

you-might-be-done-with-religion-but-religion-is-not-done-wit...

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SPEAKERS

Megan Goodwin, Krusty the Clown, Sela, Simpsons, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Detox



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

Welcome, and this is Keeping It 101: a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast.



Megan Goodwin 00:23

What's up, nerds?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:24

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst a professional and professorial killjoy, living, working, and raising killjoys on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Abenaki people. I'm a scholar of Islam, imperialism, racialization of Muslims, and the history of religion and I'm located at the University of Vermont.



Megan Goodwin 00:40

Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, the other unapologetic feminist killjoy on Keeping It 101. I'm actually wearing my feminist killjoy T-shirt today (shout out to Teepublic). I am broadcasting, get it? Because we're broads. Broadcasting from the land of the Wabenaki

Confederacy, the Abenaki, and the Aucocisco peoples. I'm a scholar of gender, sexuality, white supremacy, minority religions, politics and America, located at Northeastern University, and coordinating Sacred Writes: Public Scholarship on Religion.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:08

Hold on to your butts, nerds. Have we got a LESSON PLAN for you!



Megan Goodwin 01:12

I've a hold on to my butt. Alright, let's do it. Last time we chatted about being religious, and how individuals' practice of religion is mediated through communities and states. Today, we're talking about how folks might assume that they're done with religion, but that's not how religion works. Religion isn't done with you, whether you like it or not.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:33

So today, we're going to talk about that by talking about who gets to choose to be religious and who doesn't, how being 'spiritual, but not religious' is a new set of choices only available to some, and how secret religion lurks around every corner, like in hospitals!



Megan Goodwin 01:50

DUN, DUN, DUN! Keeping It 101: ON TODAY. This is the segment where we do some Professor work.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:56

So Megan, this is your patented and trademarked line because you say it so much on Twitter. Religion isn't done with you. Can you tell us what you mean by that?



Megan Goodwin 02:07

Yes, I can. Definitely means that I've seen too many Paul Anderson movies, because this is a thing that I lifted and adapted from "Magnolia," where the entire film threatens that you might be done with the past, but the past is not done with you. I am insisting, I am demanding that you know that even if you yourself are done with religion, religion is not done with you. And here's what I mean by that. So I am trying to get into the habit of not

telling people what I do in public, I fail at this a lot because people ask me and I am given to answering direct questions. So when I fail at not telling people what I do, one of two things happens. So they say what do you do? I say I teach religion. Always a mistake, particularly if you're trapped in an airplane. When I say that, either people want to tell me what they think about religion, and by religion they usually mean Jesus, or their eyes glaze over and they say things like, "uh, is that even really important?" or "I don't go to church" or the dreaded, "I'm spiritual, but not religious" which then means I have to keep myself from saying things like "spiritual, but not religious" is mostly just white Protestantism in a nice sweater on its way to yoga class. It's true, though. No disrespect, nerds, we are not mad at a yoga class. I know I have been to some-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:14

I take my small people to yoga classes. But I might be a little bit mad at a yoga class, but I do me, you do you.



Megan Goodwin 03:21

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But folks who think religion doesn't matter because they aren't religious, are missing a lot about how the world works, and how they've been taught to see it. Especially but not exclusively in America, Christian assumptions about what matters, who counts, and how we should share space, affect us literally every day. Even when those assumptions don't get explicitly identified as religious, even when the folks doing the assuming aren't religious themselves. So let me say this again, because it matters, even if you're done with religion, religion is not done with you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:50

Here's the way we're thinking about it academically speaking, or, you know what, nerds, just more directly. What that looks like, is three major things: voluntary religions, the barf-inducing problems with 'spiritual, but not religious,' and religion lurking in the floorboards even for those of us that are avowedly not religious, or who don't name ourselves as members of a particular religion. So, let's start with that first bit; voluntary religions. Religion is not always about choice, so what do we mean by voluntary, Megan?



