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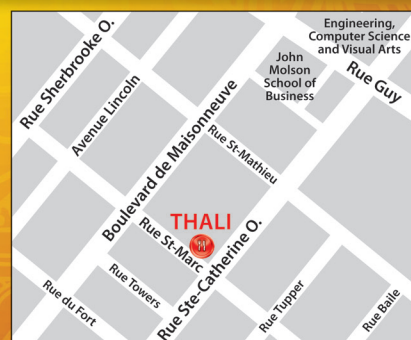


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Editorial: Secularism, Christianity Lite

Since it was violently colonized by white Christians centuries ago, Quebec has a tricky relationship with religion. Many are still weary of it. The Catholic Church's history of pressuring Quebecers to have large families, along with a legacy of poor education and health systems, has tainted perceptions of religion in this province.

Secularism has been a particularly hot topic over the last few years. There have been many bills trying to police religious minorities, such as Bill 62 under Philippe Couillard's Liberal government, which would prevent people from obtaining public services if they had their face covered—something directly targeting Muslim women. The law was overturned in 2017 and the Liberals were booted out by Francois Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec.

Now, religious minorities, who are oftentimes

racial minorities as well, are reeling under the effects of the secularism law formerly known as Bill 21. People donning the Muslim hijab, Sikh turban, and Jewish kippah, among other religious garb, are no longer able to work in the public sector, including teaching positions. This is clearly discriminatory.

People wearing religious symbols will not immediately indoctrinate those around them to their religion. Bill 21 overrides sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, notably that of freedom of religious expression, which demonstrates the bill is legal discrimination against religious minorities.

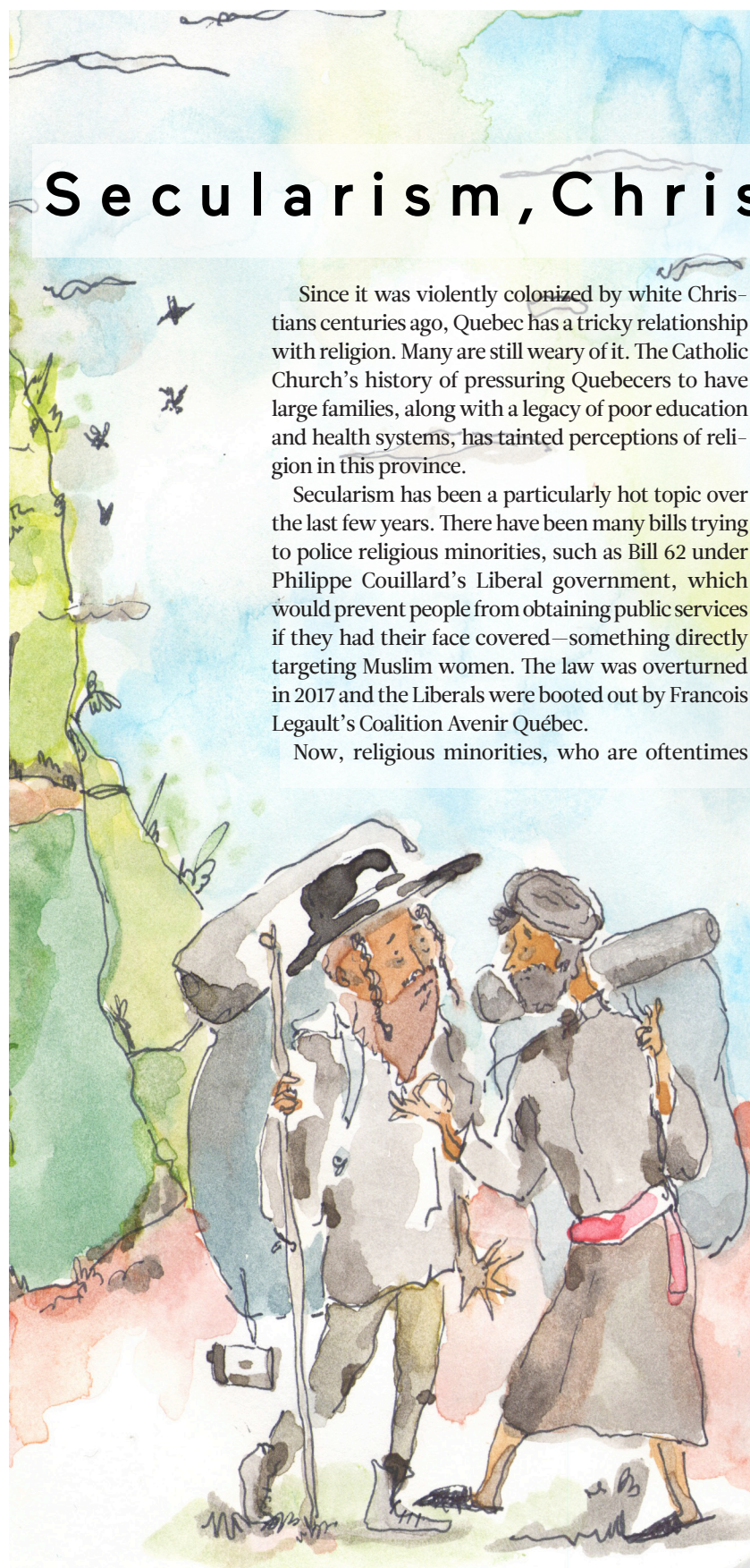
In Quebec, and North America generally, it seems secularism is like diet Christianity. We talk of “good family values” and still base most of our laws and ethics around Christian ideals. It's undeniable that fears of religious minorities, especially Islamophobia, has a growing presence in the province. In January, we marked the third anniversary of Quebec City's mosque shooting, a testament to the hatred and bigotry that has permeated Quebec society, religious, racial, or otherwise.

Faith is complex, multi-faceted, and deeply personal. For some it helps deal with mental health struggles, while others use it as a way to connect with their community. Some found their faith on their own terms, and some families have struggled in the face of the Catholic Church.

Pushing people to the margins and closing off avenues for dialogue only breeds further intolerance. If we never have to interact with people who don't look and think like us, how can we learn to coexist and understand each other? Ignorance only gives rise to fear and discrimination.

It's important to recognize our own masthead, its background, and how that influences the way we tell stories. Whether they are practicing or not, most of our masthead members come from Christian backgrounds. With this issue, we tried to explore the diversity of religious and spiritual backgrounds in Montreal communities, and that manifests itself mainly by way of personal narratives because of the private and personal nature of faith.

There are so many different religions, spiritualities, and ways to express faith. It's crucial to bridge the gaps and come together with understanding to prevent further politically accepted discrimination. □



The Life of Clara Geisman, Jewish Holocaust Survivor

Excerpts of My Great-Grandmother's Unpublished Memoir

ALEXANDER MODONESE

PHOTOS COURTESY ALEXANDER MODONESE





I wrote this book to let people know not to make a mess of their lives, like I did.”

Chills ran through my spine as I read the introduction of my great-grandmother’s unpublished memoir, *Clara*. Although I never met my great-grandmother, I have always been intrigued by the tragic and adventurous life she led.

Born in 1904 in the city of Chisinau, Moldova, Clara Geisman’s book recounts her life as a Jewish woman in fascist Italy, the deportation of many members of her family to Siberian work camps, and the time she spent as a political prisoner due to her Jewish heritage.

Clara grew up in an upper-middle-class home surrounded by her seven siblings and her parents. Due to her father’s military heroism in the Russo-Japanese War, the Geisman family was exempted from restrictions normally preventing Jewish people from living in certain areas.

Although her childhood was for the most part idyllic, at a very early age Clara witnessed the horrors of war when Romanian forces invaded Moldova, then part of Russia, in the early 1900s.

“Many people we knew had their houses broken into,” she wrote. “They attacked mostly Jews. They believed all Jews were rich, and would use that as an excuse to commit violence against us. Young girls caught on the street were raped and left with unforgivable babies and broken furniture.”

Shortly after the conflict ended in 1918, a Romanian language skills assessment became compulsory for anyone who wished to pursue a university degree. Unfortunately, due to her limited Romanian language skills, Clara, who was an aspiring pharmacist, failed the assessment. To continue her education, she made the difficult decision to immigrate to Italy and live with her cousin Aaron in Milan in 1928.

Due in part to the language barrier, initially Clara had a hard time adjusting to life in a country very culturally different from Russia.

“When I arrived in Italy, my cousin wanted to introduce me to some of his friends, so we went to a restaurant,” she wrote. “They offered me spaghetti, but I had never seen spaghetti before. I wanted to wait for them to start eating to see how they ate it first.”

Over time, Clara became increasingly accustomed to her new life in Italy. In order to perfect her Italian language skills and save up enough money to enroll in university, she worked as a toy designer. However, her plans would radically change when she met the love of her life, Nino Petino.

“All that happened to me before that moment must have been dreams,” Clara wrote of their first encounter. “I have only been fully awake and truly alive since I have known this man.”

At the beginning of their relationship the couple was very much in love and even planned to get married. Although initially hospitable towards Clara, Nino’s ardently religious and traditionally minded parents would not allow the union to occur after learning Clara was a Russian Jew.

Over time, their passionate romance began to fade. Due to his job as a traveling salesman, Clara was separated from her boyfriend for weeks at a time. Eventually, the couple had two children together, Pinuccia Petino, in 1932, and my grandmother, Ines Petino, in 1933.

“My mother was very much in love with my father, but he wasn’t in love with her,” Ines explained when asked about her parents’ relationship. “She always had to say yes, and he was always bossing her around, so it was very difficult for my mother. She would cry all night sometimes.”

Unfortunately, the immense joy Clara felt after the birth of her first



"To be a Russian Jew in Mussolini's Italy was to wait for death."

— *Clara Geisman*

daughter would be short-lived, since Nino's mother, Giusepina Petino, eventually forced her to leave Pinuccia with their family.

As an unmarried Jewish immigrant, Clara had no choice but to comply with these demands.

"Nino's mother had made my child her own. Leaving Pinuccia behind in Catania, I knew that my motherhood had been stolen," Clara lamented in her memoir.

For a while, Clara lived in poverty with her young daughter Ines. Nino would often disappear for long periods of time and only occasionally provided the family with financial assistance. Due to a rising tide of anti-Semitism and her precarious financial situation, when Ines was five years old, Clara made the difficult decision to send her off to live with Pinuccia and the Petino family in Genoa.

"To be a Russian Jew in Mussolini's Italy was to wait for death," Clara wrote.

Leaving her mother at such a young age and moving in with her grandparents, whom she barely knew, was a very emotionally painful experience for Ines.

"It was very difficult for me to live apart from my mother," she said. "When I went to live with my paternal grandparents, they were a very happy family. They didn't treat me badly, but I felt like they did not care for me, so I was always thinking about my mother."

Over the next few years, Clara visited her children in Genoa as often as she could and regularly sent them letters. Her relationship with Nino would also continue until 1938, when he left her for another woman. Despite all the hardship she endured, the emotional turmoil Clara experienced during this breakup was among the most devastating.

Although their relationship was often wrought with tumult, infidelity, and,

at times, even abusive behaviour, the intense love Clara felt for Nino lasted until the very end of her life.

"How a man could grasp a woman's life so tightly in his hands I cannot say," she wrote towards the end of her book. "I only know it is the truth. My life began when I saw Nino's smile and it will be over when he draws his last breath."

When the Nazis invaded Italy in 1943, Clara was forced into hiding. Due to her Jewish identity, she was unable to find

work and was only able to survive by illegally selling contraband cigarettes.

"I lost my home, my pretence of a normal life, my security, and my peace. I was already a non-person. I had no legal existence in Italy," she wrote. "My name was stolen, my papers a forgery, my identity as Nino's wife a bogus, empty lie. Everyone was afraid of each other. No one knew who was working for the Nazis and who was working for the partisans. Nothing was safe, except





silence.”

Luckily, due to completing all the necessary Catholic rites of passage, such as their baptism, first communion, and confirmation, Ines and Pinuccia were not in imminent danger of being captured by Nazis.

Ines, who was 10 years old at the time of the invasion, was not afraid. “I was not worried about being discovered as a Jew, because I was too young to fully realize the dangers of being Jewish,” she said.

Unfortunately, Clara would not be so lucky. In 1943, Nazis raided Clara’s apartment. She describes this frightening event in vivid detail in her autobiography:

“My heart dropped. They had found my trunk and in the bottom, there were letters from my mother in Hebrew and a replacement of my birth certificate signed by the rabbi in Chisinau.”

After she confessed to being Jewish, officers took her to the local police station for further questioning. They initially suspected that she was a Russian spy. When the lengthy interrogation was complete, Clara was taken to a dank jail cell infested with rats, where she spent an indefinite amount of time. She screamed hysterically as the rats crawled all over her body, until her mouth became dry. Eventually, Clara was taken to a large waiting room filled with people.

“When would they come to shoot us? When would they take us away to the camps? We didn’t know. We just waited,” she wrote.

Due to being ethnically Jewish, Clara was taken to a prison called Monza.

“I sat quietly amongst the murderers and other criminals in my little bed in the corner and waited. They were all very rough and said nasty things to each other all the time.”

Eventually, a Gestapo officer came up to her and began interrogating her once again.

“Are you Jewish?” he asked

“Yes I am a Jew.”

He laughed and, to another Gestapo man, he said two words, “zum schiessen,” which means “to be shot.” Clara was then lined up against a big wall with all the other Jews waiting for what she believed was her imminent death. At the last moment, a German man barked another order:

“Nicht Schiessen”—don’t shoot.

“That was the order and I was not dead,” she wrote.

Unfortunately, this would not be the end of her hardship, and she was soon transferred to an extremely small cell with almost no light, no fresh air, and no plumbing.

“We lived like animals. Moment to moment, without yesterday and without tomorrow. I didn’t care about anything anymore,” she wrote. “Time was a never-ending grey bog. We were eight Jews, eight human beings in this little room. We were only there because we were Jewish. I knew that was the only reason.”

While in prison, Clara gave most of her food to children to help them survive. She was constantly hungry and continued to lose weight. This lasted until 1945 when the war finally ended, and she was once again a free woman.

After she was released, Clara promptly found work at a Jewish community centre and spent a significant amount of time trying to convince Nino to let her see Pinuccia and Ines. When it became apparent to Clara that she would not see them for a long time, she immigrated to

Canada, which she perceived as a desolate place, in the early 1950s.

“After all I went through, I wanted to go far away. So far, that there would be no more civilization,” Clara wrote.

There, she met her future husband, Abraham Lifshitz. Her daughter Ines would eventually join her in Canada in 1961, get married, and have three children.

Despite Ines and her family’s best efforts, Clara’s book has still not been published. When asked why it was so important to share her mother’s story with the world, Ines explained “Because of all the disappointments she had in her life, I wanted to fulfill her last wish and get the book published.”

There are many unanswered questions about Clara’s life in Russia and her past that are not answered in the autobiography.

“I hardly know anything about her past. I didn’t want to ask her too many questions. I don’t know if she lost touch with her relatives in Russia,” said Ines. “This is a big mystery for me that will always be on my mind. When I meet her, it’s the first thing I will ask her.”

In order to help my grandmother find more information, I encouraged her to do a DNA test, which led her to discover a long-lost cousin living in Israel named Izhar. “It was very emotional to meet Izhar. Finally, I was able to meet somebody from my mother’s side of the family,” said Ines. “I am very proud of my Jewish identity. It appeared on the DNA test, but even before that, it always made me emotional to hear Jewish music. I can’t explain why.”

