

Speaking of the Sacred: Exploring Religion, Spirituality, and the Boundaries of Emotional Communities through Oral History

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Drawing on Barbara H. Rosenwein's work and the history of emotions more generally, this article considers the significance of emotional boundaries within the context of oral history interviews. I examine how, in my own interviews with Irish Canadians in Winnipeg, interviewees navigated these unspoken social codes when they told stories of religion and spiritual experience. Widely shared understandings among the emotional communities of Canadian society, the Irish community in Winnipeg, and the interview itself meant that some stories about spiritual experiences required an invitation while others did not. When interviewees discussed landscape and nature, they drew freely on spiritual language to relay their experience of the sublime within particular spaces. Discussion of religion, however, tended to focus on its historical and political significance within the Irish community, unless an invitation was offered to broaden the emotional boundaries of our conversation. I argue that as oral historians and co-creators of these boundaries within the interview space, it is important to consider the borders of the emotional communities that shape our interviews. If we combine oral history methodology with the work of historians of emotion and religion, we may open up new possibilities to examine the understudied role of faith and religion in interviewees' lives.

A central feature of oral history research is the consideration of how people construct personal and collective narratives, and the complexity of choices involved in the process of storytelling. Historian Greg Denning, for example, draws attention to the role of performance in our daily lives, stating, "The theatre of everyday life is talk, and we are experts in reading the immediate meaning of our words, but more importantly what those words really mean. [...] Talk is not just talk. It is presentation."¹ Similarly, my own interviews with first generation Irish Canadians living in Winnipeg reveal complex, composed narratives about individual migration experiences. This article draws specific attention to the ways in which interviewees spoke about religion and spirituality and analyzes what these experiences tell us about the wider societal structures in which we manage emotions. My conversations with two individuals, Tom Naughten and Brian

¹ Greg Denning, *Performances* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 34.

Richardson, speak particularly well to the patterns concerning religion, spirituality, and emotion that began to emerge in the other interviews I conducted.

Using Barbara H. Rosenwein's theory of emotional communities as an analytical framework, I examine how narratives concerning religion and spiritual experiences were composed in the interviews I conducted. These kinds of stories were woven throughout my conversations with interviewees – even though I did not consciously choose to discuss them. Narratives about religion were usually connected to stories about Irish history or family. In general, these stories worked to convey a point about the politics of Ireland or the difficulties of navigating Irish memory, both on the island and within the diaspora. Narratives about relationships with space and landscape, on the other hand, were typically characterized by an outpouring of emotion, often drawing on poetic, religious language or references to the supernatural. While interviewees seemed willing to discuss personal religious beliefs, these conversations required an invitation in a way that descriptions of personal spiritual experiences within certain landscapes did not. I argue that this pattern is rooted in the contexts in which my interviewees and I were operating, shaped by both Irish collective memory and western secularized culture.

Religion versus Spirituality

In this article, I use the term *religion* to refer primarily to the formal, communal structures of faith. This includes rituals, organized worship, formal institutions, and systems of belief associated with questions about ultimate meaning. These structures provide believers with ways to organize their lives and build particular kinds of relationships with their communities and the divine. When interviewees spoke of religion, they typically referred to Protestant or Catholic traditions and often discussed the place of associated institutions within Irish history and politics. *Spirituality*, on the other hand, is used throughout to describe individual emotional experiences of the sacred or sublime. While religion is certainly connected to spirituality – its structures provide venues to experience and express these moments of connection with the sacred – spirituality is not confined to established religious traditions. Eva M. Hamberg uses the term “unchurched spirituality” to refer to some contemporary forms of spirituality. This describes the efforts individuals make outside of formal religious traditions to find a personal connection to something transcendent.²

² Eva M. Hamberg, “Unchurched Spirituality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 742-749; Wade Clark Roof, “Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137-138; Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*, 5th ed. (New Kathryn Boschmann, “Speaking of the Sacred: Exploring Religion, Spirituality, and the Boundaries of Emotional Communities Through Oral History.” *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* (2017), Religious Individuals and Collective Identities: Special Issue on Oral History and Religion

Interviewees sometimes struggled to express their experiences and in so doing drew on poetic language or religious terms (such as *pilgrimage*) in their descriptions. These moments typically centred on conversations about landscape and environment, rather than on discussions of religion. I suggest that the points at which participants described the experience of something beyond the ordinary – something sacred or supernatural – are examples of unchurched spirituality which, when referring to experiences within nature, fit within the unspoken social and emotional boundaries of the interview with greater ease. On the other hand, however, it is important to emphasize that I am not making claims about my interviewees' personal beliefs or faith. Rather, I am examining the narratives they shared with me at a particular moment, which featured religion and spirituality, and considering the meaning(s) they served to demonstrate within interviewees' life stories. This article draws attention to those stories that required an invitation and those stories that were freely given without hesitation. These narrative choices made by interviewees tell us about the social codes and emotional boundaries that shape our interactions.

Emotional Communities and the Forces that Shape Them

The history of emotions has roots in the mid-twentieth century but has gained special momentum over the past few decades. Scholars in the field recognize that emotions are not an ahistorical phenomenon. The way we interpret and display what we feel changes over time and between cultures.³ Medievalist Barbara H. Rosenwein proposes an approach to the history of emotions through the framework of emotional communities. This concept refers to the systems of feeling within social groups and draws attention to the different expectations concerning emotional connection and display at, say, a dinner party, a protest, or a classroom. Just as people belong to multiple social communities, they engage with many emotional communities and move between them, adjusting their emotive displays to suit the rules of conduct within each context. Rosenwein suggests imagining a large circle that contains a number of smaller circles. "The large circle is the overarching emotional community, tied together by fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression. The

York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 4-8, 551-552; Paul Heelas, "Spiritualities of Life," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 758-766. Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 1-23.

