those questions. The stories capture some of the complexities and challenges that confront academics who study contemporary Paganisms. The invitation to contribute to this special issue included a list of stimulus questions asking how a person first became interested in the academic study of Paganism and the sorts of responses they received. Chas Clifton and I also asked them to discuss their first publications, the development of their academic career, and their relationships with other academics. Finally we asked about how their academic work relates to the contributors’ own religious practice, if they have one. We also made it clear that the questions were merely prompts, and that contributors were free to add, and ignore, questions as they saw fit.

Ideas depend on relationships. Ideas always exist in institutional and social contexts. Ideas, including academic understandings of religion, are not free-floating decontextualized statements that can be straightforwardly assessed as true or false. Academic understandings and ideas are made possible by the organizations, executive committees, friendships, and relationships between academics. The possibility that an academic idea will be taken seriously, will be examined and discussed and empirically tested, all depend on institutional and social contexts. I am not making a relativist claim here. Rather, I am making a hermeneutic argument that academic approaches to religion depend on, and are integral to, broader institutional and social processes.³ Or to use hermeneutic

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1986); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

language, truth is created and defended in the context of horizons of significance.

The importance and influence of academic friendships and meetings is one of the central themes of the autobiographies in this special edition of *The Pomegranate*. These include PhD supervisors who were prepared to take on a doctoral student studying Paganism, older or more established academics who provided encouragement and a sense of legitimacy, and colleagues who encouraged each other to begin or continue with a research or teaching project. Western people tend to systemically underestimate the importance of relationships and our embeddedness in social networks. Pre-industrial and non-Western cultures have a stronger sense of the centrality of community to the self. The academic study of Paganism has a strength and legitimacy because of these social supports and networks.

Pagan-studies books have been, and continue to be, published by leading academic publishers and Pagan-studies articles are regularly published in leading journals in the study of religion, history, anthropology, sociology, and elsewhere. Contemporary Pagan Studies is a recognized "group" at the American Academy of Religion. Pagan themes are often listed in conference calls for papers. These all indicate Pagan studies has a relatively strong institutional voice. Nonetheless, it is rare for an academic to be employed in a mainstream university specifically for their expertise in contemporary Paganisms. It is common for Pagan academics and academics studying Paganisms to experience forms of more or less explicit discrimination. One of the earliest published accounts of such an experience, which I still find heartbreaking, is Tanya Luhrmann's footnote detailing what she was told toward the end of her PhD candidature: "I stood to loose credibility and career by adherence."⁴ At the time Luhrmann wrote her PhD, her academic colleagues considered that it was not credible for a respected academic to be a member of a Pagan religion such as Witchcraft. While such attitudes are now contested and less widespread, sadly they remain too common, often to be found in subtler and less overt forms, but nonetheless still very disconcerting for the Pagan engaged in the academic study of Paganism. Nonetheless, in 2015 Graham Harvey was the president of the British Association for the Study of Religion, and I was the president of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion.

4. Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 321.

Both of us publicly identify as Pagans – which says something about the respect for Pagan scholars among our colleagues. Alternatively, it indicates that our Paganism was a largely irrelevant consideration, which is equally good news.

The history of the academic study of non-Western cultures and the history of the academic study of indigenous cultures provide useful comparisons with Pagan studies.⁵ In both cases, academic studies framed by Christian, Western, and atheist/agnostic assumptions resulted in serious misunderstandings, disrespectful practices, and were used to justify discrimination. For example, while Durkheim's use of the term "primitive" to describe Australian Aboriginal religions does relate to his theory of the historical development of religion, the term is discriminatory and extremely disrespectful.⁶ The disastrous consequences of climate change, species extinction, and environmental degradation, lead me to be increasingly sympathetic to an argument that pre-industrial nomadic and agricultural societies were in many ways more "advanced" than contemporary Christian and consumerist capitalism, and this includes a recognition of the various species extinctions that were caused by indigenous societies.⁷ There are many things that can be learnt from non-Western and indigenous cultures and societies about which the West still seems largely ignorant.

Pagan-studies academics should resist the calls from scholars drawing on Christian and agnostic/atheist frameworks for Pagan studies to become an echo chamber of mainstream and institutionally dominant approaches. Their criticisms and engagements should be taken seriously and treated respectfully for the insights they offer. However, in the spirit of democratic institutional pluralism,⁸ to simply adopt all their recommendations would impoverish both the academic study of Paganism, and the academic study of religion more generally. Pagan-studies academics have learnt much from these dominant institutional approaches, and will continue to do so. However, there is also

5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Robyn Moore, "White-washing the Gap: The Discursive Practices of Whiteness," *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 2 (2012): 2–11.

6. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.*, trans. Joseph Swain (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).

7. Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (New York: Grove Press, 2002).

8. William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Veit Bader, *Secularism or Democracy?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

much that Pagan studies has to offer the mainstream, and while the temptation is continuously there to barter away these insights in the pursuit of acceptance and membership, it would be a sad day indeed if Pagan studies were to lose its disruptive edge.

What insights does contemporary Pagan studies provide that resist and provoke the underbellies of contemporary academically dominant monotheisms and atheist/agnosticism? Tanya Luhrmann's concept of "interpretive drift"⁹ was one of the early analyses that identified that religious practice was prior to belief. Graham Harvey, following Irving Hallowell, popularized the concept of "other-than-human people," that is part of a broader unsettling of human anthropocentrism.¹⁰ Susan Greenwood and Jenny Blain both take experiences in the "otherworld" seriously in an academic context,¹¹ which makes those who are methodologically agnostic or atheist very uncomfortable, but reflects a broader move to make the academic study of religion more inclusive in its ontological assumptions.¹² Jone Salomonsen unsettles the insider/outsider dichotomy, making the point that the traditional fieldwork approaches of anthropology and sociology are manifestly inadequate to negotiate the requirements for empathy and compassion in her study of Reclaiming Witchcraft.¹³ These are just a few significant innovations that are more significant in my own thinking.

I am unsure what I think about some of these arguments. But I am sure that they are important parts of the academic study of religion and need to be taken seriously as part of that academic conversation. For example, I am uncertain what I think about including the "otherworld" as an integral part of the academic study of religion. I waver between agreement and a more skeptical immanent approach. Which ever side I eventually come down, I am sure that

9. Luhrmann, *Persuasions*.

10. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

11. Jenny Blain, *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic: Ecstasy, Neo-Shamanism in North European Paganism* (London: Routledge, 2002); Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld* (Berg, Oxford, 2000).

12. Edith Turner with W. Blodgett, S. Hakona, and F. Benwa. *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

13. Jone Salomonsen, "Methods of Compassion or Pretension? The Challenges of Conducting Fieldwork in Modern Magical Communities," in Jenny Blain, Douglas Ezzy, and Graham Harvey, eds., *Researching Paganisms* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 43–58.

the work of Greenwood and Blain, among others, will have contributed to a richer and more sophisticated academic understanding of how these experiences of “the otherworld” are understood in the academic study of religion, and in Pagan studies in particular.

These themes are all present in these autobiographies and will surely be noted by our colleagues and friends, such of those over at the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*. I welcome such debate, and hope that we don’t ever decide we are in complete agreement on everything. I also hope that as we continue to read and critique each other’s work that the publications of Pagan-studies academics will become more insightful and robust as a consequence of their criticism, and that the folk who read *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* will likewise be unsettled and learn to understand the study of religion, whatever that might be, in new ways. I thought I knew what religion was when I began my academic career, but it has changed so much since then.

Pagan studies is also institutionally located vis-à-vis the interests of contemporary Pagans. Melissa Harrington’s reflections in this volume on the opportunities she was offered, the advice she received, and the decisions she made as part of her PhD project clearly highlights this tension. This point is also there in the other autobiographies, notably the observations by Fritz Muntean that it is problematic that *The Pomegranate* is not open-access to all Pagans. Pagan studies walks, or works, the tension between the interests of Pagans and the interests, or values, of the academic study of religion. While academia is in the process of transitioning to increasingly open-access publications, the requirements of academic acceptance and peer review mean that many of our publications remain less accessible than might be desirable. The tensions, and benefits, cut both ways. Aidan Kelly’s dissection of the sources of the Wiccan Book of Shadows probably made many Wiccans uncomfortable, although I suspect most Wiccans now value this sort of work.¹⁴ Similarly, the debate between practitioners and scholars on the historical origins of contemporary Wicca generated considerable tension and some valuable insights.¹⁵

I first discovered Paganism in an early issue of *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* (I suspect it was issue 2, in 1986

14. Aidan Kelly, *Inventing Witchcraft: A Case Study in the Creation of a New Religion* (Loughborough: Thoth Publications, 2007).

15. Ronald Hutton, “Revisionism and Counter-Revisionism in Pagan History,” *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 13, no. 2 (2012): 225–56.

on Magic and Tradition that includes an article by my co-editor on "Magical Autobiographies").¹⁶ In the 1989 edition of *Gnosis* I found a review of Tanya Luhrmann's book *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*.¹⁷ Luhrmann's book was my first detailed introduction to Paganism. I read and explored Paganism widely, but it wasn't until I was finishing my own PhD thesis on the experience of unemployment in the mid 1990s that I turned, or rather returned, to an academic fascination with religion. I gave my first paper on Witchcraft at an INFORM conference in 2001 in London where I had the pleasure of meeting Helen Berger.¹⁸ We decided to work on a project together that would result in several publications, including *Teenage Witches*.¹⁹ On that trip to the UK I met many Pagan studies academics who would go on to become collaborators and good friends.

Conferences, journals, and networks of scholars are important, very important. They make the academic work possible. They make it richer, more reliable and informative. I found *The Pomegranate* in the early 2000s, just as it was making the transition from a small self-published journal to an established academic journal published by Equinox. *The Pomegranate*, the Nature Religions Scholars Network, and the associated conferences played a significant role in my becoming a Pagan studies scholar. The tyranny of distance still isolates those of us who live in the Antipodes, despite the so-called ease of international air travel. Without these networks it would have been much harder for me to find a sense of self-confidence, and a sense that my work mattered and was important. To apply a phrase often used to describe the experience of becoming a Pagan, for me, finding Pagan studies felt like "coming home." Here were a group of scholars who had read similar things to me, shared the same concerns, often engaged in similar practices, and among whom I felt understood and valued.

The study of religion has recently experienced a resurgence, largely as a consequence of the apparent dangers of religious radicals. While

16. Chas S. Clifton, "Magical Autobiographies," *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* 2 (1986): 29–33.

17. Richard Smoley, "Review of *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* by T. M. Luhrmann," *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* 13 (1989): 72.

18. Douglas Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," INFORM Conference, London, 2001.

19. Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy, *Teenage Witches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

fear may drive the concerns of some politicians, many scholars have celebrated the growth of religious diversity and the ongoing social significance of religion. Western politicians—and the Western scholars who study religion—are becoming more aware that what is required is not simply tolerance or accommodation, but constructive and respectful inclusion and engagement.²⁰ In this cosmopolitan context, Paganism becomes just one of a rich variety of religious traditions that now make up the backgrounds and research foci of academics who study religion. Pagan studies is increasingly becoming “one among many” rather than the marginalized other against a monolithic mainstream. At least, that is my experience. I know there are many academic contexts where this is still not the case, but in my experience respect and inclusion are becoming more common.

The stories in these autobiographies are important. They describe the courage, challenges, and opportunities of a group of Pagan studies scholars. Like Alice, Pagan studies scholars can expect to continue to be asked to give an account of ourselves. And, like Alice, I hope we are able to continue to reinvent ourselves in ways that challenge others, as we are likewise challenged ourselves.

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The Old *Pomegranate* and the New

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Abstract

Fritz Muntean and Diana Tracy founded *The Pomegranate: A New Journal of Neopagan Thought* as a semi-scholarly journal in 1997. The aim was to improve dialogue between academics and Pagans. Chas S. Clifton and Ronald Hutton were early contributors. The “new” *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, published by Equinox, appeared in 2004. While fully academic, the price makes it unavailable to most Pagans. Both academics and Pagans would benefit from a forum that bridges the gap between the academic study of Paganism and the literate Pagan-in-the street.

Keywords: Academic Journals; Paganism; Wicca.

In my twenties, in the 1960s, I was a hippie in the San Francisco Bay Area, being a college student, and making my living as a commercial artist.

When I got good enough at Zen-inspired meditation to actually have visionary experiences, I did not see gateless gates, unfolding lotus blossoms, or even Tantric demons. What I saw was Byzantine mosaics, circles and avenues of standing stones, and hirsute men with antlers of deer.

I had no idea what all this meant, but one of my friends had a buddy named Aidan Kelly, who lived in San Francisco. He asked Aidan about my vision and Aidan replied, “Oh, that’s Robert Graves territory,” and gave us a copy of *The White Goddess*.² I devoured and started charting Graves’ systems, especially the Tree Alphabet. We

1. Fritz Muntean is the founder and now editor emeritus of *The Pomegranate* journal.

2. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Vintage, 1948).

knew that Graves' concept was a poetic vision and not "real" history, since Graves says as much in his introduction. But it was still very inspirational.

Along with Aidan and others of our ilk, and from the early-middle '60s onward, we dug into Western inner traditions with all our might, and in the process we co-founded the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD), a playfully named Witchcraft tradition. My family and I emigrated to Canada in the early 1970s, and we continued to practice and to be involved in Vancouver and Seattle-based Pagan activities.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, my wife, Mary, and I went through the Jungian pre-analytic training course here in Vancouver. To qualify for analytic training in Zurich, people are obliged to clock two hundred hours of analysis and read Carl Jung's works under the supervision of the local analytic community. This process usually takes four years. Neither Mary nor I intended to actually go on to training in Zurich (they don't take people over fifty). But we thought it would be an excellent opportunity to sharpen our skill set.

For several years in the early 1990s, I led a weekend workshop called "Wicca and the Unconscious Mind" on the "broomstick circuit"³ throughout the Pacific Northwest, exploring the relationship between Jungian archetypal theory and Pagan magical practice, using a mix of lecture, workshop, and ritual drama. The ritual drama at Seattle's Spring Mysteries Festival, and the pageants we produce at other local festivals, etc., had their origin in these events of twenty years ago.

In 1993, I had an amazing stroke of luck. During the summer, I had taken some courses at the University of British Columbia to polish up my grasp of Classical Pagan mythology. Early that fall, many of the religious studies faculty had attended the Parliament of World Religions Centenary in Chicago. Contemporary Pagans were a major presence there, and when the UBC faculty members who had attended heard that there had been an actual Pagan Wiccan (me) amongst their students that summer—and a "mature student" at that (I was 54)—negotiations got underway. Five years later I emerged with a master's degree in religious studies. My field of study was Late Antiquity and the relationship between traditional Graeco-Roman Paganism and early Christianity.

3. The name was invented by M. Macha Nightmare.

As a Pagan in grad school, I soon noticed that there was a lot of academic interest in new religious movements (NRMs) in general, and in modern Paganism in particular. NRMs hardly ever survive the death of their founder. And those that do very often go on, like Mormon or Christian Science, to become major religions. Our own founder, Gerald Gardner, died in 1964, and that's about the point when Paganism started getting legs. By the middle 1990s, many scholars were writing learned articles about Paganism, but few of these were reaching the Pagan public.

Open and ongoing dialogues between grassroots writers and academic scholars are few and far between, especially among us Pagans. Most non-academics are satisfied with preaching to the converted at "cons" and festivals, and many scholarly articles of considerable interest are buried in journals that are not readily accessible to the literate Pagan-in-the-street.

So in 1997 my friend Diana Tracy and I founded *The Pomegranate: A New Journal of Neopagan Thought* as a semi-scholarly journal. (footnotes and bibliographies encouraged, but not required). We intended it, from the beginning, to provide a conduit of information between academic Pagans and the (literate) Pagan public, and our letters and articles originated at both ends of this spectrum—grass roots, and the halls of academe.

It was our plan that the main articles in the magazine be peer-reviewed, but not the rest of the magazine (the "Workings" section, some book reviews, the odd "editorial" article, etc), in order to allow for at least a modicum of "grassroots" writing by intelligent, well-educated, but non-academic writers.

Support for this project was immediate, generous and dramatic. Chas S. Clifton and John Yohalem contributed articles for the first issue. In our second issue, Ronald Hutton encouraged us to reprint an article he had originally published in *Antiquities*. We launched the journal at that year's American Academy of Religion meeting in San Francisco, and several of the papers read at that conference found their way into our third issue. *The Pomegranate* depended from its earliest days on the active support of both the heavy-lifters in the broader Pagan studies community and number of independent scholars and enthusiasts here in the Pacific Northwest and the Canadian West. And it was Hutton's willingness to let us to reprint articles and reviews he'd already written for established journals, and later to offer us excerpts from his upcoming books, that lent our fledgling journal a great deal of much-appreciated cachet and prestige.

Critical comment was mostly positive. For example, Sabina Magliocco, folklorist and Pagan scholar from California State University, Northridge, wrote, "I must say that I am impressed by the recent issues of the *Pom* you have sent me. The articles are for the most part serious and scholarly, and the debates are intelligent. What a relief—not another journal of bad poetry and sappy invocations!"

I went on to edit and publish the first eighteen issues. I also joined in the efforts of Pagan scholars around the world to create the Contemporary Pagan Studies Group, which has since been granted program-unit status by the American Academy of Religion.

In May of 2004, the "new" *Pomegranate* appeared, and that's the one distributed by Equinox. This is an entirely peer-reviewed "journal of record" for Pagan scholarship. Pagan academics who must "publish or perish" now have a respectable venue in which to do so. Chas S. Clifton (who helped edit the "old" *Pomegranate*) is now the general editor, and I, after serving as book-review editor for several issues, am now on the masthead as "editor emeritus." Unfortunately, the new *Pomegranate* is priced for sale to university libraries, and its price discourages subscribers from the general public.

The original *Pomegranate* was intended from the outset to function as a conduit, bridging the gap between the Pagan academic and the literate Pagan-in-the-street. The exchange of information was actively encouraged, and provocative and constructive ideas quite often passed in both directions. Scholars of Pagan studies obviously need the *Pomegranate* in its current peer-reviewed form. But, like the papers read at scholarly conferences that are attended only by other academics, articles in the new *Pom* quite actually and all-too-effectively disappear from public view.

Resurrecting the old *Pomegranate* in its original and hopelessly anachronistic print form is clearly not an option. But surely there are bright young scholars among us who are schooled in the arts and technologies of the blog and website. Could it be possible for some of these forward-looking denizens of the digital interface to create an attractive and easily accessible web presence for, say, the Contemporary Pagan Studies Group? This could be enormously effective venue for the publication of brief and succinct scholarly article and essays. Articles in the old *Pomegranate* averaged about 4,000–5,000 words. In the new *Pomegranate* they run nearly double that. Links to more dense and authoritative articles could be provided,

and carefully monitored provisions could be made for mutually educational dialogue.

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Abstract

This article covers the author's academic career from part-time "freeway flyer" to Academic Dean at Cherry Hill Seminary. Introduced to contemporary Witchcraft by one of her college students before anything called Pagan Studies existed, Griffin was one of the very first to publish fieldwork on the topic in an academic journal. Here she explores the challenges, where she found support for her work, and the key circumstances and choices that allowed her a measure of success.

Keywords: academics; Dianics; Goddess; Paganism; self-reflection.

When the large red-headed student stood up the first week of the semester and announced to my women's studies class at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), that she was a Dianic Witch, I knew it was going to be an interesting semester. It was 1987 and I was a "freeway flyer," one of those PhDs teaching on multiple campuses, trying to patch together enough part-time jobs to survive until that magical tenure-track position appeared. Mine had been the first graduate class entering the University of California, Irvine to receive an acceptance letter that said many of us would never find a position in the academy. The country was turning out more PhDs than universities could hire. But the UCI social science program emphasized quantitative research, and assured us the statistical skills we developed would practically guarantee us "applied" jobs. I spent my "field" research in the dark basement of the Santa

1. Wendy Griffin is professor emerita of women's studies at California State University, Long Beach, and academic dean of Cherry Hill Seminary.

Ana Courthouse looking through divorce case files until I had a sufficient number of custodial single parents to satisfy my committee. Although I did statistical analysis, I didn't enjoy it.

So when the Witch invited the whole class to her coven's ritual to celebrate the spring equinox, I decided to go. When I found out that I was going to be the only guest and that the coven was primarily lesbian, I turned to Tanice Foltz, another freeway flyer with whom I shared an office in the sociology department. I wanted to be particularly careful of being involved in any student activities off-campus because the women's studies program had been the target of anti-feminist and homophobic attacks a few years earlier. Academic careers had been ruined and the ensuing legal case was still not resolved.² I told Tanice I didn't want to go alone but would go if she came with me. She had done qualitative dissertation research on an alternate healer, and was game for an adventure. That first ritual, the year that followed as Tanice and I did research in Dianic Witchcraft and the effect these had on us were explored in a publication years later, later because it took us several years to get up the courage to write it.³

I had known a couple of solitary witches in the 1970s, but they never said their practices were part of a religion.⁴ And apart from reading the Tarot and doing spells, they did nothing like what my student and her covenmates did in what we came to call the Circle of the Redwood Moon.⁵ Besides the obvious feminism, it took me some time to understand the appeal of Dianic Witchcraft. A little over a year after my introduction to the group, we were camped out in the mountains surrounding Los Angeles. Redwood Moon had organized the weekend, but there were women there from all over Southern California. The ritual was starting late, the organizers were in a huddle with last-minute details, and suddenly the rest of the

2. Years later when I became chair of the women's studies department, I collected all the materials related to the case and donated them to the archives at UCLA, where scholars and interested parties may study them today.

3. Tanice G. Foltz and Wendy Griffin, "She Changes Everything She Touches: Ethnographic Journeys of Self Discovery," in *Composing Ethnographies*, ed. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996), 301-30.

4. Since my impression is that they didn't see themselves as *religious* practitioners, the word *witch* is not capitalized here.

5. In time, we learned that the coven's real name was quite well known in some Pagan circles and decided that pseudonyms for both the coven and its members were best.

women gathered in a circle under the full moon and started chanting their demand: "Ritual! Ritual! Ritual!"

With a small start, I realized these women *loved* doing ritual. It was so long ago I can't remember why I was so surprised, except that I always assumed religion was about going to church, an obligation to be endured.

And then it clicked.

From the time I was two years old until I was 16, I had spent every summer surrounded by women in the forests of Wisconsin and Michigan. My mother was the associate director of a Campfire Girls camp during WWII and then opened a girls' camp of her own.⁶ Before the campers arrived and after they had gone, I would be left pretty much on my own. I would take a lunch and walk in the woods, build fairy gardens, try to communicate with small animals. When I was a little older I'd take one of the canoes and paddle around the three small connecting lakes, losing myself in the tall reeds. I always felt safe, protected because, I would actively pretend, I was *part* of the wilderness. I remembered how we campers would walk two by two, singing softly as we processed down through the silver birch trees to the lake and the campfire that awaited us. I didn't know the word "spirituality" at the time and probably wouldn't have recognized it if I had. But as I stood there in the mountains outside Los Angeles, the memories flooded back and the magic of the night brought that sense of connection from my childhood. That was when I realized the feelings were spiritual, that I was a spiritual person, and what these women were doing were practices that they believed healed them and connected them to a greater whole.

Professional Organizations

The first place Tanice and I presented a talk on this topic was at a conference of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness in 1988, an organization with which Tanice was familiar. But it was at the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) where I found real support for this research. The ASR was quite small, only about five hundred members at the time, and fewer than one hundred came to the annual conferences. This meant that I could get to know people fairly easily and they got to know my work. People suggested

6. Wendy Griffin, "Finding My Religion." 2011. <http://wendygriffinonline.com/?tag=kinnahwee>.

readings in qualitative methods for me, made helpful comments when I presented, and told me what journals might be interested in publishing my research.⁷

After a little over one year with my student's coven, her father died, and the coven organized the funeral. It was a prime opportunity for research.⁸ The result, our first publication, appeared in *Qualitative Sociology*.⁹ The cover for this particular issue was a dramatic change from the usual staid academic journal blandness. It was a child's drawing of a witch flying on her broom across a moonlit sky.

In 1990 I was hired in a tenure-track position in the women's studies program at CSULB as the first full-time hire. My salary immediately increased by \$10,000, even though my workload was about the same. The rest of the faculty all had joint appointments with other departments, which meant that they did their service and got their travel money elsewhere. As a feminist activist and "returning student," I was especially thrilled to get the position at my age, even though it entailed teaching eight classes a year, doing mountains of extra service and paying my expenses for every conference until I got tenure.

I continued attending the ASR conferences, where I met Pagan scholar Michael York. The two of us became dear friends and would go on to do significant work in promoting Pagan studies. I also began to attend the conferences of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR). This organization was a little over twice the size of the ASR but every bit as supportive. There were other members presenting on Pagan studies, although we didn't yet call it that. Not all of our small group would call themselves Pagans, but at a conference in St. Louis, we met under the city's huge arch at dawn to do a ritual for three of us to get tenure and one to be promoted to full professor. We also visited the replica of the Parthenon in Atlanta during one SSSR conference and left flowers at the feet of the giant Athena.¹⁰ A small group of us began organizing panels on Pagan studies at both organizations' annual conferences.

7. I am especially fond of the ASR because it published a paper of mine in *Sociology of Religion* that went on to be reprinted six times in other venues.

8. By this time, Tanice had relocated to Indiana.

9. Wendy Griffin Lozano and Tanice G. Foltz, "Into the Darkness: An Ethnographic Study of Witchcraft and Death," *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 3 (1990): 211-34. (My name was Wendy G. Lozano at the time.)

10. The guard told us that sometimes when he arrived early in the morning he would find barley scattered at her feet.

Back at CSULB, support for my research was uneven. My department began to pay for me to attend one conference a year. I was doing research on women, after all. I suspect it would have been a problem had I been looking at mixed Pagan groups. I had moved my focus from Dianics to the more generic Goddess Movement. But the general grant and funding office suggested I not use the word “lesbian” in my work and find something else to research. No one was interested in Witches or goddesses. But I was.

In order to get a sabbatical my seventh year, I had to apply for tenure and a sabbatical at the same time. Fortunately, I met Eileen Barker at the SSSR. Eileen had recently started INFORM, a center for information on new religious movements, through the sociology department at the London School of Economics (LSE). She invited me to spend my sabbatical at LSE and was kind enough to put a letter to that effect in my tenure file. I had sent a letter of inquiry to various academic publishers about two potential books I wanted to write. One was an anthology on Goddess Spirituality and the other a sole-authored book on Dianic Witches. Sage Publishers wrote back that they were very interested in the anthology and liked the sample chapter I sent. That letter also went into the tenure file. I never wrote the book on Dianics. By the time the anthology came out, Sage had sold the imprint to AltaMira.¹¹

Foreign Adventures

Michael York gave me Vivianne Crowley’s contact information a few months before I left for LSE in 1997. I wrote her and she responded by telling me the Pagan Federation was having an event the week I expected to arrive. She also mentioned that she was unable to accept an invitation to speak at the University of Wales at Lampeter and asked if I was interested in substituting for her. I certainly was. The night with the Pagan Federation happened to be Valentine’s Day, and the celebration was quite unlike anything I had experienced with the Dianics, especially when Wild Hunt Morris bounded in with erect staffs. I began to see Paganism from a more holistic perspective.