Although her autobiography may never be read by the public, through sharing her experiences with *The Link’s* readers, I feel in some small way I have helped ensure Clara’s story will not be forgotten. □

If anyone reading this story would like to assist our family in publishing the book, we encourage you to contact us directly by email at modonesea@gmail.com

Aramark and the Food-Sovereign

DAVID EARLES @ni_maste_bort

If you weren't paying attention, you'd probably never notice them. The little white Aramark vans with the silhouetted red figure on the side pull in and out of Concordia each day, bringing supplies and ingredients to campus cafeterias and cafés.

But many students, preoccupied with the stresses of academic life, might be unaware that behind the scenes, this corporation is at the heart of a contentious debate on ethics, health, and institutional food autonomy.

Aramark is Concordia University's primary food-service provider and it operates the majority of the cafeterias, cafés, and food franchises on campus. The corporation, a Fortune 500 company, serves nearly two billion meals a year in institutional facilities around the world.

As a result of Aramark's corporate behaviour both in North America and abroad, however, student activists at universities around the world—including Concordia—have decried Aramark

as a company that does not belong on their campuses.

Founded in 1936 by brothers Davre and Henry Davidson, Aramark was originally a modest operation engaged in small-scale vending services. Today, the company is a multinational behemoth that services over 500 prisons and detention centers in the United States alone, some of which also house migrants and asylum claimants.

Aramark has been repeatedly implicated in serving detainees and prisoners rotten and maggot-ridden food and accused of drastically cutting portions to maximize its profits. It has also been at the centre of a long list of labour disputes and has spent a fortune in unpaid wage settlements, the most recent being a \$21-million payout announced on Nov. 8, 2019.

Allegations of insufficient staffing, price fixing, unhygienic practices, falsification of records, and gross negligence have plagued Aramark for decades, as well as other issues that transcend food quality.

In Ireland, for instance, Campbell Catering, Ltd., an Aramark subsidiary, fully operates and administers three of the country's 37 "direct provision" migrant housing facilities. This system has been characterized as "institutionalized poverty and social exclusion" by the Irish Refugee Council, a Dublin-based asylum-seeker advocacy group.

"It is, in effect, a cash cow for those private companies who operate within it," Irish parliamentarian Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire said of the system in a policy statement. "It's a highly profitable model, profiting from the hardship and misery of others."

This is the core criticism of Aramark advanced by student activists pushing to deny the company commercial spaces within their universities—a movement taking hold on campus at Concordia. "We do not want multinationals like Aramark on our campus," said external coordinator of the Concordia Food Coalition Nora Fabre. "They have a very poor track record."

The CFC is looking to present a

e Fight for a Campus

Concordia's Food Service Provider Is Under Increasing Scrutiny as Contract Expiration Nears

counter-proposal in May 2022 when Aramark's contract expires. "We're starting to seriously prepare for the request for proposals," Fabre said. "That will be an opportunity for students to organize and mobilize and change the contract for the food service provider."

Recently, student activists at New York University forced Aramark out of their campus through a direct-action pressure campaign that included protests and the occupation of campus spaces.

This success story has Concordia activists feeling emboldened. "There's certainly an arc towards escalating our tactics," Fabre said, although the CFC knows it must also present a unified, practical operational proposal in order to seize the contract from Aramark.

Student initiatives reimagine campus food service

One model of what that proposal could look like already exists on a smaller scale at the People's Potato, a collectively-run kitchen that serves free food every school day in Concordia's Hall Building.

"Our number one mandate is to feed students healthy food," said People's Potato collective member Karen Ounsworth. People's Potato is a non-profit fee-levy group, which means that it receives operational funding from voluntary student fees that are calculated on a cost-per-credit basis. These fees add up to roughly \$5 a semester for full-time undergraduate students.

"Our budget is around \$320,000 a year, and with that we're able to pay ourselves, to buy all the food, and to fix things when they need to be fixed," Ounsworth explained.

To put that in perspective, the more than 900 students living in residences at Concordia are required to buy into a mandatory, Aramark-administered meal plan that costs \$4,695 a head per year—at full capacity, that's \$4,248,975 per year.

Meanwhile, People's Potato serves free meals daily throughout the same period at a fee-levy cost of around \$10 per year, per student. Ounsworth estimates they currently serve between 400



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GRAPHIC BY WEDNESDAY LAPLANTE
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and 500 meals a day.

But the emphasis is not only on serving food. People's Potato is a grass-roots, participatory project. All employees are paid equally, though they do rely heavily on volunteers. "The number one thing that we provide is a community space," Ounsworth said. "We offer the opportunity for you to feel like you're part of something bigger than going to school and just trying to survive."

A student-led organization like People's Potato is just one vision of what a post-Aramark food landscape could look like.

"There are other ways to understand food service contracts," said Erik Chevrier, a Concordia instructor who specializes in food studies and social economy. "Concordia basically out-sources them, but there are a number of schools that have actually internalized them."

Chevrier cited the University of Toronto and the University of Winnipeg as examples of Canadian universities that have internalized their food-service systems, working with local chefs and co-operatives that create more nutritious meal plans and focus on sustainability and local procurement.

These approaches are better than the services of a massive corporation whose only interest is its bottom line, Chevrier argued. "The university could have a stake to co-create a more food-sovereign situation on campus."

Aramark's position is that the status quo is working for the populations it serves, including students.

"As one of the world's largest food service companies, we believe that all of our customers deserve healthy, nutritious meals whether they are students, business people, fans, patients, or offenders," said Aramark's Vice President of Corporate Communications, Karen Cutler.

But in the hundreds of prisons in which Aramark operates, the "offenders" aren't Aramark's customers, Chevrier argued. And since Concordia students who live in residence are not given a choice as to whether or not they buy into the Aramark meal plan, they aren't either.

"If you look at these food service corporations, they basically serve public institutions," Chevrier said. "They serve prisons, they serve the military, they serve hospitals, they serve student residences, and in each case, their markets are captive markets. Their number one condition is 'How do I profit the most off of these situations, and how do I maximize the amount of money that's coming in while providing as little as possible?'"

When the time comes to decide whether or not Concordia will renew its contract with Aramark, the administration will have to make a choice: Do they want to maintain a partnership with a faceless multinational with a record of prioritizing its bottom line above the most vulnerable among us, or are they ready to work with student groups and community organizations in pursuit of a food-sovereign campus? ☐

Get a Worldwide Review of Our Sub-Zero Weather

What Do International Students Think About Our Winter?

Sheena Macmillan
@seennamac

Meet Juan Lucuara, born in Colombia, raised in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's capital city has four seasons, but the winter snowfall will never be more than ankle-height. Unlike Canada, the snow doesn't paint the landscape white; it falls like dust. A regular winter day stays around 0 C, on occasion dipping to -10 C, "which at the time for me was very cold," said Lucuara. "But now I'm here in -10 C and I'm wearing just a hoodie."

So far, Lucuara loves the winter wonderland that is Montreal.

"The first snow of the winter, it was amazing. We all got blankets and ran outside to watch the snow. Everyone was so happy, jumping around trying to catch the snow," he said.

"I'll go outside with friends, and we'll take our shirts off and start taking pictures. We'll mess around and start throwing snowballs. Very stupid, but it's fun," he added.

While returning from a night of clubbing, Lucuara and his friends started throwing snowballs at each other. One of Lucuara's snowballs went long, falling into a manhole cover and hitting the person working inside.

"At the moment I felt bad, but now I can laugh about it," he said.

"This season is just so much happier. Super cliché stuff, but you can curl up under a blanket with someone, drink hot chocolate, watch some movies.

Photos Nanor Froudjian
@n_froudjian

With the snow falling, it's beautiful," he said. "In the cold you can always put on more layers, but in the heat there's a certain point where you can't take off any more layers."

One flaw, however, is the short days. Like many of us, Lucuara thinks the lack

of sun sucks. When the sun sets by 4:30 p.m., he said, it feels like 8 p.m. or 9 p.m., as though his whole day has already passed.

Regardless, he's become resilient to the snowballs the Canadian winter has thrown at him.



In Lima, it never gets colder than 12 C. During what would be considered the winter season, it rains a lot, but the bouts of rain come in drizzles instead of down-pours.

“Our winter is not that cold. Now that I’m here, I know what cold is,” Juárez Achata said.

“I already knew it was going to be bad because when anyone would ask me where I’m going to study, and I would tell them Montreal, they would say, ‘Are you ready for the winter there?’”

Juárez Achata figured she’d buy a winter jacket if she needed one, but her father got her one from the United States before she left for Montreal. She realized it was bold of her to assume a jacket wouldn’t be necessary. Since her arrival, she’s purchased a few other jackets on top of the one gifted by her father.

One of her fondest winter memories was when she went to the Old Port with friends. She didn’t skate because the first time she went for a spin around the

rink, she fell down countless times. She was perfectly happy watching from the sidelines as her friends skated against the backdrop of the neighbourhood’s iconic ferris wheel.

While out at a Mexican restaurant during snowfall and -20 C weather, a friend of hers put his beer in the snow to quickly chill it. The concept and its effectiveness came as a surprise to her.

That night, the weather forced her to don a hat for the first time, even though she hates wearing things on her head. “If not, I was going to freeze,” she said.

Now that she’s settled into the winter, it’s beginning to lose its charm. “I’m tired of the snow now. I’m sick of it!” she said.

“One time I was walking downtown, and I couldn’t feel my face,” she said. Factoring in the wind chill was something she didn’t foresee.

The dry weather forces her to reapply moisturizer and lip balm time and time again, something she’d never needed to do in Peru.

Meet Claudia Juárez Achata, from Lima, Peru.

Halfway through winter, Claudia Juárez Achata is growing tired of the blistering cold.

The capital of the tropical country still sees four seasons, but the winter is more comparable to that of Peru than Canada. During their winter, the temperature can drop to around 10 C, and it gets very windy. “It’s cold for Vietnamese people, but it’s not really cold,” Nguyen explained.

Like Lucuara, the shorter winter days have proven tough for Nguyen. “I feel like the days end so fast. It’s 4 p.m., and





the sun's gone!" she said.

She'd experienced snow before during a vacation in Japan, but it was nothing compared to Canada.

Freezing rain came as a surprise.

"What? What?! Why is it like ice?" she said. Building her first snowman and making her first snow angel were also standout memories from the winter so far.

During winter in Vietnam, people still go out often and get street food. While street food culture doesn't really exist in Montreal, Nguyen finds that pubs are a good substitute.

The string lights hanging from storefronts and restaurants provide a warm atmosphere in otherwise unbearable temperatures. The Old Port is one of Nguyen's favourite spots.

She had her first frostbite scare on a trip to Toronto over the winter break, when her hands were unbearably cold.

Not knowing the signs of frostbite, she thought the intense weather was enough to make her hands fall off. "I've never been that cold," she said.

She's come to hate getting rocks and salt in her boots from walking anywhere and her phone dying because it's too cold.

Surprisingly, she's yet to completely wipe out on ice. Nguyen's advice to avoid face planting in the snow? Keep your stance wide and your knees bent. "You gotta keep that balance," she said.

Meet Lea Nguyen, from Hanoi, Vietnam.



The way Montrealers celebrate winter has helped Lorna Mc Cutcheon adjust to her surroundings.

Meet Lorna Mc Cutcheon, from Cork, Ireland.

Mc Cutcheon characterizes an Irish winter as damp and grey. Very rarely does the sun break through and bring a clear sky.

While the temperature doesn't usually drop below freezing, to her an Irish 0 C feels colder than a Montreal -8 C. "I think this is because of the wind and the rain. The cold definitely gets under your skin more," she said.

"I was very intimidated by what I had heard and what I had read online about Canadian winters," she said. "I was expecting to not be able to go outside at all and couldn't understand how people could live comfortably in Montreal during the winter."

She said she used to watch YouTube videos of snowstorms in Montreal and thought the heavy snow and -20 C

weather would be the winter's everyday conditions.

Even though she had trepidations beforehand, she's thoroughly enjoyed the winter so far. "We don't get snow like this at all in Ireland, so it's such a treat to be walking around outside, especially when it's sunny and the sun reflects off the snow, which makes everything so bright," she said.

Mc Cutcheon has learnt the difficulties behind exploring Montreal on a -15 C day. "On days like this, I feel my blood vessels closing up, always in my hands and ears first, and it's genuinely painful to be walking around, especially if it's windy," she said.

While she's been in Montreal for just a couple months, she's made her fair share of great memories. Among them was

seeing Nina Kraviz at Igloofest and dancing to acid house in the snow.

"There is no better way to celebrate winter than to have an outdoor music festival in the snow. It was amazing being surrounded by the bright lights of the stage with the city skyline behind me and the snow gently falling down," she recalled. "I hardly noticed the cold because I was dancing so much, and all the people in the crowd were keeping me warm."

The way Montrealers celebrate and embrace the cold surprised her. The outdoor activities and festivals are a perfect way to make the most out of the winter.

On the other hand, her first few days in Montreal before classes started were a bit lonesome. "I did feel very lonely being in a city with a climate and culture totally different to my own," she said.



Meet Choudhary Akash, from Hyderabad, India. (left)

During Hyderabad's summer months, it can get as hot as 40 C and can dip down to a brisk 10 C in the winter.

"When I landed here it was -27 C. It was pretty cold. I didn't bring any thermal wear with me because I didn't expect it to be that cold. My hands were freezing," Akash recalled.

When buying a winter coat, the consensus was split between getting something cheap and splurging for quality. In the end, he ended up getting something on the pricier side: a grey North Face jacket with a fur-lined hood, to be exact.

A favourite memory from this winter was skiing on Mont-Tremblant with friends. "I know how to skate, so that helped me with skiing," he said.

Coming to Montreal, Akash expected it to snow all the time, but he thought the roads would always be clear as well. Both of those turned out to be false.

Meet Alexander Fevralev, from Yekaterinburg, Russia.

"My first winter in Montreal was like heaven! Compared to Russia, Canadian winters are almost nothing," he said.

Russian winters last from October to April, without a warm day in between to break the spell. Because of the high latitude, there is little sun and the temperature rarely gets higher than -10 C. All you've got is cold and darkness for six months, said Fevralev.

"Winter in Montreal is like a fake winter. Warm days, lots of sun, rain. I

Snowstorms have left Alexander Fevralev unphased, paling in comparison to Russian winters.

have always thought that it doesn't rain in winter," he said.

"You can be outside without a cap," he added. "I'm ready to cry with happiness!"

The early February snowstorm might have been a rude awakening for most international students, but Fevralev was unbothered. "[The] snowstorm was so nice, I [walked] around almost two hours because I like weather like that," he said. ☑

"I'm ready to cry with happiness!"

— Alexander Fevralev



Activism Through Art by an Angry Feminist Whale

Artist Moule Makes Waves by Shattering Stereotypes and Educating About the Environment

Noemi Stella Mazurek

Inspired by the ecological disaster unfolding across the planet and driven by empowering underrepresented people, Moule, a painter, illustrator, and graphic designer, creates art that makes a statement.

Dressed in a magenta blazer and wearing bright pink lipstick, she is as colourful and spirited as one of her illustrations.

Moule explained that she uses art as a medium to channel her will and passion into fighting for causes. “I’m very often motivated by [...] breaking the stereotypes, and there’s always an undermining bit of feminist activism,” she explained.

She is equally fueled by her love of nature. She was raised in Apt, a small, rural town in the Provence region of France, and has always felt a strong connection to the earth.