Megan Goodwin 04:23

Oh, I know this one! Okay. So when we're talking about something that's voluntary, it means that you chose to do it, right? So, we tend to think of religion as a set of choices

that you participate in. You choose to be religious, often that choice is rooted in belief. Do you believe? What do you believe? Are you a believer? Do you, for example, accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Maybe? and the reason that we're using Christianity and particularly Protestantism here is because like Winnie Sullivan has shown, you remember Winnie Sullivan, "The Impossibility of Religious Freedom," when we think about religion, the kind of 'good religion,' 'acceptable religion,' when that started to be how we think about religion, where religion is private, it's individual, it's voluntary, that is a space where we start seeing Protestant understandings of how religion is and should be, get absorbed into just, how we think about everyday life. The religion that's bad is everything else, right? Communal religion, collective religion, cultural religion, we tend to think of those kinds of religions as things we're forced to do, rather than things that we choose to do. Here's the thing, though, even if you come from a religious tradition that allows or even encourages you to choose to be religious, you maybe get teenage Confirmation of Faith, as I did, or an adult-aged Baptism, you still grew up in a family, and a kinship network, and a community, and a culture, that allowed for that choice in the first place, and shaped which choices were and weren't available to you. So religion is never just purely voluntary, and volunteerism,



Detox 05:54

It's our secret word of the day!



Megan Goodwin 05:57

the ability to choose, is always, always, always complicated by factors like gender, race, class, location, education, age, language, all of these things. This is the thing I yell a lot about on Twitter. I do a lot of yelling on Twitter, but this is one of the things that I yell about. Because when we get this. 'Okay, well, religion is a problem' or 'people who are religious are just dumb, or not evolved.' Guess who's most likely to identify as religious? People of color, women, poor folks. Guess who's most likely to not identify as religious or to identify as atheist? White cis dudes. Now this isn't to say that all women, all people of color, all poor people, are religious, or that there aren't vibrant and important traditions of, like, Black Free Thought. But overwhelmingly, the folks who identify as not religious tend to be white. So dismissing religion as stupid or irrelevant, isn't just missing the boat. It's racist. It's sexist. It's classist. And, it is incorrect. So let's talk about who thinks they're done with religion? Who gets to opt out? Who's allowed to opt out?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:04

Yes, please. Let's talk about that. Because even though voluntary is a really good keyword alert moment.



Megan Goodwin 07:14

Ooh.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:14

This idea that we all have equal access to choose, like you just said, is racist, classist, sexist, and incorrect. But specifically, this idea of choosing is not just individual, it's communal. So I loathe the idea that somehow some of us are part of 'voluntary religions,' because some of our volunteerism is not recognized as legitimate. So here's what I mean by that. Who gets to assert that they are an atheist, and then be believed, is a really good example. And I think one of the ways we can see this is in names. There's a long standing gag on Twitter, about like, # flying while brown. There's a very good set of comics, who do shticks about, like, 'My name is Ahmed Ahmed, that's my real name, and no, I can't fly anywhere.' And like, LOL, sob. But here's the real question. When folks are racialized, when religions are racialized,



Detox 08:16

It's our secret word of the day!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:18

Which is to say that when a religion, like Islam, is thought to be one homogenous whole, and that identity of Muslim tells someone something intrinsic and prognostic about that person's thoughts, actions, futures, past, children, country of origin, region of origin, language, etc. What happens when your name is Ahmed Ahmed, can you be an atheist? No, of course, there are real people named Ahmed Ahmed. And I'm sure that in a world of 1.8 billion Muslims, many of whom have the first name Ahmed and quite a number have last name Ahmed, some of them have- are bound to be atheist. So dear Mr. Ahmed, I am not talking about you. I am however, talking about this imagined guy, Mr. Ahmed, and whether or not systems of power believe him to be an atheist. So when he shows up in the TSA precheck line, does someone look at his name and think, let me check to see if he believes in God. Before I assume that a very particular understanding of terrorism, in which Muslims are commanded by their religious texts, and their God, and their religious community, to wage war, which, P.S. everybody, you hear my tone, this is not real.



Megan Goodwin 09:33

That is not true.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:34

But if that's what the system of surveillance is based on, do you think Mr. Ahmed, our imaginary atheist, is allowed to say to the TSA guy, "Yo, buddy, let me just, uh, wink-wink, nudge-nudge, I know my name is Ahmed. No big deal. I'm an atheist." And then the dude at the TSA is like, "Oh, sorry, man. Go right ahead." That's not how this works. There is no universe in which Mr. Ahmed will be taken seriously as someone who is unaffiliated with religion broadly, and with Islam specifically, given the name on his documents. And so this "Hey, man, if your concern is that I'll murder in the name of God, I don't believe in that dude. So no worries, mate, can I go through I'd like to get to Starbucks before my flight." If that doesn't work, then this question of volunteerism is rendered null and void because Mr. Ahmed does not have the choice to opt out.