The visit to Lampeter inspired me to write to other universities offering to speak about my research and to well-known Pagans asking for interviews. Several people invited me to their homes and

11. Wendy Griffin, ed. *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment* (Walnut Creek, AltaMira Press, 2000).

my network expanded. Little was known in England about Dianic Witchcraft at the time, so I was invited several places. Oxford University even offered to pay me 50 pounds. I was delighted, as London was much more expensive than I had imagined or planned for. After dinner with a few of the faculty in Oxford, I was taken to the campus to speak. I had an American's naïve awe of the very name of Oxford, the "historic seat of learning," and was on my very best behavior. I told them about the Dianics, their history, about seeing women's bodies as sacred and about how they celebrated Beltane. At the end of my talk, there was silence.

Finally, a woman in front asked loudly, "What's the matter with these women? Don't they have any boyfriends?"

Graham Harvey was in the audience and has never let me forget that. Oxford never paid me, despite repeated requests.

England was a wonderful period for me. I had lived there before in the 1960s, traveling with my then-husband's rock band. But this time I was entirely on my own and thrown on my own resources. I love adventure, but I am also a bit shy when meeting new people, so I was more than a little outside my comfort zone. I lived in a small flat in St. John's Wood, right around the corner from Abbey Road. I devoured the weekly magazine that announced what was going on, looking for anything Pagan, and then I'd go there and try to meet people. I spoke to Eileen Barker's class at LSE, used the library, INFORM, and faculty dining room and I was grateful for the office they let me use. I spent a lot of time at the British Museum and nearby Atlantis Bookstore. Caroline Wise, the owner, and second only to Olivia Robertson in the Fellowship of Isis (FOI), even gave a small dinner party for me there. Used to the long distances in the United States, taking the train or bus around England seemed fast and easy to me. I spoke at Glastonbury and at Talking Stick, a Pagan meet-up, and heard about the Beltane celebration in Hastings, where the Jack in the Green was sacrificed. Of course I jumped on a train to see it. I heard Druids were celebrating the spring equinox near the Tower of London and went to photograph. The Pagan Federation held a ritual somewhere in a woods outside London and later in a stone circle in Scotland. I was there both times.

When my lease finished on the flat, I took the ferry to Dublin, rented a car and drove around for two weeks visiting sacred sites. I had written to Olivia Robertson, high priestess and co-founder of FOI, and asked to interview her. I told her when I expected to be near her home in Clonegal. She agreed and set a time and day, but when

I arrived, she didn't remember agreeing to talk to me. She was busy hosting a tour of visiting American Goddess women, accompanied by my friend Caroline. She told me to hang around with the group and see what developed. So I joined the group and went down into the cellars to explore the Temple of Isis. After the group left, we all went down to the local pub. Olivia felt her temple had been insulted in the Dublin papers that day, so the pub owner bought her drinks. After some time, she invited me back to the castle for dinner.¹² We sat in the kitchen eating bread and soup and I set up my tape recorder as she told me exactly why the Goddess was so important. I drove an hour back to my hotel through a powerful rainstorm. The wind whipped at the trees and I played a tape of Enya at full blast. What an amazing adventure I was having! I finally got to my room in one piece and discovered that my tape recorder had failed.

At a conference in Winchester put on by Graham Harvey, I met Asphodel Long, a British Goddess foremother and respected poet and author. At her invitation, I visited her in Brighton. Over lunch, she suggested I rent a camper and really explore England. I thought it was a wonderful idea, and my last month of sabbatical was spent traveling around England and Scotland in a van. One of the highlights of this experience was meeting a contact provided by Eileen Barker, who had an acquaintance willing to talk with me confidentially, but only late at night when she got off work. I was camped out in the New Forest, where Gerald Gardner said he was initiated into a coven of Witches. There was a full moon, of course, and it was almost midnight by the time my visitor arrived bearing a bottle of red wine. We sat parked under the trees as she told me that she and two others had been sent to the United States in the 1960s to spread the teachings of Aleister Crowley. I had to promise never to reveal her name, as she said she was currently working for the British government. I have no idea if anything she said was true, but it was a great evening.

The American Academy of Religion

Vivianne suggested I check out the Nature Religions Scholars email list when I would return home. I did, and was impressed with several people. One was Chas Clifton, who had started it. Apart from knowing a lot about things I didn't, Chas seemed to know everyone. I

12. It was referred to as Castle Clonegal and was a large impressive home built in the seventeenth century. Walt Disney would probably not have called it a castle.

thought of this when my anthology came out. By that time, Sage had sold the AltaMira imprint to Rowman & Littlefield. I told my editor there that they should start a series in Pagan studies.¹³ He was enthusiastic about my proposal, but I suddenly realized that I couldn't possibly do this alone. My in-person Pagan contacts in the United States were either Dianics, feminists in the Goddess Movement, or women scholars looking primarily at women. I knew it would be a very short series unless I expanded my reach. So I contacted Chas to see if he would be interested in co-editing the series with me.

I had been reluctant to join the American Association for Religion (AAR). My two small professional organizations had served me very well. The AAR seemed overwhelming large, and I knew my university's limited funds for travel would never cover airfare, a conference and the five nights at a hotel. But I decided if I were going to do this series, I needed to meet Chas in person and see if we could work together. I bit the bullet, joined and paid my own way to the AAR in 2001. We met in the bar and got along so well that we co-edited five books before I retired from CSULB in 2011.

Previously, in 1997, a small group of scholars had proposed forming an official Pagan studies consultation in the AAR.¹⁴ The proposal was rejected on the grounds that the scholars had to show that their concerns were not being met by other program units, such as Ritual Studies or New Religious Movements. By the time I went to Denver to meet Chas, Pagan studies scholars were meeting as an "additional meeting" for two and a half hours the day before the AAR. Papers were presented just as they were in the official sessions, but it was not an official program unit. In 2003, Chas accepted the editorship of *The Pomegranate* and Cat McEarchern, an American graduate student in Scotland, stepped forward to organize a day-long Pagan Studies Conference preceding the annual meetings.

The AAR had been holding joint annual meetings with the Society of Biblical Literature, which was one of the reasons the attendance was so large. But the two organizations decided to split their combined annual meeting after 2007. This change promised to make the AAR open to proposals for more program units, and by this time we had demonstrated that scholars of Pagan studies could produce

13. I don't believe it was called that yet. There was some debate about whether it was "Nature Religion" or "Pagan Studies," with Chas promoting the latter and Bron Taylor the former.

14. A consultation is a temporary program unit with a three-year lifespan, designed to test the depth of interest in a particular area of religious studies.

enough substantive material to fill a session each year. Following the 2004 annual meeting, Cat, Michael York, and I proposed a Contemporary Pagan Studies consultation. This time the proposal was accepted, and Michael and I became co-chairs.¹⁵ The new status guaranteed us one formal panel of papers during the regularly scheduled meetings for the next three years. The term could be renewed once, after which we either had to disband or move up to “group” status. While officially we were limited to one formal session, Michael and I usually managed to parlay this into two formal sessions by doing a joint panel with another consultation, usually arranged over cocktails at the unit chairs’ reception on the last night of the meetings.

Our first official session as a consultation was during the 2005 meeting in Philadelphia. By 2007, we had managed to get three panels for the annual meeting and our attendance numbers were very strong. As our three-year consultation was up for review, I applied for full group status rather than a simple three-year renewal as a consultation. In December, 2007, we were granted this status, a full three years ahead of schedule. I believe this was very important, as it signaled that Pagan studies as a formal area of study had not only arrived, it had matured beyond those lumped together under the rubric of new religious movements, at least for the AAR.

In January, 2007, I became chair of the Women’s Studies Department at CSULB.¹⁶ I had entered an early-retirement program a semester earlier, one that provided a financial incentive for retiring within a set five years and required me to work half time. Since the position of chair was a half-time appointment, my work now became completely administrative. Although I wasn’t teaching, I continued to publish an article here, book reviews there, and I continued on the editorial board of *The Pomegranate* and as co-coordinator of our group at the AAR.

Things seemed to have stalled with our series in Pagan studies. Rowman & Littlefield let our editor go and brought in one who wanted to move us to a new imprint and restrict our books to hardback. Chas and I knew what that would do to the price of the books, so we were reluctant to continue with them. We spoke with a few publishers and finally reached an agreement with Equinox Publishing, publisher of

15. I’ve often suspected that Michael and I ended up as co-chairs because we were there at the right time and were the only Pagan PhDs with secure academic jobs.

16. By this time, the program had grown into an official department with seven full-time faculty and several more with joint appointments.

The Pomegranate. But then Equinox went through a merger, and the book series was temporarily handed off to another publisher and another new editor. During all these changes, I decided it was time to step down from the series. As a fairly new department chair, I had enough on my hands without continuing something that was beginning to feel futile. I suggested to Chas that he find another co-editor and we made the announcement to Pagan scholars at the AAR.

Michael's and my position as co-coordinators of the Pagan Studies Group at the AAR termed-out in 2010. I suggested to the steering committee that Chas and Jone Salomonsen of the University of Oslo would make excellent co-chairs, and they concurred. I was asked to stay on and agreed to only as an honorary member, as I felt it was important to give younger scholars the opportunity. The AAR in Atlanta in 2010 was my last in my official role.

Cherry Hill Seminary

But a funny thing had happened to me on the way to Atlanta. That academic year was my last before retirement. I was beginning to prepare for this mentally, thinking about knitting, writing a book, and maybe learning to play the harp. I was in between flights at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport and ducked into the ladies' restroom, when I ran into author, feminist, Witch, and Pagan activist M. Macha Nightmare, whom I had met originally on the Nature Scholars' Network. She was chair of the board of directors at Cherry Hill Seminary (CHS), the online Pagan seminary offering a master of divinity (MDiv) degree, as well as short self-enrichment classes. Over lunch at the airport Macha told me all about Cherry Hill and then mentioned that the seminary was looking for an academic dean. Was I interested?

I wasn't uninterested, but I wasn't eager either. But by the time we arrived in Atlanta, I was willing to explore the possibility of applying for the position. Macha stayed with me as the airlines searched for my lost luggage, talking on the phone most of the time to Holli Emore, who I learned was the executive director of Cherry Hill. Holli drove in from her home in South Carolina and she, Macha, and I had lunch one day during the conference for a lengthy discussion about what they were looking for and what I might offer.

It took me a couple of months to decide. The job was unpaid, and Holli told me it would probably be about ten hours a week, although I suspected it could be considerably more. But when I thought about

it, I had to admit that I had the academic administrative experience and the timing couldn't have been better for me. I had worked for years to legitimize the topic of Pagan studies and believed in the importance of Pagans having all the same legal rights as members of the legally acknowledged religions. Although I personally had never felt the need for religious ministering, I knew there were people who did, and I believed they deserved to have help that knew both how to lead a ritual and how to deal professionally with trauma. I believed in the mission of Cherry Hill Seminary.

I took the position a few months before officially retiring from CSULB. At Cherry Hill, I have been fortunate to work with deeply dedicated and hard-working professionals. That is especially important, as only the executive director and the faculty are paid, the latter only during the semester they teach and never what they are really worth. We are a small seminary and exist on a shoestring budget. Fortunately, I get a small pension from CSULB now that I am "retired," so I can afford to do service at CHS.

Coming to Cherry Hill felt like I was able to bring various aspects of my life together, the scholar, the activist, the author, the teacher, and the administrator—the practical and the spiritual. Procedures, policies, and curriculum all have been tightened in an on-going process. Because of the contacts I had made, I was able to bring in some new faculty, including noted international Pagan scholars. More have committed to us, but haven't yet found the time. We now have eight faculty members with MDiv's, something we sorely needed. Because of repeated requests, we are now offering a special MDiv focused on military chaplaincy. This unique program offers classes not given at any other seminary in the world, and the curriculum has already generated praise from outside the Pagan community. Besides the graduate programs, we maintain a rich assortment of four-week self-enrichment courses called Insights that cover a wide range of topics, from mindful meditation to designing coming-of-age rituals.

One way we do the kind of service that inspired me as an activist is through "Rhizomes." This is a series of five Insight classes we offer at our cost, intended to help strengthen Pagan groups. These include leadership, public relations, fundraising, ethics, and conflict resolution. The Pagan Life Academy we have developed for prison inmates who contact us is one of our most popular programs and provides lessons and rituals that move them through a year of spiritual growth and self-development.

In 2013 CHS held a symposium on sacred land with the University of South Carolina and brought Ronald Hutton over from Bristol University to be our keynote speaker. One of the oldest post-secondary institutions in the United States, USC had never done this kind of thing before, and to do it with a Pagan seminary was remarkable. I was fortunate to be able to edit a small anthology based on papers presented that weekend.¹⁷ USC felt the event was so successful, it agreed to hold another symposium in 2016. This time the topic is religion and its engagement with climate change. Bron Taylor is the keynoter, as might be expected.

If moving deosil means not only to move with the direction of the sun, but also to invoke and evoke energies, to go down deeper into the vortex, then moving in the opposite direction, widdershins, must also mean to come up and return from the deep, to release. When I joined CHS in 2011, I promised to be there five years. Those five years are coming to a close and I am not yet ready to step down, I have a few more goals to accomplish at CHS. But at this stage of my life and my career, I am clearly beginning to walk widdershins.

Writing this article is the first time I have looked back at my career as a Pagan studies scholar in any detail. Four main things stand out to me. First, I never would have gotten anywhere without putting in a great deal of hard work. That is a given for all of us, but to begin undergraduate education as a single parent on welfare in her thirties is uniquely challenging.

Second, the networking I have been able to do through professional organizations and the contacts I made there have been invaluable, beyond anything I could have imagined at the time. To me, that is why these annual meetings are worth it, even if there have been times when I had to go hide out in my hotel room from overload.

Third, I believe it is important to take risks, and I certainly have taken my share. Risk-taking doesn't always work out, but you can always learn something from it. That knowledge can pay off in future, unexpected ways.

Fourth, all the hard work in the world would not have led me to a successful career without good luck. In several key places I was in the right place at the right time and prepared enough to take the hand of the Goddess Fortuna when she offered it to me.

I have been blessed.

17. Wendy Griffin (ed.), *Sacred Lands and Spiritual Landscape* (Tucson: ADF Publishing, 2014).

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Playing Croquet with Hedgehogs: (Still) Becoming a Scholar of Paganism and Animism

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Abstract

A reflection on the development of a career partly concerned with the study of Paganisms. After indicating some ways of using a quotation from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the article considers the question of the subject matter of Pagan Studies. It connects contemporary Paganisms and other cultural phenomena (e.g. indigenous religions and animisms) and indicates the importance of respecting the hosts of our research. The second half of the article concerns the "difficult game of academia." It offers some ideas about learning how to play, being open to serendipity, and being aware that some colleagues think different rules are important.

Keywords: approaches; animism; guesthood; methods; Paganism; respect; serendipity.

In 1992 I presented a paper at a conference of the Traditional Cosmology Society concerned with the ways in which diverse people

1. Graham Harvey is professor of religious studies at the Open University, UK. His research is concerned with the performance and rhetoric of identities among Jews, Pagans and indigenous peoples. He is particularly interested in the "new animism," embracing relational and material approaches to interactions between humans and the larger than human world. His recent publications include *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2013) and *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (2013).

might be said to map their worlds. I called the paper and the journal article which followed, "Gods and Hedgehogs in the Greenwood: Contemporary Pagan Cosmologies."² Reading it again, I am surprised to find that many of the themes and issues which still interest me are at least mentioned. The surprise, for me, is not precisely that so much of my later career is glimpsed in this five-page article. It is more that I had remembered this conference presentation and article as being the origins of an almost accidental and, at the time, relatively simple mention of hedgehogs. While that is true, it also seems to include my first references to animism and the interrelation of religion(s) to inter-species encounters, the ecology of a multi-species community, and much more that I think I now understand better but not well enough. Other issues that I now consider to be generative of and vital to the academic study of religions and cultures (whatever those words might mean) are present in the article. Perhaps that should not surprise me because it also includes my first citation of the work of Irving Hallowell and Te Pakaka Tawhai.³ These are authors whose work continues to inspire me and other colleagues to think differently and carefully about the world and about scholarship (i.e. ontology and methodology). At the time, animism, Hallowell and Tawhai were new for me. They seemed to have presented themselves quite serendipitously and with no hint that I would continue to travel with them or think through them. Even hedgehogs and the study of contemporary religions were relatively new to me.

Before considering how this happened and what happened next—all with a view to saying something about the study of Paganisms (and other religions) rather than to writing a full autobiography—let me explain the title of the present article. My PhD supervisor introduced me to the linguistic postulations of Humpty Dumpty (i.e. words can mean whatever someone wants them to mean but deserve extra pay if they work extra hard), but while in Wonderland Alice also encountered hedgehogs. Here is a key moment:

2. Graham Harvey, "Gods and Hedgehogs in the Greenwood," in *Mapping Invisible Worlds*, ed. Gavin D. Flood (Edinburgh: Traditional Cosmology Society, 1993), 89–93.

3. A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Culture in History*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 19–52; Te Pakaka Tawhai, "Maori Religion," in *The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion*, ed. Stewart Sutherland and Peter Clarke (London: Routledge, 1988), 96–105.

The chief difficulty Alice found at first was in managing her flamingo: she succeeded in getting its body tucked away, comfortably enough, under her arm, with its legs hanging down, but generally, just as she had got its neck nicely straightened out, and was going to give the hedgehog a blow with its head, it would twist itself round and look up in her face, with such a puzzled expression that she could not help bursting out laughing; and when she had got its head down, and was going to begin again, it was very provoking to find that the hedgehog had unrolled itself, and was in the act of crawling away; besides all this, there was generally a ridge or furrow in the way wherever she wanted to send the hedgehog to, and, as the doubled-up soldiers were always getting up and walking off to other parts of the ground, Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed.⁴

Over-interpreting and being far too serious about this passage, I see the potential of these flamingos as generators of thoughts about the unruliness and non-acquiescence of those subjected to abuses by the more powerful. Alice's laughter, in such a context, suggests both cruelty and a failure to consider the perspective of others (a lesson in phenomenological methodology perhaps). Like the flamingos, the recalcitrant ridges and furrows could be used to represent the resistance of "nature" towards playing the "inert materiality" role assigned to it in the dominant anthropocentric and anthropocene fantasy. Perhaps the soldiers remind us of people who are so utterly un-interested in being analyzed or theorized that they wander off rather than answering our questions. However, it is (always) the hedgehogs who attract my attention. As stand-ins for research subjects (e.g., Pagans or Paganisms), they and the "difficult game" of scholarship are the subject of this article.

What Hedgehogs Do

In my article about Pagan cosmology I first use hedgehogs as self-evidently empirical beings. I note that some Pagans might consider deities, elementals or faeries to be "as real as humans or hedgehogs."⁵ Others might understand them to be archetypes or metaphors for some processes within humans or within "nature" (a word I seem to have had little problem with at the time). I repeat that thought on the following page, playfully (perhaps) suggesting that if some otherworld beings "may only be visible at special moments to rare

4. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Published in a combined volume with *Through the Looking Glass* (London: Puffin, 1963 [1865]) 110–11.

5. Harvey, "Gods and Hedgehogs," 90.

human-persons” this may apply equally to “rare hedgehog- or tree-persons”. Much of the article seems to seek ways of speaking about Pagan cosmologies that escape from separations between supernatural and natural kinds, and between humans and other species. In later research and publications I made better use of the work of colleagues who had also been inspired by learning from or about indigenous ontologies. In particular, a 1992 issue of the journal *Religion* devoted to Native American religions, guest-edited by Ken Morrison, provides a solid foundation for “non-supernaturalist” and personalist or relational approaches to religion.

In addition to employing hedgehogs in order to say something about the multi-species world, I invoked them in claiming Pagan parallels with Tawhai’s statements about Maori religion. I wrote that Paganism is “not about the worship of some greater power(s), still less it is about attempting to gain forgiveness and salvation.” Rather, I continued,

It is about discovering (and enhancing) the relationships and fulfilling the responsibilities of sharing a small planet with a host of human and “other-than-human persons”. If a Pagan rescues a hedgehog from a dangerous road this is not because the hedgehog was praying for salvation or will be eternally grateful. It is what must be done in redressing of the imbalance caused to “other-than-human persons” by dangerous human lifestyles.⁶

I concluded that “For the most part, Pagans, Gods and Hedgehogs will get on with lives quietly aware of the web of life that is the Greenwood.”⁷ I seem to have been thinking of Pagans as environmentalists or practitioners of a “nature religion.”⁸ These interpretations and labels now seem tricky, but the article was among my earliest efforts to write about such matters.

The thought that hedgehogs are endangered by our road traffic inspired a further analogy in some of my later publications about Paganisms.⁹ Among the beings who have entered Pagan stories from

6. Ibid., 92.

7. Ibid.

8. In the sense of the term employed by Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

9. Graham Harvey, “Fantasy in the Study of Religions: Paganism as Observed and Enhanced by Terry Pratchett,” *Diskus 6* (2000), http://basr.ac.uk/diskus_old/diskus1-6/harvey-6.txt; “Discworld and Otherworld: The Popularisation of Pagan Fantasy Literature,” in *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, ed. Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 41–51.

older folk traditions there are faeries and elves. I cited Terry Pratchett's humorous but accurate summing up much of the older, pre-romantic, pre-urban view of such beings:

Elves are wonderful. They provoke wonder. Elves are marvellous. They cause marvels. Elves are fantastic. They create fantasies. Elves are glamorous. They project glamour. Elves are enchanting. They weave enchantment. Elves are terrific. They beget terror. The thing about words is that meanings can twist just like a snake, and if you want to find snakes look for them behind words that have changed their meaning. No-one ever said elves are nice. Elves are bad.¹⁰

Hedgehogs are not (I think) bad. They might not even enchant everyone. Neither do most humans *deliberately* act badly towards hedgehogs. Nonetheless, we are typically careless of them. Generally speaking, neither the desires nor the frailty of hedgehogs (confronted by vehicles) provoke our interest or concern as a matter of course. We are, perhaps, like elves in that we expect other species to play by our rules. That might be fine if we had not extended our natural preference for those of our own species into a more totalizing and even totalitarian notion that only human interests matter. We have imagined the larger-than-human world to be resources, there for the taking, an environment we move through rather than a community to which we belong. This is, however, not the point of my use of the hedgehog/human/elf theme. It was, instead, an aspect of thinking about the relationships between imagination, Fantasy literature, mythology and folklore within Paganisms.

How Hedgehogs are like Pagans

As my interest in Paganisms became more central to my research (and later to my teaching of undergraduate students and post-graduate researchers), I realized that there are various other ways in which Pagans, Paganisms and hedgehogs are akin to each other. Importantly, all other religious and cultural phenomena share these similarities. It could not be any other way in a cosmos in which hedgehogs and religion evolved in relationship with all other beings and interrelations (as I argue in my 2013 book, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*). Thus, this section could be extended to consider analogies with other communities and persons (human or otherwise).

10. Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies* (London: Gollancz, 1993), 169–70.

Hedgehogs are not static. They move around both because they seek things and because they are responsive to what happens around them. A full understanding of them requires observation of change and of contingency. We cannot make claims about all hedgehogs based on seeing only a few doing whatever it is that we first notice them doing. Maybe tomorrow night they will do something different. Maybe what we notice today was actually quite eccentric even for that individual or group. I hope that the parallels between hedgehogs and Pagans here will be self-evident. It is, for example, possible to hear people talk about Paganisms as if they were entirely Wiccan or entirely British or entirely environmentalist. It is possible to read about leading figures in the Pagan revival or in its more recent history as if they represented “what Pagans do.” Sometimes this is purely because people have only limited time to present their ideas, but sometimes there is a carelessness about diversity and change.

However, while it is true that to understand hedgehogs we need to observe more than one, we do not need studies that only replicate research about hedgehogs in another place. Scholarship is not completed when the description is perfected. Thus, description of what hedgehogs or Pagans do in particular places is only interesting (in a scholarly context) when it generates or challenges critical debates. Even describing relationships between observed phenomena is not enough—even if you use the language of networks¹¹ or meshwork.¹² The purpose of research is less to do with answering questions than raising them, thinking and working through them. It is, therefore, important to notice the spikiness of hedgehogs. This results from their relationships with other beings. Hedgehogs evolved and exist in complex webs of life—for which the word “nature” is never rich enough while the word “ecology” is rarely inspiring enough. Hedgehogs need to be spiky because other creatures like to eat them. However, their spikes also provide homes for fleas and other creatures. Hedgehogs, like humans and all other species, are symbiotic and inherently, inescapably relational. If they are prey to foxes, they also consume slugs, beetles, caterpillars, and cat food. They are citizens of the diverse communities we call gardens, hedgerows, or woodlands. Pagans and Paganisms, too, exist in relation to other

11. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

12. Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 80; *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 84–6.

people and other movements. Being aware of those connections is vital to proper understanding. This, though, is to extend marginally a thought already offered. In tracing what spikiness tells us about hedgehogs' relationships we are attending to the ways in which they make plain other facts about the world, and we are tracing interactions that provoke questions. In a similar way, connections to debates about performance, materiality, esotericism, animism, literature, individual and social values, social change, individualization, activism, and much more, have attracted the interest of scholars who were not previously interested in Pagans to join in studying Paganisms.

As well as being enmeshed with, embraided into, and enlivened by the lives and interactions of others (of the same or other species), hedgehogs have needs and desires. As individuals and as groups they want things. It seems utterly unlikely that any hedgehog's list of "wants" includes being the subject of research... unless, perhaps, they appreciate those whose research may improve their ability to negotiate roads and other busily human spaces. Hedgehogs can be as recalcitrant and resistant as Alice's flamingos, ridges, and furrows. They may disappear into the gloaming or the undergrowth so that they become difficult or impossible to fully observe. At other times, they seem remarkably heedless of living in full view not only of beneficent or bemused observers but also of potential predators. Similarly, while some Pagans resist being "researched at," others certainly relish the attention. As with other religious or cultural minorities, some feel that being scholarly interest demonstrates legitimacy or some other style of recognition. There is an invitation, in this respect, for researchers to consider the needs and desires of those among whom they research. They could, at least, ask what it would mean to respect their hosts (whether they be hedgehogs or Pagans). Importantly, researchers should approach Pagans, hedgehogs and others on the basis that these potential subjects or hosts are already adept at performing and knowing themselves and their wishes. A superior stance towards those who are already expert about being Pagan or being hedgehog is a significant hindrance to achieving understanding or contributing to debate. This is true whether or not the questions of interest to academics are the same as those which motivate their subjects.

As a bridge to the following section, I note Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's wise words about what taking people seriously might mean for scholars:

It means to learn *to be able to speak well* to the people you study, to employ a central concept and concern of Bruno Latour – to speak *about* them *to* them in ways they do not find offensive or ridiculous. They do not need to agree with you *completely* – they will never do anyway; all we require is that they find our description a good enough one. It will always be a caricature of themselves, with certain traits exaggerated, others downplayed, certain points overstretched, others minimised, and so on. Ethnographers are not photographers – they are portrait artists.¹³

Because he follows this by concluding that anthropology is like “playing croquet with flamingos”, I am emboldened to think that the study of Paganisms (and other religions) is like playing croquet with hedgehogs. It is not only a matter of knowing our subject (hedgehog-like activities) but also of learning how to play a “difficult game.”