“[Growing up], no one was scared of leaving us free in the forest for days,” recalled Moule. “[T]he first time I took the train I think I was 17 or 18, [so] I wasn’t close to cities till a lot later in life.”

Though she grew up near the forest, she explained she has always felt a much

stronger emotional connection to the ocean. The mystery and beauty that exists beneath the water’s surface intrigues Moule.

“If ever we could see what was happening under the sea [from] atop the earth, we would lose our shit,” proclaimed Moule, whose artist name is a direct tribute to her fascination with water.

The name “Moule” is also a clever play on words. “‘Moule,’ in French, means a

mussel, so it comes from the sea,” she explained. “It also means the external part of a vagina, and [...] ‘woman’ in slang from Marseille.” However, Moule’s spirit animal is, without a doubt, a whale—an “angry feminist whale,” as she puts it.

Moule explained that names of fat mammals are often used by children in France as insults. She’s trying to reapropriate that name-calling through her art. She uses her frustration with rigid



“You can wear this to work because nobody knows what a clit is,” said Moule.

Photos Noemi Stella Mazurek



"I'm very often motivated by [...] breaking the stereotypes, and there's always an undermining bit of feminist activism."

— *Moule*

beauty standards as creative fuel, depicting people who don't fit inside society's molds. Moule is angry and proud of it, she said.

"Moule's art [...] is really important in our current social media time where we see a lot of very stereotypical representations of [...] what women are supposed to look like," said musician, collaborator, and friend Maryse Bernard. "Her art, I think, makes me and a lot of other women, and people, feel like it's okay to look a little bit different."

Moule's work portrays people of all shapes and sizes in full curvy, hairy, unclothed glory. Her illustrations are simultaneously whimsical and empowering, said Bernard. Moule explained that she tries to spread images of women, non-binary, and trans people that are not portrayed in the media.

Her art, she explained, is an outlet for frustrations that stem from society's pre-conceived standards.

Moule said she started out drawing and painting mermaids but was eventually dissuaded by their fantastical, childish appeal. She found herself wanting

to create something more serious and meaningful. "[A]s soon as I hear a whale being washed up on the seas with a large amount of plastic in her, I just think we need to try and do something [about the environment]," she said. "So I represent a lot of whales in my illustrations, and water animals."

Her adoration for these large sea mammals is evident in her studio. Three purple whales—a painting done by a good friend—hover watchfully over Moule's creative space. The space is made up of a modest desk framed by cascading houseplants and shelves displaying mason jars, paint-crusted brushes, and, of course, stuffed whales.

It was in Quebec that Moule was able to see whales for the first time in her life. During her time in Montreal, Moule has gotten to travel out of the city to Tadoussac and Gaspésie; these are trips that have been monumental for her work. "I think I kind of get a sense of what's important when I get out of the city. It's as if I [am] touching base with the human core," she said.

After falling in love with Montreal

while visiting a friend, Moule decided to make the move from London, where she was working as a graphic designer.

It was the city's diverse and accepting art scene that drew her in. "I think there's an open-mindedness in the arts [in Montreal] that is different from other countries," she explained. "I'm less scared saying what I think here than in any other country where I've lived."

She explained that in Montreal, the rich and poor art scenes seem to merge. The result is a supportive atmosphere that welcomes and encourages both young freelancers and established artists. Moule explained that she has become friends with some well-known artists in Montreal. These artists regularly host potlucks where they invite all their fellow artist friends and guests. The result is a creative gathering the likes of which Moule claimed she has never encountered before.

However, putting yourself out there can be daunting at first, especially for more introverted people, explained Moule. She recalled forcing herself to go to events and to be more social in order to



meet new artists and find work.

Using Instagram to her advantage, Moule was also able to connect with many interesting and inspiring people through the simple act of direct messaging. “I’ve had so many sketch sessions and drawing sessions and collaborations. People are willing to share moments of pure art and creation in Montreal. It’s quite amazing,” she said.

Though Montreal is a bustling hub for artists, there is a lack of paid work in well-established enterprises, explained Moule.

“I think that people just don’t trust the arts enough, and they don’t invest

enough in it,” said Moule. She recalled getting her first gigs in the city through word of mouth and friends of friends.

“The more you talk [about] and spread the love you have for your art, the more people are going to believe in it and spread it around them.”

Since arriving in the city nearly two years ago, Moule has participated in a multitude of projects through Collectif Cousines, Art Cible, Canettes de Ruelle, and walls on the island of Montreal designated for legal graffiti.

Moule describes Collectif Cousines as “a lot of people meeting up, trying to create a space, [and] trying to find solutions on how to represent women in diversity and culture and arts in Montreal.”

One such project was a live painting performance during one of Bernard and Backxwash’s concerts.

“I thought it was beautiful that she could visually represent sound and be inspired on the spot,” said Bernard, who performs under the stage name Maryze and writes about feminist and environmental themes. “I find that her art

and my music go well together and she understands the message I’m going for.”

Moule has also exhibited work at Marc Gosselin gallery and Atelier Galerie 2112. Antoine Giasson, artist and owner of Atelier Galerie 2112, first came across Moule’s work during one of the gallery’s monthly artist callouts.

“Her work is feminism, but at the same time it’s funny, so it brings out the feminist issue in a positive way that’s more approachable,” explained Giasson.

One of the legal walls where Moule has painted is the Mur Legal Rouen. Moule explained she loves the collaboration and experimentation such murals encourage. “[Montreal is] a city that lives under the snow for seven or eight months, so in the summer everyone is willing to be outside and paint on walls. It’s like a constant motivation.”

In the warmer months, catch Moule atop a ladder, paintbrush in hand—and keep an eye out for her stickers, paintings, clothing, and illustrations in art galleries and throughout Montreal. □

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Please Find Attached Three Poems

A.J. Quinn

Graphics Aiden Locke
@lockedsgn



1. Why Not Hope?

I have read a lot of things in my life, most of them depressing.
I have read about the terrifying prospect of nuclear war,
the rising ocean levels,
the rampant social misogyny and racism, homopho-
bia and hate that still plague
our governments
our workplaces
our homes
our communities
and our psyches.

I have read about the heavy footprint of colonialism and the oppression of endless poverty.
I have read about
floods and famines,
bombings and beatings,
migrants dying by the millions
and modern day slavery.

In the face of what seems to be impossibility, I have seen this barrage of literature topple
spirits and divert energy. Lay activists low with the depressing weight of history.

—And I have seen people get back up out of bed to plant new seeds.

To come together in community.

To dance, to sing.

To build, to unbuild, to be.

To drum up the sun and give thanks for the day.

I've flailed around in my own pessimism for long enough
to know the endless spirals of negativity.
Until finally one day an Elder said to me: "Hope is a skill you practice."
Hope. Is a skill you practice.

2. (Reclaiming) The Power to Choose

I chose to read that which would reconnect my wandering spirit
lost for so many years in the dusty annals of the ivory tower
back to the Earth surrounding me.

I chose to read that which would slip me out of bed and into reality
Into the woodland
Into experiencing
Into a type of learning that doesn't end when the textbook slams shut, but that sinks
into

my skin
my muscles
my very being.

I chose to farm and learn about the plants that feed me.
I chose simplicity.
I chose to see the abundance all around me.
I chose life in all its pain and beauty, hard work and glory.

To take the good with the bad and stop chasing the utopia that will never be.
To accept my flaws, my fury, my shadow, my sadness
and then to continue working

For love
For life
For peace
For community.

3. Learning to Be

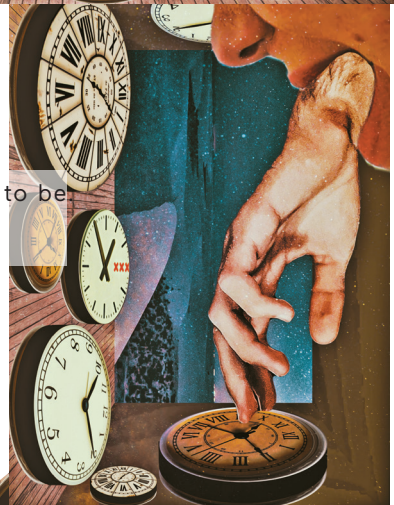
For everyone who has ever felt the crushing weight—create.
Creation liberates.

For those whose beliefs about the world cause them to hate—change.
We all have the power to choose a different way.

For those whom the rut of monotony has deadened—dream again.
Sit under a tree for days and open yourself to the silent truth of who you were meant to be.

It is not over until the bombs fly,
and even then there will still be life as blades of grass crack through the rubble,
dandelions stretch for the sun, reclaiming the old ways of being.

I have seen women on the front lines of barricades hold hands and sing.
I have seen young people of colour reclaiming their identities.
I have seen love that flows like a river without jealousy.
I have felt what it means to be a part of the beautiful mosaic of humanity.
I have felt my body merge with the trees.
I have felt what it means to be free.
And I choose hope
Every single day.



Mapping the Moment With Tarot

How the Art of Images Comes to Life

Abegail Ranaudo

Graphic Carleen Loney @shloneys

Dawn Uphold sat poised and collected inside an empty white room as gusts of snow fell meditatively outside the Montreal Open Centre, a space used for holistic and conventional therapy services.

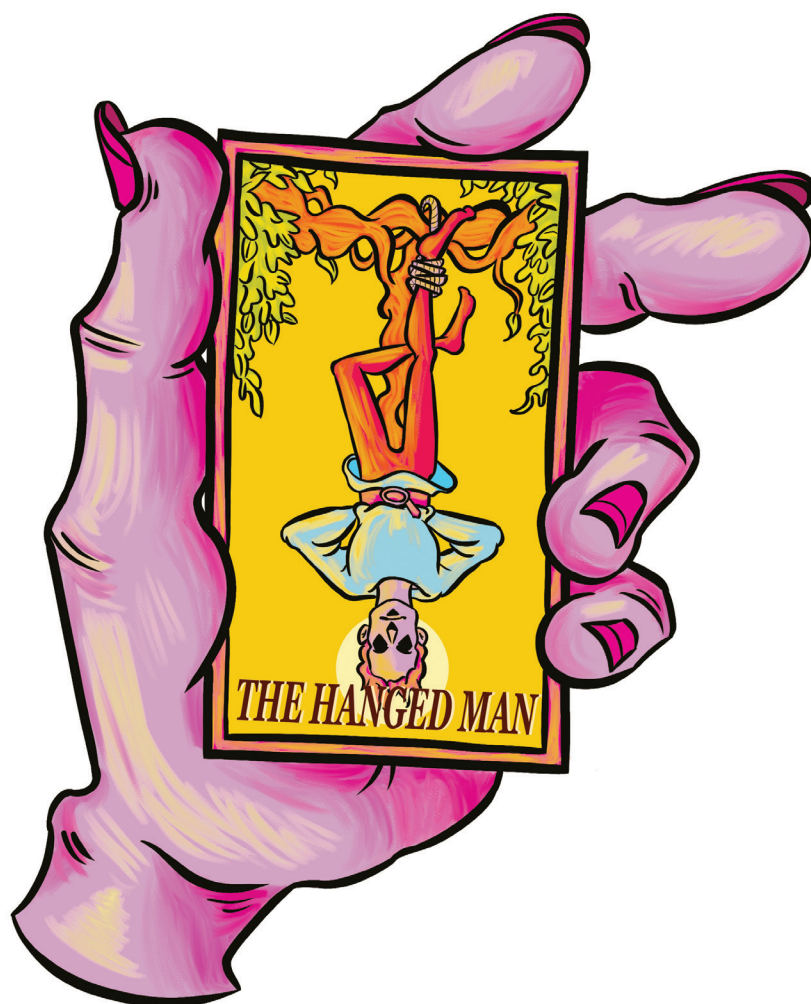
Uphold is a medium who practices spirituality and specializes in the art of tarot and reiki healing.

She plucked a card containing the image of a man suspended upside-down on a brown wooden post—the hanged man. The figure in the card was tied by his ankle, wearing stark red tights and a baby blue blouse with his head tinted yellow by a halo.

Its characteristics are designed like a stencil in a colouring book, primed to be analyzed by someone trying to untangle their deepest fears, pains, and desires.

“Most people have problems that they are dealing with on a day-to-day basis, and sometimes the problem is really that they are in a state,” said Uphold, pulling a card from the Rider-Waite deck, gracefully revealing the vivid image with her forefinger.

The tarot deck is said to originate from northern Italy around the fourteenth century, and the suit system began with the swords, batons, cups, and coins. By the late-eighteenth century, decks had spread across Europe and become a craft unto themselves.



"Within each deck are so many representations of human experience."

—Dawn Uphold

"Everyone is telling them that they should make a decision, but maybe it's not the timing for them, and they're okay with it," Uphold continued, extracting more from the burning image of the hanging man.

Uphold had laid, in front of her, a variety of tarot packs—referred to by T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Waste Land," as a wicked pack—waiting for someone to walk in, sit on the other side, and have a card reading.

Uphold hovered her palm over the hanging man, saying his surroundings will indicate whether a person is stressed or not. "You could see [the message] coming in the cards," she said, inhaling strongly through her nose.

Tarot has been celebrated for its archetypal and fortune-telling wisdom. Western occultists believed they were instruments for accessing wisdom as far back as ancient Egypt. The completed archetype pack consists of 78 cards and will map an individual's life in a linear fashion: past, present, and future.

"Within each deck are so many representations of human experience," said Uphold. As a tarot reader, she will get clients who are grappling with their daily problems, whether it's parents worried about their children or business people worried about managing deals and relationships.

When shuffled through the gifted hands of a cartomancer, the messages drawn from the images and symbols

can evoke an experience or the problem being discussed. "I find [the information] empowers people to make better decisions of what they want to do next," she said.

Though the messages channeled through the Montreal medium may hit close to home, uncovering envisioned possibilities, she states that a person should be able to practice their judgment. Uphold said the messages can seem like evidence but that it's important to remind people of their free will.

She considers herself an empath as well as a medium, able to access people's energies and emotions by getting intuitive messages, as well as messages from what she knows are disembodied spirits.

"I was definitely absorbing a lot of other people's emotions," she said of her earliest recognition of empathic abilities.

What she provides to her clients is a new perception of their situation. She warns them that she is not a lawyer offering legal advice nor a psychologist certified to assess a person's mental health.

"I will refer out if I have a client who needs that kind of care, but some people prefer to see a tarot reader because it's not really on record," said Uphold. "Coming to a tarot card reader is, in a way, getting an outside opinion, and to be able to do it with confidentiality."

Babita Sharma, a Montreal-based artist, was interested in getting a one-card reading. According to the artist, tarot allows people to gain access to their intuition.

"Sometimes when you get a message or an urge to do something, where is that coming from?" she asked. "Tarot is really telling you about what it is that your intuition is asking, and telling you to trust yourself."

Sharma owns a personal tarot deck that she deciphers herself, helping her to acquire a better understanding of the practice.

Uphold said her abilities as a medium could have a dark side. She had to learn to set the proper boundaries between

herself, her career in mediumship, and in her ability to perceive others.

"It's not appropriate for me to go down the street, have my hands get hot as I'm walking by someone, and say, 'Hey! Do you have a problem?'" she said. "I really care about privacy."

After Uphold read for Sharma, Philippa Klein entered the suite for her routine card reading. A professional social worker, guidance counsellor, and massage therapist, Klein also owns and manages the Open Centre.