Megan Goodwin 10:32

LOL sob, indeed. Also point of order, I want to point out that your imaginary Ahmed Ahmed atheist still refers to God as a "he," just saying. This is another place where we think about, like, what are our assumptions about religion even if we claim we're atheist? A lot of times atheists are pushing back against a very specific, and often very Christian understanding of God, just saying! It's a thing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:54

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Call me out on my sexism Go for it.



Megan Goodwin 10:58

Technically, I was calling Ahmed Ahmed out, but like he's got bigger problems and he is definitely not getting to the Starbucks before he gets on his plane. Just saying.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:06

Who wants Starbucks anyway? I mean-



Megan Goodwin 11:09

No, it's gross. They over-burn their beans. So our first concern with this 'you might be done with religion, but religion is not done with you' is, who gets to opt in and opt out of being religious, or of getting coded as religious. Our second bit, is this 'spiritual, but not religious' thing, which like, you can hear both Ilyse and I do a, like, "[heavy sigh] Okay..."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:33

Yeah, I mean, I teach at UVM, I am at- I am at ground zero for 'spiritual, but not religious,' so, I am both well versed, and tired.



Megan Goodwin 11:43

So tired, so very tired. Okay. Okay. So, why do we think 'spiritual, but not religious' is a thing that we can say and make sense in the world? For starters, I hear 'spiritual, but not religious' as "Alright, I have, maybe, moral commitments. I have thoughts about the way that people should be to each other or how people should be in the world. But I am not affiliated with a religious institution. So, I think that the public square should be secular." (a keyword alert)



Detox 12:17

It's our secret word of the day!



Megan Goodwin 12:19

So, when we talk about secularism, we often assume that we mean secular = no religion, not religion, the absence of religion. The Keeping It 101 explanation that we're going to give you here is, it is a space that we pretend is not religious. It is- it's a lurker. secularism isn't the absence of religion. It's what happened when we absorbed specifically Christian ways of thinking, and doing, and being into a broader culture. Capitalism is actually a really good example here. It's an economic system that grew out of a Protestant worldview. Shout out to sociologist of religion Max Weber, but the Christian roots of capitalism aren't necessarily obvious to folks who don't study religion. 'Spiritual, but not religious' is also a way that folks, many of them college-age or 20s, many of them white, say things like, they're 'spiritual, but not religious,' and what they mean is, "okay, dogma isn't important to me, religious teachings aren't necessarily important to me, you know, I'm not an -ism, man. We're all in this together. We care about the same stuff, really. All religions are like, basically getting at the same point. So can't we all just like, get along

and coexist?" I will give you another keyword alert, keyword perennialism.

D

Detox 13:40

It's our secret word of the day!

M

Megan Goodwin 13:43

This idea that all religions are basically climbing up the same mountain, and they're all going to get to the same top. Here's the thing about that, I get that there's something really tempting about 'we're all basically the same, we all basically want the same things.' But here's the thing, nerds. No, we don't. No, we're not. We are very different from each other, in a lot of big, important ways. And those differences matter. And they should matter. People are different from each other. And that's okay. And the differences that are okay, should include religious differences.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:10

Yeah, so one of the things that I see around this question of interconnectedness, or "I don't do rules, but I do the meaning behind the rules" and perennialism is also a really slick hop-step into appropriation, because spiritual is often a stand in for these groovy, Eastern or Native religions. So, like, the understanding that not-white people are somehow more authentic, or somehow they are closer to real religion, because we assume, and this is a throwback to an earlier episode where we talked about religion is seeped in imperialism and colonialism. These ideas that somehow "the Mystic East" is mystical, and authentic, and originary, is all rooted in understanding of so-called Eastern people as backward, and therefore closer to what the roots of humanity are. And so this idea of like, 'we can do yoga, or we can do meditation, but we don't have to be religious within those systems', both divorces yoga and meditation from the rules and dogmas that they most certainly are rooted in. But it also perpetuates this idea that somehow the mystical, the east, the Native, tells us something about a simpler, more natural understanding of the world and of divinities within that world.

M

Megan Goodwin 15:49

And, like, the people that are practicing that don't care about what makes that religion unique and special. We talked already about how books about Islam get filed under like "Eastern Religion."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:02

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 16:02

But Rumi is just poetry.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:05

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 16:06

Rumi was the best selling poet in the US for a long time, does not get filed under Islam or under 'Eastern Religions' because, you know, he's talking about love, man, and that's- that's what it's all about! And I just- A) no. and B) I just- I want to say on the podcast, I fucking seeing you Ivanka Trump, and as Ali Olomi says, Rumi did not fall radically in love with God for Ivanka to butcher his poetry in 2020. How dare you?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:33

Yeah, so part of our obnoxious eye roll. Famously a good look for an audi- for an audio medium. Part of our eye roll about 'spiritual, but not religious' is that so many things that people classify as spiritual or as grounding them in spiritual practice, are really appropriated traditions, practices, lineages, ideas from someone else's sets of cultural, religious and social practices.