Difficult Games

My introduction to both Paganism and Pagan studies was the result of a flippant remark and several doses of serendipity. When colleagues at the university where I had recently completed my PhD (about naming rhetorics in Jewish antiquity)¹⁴ were planning a new undergraduate course about “contemporary religions” I suggested that I could offer a session on “the Druids.” My offer was hardly serious but was based on the happy (for me) fact of being brought up near Stonehenge. I had participated in Stonehenge People’s Free Festival since 1976 (a couple of years after its founding by Wally Hope). By participate here I mean that I camped in the field, enjoyed some of the music, chatted with hippies, and participated in other festive activities. When the festival was suppressed by almost paramilitary police I joined in activism of various non-violent kinds not only to re-establish the festival but also to gain free access to Stonehenge for everyone. I was only vaguely aware that Druids and other Pagans were involved in the festival and in the activism – missing the point that Wally and others called the festival into being specifically as a solstice celebration. The point is that I had been in the company of Druids without knowing it, without interest, and with no inkling

13. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf? Some Comments on an Ongoing Anthropological Debate,” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2015): 2–17, citing Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.

14. Graham Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

that I would owe my career to a joke about including them in a university course.

Doctoral research in libraries (often scrolling through microfiche as this was prior to the digitalization of the Dead Sea Scrolls) had not prepared me for fieldwork research. Thus, I had to learn this more ethnological mode of researching religions by finding Druids. I should certainly have sought the advice of colleagues with expertise in the anthropology or sociology of religion. I suspect, however, that they would have encouraged me to learn by doing and by immersion in “the field.”

Somehow, I think, it worked out. I found people by asking other people. I spent time with them. Once I had introduced myself and demonstrated that I was ready to learn, they told me things and invited me to events. I became interested enough to make this more than what is now called “scholarship for teaching,” i.e. preparation for teaching. It became something I wanted to reflect on and write about. Perhaps because I had been hanging out with hippies and other travellers I assumed that the right thing to do would be to make sure that the people I would write about saw copies of what I wrote. As I benefitted (in career terms) from my adventures among Pagans, it seemed right that appropriate forms of payback to the Pagan community should follow. Indeed, this generally produced invitations into further conversations. Sometimes I talked at Pagan pub gatherings, conferences, or camps. Sometimes I facilitated conversations between people who might not otherwise have met. On a few occasions I have written statements supporting Pagan groups seeking particular responses from government or the media. My activist commitments brought me into other forms of contact and company with Pagans and Paganism. In these and other ways, I formed particular habits of research.

How does one learn the rules of a game? It is clearly not enough to read the rule book. Even if such a thing exists, at some point one has to actually try doing the thing. I doubt there is a manual or youtube clip which would have explained, step-by-step, how Alice should have grasped a flamingo or how she might have guaranteed the compliance of hedgehogs or soldier-cards. I began learning, experientially, about doing research long before the publication of the excellent *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*.¹⁵ Having jumped in, I then read what others had written

15. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2011).

about fieldwork research. Phrases like “participant observation” seemed to encourage more than sitting on the sidelines watching while others (“native insider participants” or “scholarly outsider observers”) played the game. However, I was also challenged. Had I “gone native” or, worse for a scholar of religion, become a theologian or an apologist? There were, evidently, rules for this difficult game.

I was, nonetheless, encouraged by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’s claim that

Twentieth-century anthropology has insisted that we have a great deal to learn about ourselves from the study of the other... This is the myth that justifies the anthropological enterprise, a myth that says that the study of the other leads to enlightenment.¹⁶

Put more colloquially, learning from others is the only excuse for poking our noses into their business. It is also a necessary result of recognizing the expertise of our hosts or, more traditionally, informants. In a cosmos where “the act of observation changes things” – and necessarily changes the observer¹⁷ – it would really be foolish not to expect even self-assessed expert researchers to be changed. I was, at any rate, greatly encouraged by works such as David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet’s (1994) *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: the Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*,¹⁸ and especially by Edith Turner’s chapter in that collection.¹⁹ Nonetheless, some colleagues still insist that there are “insiders” and “outsiders”, “participants” and “observers” and other ways of being “them and us”. Although I doubt that Eilberg-Schwartz was really thinking “religiously” when he chose to use the word “enlightenment,” by no means all scholars of religion have embraced the “reflexive” turn that now seems entirely commonplace among anthropologists.

A number of people warned me that researching among and writing about Pagans was not a good way to start an academic career. To

16. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “Witches of the West: Neopaganism and Goddess Worship as Enlightenment Religions,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (1989): 87.

17. Terry Pratchett, *Soul Music*. (London: Gollancz, 1994), 8.

18. David E. Young and Jean-Guy Goulet, eds. *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: the Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1994).

19. Edith Turner, “A Visible Spirit Form in Zambia,” in *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: the Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, edited by David E. Young and Jean-Guy Goulet, 71–95.

be charitable, not all of them said this because they thought Pagans were crazy or too marginal to be academically interesting. Happily, finding that there was a growing network of scholars with similar interests, I co-organized an international conference in 1994 dedicated to the study of Paganisms. I am, therefore, immensely grateful to the few people, who encouraged me to stick with this research interest. In addition to my wife, Molly, these include a publisher who, although looking for potential authors for an “area studies” list, was intrigued enough to commission a book on Paganism,²⁰ and a colleague who encouraged me to apply for a new post teaching religion at what is now the University of Winchester. The fact that I had tested the definitional boundaries of what “Paganism” might mean by conducting a short project among self-identified Satanists²¹ did not stop this Church foundation institution employing me. Indeed, I was further encouraged to develop interests in contemporary religions and students seemed to find Paganism and other “alternative” phenomena interesting.

Another serendipitous occurrence took me to a conference organised by Memorial University in Newfoundland and hosted at the Conne River reserve of the Mi’kmaq Nation. My paper was about shamanic and neo-shamanic healing but being there allowed me to initiate another boundary testing idea. When some Pagans claim (as an increasing number do) to be practicing some version of the “indigenous religion of Britain or northwest Europe,” I started to wonder what living indigenous religions are like in the lands invaded in the European colonial expansion. I was (and am) less interested in the historical veracity of Pagan claims and grateful that such work is done by Ronald Hutton and others. Equally, I am not particularly interested in indigeneity prior to the discovery of Columbus or Cook on indigenous beaches. My question was more to do with the vitality of indigenous traditional religions. Having already been inspired by what Hallowell learnt from his Anishinaabe hosts and by what Tawhai said about his Maori *iwi* I made some use of the chance to talk with Mi’kmaq and other hosts at Conne River.

At the end of the powwow (the reserve’s first) an eagle flew a perfect circle over the drum group playing the last honor song as elders and veterans danced the last dance. I was not alone in

20. Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (London: Hurst, 1997).

21. Graham Harvey, “Satanism in Britain Today,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10 (1995): 283–96.

expressing surprised pleasure. Locals too, hardly unfamiliar with eagles, stopped and exclaimed “*kitpu!*” or “eagle!” Afterwards several people told me, without my asking, that the eagle was affirming their pleasure at the efforts of the local human community to return to the traditional ways which eagles and bears and others had patiently maintained. A couple of younger people told me that the powwow and the eagle’s flight made them proud to be native or indigenous for the first time. When I tell Pagans about this they recognize the experience of affirmation and kinship. What interests me then is that what is affirmed varies. For some, it is a sign of the efficacy of a more-or-less esoterically inspired ritual. For others, it is exemplary of the interrelatedness and interactivity of all beings, or perhaps of the working together of local multispecies communities. None of these are exclusive and often one interpretation flows into another. Consideration of this and related encounters underlies much of my engagement with animists and animisms.²² For not, though, the point is that there are intersections between what some indigenous people and some Pagans find meaningful. Similar stories can be told about the world.

However, something else is really more relevant to this current article’s reflection on research and its relationships and methods. That is braided into the word “host” that I have now used a number of times. Continuing to struggle with how to conduct and perform myself as a researcher (without expertise) I was deeply impacted by the careful offer of guesthood made to me and other people by Maori both in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and in diaspora in London and Alice Springs. A clear protocol by which visitors can become guests while locals can become their hosts is at the heart and guts of Maori culture and knowledge. It respects strangers who might wish to be enemies, an opportunity to express this is offered in the *haka*. However, that is a single stage in the guest- and host-making *powhiri* ceremony. Even Maori guests from elsewhere, once they are guests, are invited and expected to engage in debate (vigorously if the occasion warrants it) once they are welcome among their hosts. I became increasingly convinced that this provides a better model for both theorising and doing research than the tired objective/subjective, outsider/insider, researcher/subject discourse. Having accepted

22. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst 2005); *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

that the word “Pagan” fits me as much as it fits many of the people I’ve been privileged to hang out with, I understand that I cannot stop being an academic when I am participating in ceremonies and neither can I stop being a Pagan when I reflect on them later. In this “both/and” experience there is a sense of being a guest: a respectful but critical not-fully-native but entirely participative person. Once made a guest of a Maori family or community one does not become, as if by magic, entirely the same. Difference is not collapsed or erased. Rather, it is made fruitful by the negotiated interaction of both or all concerned. My attempts to write about this are not complete or without contest.²³ However, I think they provide a way past the polemics that I now think arose because our academic ancestors thought they should emulate the allegedly objective, all seeing and impassive deity of a particular kind of elite (unliveable) Christian theology.²⁴

If I have mentioned hosts and guests a few times, I have also mentioned “hanging out” twice and think that deserves a few more words. If it seemed casual it was not. Rather it was intended to resonate with the thoughts of other researchers and to provoke questions. Is research really a kind of hanging out? Is it enough to spend time chatting with people and sharing their fire-sides to reach an understanding? Does research require such friendly familiarity? These and other questions lurk behind my evocation of the phrase, and I do not intend to set out exhaustive or over-serious answers. Rather, I intend to side with Clifford Geertz²⁵ against James Clifford’s denigration of the phrase.²⁶ These and other classic texts are worth reading. They invite us to continue worrying about our positions, approaches and relations towards those whose lives, ceremonies, worldviews or habits we seek to understand. My preference for Geertz’s “deep hanging out” might only be that it fits more closely with my pre-academic and larger-than-academic habits. I think, however, that more is at stake. This has everything to do with being

23. Graham Harvey, “Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method,” *Numen* 50, no. 2 (2003): 125–46; “Performing and Constructing Research as Guesthood,” in *Anthropologists in the Field*, ed. Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (New York: Columbia University Press), 168–82.

24. Harvey, *Food, Sex, and Strangers*.

25. Clifford Gertz, “Deeap Hanging Out,” *The New York Review of Books*, 22 October 1998. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/oct/22/deep-hanging-out/>.

26. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

present with people, seeking to appreciate (in several senses of the term) what they decide to communicate to us, and getting to grips with the relevance of what we learn to other (not necessarily better, simply different) matters, i.e. those of peculiar but not unique interest to critical debates.

Hedgehogs and Flamingos

Scholarship is a process of becoming, learning, doing, performing. Once it ceases to be a process it atrophies into “academentia” (Daly 1994).²⁷ I have been privilege to hang out with and become a guest of some wonderful people. Most are quite like hedgehogs: unwilling be the object of a game from which they benefit little if at all. They trundle away from questions that don’t interest them. Sometimes they provide deliberately misleading answers. They are, in short, spiky and we should celebrate that. However, there are other ways to engage hedgehogs than by trying to play croquet with them. This is what we need to keep seeking. When others cry “foul” and insist that we are breaking the rules, we might question whether the game requires all its established rules. Do they achieve useful goals? Do they enable us to be guests? Do they enable us “to speak *about* [the people we study] *to* them in ways they do not find offensive or ridiculous”?²⁸ In particular, I have come to appreciate that the disciplined separation of the supposedly “natural” and “social” sciences, and both of these from the “humanities,” invites us to focus on atomized and alienated individuals. That is to say, we keep looking for fictional entities. Why on earth would we imagine we can gain objective understanding about such non-empirical monsters? Instead, we need to play by different rules. These would allow us to engage with the fully and diversely relational world that Darwin and many others before and since revealed. Hedgehogs and Paganisms are braided into the mesh of interactions. We can pick out bits of the story or drama to concentrate on. Indeed, we probably must do so. We cannot, however, pretend that we are telling all there is to say. That is not a playable game. For the record, I do not think I have ever seriously played croquet and certainly do not know the rules by which it is conducted.

27. Mary Daly, *Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language/Conjured by Mary Daly in Cahoots with Jane Caputi* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994 [1988]).

28. Vivieros de Castro, “Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolaf?” 17.

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Navigating Academia and Spirituality from a Pagan Perspective

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My personal pursuit of pagan² spirituality and my academic career are deeply intertwined. One cannot be explained without an explanation of the other. I was raised a Methodist and enjoyed from that tradition the emphasis on developing one's personal contact with the divine. While still in my teenage years, I began to study other religions and found them all fascinating—especially Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto but also the Ethical Society, the Religious Society of Friends, Sufi and Unitarianism. In college, however, through reading Will Durant³ I lost my faith and adopted what amounted to a nihilistic surrender to the emptiness of everything—a focus principally on the impersonal Brahman. When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, I became profoundly worried for democracy in face of the advance of communism, and as a consequence I made a pact with the devil—offering my soul in exchange for world peace.

Subsequently, in San Francisco where I enrolled into a master's program in international relations, there were three seminal events behind my spiritual quest. Two of these coincided. One was the emergence of the counterculture. I was living in the Haight-Ashbury, and the whole community, originally an old-fashioned "delicatessen district," transformed all-around me into the hippy matrix. At one point,

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2. My preference for the lowercase "pagan" is explained further on in this essay.

3. William James Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1926).

in an apartment of a friend of a friend, I noticed on his coffee table a copy of Margaret Murray's *The God of the Witches*. The owner and I became friends and together wished if we could find eleven other like-minded people to found a coven. My anti-Christian sentiments had also developed by this point, and I subsequently enrolled in Anton LaVey's Church of Satan's catechism classes. When the course was completed, we were each given a written test to complete along with a clause to sign in which we were to swear eternal fealty to LaVey as the Satanic Pope. This was something to which I could not agree.

Concurrently the psychiatric ward of the University of California Hospital, where my wife worked as an occupational therapist, was suddenly closed, and the entire staff was on unemployment just as the whole Haight-Ashbury phenomenon was taking off. Fortunately, when any one of us went to one event or another those days, the entire staff was also there—so much so that we bonded for life. And suddenly George and I had our coven. This was for me the second of the seminal San Francisco events.

I researched as much as I could and put together a ritual for our first occasion which was Samhain of 1969. We selected the concave top of Strawberry Hill in Golden Gate Park as our venue. George could not bring himself to participate and volunteered instead to drive us to the park. We built a bonfire and smeared our naked bodies with a belladonna and jimson weed oil that I had concocted. We drew lots on the occasion to determine who would be the coven king and queen, and that became my wife and me. Another prospective participant had canceled at the last minute, and while on the hill, a chap wandered by, and we invited him to join us—which he did. We were thirteen—a number I have repeatedly learned is almost impossible to obtain unless it occurs spontaneously.

Our first coven gathering was dedicated to Lucifer as the god of the witches. We sought to merge our individual selves into a single collective self. I would assess this endeavor subsequently as more interesting than necessarily successful. We then celebrated the eight sabbats in one way or another for the ensuing year. Midwinter's we spent in the library of the San Francisco Art Institute, because we had been told it was haunted. A couple of other occasions took place in private homes, but Strawberry Hill was our main site, and for our final Samhain meeting we all sat naked in a circle with our feet touching and chanted the *Om* syllable around a bonfire as we had a year earlier—the satanic metaphor having been, post-LaVey, completely discarded.

The other seminal event at this time came about when I would leave the city and camp out in the hills of northern California. Away from urban lights, I was astounded over the richness of the stellar expanse overhead. This provoked me to attempt to learn what stories the pre-European peoples of the area had had of the stars. Ironically, I discovered they had had very little. Orion's Belt was recognized along, if I remember correctly, Ursa Major and the North Star and little if anything more. But instead what I had inadvertently come across was a beautiful and natural way of life that we Europeans had virtually destroyed completely. I felt deep shame and came to the conclusion that I did not belong on Turtle Island but had to return to where my own ancestors had come from, namely, Europe. My path crossed at this point that of the gestalt therapist Fritz Perls (1893–1970). Here was a German Jew who had fled Germany in the 1930s for South Africa but subsequently, because of apartheid, left and became famous in Big Sur, California. Then he left America and re-founded his center in Victoria, British Columbia. Here, for me, was a man who knew, and the writing was on the wall. I convinced half of our group to flee with me, and we ended up in Amsterdam.

The use of entheogens was a regular part of the counterculture. But I came to discover that certain days were more conducive than others. Those that were not were Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Instead, those that worked best were the solstices, the equinoxes and the Celtic quarter-days – the eight sabbats of Neopaganism in fact. And one day in an Amsterdam bookshop a book literally fell off the shelf into my hands. It was Franz Altheim's *A History of Roman Religion*, which contained a list of exactly what I wanted: the forty-five Roman religious festivals identified by the days we know in the Gregorian calendar – e.g, the Vestalia of 9 June and the Saturnalia of 17 December.⁴ My project of the time was an attempt to rewrite the Bible – backwards beginning with the Book of Revelation. I never got further than this last, but my finished project had four footnotes – one of which became in time my first published book through Kenneth Jay Wilson of Peter Lang, *The Roman Festival Calendar of Numa Pompilius*, that had been inspired by Altheim as well as William Ward Fowler's *The Roman Festivals*.⁵

4. Franz Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*, trans. H. Mattingly (London: Methuen, 1938 [1931]).

5. W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (London: Macmillan, 1899).

The second footnote became my *magnum opus*, namely, *The Divine versus the Asurian An Interpretation of Indo-European Cult and Myth*. Essentially, I had sought in Europe to do what I had done in California: endeavor to understand the original religious perceptions and beliefs of the indigenous people. I crisscrossed Europe in search of ancient sites from Stonehenge to Delphi to Uppsala to Chartres as well spending many hours in the Reading Room of the British Museum. The upshot became a completed manuscript with no publisher. Eventually I realized that since the work was academic, I needed to secure a PhD in order to be considered by an academic publisher.

But the next question was where? Since I was interested in Indo-European studies, the obvious place was UCLA, but returning to the United States for me was out of the question. I focused instead on Britain. I discovered King's College London, but Keith Ward, who headed at the time the religious studies department, said that my subject was interesting but that there was no one at King's who could supervise me. With King's, however, being only five stops on the Underground from my flat in Chelsea, I became determined that my further education should be at King's College. I was put in contact with Peter Clarke as a possible supervisor. When we met, he bluntly said that he was *only* interested in new religious movements. I had no intrinsic difficulty with that because I was concerned with the relevance of proto-Indo-European spirituality to today. Fortunately I had read the day before in *The Herald Tribune* about a new movement involving Shirley MacLaine and J. Z. Knight calling itself New Age. I mentioned to Peter that I could be interested in this. He immediately snapped his fingers and said, "Yes!"

The Department for Theology and Religious Studies at King's at the time was relatively advanced and innovative but still predominantly Christian and conservative. At one point, Peter asked me to organize a conference on the New Age. There had already been one or two, so I proposed instead that we invite for a series of papers based on the theme of "New Age Dimensions of Goddess Spirituality." This occurred on the 15th of December 1990, and was sponsored by the Centre for New Religions. I believe it was the first academic conference on the subject of Paganism.

As I became more familiar with King's College as well as comfortable, I was able to extend my research focus into a comparison between New Age spirituality and Neo-paganism. Although at first I felt it appropriate to move judiciously, by finding the whole range of

courses concerning religion to be utterly fascinating, I was able increasingly to engage with so many of the interesting minds among the college's staff. The "Goddess Spirituality" conference had also helped to open things further and make my subject known. Consequently, I never felt any resistance or difficulty with my project from the department. Several years after I had graduated, Peter Clarke invited me to address a seminar. I was astonished to find so many of the pagans I had studied for my dissertation now to be students at King's College and even to be teaching there. Vivianne Crowley, who was now a part of the faculty, explained that I had opened the college for pagans.

Elisabeth Arweck (editor of *The Journal of Contemporary Religion*) and I succeeded to register the Academy for Cultural and Educational Studies as a legal British charity, and ACES henceforth sponsored the following conferences: "Dissent and Change: Sociological and Theological Issues" (1994), "Christians and Pagans: Can Divergent Traditions Converse? A Contemporary Dialogue" (1995), and "Perspectives on the Dynamics of Sacred Space" (1996). I should probably note here before continuing that I am proud of the lower-case term "pagan" and prefer it to distinguish paganism from the other world religious competitors (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) In this practice, I am supported by others from within the pagan community (e.g., Andras Corban-Arthen). In reclaiming the pagan designation, I have chosen to take advantage of what historically has been employed as a term of opprobriousness. I recognize the efforts of many within the community to have "Paganism" accepted as a legal religion, and while I support this effort, I argue that "paganism" could still gain legitimacy without sacrificing its distinctiveness. My second reason for the terms "pagan" and "paganism" is that I am chiefly interested in the natural and often spontaneous religiosity of humanity that may include or generate institutional forms but is not itself institutional (vernacular religion, folk belief, telluric spirituality, superstition). The term "Neo-pagan" I accept as a more definite (and self-conscious) religious movement.

The first large-scale academic pagan conference was organized in 1994 by Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey: "Paganism in Contemporary Britain" and its proceedings were published as *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, The Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-first Century*.⁶ In 1996 Jo Pearson organized

6. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey, *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, The Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Thorsons, 1996).

"Nature Religion Today: Western Paganism, Shamanism and Esotericism in the 1990s" for the Lake District Campus of Lancaster University. Both of these conferences served as major breakthroughs in the advance of Pagan studies.

While I was able to extend my doctoral studies at King's College to include equally Neo-paganism, I proceeded initially more often with New Age and the scholarly concept of post-modernism as my subjects of presentation. In 1991, for the "New Religions in Global Perspective" conference sponsored by the Santa Barbara Centre for Humanistic Studies in Solvang, California, I presented a paper entitled "The New Age in Great Britain." and at the Ilkley Study Group conference in Glastonbury, UK, I was able to speak on "The New Age/Christian Overlap." With both of these I was endeavoring to introduce a focus on the New Age movement which itself at the time was a new and generally unknown concept. A significant moment of progress for both myself and several sociologists of religion came with the British Sociological Association-Sociology of Religion Study Group Conference on "Postmodernity and Religion" in 1993. The research for my paper on "Postmodernity, Architecture, Society and Religion: 'A Heap of Broken Images' or 'A Change of Heart'?" became seminal for much of my further investigations, and it provided me with a helpful *lingua franca* through which to converse with various religious studies scholars in the years that followed. However, a telling event that suggests the difficulty pagans first faced in attempting to make others aware of telluric spirituality occurred for me at the 'Ethics within the New Age Spectrum: Differentiations and Problems of Authenticity' for the Religious Studies/Theology and Philosophy Student Conference, sponsored by St. Brendan's College at the Broadmead Baptist Church in 1996 in Bristol when, during the general discussion, an audience member could not countenance that the physical could possibly be described as spiritual. For her, they were diametrically opposite.

Nevertheless, despite my initial emphasis on New Age and post-modernism, I would introduce paganism or pagan subjects when I could. I began first with my Indo-European interests and gave a paper in 1991 for the 36th annual International Linguistic Association conference in New York, speaking on "Toward a Proto-Indo-European Vocabulary of the Sacred." It was on this occasion that I met Marija Gimbutas and sitting next to her during the conference dinner, discussed Colin Renfrew and his wave-of-advance theory concerning Indo-European migration through the spread of

agriculture (the Anatolian hypothesis).⁷ Gimbutas informed me that she had tried to talk Renfrew out of publishing his 1987 *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*. She shrugged and said, "You know, every archaeologist thinks he is right," implying, of course, that Renfrew was no exception. She then paused to let me guess vaguely where she might be going with this before continuing, "but I *know* that I am right." She was very sweet, and I could not say this, but through my own research I was thinking to myself, "But I know that you are wrong."

For the Fourth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference in 1992, I spoke on "The Mithraic Tauroctony as a Derivative of an Indo-European Soma/Hoama Sacramental Cult." This paper had a mixed reaction. Younger scholars appeared to appreciate it, but the older ones were aghast that I had dared to question their revered icon and founder of contemporary Indo-European studies, Georges Dumézil. I was also an unknown and had not arrived through the officially legitimated studies that were occurring at and only at UCLA. Several years later I met Bruce Lincoln (author of *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, 1991) who proceeded to tell me that he had subsequently "renounced Indo-European Studies." I was surprised to hear him say this, but he explained that he had found those who were active in the field to be completely too ideological and fascist for his tastes. When I objected that that made it all the more important to pursue and transform the field, he replied "Well, good luck!" What I had learned myself in the IE venues, however, was what almost amounted to a certain vicious disdain and disrespect for the work of others. This last contrasted with sociology where there could be strong disagreement, but this was still always expressed through polite and courteous respect.

However, in my experience, it was both the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion who were the major academic venues that first welcomed the theme of paganism as a legitimate area of study. In 1994 Los Angeles, my paper for the ASR's annual meeting, "Reinventing Religion: Old Religions, New Religions, New-Old Religions, Old-New Religions," covered "Reinvented Anglo-American Neo-paganism and Reinvigorated Baltic Paganism: Sociological and Ideological Comparisons," while for the SSSR (1996), I presented "'Invented Culture/Invented Religion: The Fictional Origins of Contemporary Paganism."

7. Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London: Pimlico, 1987).

Helen Berger and I organized a “Neo-paganism and the Status Quo” session for the San Diego meeting of the SSSR in 1997 on “Borders and Boundaries: Remapping Religion in a Changing World.” My paper for this occasion was “Paganism and the British Charity Commission: A Question of Restricting Boundaries?” in which I discussed the persistent difficulties faced by the Pagan Federation in the United Kingdom to become accepted as a legal charity.

I continued with this theme at the 2000 SSSR meeting in Houston with “Defining Paganism: Conflicting Viewpoints between the Pagan Federation, the British Charity Commission, and an Academic Perspective.” If none of these talks heralded major breakthroughs, they at least succeeded in steadily advancing paganism as a legitimate area for academic study. Again, Helen Berger and I were able to continue this step-by-step process, organizing a session on “Diachronic and Synchronic Dimensions of Contemporary Paganism” for the SSSR meeting in 1998. For the ASR meeting the following year (1999) I organized a session on “The Goddess, The Gods and the Gendered Self (I)” for which I presented “Shakti/Wicca Contrasts in Gender-based Social Integration” and also served as the respondent for the session on “The Goddess, The Gods and the Gendered Self (II).” Helen Berger and I next organized a session on “Paganism and New Age Spirituality” for the 1999 SSSR meeting, themed “The Sacred in the Secular: Finding ‘Religious’ Dimensions in the World beyond Religion.” We were by this point an accepted presence in academic venues. Subsequent topics that we have been able to present for scholarly discussion include the “Civil Religion Aspects of Neo-paganism,” “Idolatry and Ethics” and “Contemporary Western Paganism: Changes, Accommodations, and Tensions.”