³ For more on the history of emotion, see Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005); Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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smaller circles represent subordinate emotional communities, partaking in the larger one and revealing its possibilities and its limitation.”⁴ A researcher would then examine how these communities and the individuals that constitute them evaluate emotions, create and maintain bonds, and decide which modes of emotional expression are acceptable or inappropriate in different situations.⁵

The emotional communities that shaped in these interviews include the larger circles of Canadian and Manitoban society as well as the Irish diaspora. Winnipeg’s Irish community, both as a whole and as a variety of smaller groupings (such as different clubs, dance companies, and music session groups), is contained within these two larger emotional communities. I would also posit that there exist small emotional communities, created between my interviewees and myself, which were shaped by the intent of the larger project, to gain an understanding of interviewees’ migration experience. There exist social codes and boundaries established by these larger emotional communities before we even begin our interviews. As the interview progresses, these codes are re-established or re-shaped by social cues, such as body language, tone of voice, and invitations to speak more thoroughly on particular subjects. Together we re-draw the boundary lines of our emotional community and establish what is considered acceptable in the context of this conversation.

To understand the boundaries of these emotional communities, we can examine the decisions individuals make when they share their stories. Within the context of a formal interview and in most everyday conversations, people make narrative choices on both the conscious and subconscious level in order to compose those stories they are comfortable telling. The times interviewees appeared at ease initiating conversations about religion and spirituality and when they seemed to require an invitation to speak about certain experiences provide insight into the boundaries shape our interactions with others.

In her contribution to the volume *Ageing, Ritual and Social Change: Comparing the Secular and Religious in Eastern and Western Europe*, Sidonia Grama explores key narratives in interviews connected to religious belief and practices. She notes that there is a tendency for both interviewees and scholars to divide spiritual experience from religious ritual within secularized societies. “The sacredness implicit in the relation between a religious person and the transcendent seemed removed, detached, severed from many of the life histories elicited. Moreover, even when this dimension is present as a mark of religiosity, it can be lost in analysis and research. Eventually, all these symptomatic omissions,

⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 24.

⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 821-828, 836-843.

oblivions and forms of silencing of the transcendent reality, coupled with the lost meaning of the sacred and holiness, are embedded in the secularized worldview.”⁶

Secularization shapes how religious and non-religious interviewees tell their stories and how scholars analyze these narratives. I suggest that the trend towards secularization in Canada, particularly within urban centers, shapes the overarching emotional community. This plays a significant role in determining when interviewees feel most at ease to describe encounters with the sublime and which stories require an invitation and opening of emotional boundaries. While most of my interviewees are still practicing Christians (typically within either Catholic or Anglican traditions), one described herself as not religious and another two, including Brian, have adopted spiritual worldviews with a greater focus on relationships with nature. Throughout the interviews, the subject of landscape and the experience of the sublime in nature often came up on its own and was freely shared. In these discussions, the transcendent and spiritual were not detached from the description of being within a landscape, particularly those connected to a sense of belonging. Conversations about personal experiences with the sacred or the sublime within the context of traditional religious institutions, however, appeared to require an invitation and these descriptions were often more reserved in terms of emotional displays and use of spiritual language.

Intersubjectivity and Oral History

Central to this analysis is the concept of *intersubjectivity*, or the meeting of subjectivities within the interview. Both interviewer and interviewee enter the conversation with personal experiences, worldviews, social forces, and so on, which shape their exchange. Neither can be entirely neutral as stories are shared and heard. The everyday experience of telling a story requires performance. Most of the time, instinctive choices are made in the language, gestures, non-committal responses, and tone of voice, all of which work to transmit a particular meaning (or meanings). Rosenwein points out how emotions must be delivered second hand through these displays – through laughing, crying, frowning, and yelling. “None of these things *are* the emotion; they are symptoms that must be interpreted – both by the person feeling them and by observers.”⁷ An audience must then read these symptoms and draw on established social cues to interpret what is being said. As Denning states, “For an expression to have shared meaning,

⁶ Sidonia Grama, “Ineffable Silence and the Sacred: Crucial Moments in Life Histories,” in *Ageing, Ritual and Social Change: Comparing the Secular and Religious in Eastern and Western Europe*, eds. Peter Coleman, Daniela Koleva and Joanna Bornat (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 92, 106.

⁷ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 27.

it must be possessed of some system which can be recognised.”⁸ As stories and emotions are shared, both storyteller and listener interpret them, and neither can be entirely objective in the process.

This has become an important concept in oral history scholarship, encouraging considerable self-reflection on the part of historians. As in any conversation, the questions asked, the rapport established between participants in the dialogue, the physical spaces used for the interview, and the stories that interviewees, and at times interviewers chose to share, can shape the interaction. In addition, our instincts and emotional reading of the exchange are central to how we interpret these stories. Oral historian Jane Moodie points out that language “not only *expresses* emotion but also *evokes* it, both in the listener and in the speaker.”⁹ To analyse these interviews, I am drawing on my own understanding of emotional codes and the feelings I experienced as I listened to these interviews (including the original conversations and the recordings).

It has been recognized within the field of oral history that transcripts flatten interviews considerably and that much is lost when we take aurality out of oral history. Alessandro Portelli reminds us of the importance of listening in our interpretation of interviews since, “The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing.”¹⁰ With this in mind, I believe it is important to give readers the opportunity to hear for themselves the voices and rhythms of the participants involved in this project. While readers will still lack personal experience and relationships with these interviewees, hearing portions of the interviews may afford them an enhanced opportunity to assess for themselves my interpretation of the emotional communities that my interviewees and I are navigating. To this end, I have created a podcast to accompany this article that features the voices of my interviewees as well as my own voice. The podcast will include clips from the interview featured in this article, while focusing on questions of methodology and examining further the concept intersubjectivity.

Historical Contexts and Abiding Memories

In my interviews with Irish-Canadians, I was continually struck by the strength of Irish collective memory in the present day. In my visits to Ireland, I found significant personalities or events in Irish history were commemorated nearly

⁸ Denning, *Performances*, 36; Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 54-60.

⁹ Jane Moodie, “Surprised by Joy: A Case History Exploring the Expression of Spiritual Joy in Oral History,” *Oral History* 38, no. 2 (Autumn, 2010): 79. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 47.

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everywhere in public spaces through murals, statues, plaques, and street art. Within the interviews themselves, participants often demonstrated extensive knowledge of Irish history, literature, and traditional culture. The understandings of this past have continued to shape interactions within Manitoba's Irish community in many ways. It is important, then, to ground this analysis in the historical context that shaped our conversations about religion and spiritual experience.

