



SACRED WRITES
PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP ON RELIGION

Activity: Getting Started

(by 12 May) Share a few links to some of your favorite public scholarship, on religion or otherwise. Which format(s) appeal to you and why?

(by 14 May) check out your podmates' examples and let them know what you thought. What stood out to you about their suggestions? Could you see yourself doing this kind of public scholarship?

Feel free to let us & the rest of the cohort know what you thought about these examples:

[@Sacred_Writes](#) #SmartInPublic

Megan

recent faves include [Sara Ahmed](#)'s interview on "Secret Feminist Agenda" because both Sara Ahmed and Hannah McGregor are amazing -- they've really shaped how I think about public scholarship and what is possible to do with your research outside traditional venues. (We'll be hearing from Hannah later in the summer!)

I also really like [this piece I did with Yohana Junker](#) for *Feminist Studies in Religion*, because it responded to another piece of really provocative public scholarship and because it started as a traditional op-ed/response to a newshook and became a collaborative reflection on what decolonizing the academy might look like.

I feel pretty comfortable in both written and audio formats. It's possible to cover more, I think, in a written piece; but many audiences that wouldn't read an op-ed on religion might listen to a quick interview about an interesting book. I like covering all the bases.

Jolyon

With the caveat that she's my colleague and department chair, [this piece](#) by Anthea Butler really hit me in the chest when I first read it. It's at TIF so it's a sort of scholarly public, but I think it could be read by a broader audience.

I'm admittedly not a podcast guy, although I've been interviewed for several. One interviewer who does a great job breaking things down for a nonspecialist audience is Greg Soden of the [Classical Ideas podcast](#). Andrew Mark Henry does heroic work over at [Religion for Breakfast](#).

As far as text goes, I really like venues like the Revealer, Religion Dispatches, Killing the Buddha, etc. One fave is [this one](#) by Megan at RNS. I have a deep fondness for the single-sentence paragraph, which she uses to great effect in this piece.

Even though I don't listen to podcasts much, I have enjoyed appearing on them. I think I'm a little more comfortable making my own videos, which probably means I'm a control freak and like the headshot video more than the dialogue-driven podcast. But at the end of the day I'd rather write out my thoughts in a Twitter thread or a public-facing essay. Whatever the venue, editing is key!

Sahar

I don't think it's a coincidence that Hannah's [Secret Feminist Agenda](#) has already been mentioned by Megan. That podcast, in its entirety, has really shaped my understanding of public scholarship, of what scholarly work is and should be, and helped a baby PhD see that scholarship can be fun. It remains, to date, my favourite podcast of all time (followed hotly on its heels by '[Witch, Please](#)', Hannah's other podcast, with Marcelle Kosman, about the Harry Potter series).

I would be lying if I didn't admit that my own podcast is also one of my favourite attempts at doing public scholarship. '[The Hublic Sphere](#)' is a podcast created by

early career researchers (including me) at the Trinity Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin's Arts and Humanities Research Institute. All of us, from different fields and backgrounds, got together and decided to give podcasting a go. We were heavily inspired by the Secret Feminist Agenda, wanted to create scholarship, and had no clue how to do it. It's done well and I'm fairly proud of it.

I could go on and on about podcasts I love and I think that is really indicative of what format appeals to me. I like the written word, I like texts. But podcasts have really transformed my relationship to learning and I find myself consuming them more and more. (I'm also a lawyer and sadly, am a cliché, because I do like the sound of my own voice and so love appearing on them).

Krista

Sahar already talked about [Witch, Please](#), which is one of my favourite podcasts as well. I'm not even a huge Harry Potter fan (and **most definitely not** a JKR fan), but I love the creativity and thoughtfulness in their reading of it, and the way that the rebooted version brings in such a range of theoretical perspectives.

Another podcast I really appreciate is [Ologies](#); the host herself isn't an academic, but she interviews a lot of academics who are experts in different fields, and the conversations are nerdy and just delightful. Many (but not all) of the episodes are more science-focused, and she makes a point of prioritizing experts who are Black, Indigenous, people of colour, queer, trans, disabled, etc. She also very often interviews junior scholars, often current grad students.