Megan Goodwin 17:03

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:04

So moving from appropriation, I think that gives us actually a really good call back to the categories of "minor religions." And who gets to be a "major religion" who gets to be a "minor religion," but here, who GETS to be "spiritual" and who HAS to be religious, where if spiritual is somehow divorced from text, and dogma, and culture, and practice, then religious is dogmatic, textual, rule-abiding, and firm without flexibility. So for me, one of

the questions that's really troubling about the category of spirituality is that it's often tied to a lack of texts. And that matters to me because it means that folks who are affiliated with texts like, I don't know, Muslims, lose the ability just not- not just to be voluntarily Muslim or not Muslim, but they lose the ability to say, "my Islam is a spiritual practice. I find spiritual value, or I have spiritual traditions within my own Muslim worldview." And so that dichotomy between spiritual and religious is also rooted in this dichotomy of, whose religion counts and whose religion is stereotyped in really harmful ways. And then, I think that- yeah, and I just want to like say another bit about Rumi. Because Rumi is a medieval Persian mystic who is most decidedly Muslim. And as Omid Safi, who will be our guest on the next podcast episode, has written about and is working on a whole book about, the idea that somehow Rumi is not Muslim is the thing that allows Rumi to be popular in American subcultures, and frankly, global Anglophone, poetic, and spiritual spaces. So the idea that one of the most important Muslims is somehow not really a Muslim, not an authentic Muslim, because his practice is either spiritual, or, because his practice allows for spirituality, is a deep violence to the richness of Islam. And so that question of, like, religion not being done with you, is every time- and I see you, middle-aged and elder white ladies on Facebook, sharing those Rumi memes, I see you. Every time you do that, even while you're saying "I'm not religious," you're participating in (often a fabricated Rumi quote but)- you're still participating- that's one of those ways that religion is not done with you. And so what we're asking you to do is to see religion in your yoga class, your meditation app that is like Buddhism lite, your mindfulness coloring book that sounds a lot like mandala practices of South and Southeast Asia, your local school districts incorporation of 'breathing' into its curriculum, where breath practices are part of many ancient traditions, but specifically those of the Indian subcontinent, and think through like whether or not science, which proves that mindfulness, and meditation, and yoga are all really, "good for us," they are 'universal' practices. But ask yourself how many scientists are looking into the Shi'i practices of self-mortification as meditation practices? Ask yourself how many folks are researching davening, Jewish movement in prayer, as another way of grounding oneself in a meditative practice? I've done that research, my friends, I could tell you it's not many. And so, what we think of as universal, spiritual, applicable to everybody, freed from its cultural constraints, and what we see as religious, dogmatic, inherently rooted in someone's tradition. Those are troubling. Those are reasons that I'm suspicious and eye-roll-y about 'spiritual, but not religious.'

M

Megan Goodwin 20:56

Audibly, eye-roll-y. Yes, same. Our final thinking about the ways that you're still shaped by religion, even if you yourself are not religious, is religion lurking in the floorboards. Basically, religion popping up or shaping how you can be in the world, even when you're not aware of it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:16

DUN, DUN, DUN.



Megan Goodwin 21:18

Uh- yes. Be afraid, if you are a person whose body can get pregnant, and you wind up in a hospital that is owned (as a staggering percentage of hospitals are) by a Catholic affiliated hospital or healthcare group, you cannot access any number of reproductive health care technologies. You just can't. Even if they could save your life, they are not available at Catholic-affiliated hospitals. Overwhelmingly, the hospitals that are still present in rural areas and in poor areas are owned by Catholic organizations. So this means just what kind of medical treatment you can access, is shaped by the Roman Catholic Church and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. There is so, so much more to say here. But let me just briefly summarize by saying, even if you are a dyed in the wool atheist, if you show up at a hospital owned by a Catholic health organization, they are not going to care what your personal relationship with God is or is not. They're going to treat you based on the commitments of that organization, and its religious affiliations. So, too bad for you. If you don't believe in God, you get health care based on what the Catholic Church thinks is best for your body.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:33

Megan, can I ask a follow up question because that feels like shocking information?