The role of the sectarian and political conflict, known as the Troubles, was of particular importance to these conversations. The Troubles are generally described as a conflict between Protestants in favour of unity with Britain and nationalist Catholics seeking independence. This is, of course, an oversimplification of a complex conflict, which spans centuries and is rooted in a long history of English colonialism. British involvement in Ireland dates back to the Norman Conquest and intensified during the Tudor era (1534-1603) with a greater military presence and increased efforts to establish Protestantism as the primary religion on the island. Starting in this period, the primarily Catholic, Anglo- and Gaelic-Irish who resisted British authority were forced off their land and replaced by English and, later, Scottish settlers, in order to establish a more powerful Protestant landowning class. This practice, called "plantation," became increasingly systematic under the Stuarts and Oliver Cromwell, particularly in the northern province of Ulster where resistance to British rule had been especially strong in the 16th and 17th centuries. Under British colonial pressure, tensions between Catholics and Protestants continued to grow.¹¹

The 19th century saw a gradual intensification of nationalist movements in Irish politics, deeply connected with notions about defining and recovering traditional Irish culture. The Act of Union of 1800 ended Irish Parliament, placing the island under the rule of a united British state, and spurring on resistance to colonial rule in Ireland. The Great Famine (1845-1852) was seen by many in Ireland as proof that this union was untenable. One major nationalist effort was the campaign to set up a system of Home Rule, which would re-establish the Irish parliament without secession from Britain. This movement became a major political force by the 1870s. While it achieved some of its goals, it largely failed to make headway in the British Parliament.¹² Around the turn of the century, the nationalist party Sinn Féin began to call for complete independence for Ireland, an aspiration that increasingly grew in strength. Nationalist movements such as these were fueled in part by the Gaelic revival, which celebrated Irish traditional culture and encouraged its preservation. While there were Protestants involved in this

¹¹ Joseph Coohill, *Ireland: A Short History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 13-38.

¹² Coohill, *Ireland*, 106-107; Christine Kinealy, *A New History of Ireland* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2004), 145-151, 161-215; Daniel Webster Hollis III, *The History of Ireland* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 107-108.

movement, the associations that organized cultural programs, including music competitions and Irish sport leagues, were increasingly associated with Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church, embroiling these activities in memory struggles.¹³

Following the First World War and the Easter Uprising of 1916, the militant Irish Republican Army (IRA) began to wage a guerrilla war against the British government in 1919. This conflict, called the Anglo-Irish War, persisted until 1921 when negotiations began for the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This agreement would divide the island into two separate political entities: the Irish Free State and the Province of Northern Ireland still under British rule (this included six of Ulster's nine counties in the northeast part of Ireland). Both remained part of the British Commonwealth until 1948 when the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, broke all ties to Britain. In the meantime, much of society in Northern Ireland was defined by the inequalities between Catholics and Protestants, which steadily deepened divisions. While most in the North went about their lives as best they could, the late 1960s saw an increase of political protest in both violent and non-violent ways. The conflict was at its worst between 1971 and 1976, galvanized in part by civil rights movements occurring in America and elsewhere in the world. Hostilities between the IRA and the British army peaked in 1972, a year wherein 474 people lost their lives to sectarian violence. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement was a major development in the peace process in Northern Ireland and eventually led to the easing of tensions and a significant decline in political violence.¹⁴

The memories of the colonial past and historic injustices continue to shape interactions in both Ireland and the diaspora. Interviewees' personal understandings of this history has a significant effect on the way they view their present identity as Irish as well as how they understand the role of culture and religion in their lives. A moment in my conversation with married couple Joe and Mary Campbell illustrates the kind of connections between religion, history, politics, and culture that were common in oral history interviews with Irish immigrants. Joe was raised in Dublin and was a member of the Dominican Order for a number of years before deciding to move to Manitoba in 1972 to pursue a doctorate in Clinical Psychology. Significantly, this path in his life was framed in terms of his academic trajectory, and he chose not to describe changes in his spiritual life. I would suggest that this is because I did not ask any questions about this aspect of his life and so, without the invitation and the opening of emotional boundaries, this topic was left undiscussed. Joe met Mary, a practicing nurse from

¹³ Coohill, *Ireland*, 115-120; Helen O'Shea, *The Making of Irish Traditional Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 18; John O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), 6.

¹⁴ Coohill, *Ireland*, 125-132, 144-145, 171-202

County Tipperary who was visiting her sister in Winnipeg at the time, and the two married soon afterwards. In our conversation, we discussed the ways in which they expressed their Irishness, including the kinds of traditional performances they participated in, such as music and theatre. I asked about the kinds of songs they would sing when they gathered together in Ireland and Joe explained:

J: And we did learn a lot of, um, Irish rebel – kind of, rebel – patriotic songs.

M: Yeah, yeah.

K: Yeah.

J: With the Brothers.¹⁵ The Christian Brothers were very, very, very, um...

K: Patriotic.

M: Yes.

J: Whew. Yeah, I mean, that's – that's how really Gaelic football and hurling started. The big, huge – to – as opposition to the Protestant soccer. You know what I'm saying? It's interesting. But soccer was seen as English. Not so much Protestant. But English. And we don't want anything English. So – so...

M: Well, that – that started in early 1900s too.

J: Oh, yeah. That – that goes way back.

M: When there was that huge cultural revival which always precedes revolution, doesn't it?

J: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

M: That cultural identity awareness and what have you from the 1900s and onwards. Like, Yeats and the Abbey Theatre.

K: Yeah.

M: And then there was Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League. Wasn't that another one, Joe?

J: Yeah, yeah.

M: And the GAA started then. And...

J: The GAA. The Gaelic Athletic Association.¹⁶

This conversation demonstrates the typical way in which religion was treated within my interviews. Religion was not discussed in terms of faith but largely in terms of connections between Irish culture, political ideologies, and religious institutions. Neither the Gaelic League (established in 1893) nor the Gaelic

¹⁵ Joe is referring to the Christian Brothers school he attended in Dublin.