I'm realizing as I write this that I don't think I am all that engaged with much public scholarship coming from academic fields closer to my own! I listen to a ton of podcasts, but usually it happens specifically in moments when I want to disconnect and not feel too much like I'm working.

I'm probably more likely to read stuff that's closer to my work in written form; here are a couple I've kept open on my browser lately (though neither is a recent article): [Black Muslims in Canada: Challenging Narratives of Belonging and Rootedness](#)
[Canadian Education Is Steeped in Anti-Black Racism](#)

I spent several years as editor of [Muslimah Media Watch](#) and did quite a bit of [writing there](#) too, so in terms of my own expression, that's the kind of thing I have the most experience/comfort with. But I definitely feel much more comfortable in the place of a media/pop culture critic (in other words, responding to work that someone else has

done) than I do putting myself out there as an expert, whether in writing or any other form, which is one of the things I want to work on!

Annie

Tia Noelle Pratt's "[I Bring Myself, My Black Self: Sr. Thea Bowman's Challenge to the Catholic Church](#)" is one of my favorites. It's a perfect blend of personal and historical. I learned concrete information, but there's so much more to it than that. I get totally absorbed into this article every time I read it, in the best possible way.

I tend to like stories and reflections over explainers, but I really love this explainer on Catholic Social Teaching by Brianne Jacobs: [Yes, Democratic Socialism is Compatible with Catholic Social Teaching](#). This article does such a huge service by explaining practical topics in ways that are easy to understand. AOC even tweeted this article, which is pretty cool for public scholarship. The simplicity of this article really appeals to me.

One of my unexpected pandemic changes is that I can no longer listen to podcasts. They just feel too busy to me, too loud, too much going on in the smallness of my house. Writing, and shorter essays in particular, have been what I gravitate to.

Lee

Arundhati Roy, swoon when she declared that the [pandemic is a portal](#) she wrote like the prophetic poet that she is and then her latest piece is an equally haunting [follow up](#). This [op-ed](#) by my head of centre Sarojini Nadar, although a little older, reminds me of religion's entanglement with the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence.

Oftentimes podcasts on religion don't include the voices of African scholars or scholars working in Africa. And then the African scholars that are featured often work within "western" paradigms and so while some podcasts can be really interesting, their resonance is sometimes so limited.

I might not be looking in the right places so I am keen to explore the many options that members of the pod have shared.

During the pandemic I became a fan of the True Crime South African podcast and the more I listen the more I am convinced that this is a rich research site for analysing and understanding the relationships between religion, race, gender, and socio-economic status Could this be a public scholarship project perhaps?

Amanda

The Fowler Museum's Programming during the pandemic.

<https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/upcoming-events/>

I enjoy the diversity of events from cooking lessons to interviews and conversations with artists and scholars from across the globe. The museum even underwent some controversy over artifacts within their collection and rather than refute or avoid the controversy they decided to structure their entire programming around the community debate. The curatorial team met with community members and leaders to address their concerns and has created a plan of action. I think it's a good example of how to handle the problems and challenges that might occur when doing public scholarship and serving as a public resource for the community. They also make sure their programming is inclusive and serves a range of audiences with varying abilities and interests.

In general, I prefer video platforms, such as YouTube and Vimeo as a format since it's more accessible to audiences with a range of abilities and tends to maintain a more global audience. It also humanizes you as a public scholar since the audience can at least see your face and mannerisms when you speak which humanizes you in a way that written mediums might not capture.

I also really liked Diana Walsh Pasulka on Lex Fridman's Podcast where she discussed the connections between religion and technology. I thought she did a really good job demonstrating just how important the study of religion is for understanding technology and developing more robust and sophisticated approaches to new technologies, like digital media.