I completed my dissertation in 1991 and received my PhD the following year. But by this point, I had become hooked on academia itself and wanted to stay involved and, if possible, teach. However, this was the very time in which universities throughout the United States and the United Kingdom were not hiring but cutting down instead on their teaching staffs. The advice I was given and which I always share now with others who are looking for an academic position is to attend as many conferences as possible and to publish also as much as possible. In 1994, I was accepted as a visiting scholar for the College of Creative Studies in the University of California, Santa Barbara, my alma mater. As an investigation into the contemporary New Age, Neo-pagan and Human Potential movements as well as church-sect typology, my dissertation was published in 1995 by

Rowman & Littlefield: *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements*. In the same year, my magnum opus was finally published as *The Divine versus the Asurian: An Interpretation of Indo-European Cult and Myth* by International Scholars Publications, which subsequently merged with Rowman & Littlefield. The DVA is blurbed as “a reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European religion and lifestyle through linguistic analysis, comparative mythology and a deconstruction of the cult practices belonging to the Indo-European daughter cultures.”

After securing my doctorate, finding employment was challenging in the least. I had returned to Europe to check on my property and was literally going out the door of the London flat for the Midi when the phone rang. It was Marion Bowman, a colleague, wondering if I might be interested in applying for a research fellowship at the Bath College of Higher Education (now Bath Spa University). I was indeed interested, applied, and got it—becoming part of the Department for the Study of Religions (that “s” being always stressed) under Brian Bocking. And it was, apart for a relatively meager salary, the dream job of dream jobs. I was expected to travel and network, be unsupervised and free. And it was during some of these times that I was able to do my vernacular Hinduism research, participate in the Erasmus Exchange Programme with the University of Helsinki, lecture at the Department of Philosophy and Religion in the Banaras Hindu University, do seminars, and give workshops. I also taught but only because I wished to and secured permission to develop a module on sacred geography. With Professor Bocking’s backing, I was allowed to establish a Pagan studies program through the department.

But after so many years, the funding for my fellowship was finally running out. With financial backing behind him, my graduate student Nicholas Campion, without my knowing, had approached the administration with the proposal to construct a center for the study of astrology—or, rather, *re-construct* an existing cowshed, since the campus was on land belonging to the Prince of Wales—half-school, half-farm—by whom no new buildings were allowed. Nick had in mind me as director of the Sophia Centre and with both the title of principal lecturer and a secretary! I had many years earlier been interested in astrology until I began to follow the Numan festival calendar, and astrology then for me became increasingly excess baggage. But I was now interested in how *belief* in astrology affects one’s decisions—like, for instance, the Republic of India postponing its day of independence because the stars were not propitious. It was

the sociology of astrology rather than the study of astrology itself that I was able to promote and sell to the college's administration. And it was on this basis that our master's program was established. I came to be fascinated with the students (most being professional astrologers) who enrolled. Those were heady times despite Tony Blair's "target culture" and the pressure under which two of the teaching staff for the Study of Religions, under which the School for Cultural Astronomy and Astrology was placed, had nervous breakdowns, and two went on sabbatical and never came back.

Another challenge during my academic years has been the American Academy of Religion's resistance to "paganism." From liberal to conservative, it is the Association (ASR) to the Society (SSSR) to the Academy (AAR). For a number of years, the AAR would not consider Pagan studies as apart from the New Religious Movements Group, and pagan academics met instead for a Nature Religions Scholars Network session as a pre-AAR conference. In 2003, the Network session was replaced by the "Conference on Contemporary Pagan Studies" for which I was able to address "The Implications of the Nature Bias of Contemporary Paganism." By 2005, the AAR had finally accepted an independent Pagan study section, and the Contemporary Pagan Studies "consultation" came into being, elevated to "group" status by 2008. Wendy Griffin and I were the CPS co-chairs until 2011.

In 2003 I was invited to give the keynote address for the ASANAS/The Open University "Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies" conference in Milton Keynes. Often among sociologists of religion/new religious movements, contemporary Western paganism is included and approached as New Age. Certainly there are New Age elements and practices among many current pagans, but until this point I endeavored to understand the two broad spiritualities separately. However, in preparation for my address, "Wanting to Have Your New Age Cake and Eat It Too," I came to the conclusion that New Age may be thought of more accurately as another pagan denomination – paganism being the larger and more embracing phenomenon. There are in fact many different forms of paganisms. New Age is simply one of those forms – at heart a gnostic form of paganism but still pagan.

When I was approaching my retirement from Bath Spa University, I organized a three-day conference in June 2004 on "Exploring Consciousness: With What Intent?" sponsored by the Sophia Centre for Cultural Astronomy and Astrology, Bath Spa University College,

the Academy for Cultural and Educational Studies and Psychonauts UK. The call for papers read,

The connection between the cosmos and consciousness has fascinated and inspired human beings for thousands of years. It has given us rich mythologies and cosmologies. Is the cosmos alive and intelligent? Or is consciousness the bi-product of brain chemistry? We invite papers which will address the twin themes of cosmos and consciousness through the arts, psychology, poetry, science, history and, philosophy.

My purpose was to initiate a conversation between academics, New Agers, pagans, astrologers and psychonauts, i.e., those who explore consciousness through entheogenic media. In all, it became a stimulating affair. The psychonauts were outrageous and almost appropriated everything since this was the first academic conference in which they had participated. The astrologers were upset for not being center-stage. But the pagans demonstrated a professional coolness and were refreshingly at home in a scholarly environment.

Following my retirement, I now teach an online course for Cherry Hill Seminary on the “World Religions from a Pagan Perspective.” This class is framed by the understanding that for nearly two millennia, paganism has been excluded from the theological roundtable. In the West, the Judeo-Christian hegemony has only gradually cracked through the efforts of the American Transcendentalists and Theosophy—culminating with the appearance of Swami Vivekananda at the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago. In the twentieth century, the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have come to acknowledge at least the existence, if not validity, of the dharmic faiths of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In the twenty-first century, we can now appreciate the world’s growing acknowledgement of paganism as well.

Two other books I have since published are my 2003 *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion* and the *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements* in 2004. *Pagan Theology* represents a culmination of my experiences as a pagan along with my investigations of other world religions. As has been my experience with publishing in general, this book was difficult to get into print. In that work, I had not really concentrated on theology and had envisioned it originally to be titled “Understanding Paganism.” But the editors of New York University Press suggested the book to be called “Pagan Theology,” and so it is. There is more theology as such in the two sequels, and my *Pagan Ethics: Paganism as a World Religion* has been published in 2016 by Springer. This will hopefully be followed with

Pagan Mysticism. With regard to *Pagan Theology*, David Martin called my concept of pagan spirituality upside-down.⁸ A *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* review claims that there is “little doubt that it will reinvigorate not only the debate over the definition of religion but, perhaps more significantly, the debate over where one religion starts and another ends.” *Missiology: An International Review* holds that “Folk religionists and those interested in placing “pagan phenomena” in the context of worldwide religiosity [sic] will find York’s book interesting,” and *Sociology of Religion* has found that the “work will interest anyone investigating the nexus of science, social policy, and the law in modern America.” University of Leeds’ Terry Gifford has labeled the book “Scholarly, but wholly accessible.” Wendy Griffin claims it as “the first successful attempt to articulate a theology that is based on what paganism is, rather than on what it is not when compared to Judeo/Christian traditions. York’s work is an important contribution to the study of religion in general, and foundational for the emerging field of Pagan Studies. It is the beginning of a whole new dialogue,” and Chas S. Clifton calls it an “audacious redrawing of traditional religious boundaries and scholarly categories [that] reaffirms Paganism’s place both as legitimate spiritual expression and as a field of academic inquiry.”

So to formulate a response to where I think the general state of Pagan studies is today I would have to respond that my feeling is that the studies themselves are absolutely imperative. We operate at present under an economic ideology that at heart has come to be based on exploitation. The desire for profit takes precedence over any and all other values—including that which is dedicated to the well-being and defensible preservation of the very planet upon which our sustenance depends. The undeniable and growing awareness of the precarious situation of the earth and of a viable future for our children are together undeniably the chief impetus behind the contemporary pagan awakening.

As Bryan Wilson observed, the number of people involved with new religious movements vastly exceeds the number of indigenous peoples who have been the traditional focus of anthropology, and, consequently, the sociology of new religious movements moves to the very forefront of our efforts to understand society and any role that religion may continue to play in it. The study of NRMs is as

8. David Martin, “Pews for Pagans,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 5 March 2004.

much a study of ourselves as it is a study of the new religions or spiritualities themselves—especially as it elucidates what we are able as a mainstream peoples to tolerate and what not. Contemporary Western Paganism, I believe, will be the definitive NRM as the twenty-first century plays itself out. We need to understand this development and the crucial need for it.

Like virtually all religions, modern Paganism has its weaknesses and often ridiculous inner conflicts. But at the same time, it possesses the potential to offer people a pragmatic and mature environmental awareness as well as the auxiliary needs that speak to humanity's atavistic yearning for a sense of enchantment. The academic study of Paganism is a part of this process. In my own day, I have been privileged to have been able to witness its surprising and phenomenal growth. It still has a long way to go, but the ecological challenges that might otherwise suffocate us insure both the necessity for a growing pagan awareness and humanity's inevitable desire to study it.

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An Outsider Inside: Becoming a Scholar of Contemporary Paganism¹

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In 1985, I was a relatively newly minted PhD in my first tenure-track position, at Boston University, when I received a phone call from the Boston Public Library asking if I would be available in October 1986 to do a series of talks at the library about witchcraft in New England.³ That phone call would change the direction of my research for the rest of my academic career. My doctoral dissertation had been about women's involvement as alleged witches in the English witchcraft trails of the early modern period. At that time I was an historical sociologist interested in issues of gender and social change, particularly of major transitions such as that from feudalism to modernity. The library, which had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to run a series of talks, had found me through the very active Boston University public-relations department. I had filled out a form when I first joined the faculty that year stating that I would be willing to give public talks on, among

1. I would like to thank the members of my Social Issues Research Group at the Brandeis WSRC for their feedback on an early draft of this article. In particular I would like to acknowledge, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Janet Freedman, Phoebe Schnitzer, Rhoda Unger, and Nicola Curtin.

2. Helen A. Berger is a resident scholar at the Women's Studies Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass., and professor emerita of sociology at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

3. I use the convention in this paper and in all my work of capitalizing the words, *witch* or *witchcraft* when referring to the religion or its practitioners. Lower-case is used when applied to the historic witch trials and accusations.

other things, witchcraft. My initial response to the library representative's request was to say that I had studied English witchcraft and that I suspected they could find someone in the Boston area whose expertise was in witchcraft in the American colonies. I added that if they didn't find a willing specialist in the area that I would be happy to do it. In a parting remark the library representative mentioned that there was an honorarium of \$1,500 for presenting. In 1985 that was half the amount I would be paid to teach an extra course, but without the grading and with only being asked to prepare a handful of lectures. With bills left from finishing my Ph.D. and the low salary of a junior faculty member, I began immediately to kick myself for passing up this opportunity. But, ultimately I put this out of my mind. Months passed before I received the second phone call from the library again asking if I would be willing to do this set of talks. This time I readily said yes. I began to refer to myself as the "Halloween Special," as I was asked to talk for approximately an hour each Thursday in October with time left at the end for questions from the audience. Once I agreed to give the lecture series, I turned my attention to what those five lectures would each cover. The first four were easily decided on, each looking at a different aspect of the trials—legal, religious, social, and gender relations—and comparing the colonial response to those in England and Europe. The topic for the fifth lecture was eluding me until I had a conversation with a graduate school friend, Paul Shapiro, in a Greenwich Village café. During that rather free-wielding conversation I mentioned that there had recently been an article in the *Boston Globe* about the Witches' Anti-Defamation League protesting against the movie *The Witches of Eastwick*.⁴ The notion that contemporary women and men were claiming an identity that I thought was not only from another era, but also one that was not usually willingly accepted, was intriguing. My friend encouraged me to make my last lecture about contemporary Witches. I thought initially I would do some quick research, just enough to put together a respectable public lecture on the topic, and then return to my work on historical sociology. However, once I began my research I never turned back—I re-created myself as a sociologist of religion with a specialty in contemporary Paganism.

At the time I began my research for my public talk there was very little academic work about contemporary Pagans. The best source was by an NPR reporter, who would later become a friend,

4. *The Witches of Eastwick*, dir. George Miller (Warner Bros., 1987).

Margot Adler.⁵I found only one sociological study of contemporary Witchcraft.⁶ The lack of research piqued my interest. Since so little was written about this phenomenon, I thought I should begin by trying to meet some Witches in the Boston area. In 1986, Laurie Cabot and the Witches Anti-Defamation League were unusual; they were public. Most other covens and individuals were covert as they feared, often for good reason, suffering discrimination in employment and the potential loss of their children in child custody cases. Although I was ultimately invited to Laurie Cabot's home and was able to interview her, at that juncture she was not interested in meeting with me, nor was she willing to put me in touch with others in the League. One colleague offered to introduce me to her Cambridge neighbor, whom she described as on the fringe of the movement. Unfortunately the neighbor was not involved in the movement but she did know that the owner of a local metaphysical store was a practicing Wiccan. The store owner was wary of speaking to me, but did suggest several books when I was in her shop, including *The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk.⁷ Using what sources I had, I prepared the last of my talks.

The library had advertised each of my talks in, among other places, the local newspaper, *The Boston Globe*, and each week there were some of the same people and a few new ones who were interested in a particular topic. At the last talk there were more and younger people than at the other lectures. During that final lecture I mentioned what at that time was a stunning fact—contemporary Witches looked like typical Americans who might work with or live next door to you without your being aware of it. One woman who had attended all five of the lectures, always sat in the front, and asked provocative questions, stopped me at that point and in an incredulous voice asked if I really meant that there could be Witches in that very room. After I responded that indeed I suspected there were, she stood up, turned around, and asked if anyone in the room was a Witch. A number of people, possibly equally stunned as I was at the question, raised their hands. After the talk as we all stood

5. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

6. George R. Kirkpatrick, Rich Rainey, and Kathryn Rubi, "An Empirical Study of Wiccan Religion in Postindustrial Society" *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 14, no. 1 (1986): 33–8.

7. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

around drinking the hot cider and eating the cookies provided by the library, I sort out those who self-identified as Witches and asked for their help in meeting others. I was rewarded by being invited to join, as a researcher, a coven that was just beginning and to attend an open ritual being run by EarthSpirit Community, a local umbrella group that had a newsletter, open rituals, and ran a festival in the spring. These two contacts would launch my career as a sociologist of contemporary Paganism.

Although not unique, I am an unusual scholar of contemporary Paganism as I am not myself a contemporary Pagan. This raised a different set of issues and problems than those experienced by scholars who are insiders. Ethically, it was important to me that everyone I met knew that I was an outsider; furthermore, I felt the need from time to time to remind them, as it would be easy for many to forget. I comfortably fit the demographic of the contemporary Pagan movement in the late 1980 and early 1990s. I was a young, female, white, college-educated feminist who was concerned about environmental issues and took yoga classes. My reminding people of my outsider status made some uncomfortable with my attending rituals, festivals, and other events. At times, some people would not permit me to interview them or were cautious of what they said to or around me. Additionally there were some experiences, such as ecstatic states that I could only describe as they were reported to me, never from experience. Nonetheless, it is important for outsiders to study all groups including religious groups, whether that is mainstream religions, such as Christianity in the West or minority religions. We outsiders bring a particular lens to the religion, just as insiders have justifiably claimed that they bring a particular and important view. After the publication of my first two books,⁸ both of which gave a sympathetic analysis of the religion, most of the contemporary Pagans I met were somewhat less wary of me as a researcher. Although I have had collegial relations with other scholars of contemporary Paganism and have become friends with some, I still feel even in this group some discomfort at my not also being an insider. I think some of this comes from a sense that they are asked to justify themselves to other scholars in a way that I am not, and in

8. Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 1999; Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: Contemporary: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (Columbia: S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

some instances they contend that their own methodology and position is really superior to mine. This translates to subtle behaviors, with other contemporary Pagan scholars being less likely to cite or refer to me or my work even when it clearly would be relevant. Of course being an outsider does give me more credibility with others outside of contemporary Paganism.

I was one of a small group of scholars that began researching contemporary Paganism in the mid-1980s. When I began my research, scholars outside of those who studied New Religious Movements frequently stated openly to me that they thought I was wasting my time studying what was then a relatively small group which they believed were really just part of the New Age and whose members would ultimately return to more traditional religions without significantly changing the religious or social landscape. Even as the religion has grown, claiming more adherents each year and having increased cultural significance—as indicated by the growth in the number of books, movies, and television programs about Witches or other forms of contemporary Paganism, the inclusion of goddess worship into more mainstream venues, and the greater emphasis on spirituality and private or personal religious practices throughout the Western world—many still refuse to take the religion and my and related research seriously. When I was invited to participate in workshop, “Challenges of the New Media Order to Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Religion and Belief, and Group Rights” at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School in 2001, one of the other participants, who had worked in the Clinton administration, commented to everyone present that he thought my topic was “cute.” He was the most direct and obnoxious distractor that I have encountered, permitting, actually requiring, that I provide counter remarks about the import of studying this religion. Others, although more guarded and polite, have implied the same thing. The study of few other religions would result in scholars having to defend their topic more than their findings. The presumption by many people that I am a Witch or a Wiccan and their unwillingness to accept that I am not is equally disturbing because it implies that no one but an adherent could possibly be interested in this phenomenon. This attitude affects my ability, and that of other scholars of contemporary Paganism, to get grants and positions at universities. Of course it is always hard to know if you didn’t get the grant or job because of the quality of your application in comparison to others applying or because your topic was in itself seen as less

worthy. But, certainly, committee members' views of which issues and topics are important influence their decision making.

Why then did I devote most of my career to the study of this religion? In part, I was not strategic in planning my career. I initially had naively thought that doing "good work" was sufficient and the topic was just a matter of personal preference. But a more important element was that I believed, and continue to believe, that there is much to learn about religion, culture, and social transformation by studying contemporary Paganism. In my first book, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States*, which was based on an ethnographic study in the Boston area and interviews of contemporary Pagans from around the United States, I argued that this was a religion and that it did create a community around it, albeit a free-flowing and decentered one. Following the theoretical work of Anthony Giddens⁹ and James Beckford,¹⁰ I noted that contemporary Paganism or Neo-Paganism, as it was called then, was a product of late modernity and as such was providing a spiritual expression and group membership that was consistent with the social conditions of the era – the growth of globalization, increased travel, the development of the Internet, and other forms of mass media. This more loosely organized variety of religion, I argued, was a model of one form of religious formation and community that was developing and that would continue to develop in contemporary society.

My second book, *Voices From the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, which I wrote with two colleagues at West Chester University where I was a tenured faculty member for many years after I left Boston University, took a very different turn; it was a quantitative book, which grew out of a survey that I completed with Andras Corban Arthen, one of the founders and leaders of Earthspirit Community. Andras had an ambitious project – the completion of a census of all American contemporary Pagans – which he asked me to help him realize. Although we were unable to do an actual census of contemporary Pagans, we did

9. Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

10. James Beckford, "Holistic Imagery and Ethics in New Religious and Healing Movements," *Social Compass* 31 (1984): 259–72; *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); "Religion and Modernity, Post-Modernity," in *Religion: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Bryan Wilson (London: Bellew, 1992), 1–23.

complete one of the largest surveys of the group at that time. It was largely through Andras that we received endorsements and support from most of the leaders in the U.S. Pagan community. Andras and I worked on the questionnaire, which included some topics of interest to both of us and others that were of particular interest to one or the other of us. In the end, the survey was five legal-sized pages long. At the suggestion of a colleague, I included questions from the General Social Science Survey (GSS) to permit comparisons between contemporary Pagans and the general American public. At about the same time that Andras and I conducted our survey William Sims Bainbridge also included GSS questions in his study of the controversial new religious movement, *The Family*.¹¹ These were the earliest studies to use GSS questions to compare members of marginal religions to a broader range of Americans. Bainbridge found a remarkable consistency in responses from Family members and other Americans. My research suggested that contemporary Pagans were more liberal, more politically active, and had more metaphysical experiences than other Americans. The differences in our results are in part real differences between the two groups we studied, and in part a result of the specific GSS questions we compared.

I solicited help from several colleagues who taught methods: Leigh Shaffer in my department and David Bills at Iowa University. After describing the hidden nature of the population and its dispersion across the United States, they both suggested that I use a random sample of subscribers to Pagan magazines, memberships in umbrella groups, such as Earthspirit, Circle Sanctuary, Covenant of the Goddess, and do a random sample of those attending festivals. This seemed like an excellent plan. To ensure a random sample the plan entailed gaining access to all the subscription and membership lists and making sure that each person was only listed once for our purposes. This methodological plan proved impossible as groups would not release their lists due to privacy concerns. We then hoped that each group would do its own random sample. Even this, however, became impossible as some groups sent out the survey to everyone on their lists, others put it in their magazine, Pagans who wanted to be heard Xeroxed the survey and passed it to friends and associates, and ultimately some computer-savvy Pagans put it on the Internet. This resulted in our receiving close to three thousand

11. William S. Bainbridge, *The Endtime Family: Children of God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).

responses, which at the time was the largest survey of Pagans that had been done.

My initial response, however, was not joyous. My random sample was gone and I had more surveys in my office than I had anticipated, which needed to be analyzed. Leigh Shaffer helped me think through how to work with the survey as a snowball sample instead of a random one and to justify this to the granting agencies that had provided funding for the research. We then engaged another colleague, Evan Leach, to help with the statistical analysis. The survey provided some substantiation of what the few ethnographic studies that existed at the time had found: most contemporary Pagans were well-educated, in their thirties, and disproportionately women. But it also provided some surprising findings, particularly that contemporary Pagans were about as politically active as Unitarian Universalists, who are noted for crusading for liberal causes. Although I continue to hear scholars argue that contemporary Pagans are not politically active, it was not what we found. I think the difference between our findings and those of ethnographers is in part that our comparison was with the general American population, and not with members of Greenpeace or some other political organization. Furthermore, while organizations such as the Unitarian Universalists form groups in their churches to do political work, contemporary Pagans tend to join marches as individuals or as members of another group, such as gay rights groups or women's rights groups. The data from the Pagan Census remains an important historical document. The results are preserved for public use online at the Murray Research Archive at Harvard University.¹²

At the same time I was completing *Voices from the Pagan Census*, I was asked by the University of Pennsylvania Press to do an anthology on *Witchcraft and Magic in the Contemporary United States*.¹³ Initially this was to add to their series on Witchcraft and Magic, but it remains a separate volume, in large part because a new acquisitions editor came in who had less interest in the series than the one who had commissioned my volume. Working on an anthology was more

12. Data from the "Pagan Census" is online at: Murray Research Archive at Harvard University and through The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/haberger/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=18826&studyListingIndex=24_f99b89fcf82af878c307a83e09db

13. Helen A. Berger, ed. *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

work than I anticipated, but I am pleased with the volume, which remains in print as do my other books. Unlike many other anthologies that have a series of loosely related essays, mine has only seven longer chapters, each of which focuses on spiritual and magical practices among different groups—Neo-Pagans, New Age practitioners, Santeria, women's spirituality, shamans—and on the commodification of those practices. The quality of the authors I was able to involve in the project, the length of the chapters, and the focus around a narrower topic, I believe helped to make the book particularly useful.

I was in the midst of doing work on the development of contemporary Pagans within the Unitarian Universalists when I changed direction after attending a conference in London. I had gone to London to see a sick friend, who I thought might be dying, and arrived serendipitously as a conference was beginning on New Religions at the London School of Economics. The conference served as a wonderful balance to my time visiting my friend in the hospital. While at the conference I heard an intriguing paper by a then-young scholar from Australia, Douglas Ezzy, about commodification of Witchcraft. I caught him over lunch to discuss the fact that I thought he was leaving out of his discussion the growing phenomenon of teenagers becoming Witches. He replied that while not mentioned in the paper, it was of course an underlying aspect of what he was researching. As we continued to talk we decided to commence on a joint research project on teenagers who were becoming Witches in the United States and Australia.

Doug and I formatted a working draft of a research agenda at the meeting, which became refined through e-mail communications. We each then proceeded to get institutional review board approvals from our respective universities. While I was still awaiting my approval for this project, I was invited to speak with the acquisitions editor at Rutgers University Press at a subsequent conference I was attending. When I mentioned the project to the editor, noting that we were just at the early stages, in fact had not yet commenced the research, he stated that he was interested in the project but that he wanted us to include England to make it of greater interest to what he envisioned would be a largely American audience.¹⁴ When I

14. Because of historic and cultural differences among the formerly separate political entities that form the United Kingdom, we made the research decision to restrict our interviews to England and did not include teenagers from Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland in our study.

communicated with Doug he was enthusiastic about including England in our project. At this point I put the project on the Unitarian Universalists Pagans on hold to focus on teenage Witches in three countries. Doug and I each received grants that permitted us to go to England to interview teenage Witches. We coordinated our schedules so that our stays overlapped, permitting us to meet face-to-face to discuss the project before we continued on to Heidelberg University, where we had been invited to speak and participate in a workshop. We had one more face-to-face meeting in the United States at a conference we both attended. Everything else was discussed over the Internet with gaps of time that occurred naturally due to time differences and because of personal schedules. This was my second co-authored book, but the first that I wrote with someone who was also a scholar of contemporary Paganism. This required more discussion and at times compromise in how we interpreted the data, which I believe made it a stronger book.

I am now working on the analysis of a second survey, "The Pagan Census Revisited." This is somewhat of a longitudinal study, using many of the same questions as the first survey and including some new ones that reflect both changes in the religion, how it is practiced, and my own changing interests. As with the first survey I have incorporated questions from other surveys so that I can make comparisons with other groups. This survey is international but most of the responses are from the United States, resulting in the United States again being my focus. I am now working on turning this data into a book.

After the distribution of the Pagan Census Revisited, I was approached by an Israeli graduate student at Tel-Aviv University, Shai Ferraro, who wanted to reproduce the survey in Hebrew. This was a rare opportunity to do a comparison of data from two very different populations of contemporary Pagans. I have met with Shai twice outside of our interchanges through e-mail, once when I was invited to present a paper and participate in a workshop at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and then shortly after while he was in the United States to attend a conference. We presented a preliminary paper comparing our results at the fall 2015 meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which we hope to eventually expand and publish. Although there have been a few international comparisons of contemporary Paganism, including Doug Ezzy's and my book on teenage Witches, more are needed to better understand the international nature of contemporary Paganism.

Sociology of religion was not my initial area of inquiry but once I entered into it, I have embraced it as it permits me to explore many of the issues and concerns that first made me interested in sociology—questions of social change, gender, and political activity. Oddly, sociologists have continued to shy away from the academic study of religion at the same time as its importance in world politics and cultural life has so clearly increased. Contemporary Paganism provides a very important case study of “disorganized” religion. Although there are leaders of specific organizations and noted authors, the religion lacks a clear center or hierarchy. This makes contemporary Paganism part of what Linda Woodhead has defined as an emerging paradigm, one in which spiritual manifestations feed social movements and ideas locally and globally, but unlike traditional churches or even congregations, are less involved in national politics.¹⁵ The use of virtual space to create a network of interactions, learning, and sharing makes contemporary Paganism a good case study of many aspects of religion, culture, and political action in late modernity. This can be seen in the way in which support for environmentalism, feminism, and gay rights may be communicated and promoted through the loose community that develops around religions like contemporary Paganism. Although I have often said that the study of contemporary Paganism came to find me, more than I it, I now embrace the field as it provides an excellent venue for the study of contemporary society.