Megan Goodwin 22:37

Yeah, yeah, hit me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:39

So if I am in a car accident, and I am brought into a Catholic hospital or a Catholic administered hospital, and I'm unconscious, are you suggesting that my options of care, whether or not I consent to them, and whether or not I chose that hospital, so, like, for me, it's like the choice of hospital, like, I didn't walk into that hospital voluntarily. I was brought to that hospital as the most local and accepting of trauma,



Megan Goodwin 23:05

Yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:06

I don't- My rights in a different hospital- like my access to care in a different hospital would- let me rephrase that, I'm so sorry, I'm stumbling- Well cuz like- I'm like- my brain is stuck. So if I am brought involuntarily into a Catholic or Catholic administered hospital,



Megan Goodwin 23:24

Yes, you are having the worst day of your life, you are unconscious,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:27

I'm having the worst day of my life. I'm unconscious, someone brings me into an ER. The ER that was closer was St. Joe's as opposed to Mount Sinai. If I went to Mount Sinai, I might have access to different care than if I brought into St. Joe's even though I didn't make that choice?



Megan Goodwin 23:41

100%.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:42

WHAAAT?



Megan Goodwin 23:44

I am not suggesting that, I am outright saying it. And if that surprises you, hi, this is- this is the world in which we live. And if that angers you, then you need to pay attention to health care legislation in this country because I tell you what, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is paying attention to health care in this country. P.S. if you're really interested in this, I cannot recommend highly enough. Patricia Miller's "Good Catholics," she's great and very smart. Read her book.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:09

So that's like a real lurking in the floorboards, though.



Megan Goodwin 24:14

Mhm, mhm, mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:14

Cuz that's not- that's like a really concrete example. That's not like us trying to be all theoretical here. Like, "oh, did you notice at an airport, people are racially profiled?" That's- well, that- that's also a real example. But you could make wudgie comments about colorism, and country of origin, and language use, and appearance, right? So, like, I hear those slipperinesses. This is not slippery. This is, even if you believe in God and your God is not- does not have the same rules, as the Catholic God.



Megan Goodwin 24:45

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:46

You do not have access to the things that you might could have access in another building.



Megan Goodwin 24:52

Yeah, that is correct. If you are in a state that allows assisted end of life choices, but you were in a Catholic hospital, that choice is not available to you. Again, if you need any number of procedures central to reproductive health care, those are not necessarily available to you in Catholic owned or affiliated hospitals. They just aren't. And again, maybe you're at a St. Joe's, and you know, at least that you're in a Catholic hospital, but a lot of these places have not-religious names. And you might not find out until you need this life saving procedure, "mmm sorry, you can't have it."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:28

Oh, so that's even more lurky.



Megan Goodwin 25:31

Yeah, it's super scary. And again, I want to- I want to be clear on this point. I don't want it does sound as though all Catholics are opposed to reproductive justice. That's absolutely not the case. There are thousands and thousands of Catholics fighting every day for reproductive justice. But the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is not invested in reproductive justice. It has different commitments. And those commitments are expressed in hospitals, you could show up on the worst day of your life needing care that you can't get because old Catholic men who allegedly don't have sex, don't think you should have it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:05

Oh, boy.



Megan Goodwin 26:06

Yeah. Anyway, universal health care now. So to wrap up, even if you hate religion, or you think it's for stupid people, or you think we should be over it as, like, a culture, or society, or as a, I don't know, species. Even if you are an atheist, even if you've decided that everything is just politics, or class, sorry about it, but you are wrong. A) religion is politics, particularly but not exclusively in the United States. And religion is not done with you. Religion isn't going anywhere just because you don't want to deal with it. Religion shows up in who gets to be an atheist, what gets labeled a spiritual. and who gets to make decisions based on 'sincerely held beliefs.'



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:51

Well, you've heard from us, and we have been putting you through the wringer. So let's hear about us. It's time for PRIMARY SOURCES.



Megan Goodwin 27:00

[singing] Primary sources! Never not amused by that. Okay. Okay. My primary source for religion lurking in the floorboards day, is the experience of getting legally married in the state of North Carolina. So there's- there's a lot going on there. I am a queer person who married a cis white dude. So passin' as straight, feelin' a way about it. But I'm in my 40s now. So like, I love him, this is what's happening. Anyway, having done all of that wrangling both within myself and then very much out loud to the dude I married, to any of my friends who would listen, got to go and get a license, because apparently it's the

state's business who I want to spend my life with. Okay, sure. So we roll up to the county clerk's office in Hillsboro, North Carolina, and we are filling out paperwork, and we are swearing that we're not related. And in order to get this license, you have to swear an oath. So in a lot of places, legal oath swearing allows you to swear on the sacred text of your choice. In this particular office, I was given the option to swear on the Bible, the Christian Bible, so including a New Testament, not the Catholic version, I grew up with BTW, or I could swear on the particleboard desk.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:20

Amazing.