Kristian

I liked how Rebecca Epstein-Levi's "[Pausing the Panic Button: Can Religious Scholarship Teach Media Literacy?](#)" (Bitch Media) addressed a hot topic with nuance and redirected readers to a skill we cultivate in Religious Studies, likewise, how Bradley Onishi's "[Trump's New Civil Religion](#)" (NY Times) showed how myth operates outside of "religious" contexts, how Simran Jeet Singh's "[Why universities — and the rest of us — need religion studies](#)" (RNS) put his smarts to work for a good cause and revealed why our discipline is critically necessary, and how Charisse Burden-Stelly's "[Caste Does Not Explain Race](#)" (Boston Review) deconstructed and critiqued a popular book through her years of scholarly training. I also think [Religion for Breakfast](#) is wonderful. Ali Olomi's [Twitter threads](#) are epic. Sofia Rehman's Instagram book group ([@sofia_reading](#)) on Islam and women is an interesting example. Shehnaz Haqqani has a great youtube channel (talking head style) called "[What the Patriarchy?!?](#)" that is great.

I'd like to focus on writing short form topic relevant essays for wider audiences. My trouble is I'm too slow and get bogged down in the details. Long term I'd like to try video essays, audio documentary, and I even have an idea for an academic type documentary that I think would be great for classrooms. For those projects I don't really have the editing skills they require and haven't had the time to focus on learning yet.

Akissi

Right now I am obsessed with the podcast [Zora's Daughters](#), two Black feminist phd candidates combining anthropology, Black feminist thought, Black Studies and popular culture. This is the first (and only so far) podcast that I've listened to with any regularity. The way they break down complex theoretical concepts and then applying them to popular culture is wonderful. They also have an Instagram account [here](#).

As I mentioned yesterday, my all time favorite Twitter-er is Michael Harriot from The Root, whose threads are always epic. Detailed and funny as all get out. [Here's](#) one and it's not even my favorite (for some reason I didn't save them to my Bookmarks).

[Know Your Caribbean](#) shares interesting and often unknown histories of the region on Instagram. Their captions are detailed, images and videos short, informative, and entertaining, and the debates that open up in the comments are lively. This person who runs the page isn't an academic but they are bringing scholarship and history of the region to a predominantly non-academic audience.

One of the first examples of public scholarship that I loved was Melissa Harris Perry's show on MSNBC a few years back. Her analysis of current events using her knowledge as a Black feminist scholar was impeccable. She's paved the way for other Black scholars who now appear regularly on the news channel, including my colleague Brittney Cooper.

Speaking of Brittney Cooper, she and others began the [Crunk Feminist Collective](#) back in 2011 and have relaunched it on Substack as [The Remix](#). I've thoroughly enjoyed how they've tied their feminism to their love of hip hop and popular culture and contributed to showing the relevance of feminism to a broader, younger, and often ignored population.

(I just realized that none of these are about religion!)

As a former magazine writer and editor I lean toward more text-based platforms and am interested in writing short and long form essays, as well as mastering the Twitter thread. But I am also coming to enjoy podcasts and use of social media like Instagram and possibly even Tik Tok. While I am not big on watching videos I would like to learn and train more on how to do live and video appearances.

Alyssa

I want to encourage myself to think beyond the written word as a medium for public scholarship and I really loved Lee, Kristian, Jolyon and other's comments in our first meeting about video, podcasts and other visual and audible ways of sharing knowledge. So here I'll share some favorite pieces of writing, and some multimedia things too. The American Catholic Historical Association has been doing virtual pilgrimages on their twitter, these are essentially tweet threads of images, historical information, and videos that bring people into the richness of a site and its built environment, material culture, ritual life, etc. [Kathleen Holscher did one recently on the Santuario de Chimayó in New Mexico](#) and I thought it was so fun and useful for teaching. [Faith in the Five Boroughs](#) is a series of short beautiful videos about different religious communities in NYC, and includes videos on Haitian charismatic Catholics, Russian Jews, a Muslim Youth Center, and Hindu celebrations for Ganesha. These videos are perfect for the classroom and capture the texture, sound, and feel, and broader concerns of urban religious communities. (I don't know much about the creators of this short film series). Robert Chiles has partnered with the New York State Museum on a video interview series called [Empire State Engagements](#) with historians and scholars of New York; this just launched and I can't wait to see all the episodes.