During the past thirty years I have seen the study of contemporary Paganism blossom. When I began my research there were a handful of scholars who were studying this religion, now there are enough for us to have a section at the American Academy of Religion. Each year there appears to be a growing number of graduate students who are including contemporary Paganism as one of the religions they are researching or focusing completely on it as the basis of their work. There are fewer books and articles that are overviews and more that focus on a particular form of Paganism, such as the Asatru or Reclaiming Witches,¹⁶ or on a particular issue, such as

15. Linda Woodhead, “New Forms of Religion and Society,” in “Spirituality in Global Civil Society,” *International Studies in Religion and Society* 20 (2013): 29–52; “Old, New, And Emerging Paradigms in the Sociological Study of Religion,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 22, no. 2 (2009): 103–21.

16. Michael Strmiska, “Putting the Blood Back into Blot: The Revival of Animal Sacrifice in Modern Nordic Paganism,” *The Pomegranate: The International Journal*

raising Pagan children.¹⁷ The subfield is maturing and changing as the religion itself is moving from a primarily first generation of practitioners to include more adults raised in the religion or around it. I am proud to be one of the scholars that helped to create this new subfield.

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The Owl, the Dragon and the Magician: Reflections on Being an Anthropologist Studying Magic

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When I was a child I spoke to soft toys, particularly my blue-and-white rabbit, and also to the earthworms that had wriggled their way into my overgrown sandpit at the end of our garden; everything to my young mind had life, what I would now as an anthropologist call “elemental spirit vitality.” By contrast with my upbringing within the Church of England religious culture of the day, I found more spiritual meaning in nature. By the time I reached my early twenties, I was actively searching for alternatives to what I considered to be such a patriarchal establishment. Having been inspired by Second Wave feminism in the early 1980s, I joined a witchcraft coven in south London. Starting to practice feminist witchcraft became a way of reconnecting with my earlier experiences with nature. Here, for the first time, I found a spirituality with which I felt more comfortable. But it was not enough to locate my spiritual leanings within a magical practice; I had questions that I wanted to ask. I decided to study anthropology to put my explorations into a wider cross-cultural context. The discipline of anthropology has since provided me with the theoretical and methodological frameworks for questions regarding magic and the alternate process of mind that can communicate with other beings, material and non-material. Although I do not like labels, now I would probably identify as a very eclectic solitary shamanic witch, and a Pagan more broadly. Thus my field of investigation has been linked closely with my own experience and research of Paganism, however my academic discipline has not been in Pagan studies, or even religious studies. Nevertheless, Pagan studies has given me a valuable theoretical and practical resource

1. Susan Greenwood is a past Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sussex, UK.

due to the content of my research, and also to my associations with colleagues working in the same area.

* * *

My academic exploration of spirituality and nature started with an undergraduate degree in anthropology and sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. This was a revelation in terms of helping me to understand the rigors of scholarly study in relation to the dynamics of applying analytical thought to cross-cultural studies. Above all, I felt that anthropology gave me a lens with which to examine my own western culture. A third-year dissertation on women's spirituality led into an anthropology PhD on the "British Occult Subculture: Gender, Identity and Morality," also at Goldsmiths. My overall aim in my doctoral work was to apply analytical anthropological theories and participant-observation methodology to a study of magic, without losing the essential element of spirituality. This was challenging at the time as I wanted to include my own magical experience, and this confronted a rather fine line of demarcation between researcher and informant, objectivity and subjectivity. The issue of "going native" loomed large. However, I reasoned that if I was already a practitioner of magic, then it seemed illogical to abandon my subjectivity as this could hold some vital information, if I could learn to analyze my experience as informant. I argued that to really understand this aspect of magic it was important to experience it, without rendering it invisible by a too rationalist approach. Perhaps being a "native" could offer something of value that might otherwise be overlooked or missed. My trajectory of working in a field with which I identified as a researcher and as my own informant was open to criticism by some academics who thought that I had strayed too far off the more conventional academic path. However, I felt that I had a point to make and I conducted participant observation in numerous magical groups, mainly of ceremonial or high magic and of witchcraft and Wiccan covens.

A paper given at the London School of Economics for a Sociology of Religion Graduate Seminar in 1992, which was helpfully suggested by Michael York and led by Eileen Barker, led to my first publication. The chapter, entitled "The British Occult Subculture: Beyond Good and Evil?" eventually appeared in James R. Lewis's edited collection *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*.² Part of my

2. Susan Greenwood, "The British Occult Subculture: Beyond Good and Evil?" in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 277-96.

doctoral thesis was based on the same theme of Pagan morality and was published as *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*.³ My main focus at this time was on demarcating a magical “otherworld” for academic analysis, not as a separate realm but as a liminal area of non-materiality or spirit interacting with the material dimension.

Communication between magical practitioners and academia was another issue with which I was engaged, as there seemed to be a lacuna of dialogue between “workers of magic” and academia. It was this dissonance that I sought to try to ameliorate by writing *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Witchcraft*.⁴ This was an attempt to put anthropological ideas into an accessible and practical context for non-academics. At this time I was lecturing a second-year compulsory course and MA on the anthropology of religion at Goldsmiths. In the early days there was some suspicion among my colleagues in the anthropology department about my research and the field of studying “nature religions,” especially as several MA students wanted to continue to study at PhD level. Although many anthropological staff at Goldsmiths supported me, there were one or two others who did not like the idea of too much attention being paid to Paganism as an academic area of study. The anthropology department hosted an intercollegiate seminar series on nature religions that I convened and it received something of a mixed reception.

Alternate States of Consciousness

I found that there was a more open attitude at the University of Sussex, when I started teaching undergraduate interdisciplinary courses on shamanic consciousness and altered states of consciousness there shortly afterwards. This positive attitude was due to the influence of my psychologist colleague and magical partner Brian Bates, author of *The Way of Wyrld* and *The Wisdom of the Wyrld*, and the enduring popularity of these courses that he had instigated. Here I found myself as an anthropologist initially working within the Psychology Department. This was an opportunity because one of the things that I liked, and still like, about anthropology is that its remit is broad; the discipline can incorporate psychological aspects. After all, the definition of *anthropo*, the prefix coming from the Greek,

3. Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft, and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

4. Susan Greenwood, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Witchcraft: An Illustrated Historical Reference to Spiritual Worlds* (London: Lorenz, 2001).

means “human.” So anthropology is the study of what it is to be human—that can cover quite a lot! Moving to the University of Sussex changed the direction of my research. Although employed in the Psychology Department as an anthropologist I worked in the School of Cultural and Community Studies. The interdisciplinary nature of the school meant that I taught a wide range of students studying psychology, human sciences, geography, media studies, and history, as well as anthropology.

My second book, *The Nature of Magic*,⁵ was based on my fieldwork with a diverse range of Pagan groups coupled with research for teaching Graham Harvey’s course on nature and religion at King Alfred’s College, now the University of Winchester, and also the consciousness courses at Sussex. The courses at Sussex in particular helped me to focus my attention on consciousness and its “magical” aspects and they changed the direction of my academic work. I was interested in examining magic as a subjective process of mind that participates with an interactive otherworld. After sharing experiences with many other practitioners of magic during my fieldwork, I knew that what I would come to term “magical consciousness” existed. Intuitively I had known about this as a child, but I described trying to put it into words as like crossing a chasm or an abyss to bring the meaning through, and then only incompletely. The problem was how to express the inexpressible.

At Sussex I was able to develop my concept of magical consciousness as a specific perception of the world. I conceptualized it on a spectrum: some people have a highly developed sense—such as Pagans and other practitioners of magic, some of whom might train for years to hone their skills—through to the odd flashes of inspiration or day-dream that most people might have. Most importantly, I thought that magical consciousness was part of a wider process of experience that could be examined from a wide cross-cultural perspective, and that this could usefully be termed “animism in action.”⁶ The two concepts of animism and magic together encapsulate a way of understanding a relational and holistic mode of cognition, as well as the plethora of different cultural and social frameworks within which humans engage with and understand a world where non-human

5. Susan Greenwood, *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness* (Oxford, Berg: 2005).

6. A phrase first suggested by my colleague Erik Goodwyn in our collaborative work *Magical Consciousness: An Anthropological and Neurobiological Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

beings have agency, vitality and spirit. Rather than just being characterized as esoteric, instrumental and disassociated from the everyday world, magic as a term could be explained on one level as a practical participatory process of being. The issue was how to examine it both cognitively and culturally, without reduction to either aspect.

In *The Nature of Magic* I attempted to show how Pagans and other practitioners of nature religions thought in terms of magical consciousness. However, I found a tension within some magical practices on the focus of magical thought. This work raised the inherent contradictions within much magical practice between religiosity and mystery, with its attendant discourses on esotericism, on the one hand, and ecology with its associated organismic discourses on the other. A central question was “Does nature religion affirm the sacred nature of the earth as claimed by many Pagans?” My research concluded, amongst other findings, that magical consciousness is not primarily supernatural or mystical, but is a context-specific expression of human thought. How Pagans adopt their specific and changing world views might be in constant flux with regard to esoteric or organismic tending balances, but the process of mind engaged with while thinking magically was similar. A chapter called “The Wild Hunt: A Mythological Language of Magic” from *The Nature of Magic* was reprinted in James R. Lewis and Murphy Pizza’s edited volume *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, one of the Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion series.⁷

Thinking about how I could express the magical experiences that I was having, both as an anthropologist and as a Pagan practitioner of magic, I decided to write an account of my own thinking, utilizing both analytical and magical thought. I started work on what I called my dragon project. This was to be a narrative of my encounter with magic through the elemental forces of nature that I summed up as “the dragon.” I had barely started this work when Berg, the publishers of my previous two academic volumes, invited me to write an introductory book on magic and anthropology. At first I did not want to be detracted from my dragon research, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed that such a book on magic could be helpful to those wishing to find out more about magic as experience. And so I stopped working on the dragon material and

7. Susan Greenwood, “The Wild Hunt: A Mythological Language of Magic,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, ed. James R. Lewis and Murphy Pizza (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 195–222.

set about writing *The Anthropology of Magic*, which was eventually published in 2009.⁸ Reflecting now on my motivation for writing it, I can see that I wanted to write the sort of volume that I needed when I first started my academic studies. This was a study that looked at magic straight on as a worldview and a practice and took the experience of magic seriously, without reducing it to its material effects in social or psychological terms.

A central part of *The Anthropology of Magic* was based on an imaginary dialogue between the philosopher Lucien Lévi-Bruhl and the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard concerning Lévi-Bruhl's term "mystical mentality" and his concept of "participation." Lévi-Bruhl has had a bad press in anthropology, due in part to what I consider to be an ambivalence about magic: some scholars still consider it to be ultimately irrational compared to science. I was interested in the philosopher's writings on mystical mentality and his observation that native peoples thought differently from people in scientifically based societies. Lévi-Bruhl's correspondence with Evans-Pritchard clarified their agreed position that we all think analytically (scientifically) and magically, but in some non-Western cultures the social emphasis tends toward the mystical, rather than the more analytical. This important observation had become shrouded in a "pre-logical" debate that has, in my opinion, cast Lévi-Bruhl in an unjustified racist light detracting from his insights on mystical mentality. My work on magical consciousness largely developed from Lévi-Bruhl's work. What I took from this debate was that mystical mentality was distinctly different to analytical thought, although of course it must be emphasized that the two modes are intimately connected. A magical mode of consciousness differs from, but is emphatically not separate from, logical, abstract, and analytical thinking, the more usual focus of academic scientific thought. Most people experience magical and analytical ways of thinking, we probably shift from one to the other all the time, I called this process "Not only, but Also" in the final chapter of *The Anthropology of Magic*.

The Dragon Research

This volume completed, I could finally concentrate on my dragon project that would take me much deeper into magical consciousness. Three chapters in edited collections were formative in shaping my

8. Susan Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

ideas. In 2013 “On Becoming an Owl” was published by Routledge in *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, edited by Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston.⁹ Here I started to explore my participatory relationships with spirit beings, in this case a snow owl, in magical consciousness. The participation with the owl described in this chapter occurred through my first shamanic journey at a conference in Cardiff in 1999. The journey was facilitated by the late Dan Noel, author of the then recently published *The Soul of Shamanism*¹⁰ and a past student of Michael Harnner’s “core shamanism.” Not surprisingly, this journey – in which I experienced crawling through a dark tunnel in the earth and having my skin and bodily layers of fat and muscle stripped off until I was a pile of bones – had a lasting impact on my writing and my academic career. No longer could I be under any illusion that the power of the mind and the inspirited magical imagination was not a potent force to be reckoned with. The owl helped me to see in the dark things that I might otherwise have missed. An ability to fly silently and to hunt out information was her gift.

The second chapter that helped to shape my writing about the dragon was “Magical Consciousness: A Legitimate Form of Knowledge?” in *Defining Magic: a Reader*, edited by Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg for the Critical Categories in the Study of Religion series, published by Equinox in 2013.¹¹ Here I could describe my early otherworldly experience of the dragon:

An old photograph shows a seven-year-old child standing on a beach, her bare toes wriggling in the sand and her fingers stiff with excitement. I recall the moment well for this is a photograph of me. The thrill of arriving at the seaside after a long car journey from London to the south coast of England is still fresh in my memory after many years. Once on the beach, I was fascinated with the rock pools with their dark purple frond-waving anemones, scuttling crabs and small, darting, semi-transparent shrimps. I felt that I was entering other worlds within these pools of otherness. My awareness expanded and I imagined that I became a sea dragon. Of course, I did not materially

9. Susan Greenwood, “On Becoming an Owl,” in *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, ed. Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston (Abington, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013), 211–23.

10. Daniel C. Noel, *The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imaginal Realities* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

11. Susan Greenwood, “Magical Consciousness: A Legitimate Form of Knowledge?” in *Defining Magic: A Reader*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 197–210.

transform into a reptilian fire-breathing water monster; but later as an anthropologist studying British practitioners of magic I revisited such childhood memories of the dragon as part of my fieldwork.¹⁰

It was intensely individual aspects of experiences like these that let me to write more about the dragon as research into the spirit aspects of magical consciousness. The question that I was pursuing was “How does individual experience shape magical thinking?” Magic is well understood in the social sciences from its sociological perspectives, how it impinges on the social, and from its psychological aspects shaping personal and collective behavior, but what would be the effect of a study of magic that sought to go beyond materialistic boundaries into a transpersonal realm? Was there a specific mode of thought that could define the experience of the individual as an organism within its material cultural environment, as well as participating in a non-material dimension? This was the question that intrigued me.

I decided that I should start writing about my on-going research with the dragon as an elemental force of inspirited nature when I was invited to contribute a chapter to Diana Espirito Santo and Ruy Llera Blane’s bold and innovative *The Social Life of Spirits*.¹² Composing my contribution, “Toward an Epistemology of Imaginal Alterity: Fieldwork with the Dragon,” provided me with a vehicle to explain how the dragon had a manifest reality in my everyday life. What I called “the dragon” had a form of corporeal as well as imaginal reality:

The dragon came once as the wild elements of an alien nature, cold and totally nonhuman, so much so that any communication—certainly through words—seemed all but impossible. The dragon seemed to take me to an extreme place of alterity difficult to describe... Another time the dragon came more definitely as a palpable dragon, a red primordial energy that not only felt as if it took me deeper into my blood and bones but also into a feeling of the essence of life and death itself through what seemed like cycling rounds of eternity. It was these early encounters with the dragon that prompted me to start recording and thinking about my fieldwork experiences with imaginal “entities of otherness.”¹³

Writing this chapter invited me to explore why the dragon had meant so much to me. Maybe it was due to my rather solitary childhood,

12. Susan Greenwood, “Toward an Epistemology of Imaginal Alterity: Fieldwork with the Dragon,” in *The Social Life of Spirits*, ed. Ruy Llera Blanes and Diana Espirito Santo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 198–217.

13. Greenwood, “Epistemology”, 200.

my attachment to nature rather than any religious affiliation. Additionally, perhaps my working as an anthropologist studying altered states of consciousness had made me more sensitive to spiritual communication. Most probably it was a combination of these factors. The dragon had become what seemed like a living symbol and metaphor for a whole collection of magical and animistic experiences with nature. Of course, exploring these subjective issues did make me think about my academic credibility. Some scholars would think that I had taken my research position too far into reflexive realms, but I decided to carry on nonetheless. It was only through coming to understand the pattern that the dragon that made in my own psyche I could really examine in detail such an ethnography of mind.

An Ethnography of Mind

It was at this point that I started working with neuroscientist and psychiatrist Erik D. Goodwyn, author of *The Neurobiology of the Gods*. When I first read this book I wrote inside the front cover "This book gives me the keys to a previously locked room." Here was an author, trained in the natural sciences, searching for a non-reductive but still scientific explanation of our relationship with non-material divine entities. Our positions seemed to be similar, albeit coming from different academic disciplines. I invited Erik to work on my dragon material and we started to explore in more depth how a mind thinks magically—how my own mind worked reflexively as a research project. This was an interesting exercise and pushed to the limits the boundaries of my own objectivity. Analyzing my own experience in such a manner, and from such a different scientific neurobiological perspective, gave me great insight that would have been impossible otherwise. My training in anthropology had given me a cross-cultural emphasis and now I could go some way to understanding the biological and physiological aspects of magical consciousness. The cognitive and cultural aspects of magical consciousness had come together, importantly without any reduction to either. Our collaborative work resulted in the co-authored volume *Magical Consciousness: an anthropological and neurobiological approach*, published in 2015 by Routledge in their Studies in Anthropology series.

In this study we wanted to find a common ground between what initially seemed to be radically different ways of thinking about human consciousness, and the ways that it was expressed culturally:

More than 20,000 years ago, prehistoric humans in southern Africa painted lines on cave walls alive with images of humans and animals. Neuropsychological studies of altered states of consciousness suggest that these marks might be indications or recordings of certain kinds of brain activity¹⁴, but when asked for explanation some contemporary Kalahari San people explain them as “threads of light” from the sky to take shamans (*n/omkxaosi*), climbing or gliding upwards while in trance, to visit god and his vast herd of animals¹⁵. One explanation of the cave art is based on materialistic neurobiology, whereas the other relies on an indigenous “magical” meanings, such as those studied by anthropologists.¹⁶ If each explanation for the prehistoric painted lines is seen as plausible then we need some form of incorporating these very different interpretations. The issue is to find a basis of common ground.¹⁷

Magic, of course, gets to the very heart of some theoretical and methodological difficulties encountered in the social and natural sciences, especially to do with issues of rationality. But we found that we could maintain theoretical analysis while still pushing the boundaries of examining the intense subjectivity of magical consciousness. Erik, for the purpose of this project.... enabled me to go even deeper into the process of my dragon experience gained through years of anthropological fieldwork with British practitioners of magic.

We used my dragon experiential data to study in depth magical consciousness as an intensely individual, relational and holistic aspect of mind in which spiritual entities are experienced as pervading the universe. Without being determinist to either cultural or neurobiological explanations, we sought to explore the process of thinking and being experienced in this mode of being. In this way we could discuss the process of thinking magically and then apply it to a specific case.

Our aim was to discover a creative, experimental and non-essentialist interdisciplinary place of amelioration between anthropology and neuroscience. The final result is an ethnographic and intimate view of the cognitive architecture of a mind engaged with the emotions and imagination in a pattern of meanings related to

14. J. D. Lewis-Williams, “South African Rock Art and Beyond: a Personal Perspective,” *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2013): 46.

15. *Ibid.*, 45.

16. Richard Katz, *Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

17. Susan Greenwood and Erik D. Goodwyn. *Magical Consciousness: An Anthropological and Neurobiological Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23.

childhood experiences, spiritual communications and the environment. The work is a poly-vocal study in which the voices of the neurobiologist, anthropologist as anthropologist, anthropologist as native, and various spirit beings weave an alternative narrative displaying the process of magical thinking. This was exciting and challenging. To use so much of my own experiential data on the dragon in this way meant that perhaps vital information gained through years of experience could contribute to knowledge. I felt this could only have happened after I had completed a substantial amount of research in the area of magic and consciousness.

Current Research: Magic and Art

My current research is based on a return to a previous interest in art. Having done a foundation year art course and creative photography course at Wimbledon School of Art, I have always been interested in art as an expression of human thought and emotion. This aspect of my interest had lain largely dormant until in 2014 I was invited to give a lecture on magic at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, as part of a modern artwork installation entitled "The Naked Magician" by the Brazilian artist Laura Lima. My lecture was based on exploring the imagination in magic and art and some of the issues raised in the installation. Experiencing Lima's work at the museum was a catalyst for taking my study of magic into the sphere of art and creativity. The description of that experience below indicates some early questions and possible directions of future research:

On my arrival at the museum, I entered the installation via a doorway leading into an Alice-in-Wonderland corridor with many doors fixed at varying angles and opening into different areas. I was immediately captivated by a sense of entering a liminal in-between space. As I set foot through one door I was greeted with a mirror, and so I could see myself entering this alternative reality. My self-reflection made me aware that it was "I" who was engaging in the experience that was about to confront me. Walking through the many convoluted areas containing shelving at strange angles, I was aware of canes, woodworking tools, glass bottles, flasks, boxes, and rolls of paper contained on their odd proportions. The shelves were littered with past and present workshop activities, such as pottery, model making, drawing, painting, plastering, electronic equipment manufacture, and even cooking. My gaze was drawn to a blackboard with the following message chalked: *Twelve birds can't fly in the same place*

at the same time but they can try. My eye was taken by the disorder at every turn and I found myself asking what the chaos of it all meant to me. Questions such as “How do we control our interpretations of the world?” and “How are our world views controlled for us?” and “How do we process and make sense of our environments?” sprang to mind.

Smelling cooking, I walked into an end section and saw the Magician, who was wearing a top hat and a tailcoat with the sleeves cut off: this apparently signaled “no tricks.” Was it that the Magician was revealing the inner workings of magic through traversing different modes of perception? He was chopping vegetables into small pieces preparatory to their adding to a pot boiling on the stove. On his right, was a “cookbook” that showed diagrams of hydraulic pulleys and lifts. To the logical mind it was madness—there was no connection—but to the magical mind there was some association, or maybe there was not. Perhaps it just made the participant in the scene aware of a disjuncture of logic. This installation was about something other. The artist Laura Lima was interested in dramaturgic installations that transcended the worlds of art and performance for the stage. The Magician went about his business drawing visitors into an experience that could take them somewhere different in their imagination. As I chatted with the Magician, I became aware of what this something else was about. He told me that any visitor to the installation could become involved, if they so wished. Everyone was invited to participate in the on-going creative process of the artwork. He told me that often people would revert back to being a child; he spoke about how he had just had great fun with a group of children having a tea-bag race on a wall, seeing which teabag thrown on the flat surface could reach the ground first. But there were also other on-going projects like the creation of imaginative stairways with esoteric symbols, and some people had spent time cutting out paper and making random shapes. Here was a space where the imagination could take flight without all the usual boundaries, culturally or self-imposed. Here, I realized, was the link between magic and art.

Later that evening, during my lecture, I spoke about the importance of the imagination for an understanding of magic as an alternative perception. I suggested that Laura Lima’s installation of *The Naked Magician* created a magical realm, a liminal space apart from the everyday; a space between order and chaos of disorder in which the Magician was in touch with a non-material realm that we could not see, but were invited to join. The Magician, it seemed, was

working in a modern alchemist's laboratory, going about his business; a business that we cannot quite fathom, but he draws us in through our curiosity. The magician can be a provocateur, playing with art, assumptions, pretensions, and rituals. We sense that this is an encounter with magic. Lima's magician holds the space between order and chaos, but with a difference. With Lima's magician we are left to pick up the pieces using our own imaginations. The artist is encouraging us to explore our own chaos, our own borders of logical and rational thought as we enter the in-between area of magic. Lima takes us into our own imagination by inviting us indirectly to participate in something other.

In an interview conducted previously by the museum, Lima talked about opening up poetic possibilities—the bringing together of matter and the web-of-life experience plus something unfathomable. To my mind, the unfathomable is what happens when we let the magical imagination have full rein. It is a creative act, a chaotic act, we need to let go of our assumptions and engage in what might seem like madness. Plunging into the world of magic is a re-awakening of strong imagination, a re-kindling of soul and a resistance to over-rationalization. I finished my lecture by quoting the artist Damien Hirst (who had been at Goldsmiths at the same time as me when I was studying anthropology but whom I had never met due to the fact that we were in different departments) who said that 'you trick the viewer into thinking that you're telling them something, ...revealing something that they already have. This "something," for me, is the ability to think magically. My work on art and magic is on going. In 2015 I was privileged to be invited to speak on Magical Consciousness: Magical Knowledge at an interdisciplinary seminar series—Interdisziplinäre Vortragsreihe des cx centrum für interdisziplinäre studien Akademie der Bildenden Künste München—on Reale Magie, at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. Presently, all the contributors of the seminar are working on a publication for *diaphanes*, a Berlin/Zurich-based publishing house. The theme of the publication is: Why is magic becoming such a popular topic in academic discourses, aesthetic works, and everyday life? I look forward to seeing how it shapes.

* * *

It will be clear from the foregoing that my work in relation to Pagan studies has been tangential at times, but always focused on magic. I could say the same for my research in anthropology too; for my

interests have strayed from a more traditional anthropological terrain that still generally feels more at home studying non-western cultures. In this sense, it could be said that I am an outsider to both Pagan studies and anthropology; maybe I have to own being a maverick. It is a position that is both comfortable and awkward, but I use it to endeavor to make communication with magical non-material dimensions of experience clearer, or that is the aim anyway!

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The Academy, the Otherworld, and Between

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I had a charmed entry to the world of witches, but like many stories of enchantment, I seemed to suddenly find myself “there” with little conscious effort or planning. Back at university in 1990 to do a PhD after a decade’s break, I was casting about for a research topic which would keep me fascinated for the three or so years the degree would take.

I was employed to tutor a first year social anthropology class at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand, and it was while sitting in on a lecture on cross-cultural ideas about illness and healing, medicine and magic that the idea of studying witches popped into my head. Why not? Witchcraft was a well-established area of anthropological study and there seemed little chance of becoming bored by such a topic. However, to my knowledge, anthropologists had only ever conducted research on witchcraft in “other cultures,” particularly in Africa, Melanesia, and the Americas, and had universally focused on those other cultures’ *beliefs about* witches. It seemed the witch was only as real to my discipline as the witchcraft belief. Because anthropologists—and historians studying the European “witch-craze” and Salem witch trials—“knew” that “real witches” did not exist, they searched for social, psychological, political, and economic reasons to explain why societies (always, everywhere and still) constructed witch beliefs, labeled some people “witches,” and persecuted or killed the hapless objects of such labeling.