Megan Goodwin 28:22

Just like, I've never gotten over it. So the option is like, God, or "Good luck, you heathens" sort of thing. It's probably not news to you that there is some Christianity lurking in our legal spaces, but I have never gotten over the like, either, it's Jesus, or it's particleboard. [tired singing] Primary sources.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:44

What I like so much about that, is that you and I both have such, like, weird trauma spaces in that same freakin' clerk's office.



Megan Goodwin 28:52

Yeah, yeah, yeah. When they erased Kevin? Yes, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:54

They- no they rebirthed him.



Megan Goodwin 28:56

Oh, right. Mazel Tov.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:58

Yeah. Okay, so my primary source, I'm switching last second. So I was going to talk about how Jews hate- that's not true, let me rephrase. How growing up, all I heard about going to hospitals was to NEVER go to a Catholic hospital and it was all of my Jewish other mothers, Auntie-types who were women who came of age in the early and mid 60s. So pre-Roe v. Wade, and who would very, very out the side of their eye be like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, I was going to talk about that. But we just did that. So I want to actually talk about Freud and his Christmas tree. So-



Megan Goodwin 29:36

Okay, I don't know this story. I'm excited to hear this story.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:38

So like, here's the thing, and I know this isn't really a primary source but here's- I don't even know if this is true. I did some googling and it turns out I might be- I might be reteaching stuff that's, like, a lie. So other nerds, you- you tell me if this is not real, because I need to know. But there's a hagiographical, like a- like a biography of a saint story of Sigmund Freud. Famed psychologist and famed scholar of religion, so folks like me teach him pretty- pretty regularly like, really to beat him up, but- but to also teach him and see what his influences are. And one of the things that I- I am- I- I chew on with Freud, and I think about this, really, like, once a week. This is one of those things I can't get out of my head, is that Freud so badly wanted to be secular. And he was from a long line of Jews, he's a Jewish dude, marries a Jewish lady. He forbids speaking of Yiddish in his home. And I think, maybe, this is like a leg- a legend as opposed to true, but I remember learning that Freud went so far as to have a Christmas tree around Christmas time in his like, Viennese apartment. Because this was a way to fit in to mainstream European, Christianities and specifically Austrian European Christianities. And the reason I think about this all the time is because Freud and his papers and museums are all in London, right? Because he dies in exile because the Nazis did not frickin' care that bro is an atheist, they don't care. They do not care that he thinks religion is bullshit. They do not care that he disavows all the Jewish stuff in his life. They don't care that he has a Christmas tree, the Christmas tree does not save Freud. And I think about this all the time when I think about what it means to pass, but not to have been absorbed, right? So to pass as white and Christian as opposed to be recognized fully, all the time, as white and Christian. So I think about that when I think about the limits of thinking about religion as voluntary, and even when I think about what Freud was trying to do, right, Freud's entire life work of like religion is bullshit. Religion is bullshit. Religion is bullshit. Dude, that Christmas tree did not protect you, you didn't have to be religious to get- to get threatened. And if you weren't Freud, you would have died.

And so that's like a- that's like a big womp womp, but I really, I think of that Christmas tree all the time, like the Christmas tree will not protect you.



Megan Goodwin 31:54

Oh my god, I'm so damaged by that story.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:57

I'm so sorry. My primary sources are so dark.



Megan Goodwin 32:03

I just- hoo. I, hoo. Okay, like A) "Sigmund Freud's Christmas Tree" should be someone's band name, B)



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:11

It's mine now! Because I-



Megan Goodwin 32:13

Yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:13

I might've made the story up like I don't- I- I couldn't- I couldn't find the citation. So like, that doesn't mean it's not there, but I could not find it while we were prepping for this podcast.



Megan Goodwin 32:24

I choose to believe it's true, regardless, it is head canon now. I also love that the move to "I'm an atheist, I'm going to blend in and be secular. Let me get this Jesus tree."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:34

Yeah, well, because how do you prove that you're participating in cultural norms?

Christmas. So your secularity isn't secular, ba da ba da bom.