Klein thinks that tarot is fun, and prefers the Rider-Waite deck over more recent illustrations with fewer medieval binary concepts like nobility and peasantry. "I like the old school deck because I know it well," she said. "I'm a therapist, so I kind of think of them in a Jungian sort of way."

She compared tarot to a child forced to decide between two chocolate bars. "The kid doesn't know which chocolate they want, so you put them both behind your back. I could say, 'Okay, pick a hand,'" she explained. "'Oh! There's the Kit Kat.'"

The same thing may occur when someone has great difficulty making a decision, noted Klein. Tarot can make the choice less stressful, she said, because the image can bring a given reaction or outcome into play, whether it's anticipated or not.

"Sometimes your cognition gets in the way of your emotional reaction to things," Klein said.

While an image can be deceitful, the allure of the tarot images is in reinterpretation.

"If you're looking at your own cards, you look very distinctly at the pictures, and you relate to them, and that's your subconscious coming in," Klein said. "You pull out of the card what you see in it or the interpreter gives it to you."

Klein invoked the Rorschach or inkblot test administered by some psychologists. "It's looking at an image and letting your subconscious fill it," she said. "I think tarot cards are really similar." □

The JOY of Food

Cooking Beyond the Kitchen: Authentic Cuisine & Cultural Heritage

Nanor Froundjian @n_froundjian

On a regular evening, Kazu's tiny doorway is crammed with a hungry line-up of customers, bustling to get their foot in the door. Waiters and waitresses walk hastily, carrying dishes from the open kitchen counter to small tables while customers look through the menu of traditional Japanese dishes. Kazuo Akutsu, owner of Japanese restaurant Kazu in Shaughnessy Village, personalizes the traditional recipes, adding more flavours and spices to each dish. Cooking and serving the customers is what makes Akutsu happy, which is why the restaurant is always busy, he explained. That's how it has created a sense of community.

Buta-Don, his favourite traditional dish—a 48-hour stewed pork with onions on rice with red ginger—is a Japanese curry recipe he learned from his family, featured as number 22 on the menu.

Akutsu took an interest in cooking at a young age and learned the basics from his mother and grandmother. But it's his experience working at a hotel kitchen that shaped him into the chef he is today. The most important thing in cooking, he said, is the heart.

Eating was not always an inconvenience, but today it is something we scramble to find time for in our busy schedules. It has become a multitask-

ing activity. Sixty per cent of Canadians say they sometimes do another activity while eating. However, eating and cooking still is, for some, an inseparable part of culture and identity. Food was prepared to be enjoyed. And in some cultures, it remains that way.

Canadian immigrants have brought with them traditional values and customs of cooking that are thriving here.

A big part of food is the culture behind it—the hand-picked ingredients, the age-old recipes, the cooking techniques, and, most importantly, the people. “There’s always joy when we’re eating together, and the way we eat, [...] it’s just something that bonds us,” said Anthony Vassiliou, owner of Eviva Greek Tavern in Dollard-des-Ormeaux.

In the restaurant, painted blue and white for the Greek flag, Vassiliou has created a homey atmosphere for his diverse clientele to enjoy. Once they enter the restaurant, they enter Greece—from the flavours to spending more than a couple of hours at the dinner table. “They come, they sit, they enjoy the food the way we enjoy the food,” he said.

Eviva, in Greek, translates to “cheers” and is commonly used around the table.

Food is at the centre of the family and brings everyone together. “Food was so important that my friends would come and my grandmother would chase them around the house to feed them. God forbid you leave without eating—you’d break her heart,” Vassiliou said.

After arriving in Canada from Greece, Vassiliou’s parents went into the restaurant business. Whether at home or

“Food was so important that even visitors, my friends would come and my grandmother would chase them around the house to feed them. God forbid you leave without eating—you’d break her heart.”

— Anthony Vassiliou

not, Vassiliou was always surrounded by Greek food and tradition. Later on, he developed an interest in family recipes and their origins. “I grew up with it. I have an inclination towards it,” Vassiliou said.

All the food at Eviva is prepared by the family. Vassiliou’s mother prepares all the casserole dishes, such as moussaka—an eggplant or potato-based dish, often including ground meat—and biftokia—a baked pasta dish with ground meat and béchamel sauce. His uncle prepares the sides like potatoes and rice, and Vassiliou himself cooks at the grill. “The beauty about this kind of restaurant is that it’s a very hands-on family operation,” he explained.

Traditional recipes traveled across the ocean to Montreal’s restaurant table. “Something I’m still trying to master is moussaka,” Vassiliou said of a family recipe that goes back four generations.



One tray can take up to three to four hours to prepare, he said.

“If you cut one little corner, it changes the whole dish,” he said, explaining the importance of detail in its preparation.

Traditional recipes are time-consuming, and cooking is a part of the enjoyment, particularly for special occasions and holidays that gather the entire family.

“Every festivity brings with it the joy of eating and sharing the table, singing and dancing,” said Rajiv Chopra, owner of Sahib, an authentic Indian restaurant in Pointe-Claire. “So Indians have a very proud heritage, we have a rich culture. Food is of tremendous importance, and certain dishes are made for certain fes-

tivities.”

Milk-based sweets for example, like the laddu or barfi, are usually prepared for special occasions. These recipes take time.

“Paneer is something that they would painstakingly make and then it would be ‘Oh wow, there’s fresh paneer in the house,’” he said, explaining the laborious process of making it. Paneer is a fresh cheese used for sweets and curries, among other recipes.

Today, people have less time to dedicate to cooking. The convenience of takeout is a very tempting solution. More than 50 per cent of Canadians eat out or order takeout at least once a

week, and 40 per cent of the time, it’s because of the convenience. The pace of life is faster, and more and more foods are available upon order and delivery.

“They charge you to save your time so you can buy absolutely [anything],” Chopra said. Any Indian dish, from daal and samosas to paratha and naan bread, can be found premade or frozen, ready to reheat. At Sahib, however, trained chefs use tandoors to cook the dishes, from skewered meats to naan. Chopra explained that originally, the tandoor worked with charcoal, but now, for efficiency and cleanliness, they use propane.

After the lunch hour rush, the chefs prepared roti for themselves in the tandoor—a crispy, unleavened wheat-flour bread.

Despite India having a very large population with vegetarian and vegan diets due to cultural beliefs and faith, Chopra serves meat to accommodate his restaurant’s diverse clientele. Chopra himself had never eaten beef before arriving in Montreal in his early twenties from Chandigarh, the capital city of Punjab and Haryana.

In traditional Indian households, the women ruled the kitchen, said Chopra, and everything from yogurt to chapati—a variation of roti—was made from scratch.

Kazuo Akutsu started working in the kitchen of a hotel in his hometown at 18 where he learned to cook from his mentor.

Photos Esteban Cuevas
@esteban_bam_bam





All the food at Eviva Greek Tavern is prepared by the Vassili family.

Photos Nanor Froundjian

“Both my grandmothers, they had their own recipe for making, for instance, mango chutney. Both had their own flavours. [...] Mango is the most desired fruit in India,” he said.

“My [maternal] grandmother used to control the kitchen. She was vegetarian—she didn’t want any meat to enter her kitchen. If somebody wanted to cook [it], we had to cook it outside of her kitchen,” he said.

He explained that every household has its own recipe for traditional dishes, like curry. The use of ingredients differs according to the region. In the south, for example, using coconut and its oil is common, whereas in the north, using canola oil is the norm as is a heavier handful of onions.

The influence of geography is even greater across oceans. One challenge that comes with bringing traditional cuisine to another country is the difference in the produce that is available. “I do everything by myself. I go to the market every morning. I pick up



my own vegetables and fruits so everything is fresh,” said Vassiliou.

Akutsu, too, faces the same challenge, to which he was a stranger before moving to Montreal. He began working as a cook in his Japanese hometown of Ibaraki, which he describes as an oceanside fisherman’s city. The daily supply of fresh seafood was plentiful and easy to access. “[In Montreal], it’s difficult. Everything

is frozen,” he said, laughing.

All three restaurant owners have incorporated the traditions of their relatives and carried these over to Montreal. However, they all expressed uncertainty in regard to passing these down to the next generation, due to the differences of the Canadian culture, where family structure, social



Rajiv Chopra arrived in Montreal in 1993 and was managing Indian restaurants before opening Sahib in 2003.
Photos Nanor Froundjian

environment, and way of life aren't the same.

Despite the difficulties of maintaining cultural authenticity and resisting erosion from the Western world, food remains at the centre of life—for necessity, but also for so much more.

In Chopra's words, "It's the joie de vivre." □



Shut Up and Dribble:

Bill 21's Unseen Effect on Pro Sports in Montreal

Elias Grigoriadis
@eligigoriadis

On June 17, 2019, the province of Quebec took a stance. Over the years, different governments had flirted with different variations of this concept without ever pulling through. Be it through losing an election or an appeal, laws openly discriminating based on religion have never become entrenched—but not for lack of trying.

Enter François Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec government and Bill 21: *La loi sur la laïcité de l'état*. Despite protests, public opinion being largely against it in areas it was most likely to affect, and a whole lot of appeals, the bill passed by a comfortable margin.

What the CAQ succeeded in doing was to send a message to not only prospective immigrants looking at the province as one of the few francophone regions in North America, but to its very own population.

It didn't take long for this openly xenophobic piece of legislation to garner attention from media outside of Canada. After *The New York Times* picked up the story, Quebec's implementation of Bill 21 drew international attention and criticism.

Canada, in general, has always had a reputation as being a country that is welcoming and open to diversity. Montreal's multiculturalism alone has made it a more attractive option for immigration, and that can be shown through athletes' decisions to settle here.

All-time world footballing greats like Italians Alessandro Nesta, Marco Di Vaio,

and Didier Drogba, from the Ivory Coast, had enough star power to go to any city of their choosing. Yet, when making the move to Major League Soccer, Montreal is where they wound up.

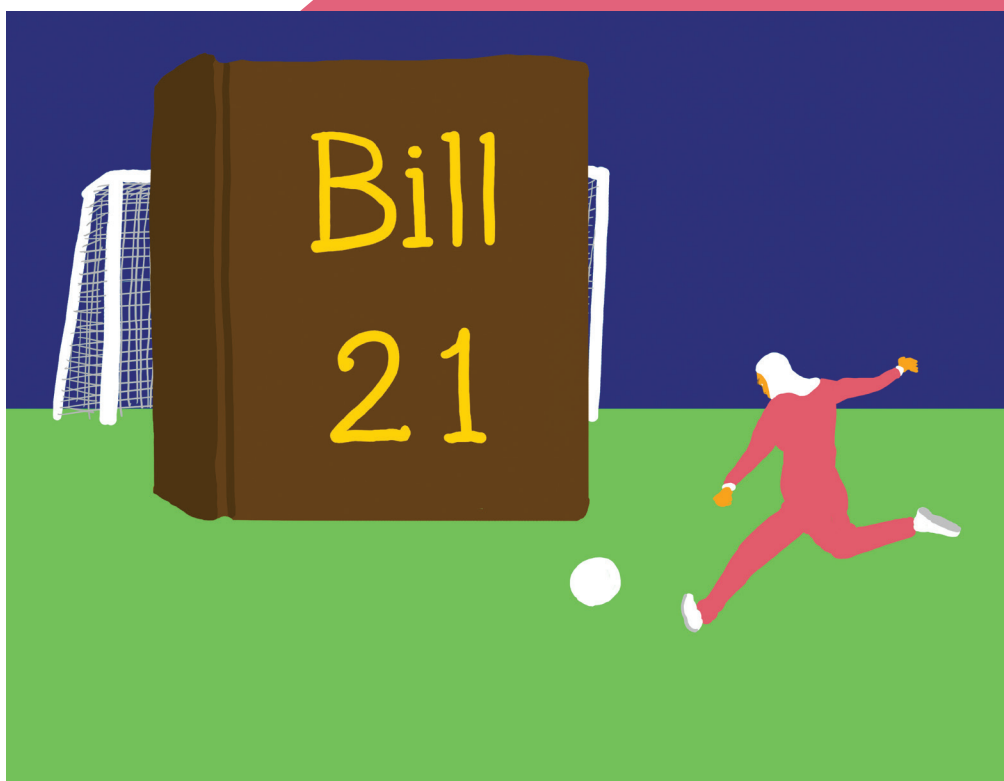
The massive Italian and Ivorian communities here played a role in the players' arrival and prominence in the city. These communities and their significance in Montreal helped all three—even Drogba, who only stayed for a year and a half—become cherished parts of both soccer and popular culture in Montreal. What Bill 21's passing signifies is a legislative change in that respect. Montreal and Quebec often find themselves on the wrong side of racist, xenophobic, and downright discriminatory issues. But this bill's passing was something else entirely.

Graphic Joey Bruce
@joeybruceart

The provincial government has sent a message, and that message is a massive xenophobic fuck you to anyone who is neither white nor Christian. Athletes definitely take into account the culture of the city they're moving to when looking at MLS teams.

While the league's profile is definitely on the rise, it is also a favourable destination for world-class players looking to play out the ends of their careers.

There are clearly bigger fish to fry and more pressing ramifications to Bill 21, but the fact that athletes might be deterred from coming due to the government being more open than ever about its xenophobia is a telling sign of how Quebec's international image has been affected since that fateful day in June. ☒



Being a player of colour comes with its challenges, often being questioned about if I even play hockey regardless of what I say, or people assuming I only play cricket, and it gets frustrating, but you do get used to it.

—Janushan Saravanamuthu



What Is Hockey to Me?



**Hockey Has Been
the Sport I Love
Since I Was a Kid,
but Sometimes It
Doesn't Love Me
Back**

Janushan Saravanamuthu
@Janu2198

Photos Esteban Cuevas
@esteban_bam_bam

My life started off just like many other young boys: I was obsessed with cartoons and toy cars. I had no interest in any sport at the time—it was just something I'd do in gym class.

Growing up with immigrant parents, life wasn't always easy. As a family, we always had our struggles financially, but that never stopped my parents from giving me every opportunity to succeed.

My life forever changed when my mom came to me one day and asked me if I wanted to play hockey. At this point, I was seven and had already played a year of soccer, having only seen hockey on television when my dad would watch it. I thought why not try it out and see how it goes. Leading up to the first day I would ever play hockey, having never skated in my life, I was nervous yet really excited.

To this day, I still remember that first time on the ice, with my parents in the room with me, helping me get my equipment on and holding my hand until I got on the ice. When I took that first step, I realized this was going

to be the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, and it was.

My first year of hockey wasn't that great. When I was on the ice, I struggled a lot. My parents knew I would. Seven-year-old me was fed up with not being able to score and not being as good as the other kids.

I wanted to quit.

When registration was opening up for the next season, I told my Mom that I didn't want to play. She told me that it was not just going to come easy, and I might regret it down the line. So, she signed me up, and I was ready for my second season, hoping it would go better than the last.

I would spend hours in my basement alone, shooting pucks, tennis balls, and even rolls of tape to get better. A sport I almost quit became the only thing I knew, my life's passion. Every Halloween, I went as a hockey player. Every time someone asked me what I wanted to be, I said a hockey player. My mind was made up and nobody could change it.

As the years went by, I was catching up to the other kids and I could feel myself getting better and better. It was only at the age of 11 when I had my first good season. It was also the first year I was named captain.

Being captain of your hockey team is a special feeling and an added responsibility that most players in any sport hope to have.

Although I was only 11, I took that role seriously and I wanted to make sure I was the best captain I could be. Since it was my first time, I needed to learn to be a proper leader.