I thought it would be novel to study witches themselves, people who self-identified as such, rather than those labeled and damned

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as “witches” by their communities. I also wanted to study witches “at home” in New Zealand rather than in an exotic “other” context. At the time I knew none, had no idea how I might come to meet some, and imagined it might be difficult to find them, and more difficult getting them to agree to being studied. I had never heard of Wicca, feminist or any other kind of modern witchcraft, Paganism or Goddess Spirituality. During the tutorial after my epiphany in the anthropology class, I told my group about my idea to study witches. One of the students cheerfully spoke up telling us she was a witch and that I should read Starhawk, an American writer, if I wanted to find out more about contemporary witches and witchcraft. I found *The Spiral Dance* in the university library, took it home, and read it in an evening.²

I have learned since, of course, that *The Spiral Dance* is the first book many contemporary witches read and, like many of them, I was entranced. The world it opened up was intriguing and appealing, yet comfortably familiar. I had chosen to study self-identified witches without knowing the phenomenon of modern Pagan witchcraft existed. I had thought I was choosing a risky and perhaps risqué topic, but found that the world of Pagan witches was neither of these. I had imagined, I am sorry to admit, that I might dine out for a few years on spicy stories of witches’ goings-on, but instead have spent the last quarter of a century assuring audiences that witches are pretty ordinary people. Nowadays this is not news to most people—when I give a lecture about witches, invariably there are one or two witches in the class, or students are keen to proffer that they have a friend/mother/grandmother/sister/girlfriend who is a witch. But during the mid-1990s a few students would stay away from class (often on the advice of their church’s pastor) if they knew the lecture was about witchcraft. Or, abnormally alert, they would perch on the edge of their seats expecting salacious revelations.

When I excitedly told other people what I hoped to study, most made jokes (about orgies in graveyards, developing a taste for newt and bat, etc.) or expressed doubt that it constituted a legitimate area of study, let alone doctoral study in anthropology. I could not find a thesis supervisor inside or outside my discipline because no one took the topic, or my wish to study it, seriously. A history professor I was advised to approach could not fathom how I had failed to

2. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

gather that no “real” witches existed. I should have understood by now that witches were scapegoats for community hostilities and victims of misogyny; as Monica Wilson famously put it, witches represent “the standardized nightmares of the group.”³

Oddly, none of this bothered me. Eventually, the head of department in which I wanted to enroll, a sociologist who specialized in the media and knew nothing about my topic, agreed to supervise my thesis because, he told me years later, my blind perseverance had worn him down. Within a few months two anthropologists had joined the supervisory panel, both of whom were interested in women, healing, and ritual.

This did not mean, however, that the academy had embraced my topic. When I gave seminars, I was sometimes asked, “How do you identify yourself? As a social scientist or a witch?” There was no right answer to that question. If I said I was a witch I could say farewell to any hope of academic credibility. It would have been more acceptable to say I was a social scientist, but because I located myself as a feminist researcher, I risked the accusation that I was turning my witch research participants, already vulnerable because of the misogynistic popular stereotype, into research “objects” — “others” from whom I would “obtain data.” This was 1990 and feminist research methods and epistemologies had begun to make their revolutionary impact on traditional research approaches; it was a time of soul-searching and rigorous critique, exciting experimentation, and not a little angst. Of course it was common for anthropologists to worry about their role as mediators between cultures, “transcultural transvestites, professional aliens, cross-cultural voyeurs,” perpetual “in-betweeners.”⁴ I was not the only one needing to come to terms with my position. Since the mid-1980s researcher reflexivity, admittedly sometimes tipping close to navel-gazing, had become normal and almost obligatory. Even so, in the academy’s eyes, being or becoming an insider in witchcraft research — “going native” — seemed a good deal more problematic than becoming an insider in any other research community.

3. Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Enquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 96.

4. Ioan Lewis, *Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4; Richard Schechner, “Collective Reflexivity: Restoration of Behaviour,” in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982), 80.

I was delighted, therefore, to discover a solution to the ‘What are you?’ question by identifying as a *hag*. While researching literature on witchcraft, I came across Hans Duerr’s *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization* and learned that as late as the Middle Ages, the witch was still the *hagazussa*, a being who sat on the *hag* – the fence – yet who participated in both worlds.⁵ She could be in two places at once. I embraced the *hag* as a useful metaphor for my hitherto awkward positioning: I could claim to “sit on the fence” between the worlds of academia and witchcraft, and at the same time participate in both worlds.

Although I had imagined my greatest difficulty would be finding witches who would accept me, compared with gaining acceptance in the university, the witches were easy. The research quickly drew me in. People passed on snippets of useful information, one being that the University of Auckland’s Continuing Education Programme was offering various courses on Goddess Spirituality, women, and ritual. I perused its publicity brochure, discovered that a weekend course called “Rites of Passage for Women” was due to start in a few days, phoned up, and secured the last place on the course. That weekend we all had to nominate a personal rite of passage to process with the group’s support: mine was initiation into witchcraft research.

A few weekends later I was back at the university for another course which involved watching Joseph Campbell’s *Power of Myth* series of filmed conversations with journalist Bill Moyers.⁶ The intense impact of hearing, for the first time, Campbell’s injunction to “follow your bliss” and thereby discover a “deep sense of being in form and going where your body and soul want to go” has never left me. Campbell claims that following one’s bliss puts one “on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living.”⁷ I took this to mean neither selfish hedonism nor passive acquiescence in a pre-ordained destiny, but rather that when one’s desire, will and action are aligned and mutually engaged, one’s life trajectory actualizes

5. Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 46.

6. The 1988 PBS documentary *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* was originally broadcast as six one-hour conversations between mythologist Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) and journalist Bill Moyers. “Follow your bliss” comes in the fourth episode: “Sacrifice and Bliss.”

7. Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 120.

accordingly. One becomes director of one's own life drama, author of one's life-narrative. And somehow this personal agency is connected to, and in negotiation with, some unimaginably vast creative agent or energetic system beyond oneself. "Follow your bliss" has been quoted so widely and often as to become a cheesy New Age cliché, spilling into such areas as career guidance, life coaching and university course advice, but it clearly still has powerful resonance. Just last week, while supervising a twenty-two-year-old graduate student in my office, I noticed "follow your bliss" tattooed on her wrist.

My doctoral research on feminist witchcraft and Goddess Spirituality was conducted in the early 1990s, during the early stages of the movement's heyday – which paralleled feminism's heyday – in New Zealand. Courses were being run, literature and several high profile visitors from the United States made their way into the country, a *Women's Spirituality Newsletter* was started (which has just published its 120th edition) and women's covens and Goddess groups were springing up, often in the wake of workshops. With the consent of one such group, I joined as a researcher and participating member; in August 2015 the group, to which I still belong, celebrated its twenty-sixth Imbolc. (In the southern hemisphere the Pagan Wheel of the Year is inverted.) Christian feminists were also becoming active, and indeed some of them migrated out of Christianity and became feminist witches (one I interviewed had previously spent many years as a Methodist missionary in Papua New Guinea).

As well as reading Starhawk, I and some of my witch friends avidly read Mary Daly, Carol P. Christ, Jean Shinoda Bolen, Zsuzsanna Budapest, Naomi Goldenberg, Diane Stein, Charlene Spretnak, Margot Adler, Merlin Stone, Marija Gimbutas, Luisah Teish, and others. The political, psychological and symbolic implications of re-interpreting and re-appropriating the "witch" and the "Goddess"⁸ as potentially empowering images for women struck a chord with many 1990s spiritual feminists in New Zealand, as did the re-valuing of "Nature" and implicit ecological project. The religious, magical, and esoteric aspects were less important. Surprisingly, I did not come across Wiccans during my three years of doctoral research (however,

8. Cf. Christ, Carol P. "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections." In *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader on Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 273–87.

they were not my focus and I do not doubt there were some in New Zealand at that time).⁹ In 1988 a New Zealand artist and ritual-maker, Juliet Batten, published *Power from Within: A Feminist Guide to Ritual-making*, geared especially to New Zealand women, the local environment and seasonal round in the southern hemisphere. This and Batten's *Celebrating the Southern Seasons* (1995), which included information on both indigenous Māori and Celtic religious festivals (the two predominant heritages of New Zealanders), quickly became and have remained key guides for local women's ritual groups and others wanting ideas for rituals which sacralize the local landscape and turning seasons.¹⁰

During the 1990s the trickle of scholarly works on modern witchcraft, Paganism, and feminist spirituality became a steady stream, which was very helpful when I finally got around to publishing my New Zealand study as a monograph.¹¹ When I first went looking, though, anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann's 1989 ethnography, based on her research with several mixed-gender, Gardnerian-inspired English covens, was the only academic study available and I was grateful to find it. Luhrmann has taken a lot of flak from Pagans and scholars alike because, mostly, of her problematic self-positioning: being initiated into groups, but claiming, "I am no witch, no wizard, though I have been initiated as though I were," and describing witches' beliefs as "outlandish."¹² Given that hers was the first anthropological study

9. During the 1990s in New Zealand, feminist witchcraft, a term used more or less interchangeably with Goddess spirituality, had a higher profile and drew more members than other kinds of modern witchcraft or Paganism. This is no longer the case. I would guess that eclectic Pagans, Wiccans, Druids and Heathens now outnumber women in Goddess spirituality.

10. Juliet Batten, *Power from Within: A Feminist Guide to Ritual-making* (Auckland: Ishtar Books, 1988); *Celebrating the Southern Seasons: Rituals for Aotearoa* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1995).

11. Kathryn Rountree, *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-Makers in New Zealand* (London: Routledge, 2004). I had earlier published a few articles in low profile Australasian journals, as well as "The New Witch of the West: Feminists Reclaim the Crone," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 4 (1997): 211-29 and "The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate," *Social Analysis* 43, no. 2 (1996): 138-65. I am indebted to Graham Harvey, whose contribution to Pagan scholarship, the Pagan community and Pagan scholars is vast, for introducing me to a commissioning editor for Routledge at the BSA SocRel conference (Plater College, Oxford, 9-11 April 2001) and for other much appreciated collegial generosity over the years.

12. Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 18, 7.

of modern Pagan witches and the academic climate at the time, it is perhaps not difficult to understand Luhrmann's reticence regarding her position in the field and her text. Even so, her insistence that she is "no witch" seems overly preoccupied with reassuring an academic audience at the expense of her research participants' sensibilities, and in lieu of a more reflexive and less dichotomizing discussion of her position. In retrospect, Luhrmann's caution has worked against her and arguably become the most notable legacy of her witchcraft research.

Anthropologists in her wake who have explicitly and reflexively addressed their positioning have strengthened rather than compromised the serious scholarly reception of their work. Lynne Hume, in her book about Australian witches and Pagans, does not shy away from embracing insider status, but insists that her witch self does not eclipse her other roles and selves, including her academic one.¹³ Similarly, Susan Greenwood, in her ethnography of English witches, sometimes felt she occupied two worlds at once, producing feelings of schizophrenia. Nonetheless, she argues, it is not opening one's subjective self to experiences of the "otherworld" which compromises the quality of research, but failure to do so.¹⁴ In a quest for the emic point of view, it is difficult to see how an anthropologist can do otherwise. On the first page of Sabina Magliocco's *Witching Culture* (2004), in her excerpted field notes, Magliocco makes explicit the interweaving of her research and life.¹⁵ Jenny Blain has consistently identified as "an anthropologist and writer, Heathen, and with a strong interest in shamanism and the practice of seidr."¹⁶ The honest and careful attention each of these scholars has given to the problematic of researcher positionality has contributed valuably to enlarge and normalize a space for anthropologists and other Pagan scholars as insiders to Pagan communities, if that is one of the "selves" they wish to claim.

However, not every scholar does. Ironically, given the academy's (former) tetchiness about researchers "going native," it appears that in some quarters of Pagan scholarship there has developed a reverse

13. Lynn Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

14. Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 12–14.

15. Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

16. Jenny Blain, *My Sheffield Hearth*, <http://home.freeuk.net/jenny.blain>.

prejudice against scholars who *do not* identify as Pagan insiders. This implies what seems to me a problematic conflation of research quality with researcher identity, irrespective of the depth of understanding, sensitivity, respect, ability to empathize, intimacy with research participants, or quality of analysis revealed in the research. It could be seen as homogenizing insiders, glossing over individual differences and assuming that “because I am an insider, I understand you because you are like me.” I am not convinced that opening oneself subjectively to experiences of others’ worlds necessarily requires a (wholly, permanent and perfectly aligned) insider identity, nor that an alignment of spiritual self and academic self is a prerequisite for good research or, indeed, guarantees it. There may well be a frequent connection between insider researchers and the depth of insight present in the research product, and I think that the people being researched should recognize themselves in the ethnographic text. But making insider identity a requirement for research on Pagans or anyone else seems fundamentally contrary to the anthropological endeavor of “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.”¹⁷ It would also suggest I could never study a community of which I am not a member.

After my PhD and a two-year post-doctoral fellowship at Victoria University of Wellington,¹⁸ I got my first permanent academic post at Massey University’s Auckland campus in 1996, and here I still am. Although it took a while at the beginning of my PhD for the academy to come round to taking my research seriously, I have been fortunate since then that my career and professional credibility have not suffered, as far as I know, on account of my choice to mostly study Pagans. In terms of being granted research leave, funding and academic promotion—not to mention getting a job in the first place—I have been treated equitably. Academic life undoubtedly has its difficult patches, but I cannot honestly say that any of mine have been related to my choice of research area, and it is still the best life I could wish for.

17. T. S. Eliot used this phrase originally to refer to “good” poetry, but it applies so well to anthropology that it has become an oft-repeated tenet. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), 259.

18. My post-doctoral project, which resulted in publications about Māori women in relation to European explorers and missionaries (e.g. Rountree 1998, 2000), was unconnected to witchcraft and Paganism, but drew on my commitment to feminist research and my sub-doctoral research and training in archaeology. During the 1980s I wrote a series of books on New Zealand’s early history for use in primary schools.

I think this good fortune is partly a result of luck, partly timing, and partly because New Zealand is a relatively open environment with perhaps less-entrenched prejudices, an ethos of social equity,¹⁹ and a fairly wide tolerance for non-conformity simply because it is a youngish society. (However, I would emphasize “relatively” in the last sentence; there is still much to be done.) Furthermore, my academic position was at Massey’s newest campus, and this meant there was more flexibility, energy, and space to create our own direction. Within a year I had introduced a course on the anthropology of ritual and belief, so I have always had an outlet for research-led teaching. In regard to timing, as noted above, during the 1990s there were scholars in various disciplines dotted around the world, often unknown to each other, who were conducting research on modern Paganism and who began publishing in this decade. This pioneering research prised open an ever-widening path for future researchers so that by the early years of this century a critical mass of scholars and scholarship was emerging. From this time onward, research on Pagans was demonstrably not “weird,” “ridiculous” or unimportant, and there were opportunities to publish in good journals and with well-reputed publishers.

Having done a PhD “at home,” for my next big research project I wanted to go far away in the manner of traditional anthropologists, partly, perhaps, to legitimize my anthropological identity, but more for the adventure of it. After watching Donna Read’s 1989 film *Goddess Remembered*, which visits archaeological sites where remnants of ancient “Goddess culture” have survived, I felt lured back to my sub-doctoral discipline of archaeology. Read’s film opens with an exquisite female figurine from one of Malta’s Neolithic sites gliding across the screen:²⁰ this image introduced me to the field-site where I have conducted research for the last eighteen years. I learned from the film that Malta’s temples drew women involved in Goddess spirituality from around the world, attracted by the idea that ancient Malta represented a peaceful, woman-honoring, Goddess-worshipping society. I was eager to see these 5–6,000 year old sites and wondered what meanings Maltese people themselves ascribed to them. And how did the Maltese feel about the foreign women

19. The day I celebrated submitting my PhD thesis with a bunch of women friends was also the centenary of women’s suffrage in New Zealand – the first country to extend the vote to women on 19 September 1893.

20. The artefact was “the Sleeping Lady,” excavated from the Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum in Paola, an extraordinary subterranean temple-tomb.

who made pilgrimages to the temples and romanticized Neolithic Malta as a matrifocal golden age? These questions were prompted by my experience of cultural politics in New Zealand and ferocious national debates since the early 1980s about the appropriation of indigenous people's cultural property.

Thus, in 1998 I began visiting Malta to research contemporary understandings of the temples, the diverse local attitudes to them, and Goddess pilgrims' experiences of spending time in them.²¹ Discovering that archaeologists and Goddess visitors had strikingly different interpretations of the sites, which I attributed, respectively, to their scientific or religious agendas and different discursive framings, I also undertook short periods of research at two other high-profile contested sites important to Pagans: Çatalhöyük on the Konya Plain in Turkey in 2003²² and the Hill of Tara in County Meath, Ireland, in 2009.²³ The story of the relationship between Pagans and archaeology, and between Pagans and the State which ultimately controls ancient sites, has been fraught in many places, but is not entirely gloomy as Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis's (2007) excellent

21. Kathryn Rountree, "Goddesses and Monsters: Contesting Approaches to Malta's Neolithic Past," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 9, no. 2 (1999): 204-31; "The Past is a Foreigners' Country: Goddess Feminists, Archaeologists, and the Appropriation of Prehistory," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 1 (2001): 5-27; "Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body through Sacred Travel," *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 4 (2002): 475-96; "Re-inventing Malta's Neolithic Temples: Contemporary Interpretations and Agendas," *History and Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2002): 31-51; "The Case of the Missing Goddess: Plurality, Power and Prejudice in Reconstructions of Malta's Neolithic Past," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19, no. 2 (2003): 25-44; "Performing the Divine: Neo-Pagan Pilgrimages and Embodiment at Sacred Sites," *Body and Society* 12, no. 4 (2006): 95-115; "Tourist Attractions, Cultural Icons, Sites of Sacred Encounter: Engagements with Malta's Neolithic Temples," in *Thinking Through Tourism*, ed. Tom Selwyn and Julie Scott (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 183-208.

22. Kathryn Rountree, "Archaeologists and Goddess Feminists at Çatalhöyük: An Experiment in Multivocality," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (2007): 7-26; "Is Dialogue between Religion and Science Possible? The Case of Archaeology and the Goddess Movement," in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 797-818.

23. Kathryn Rountree, "Tara, the M3, and the Celtic Tiger: Contesting Cultural Heritage, Identity and a Sacred Landscape in Ireland," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 68, no. 4 (2012): 519-44. In Ireland a bitter decade-long contest had raged over the construction of a new motorway through the sacred landscape adjacent to the iconic Hill of Tara. In this case, archaeologists were divided, with some archaeologists and Pagans forming two of the constituent interest groups who protested long and hard against the motorway. My research was conducted just prior to the opening of the motorway for public use.

long-term research in regard to British sites shows. Blain and Wallis describe encouraging cases of constructive negotiation, compromise and accommodation of differing perspectives and requirements, and I have seen this too, recently, in Heritage Malta's dealings with Pagan visitors – local and foreign – to Malta's Neolithic temples.

In the course of four periods of fieldwork in Malta from the late 1990s to early 2000s, despite the fact I had been researching the experiences of foreign Goddess pilgrims, I never came across members of an indigenous Pagan community. Then, in September 2004, I received an email from someone in Malta asking whether I knew about a Maltese Pagan group and offering to introduce me to a young Maltese witch. I was astonished and intrigued, and immediately wrote to the young woman, "Isabella," who became a critical and wonderful key participant in what became my ethnographic study of the Maltese Pagan community for the next decade.²⁴ This community of witches and Pagans was similar to, and considerably different from, the witches I knew so well in New Zealand. The biggest difference was the fact that they were *Maltese*. They inhabited a small, hidden (at that time, less so now) subculture in a strongly Catholic society where religion permeated every sphere of public and domestic, social, and political life. Their landscape and seasons were different both from New Zealand and from the United States and United Kingdom to whom they looked for inspiration. They were mixed-gender and did not particularly espouse a feminist politics. They were youngish (mostly late teens and twenties); they loved magic. Yet they embraced me, helped and taught me, and became my friends. At first they were astonished that I knew the same songs and chants that they did, but once they saw I was familiar with many of their ritual practices, they not only allowed but expected me to participate and know what to do. If I was told to interpret what I saw in a scrying bowl, or invoke one of the four directions, or embody the fierce goddess Sekhmet, I had to do it.

My research with Maltese Pagans was preoccupied with the relationship between the local and global: what happens when the global "culture" of Paganism interacts with a particular local culture

24. Kathryn Rountree, *Crafting Contemporary Pagan Identities in a Catholic Society* (London: Ashgate, 2010); "Localising Neo-Paganism: Integrating Global and Indigenous Traditions in a Mediterranean Catholic Society," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 4 (2011): 846–72; "Neo-Paganism, Native Faith and Indigenous Religion: A Case Study of Malta within the European Context," *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 22, no. 1 (2014): 81–100.

which has its own unique social, cultural, historical, political, geographical and religious context, as well as, in the case of Malta, its own indigenous tradition of magical belief. What, then, of my position in relation to the Pagan community in Malta? I was obviously not Maltese and lived as far away from Malta as you can get, but when I visited I was treated as one who belonged. Despite not being Maltese and therefore a cultural outsider, I did (and do) consider myself to be a kind of Pagan. Indeed, because of the youthfulness of most of my research participants, I had been involved in Paganism longer than most of them. In a broad sense, then, I shared the same religious identity as the people I was studying if not their ethnic and cultural heritage: we were fellow insiders of a global Pagan community, even if the local contexts in which we constructed our identities and the particular traditions we followed were different. I now have Maltese citizenship and a Maltese identity card, but I am not fooling myself that this gives me full cultural insider status. Personal identities are multiple and partial, often impermanent and non-discrete, usually works-in-progress. I like Elisabeth Kirtsoglou's description of an ethnographer as one who belongs to a "third culture," a sometimes awkward position outside one's culture of origin *and* the culture being studied despite participation in both, straddling the distance between the two while trying to explain one to the other.²⁵

My interests in the last few years have continued to pursue this line. At the 2011 conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion held in Budapest I was struck by the amount of research with Pagan communities happening throughout Europe, most of which I knew little to nothing about beyond the fascinating studies in Michael Strmiska's 2005 edited volume.²⁶ These Pagan and Native Faith groups were clearly diverse and offered a wider window on the complex and ever-expanding phenomenon of Paganism: on local/global influences, innovation and tradition, nationalism and trans-nationalism. I invited scholars researching groups throughout Europe to contribute to the volume *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses*.²⁷ While this manuscript was in preparation, Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott

25. Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, *For the Love of Women: Gender, Identity and Same-Sex Relationships in a Greek Provincial Town* (London: Routledge, 2004).

26. Michael Strmiska, ed., *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2005).

27. Kathryn Rountree, ed., *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

Simpson's edited volume came out,²⁸ which has contributed immeasurably to expanding our knowledge of the diversity of Pagan and Native Faith communities in central and eastern Europe. My current project is another edited volume which takes up the theme of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in relation to Pagan communities globally. It explores the culturally inflected nature of Pagan diversity along with the global commonalities which emerge as a result of Pagans occupying a "glocal" space and participating in supranational social networks facilitated by the Internet and increasing mobility.

As I said at the start of this piece, I began this research twenty-five years ago with no idea what I was doing. I could not have imagined where it would take me, and cannot say where it will go next. It has often felt as if the path comes into being as I walk it. The constants are my conviction that the personal is political, "work-life" is indivisible, and whichever way I turn the world is a staggeringly interesting place.

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Making the Strange Familiar

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I did not expect to find my first academic colleagues at a Pagan festival. Yet it was in the 1990s at Pagan Spirit Gathering (PSG), a festival sponsored by Circle Sanctuary in Wisconsin, that I got to know Sabina Magliocco and Adrian Ivakhiv, both good friends and colleagues still, two decades later. Not long after that, I met Michael York and Jone Salmonsens at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting, and my first circle of Pagan studies colleagues was in the making, a circle that has extended out in the years since to include many others. But it was these early friends and the conversations we had, the struggles we went through to have our work taken seriously, and the job changes and challenges we shared before there was a field called Pagan studies, that I am profoundly grateful for.

Today it is much easier to find a variety of academic homes in which to study contemporary Paganism, but in the mid-1990s there was nothing known as “Pagan studies.” Instead, the AAR’s New Religious Movements Group was a welcoming academic community for many of us, and the senior scholars involved with that Group, especially Tim Miller and Cathy Wessinger, were supportive and encouraging of younger scholars. The annual New Religious Movements reception at the AAR is still one of my cannot-miss events, even as my schedule has filled up with many other obligations, because it is always a great opportunity to meet and catch up with other Pagan studies scholars. However, outside of these contexts, in my early career the majority of religious studies scholars

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tended to trivialize or ignore contemporary Paganism, and it was up to those of us who were convinced it was an important new religious movement to prove to our colleagues that it deserved scholarly attention.

Around the same time I met Sabina and Adrian in Wisconsin during my first years of field work, I was developing relationships with local Pagans throughout the Midwestern United States and learning—most significantly for my scholarship later on—about nature, ritual, sacred space, and the work of memory in self and community creation. These interests remain central to my work today, whether I am researching and writing about environmentalism, the Burning Man festival, ecstatic dance, or teenage Hare Krishna hardcore fans. In a sense, Paganism—in addition to the publications and advice of my first mentors, Robert Orsi (religious studies) and Michael Jackson (anthropology)—profoundly shaped my academic career by introducing me to issues that continue to draw my academic curiosity. For instance, I have become increasingly interested in the ways that childhood and adolescent experiences of nature shape adult identities and ecological commitments, especially among contemporary Pagans and environmental activists, two communities that see nature as sacred. During interviews for my latest project on radical environmental protests, a number of activists described to me their years as teenage Pagans or childhood animists. Like many contemporary Pagans, some of them recall first becoming sensitive to spiritual presences in nature when they were children or teenagers and they drew on these childhood experiences as they discovered and constructed identities as activists for whom nature is sacred.

I first became aware of important connections between childhood, ritual and sacred space while interviewing contemporary Pagans in Bloomington, Indiana. When I moved to Bloomington in 1987 to begin graduate school, I had the vague idea that I would study Tibetan Buddhism, but little direction. When I encountered contemporary Paganism during my first year of graduate study, that direction shifted and a new plan began to take shape. One of my initial shopping expeditions in downtown Bloomington led me to the Eye of Osiris, an occult/metaphysical shop that, like many other such shops in other cities in the 1990s, was a center for esoteric and Pagan networking before the Internet. The owners of the shop were also active in the Elf Lore Family (ELF), an eclectic Pagan organization that began in 1983 and ran a nature sanctuary called Lothlorien,

consisting of over a hundred acres of dense green woodlands in rural Indiana's limestone belt. Lothlorien hosted festivals throughout the year that were open to people of any persuasion, including the unaffiliated like myself. It was there that I was introduced to a number of Neopagan traditions, but especially to Wicca and the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). But what drew me in and delighted me most in my first encounter with Paganism in the woods of Indiana was the way in which members of Lothlorien and visitors to its gatherings created sacred spaces.

My first book, an ethnography of Pagan festivals in the United States entitled *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* (2001) is about many things, but particularly focuses on conflicts and contested meanings in the creation, performance and experience of self and community in the spaces of Pagan festivals, including those at Lothlorien.² In the book, I explore spatial practices that range from the space of the festival itself as understood to be apart from and in contrast to the "mundane" world outside festivals to a tiny altar in the crook of a tree dedicated to fairies of the land. As individuals moved through and interacted with various sites within the festival, their identities were shaped and expressed both alone and in concert with others, human and nonhuman. As they created and experienced these spaces, they negotiated various understandings of self in relation to community, memory and history.