Megan Goodwin 32:43

Womp! Well, on that note. Cup of tea, dearies? It's STORY TIME.



Krusty the Klown 32:57

Hey, kids, it's story time.



Megan Goodwin 33:00

Today's storytime is taken from Ann Pellegrini and Janet Jakobsen's "Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance." This is a book that looks at how judges have decided Supreme Court cases about sexuality, based on their personal interpretations of sexual morality. Their personal interpretations of sexual morality, by the way, are pretty Christian, even if the judges themselves aren't, or they don't acknowledge having a Christian bias. So here's the quote. "With this recasting of specific religious laws as generically moral ones, the Court dispenses religion in the place of justice -- and this despite the Court's responsibility to uphold the principle of Church-state separation. / This is not a matter of hypocrisy or duplicity. Even as it appeals to religious doctrine, the Court can truly believe that it is acting in a secular manner...even at its moment of institution the secular is not necessarily 'free' from the religious" (32-33). Okay, there's a lot going on in this passage. But what Pellegrini and Jakobsen are saying here, is that our assumptions about secular institutions like governments, courts, schools, hospitals, maybe? All of these assumptions about what secularism should look like, or what secular institutions should do, come out of an explicitly Christian worldview. This manifests in a lot of different ways. Quirky ones, like the fact that we still vote on Tuesdays because farmers who wouldn't work on Sundays because most Christians observe the Sabbath on Sunday, would need Monday to travel to the polls, right? So you you vote on Tuesday, because Christianity, even though separation of church and state, it also manifests in some truly terrifying ways. Like, as I mentioned, people not being able to access reproductive health care or not having full bodily autonomy, because we gloss conservative Christian sexual ethics as 'good old American values.' 'Good old American values' is a Jakobsen and Pellegrini quote, also. P.S. if this is something you're interested in, I might have just written a book about it. We'll come back. Hey, Ilyse, what are you hearing in this quote?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:53

So I know that Pellegrini and Jakobsen are go-to's for you, they're- they're less familiar to me. though you recommend them to me all the time. So I think what I hear them saying, is that not only are secularisms grounded in Christian worldviews, but that Christians, or those of us who are steeped in Christian-spaces or Christian etiological spaces, can't even see the Christianity anymore. And so it for me, it like reminds me of that old gag, right? Like the fish doesn't know that it's in water because it's immersed so fully, so completely, it just- it just literally doesn't know it's in water. And so I think that's why we think the calendar is secular, which y'all nerds know I am intent on making you never forget that it isn't. I think that's why we think the week is somehow neutral, that Saturday and Sunday should be off. And that's like a natural end to the week even though that's biblical, and why I have supposed colleagues on campus who say and who teach, absurdly racist things like Islam is incompatible with democracy, as if the US wasn't founded on white Christian supremacy, and as if that doctrinal orientation were democratic. So I think this question of being stuck inside religion is what- is what I'm taking out of this Pellegrini and Jakobsen quote.



Megan Goodwin 36:10

YES! Sorry, but I was excited. Yes, that is- that is correct. Which brings us to the thesis I think. Voluntary religion, feeling like you have a right, as an individual, to choose to be religious or not, is real. But it's also rooted in whiteness, Christianity, and access. Someone else's religion might impact your ability to make choices like in our Catholic hospitals example, your name and how it's seen or read might impact your ability or your community's ability to choose to be an atheist, or to have your atheism count, say, when crossing a border, or facing a genocidal regime. And no matter how you personally feel about religion, religion is not done with you. Religion is everywhere, in our personal lives and our legal systems, and our ways of structuring ideas and even in how we talk about being or not being religion. Religion is not done with you. And neither are we, maniacal laugh, maniacal laugh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:10

Alright, nerds. Next time. We have been working y'all really hard with definitions and examples and keywords and theses and homework lists that seems to be growing by the episode. Do you feel like you're behind and need to make up some imaginary points in our imaginary course? Well, good news, nerds. We've got an extra credit opportunity. We have a guest, Professor Omid Safi, joining us on the pod to talk religion, social justice, being a scholar, being an activist, and just being in the world. He's going to say love a lot, because he loves love.



Megan Goodwin 37:42

He does love love. He also loves us. And especially Ilyse, he might love Ilyse best in the whole world.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:49

Not in the whole world. But-



Megan Goodwin 37:50

Well, I mean, he's married and he has kids and stuff, but after that, mm, it might be Ilyse. Anyway, Omid is great, Ilyse is great. Tune in next time for extra credit. But don't pick up your stuff yet, nerds. You've got homework!