¹⁶ Joe and Mary Campbell, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 11 July 2014. It is worth noting that I have taken out most of my non-committal comments (mostly Yeahs and Mm-hmms) in these transcript selections since they break up the reading without adding a great deal. However, readers will still be able to hear my non-committals in the accompanying podcast.

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Athletic Association (established in 1884) started out as political organizations. But their mandate to promote Irish culture (particularly music, language, and sport) rather than English cultural imports was useful in efforts to promote nationalism.¹⁷ The patriotism of the Christian Brothers and their encouragement of rebel songs, as noted by Joe, was not uncommon. The Catholic Church in Ireland supported a number of non-violent nationalist organizations, including the Gaelic League and the GAA. This had the effect of further entrenching divisions between Protestants and Catholics as the conflict intensified. While there were certainly Protestant nationalists, cultural nationalism increasingly defined “Irishness” as Gaelic and Catholic and Protestantism grew strong associations with unionism and “Britishness.”¹⁸ This idea that certain activities were associated with particular political and religious groups is further illustrated by Joe’s description of soccer as Protestant before clarifying, “Not so much Protestant. But English.” Protestantism and Englishness were – and still are – deeply connected in the context of Ireland and Irish cultural activities in the twentieth century.¹⁹ As Mary recognized, the ideas which shaped the way they understood and responded to certain cultural activities while they were growing up in Ireland had a long history which continued to influence perceptions after the Republic of Ireland achieved independence.

Joe, Mary, and the other eight individuals interviewed all migrated to Canada in the post-war period – a time in Ireland that was characterized by significant ebbs and flows in migration. The difficult economic conditions of the 1950s and late ‘70s and ‘80s saw rises in net emigration while the ‘60s and the Celtic Tiger of the ‘90s saw a switch to net immigration into the country. In addition, the Troubles contributed to both internal migration and emigration. The interviewees involved in this project migrated to Canada in three distinct waves: the 1950s, the 1970s and 1980s, and a recent migration wave which started in 2011.²⁰

During this period, the city of Winnipeg experienced a steady influx of immigrants, primarily arriving from Europe and rural areas of Manitoba. In the 1970s and the decades that followed, the largest migrant populations coming to Winnipeg were from parts of Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean, as well as significant numbers of First Nations peoples moving

¹⁷ Coohill, *Ireland*, 116-120; Dorothea E. Hast and Stanley Scott, *Music in Ireland: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36-41.

¹⁸ Coohill, *Ireland*, 116-120; O’Shea, *The Making of Irish Traditional Music*, 18.

¹⁹ Patrick F. McDevitt, “Muscular Catholicism: Nationalism, Masculinity and Gaelic Team Sports, 1884-1916,” *Gender & History* 9, no. 2 (August 1997): 264-265, 270, 280.

²⁰ Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 224, 236, 248. Mary Gilmartin, “The changing landscape of Irish migration, 2000-2012,” (working paper, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis Working Paper Series, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, October, 2012), 10.

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from reserves to the city.²¹ The majority of my interviewees arrived in the '70s, when Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau introduced multicultural policies that encouraged innocuous expressions of ethnic diversity. One of the most visible expressions of this policy in Winnipeg is the annual two-week summer festival *Folklorama*, which celebrates a variety of ethno-cultural groups in the city.²²

After they came to Canada, my interviewees were faced with deciding how to deal with the difficulties in Irish collective memory within their community and the larger host society in Manitoba. When the 1970s wave of Irish immigrants arrived in Winnipeg, a few Irish ethnic associations were already established, including the Sons of Ireland and the Irish Protestant Association. However, this wave had more exposure to the devastation of the Troubles and felt the need to create a club that would intentionally set aside historic divisions and work to foster a community that would be welcoming to all Irish immigrants living in Winnipeg. This led to the formation of the Irish Association of Manitoba (est. 1972), or the Irish Club, which has maintained a policy to be non-political and non-sectarian. Members have carefully mediated how the past is approached and enacted – an effort that is demonstrated in their choice to display the Irish provincial coat of arms instead of the national flag of the Republic and the decision to not sing Irish rebel songs at Club events.²³

Nearly all interviewees involved in this project have participated in Club activities at some point and are familiar with its goals and policies. They expressed differing opinions concerning whether or not the Club was successful in fulfilling its mandate and if it was worth maintaining the policy to be non-political and non-sectarian so strictly now that the tensions in Northern Ireland have eased. However, most appreciated what the Irish Club has worked to achieve and its role in providing Irish immigrants with a way to explore and express their ethnic heritage in Winnipeg.

Along with the context of Irish collective memory and the diaspora community established here in Winnipeg, it should be recognized that both my

²¹ Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 77, 139.

²² This festival initiated by the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg Inc. in 1970 and has continued to expand over the decades. The festival was often mentioned by interviewees who appreciated its goals and often participated as either performers or organizers. Cynthia Thoroski and Pauline Greenhill, "Putting a price on culture: ethnic organisations, volunteers, and the marketing of multicultural festivals," *Ethnologies* 23, no. 1 (2001): 189-209.

²³ "Ireland's Sons Celebrate," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 March 1955; "Irish Protestants Keep St. Patrick in Memory," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 March 1955; "Ethnic groups defend shows," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 August 1986. It appears that The Irish Association of Manitoba is the only Irish club currently in operation. There was another Irish association present in Winnipeg when I began research for this project in late 2013 and early 2014. However, it appears to have shut down within since then and information on its activities is no longer available.

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interviewees and myself are operating in the context of a postmodern and largely secularized society where religion and faith have increasingly been considered part of the private sphere. One of the characteristics of modernity in the West is the value placed on the individual – a feature that many scholars have connected to the growth of secularization. As more rights are assigned to the individual and societies become increasingly pluralized, roles and authorities that used to be held by religious organizations begin to fall under the purview of the state. Early theories concerning secularization asserted that this trend would result in the disappearance of religion. However, it has become clear to scholars of religion that this has not been the case, nor has secularism had a uniform effect. In the case of Canada, religion, particularly Victorian Christianity, has played a significant role in its history and the development of the state. Its ideologies and structures are imbedded in Canadian public institutions. Even so, secularization has been an important force in Canada, as seen most clearly in the Quiet Revolution in Quebec during the 1960s and 70s. Increased pluralism has resulted in the growth of what some scholars have termed the “religious marketplace” as individuals find and subscribe to beliefs that suit their spiritual needs. They might find their needs filled within a traditional religious structure or within a more personalized unchurched spirituality, and this diversity results in an eclectic religious landscape within Canada.²⁴

These contexts shaped the emotional and social boundaries in my interviews. My conversations with Tom Naughten and Brian Richardson work well to demonstrate where the boundary lines fell as well as moments in which they were broadened.