Lothlorien's founders saw the woods as a place in which visitors as well as ELF members could focus their encounters with spirits and facilitate their search for identity and communal belonging. Many shrines and altars were scattered through Lothlorien's woods, as small sites of focused attention and accumulated meanings, including an Ancestors Shrine for communing with the dead. The circles, groves, stones, and springs of that land offered many opportunities for participants to interface with the more than human world. In this way, Lothlorien and other festivals I studied introduced me to a particular kind of domestication of nature that in many ways is the opposite of the discourse of wild nature I am now exploring in the lives of radical environmentalists. These festival sites set apart from the cities and suburbs in which most Pagan festival-goers lived expressed a tension between the spaces carved out by human

2. Sarah Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

hands—altars, shrines, circles, buildings—and the more untamed nature of surrounding woodlands that also contributed to the sense of being separated from the world outside.

The rich material culture of Pagan festivals and festival-goers' many ways of creating ritual spaces with things as well as gestures, language and music effectively drew me into a world that I was previously unfamiliar with, a world that was a far cry from the liberal Episcopal church I grew up in and the Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues I had visited with childhood friends. In my religious background, feelings and politics were important to the religious adults around me, but not spirits or special places to commune with them. The meanings and uses of the material culture of altars and shrines in particular has been a theme that I first discussed in *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves* (and in the dissertation on which it was based) and which I have more recently traced in a couple of articles on mourning rites and memorialization at a temple for the dead at the Burning Man festival ("Performing Grief in Formal and Informal Rituals at the Burning Man Festival" and No Novenas for the Dead: Ritual Action and Communal Memory at the Temple of Tears"), as well as altars and shrines at other spiritual festivals not tied to a particular religion, but often influenced by Pagan beliefs and practices.³ It was Pagan festivals that first drew my attention to the importance of these kinds of spectacular collective events in American religious history as what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopia," sites at which something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which...all the other real sites...are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."⁴ In the case of the temples at Burning Man, it was Western ways of mourning that were inverted and contested, while the temples also created spaces for alternative expressions of grief, longing, and desire expressed through material culture, especially altars.

In this way, Pagan festivals were of interest to me first of all as sites that functioned as heterotopia but especially because of their

3. "No Novenas for the Dead: Ritual Action and Communal Memory at the Temple of Tears," in *Afterburn: Reflections on Burning Man*, ed. Lee Gilmore and Mark Van Proyen (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 195–213, and "Performing Grief in Formal and Informal Rituals at the Burning Man Festival," in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual. Vol. 2. Body, Performance, Agency and Experience*, ed. Jan Weinhold and Geoffrey Samuel (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2010), 525–40.

4. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 23.

aesthetics, the interactions of humans with nature and the spirit world and the myriad ways spirits were made present in ritual, mediated by places, things and ritual design. The bright costumes of festival-goers, their tattoos and jewelry, were another aesthetic aspect that led me to inquire beyond the surface: what was behind the pageantry? What memories, life stories, experiences and beliefs led to certain kinds of self-presentation? Pagan festivals seemed to promise a way to talk about all the issues that were important to me and helped make the case that here was a religious tradition that could be situated within the larger landscape of late modern American religiosity. Since my training at Indiana University's PhD program was in North American religious history, such connections were essential for me to make the case that my dissertation would contribute to a larger body of scholarship.

While I was enthralled by the contemporary Pagan world I entered at festivals, my professors at Indiana were not convinced that an ethnography of Pagan festivals would make a marketable and academically respectable dissertation topic. Fortunately, I was blessed with two champions – American religious historians Stephen Stein and Robert Orsi – who recognized the potential of the project to make a contribution to the study of American religion as well as religious studies more generally. Without the two of them (and neither knew much of anything about Paganism at the time) I would never have finished my PhD. Because Stein was writing a book about the Shakers and Orsi was working on popular Catholicism, both knew something about religious practices that are maligned by observers and marginalized in scholarship on religion. They taught me to use my study of a marginalized religion to critique the center – the Protestant underpinnings of the field of religious studies and the lack of attention to religions considered to be outside the norm and to the lived experiences of religious people – as well as to understand broader cultural issues through the lens of a particular religious community. I was fortunate indeed to have the guidance of more experienced scholars who encouraged me to situate my study within other academic contexts such as North American religious history, ritual studies and new religious movements. In my dissertation, these issues of broader interest included religious improvisation, practices of authenticity, ritual creativity, humans' relationship to the natural world, cultural appropriation of Native American religions, religious freedom, the relationship between religion, sexuality and gender identity, and the role of ritual and sacred space.

In all of these ways, I was also able to create a scholarly profile that suggested the kinds of courses I would be able to teach as an American religionist and specialist in new religious movements. In my current position as professor of comparative religion at a state university in California, I cover a required course for majors on religion in America, but I have also been able to develop and teach some specialized courses on topics that initially came to be of interest to me during research on contemporary Paganism, including the following: Religion, Nature and Environmentalism; American Indian Worldviews; Confronting the Animal; Religion and America's Ethnic Minorities; The End of the World; "Cults" and New Religions; Gender, Family and God; Pilgrimage and Sacred Space; Violence in American Religious History; and Religion and Social Institutions, which focused on religious freedom.

Attention to the demonized and marginal other became part of my identity as a scholar and teacher from the earliest years of my career. Scholars of Paganism are exceptionally well-suited to play a role in other contexts involving marginalization, persecution, and misunderstanding of religious minorities (in news media, prisons, the military, etc.) as well as in ongoing struggles of religious minorities to achieve religious freedom and inclusion. These are all issues that continue to matter to me in both teaching and research. After the publication of *Magical Selves, Earthly Bodies* in 2001, followed three years later in 2004 by *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, a text in Columbia University's series on American religions,⁵ I received many calls and requests from reporters, legal experts, social workers, prison chaplains and other professionals who wanted to understand Paganism and other new religions that were so often given a bad rap in the public sphere.

Usually this kind of consultation has been very positive, but occasionally, and especially in my first few years as a professor, I found it challenging and less than rewarding. I had taken to heart Susan Sontag's dictum that the task of the intellectual is "to promote dialogue, support the right of a multiplicity of voices to be heard, strengthen skepticism about received opinion." When in 1997, a television news reporter called me to set up an interview about the Heaven's Gate suicides that had occurred in San Diego the previous week, I jumped on this opportunity to educate television viewers about the difference

5. Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

between a “cult” and a “new religious movement.”⁶ “Cults,” according to received opinion, are not real religions, and the news media’s stereotypes of Heaven’s Gate’s “deluded” followers did not represent a multiplicity of voices. For this reason, during our interview, I suggested that most religions begin as “cults,” or small groups gathered around charismatic leaders. I also pointed out that mainstream religions include all the “bad” things that are commonly attached to so called “cults,” including substance abuse and child molestation. The reporter nodded with understanding and asked me several questions about local religious groups in Chico, including religions that recruit on campus, none of which I had encountered and I told him so.

But the next night, when I sat down to watch the news program, I was startled by the title: “Vampire Cults in Chico.” The ten-minute report consisted of my comments taken out of context and spliced in between rumors about a “blood-drinking cult” recruiting on college campuses, so that I seemed to be warning parents to protect their children from dangerous cults, the very opposite of the message I had tried to get across. In the few minutes allotted to Heaven’s Gate, the program portrayed its leaders as evil and manipulative and their followers mentally unstable, further guaranteeing their incomprehensibility. Since then, my efforts to make the strange familiar to reporters have more often than not been successful, but this story stays with me as a spectacular failure.

In her 2010 book, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, philosopher Martha Nussbaum writes that the humanities cultivate the ability “to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person,” and I would add that religious studies does this at least as much if not more than other humanities disciplines.⁷ It is this aspect of my religious studies training that I have always found most significant; not only imagining the predicament of others, but also entering their worlds of experience and returning to my own better informed about what it means to be human. It is our job as religious studies scholars to cross boundaries and close gaps, especially those gaps in understanding that leave us ignorant and the texts and people we study inarticulate. In my own journey as a scholar what

6. Susan Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux 2001), 296.

7. Mick Sussman, “Nonfiction Chronicle,” *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, August 13, 2010, accessed September 16, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/15/books/review/Sussman-t.html?_r=0.

has often motivated my research is the desire to cross into other people's worlds in order to make sense of what seem to outsiders the bizarre and dangerous things they do or believe. Scholars of religion are often given the task of explaining what seems inexplicable: why educated and economically comfortable men and women would decide to die by their own hand in order to catch a ride on an alien space ship they thought was behind the Hale-Bopp comet, why dedicated Muslims would destroy innocent people on September 11, 2001, or how Catholic priests could justify molesting boys under their spiritual guidance. These and other examples of religious people's incomprehensibility to outsiders are a typical occasion on which religion scholars speak to the news media.

The theme of demonization of religious others emerged in the years I spent researching *Earthly Bodies*, *Magical Selves* and *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, both in responses from Pagans sharing stories of persecution and harassment and from others who were sure Pagans were symptomatic of a demonic takeover of American life. The threat of satanic forces seemed to be especially focused on teenagers. Young Wiccans and Pagans often experienced unfair treatment as a result of the kinds of fears that my colleague, American religious historian Jason Bivins, describes so well in his 2008 book, *The Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism*.⁸ My curiosity about the attribution of demonic intentions to marginalized religions and people continues unabated, which has meant traveling to some dark places in my professional life, such as studying the blatantly unjust trial of the West Memphis Three, three teenagers who were charged with the brutal murders of three young boys in West Memphis, Arkansas and convicted on little more evidence than that they wore black, listened to heavy metal music, and checked out books on Wicca from the library.⁹

The persistence of narratives about possessed and demonic youth that emerged around the West Memphis Three trial reveals contemporary concerns, but just as importantly, takes place within the historical context of the ways in which Americans have imagined youth since colonial times. Although I was first alerted to the "dark teens" trope in interviews with Pagans, a long tradition of American discourse about young people and captivity by evil forces includes the

8. Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

9. Sarah Pike, "The West Memphis Three: Demons in the Dock... Or the Press Box?" *Trans/Missions* (August 24, 2011). <http://www.trans-missions.org/?p=43700>.

following: Protestant captivity narratives dating from the colonial period, Salem witchcraft accusations, discourse about troubled and delinquent youth that has its origins in the early twentieth century, school shootings, and the satanic rumor panic of the 1980s, among a host of other possible examples. Captivity stories convey concern for a culture gone awry, where social problems are spiraling out of control and adolescents are held captive by strange forces. Paganism and Pagan youth in particular, were often caught up in these stories and suffered from such blatant misunderstanding of their religious lives.

In order to understand the persecution of Pagans and other religious minorities, I wanted to explore why these stories of being captured by evil had been so persistent in American religious history and what purposes and agendas they serve. I continue to be interested in such misrepresentations and misunderstandings of religious others and especially of young people's spiritual commitments, which I am exploring now in the context of similar stories about young "eco-terrorists." The persistence of stories about possessed youth into twenty-first century American culture reveals the powerful hold such images have on Americans' imaginations and links young bodies, spiritual warfare and apocalyptic expectations in unique ways. In "Dark Teens and Born-Again Martyrs: Captivity Narratives After Columbine," an article published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* in 2009, I explore the dark teens trope and its place in American religious history.¹⁰ This article might serve as an example of how I learned to situate issues related to Pagan studies within broader religious studies and American religion contexts.

As the article on dark teens suggests, in my work, understanding human existence means understanding the fringes, the edges, the strange, the extreme (or those who are perceived in these ways). It is an approach that, according to Robert Orsi, charts a course between on the one hand simply accepting, or even promoting the beliefs of the people we study or on the other dismissing them as unintelligible. Orsi suggests that the scholar of religion must find a third way and this way must "bring the other, [by which he means those we study that challenge our understanding] into fuller focus within the circumstances of his or her history, relationships, and experiences."

10. Sarah M. Pike, "Dark Teens and Born-Again Martyrs: Captivity Narratives After Columbine," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77 (2009): 647-72.

Orsi suggests that such an approach requires “an attitude of disciplined openness and attentiveness before a religious practice or idea of another era or culture, on which we do not impose our wishes, dreams, or anxieties.”¹¹ This attitude of disciplined openness and attentiveness is what scholars of new religious movements can bring to the study of religion and is an approach I have tried to cultivate in my own work on contemporary Paganism and other new spiritual and religious beliefs and practices.

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11. Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 8.

Reflecting on Studying Wicca from within the Academy and the Craft: An Autobiographical Perspective

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I am honored to be invited to reflect on my academic biography and its intersection with Pagan studies, particularly to discuss my experience of the relationship between Pagan studies and Wicca, and to talk about the interactions between scholar and practitioner. This aim for reflexivity is a useful common ground within the wide transdisciplinary field that has come to embody the contemporary study of Paganism (an umbrella term for Pagan religiosity). Such reflexivity allows scrutiny for researcher effects, and rejects the assumption that it is possible to study human behavior and belief as an objective observer, particularly when studying one's own culture. It attempts to account for the individual researcher, how they affect their research, and how their research affects them. In my case this discussion leads into the insider/outsider debate; the interface of Pagan studies with other fields; and theory and methodology in the study of Paganisms (a specific term emphasizing the diverse religions and ideologies that form Paganism). I will start with a potted biography.

An Academic Biography

British state education in the 1970s was not good. I went to a junior school with four hundred children, no learning objectives, and no internal walls. My secondary school was an ex "secondary modern,"

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which on the abolition of the grammar-school system had been deemed “comprehensive,” without changing its staff or limited curriculum. Everything conformed to the intellectual culture of the lowest academic levels. It didn’t have a sixth form, so at sixteen I commuted fifteen miles to the nearest one, which neither encouraged nor promoted university. I left school to work with horses, taught English in Spain, and then became a temporary secretary in London before working my way up in marketing at L’Oreal; this was an enjoyable environment with excellent benefits, but then I discovered Wicca.

Wicca opened a new intellectual world to me. As a child I read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from cover to cover and requested the *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology* by my ninth birthday, but the drab utilitarianism of school had extinguished any thought of further education. Wicca strongly re-awakened this thirst for knowledge, with new concepts in religion and a path into history, philosophy, comparative and alternative religion, magic, feminism, ritual, spirituality, ecology, personal development and psychology. After trying to balance work and study, I gave up my career with its financial security and incentives, and applied to Royal Holloway University to study psychology as I approached my thirtieth birthday.

I enjoyed the cognitive and clinically focused BSc while reading for pleasure in the philosophy, classics, and religious libraries. I intensively explored the magical milieu, including sojourns in magical communities and initiation into ceremonial and Western Mystery traditions. I did my dissertation on a cognitive model for magical consciousness and a research project on conversion to Wicca. I intended to become an occupational psychologist, combining academic qualifications with prior experience and connections.

However, Professor Peter Clarke, head of the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements within the Theology and Religious Studies department at King’s College, London liked my undergraduate work and invited me to extend my research project into a PhD supervised by him and Vivianne Crowley, who lectured there on the psychology of religion. I was delighted to accept and join students on the MA in the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion, and explore new religious movements while reading up on gender and feminist scholarship. I also visited the British Museum, enjoying the reading rooms of the old British Library, reading widely on anything related to Wiccan history. I was also in two Enochian groups; district manager, open-sabbats co-ordinator and media officer for the Pagan Federation

London; running my own coven; secretary and an initiating officer in Shemesh Lodge OTO; and running the London OTO.

By then I was considering becoming a full-time academic, but life presented a greater challenge. I was married, thirty-five years old, and it was time to start a family. We did, and then moved 240 miles home to Cumbria, also reducing my Pagan/magical commitments to one coven, generic Thelema, and district manager for the Pagan Federation North West. Professor Clarke has my gratitude for keeping me on track throughout the two maternity leaves, part-time affiliation, and the several suspensions of research that followed, but nevertheless both he and Vivianne had retired from King's by the time I came to do my viva.

After a significant break to nurture and enjoy my young family, renovate houses, and to help develop my husband's business, I sought relevant academic teaching experience by offering my local adult education body courses on sociology, psychology, and psychology of religion, wherewith they also offered me extra training in adult education, which I used as a springboard to become a visiting lecturer at the University of Cumbria, on postgraduate courses in cognitive behavioral psychotherapy. This fitted well with my family commitments and I intend to continue with this work-life balance while eventually publishing from my PhD, a number of books on conversion and Wicca, and possibly to re-engage in research on cognitive and cultural aspects of religious conversion. I would also like to publish on aspects of the courses I teach at the University of Cumbria.

I now do *ad hoc* magic with groups of friends, and enjoy the role of matriarch to my "downline" in Wicca. I organize conferences for the Pagan Federation, including academics as speakers. I also am invited to give international workshops and lectures. So it seems that a chance meeting with a Tarot reader many years ago has led me to the role of senior lecturer and consultant Witch.

Pagan Studies

Pagan studies has so far been an umbrella term for the study of Paganism from many different academic fields, leading to a collaborative interdisciplinary research base rather than any one overall "monotheory." This has facilitated building a polyvocal body of work engaged with multiple forms of religious belonging and multiple approaches to research of Pagan religion and its place in

the modern world, as outlined in the goals of the Contemporary Pagan Studies Consultation of the American Academy of Religion. This was established in 2005 stating a two-fold mission: 1. Foster the development of new research and new methods in the study of Paganism 2. Create an environment that helps to foster critical in-depth evaluation of current research.

Pagan studies started by mapping Paganism as it has developed, with research also reflecting its demography as it has grown. Wicca, as the largest path, has had the widest interest, and its constant diversification and denomination means there is much descriptive work left to be done. Pagans talk about “Wiccanate privilege,” whereby interest in Wicca overshadows the development of other Paganisms to the extent that outsiders see Paganism in terms of a generic sort of Wicca; this can be seen in general accounts from religious studies.² Pagan studies scholars’ work has helped to build a much more nuanced academic understanding of contemporary Paganisms in all their forms and functions, and is developing a global interest with research now beginning to take place in Australia, post-Soviet states and the Middle East.

Fostering the Development of New Research

Paganism is a religion that is as much an expression of contemporary culture as it is a rebirth of polytheistic mystery religion.³ In researching Pagans, even if identifying as an “outsider”, researchers have been studying their own race, culture and class, some of whom are more educated than the researcher. They are keen to assist, and to absorb, reflect and critique academic accounts. This has led to the concept of dialogue with researched communities, and criticism of the “colonialist” narrative of classical anthropology and of the “reductionist outsider” stance. It has also led to inter-field discussion of how researching Paganisms might help to avoid the normal research perils of affecting data by presence, or skewing analysis by consciously or unconsciously favoring theory, methodology, agendas, religious viewpoints, ideology, and individual beliefs. Thus one of the key identifying features within the study of Paganisms is a high level of reflexivity, allied to discussion of how best to engage in

2. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

3. Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacrilization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: Continuum, 2004).

the dynamic process of studying evolving religions within our own culture, and how to apply that to wider research communities.⁴

Fostering the Development of New Methodologies

Studying Paganism's manifestation of spirituality, religion, ideology and identity in the twenty-first century is helping to develop appropriate methodologies and tools for contemporary religions that can then be used for studying wider religion.⁵

As an undergraduate psychologist I realized that psychological conversion literature did not reflect the common Wiccan experience of an internal shift in "coming home," but placed more emphasis on adopting religion due to outside agency. In my final research project I created a scale to measure "recognition" as a conversion motif alongside Lofland and Skonovd's existing motifs of intellectual, mystical, revivalist, affectional, and coercive conversion, which I then applied to Wiccans.⁶ The recognition motif scored highest for all participants as their key conversion motif; I ascribed this to pre-existing cognitive factors.⁷ In a later assessment of the rise of Paganism in Britain I have attributed these factors as ones which have led to a quiet religious revolution with Paganism becoming the largest "other" religion in Britain today.⁸

I explored this process in my PhD and ascribed such conversion to a process of "schematic integration," whereby a religion fits with previously constructed cognitive schema or templates. I have realized since that this "recognition" is a description of the process of cognitive consistency, the opposite of cognitive dissonance, which engenders that feeling of homecoming. I think this could be applied to young Muslims converting to extremist Islamic groups, as a more useful model for understanding Western jihadism than the current

4. Graham Harvey, "Pagan Studies or the Study of Paganisms? A Case Study in the Study of Religions," in *Researching Paganisms*, ed. Jenny Blain, Douglas Ezzy, and Graham Harvey (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2004), 241–55.

5. Michael York, *The Emerging Network, A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995); Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London: Routledge, 2002).

6. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (1981): 373–85.

7. Melissa Harrington, "Conversion to Wicca?" DISKUS, 2000, <http://www.uni.marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/harrington.html>

8. Melissa Harrington, "The Popularity of Paganism: Making Sense of the Census," *BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group, Study Day 2013: "Making Sense of the Census, The SocRel Response,"* 2013.

“grooming” hypothesis favored by the media, which leans towards “brainwashing” theory discredited by sociologists such as Eileen Barker. Looking at schema theory and conversion I see that “hate-preachers” provide a revivalist element to jihadist conversion, but the problem of Britons supporting Daesh is arguably far more deeply seated in the generation who have grown up in an adopted country during the Bush/Blair years.

Going Native in Reverse: An Initiatory Process

Becoming Wiccan was an integral part of my becoming an academic. Jo Pearson developed the term “going native in reverse,”⁹ and I find it apt for my experience, though without the negative connotations that are implicit in the original anthropological concept. I would like to build upon Pearson’s discussion and say that this was a result of a successful initiation into the Academy. Academia has degrees of initiation, each with its own liminalities and learning processes, ordeals, expectations, rituals, and robes that define one’s status and experience. Their achievement implies and ensures increasing levels of enculturation. I found the viva voce and trial by critic to be greater ordeals than any esoteric initiation. I see my own determination to stay involved as proof that once one has invested so much energy and belief into something one is likely to value it, identify with it, and believe in its ideology, culture and norms.

Interpretative Drift

This is similar to Tania Luhrmann’s process of “interpretive drift,” which I find viable as a descriptor of enculturation but problematical in its suggestion of cognitive dissonance as a causative force in the adoption of magical belief systems.¹⁰ I think she describes a general process of organizational socialization that is not sufficient to explain magical beliefs, particularly as many people join magical societies *because* they have already had magical/mystical experience.

9. Joanne E. Pearson, “‘Going Native in Reverse’: The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca,” in *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual*, ed. Elizabeth Arweckand Martin D. Stringer (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press), 97–113.

10. Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witches’ Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

As I worked magic with many of the people Luhrmann did, I know there are various accounts of magical belief systems that she was exposed to but did not include in her write-up. This may have been a conscious choice as they didn't fit with her theory, or unconscious avoidance due to the "cognitive contamination" of the overarching plausibility structure of the academic rite of passage which was the key driving force in her magical training.¹¹

In psychology one would not set out to prove rather than test a hypothesis, as Luhrmann does, nor ignore a prevalent narrative such as "coming home" to magical *communitas*, which is resonant with cognitive consistency rather than its opposite cognitive dissonance, to which Luhrmann attributes magical affiliation. From a psychological research framework, her study is a single case study of Luhrmann, rather than her environment. It is the story of one girl's struggle with cognitive dissonance created by her research parameters, rather than an impartial examination of belief adoption, such as Eileen Barker's *The Making of a Moonie*.¹²

What Luhrmann finds in herself, she projects onto her respondents, creating a cognitive model based on her own dissonant cognitions, initiated "as if" she was a Witch but never participating in ritual or *communitas* within the same cognitive space. It is interesting to wonder what Luhrmann would have written had she done her research ten years later, in a different institution, using something other than anthropology, or if supervised by any of the senior scholars who write reflexively in *Researching Paganisms*, which discusses these issues in depth. What stands out in Luhrmann's study is her very honest account of her struggle, an early independent attempt at the reflexivity that has come to typify Pagan studies, from within an institution with an extremely conservative academic ethos. *Persuasions of the Witches' Craft* has thus come to be a litmus test in insider/outsider debate related to studying Paganisms, and it is only due to Luhrmann's honesty in providing this data about her own struggle that so many subsequent scholars have been able to use the book to determine their own stance.

If interpretive drift is a robust theory it should be applicable to other accounts of coming into magical belief/practice, but so far this does not seem to be the case. Equally if the theory is robust it

11. Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

12. Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

could be applicable to other forms of initiation and enculturation. One might then expect cognitive dissonance to be part of my own journey from “irrational” Wicca into rational academia. However I found no cognitive dissonance from my initiation into academia, in contrast it offered me tools to understand and continue my own spiritual journey.

Knowledge Transfer and Exchange, Reflexivity and Reactivity

Most Pagans want to learn more about Paganism. The successes of Vivianne Crowley’s Jungian analysis of Wicca and of Ronald Hutton’s academic histories illustrate this. It is interesting to note that the textual emphasis of academia could lead to the assumption Hutton’s work was not popular among Pagans, as three Pagan critiques of Hutton led to a response from him and articles by Peg Aloï and Caroline Tully.¹³ However Ronald Hutton is the invited keynote speaker at many Pagan conferences. The Doreen Valiente Trust and Centre for Pagan Studies have put on special “Days for” celebrating the contribution and life of founders of Wicca. These have so far included Doreen Valiente, Gerald Gardner, Patricia Crowther, and Ronald Hutton. There could not be a much higher accolade from the community than this.

I speak at Pagan conferences, where academic contributions are warmly received. This has the dual benefit of providing a knowledgeable audience who can offer specific constructive feedback, and bringing academic tools into the Paganism. I see this as a valuable process of basic knowledge transfer and exchange. Knowledge transfer is usually seen in terms of business or industry uptake and application rather than religion, but it may be relevant in this domain. It takes research out of the ivory tower and into an applied capacity. This concept of course opens into a debate about reactivity, how can researchers achieve an open dialogue but not affect or contaminate their own data, which is a key discussion point in Pagan Studies. Clear research methodologies, conscious reflexivity and collaboration seem to be the best way to negotiate this. Lowell Livezey’s epilogue in Arweck and Stringer discusses the formalized

13. Peg Aloï, “Review of *Trials of the Moon*,” *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 12 no. 2 (2010): 263–69; Caroline Jane Tully, “Researching the Past is a Foreign Country: Cognitive Dissonance as a Response by Practitioner Pagans to Academic Research on the History of Pagan Religions,” *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 98–105.

sharing procedures used by the Religion in Urban America Program that do not confer veto or control, but enable critical evaluation by the researched community.¹⁴ This research program also creates research teams of people who are of diverse gender, race, and religions to work together.

Other concepts that are highlighted in literature on “knowledge transfer,” which are relevant to Pagan studies, are knowledge as power: what is the knowledge, where is it located/embedded, how can it be shared, what are the ethics of how it is shared, who has the knowledge, and how do they share it? This is already discussed in Pagan studies, but could be usefully allied with extant theory from this area of social science, particularly in terms of how knowledge as power is seen and transmitted in Paganism, and how the academy interacts with, treats, and portrays practitioners, and the knowledge they share.