Simpsons 38:04

Homework, what homework?



Megan Goodwin 38:06

Don't forget, that all of this and more will be in the show notes. And for today's homework, class, there's lots of great books about thinking through how religion is everywhere, that makes religion hard to escape. Ilyse, what do you got?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:19

So I kind of want to assign a bunch of stuff about the Orientalism, appropriation, and involuntary religion pieces here. So I'm going to recommend a couple of heavy books and then some fun accessible pieces. And I will link up a few things I've written myself. So the first thing I think that's a really great read, and for an academic book pretty accessible is Andrea Jain's "Selling Yoga." It's about how yoga becomes a commodified contemporary and modern religion, but also a secularized process, and that it's both appropriated and not. So it's a complex book with a good argument. And this is going to seem a little bit off topic, but the Islamophobia is Racism Syllabus has a whole section just on surveillance, the syllabus is modeled on the Ferguson Syllabus and Black Lives Matter Syllabus. And what I think I want you to take out of it, is that the thematic here is one racialized identity is assumed and static and enforced. So it's getting at that involuntary religion piece. I can't make you read everything that's on there, but all of it has really active links so almost everything is fully accessible and I strongly suggest it. Now give me a second here

because citational politics are important, so I'm going to list the very large number of folks who put that syllabus together initially. Professors Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, Arshad Ali, Evelyn Alsultany, Sohail Daulatzai, Lara Deeb, Carol Fadda, Zareena Grewal, Juliane Hammer, Nadine Naber, and Junaid Rana and I'll link that up for you. And then I want to recommend the "See Something, Say Something" pod with Ahmed Ali Akbar which is super rad and has a lot of really relevant material here but I like the episode "Terrorist Number One in a Chuck Norris Movie" because it's on point for this particular theme.



Megan Goodwin 40:00

Rad. I want to know all of that. I also can't help but notice that the Islamophobia is Racism Syllabus seems to have been largely compiled by women professors. So shout out the lady professors who are doing the work of helping us understand why we need to think about racism and white supremacy when we're thinking about Islamophobia.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:19

Not only ladies, but there are a fair number of badass scholars of Islamic Studies who happen to be women, on that list.



Megan Goodwin 40:27

Yay, ladies, also other people. Anyway, that's my homework for the week. Okay, so I have already recommended Winnie Sullivan's "Impossibility of Religious Freedom" on the pod, her work is definitely still relevant. I have a whole list of secularism isn't the absence of religion recommendations, but my favorite is still the Pellegrini and Jakobsen piece that we read for today. "Love the Sin." I also want to strongly recommend that you check out Patricia Miller's "Good Catholics," particularly if you're invested in this, "Wait, Catholics are telling me what kind of health care I can get? I'm not Catholic!" Read the book. Oh, also, I wrote a thing. We didn't have time to get into how the 'sincerely held beliefs' of a company that sells pipe cleaners, what up Hobby Lobby, helped undermine the Affordable Care Act contraceptive mandate, but if you're interested in that, you can check out my chapter "Costs of Corporate Conscience: How Women, Queers, and People of Color Are Aaying for Hobby Lobby Sincerely Held Beliefs" in the "Religion in the Age of Obama" volume, edited by Anthony Pinn and Juan Floyd-Thomas. In terms of how religious volunteerism is complicated by factors like race, I would like for you to look at Nyasha Junior's work, including her BuzzFeed piece "Black Church Taught Me How To Be Black." When we're thinking about how religious volunteerism gets complicated by class, I really like Mary McClintock Fulkerson's "Changing the Subject," which is on conservative

Christian white women in Appalachia. We also talk some smack about the 'spiritual, but not religious' crowd. But I do really like Kaya Oakes, the nones- "The Nones Are Alright." I think even as we're complicating this 'spiritual, but not religious' identification. It's really important to take folks self description seriously. Even while we're insisting that religion matters for nonreligious folks.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:04

We say this every week, nerds, but ratings matter. Please rate and review the podcast on iTunes or wherever you listen. You can find Megan on twitter @mpgPhD and me, I'm Ilyse, @profirnf . You can find the show @keepingit_101 , and find us on our website at keepingit101.com . That's where we hide the show notes and all other sorts of goodies. Till next time, peace out, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 42:30

Do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Sela 42:54

[Rocks out]



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:57

What song is that?



Sela 43:00

The theme song for Keeping It 101.