I can thank my teachers, coaches, family, friends, and idols such as Daniel Alfredsson for showing me the way, not just in hockey, but in life.

At this point, the dream of becoming a player in the National Hockey League was far from gone, but I still wanted to get better each and every day at the sport that changed my life. I still get on the ice with that same passion and wake up excited knowing that I'll be getting on the ice for a practice or a game, and I hope that never goes away.

As I progressed through hockey, there was not much chirping on the ice, and you avoided hearing many things that should not have been said. But as I got older, I first heard the racist comments.

The first time it happened I was a bit



"I would spend hours in my basement alone, shooting pucks, tennis balls, and even rolls of tape to get better."

Photos Esteban Cuevas
@esteban_bam_bam

shocked, but I always expected it at some point. You tell your coaches, but there's not much they can really do. The team supports you through these situations, but there isn't much anybody can do about it.

My teammates would tell me just to ignore it and not let it bother me, but they would then go on to say a few words themselves to the individual who made these comments to have my back.

It was hard to skate away at times because you knew these things shouldn't be said—not on the ice, not anywhere. Although these experiences were frustrating and still happen to this day to me and my fellow teammates of colour, it's something you use to motivate yourself to be the better person and just ignore the individuals with those awful words.

I've barely experienced racism outside of hockey.

Most of it has been on the ice through the opponents I have faced over the years, usually against rival teams where tensions rise and they feel obligated to say such things.

These experiences have made me stronger and taught me to dismiss a lot of the ignorance that comes my way. Being a player of colour comes with its challenges, often being questioned about if I even play hockey regardless of what I say, or people assuming I only play cricket, and it gets frus-



trating, but you do get used to it.

It's discouraging that it has happened so much to the point where it becomes normal, and you can't do anything about it but walk away and not acknowledge that individual. You just fight through it and learn to take the high road.

This year will be my last playing hockey for the Dollard-des-Ormeaux Junior B Civics, where it all started, and I have had the honour of ending it as captain and having my friends and coaches who've been there with me throughout the years. It is sad to see that chapter of my life end, but it won't be the last time I lace up the skates with my boys.

Hockey did not only teach me about having to work hard to get to where I am today, but it has also taught me to be humble and become a better person. It has given me an out on many of my worst days. If I am ever upset or feeling down, just picking up a stick and stepping onto the ice distracts me from everything else going on around me, and I feel at home. 📺



Sex Ed(itorial): Tie Me Up so I Can Let Go

The Art of Shibari Builds Trust, Intimacy, and Relief

Erika Morris @thingjpg

Graphic Felix Mux Wahl

Sprinkle (their kink name) is hanging from a beam, wrapped in elaborate ropes, a small cinder block hanging from their thigh.

Sprinkle is suspended by the ropes embracing their chest and arms, round their neck, down to their thighs, feet, and through their hair. The cinder block hanging from their thigh serves as extra weight, for additional torture.

Sprinkle is a rope bottom, or rope bunny, who practices shibari. Once their back starts to hurt, their top, Dante, gently lets them down. Once they're untied, Dante and Sprinkle hug and share a tender moment, revelling in their intimacy.

Shibari is the art of Japanese rope bondage. Beginning in the thirteenth century, hojojutsu, rope tying, was used to restrain and punish prisoners. It evolved to kinbaku as an erotic art. Kinbaku-bi (緊縛美) translates to "the beauty of binding tightly."

Kinbaku was dubbed shibari as it moved to the Western world and means "to tie." Riggers, or rope tops, spend years studying the rope as someone would study a martial art: perfecting the art of their ties and forms, both for aesthetics and safety.

Sprinkle had a lot of issues with sexual repression due to their upbringing, so they took no conscious interest in heteronormative sexuality. But, on a subconscious level, they had taken interest in kink and bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism in ways that didn't include penetrative sex.

While studying in Japan, Sprinkle was exposed to erotic gore art, which often involved torture scenes with people tied up.

From there they found some videos online of people doing shibari and said the intimacy shared between the rigger and bottom was unlike any-

thing they'd ever seen. They added it doesn't always have to be sexual, either.

"There are so many other ways we can be intimate within kink as a whole, but I loved rope, I loved being wrapped up in someone's affection, knowing that the rigger has your best interests at heart and is paying complete attention to your reactions," they said.

"I love the combination of pain and affection, the kind of meditation that comes from being held in an uncomfortable suspension but working through it mentally, pushing my pain limits, mixing torture like impact play, biting, wax, needles with the sweet comfort of being touched and held and kissed."

Dante is a highly skilled rope top and their full-time job is tying people. It's a form of sex work, but without traditional sexual elements. Their interest in romance and sexual chemistry is different with everyone, but they mainly play platonically.

"You are sitting with them to offer your time to someone—even if it has nothing to do with genitals, it is still intimacy in a way," they said. "When people say it's inherently sexual, they mean that the play is emotional to them. Obviously sex can be part of it, but usually Japanese bondage is more like foreplay."

They say the way they tie is platonic because intentions are vocalized clearly and they won't touch people in ways that would make them feel like sexual prey.

"I touch to reassure and encourage the person to relax. So, the focus is entirely on them," they said.

Dante used to be willing to provide a trial for people, but not everyone likes it, "and it's fair," they said. But, as they don't need new partners,



having people try rope is labour. When they are paid, they are able to enter a better headspace, without feeling like people are taking their energy for granted, and are willing to put their expertise to use.

“When I start with someone new, it’s not as comfortable at first because the trust needs to be built on both sides,” they said. “So if I tie someone once just for them, I don’t really have fun. I can’t play with risk; I’m just offering care.”

There is a lot of stigma surrounding shibari and BDSM as a whole, though the

practice has crept into mainstream culture.

Dante said people either believe shibari is much easier than it actually is or, conversely, that it is terrible, violent, and dangerous. For those who practice it, though, it involves a deep sense of intimacy. Restriction doesn’t just have to do with rope on the body, it also has to do with the psychological state of having no control over your situation and complete trust in your partner. It’s about release.

“When I top, I give attention, and when I bottom, I receive attention. To me the dif-

ference is like being spoiled versus spoiling someone. Both are fun,” said Dante.

“That said, everyone has different reasons for trying shibari. Sometimes it can be to reaffirm consent, to move on from a negative experience. Or because, as a woman, getting tied by a man feels like we’re supposed to please him, so paying for that service can be very liberating as a form of self-care,” they added.

Though shibari involves pain, it isn’t always sadistic. People’s experience and resistance to physical challenge and pain are all different, and a good rope is a rope that matches the intentions and mood of those involved. Sprinkle finds themselves lucky to have found Dante right away as there are rope riggers out there who don’t always practice safely or with the right intentions.

Dante always has discussions to make sure the bottom gets what they need. They will reach out the next day to ask what can be improved, how they feel, and what made them sore. There’s also a discussion prior to play where they are upfront about the risks involved.

But, Sprinkle said, shibari ties and forms have been developed to become much more conscious of possible bodily harm and how to avoid it. The ties are made to sit in ways that avoid the possibility of causing nerve damage or other long-term harm.

Shibari appreciates the contrast between the body and ropes, the way flesh sits against rope, the curves of bodies, and the intricacies of knots, with very specific traditions and tying methods.

“I like to tie pretty things so you feel pretty. If you feel good and you let go, that’s what I find pretty. There’s some aspect of symmetry and beautiful shapes, but the real beauty is emotions,” said Dante. “If someone just ties pretty things, but there’s no emotion in it, I’m not interested in looking at it.” □



Dont @ Me:

Pantone's Colour of the Year Is an Embarrassment to Nice Colours

Why I Chose Lavender as My Personal Colour of the Year

Aysha White
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Graphic Maria Chabelnik
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Happy (belated) 2020! Pretty cool to exist in the second decade of a new millennium, especially one that has an aesthetically pleasing symmetry when written.

I like getting excited about small things.

Because they aren't always small as they seem. Take the influence of colours as an example.

Even if you're not "artsy," you'd probably agree that colours have this mysterious effect on, well, everything. We use colours as emotional descriptors, like I was "seeing red" (angry) or "feeling blue" (sad).

In case you don't know—Pantone is kind of like the God of colours, having created a colour matching system that unified and revolutionized the printing world in 1963.

The New Jersey-based firm has been choosing a colour of the year since 1999. Its choice creates ripple effects in the aesthetic world, including but not limited to design, fashion, makeup artistry, etc. These are the colours the general population will start to see often, lodging the shade in our collective consciousness for a year, at minimum.

Classic Blue (ew) was chosen this year, supposedly to represent the sky at dusk. I think it looks more like the colour of a middle-management Midwesterner's button-down. Boring, stale, and con-

servative. The Pantone Color Institute claims to follow global design trends, and that it's yearly choice is just careful tracking of global aesthetic patterns.

Laurie Pressman, the vice-president of the institute, told CNN, "It's a [colour] that anticipates what's going to happen next. What's the future going to bring as

Classic Blue (ew) was chosen this year, supposedly to represent the sky at dusk. I think it looks more like the colour of a middle-management Midwesterner's button-down. Boring, stale, and conservative.

we move into the evening hours?"

Well, not a lot of innovation, creativity, or fun judging by this boring blue.

Don't get me wrong. It's pretty. But it's a relatively safe choice, favoured by the majority.

"We all see this blue sky and can relate to it, it's approachable," said Pressman to CNN.

While I can sort of see the logic Pantone was using in this choice, I guess what I'm getting at is I think it's dumb. I'm excited for 2020! This new decade feels full of promise and hope, even if the whole con-

cept of a "new decade" is kinda arbitrary.

I don't think approachability is what creates change and innovation—two things our burning planet and failing economic system could seriously use for the next 10 years. And I get why people love blue. It's a nice colour, one that symbolizes the ocean and sky and tends to be associated with more subdued language than red or yellow. It makes sense that a dentist's waiting room might be painted the colour of a calming Caribbean ocean.

Blue at twilight is the concept behind Classic Blue (ew), meant to represent that we don't know what's up with this new decade. But instead of leaning into not knowing, why not take more control of our futures and try to create the one we want for ourselves? I think what bothers me the most about Classic Blue (ew) is it feels like visual acquiescence to the mass of crap we call "institutions" causing people climate anxiety attacks etc. etc.

Pressman said Classic Blue (ew) is relatable, but just because you can relate to something does not mean it's an objectively good thing or that it'll further your growth. This shade of blue does not make its viewer feel compelled to take action. Approachable is also a euphemism for easy. And it feels like humanity has been taking the easy way out more often than not.

I'm not just complaining endlessly. I have a proposal for this problem.

Call it a one-person (and counting) people's revolution.



I chose a light, icy lavender as my personal AYSHA WHITE 2020 COLOUR.

My iPhone, several new clothing items, water bottle, and an overpriced ConU bookstore highlighter all reference it. Rihanna also broke the internet in 2020, posting a photo of herself in a purple wig and lavender lingerie. We're on the right side of history together.

Purple is a colour associated with royalty and mysticism. It references the feeling of blue (boy) and pink (girl). But purple is neither, highlighting a budding collective softening in our understanding of super-rigid gender roles.

I've been reflecting on what purple can teach us values-wise (royalty = confidence, mysticism = openness). If you think about it—we've been blue. It's time for a change.

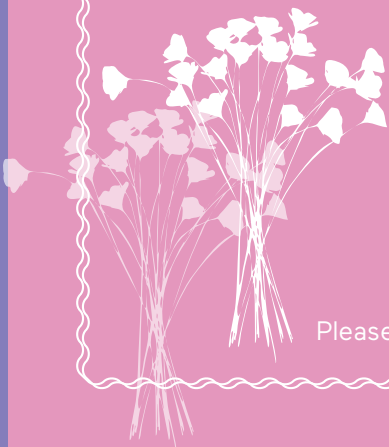
Pick purple and pick a fun-filled progressive future with me! ☑

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School Board Closures: A Right-Wing Tactic

How the Past and Present Should Make Us
Concerned About Bill 40

Samantha Candido @samalicanidido

A People's History of Canada

Abolishing school boards across Quebec and turning them into service centers is a quintessentially right-wing tactic.

The Coalition Avenir Québec government's move to pass Bill 40 in February 2020 seriously risks lowering the quality of the education of Quebec's children. It could also harm the communities behind anglophone and francophone school boards.

Prior to the 1960s, most of Quebec's schools, francophone universities, hospitals, and social services were overseen by the Catholic Church, a primary institution of colonial Quebec society.

When the British North America Act came into play, it brought education under provincial mandates and divided schools into two separate educational streams. Until 1964, schools were administered by the Department of Public Instruction, divided between a Catholic and a Protestant committee. Catholic subcommittees formed under this department in Quebec with a distinct curriculum and brought teaching personnel directly from the clergy.

From 1960 through 1966, Premier Jean Lesage gradually ushered in an expansive set of reforms for Quebec society. During this time, the Parent Commission of 1963 convened to discuss and settle on the details of this educational reform.

Quebec was emerging from the era of La Grande Noirceur, or the Great Darkness, and the province became secularized in an effort to elevate their standards relative to other provinces. Education became a top priority in Quebec under Premier Jean Lesage and became the emancipatory answer for French Canadians.

The Parent Commission produced a five-volume report that framed education as a right and no longer a privilege and sought to secularize it. Key reforms implemented by the Liberal government included creating the Ministry of Education and rolling out Operation 55, which reduced Catholic school boards from 1,500 to 55, while Protestant school boards were set at nine.

The switch to language-based school boards began in the 1990s, when Quebec's pool of immigrants widened and the religious school system no longer reflected the needs of Quebec's broadening society. An amendment to the Canadian Constitution in 1997 excluded Quebec from its provincial duty to divide Canadians between Catholics and Protestants, thus dawning the era of English and French school boards.

Fast forward to August 2018, when the centre-right CAQ party vowed in its electoral platform to abolish school boards for an educational system that is more "people-focused." In February 2020, the CAQ government delivered on that promise

and invoked closure to limit debate in the National Assembly to speed up the passage of Bill 40.

As of next school year, school boards are to be abolished in Quebec and will be transformed throughout 2020 into regional service centres, aiming to bridge the management of schools and the families of public school students. These service centres will be overseen by governing boards, where the English sector can elect its board members, while the French sector will have them appointed by the Ministry of Education.

These ill-consulted reforms are concerning. By turning school boards into service centers, the CAQ is decentralizing authority and undermining the responsibility that school commissioners and chairpeople are trusted with. The government is restructuring the Quebec public education system based on market conditions and the allure of private firms.

Cutting down on bureaucracy, also known as "red tape," is a traditional tactic of right-wing governments with neoliberal agendas. Cutting down on red tape happens when governing bodies are seen as "too big" in size and scope and are perceived as a burden to the public sector.

The Ministère de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport administers funding through federal transfers, while school boards have full authority to allocate the funding



By turning school boards into service centers, the CAQ is decentralizing authority and undermining the responsibility that school commissioners and chairpeople are trusted with.

Graphic Aiden Locke

@lockdsgn

they receive. In October 2019, a scathing report published by the government auditor accused the English Montreal School Board of mismanaging millions in private contracts with private schools not registered on the government's electronic bidding site. As private schools, they are not required to go through the government's bidding process.

EMSB commissioner Julien Feldman says that he and fellow commissioner Agostino Cannavino have been complaining about cost increases due to poor budgeting and the lack of a competitive environment within the bidding process for many years.

This means school boards are likely to overspend for necessities like furniture supplies for a new school and building inspections.