In the realm of Catholics, I love Tia Noelle Pratt's work crafting the Black Catholics Syllabus, this has been a go-to resource. I cannot say enough about the Classical Ideas Podcast and how it has introduced me to new work, and has offered primers and introductions to scholars I might not have come across in my own subfield reading. Today a student told me they listened to the [episode on Maia Kotrosits's *The Lives of Objects*](#) and now is ordering the book to read it! When students are getting excited about ideas and books that have nothing to do with their coursework I know that something is special is going on! I loved Kayla Wheeler's piece in the reveler on Black Muslim men's fashion ["Bowties, Beards, and Boubous: Black Muslim Men's Fashion in the United States"](#) it is super teachable, has great pictures, and really brings a regional approach to the study of clothing and embodiment. I also really like interviews with scholars as a place where they can distill their arguments, tell stories

about their research and own backgrounds, and give accessible glimpses into their methodology. I really like this one with Shannen Dee Williams, [“Radicals Habits: Unearthing the History of Black Catholic Nuns in the Black Freedom Struggle.”](#)

I wrote a piece called [“The Enchanted Catholic World of Tattoo Artists”](#) that is one of my favorite things I have written this year. I visited and interviewed two tattooers on their relationship to Catholicism, devotional stuff, and Catholic iconography and how it shapes their aesthetics and spaces. I got to include so many photos and this is the kind of work I’d love to be doing because it allows me to do bite sized ethnographic research, offer perspectives on materiality and material culture, and lets me tell compelling stories without the amount of “data” or fieldwork I might need to write an academic piece.

Kori

Sliding in under the wire because it’s still the 12th in California. One of the pieces that stuck with me for several months is Justine Jablonski’s [The Damning Silence of Polish Americans - zocalopublicsquare.org](#) about the silence of Polish-Americans in response to Black Lives Matter movements and their outcry due to a statue of Kosciuszko (himself an abolitionist) being “vandalized.” (Full disclosure, Justine and I have been friends for decades, grew up in the same organizations and have similar family stories.) I appreciated her weaving of experience, memory, and history with current political issues and trying to get our community to understand the connections we were seeing.

Like some of us, my brain defaults to writing as the primary form of scholarship, even though it’s not always the medium I work in. I haven’t had my normal long commute for podcast listening, but [Profane Faith – White Hodge Podcasts](#) was usually a good one that I’d rec to folks.

This week I’ve been thinking about how we define public scholarship and what we consider part of it. As someone who works both inside and outside the academy, do sermons count as public scholarship? How do you do scholarship that doesn’t involve the written word? (As much as I love an elegant turn of phrase).

Caleb

There are so many forms of public scholarship! It's really amazing. I've been thinking so much about the need to create the right kinds of guidance for our institutions about how we review this work—what does peer review of public scholarship look like? Who are the peers?

A number of you have mentioned the wonderful Hannah McGregor in your posts—the way that Hannah has gone about integrating the Secret Feminist Agenda podcast into [scholarly review structures](#) is brilliant. I wonder—is it a model that translates equally well to other mediums for public scholarship? Yves Rees's [review of the podcast](#) also provides some good food for thought re: peer review of public scholarship. Rees talks about having Secret Feminist Agenda in their feminist killjoy survival kit...which brings me to my final point on this subject: Like some of you, the Secret Feminist Agenda [episode with Sara Ahmed](#) is my favorite podcast episode ever. It's honest, searching, and left me feeling so very invigorated about living.

Anyhow, having said that, I've been having a hard time listening to podcasts recently. I don't know when to listen. I'm trying really hard to take time away from reading/listening/watching things. I used to listen on walks. But now I kind of want to listen to the world. Maybe it's just a moment.

Having been working on web-based digital humanities stuff for a while, a lot of my favorite public scholarship falls into that category. [A Red Record](#) is an amazing piece of work. (Warning: The project documents racial violence in the United States.) I appreciated Kori's point about inside/outside the academy—lots of my favorite DH projects involve folks both inside and outside the academy. [Native Land](#) is an amazing collaboration. The [Anti-Eviction Mapping Project](#) also comes to mind. My absolute favorite is [Mapping Police Violence](#).

I have many favorites—too many to share. Thank you for sharing so much amazing work, friends!