Introducing Tom and Brian

Tom responded to an advertisement I had posted in the Irish Club’s newsletter about the project and was one of the first participants I interviewed. Tom, a native

²⁴ Hamberg, “Unchurched Spirituality,” 745-747; Robert W. Hefner, “Religion and Modernity Worldwide,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 152-153, 162-165; Nikolai G. Wenzel, “Postmodernism and Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176-179; Roger O’Toole, “Religion in Canada: Its Development and Contemporary Situation,” in *Religion in Canadian Society: Traditions, Transitions, and Innovations*, ed. Lori G. Beaman (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2006), 7-10; Peter Beyer, “Religious Vitality in Canada: The Complementarity of Religious Market and Secularization Perspectives,” in *Religion in Canadian Society: Traditions, Transitions, and Innovations*, ed. Lori G. Beaman (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2006), 71-73, 85-88; William Closson James, “Dimorphs and Cobblers: Ways of Being Religious in Canada,” in *Religion in Canadian Society: Traditions, Transitions, and Innovations*, ed. Lori G. Beaman (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2006), 129-130.

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Dubliners, was born in May 1954 into what he described as a strong, matriarchal family. He left Ireland first when he was in high school to work in England for one summer and then in Vancouver for another summer during his college years. After completing his first degree at Trinity College in Dublin, he decided to pursue graduate studies in geography at Simon Fraser University. Afterwards he worked in the Yukon for many years before settling in Winnipeg in 1990 where he and his wife Heather (whom he met through the Irish Club) raised their two sons. He connected me with his mother-in-law, Eileen Baxter, who also participated in my larger project as an interviewee.

I was introduced to Brian by Maureen Taggart, another interviewee, who became his friend during her first year in Winnipeg. Brian and Maureen both participated in a theatre production of *Juno and the Paycock*. Born in 1945 and raised in Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin, Brian first moved to Potsdam, New York, to study biology when he was nineteen years old. He worked as a teacher for a while but eventually decided to pursue acting. He moved to Canada and lived in Montreal and Halifax for a few years before heading out west with a friend from Manitoba in 1970. As they were passing through Winnipeg, their car broke down which resulted in his eventual settling in the city. He has made his living through his art and has worked as an actor, storyteller, musician, director, playwright, and poet.

Both Tom and Brian were very animated in their interviews and spoke openly on a variety of topics. While conversations about religion came up relatively often in their interviews, stories that involved spirituality or encounters with the sacred in the context of traditional religious structures typically did not.

Sacred Lands

In our first interview, Tom spoke of returning to a beach called Roundstone whenever he and his wife Heather have a chance to visit Ireland. Heather spent a great deal of her childhood on this beach and it has great emotional significance for her. When describing a trip to Ireland he and his family were planning for the summer of 2014, Tom told me about returning to that beach and explained, "I call it the pilgrimage. [Every] time we go back Heather has to go back to those rocks. And just spend a little time there, and let the sea spray hit her in the face, and she can taste the sea and the salt. And so we do that. And we'll go back with all of them and walk that beach again. It's important."²⁵ Tom's choice of words to describe their visit to Roundstone suggests that there is something spiritual and restorative about this place and the ocean itself. There is a sense of homecoming in these visits and that, according to Tom, being in Roundstone reaffirms

²⁵ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

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Heather's sense of identity through a connection to that space. There is nostalgia in this revisiting but the ritual of going back to this place is important on a deep level for them both.²⁶

After Tom relayed this story, I asked about what he thought about the connection between geography, space, and heritage. His response is filled with spiritual language and is worth quoting at length.

Okay, well, let me put it a weird way to you. Um, I can never get the Ireland out of me because there's too many ghosts. The spirit of the land. I mean, when I go walk in Ireland there's a spirit you can feel. It's ancient. I mean, it's – you know, you turn any corner in Ireland and you're coming up against a bunch of vertical stones or something that, you know, have been part of something for thousands of years. It's like Stonehenge. You know? You find Stonehenge everywhere. Stonehenge is just a nice, big one. But there's tons of them around. All over. Because, you know, the Celts before in Ireland did – they – they were in touch with the land a lot. And we are. We – we all grow out of the land. I suspect Mennonites do the same thing, but a lot of Canadians don't, because Canadians are mobile. There's a lot more mobility. [...] Whereas a farming community is – is stuck to the land, you know? They'll – they walk it. They get so much growth out of it. They feel that there's a spirit. There's a spirit connectivity. It's the same thing in Ireland. And – and what's funny is, um, I – I can give you tons of stories of ghosts. That – ghost stories that my father taught me, but also ghost stories that I felt. You know, camping and – and things I can't explain. But feelings of spirits and places I've been. And I could go back and feel them again now. I'd tell you exactly where they are. And there's spirits, and there's feelings, and there's ancient feelings. And I've only ever once, once, felt a spirit in Canada. And that was up in the Yukon, when I was way the way the – hell-a gone from everybody. And that's the only time I've ever felt it and I'd been there for a couple of days. And I was pretty much in tune with the land at that time. Um, but I – I've never felt it – that same spirit in Canada, and I don't – and I don't know whether it's me and this is an

²⁶ John C. Walsh, "Performing Public Memory and Re-Placing Home in the Ottawa Valley, 1900-58," in *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*, eds. James Opp and John C. Walsh (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 26; Paul Basu, "Roots-tourism as Return Movements: Semantics and the Scottish Diaspora," in *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movements of Emigrants, 1600-2000*, ed. Marjory Harper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 133.