Since the last major reforms in the 1990s, Quebec has been operating under public policies that restrict public money and have decreased control over state sectors—causing educational institutions to operate and act like private firms. The EMSB conflict is but one example.

The transformation of the province's role over the past two decades is a result of fiscal discipline and the effects of austerity in public spending. Under budgetary constraints, subsidizing private schools became an effective measure for MELS to privatize the education system and stimulate the development of higher educational institutions at the cost of public schooling.

Originally, the Private Education Act was established in 1968 in order to des-

ignate which institutions received state subsidies and to what extent. According to "Neoliberalism and education: A case study on Quebec," a thesis written by McGill master's student Punjita Bhardwaj, this act emerged from concerns about the intense democratization of the Quiet Revolution and was intended to protect religion and its role in Quebec's social history.

The government used this same line of argumentation and mirrored the libertarian values from the private sector when it published *The Estates General on Education, 1995–1996: The State of Education in Québec*.

This was the advent of neoliberal ideology in Quebec, Bhardwaj argued.

Incorporating end-of-cycle examinations and standardized tests became a way to focus on the profitability of education and treat it as a numbers game, instead of dedicating those millions of dollars towards alternatives like experiential learning.

With service centers, more responsibility and work is given to fewer people, receiving limited financial compensation to manage public schools across the province at primary, secondary, and vocational levels. Board members receive a mere \$100 per monthly meeting.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Jean-François Roberge is expecting a lot more volunteer work from parents, who already must balance careers and family life.

Reducing school administrations to simple service centres and a lack of legis-

lation on private education turns Quebec's public education away from being a social right and space of local democracy and equity.

Since Bill 40's passage in the early hours of Feb. 8, 2020, many problems have arisen. The reform's effects are felt as opposition members of the National Assembly are in a furious panic as French school commissioners are dismissed, effective within the first week of the legislation's implementation. Parents feel helpless as to who to turn to throughout the transition.

The Quebec English School Board Association and the Alliance for the Promotion of Public English-language Education in Québec recommend that the provincial government start with a clear vision. A white paper is recommended to keep track of consultations and to form an evidence-based plan for change. This, ex-MNA Geoff Kelley is quoted as saying in the press release, would get consensus from every party involved and ensure the best results for students.

Improving voter turnout rate in school board elections is also another key solution. Everyone who pays school taxes—property owners and tenants—should have a say in who gets elected to manage these schools.

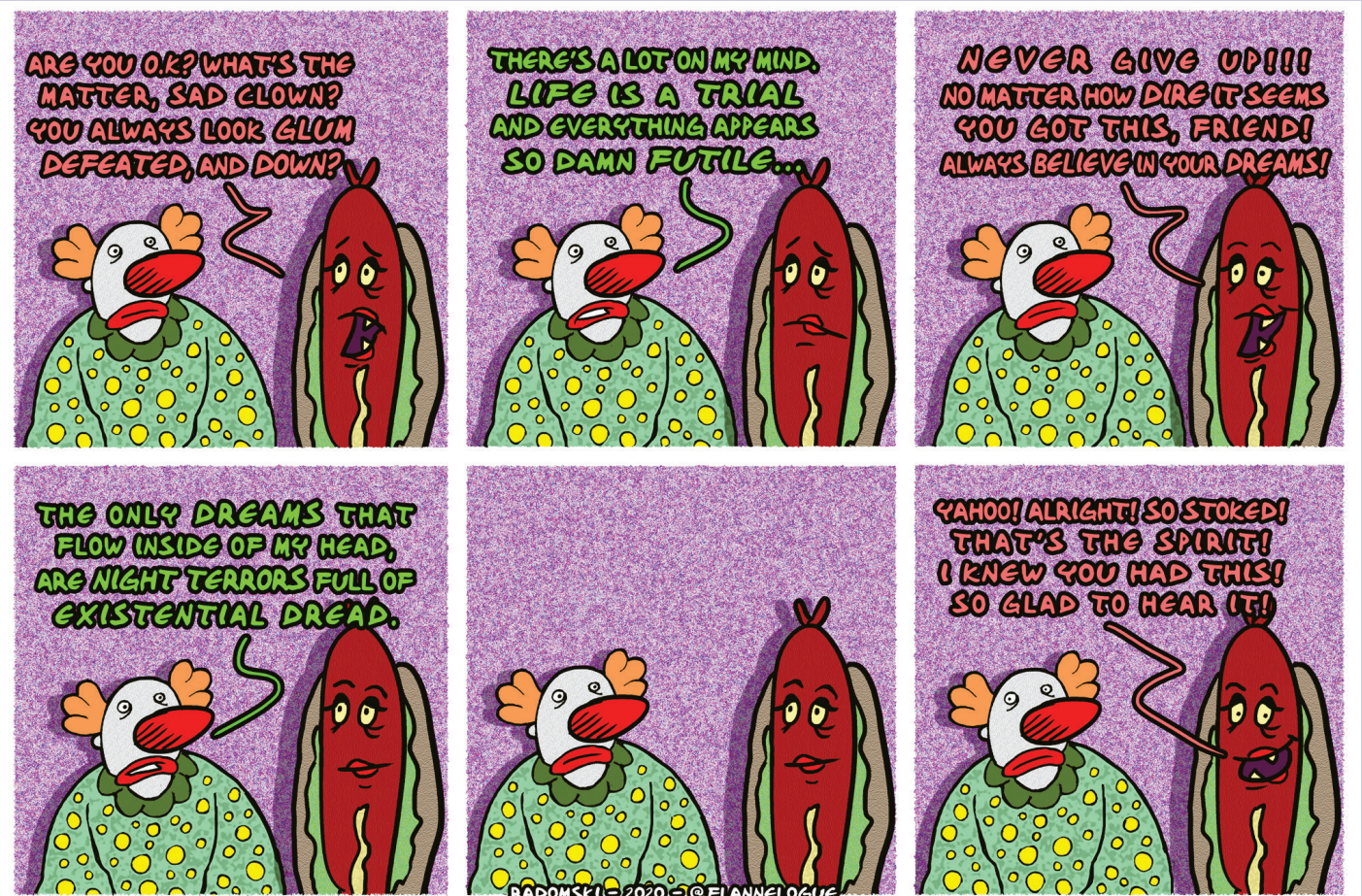
Financial cuts to public education suggest the minister's misdirected frustration at systemic issues. The quality and accessibility of public education should not rest on the backs of overworked and underpaid individuals. □

The Epic Adventures of Everyman



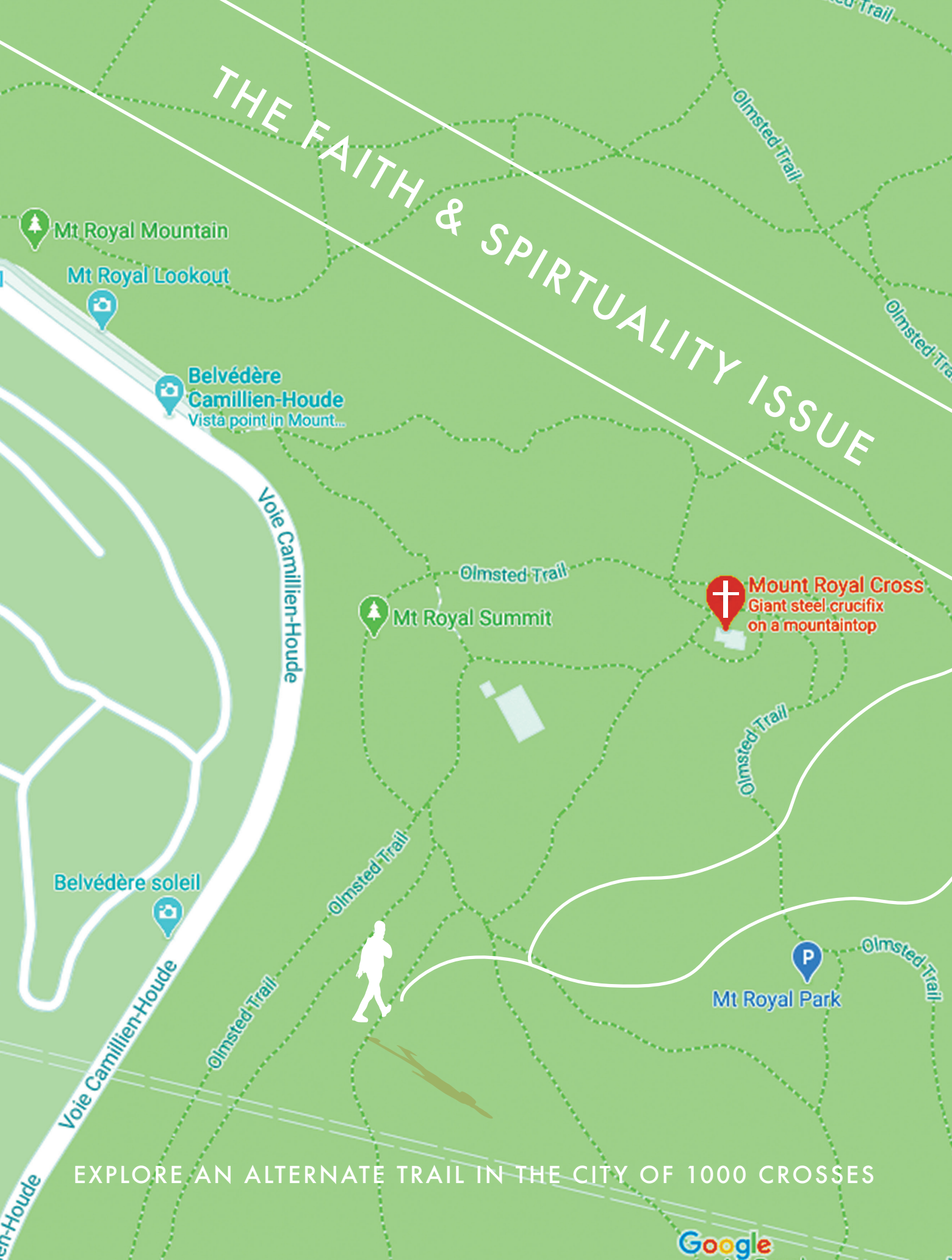
By Every-Man @theepicadventuresofeveryman

Hastily Put Together



By Theo Radomski @flannelogue

THE FAITH & SPIRITUALITY ISSUE



EXPLORE AN ALTERNATE TRAIL IN THE CITY OF 1000 CROSSES

Photo Essay: A Portrait of How People Pray In Montreal

Learn More About Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism

Esteban Cuevas and Bree Rockbrand

Christianity

The heart of Montreal is with its people. We visited places of worship and learned about the different ways people pray across realities. Faith, prayer, and connection to the divine are all facets shared amongst these communities.

Photos Esteban Cuevas
@esteban_bam_bam



The choir sings a religious song at Côte-des-Neiges Presbyterian Church.

A Christian man sings along with the choir during mass.



"Prayer is not something scripted, it comes from the heart."

— Reverend Joel Coppieters



Reverend Joel Coppieters gives a sermon on current events to his congregation.

Hinduism

"Sometimes [it's] just a presence; [being] in front of God can be enough. He, or she, in a sense, is known."

—Bhavesh Patel,
member of the Shree
Ramji Temple

A priest uses a chamara, a fan used to show respect for Ganesha, a Hindu deity known as the Remover of Obstacles. (below)

A devotee bows down to Lord Ram, one of the most widely venerated deities in Hinduism, and the embodiment of chivalry and virtue. (right)



Judaism



The members of the clergy stand on the bimah, a religious altar, to read from the Torah. (left)

Photos Esteban Cuevas
@esteban_bam_bam

Tefillin, a black box with leather straps, is tied around devotees' arms. The box contains scrolls of parchment with written passages of the Torah.



Talit, a prayer shawl, is worn at the congregation and is available for members to wear.

"I think that holiness doesn't have to be this austere thing that happens in a church. Holiness is hanging out with your friends and doing something nice with others. It can happen every second of every day."

—Cantor Adam Stotland





Led by Imam Owais Ahmed Al-Najjar of the Canadian Islamic Centre Al-Jamieh, everyone bows in the direction of Mecca during Friday prayer. (left)

Owais Ahmed Al-Najjar giving a sermon on top of the minbar, a pulpit used by imams to lead the Friday prayer.



"You're leaving your connection with everything else in the world and you're turning to God in prayer. It's something divine."

—Imam Daood Butt

"Our Prophet Mohammed taught us that anyone that recites that verse on a Friday will have ease and comfort in their heart and their mind from a Friday to another," said Imam Daood Butt on the many people reading the Qur'an right before the prayer.



Venerable Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Jamyang, founder of the Manjushri Buddhist Centre, sings a Tibetan prayer during the Saturday meditation.

Buddhism

"Buddha teachings are like medicine. If the doctor gives you medicine, you need to take it."

— Venerable Geshe La

Offerings are an act of generosity and a physical expression of reverence to Buddha. Food, flowers, water, oil, and candles are common offerings. Photo Bree Rockbrand (right)



To read the companion texts written on each faith, please scan this QR code and it will take you to our website.



Buddhist practitioner receives a Khata from Venerable Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Jamyang. Khata, a traditional Tibetan scarf, symbolizes purity and compassion. When brought to a temple by a student, it shows gratitude for the teacher's lessons.



My F-Words: From Fear to Faith

How I Learned Not to Be Afraid of the Dark

Fatima Dia @fhdia_j

I remember one Thursday, my teacher came in her usual grey abaya, a long dress that accompanies a traditional veil. She smiled at us, as she always did, and set down the radio she was carrying. “Today we’ll listen

to a story,” she said.

She pressed play, and the beginning of my tremendous fear of Islam began. The voice from the radio was low, thick, and melodic—very much like the narration of a horror movie. The contents of the story are a bit hazy in my mind, but I still remember one bit where Hassan, a young boy, disobeyed his parents. Consequently, the Angel of Death came to suck his soul out of his toes, slowly and painfully, as punishment.

To be honest, looking back, I don’t even know if the story was the right one or if my teacher made it up to scare us into listening to her.

I was born and raised in Foz do Iguaçu, a small town in Brazil. My Lebanese parents wanted me to learn Arabic, so they put me in an Islamic school. It was also a great way, they thought, to become more acquainted with “my religion.”

The truth is, and this doesn’t just encompass Islamic schools, religiously driven schools should not be in charge of teaching kids. What I’ve learned in my journey from ignorance, to fear, to love, is that faith cannot be taught.

To be honest, it’s not easy to write about this. I still feel a little voice in the back of my head telling me not to risk it, because what if it’s true, and if I don’t obey, the Angel of Death will come suck my soul out of my toes? My 21-year-old self still does not sleep uncovered.

I moved to Lebanon when I was 12 and that was when I started understanding the basis of my fears and where this constant alertness came from. Even though I lived in Brazil, I was part of a small community and wasn’t as exposed to other realities.

When I went to Lebanon, there was such a clash of religions, sects, and things I had never heard of before. I was so confused. That’s when I started reading and asking questions—but never out loud. In a way, I was scared God would hear me, decide I’m a bad person, and send the Angel of Death my way.

At around 14, I told myself that I do not believe in God. Why would I? I didn’t agree with everything the Qur’an was telling me. I thought it was bullshit that there were three Abrahamic religions, that they agreed on almost nothing, and even more absurd was all the sects within these religions. In addition to all that, politics seemed to always come hand-in-hand with religion.

To me, it was simple: If there was one God, why all the division?