A View from “Inside”

When discussing the insider/outsider debate I recommend Kim Knott’s discussion of the evolution of different approaches, and their positive and negative effects.¹⁵ Ann Taves provides eloquent reflection, and Arweck and Stringer a multidisciplinary perspective. *Researching Paganisms* gives a detailed Pagan specific view, as does Barbara Davy’s *Introduction to Pagan Studies*.¹⁶

Researching Paganisms has various detailed accounts of how Pagan scholars negotiate the boundaries within and between Paganism and the academy. How one negotiates walking between these worlds is ultimately due to each setting their own criteria and ethics in conjunction with academic ethos. I ask, as in practical magic, “to what end?” This encompasses such questions as “Why would I do that work, who will it benefit, who might it hurt, what could be the result, what do I hope to gain from it, what problems might it create, can it be a success, and what is the best way to go about it?” I try

14. Lowell W. Livezey, “Epilogue: The Ethnographer and the Quests for Meaning,” in *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual*, ed. Elizabeth Arwick and Martin D. Stringer (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002), 155–65.

15. Kim Knott, “Insider/Outsider Perspectives,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnels (London: Routledge, 2005), 230–70.

16. Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2007).

to observe boundaries that practitioners expect academics to preserve while using academic practice to elicit or convey information that is useful to both communities. This question is not dissimilar to that posed by Ann Taves: “*What we are trying to make?*” She suggests shifting self reflexively between detachment and engagement, using the metaphor of researcher role rather than researcher place. This resonates with the discussions in *Researching Paganisms*.¹⁷

However, even if we follow Taves’ recommendation to shift into role rather than place, we can still be affected by the roles we choose and thus affect our research. It is easier to control for academic bias and researcher effects with research methodologies than it is to control for overzealous application of such controls due to personal insecurity as an insider, which I now think is a common feature of both mine and Luhrmann’s research. Jo Pearson once bemoaned to me her criteria, set by herself, as to what she can and cannot research within Wicca. I now wonder if my concern to create valid research in my own limited studies, to stand up to judgment, has been to the detriment of what I could have contributed to the bigger picture.

When I did my undergraduate project on conversion to Wicca, it was as a training exercise to create a psychological research tool within the overall framework of a quantitative experiment. I sent the questionnaire to a set of respondents that could easily be replicated, from a popular, then well-published, gathering. Anyone of any religion or background could replicate my study. I carried on in my PhD with the same ethos, using snowballing from an open source and standardized qualitative interviews, so the work could be tested, replicated, or used in a meta-analysis of similar studies within or between religions. I never used my personal contacts, though they were those of a key gatekeeper and I was using them at the time to help journalists, authors, academics, and seekers. Instead I created careful studies that had my elderly Witch friends somewhat amused, and Doreen Valiente gave me her press cuttings in case they would help. On reflection it is possible that all the time and effort I have spent engaged in academia has directly contributed to a loss rather than a gain in knowledge about Paganism, as I could have preserved so much knowledge, wisdom and information from Gardner’s high priestesses, instead of setting up studies of A.N. Other Wiccan group that could be replicated by A.N. Other researcher.

17. Ann Taves, “Negotiating the Boundaries in Theological and Religious Studies,” www.religion.ucsb.edu/Faculty/taves/GTU-FinalLecture.pdf.

Porous Boundaries Between In and Outside

Pagan scholars use various terms to describe joint insidership of the academy and Paganism, and how they site themselves within both. Neither category is solely exclusive, with many levels of in/outsiderness in both. I see a constant interaction of academia and Paganism that is invisible to Pagans, and raises ethical questions about covert research. One Witchfest International I spoke at included three eminent professors in the audience. The last people at the Pagan Federation fortieth anniversary conference in London, apart from myself and the after-party organizer with whom I was staying, were two Scandinavian academics. This raises the old joke “How many Witches does it take to change a light bulb?” with the answer “None – the anthropologist will do it.”

Markus Davidsen writes emphatically against insider research, but has spent time in the Pagan milieu, with Wiccan gatekeepers assisting him, including promoting and attending (and thereby endorsing) a symposium on Paganism run by him.¹⁸ He was given insider privileges, which he has never acknowledged. These gatekeepers were astonished to read his attack on academic Wiccans, and see it as a manifestation of him being more of a Pagan outsider than an impartial outsider looking at Paganism (pers comm).

Inside, Outside and Upside Down

Understandably there are Witches in academia who are not “out.” However, I struggled with a paper a neophyte initiate wrote that is complicated by their claim to be a complete outsider. The group they joined has demanded the community accepts its neophytes on equal terms with others’ first degrees, and thus I dispute their avowed outsidership. They may have taken a Luhrmann-oath, “as if” they were an initiate, but it still gives them full access to the community. Does their personal statement that they are an outsider mean I can “out” them in the interest of critical evaluation? Or am I bound by my own oaths to protect their identity? I feel that that this inverts the ethics, principles and practice of research. If the dichotomous insider/outsider paradigm has caused this behaviour it is proof that it is inappropriate for Pagan studies.

18. Markus Davidsen, “What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 183–99.

Questionable "Critical Analysis" and its Negative Effect

Some of the arguments against insider research seem to seek "power over," rather than share "power with." They presume that the outsider is right just because they are a (rational, pure, unbiased knowledgeable) outsider, as opposed to an (irrational, contaminated, biased naive native) insider, even if the insiders are established researchers and the outsider is a novice academic. Davidsen and Leon van Gulik both published "critical analyses" that appear to be driven by personal assumptions and emotions and which aimed to strengthen claims of personal detachment and reason. I have already commented on Davidsen in notes put on academia.edu for discussion at the Pagan Studies session at the American Academy of Religion 2013, which forms the draft of a future paper, and to which any constructive criticism is welcome.¹⁹

The tone and nature of Van Gulik's article reflect a misunderstanding during his field work. He assumed a request to not attend a workshop was due to the intention of blocking his "outsider" research, rather than about attendees not having given permission, nor expecting, their personal experience of bereavement to be used as research data. This raises the question as to how much academics respect the consent of the community studied, and how much they assume from having once completed forms for their university ethics committee. This feeds back into my earlier discussion about the relationship between academia and Wicca. Who has the authority to demand what? Why should an academic, particularly a self identified outsider to the community, assume that the purposes of their personal project should take priority over the individual and group purposes of practitioners? His paper also raises the issue of how a researcher responds to others who say "no." There will always be disappointments, and moments when research participants are not able to offer academics what they desire. This brings us back to the applicability of the concept Graham Harvey has developed of "guesthood,"²⁰ with its recommendation of a mutual effort of respect, care, and a genuine attempt to understand.

19. Available at www.academia.edu/5163312/Academia_edu_davidsen.

20. Harvey, Graham. "Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method," *Numen* 50, no. 2 (2003): 125-46.

Looking Forward

We live in very interesting times and are privileged to be working in a fascinating field. I am grateful to both Paganism and academia for enriching my life and giving me incredible tools for looking at the world around me and my place within it; these have led to my interest in much wider debate, in politics, policy and global humanity. I left school to try to make it as a show-jumper, looking at the world from between a horse's ears. I never thought I'd become a Witch, let alone a university lecturer, much less be invited to contribute to an edition like this. For me it is a journey that continues, and I know not where that will take me. I do not solely identify as a Wiccan – my life is wider than that – and it is only part of my identity and religious path; however, it is the one thing that everyone, from my neighbors to the academy, seems to want to hear about. I think the study of contemporary Pagan Witchcraft has only just scraped the surface of what it could be, and that academia can work in a very effective dialogue with scholars and practitioners. I hope that as Pagan studies progresses it will continue to strive for honesty and reflexivity, with all Pagans out of the broom closet, as their human right, and part of a wider ranging scholarly necessity. What I do know is that as Pagan studies grows it will continue to provide a vital view of contemporary religion, community, identity, and belief, and remain at the forefront of developing new resources for studying humanity and its dilemmas, drives and dreams in the twenty-first century; and I am be proud to be a part of this.

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Pagan(ish) Senses and Sensibilities

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If there is an easier task for an academic than to write one's "academic biography," I'm not sure what it is. We academics are always thinking about what we do, documenting it, and explaining it to others, whether in the process of annual performance reviews, tenure or full professor applications, research proposals, grant applications, and whatnot. (Some would call that the academic meat grinder.) Many of us don't get to be very personal in these accounts — we're cultivating a certain persona, but it's always aimed at specific professional goals. So the opportunity to bring things to a more personal and biographical level should be welcomed.

But wait...my career isn't over yet, nor (I hope) even close to it, so I'm not prepared to write my memoirs yet. And I'm not being asked for an academic biography in general, but one that is relevant to Pagan studies—a field that is hardly mainstream in academe or anywhere else. It's an interesting challenge. On the assumption that a set of such biographies will provide an interesting read of the field, I'm happy to take it up, and I'll do so by following the outline of questions provided.

When did you first become interested in the academic study of contemporary Paganism? How did this come about? What sorts of responses, real and imagined, did you encounter from academics and Pagans?

1. Adrian Ivakhiv is Professor of Environmental Thought and Culture at the University of Vermont's Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources.

My interest in Pagan studies evolved alongside a broad array of intellectual and experiential pursuits, beginning in childhood. I was a voracious reader who developed a passion for metaphysical questions, deep interest in science and speculative fiction (Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Ursula LeGuin, Samuel Delany, and others), and genuine curiosity about unexplained and extraordinary things, from UFOs and psychic phenomena to the mystical and magical. All of these mixed together with the formative influence of my Eastern Christian (Ukrainian Catholic) background, which with its contemplative music, rich and idiosyncratic iconography, and heavily storied sense of geography and temporality provided a fertile ground for religious and experiential exploration.

As an undergraduate in fine arts studies at York University in Toronto, I felt genuine joy in discovering the suddenly wide-open world of philosophical and political ideas, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. I delved into the 1960s counterculture (which I had been too young to participate in, having been born in 1962), the anti-nuclear movement, consciousness exploration, health foods, anarchism, communitarianism, indigenous solidarity, existentialism, and musical and artistic pursuits that included psychedelic and cosmic rock, electronic and experimental music, punk and post-punk, free jazz, Beat poetry and literature, multi-media and installation art, Dada and Surrealism, and the ritualistic theatre of Jerzy Grotowski (many of these not just as reader/listener/appreciator, but as dabbling practitioner, too). Alongside those, I explored Buddhist meditation, Daoist philosophy, yoga and Tai Chi, the Gurdjieff Work, ritual magic, and sundry forms of esoteric and mystical practice from Eastern and Western sources (including, and never quite rejecting, the Eastern Christianity of my ancestry). All of these stayed with me to varying degrees.

Experience in the Canadian wilderness – initially through being an active member of a Ukrainian scouting organization – seemed to somehow naturally flow into my enjoyment at visiting Pagan festivals (WiccanFest outside Toronto, Pagan Spirit Gathering, and Starwood), with Paganism ultimately seeming more “home-ish” than other religions, for the same reasons that many Pagans declare their turn to the faith as a homecoming rather than a conversion. There was also a certain transgressive lure to it for me, a former Catholic altar and choir boy, which added to the fascination (as, for a while, had the heavy metal music of Black Sabbath and others).

Returning to York to do a graduate degree in environmental studies, I pursued a master's project that arose from my travels across Europe in quest of "traditional ecoculture," or something like it, in the Celtic and Slavic backwaters of western Ireland, northern Scotland, southern Poland, and Ukraine. Returning to Ukraine as a Canada-USSR scholar in 1989-90, I delved deeper into the intersections between culture, environment, and religion, and acquainted myself with leaders of the nascent Ukrainian independence movement, including writers and artists, but also some of the originators of the Pagan and Native Faith resurgence. (Some years later I was to follow up the latter with more extensive research on Ukrainian Native Faith.) My master's thesis, entitled "Indigenicity, Sacredness, and the Ecology of Mind," focused on the potential for "re-indigenization" of consciousness as part of an emergent "ecological epistemology."

In all of this, I felt supported by my academic mentors, especially by my advisor, eco-theorist, naturalist, and radio and television broadcaster John Livingston. My mentors were an unusual bunch at a place—York's Faculty of Environmental Studies—that was wildly interdisciplinary. When I began work there, in the early 1990s, on a doctoral dissertation on sacred space and the politics of landscape within contemporary eco-spiritual communities—eventually it became a study of two alternative spirituality havens—Glastonbury, England, and Sedona, Arizona—I knew I was doing what fascinated me, and I knew that the work of translation across diverse intellectual and cultural communities would be my fate as a boundary-crossing academic. My advisory committee was to include, at various times, a cultural sociologist and media studies scholar (my advisor, Jody Berland), a religion scholar, a Continental philosopher, a political geographer, an ecophilosopher, and a cultural anthropologist. Following a stint as a lecturer at York, I was hired in 2000 into a tenure-track cross-appointment between environmental studies and religious studies/anthropology at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Within three years, I applied for and was hired into my current position in environmental studies at the University of Vermont.

What was your first academic publication in Pagan studies? What motivated it? Where was it published? What sorts of responses did you receive?

I had written a few popular publications on Paganish themes, mostly published under pen names (e.g., "Hymn to Pan Polymorph" by

"crayfish," or "The Slavic Spirit and the Earth" by "Slavomyr Chornozemnyi," a name that translates from Ukrainian as "Peace-Glorifying Black-Earther"). My first academic publication—on themes of magic, ritual, consciousness, and ecology—came out in the ecophilosophy journal *The Trumpeter* in 1991. It eventually developed into the chapter "The Resurgence of Magical Religion as a Response to the Crisis of Modernity," published in the anthology *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*.² The chapter has always gotten warm responses from those who have told me they read it. Other early popular or academic publications included "The Cosmos of the Ancient Slavs"³ and "Scholarship on the Ancient Eastern Slavs: A Bibliographic Overview."⁴ These themes of magic, imagination, ritual, and identity (Slavic or otherwise) have continued as themes through my scholarly career.

What role does your Pagan studies work play in your overall academic career? What sorts of responses have you had from the institutions you work in to your Pagan studies research?

My overall academic career has come to be defined by the rubric of "environmental thought and culture." Within this, I focus on conceptualizations of the changing relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. This includes ethnographic work on cultural perceptions of environmental change; study of the role of media in an ever more digital and global environment; in-depth study of cultural and media documents, including films, visual art, and music; and theoretical work on the nature-culture nexus. My work in Pagan studies is comfortably lodged within this broader set of interests, and helps to inform my own theorization of the issues I study, but it has not always been central to my research, except for a few periods.

My doctoral dissertation, carried out in the mid-1990s, was a study of two centers of ecospirituality, which included significant Pagan-ish populations, but also a more diffuse form of alternative spirituality that falls more comfortably into the "ASANAS" (Alternative Spirituality and New Age Studies) rubric. Published in 2001 as *Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury*

2. Adrian Ivakhiv, "The Resurgence of Magical Religion as a response to the Crisis of Modernity," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 237–65.

3. Adrian Ivakhiv, "The Cosmos of the Ancient Slavs," *Gnosis* 31 (1994): 28–35.

4. Adrian Ivakhiv, "Scholarship on the Ancient Eastern Slavs: A Bibliographic Overview," *Ethnic Forum* 15, nos. 1–2 (1995): 162–75.

and Sedona,⁵ the book theorizes the place of such places—small but vibrant magnets for diverse forms of earth-based religion—within changing global cultural, religious, and political-economic contexts in which struggles over the Earth and the sacred play themselves out in acutely conflictual, and interesting, ways. The book's focus on the phenomenology of place-based experiential practice remains highly relevant to understanding nature-based religiosity in all its forms, and its detailed histories of the two places and (multiple) communities in question remain required reading for anyone interested in these two sites.

In the early 2000s, I carried out fieldwork among Ukrainian Pagans and Native Faith believers, which was published in a series of articles and book chapters (in *Nova Religio*, *The Pomegranate*, and elsewhere).⁶ Together with my earlier book and a well-attended panel appearance at the American Academy of Religion, these led to an hour-long interview profile on Krista Tippett's nationally syndicated radio show *Speaking of Faith* (now called *On Being*). Sandwiched between profiles of Wangari Maathai and Thich Nhat Hanh, I felt honored, if a little nervous, to be the show's first featured "Pagan guest." "Pagans, Ancient and Modern" aired first on June 12, 2008 and has been replayed a few times since. It is still available online, but its collection of several dozen comments was deleted when the program moved to a new name and web site.⁷

Responses to my work from colleagues has varied. My position is cross-appointed between a highly interdisciplinary environmental studies program and a largely science-based school of environment and natural resources; in the latter, I have only one or two humanist colleagues, so I have had to expend significant effort over the years to explain what I do. The *Speaking of Faith* interview aroused interest among colleagues because of its high profile, with some reactions

5. Adrian Ivakhiv, *Claiming Sacred Ground Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=121819>.

6. Adrian Ivakhiv, "In Search of Deeper Identities: Paganism and Native Faith in Contemporary Ukraine," *Nova Religio* 8, no. 3 (2005): 7–38; "Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethics of the Religious Right?" *Pomegranate* 7, no. 2 (2005): 194–225, reprinted in *Paganism (Critical Concepts in Religious Studies)*, vol. 2, *Ecology*, ed. B. J. Davy (London: Routledge, 2008), 213–42; "The Revival of Ukrainian Native Faith," *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Michael F. Strmiska (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clío, 2006), 209–39.

7. "Pagans: Ancient and Modern," *On Being*, 12 June 2008, <http://www.onbeing.org/program/pagans-ancient-and-modern/139>.

being quite positive and supportive, and others more mixed and a little incomprehending. I have rarely felt any outright hostility, dismissiveness, or discrimination against me for this work. But since leaving my previous religious studies cross-appointment, I have felt a need to maintain a recognizably “environmental” research profile, within which the study of Paganism is not as comfortable a fit as I would like it to be. (That said, I’ve just graduated a student whose thesis was likely the first master of science on faery faith granted by a school of natural resources in the United States!)

Interestingly, with respect to the *Speaking of Faith* interview, I have found that Pagans themselves did not necessarily appreciate being represented by an academic who was largely unknown in their own community. So it goes.

Who are some of the most significant influences on your academic work in Pagan Studies?

I cannot imagine studying contemporary Paganism without the tremendous work of those colleagues who have led in the growth of the field over the last few decades: people like Michael York, Graham Harvey, Bron Taylor, Chas S. Clifton, Sarah Pike, Doug Ezzy, Sabina Magliocco, Helen Berger, Jenny Blain, Michael Strmiska, Wendy Griffin, and many others. Even less can I imagine it without the pioneering popularizations of Starhawk and especially the late Margo Adler. Ronald Hutton’s historical research towers above all other recent efforts to understand where contemporary Paganism (especially the British kind) comes from. Many other historians, anthropologists, mythographers, and philosophers have done important work in reconstructing the beliefs and practices of ancient Pagan cultures: Ramsay MacMullen and Pierre Hadot are two that come to mind, but the work of Eliade, Dumézil, Gimbutas, Ivanov and Toporov, and many others certainly influenced me at one point or another, as (eventually) did their critics. So have more recent theoreticians of ritual, sacred space, indigenous religion, embodiment, postcoloniality, religious globalization, and the like; the names worth mentioning there are too numerous to even start listing. My own approach to the field has also been strongly influenced by those whose work in the environmental humanities, geography, cultural anthropology, and related fields impinges on my thinking of religion and the nature-culture nexus: Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, Donna Haraway, Isabelle Stengers, Tim Ingold, Doreen Massey, Anna Tsing, and many others.

What are some of the high points in your academic publications in Pagan studies? What was going on for you at the time of those publications? At what stage of your academic career were you? How do these publications relate to the development of your broader academic self-understanding? How does your work in Pagan studies relate to your other academic work, including both publications and teaching?

My work on the post-1989 resurgence of Ukrainian Paganism and Native Faith was the first in-depth treatment of this topic in the English-language world. Today it has been surpassed in its details by Maria Lesiv's study *The Return of Ancestral Gods: Modern Ukrainian Paganism as an Alternative Vision for a Nation*⁸ (I served as Maria's external dissertation examiner). But the contributions I made in documenting and theorizing Native Faith in the Ukrainian context remain, I think, invaluable. I also consider my *Claiming Sacred Ground* to include important analyses of space, place, landscape, nature, and the sacred that retain their relevance for Pagan conceptions of their own religious practices.

These publications came at an early stage of my academic career, but they remain central to my development as a researcher and theorist. My more recent work, which has been focused in ecocriticism, environmental philosophy, cultural geography, and visual and media studies, has only indirectly addressed the core interests animating Pagan studies today. But the theorization of the imagination that features across all my writings—from the earlier work on magic to my recent book on the “moving image”⁹—is imbued with the same impulse that brought me to Pagan studies, and future writing will address this connection more directly. My scholarship on Ukrainian Paganism has also folded into ongoing work on national identity, sacred space, and cultural and natural heritage in that country and elsewhere.¹⁰

8. Mariya Lesiv, *The Return of Ancestral Gods: Modern Ukrainian Paganism as an Alternative Vision for a Nation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013). <http://librarytitles.ebrary.com/id/10787149>.

9. Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press Environmental Humanities Series, 2013).

10. E.g., Adrian Ivakhiv, “Toward a Multicultural Ecology,” *Organization and Environment* 15.4 (2002): 389–409; “Coloring Cape Breton ‘Celtic’: Topographies of Culture and Identity in Cape Breton Island,” *Ethnologies* 27, no. 2 (2006): 107–36; “Toward a Geography of ‘Religion’: On the Spatial Dimension of Significance,”

Do you think the discipline of Pagan studies has distinctive characteristics, and things to offer the broader discipline of religion studies, or the history, or sociology of religion?

Pagan studies shares with many subfields of religious studies an interest in forms of religious belief and expression that are commonly misunderstood and that, therefore, require careful and nuanced treatment. Since many researchers in the field are, to one extent or another, active participants in the communities they study, issues of scholarly positioning (including methods such as auto-ethnography) arise more acutely than elsewhere. But there are some specific characteristics that I believe add value to the field's distinctive contribution to the study of religion. These concern Paganism's place as a religion that is centrally and often uniquely concerned with the natural world, with matter and biological life, with conceptualization of earthly being (in a general sense) and ecological crisis, and, though more debatably, with the role of images, icons, representations of deity and trans-human agency, and everyday and cultic practices in the relationship between people and nature. Here is where I believe Paganism's significance extends beyond the community of believing and practicing, self-identified Pagans.

These issues are related to a tension that I have experienced in my own relationship to Paganism. This is the tension of the upper versus lower case "p": Is P/paganism a religion among other religions, or is it something else, such as a sensibility, an approach to the world, a philosophical mindset, or even a way of conceiving of

Annals of the Association of American Geographers 96, no. 1 (2005): 169–75; "Stoking the Heart of (a Certain) Europe: Crafting Hybrid Identities in the Ukraine-EU Borderlands," *Spaces of Identity* 6, no. 1 (2006): 11–44; C. M. Tucker and A. J. Ivakhiv, "Intersections of Nature, Science, and Religion: An Introduction," with Catherine M. Tucker, in *Nature, Science, and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment*, ed. Catherine M. Tucker (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2012), 3–21; "Religious (Re)Turns in the Wake of Global Nature: Toward a Cosmopolitics," in C. M. Tucker, ed., *Nature, Science, and Religion* (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2012), 213–30; "Green Pilgrimage: Problems and Prospects for Ecology and Peace-Building," *Pilgrims and Pilgrimages as Peacemakers in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, ed. A. Pazos and C. Gonzales Paz (Ashgate Press/Compostela International Studies in Pilgrimage History and Culture, 2013), 85–103; M. Sonevytsky and A. Ivakhiv, "Late Soviet Discourses of Nature and the Natural: Musical *Avtentyka*, Native Faith, and Environmentalism After Chernobyl," in *Ecomusicology: A Field Guide*, ed. Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe (New York: Routledge Research in Music Series, 2016), 135–146.

religion that is more encompassing than others? There is certainly value for Pagans to have their religious beliefs and practices recognized as such. But I believe there is also value in making a case for an earth-honoring spirituality that encompasses philosophy, science, artistic practice, and more, and that infuses many “religions” in diverse ways—something that they forget to their detriment. In this latter sense, paganism may be something to be rediscovered within the manifold practices by which humans experience value, agency, and mystery in (and beyond) the world around them.

As most scholars of Paganism concede, Paganism can only ever refer to paganisms; it is always multiple, just as are its deities (typically). As such, there can be no church or centralized authority defining who or what qualifies as “Pagan.” It is in this multiplicity, and in the ambiguity that it gives rise to, that paganism—with or without the capital “P”—may have something distinctive to contribute to the understanding of religion.

Do you have a sense of community among Pagan studies academics? How did you get to know other Pagan studies academics and what are the important points of contact with them?

Yes, I feel a strong sense of community among the Pagan studies academics I have come to know over many years of conversation—both through meetings such as the American Academy of Religion’s Contemporary Pagan Studies Group (and related groups, like the Religion and Ecology Section), the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, and others, and through listservs, social media, and email. Those connections have been central to my feeling of membership within that community.

How does your academic work relate to your religious practice, if you have one?

Religion has been a complex part of my life, and one that has required extensive negotiation, especially given my upbringing within a strongly religious (Ukrainian Catholic) family and in a social context that I remain connected to. My personal and scholarly explorations have made it impossible for me to identify myself in any simple way, as I’m all too aware of the social variability and historical contingency of labels, and even of the meanings of the terms “religion” and “spirituality.” I have sometimes been actively involved in

communities, including Pagan and other kinds (Buddhist, Christian, Quaker, as well as political and environmental communities), but this has often been separate from the core of regular spiritual practice that I have maintained over the last thirty-five years, which is eclectic in its sources and philosophical in its sensibility.

Ultimately, I see the religious as part and parcel of the task of living, which is philosophical (a matter of theory and questioning), ethical (a matter of practical relations), and aesthetic (a matter of openness to experience and to the expressive materiality of the world). Religion, in this sense, is the practice by which we cultivate better relations with others and with the earth. In the end, I feel more committed to a kind of pantheistic universalism—an Earthism open to a mysterious universe—than I do to any specific tradition or denomination.

What opportunities and challenges do you see in the future for Pagan studies?

A challenge I see for the field comes from its marginality vis-à-vis the larger field of religious studies. Scholars of Paganism are one small piece of a much larger fabric, and so what they offer can only have limited impact. This is especially the case when the flow of theories and methods operates in one direction only: that is, when we apply ideas to the study of Paganism that were developed elsewhere.

The way to address this, as I see it, is to let the subject matter itself—which, as I’ve argued, is much larger than a mere minority “religion”—dictate the directions in which our thinking and investigation might go. This would open up a wide berth for intellectual and creative investigation. Paganism in this broader sense is found everywhere: in popular culture (from the obvious—the music of Led Zeppelin, the films of Kenneth Anger and Maya Deren, the nature spirits in *Avatar* or the films of Hayao Miyazaki—to the pervasive paganish currents in rock, heavy metal, R&B, psychedelic, and other musical forms) and in cultures around the world; in recent disciplinary shifts such as anthropology’s “ontological” and “cosmopolitical” turns (via the work of Latour, Viveiros de Castro, Descola, de la Cadena, Kohn, and others); and in the writings of philosophers across the spectrum, from well-known French and German thinkers—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Lyotard, Serres, Deleuze, Sloterdijk—to Asian, African, South American, and indigenous/aboriginal thinkers across the ages and today.

Does finding “paganism” in these places render the field of Pagan studies too vacuous? Perhaps. Some will want to retain a tighter grip on their own identities, and to establish them more firmly as an option along the spectrum of religious options. That’s not a problem that I am very concerned with, though I understand and respect when it arises for others. There is room for both of these approaches on this pagan earth.

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