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alien Canada ... an alien land that – that I haven't grown up with. Or... or what?²⁷

Tom's description is full of poetic, spiritual language about encounters with the supernatural. There is a sense in this narrative that the land itself roots people in place and time, connecting them to an ancient history and identity. Archaeologist Christopher Tilley is interested in human relationships with landscapes and suggests that they are infused with individual and collective memory. He states, "While places and movements between them are intimately related to the formation of personal biographies, places themselves may be said to acquire a history, sedimented layers of meaning by virtue of the actions and events that take place in them. Personal biographies, social identities and biography of place are intimately connected."²⁸ Being in these spaces connects us to those memories and there is a feeling that, while we might change over time, the land will always be there, available to remind us of who we were and reassure us of who we are now. This story works to demonstrate that Tom's identity is connected to Ireland's spaces – the environment where he encounters the spirits and ghosts of the past. Elsewhere in our conversation, Tom shared stories that demonstrated a deep appreciation for Canada's landscapes. But, as this excerpt makes apparent, these landscapes do not hold the same kind of meaning for him.

Tom's narrative hints at encounters with the sublime in Ireland's natural spaces. The concept of the sublime has been theorized by many scholars and was, in many of its earlier conceptualisations, generally associated with the awe of God's majesty and power. Literary scholar Philip Shaw, has examined the history of thought around the sublime. He explains, "Sublimity [...] refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language."²⁹ In Tom's narrative, there is sublimity in the "things I can't explain."³⁰ And yet, by expressing an inability to explain these encounters, I felt able to gain a sense of his meaning by drawing on my own experiences of the sublime in nature. Use of religious language here conveys a particular experience to his audience and is familiar as well as comfortable in the context of stories about environment.

In addition to long-standing traditions of experiencing the sublime in nature, there is a growing connection in Western society between forms of unchurched spirituality and the environmentalist movement, which draws on this

²⁷ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

²⁸ Christopher Tilley, *Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford and Providence: Berg Publishers, 1994), 27.

²⁹ Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

³⁰ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

discourse to support arguments for why certain environments need to be preserved. Environmental historian Thomas R. Dunlap has drawn parallels between the environmental movement and traditional religious systems.

Environmentalism campaigns for new laws, but it also gives moral weight to the apparently trivial decisions of daily life. [...] It asks not just that we change our policies or even our habits, but that we change our hearts, not just that we recycle papers, cans, and bottles, but that we form a new relationship with nature. Finally, it invokes the sacred, holding some areas and species in awe and finding in wilderness the opening to ultimate reality.³¹

He roots this trend in the Enlightenment's rational treatment of nature and Romanticism's emphasis of humans' emotional connections to it.³² I suggest that this context makes conversations about spiritual encounters in nature more comfortable within the emotional communities in which my interviewees and I were operating (or, the wider Canadian society, Winnipeg's Irish community, and the relationship established between myself and my interviewees).

Brian draws on a similar framework to describe his relationship with land in Ireland. When we spoke, he told me that he returned to Ireland for a time to care for his dying mother and, shortly after moving, his marriage ended. He spent much of this time busking on the Cliff of Moher in County Clare and made some wonderful friendships with other musicians and vendors. He recently chose to dramatize the experience in a play called *Now You Are Everywhere*. He explained that, while there were parts of Irish culture with which he could never be entirely comfortable, much of it was familiar and felt to be second nature.

But I also recognize that I had lived in Canada for more of my life than I did in Ireland. Um, so, whatever created my original spirit is still there. It's been changed and affected by being here but, um, and I always talk about it as the difference between soul and, maybe even soul and spirit. I'm not quite sure which. But it's – the soul is created there. The spirit is what carries on. And learning to find where to balance the two. I loved being in Ireland.³³

³¹ Thomas R. Dunlap, *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 4.

³² Thomas R. Dunlap, *Faith in Nature*, 11-13; Shaw, *The Sublime*, 4-5.

³³ Brian Richardson, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 18 July 2014, Part 1.

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Like Tom, Brian draws on spiritual language to describe the experience of being both in Ireland and Canada. This language also features in the play when Brian's main protagonist Rich E. looks over the cliffs and says,

There you are, standing atop a sheer drop of seven hundred feet of rock to the sea, stretching on either side of your periphery as you stare westward into a horizon of ceaseless water, an ocean away from the next diocese: Newfoundland. Pilgrims, fall on your knees. *Pause*. Follow the pilgrims. Upward and onward!³⁴

The pilgrims here refer to the tourists who fill the Cliffs daily (a space that, like many in Ireland, has been heavily commodified by the tourism industry). Rich E.'s choice of words here captures some of what the tourists are supposedly hoping to experience – an encounter with the sublime through an experience with nature.³⁵

This kind of rhetoric also fits into an established discourse about Irish landscape, which I encountered multiple times throughout my research. John Wilson Foster, who specializes in Irish literature, has examined human relationships with Ireland's geography. He notes that within Irish folklore, there are "are resilient vestiges of the ancient assumption of an intimate traffic between human beings and nature, and between the natural and the supernatural world. Remnants of this venerable attitude can still be found, so that the pre-scientific relationship to nature has in fact persisted in Ireland and elsewhere."³⁶ This discourse has also been developed by various Irish literary giants, including W. B. Yeats and John Millington Synge who were active during the Gaelic Revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Patrick J. Duffy explores the ways in which authors and artists have shaped perceptions of Irish landscape and argues that the idealization of rural landscapes, particularly those in the west of Ireland, was connected to efforts on the part of nationalist movements to find an identity separate from the influences of English colonialism.³⁷

³⁴ Brian Richardson, "Now You Are Everywhere," (unpublished play, 2014, courtesy of the author), Word file.

³⁵ I had the chance to visit the Cliffs of Moher myself and was surrounded by fellow tourists. I was struck by how many people I observed asking their companions to take pictures of them as they looked out towards the ocean. Along with encountering the sublime, there appears to be an increasing drive to document this experience through photography.

³⁶ John Wilson Foster, "Encountering Traditions," in *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, ed. John Wilson Foster (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 45.