I hated the entire construct of religion. I hated how there were designated men telling me what to do, and how everyone just listened. I never understood how in a world where women’s rights are fought for, women listened to those

I thought faith was supposed to not let you feel so alone.

men unconditionally. The whole system frustrated me. Wasn’t religion supposed to be between you and that God?

When I was 17, I met my partner, Rody, who ended up becoming a genuine source of faith. He believed in God and in a lot of the things the Qur’an said, but agreed with some of my frustrations, too. That little part of him agreeing with me was different from what I was used to—“it’s this way because that’s what the Qur’an says,” or “that’s what the Bible says,” or “Because it is.” I felt validated and not alone, and that maybe I wasn’t a bad person for doubting the way I did.

The term deist was introduced to me, and I thought maybe that’s what I am; I believe in God, but not religion. Shortly after, it was agnostic, and I thought, “Oh, that makes sense.” I had no idea

what I believed in, but there was something.

When I was 18, I had moved to Montreal to study, and I decided to take a theology course. My professor, a devout Catholic, described faith and belief in God as falling in love. It's a moment in time when suddenly you're unafraid, and you're so filled with love it's almost overwhelming. I smiled when I first heard that. It was such a lovely way of looking at it.

During this time, I began to understand that religion isn't really at fault—it's people. It's always been people, the way a large number of us are driven by greed and an insatiable desire for power. Somewhere along history, religion became a power play. Not only the Abrahamic religions, but Paganism, too. It was always taken as far off to a point where it wasn't personal anymore. Even Buddhism today has been so commercialized I can't relate to it anymore.

The summer after that class, I went back to Lebanon, and I was really agitated. I felt like I was looking for something, maybe that feeling the professor was talking about. There's something you should know about me, and that is I'm an incredibly sensitive person. If you feel something and tell me about it, I'm going to feel it right with you. If I'm watching a movie and someone cries, I cry too. If they're happy, I cry happy tears. You get the point. But for whatever reason, I couldn't feel what the professor described.

Being back around my family, back with Rody, I put that agitation aside. One night, we were watching *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, and—spoiler alert—the end scene, in which Lily James, Meryl Streep, and Amanda Sey-

fried sing "My Love, My Life," cracked me open. I felt something so strong in my chest as each mother figure was approaching the altar with their respective babies that I genuinely couldn't describe it. I began sobbing in the middle of the theatre.

I looked over to Rody and I'm pretty sure he was as confused as ever—I cry a lot during movies, but it was never like that. I wondered if this was the feeling the professor had talked about. I felt happy. This is it, I thought. I have faith now.

After two years with Rody, and two years in Montreal, something broke in me. My family and I went through some

personal problems, and I was living alone in Canada. I went through an incredibly self-destructive run, allowed all the fear disguised as anger to take me over, and jumped straight into a rabbit hole that lasted an entire year.

So much went wrong that year, and whatever faith I thought I had acquired the year before just disappeared. No trace of it.

I thought faith was supposed to not let you feel so alone, I told my window once. Wallowing in loneliness, confused, incredibly angry, I decided to take a semester off and go stay with my family.

The process of healing is slow and really shaky. When you think, "Oh,



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• • •



I'm better now," every single scar you thought closed decides to bleed again. And you think to yourself, I've felt this pain before, so it won't be as bad this time. But somehow it's worse. It's as if today's pain is just mounted on yesterday's, and the day before's.

During that time, I looked at the sky quite a lot, mostly at night. My source of faith wasn't with me, and my siblings were all younger than me. I didn't want to burden them. I felt it was my job to make sure they didn't feel what I was feeling—I just wanted to be their support system. For me, it was just really lonely.

I always loved to paint, and the colours of the night sky was a theme I used often. So I started looking up more often and thinking that maybe I'm going to be okay. I remember thinking how far away the sky was, and that maybe it, too, felt

responsible for all of us and didn't want us to feel the loneliness it was feeling.

One night at a time, I started feeling less lonely. It was very strange, like a deflated balloon slowly getting air back in. Within around three months, this feeling was so big it felt like what you imagined sleeping on a cloud would feel like. I was filled with trust—I have no idea in what, but I trusted that I was going to be OK. I breathed more lightly, I walked more lightly, and things began brightening.

There's a little bit of magic in the world, and I was starting to see it.

I think that's where I found my faith. It was a long process of building trust and fighting an ego that thought it knew better. Coming to terms with the fact that I don't know better and that sometimes what I want isn't what's best for me, that

was what set my faith in stone.

There's a saying back home that goes "*la takrahu shay'an la'allahu khayran lakum.*"

What this means is don't hate or regret what has happened, because it might just be a blessing. After that endless year of pain, I reached the summer of the next year stronger. I didn't find a religion to fit me, but I learned to see how much beauty Islam has—within its very name, it says surrender—to sur-

render to faith, to trust. I learned to see how beautiful people were to put their trust in something Other.

Faith is like a long-term relationship—it's a process of loving yourself, of forgiving, of trusting, of understanding. It can't really be taught. It can't be read. It's just felt.

Maybe it's that song that helps you sleep when your head won't quiet down. Maybe it's that person who holds your hand when you feel alone, even though you never said anything. Maybe it's that random nice gesture from a stranger. Faith has become the basis of how I live my life. I have faith in myself, in my family, in Rody, in the universe. Partner that with your hard work, and there's no need to protect your toes from the Angel of Death. ☐

The Repression Olympics

How Faith Can Foster Shame Around Sexuality

Samuel Miriello
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I'm a camp counsellor at the local Christian camp, comforting an 11-year-old child at 2 a.m. on the gymnasium floor because he confessed to watching porn. "Am I going to hell for this?" he asks. My job was to lead and inspire the next generation of religious leaders, and their minds were filled with everything but the quest to create goodness in the world.

Imagine thinking you deserve an eternity in hell for being a little curious.

This constant fear of punishment over natural human behaviour is a common theme in religious communities.

Many religious people discuss whether this behaviour is caused by an evil force seeking to corrupt humans or whether it is more or less "pure" to engage in these activities.

What is rarely discussed is how this quest for purity leaves a destructive and sometimes traumatizing mark on its followers.

A religious community can sometimes veer from being an action committee for the advancement of good to being a group of people competing aggressively for the title of most pure—or most repressed.

In some groups, you can often find discussions on how to avoid looking at women, how to avoid thinking about women, how to avoid masturbation, and feeling guilt when horny.

All this precious time could perhaps

be better dedicated to solving poverty, homelessness, pain, and suffering. Instead, these goals are supplanted by those of No Nut November, but lasting all the way until marriage.

Many religious leaders boast of their success in slaying the beast of their own sexual temptations. These same leaders are constantly being found to have secret sexual partners, or even a history of being sexually abusive.

Eventually you realize that these leaders, who boast about repressing their sexual desires while binging sexual behaviour in private, are part of a bigger underlying problem.

This problem is then propagated onto their followers, leaving people in an endless cycle of fear, shame, and guilt. This issue is known as sexual anorexia when it results in a lack of romantic and sexual appetite.

Anorexia is not always about food—it can be about anything that you believe makes your body or your existence less pure and less valid. In this context, it's sex being reserved for marriage, and in some extreme cases, only for procreation.

You might be brought up to believe that arousal, a natural, unstoppable bodily process, like hunger, is a source of shame and suffering. This can hurt the self a lot, and can also hurt the people around you.

Growing up in the church, you are educated day in and day out about the dangers of sex, and you're told that

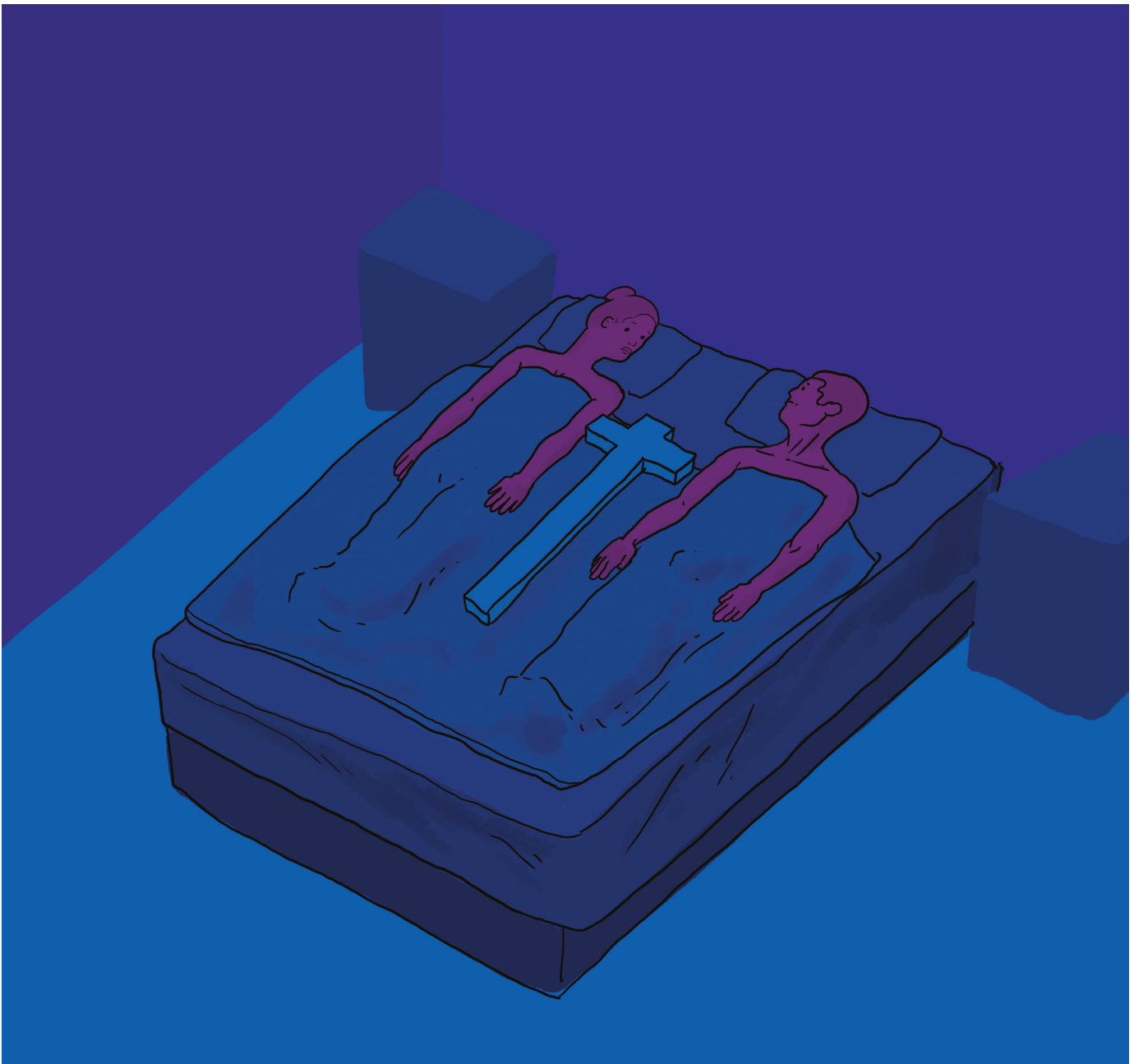
"Am I
going to hell
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he asks.

marriage is the only path to sexual freedom. This leaves young people rushing themselves into relationships without ever giving a thought to the dimension of sexuality, only to find themselves locked in a marriage that is filled with sexual frustration and confusion.

Sexual shame doesn't disappear when you get married—it gets worse. When you're single, sexual shame only has one dimension: You have to avoid sex. When you're married, this shame begins to infect your partner and your relationship.

You might still believe sex is shameful, and you have no experience navigating the intimacy it requires. You find yourself overwhelmed with the new dimension of sensuality your body is providing you with, and, in a culture of sexual shame, you may find yourself dealing with these experiences alone. You might still fantasize about other people sometimes.

You're still going to feel horny, but your sexual freedom is now tied to another human being. Even though the supposed guilt-free sex is right in front of you, you may still find yourself avoiding it at all costs.



What's worse is that sexual anorexia, just like food anorexia, can lead to bingeing.

This bingeing can manifest itself in ways that damage you and the people around you. While deprived of sexual satisfaction, you may find yourself taking greater risks to find that pleasure. This can lead to cheating on your dearly beloved spouse, participating in dangerous sexual practices, or developing secretive addictions that eat away at you.

An endless cycle of self-hatred that

leads to both self-destruction and destruction of relationships through abusive behavior can ensue.

Religious communities centred on the failures of man lose sight of the primary message of their belief system.

You have been saved, now go make the world a better place!

It's important for religious communities to ask themselves if self-flagellation is really bringing them purity, or if their saviour already carried that burden for them.

In many ways, religion can be a blessing, but the ongoing theme of sexual deprivation is not making anyone more pure. Shedding light on sex will allow people to be more educated and in control of their decisions. The fear of this natural drive will not save people from darkness.

Besides, why deny this God-given pleasure?

Ending repression could help individuals live their lives more authentically, and in a religiously pure manner. □

The Hidden Powers of Faith

How BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Students Are Using Their Spirituality to Deal With Their Mental Health

Mzwandile Poncana

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I have always had a complicated relationship with faith and spirituality. I remember attending Sunday mass as a child and being dazzled by the biblical stories, the hymns, the golden architecture, and the strength of being in a congregation. The ideas of being unconditionally loved by God—who will redeem me or “save me” whenever I’m having an issue—and of a pleasant afterlife awaiting me filled me with hope, excitement, and belonging.

I now look back at that period as a moment of a broad, childlike hope. I didn’t see any complexities or anything problematic about my religious faith. It served as a refuge at a time when I was growing up in a world I was trying to make sense of. It didn’t present me with a delusion, but rather with a life I wanted to believe in.

Now, I am spiritual. I often meditate, and it has incredibly helped me with occasional anxiety and depression. To me, my spirituality has generally made me more aware of my emotions and consistently inspired me to help others. The term spiritual is a broad, magnificent umbrella that turns the values of love, community, and kindness into the centrepieces of my life, and it does this without shackling itself to any significant rules, bigotries, or restrictions.

In the Western world, people have taken up Eastern practices like meditation and yoga for stress relief. People with religious faith often fall on prayer or their congregation to feel emotionally supported or like someone is listening to them.

The relationship between spirituality and mental health has always interested me. I wanted to explore how common it is for people to use religious faith and spirituality as a way to preserve mental wellness. How do other university students use their beliefs in their individual practices to combat feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem?

At Concordia, the Multi-Faith and Spirituality Centre attempts to be a refuge for students who seek answers and emotional guidance for their spiritual practices.

Ellie Hummel, the Chaplain and Coordinator of the MFSC, says students go there for a range of reasons. Some for religious conviction, and some because it’s a safe space where they can just be themselves. There have also been students who

“My faith in God has also saved me from self-sabotaging and continues to guide me today. I still struggle with depression, but I am no longer hopeless.”

—Amira Adam

use it as a refuge for their mental health struggles as they recognize a link between mental health and spiritual well-being.

She says the MFSC hosts many events for students. There’s the meditation space where students can meditate or take a midday nap. There’s group guided meditation and meditative colouring, for example. On Wellness Wednesdays, students can colour, sculpt, or play games at the Loyola Chapel. There’s also a commu-

nity drum circle every Monday.

“Sometimes students come to me and are really down about something. One spiel I tell them is ‘Wake up every morning and think of two things you’re grateful for.’ It’s a very powerful way to have a spiritual practice that is small yet profound,” said Hummel.