³⁷ Patrick J. Duffy, "Writing Ireland: Literature and art in the representation of Irish place," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 64-69. Geographer Brian Graham has pointed out how politics and identity are connected

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Cultural education was a significant part of creating a sense of Irish national identity and its effect was made apparent in a comment from Tom who noted,

Education in Ireland isn't just on science and math. It's a huge component in the arts. And so people are very culturally aware. Right throughout all the classes. You know, whether you're rich or poor, um, there's a ton of cultural awareness. Like, you can go into a working-class pub and you'll have Brendan Behan quoted at you. Or some play or something, you know?³⁸

This widespread appreciation of Ireland's authors contributes to the prevalence of a particular rhetoric concerning spiritual connections Irish landscape. The majority of my interviewees were clearly familiar with this way of imagining Ireland's environment and drew on it during our conversations.

Some have suggested that immigrant descriptions of spiritual relationships with the landscape of the homeland are rooted in a desire for a place of "uncomplicated belonging" – in the case of Ireland, one that claims indigeneity and, in the process, might exclude certain inhabitants.³⁹ However, I would argue that this is not exactly the case in Tom or Brian's narratives. The question of belonging in Ireland is complicated in itself for both men and, while the discourses about landscape may work to establish and maintain boundaries, Tom and Brian's use of spiritual language is not aimed at excluding others (Brian's "pilgrims" include tourists who often have no Irish heritage). Rather, they draw on the spiritual language and established discourses because it serves a purpose in their life story narratives. It works to describe the indescribable feeling of being connected to a place from which they are separated through migration.

to a sense of territoriality and boundary maintenance – who belongs in this space and who does not. Spaced become symbols of national identity, particularly when some areas in Ireland are categorized as "more Irish" than others. For example, the Gaeltacht regions in Ireland are regions where there is a high percentage of Irish language speakers, located primarily along the west coast of the island. The rugged and rolling landscape and its inhabitants became engrained in the nationalist narrative as emblems of true Irishness, largely untouched by British colonialism. Brian Graham, "Ireland and Irishness: Place, culture and identity," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 4-5; Nuala C. Johnson, "Making Space: Gaeltacht Policy and the Politics of Identity," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 174-184.

³⁸ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

³⁹ Paul Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 207; Brian Graham, "The Imagining of Place: Representation and identity in contemporary Ireland," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 192-210.

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This all contributes to the shape of the emotional communities – their boundaries include emotive descriptions of spiritual connections with nature. Tom and Brian’s conversations about land and spirit offer an interesting contrast to their stories about experiences within the traditional religious structures and their personal beliefs.

Faith, Religion, and Unspoken Boundaries

As Tom told me stories about his life in our first interview, he eventually turned to the early days of his relationship with Heather. They met in Winnipeg through connections at the Irish Club and began dating soon afterwards. Heather and her family are Protestants from Northern Ireland and her father Ralph has recently retired from a long career as a minister and dean in the Anglican Church. Tom, who was raised Catholic, explained that, on their first date together, Heather left in a hurry in order to attend the folk mass at St. Luke’s. When this looked like it might happen again on their second outing together, Tom decided to join her.

T: So we go to St. Luke’s church and there’s a folk mass on there. But it’s Anglican. It’s not Catholic, it’s Anglican. And I’m going, “Wait a minute, this is a Protestant church.” She said, “Yeah.” “Okay, well, whatever. Sure. Okay.” So I go in. I knew all the prayers. I knew all the liturgy. It wasn’t different. And I’m going, “These people are normal looking people.” You know, I mean, they’re Protestants. But they’re normal. This is weird! (Laughs)

K: Yeah. Was that, sort of, the first time you had, I guess, run into something like that?

T: It’s first Protestant service I’d gone to. I mean, I knew people from both sides, um, in Ireland and that was fine. But I went to a Catholic school. And a cousin of mine who was Protestant from up North, he came and stayed with us and I would drag him off to church on Sunday at Mass. Right? And he would – he said – years later I talked to him about it and he said, “I had no idea what was going on.” He said, “I just got up when you got up and got – knelt down when you knelt down and that was fine.” You know?

K: Yeah, yeah.

T: And – and, um, but to him, it was the same – it was a big opening of eyes. And mine was a big opening of eyes when I went to St. Luke’s. It wasn’t – probably wasn’t the very... no, it must have been the first service I went to, because I really didn’t know. And the church looked Protestant. It’s different than a Catholic church. It’s got flags and things up, you know? But it wasn’t alien. And it wasn’t really different. And

what they were talking about and what they were preaching on and what they were saying and the prayers they were doing were all very, very comfortable. And I hadn't been in church in a long, long time. I really hadn't. Since I'd left Ireland, I hadn't really been involved in church at all. So it felt very good to be back in a church and – and to have some contact again. And so, I liked it.⁴⁰

In this story, there are hints to spiritual experiences within St. Luke's, but Tom does not describe them as freely as he described his encounters with the supernatural in the landscape of Ireland. Tom, who is an excellent and expressive storyteller, is more reserved in his description here. To a certain degree, this story reflects Grama's observation concerning the removal of the sacred in interviews and academic literature concerning religion. This does not mean that Tom does not have spiritual experiences in his church – his comment that it felt good to be back in church and “to have some contact again” speaks to the opposite. Instead, the narrative choices here speak to the kind of boundaries emotional communities have established around conversations about religion. Along with the influence of Western secularism, Ireland's historical relationship with Catholic and Anglican traditions also shapes the stories told to me by my interviewees. This is further illustrated in the rest of Tom's story about his relationship with Heather.

After they had dated for a while, Heather brought Tom to meet her parents. Her father, Ralph, was involved in the peace movement in Northern Ireland and Tom had an idea of who he was before they met. “And so, he wasn't a stranger to me. But he didn't know anything about me. I was just little Catholic kid from Dublin. And he kind of suspected my background. And so he said, ‘I think we need to go for a walk.’ And I said, ‘I think we do.’”⁴¹ While they walked they discussed Tom's background, his reasons for leaving Ireland, Ralph's story, their politics, and what they believed was necessary for peace in Ireland. Finding that many of their views were aligned, Ralph gave his blessing for the relationship and Tom has forged a strong relationship with his in-laws in the following years.

Tom moved on from this story to discuss the times in which he and Heather have considered moving back to Ireland and the reasons that have stopped them from doing so.

And so we talked about it many times but it always came back to the same thing: we had two young sons who were in school. Whether they were in junior school or high schools or whatever. They were in school. What school were we going to go – put them in when we went back to Ireland? Protestant school or the Catholic school? Which church were

⁴⁰ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

⁴¹ Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

we going to go to on Sunday? The Catholic school – or the Catholic church or the Protestant church? And we didn't want to answer the question. So, here in Winnipeg, we're going to an Anglican church that I felt incredibly comfortable with and not alien at all. The boys went to schools down the road, local schools that weren't religious. Um, we went to an Irish Club and we hung out and met a lot of other Irish people where there were no flags, no Irish flags or any flags flown. There are only the four flags of the provinces are- are flown. So it's non-political, non-sectarian. And we work very, very hard to do that. Because when you have an AGM, you'll have 20, 25 families represented. And of those 25 families, maybe 20 of them, 23 of them are Protestant and Catholic mix marriages. And you can't have it where a husband and wife go into the – the Club and there's one flag. Well, who's going to feel left out? You can't do it. So, you know, my talk with Ralph was very important. Because he didn't want those issues of – of religion and politics and all the rest, coming into his daughter's life again, if he could help it.⁴²

These are emotional narratives that point to the importance of religion for Tom. He speaks of his church and its community with great respect and affection and, from all accounts, values its presence in his life. But, these stories work to tell his audience more about the emotional importance of finding spaces where collective memory can be negotiated in a way that ensures that the pain of historic divisions is kept separate from his family. His story, like Joe and Mary's anecdote quoted earlier, demonstrates the associations between religion and politics in Irish collective memory. Attending a church where he and his family felt at home, participating in an ethnic association where no one is left out, and living in city where his children can go to a school that does not promote one faith over another, are all points of great importance to Tom. Through migration, he and Heather are able to find compromises that they do not feel they would be able to create in Ireland, where collective memory of sectarian conflict can still weigh heavily.

Brian also spoke about the role of Christianity and Judaism in his youth, but described his personal beliefs and how they have changed over time. He was raised in a multi-faith home with his mother, Jewish grandmother, and Protestant Irish grandfather. His mother married a Catholic man and Brian attended Mass during his youth. He recalled that sometimes after church on Sunday, which he would attend on his own, he and his family might go for a drive to Clanbrassil Street to buy rye bread and matzah, something he described as a very Jewish thing

⁴² Tom Naughten, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 10 June 2014, Part 2.

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to do. When he went to study biology in Potsdam, New York, he found the classes he took had a profound effect on his religious beliefs. He explained,

B: But I got a sense of the immensity of the universe. And the immensity of the micro-universe. Um, I think for the first time it really came home to me when we – we got to use an electron microscope. And I went, “Yike!” And look how deep we’re seeing in. We’re only seeing – we’re just scratching the surface. And then, you know, getting some idea of atomic theory, getting all of this material. And then starting to look out into the stars. And really coming to see how incredibly vast. You – it changes your theology too.

K: It does.

B: I kind of gave up on – on all of the church, uh, in my second year.

K: Right. And was that something that, sort of, lasted the rest of your life then? Or was it a...

B: Yeah, I – I think I’m reformulating what I – I see. Um, the – the idea of a God who’s sitting down, looking at us, and, you know, waving the finger and so forth. Um, that really disappeared. Um, I do see a great force. I don’t see one necessarily that’s sitting, watching us. Um, what I came to, and I – I really haven’t read enough of him but I’ve about his theories: Spinoza.

K: Oh, I’ve heard of him.

B: Spinoza was a very interesting, uh, character. 1600s. He was a Dutch Jew. They – they went to Holland because they were least persecuted in Holland. Um, he started talking about seeing God – he – he had some real problems with religion. He said, you know, at – at the bottom, yes, it starts out well. But then it becomes a controlling element. Um, that, in fact, he saw all nature as God. And I thought, “That makes sense.” You know, that it is. It’s everything. And whether there’s an entity that encompasses that, I don’t know. And the other thing that I encountered was the Gaia theory. Now, to some degree, I had already been starting to arrive at the idea that the planet itself is a living organism. And what the Gaia theory has really started to do is prove it scientifically. But that living organism must also have a consciousness. More than likely. Which means that every element – if – if Earth has a consciousness, Mars has a consciousness, the Sun has a consciousness. And that’s where my theology is going. What is that consciousness?⁴³

⁴³ Brian Richardson, interview by Kathryn Boschmann, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 18 July 2014, Part 1. Kathryn Boschmann, “Speaking of the Sacred: Exploring Religion, Spirituality, and the Boundaries of Emotional Communities Through Oral History.” *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* (2017), Religious Individuals and Collective Identities: Special Issue on Oral History and Religion 22

This conversation differs from the others I have examined here. My interviews were framed with questions about migration. It follows, then, that most of our conversations focused on those experiences and that the discussions about religion and spirituality usually work to describe the difficulties of negotiating Irish collective memory or the feeling of being connected to certain spaces. But Brian's description here is simply about his personal spiritual beliefs. His form of unchurched spirituality fits within the discourse of mainstream environmentalism, which has contributed to shaping an emotional community which encourages viewing nature as sacred. While this may have played a role in making Brian comfortable in sharing his personal beliefs with me, it is important to note that I made an invitation in our conversation, which opened up the emotional boundaries to include discussions about faith. In the case of Tom's story about attending St. Luke's, I did not invite him to describe his experience further and that emotional boundary was left in place.

Conclusion

By looking at these stories of religion and spiritual experiences, and considering what meaning they convey in the context of these interviews, we can gain insight into the shape of certain emotional communities. As interviewees share their experiences, they navigate silent emotional codes about religion and spirituality. In this process, the shape of these systems of feeling begins to be revealed. Widely shared understandings among the emotional communities of Canadian society, the Irish community in Winnipeg, and the interview itself meant that some stories about spiritual experiences required an invitation while others did not. As oral historians, it is important to consider the boundaries of the emotional communities that shape our interviews. As co-creators of these boundaries within the interview space, we have the opportunity to open doors to stories that might be gladly shared but must first be invited.