For marginalized students, the relationship to spirituality can be a bit more complicated. For LGBTQ+ students specifically, there is often an aversion to faith and spirituality due to the church historically shutting them out. It isn’t a secret that, for years, queer people have had to deal with religion being the main reason for the invalidation of their identity.

For Black, Indigenous, People of Colour and ethnic conservative communities, mental health is usually not taken seriously. In these communities, religious faith can often be used as a replacement for more serious approaches to mental health intervention. For example, if a child complains about depression, a parent might tell the child to just “pray it away.”

This may lead LGBTQ+ and BIPOC folks to have antipathy towards any sort of spiritual practice in adulthood, as it could unearth past traumas and remind them of when their mental health had once not been given the attention it needed.

However, Ashley Crouch, the interfaith facilitator at MFSC, says some of these students still come to the centre seeking spiritual guidance.

“We invite students to explore it for themselves because a lot of students want to find their place and community but don’t necessarily want to find a religion, whether it’s because of institutional frustrations or they’re LGBTQ and they have to reconcile with that,” she says. “We do a lot of active listening and figuring out for them. We then direct them where to go.”

Crouch also spoke of the relationship between spirituality, mental health, and social work. Spirituality can “propel people to action,” and this can ultimately benefit their mental well-being. For example, if someone is experiencing eco-anxiety, their spirituality can call them to

participate in things like beach cleanups or protests.

As a recent student herself, she understands how vital it is to volunteer and get outside of yourself to deal with the daily stresses and challenges of student life.

Amira Adam*

is a Black and Muslim Concordia undergraduate student. She frequents the MFSC to take naps in the meditation room. Outside the MFSC, she practices her spirituality by praying and meditating often.

"It keeps me grounded. Especially when I'm feeling lost or emotionally drained," she says.

Adam faced childhood trauma, and her spirituality helps her deal with it in adulthood.

"My faith in God has also saved me from self-sabotaging and continues to guide me today. I still struggle with depression, but I am no longer hopeless," she says.

Adam highlighted how her faith has helped her cut down on drinking. "I view prayer and meditation as wholesome alternatives to me drinking myself silly." "Happiness is not something that is out there that I need to go find but rather something that we create for ourselves by investing in what-ever brings us genuine joy on a daily basis. Which, for me, can be as trivial as a 15-minute midday solo meditation."

Her spirituality is linked to emotional vulnerability and the comfort and self-nurturing that can bring.

She is bisexual and polyamorous but hasn't come out to her family, saying she doesn't feel the need to declare her sexuality to anyone. She struggles with reconciling the relationship between her religion and her sexuality as the former can be intolerant of the latter.

This reconciliation isn't an active struggle for her, though, because she says she knows God loves her as she is.

"Either way, I've always felt that heteronormativity and the gender binary were social constructs that don't necessarily reflect the truth of nature, science, or the universe," she says. "I don't put it past these institutions to manipulate spiritual realities to fit their agenda, and as such it's my responsibility to have my own approach to it."

"I don't deny the existence of God or His scriptures, I just don't buy that He hates me. I am here after all, and He must have wanted that. Whatever business I have with God is between me and Him and is absolutely nobody else's business," she adds.

Hunter Dewache

is a two-spirit Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi who studies communications. When he was a teenager, he didn't have many problems with his mental health. It was only when he turned 16 that he started to experience anxiety and depression. He says he has learned to manage it, but it's a work in progress.

"It's not the same every day—some days are easier than others, some days are a bit more difficult, and some are unbearable," he says. "It can get to the point where I feel like I can't even leave my house or deal with people."

During his first year at Concordia, he dealt with depression, particularly because he was away from home for the first time.

When he lived in residence, his depression affected his sleeping schedule. He was up all night and asleep all day. This meant he wasn't able to make it to the cafeteria to eat during meal times. He had to eat out, which financially depleted him. His sleeping schedule also led him to miss classes.

"Our spirituality doesn't really have a name, but I guess in settler terms it could be called animism, where you believe that everything has a soul," he explained. "My beliefs are never centred around aspects of personal life but are more centred around how your life intertwines with the world."

He gives an example of hunting as a spiritual practice. In his culture, whenever an animal is hunted, all of the animal is used.

"It's our way of showing respect to the animal. So the animal didn't give its life up just to be killed but the animal would be cherished for giving its life up to continue ours," he says. Hunter has often turned to his spirituality for help. He refers to a belief in his spirituality where an individual has to look after four aspects of their lives in order to maintain their well-being. These four aspects include the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects.

The physical aspect deals with taking care of your body through things like exercise. The mental aspect deals with communication and how important it is to communicate when feeling low or isolated. The spiritual aspect deals more with a constant awareness of culture. It involves going to ceremonies and eating custom foods. The emotional aspect deals with the acknowledgment of emotions and making sure that you always process and express your emotions in an appropriate manner.

What has helped Dewache the most to alleviate his anxiety and depression is making sure these four





aspects of his life are always balanced.

Like many other BIPOC students, he's dealt with different microaggressions at Concordia that have negatively affected his mental health. For example, a teacher once tokenized him during one of his communications classes by asking him an Indigenous-related question in the middle of the lecture.

The question was about a different First Nation than his. Even though he knew the answer, he felt like the lecturer was generalizing, which was hurtful to him.

Another issue on campus that has negatively affected him is the lack of space for his two-spirit identity at Concordia. He feels as if there isn't enough initiative to create two-spirit spaces.

Elisha Grey

is an undergraduate at Concordia studying studio arts. She is bisexual and has struggled with anxiety and a panic disorder throughout her life. The practice that has helped her the most is yoga nidra, which is used for the nervous system.

It has been specifically beneficial because her panic disorder makes her nervous system easily overwhelmed. As a teenager, she often found it difficult to function and get through the day. With yoga nidra, and occasional meditation, she's less reactive to things that don't necessarily deserve a reaction.

"I now have a conversation with my body like this: 'Is this worth the adrenaline rush? Is this worth a panic attack? Or is there another way you can think about this situation that can be more beneficial to you and to the people around of you?'" she says.

Having her aunt as a sort of mentor has also been helpful. As a teenager, her panic disorder once reached a dire level.

"I remember talking to my aunt one day and I said, 'If I'm still having three panic attacks a day, I don't want to be on this Earth anymore,'" she says.

Her aunt ended up taking her into her quiet house in Connecticut. This is where she started meditating, and this had profound effects for her overall well-being.

She says her spiritual practice can be anything. "It can be thinking about how your own actions are interconnected with other people and about how your own actions aren't the only ones in the world." She likes to volunteer and feels like there's something bigger than her. □

She says she values congregation in religious practices because when you have a mental illness it's important to go outside of yourself.

**This person's name has been changed to maintain anonymity.*

My Big Fat Catholic Family

What I Learned About Family Size and Catholicism in Quebec

April Tardif Levesque @AprilTardif

Grampy—my grandfather—used to hate dogs beyond all human understanding, my mother and grandmother would tell me.

He's a fascinating man. I know everyone says this about their grandparents, but we are all entitled to our own family intrigues.

Being curious, I dug for the reason behind his canine contempt, and this became a Pandora's box of questions I would carry with me throughout my childhood and to this very moment.

Grampy had 15 siblings, and the portrait of his family haunted me for the sheer size of it.

I was able to narrow down a few things. Culture and location play a large role in why they had a big family—but I missed the influence of Catholicism on the size and traditions of Quebec families.



It was said that no one knew when Grampy's mom, Grand-Maman Tardif, was pregnant; babies would just appear in the house, and an older sibling would volunteer to look after it to give Grand-Maman the ability to continue being the homemaker.

She was always revered by Grampy, who was endlessly fascinated by her ability to cook for 18 people, multiple meals daily, in good times and bad. Her inexpensive soup recipe is a family fixture to this day.

She sewed clothes, hosted visitors,

kept her philandering husband in check, and birthed and nurtured an endless stream of babies—16 of which survived.

Like many elders, he recounts a trek to school that resembles the plot of an entire film, a journey lasting multiple kilometres that begins at the family farm.

Many Quebecers in rural areas, Grampy's family included, raised pigs and other farm animals and did a variety of odd jobs around the farm to help their parents. It goes without saying, however, that reeking of agriculture might prove traumatic to many kids attending school with non-farming peers.

Another issue was the siblings having so few pairs of shoes between them, sharing one or two pairs to wear to school. The day his mother's dog ate one of their only pairs was the day his hate for dogs was carved in stone, relatives explained. Mom said pets in general were nonexistent in his house, despite his later successes as a contractor and as many shoes as he wanted.

While the woman is clearly as close as it gets to a saint in my eyes, why on earth would anyone have that many children?

Some of her children went on to have as many as 10 of their own, and the family is so big I don't even know everyone in it. I'm acquainted with three or four distant cousins at most, about four of Grampy's siblings, and a handful of other relatives I ran into on some occasions as a child.

I assumed it might have been the region, lack of birth control, lack of sex

education, or pure need for farm labour that made for such big families.



Grampy would discuss the church at times, but always with a tinge of bitterness. He later became an evangelical Christian, but it never gave him much sympathy or feelings of common ground with Catholicism.

"The *curé* would come by and ask indirectly why we weren't having a baby that year," he would say bitterly of the priest that would visit them.

God forbid Grand-Maman take a break from birthing.

The above was corroborated by other relatives, who all seem to have great reverence for the matriarch. At a time when women couldn't even open a bank account without their husband's signature, and just around the time where women began to have the right to vote, a woman like Grand-Maman commanded respect by meeting and exceeding the standards of her time and place—fertility, cooking, and managing a household.

The thought of this gives me dismay. This was at a time under Premier Maurice Duplessis when the church was at the height of its influence in Quebec.

In another era, she could have been me, studying what delights her, being told the sky's the limit, facing some barriers due to gender that have, at least, improved somewhat and can feasibly be fought. At my age, 25, she was probably

already married and with multiple children. At my age, my own grandmother was married with kids. My mother was married by 23 with two children.

I am, thankfully, unmarried, childless, and allowed to plan for the future and career I dream of. This is thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of so many women before me, and despite the men that would have sat by and allowed the status quo to prevail.

Perhaps our family size waned over generations with the decreasing influence of the church and religion in general; birth control and feminism becoming more mainstream may also have played a large part.

Over time women asserted that they can be more and do more than just have babies. Whether that translated to us just ending up doing more is still up for debate.

Many argue the allocation of domestic duties is still not split equitably between men and women, and women are expected to be mothers, career women, and pin-up girls all at once. The pressure we feel today is monumental, but I'll argue it's so much better than managing a household of 16 children and their children.

The church under Duplessis dominated radio, schools, and hospitals. Women who were pregnant out of wedlock went to the nuns, who would take the children into orphanages. Many such "illegitimate children" were given or even sold to unsuspecting Jewish families who were unable to conceive. Others languished in miserable underfunded orphanages and were indoctrinated.

This does not even begin to describe the horrors Indigenous people suffered at the hands of the Catholic Church.

One could argue that censorship, the use of religion for control, and rigorous traditional standards imposed on women, especially on birth, sounds like fascism. I wouldn't disagree.

In what many argue is a post-Catholic

society, we still see churches and crosses everywhere, remnants of a brutal past that kept the everyman under control and the everywoman his property.

When I see Quebecers today insisting a woman remove pieces of clothing intended to cover her for her own liberation, the irony is not lost on me.

Every day, I am far more offended by Catholic symbols in hospitals in rural Quebec, where they represent the real oppression Quebecers have fought against, than women choosing to cover their head in a state where they have civil rights and freedom of choice.

Every day, I strive to live a life that makes my Grampy proud and Duplessis turn in his grave. □



La Fabrique
Church in
Saint-Évariste-
de-Forsyth.

Photo
April Tardif
Levesque



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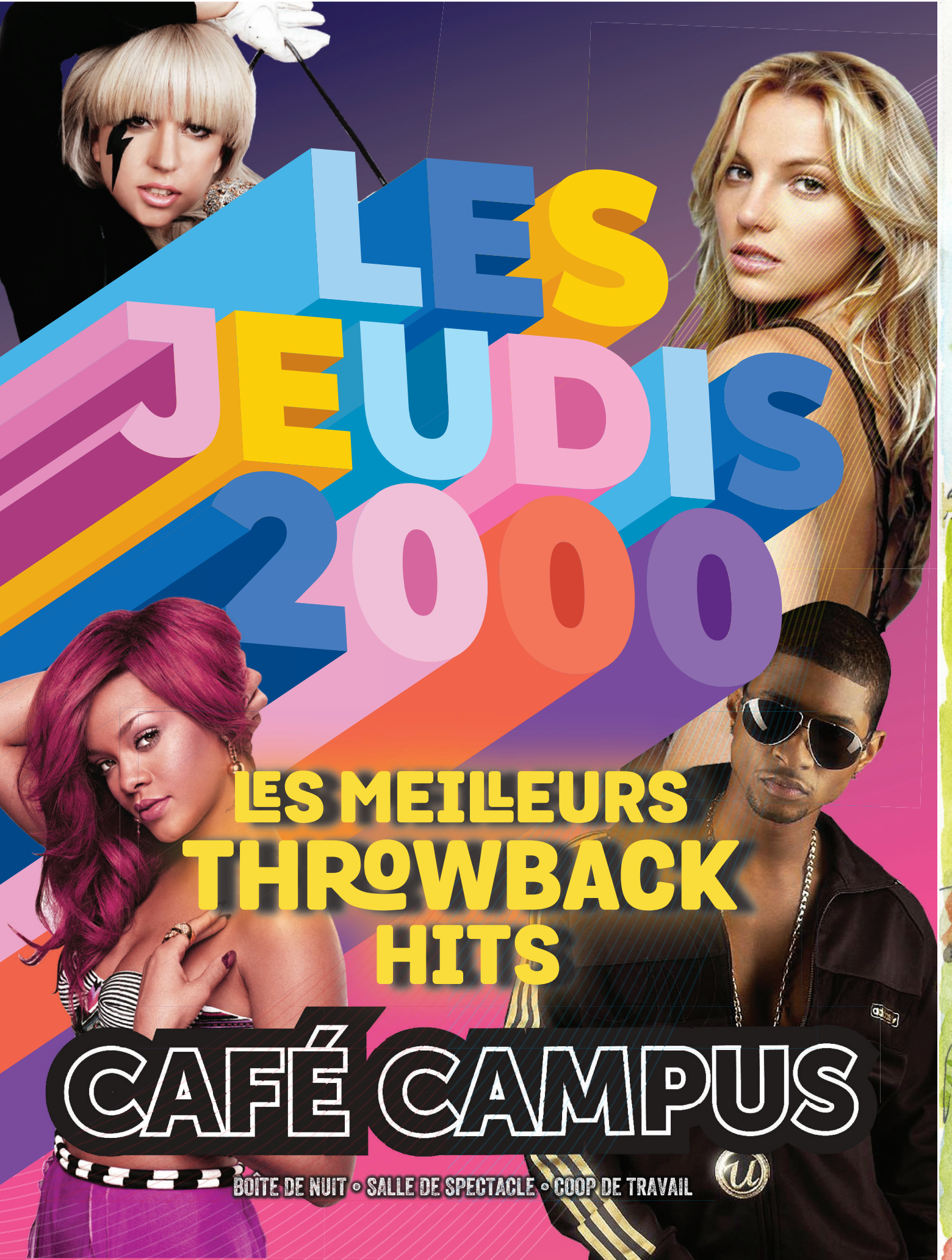
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