

## Who Are My People: Do I Have Belonging in Sanctuary?

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*Sanctuary is the foundational underpinning of this qualitative inquiry between a Sufi biracial woman of ambiguous ethnic phenotype, daughter of a third-generation Japanese American mother and White father whose ancestry traces back to Ireland before 1830 and the English settlement at Plymouth. And a descendent of chattel slavery, a lineage of enslaved sharecroppers from the tobacco plantations of Virginia during 1740 and the cotton fields in Georgia in 1855, given the dehumanized label of the slave who is Roman Catholic will further transform the meaning of sanctuary. In this study, there is a coexisting cacophony at the center of the social constructs of religion, politics and legal entities that govern the individual and the collective need for refuge and safety. At the intersections of protection lies trauma theory, relative deprivation theory, and social identity theory of intergroup conflict. And it is through these deeper explorations of belonging, the veil, ancestral memory, and the earth and self may illuminate some direction.*

*Keywords: sanctuary, belonging, the veil, ancestral memory, the earth and self*

Human social interdependence necessitates a sense of belonging. The concept of belonging consists of the need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions that provide temporal stability for each other's wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> In the socialized context of human civilization, there are hierarchical constructs with categories that engender labels with identities that characterize population performance. These actors consist of individual and collective approaches and objectives that implicate a political agenda with distinct legal policies and supported by religious doctrine. Considering the global governing principles surrounding sanctuary reveals that different groups of people and ecosystems suffer. In today's environment, it is challenging to contemplate the meaning of safety or belonging without examining the political, economic, and ecological influxes. The global coronavirus (that is, SARS-CoV2 or COVID-19) pandemic, with an estimated death toll of 6,419,646 worldwide, highlighted discrimination by exposing preferential medical care and accepted practices of indifferences.<sup>2</sup> The Russia invasion of Ukraine is impacting approximately twelve million people.<sup>3</sup> The deforestation of Brazil's Amazon from January to June 2022 cleared 1,540 square miles in the region.<sup>4</sup> And the recent Supreme court reversal of *Roe v. Wade* has revealed political authority over women's reproductive healthcare rights.<sup>5</sup>

The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children  
cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment

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<sup>1</sup> Roy R. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation," in *Psychological Bulletin* 117, No. 3. (1995): 497–529.

<sup>2</sup> "Coronavirus death toll" as reported by *worldometers.com* (2021). <https://www.worldometers.info>.

<sup>3</sup> "How many Ukrainian refugees are there and where have they gone?" BBC News (4 July 2022); [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com).

<sup>4</sup> Jake Spring and Bruno Kelly, "Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon hits record for first half of 2022," Reuters (8 July 2022 July 8). <https://www.reuters.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Macagnone, "Supreme Court reverses *Roe v. Wade* ends right to abortion," *rollcall.com* (24 June 2022) <https://rollcall.com>.

we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us, and the light goes out.<sup>6</sup>

—James Baldwin, *Nothing is Fixed*

We live in a moment of profound possibility and disruption—a moment that is marked by the dying of an old mindset and logical organizing; one that is marked by the rise of a new awareness and a new way of activating generative social fields. What is dying and disintegrating is a world of “Me First,” “bigger is better,” and special interest group-driven decision-making that has led us into a state of organized irresponsibility.<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult to clearly imagine the complexities and entanglements around racism, homophobic, and border patrol along with entropy (the degradation of the matter and energy in the universe) or to fully grasp what is meant by Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene.<sup>8</sup> At the center is anthropocentrism (human centeredness)—the dominant influence over the environment with little regard to equitable existence, which further exacerbates the thin line between human beings and non-humans. By contrast, Capitalocentrism is steeped in exponential growth through the auspicious belief in limitless natural resources, while Chthulucentrism is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming in precarious times, during which the world is not finished, and the sky has not fallen—yet. The biological interdependency between earth and self is woven into the very fabric of this world. It demands our attention to the “ecological, social, and religious divides.”<sup>9</sup>

This qualitative, explorative inquiry looks at religious interpretations of belonging and sanctuary through the eyes of two members of a Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community. As a precursor to exploring the notion of veiling, we examine the questions “Who are my people?” and “Do I have belonging and sanctuary?” We then peek through the lens that helps us see how societal influences contribute to ancestral memory, and how land is essential to intersectional identity.

## Who Are My People?

*Who are my people?* Is this an inquiry into cultural adaptation? To deeply ponder this question means to grapple with exceptionalism within the social construct of categories. These constructs were cultivated to usurp policies and to support laws around gender at birth, racial identity, sexual orientation. In many cases, these categories of identity were and remain supported by religion doctrine. Many of the folks who live in these crossroad communities without a firm traditional religious connection speak of the search for sanctuary, of looking for or finding their people. The modern emphasis on individualism and the Cartesian subject-object divides leaves people seeking a form of belonging they often see as a return of an idealized tribalism.

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<sup>6</sup> An excerpt from an essay by James Baldwin that accompanied a collection of photos by Richard Avedon, originally published as *Nothing Personal* (Lucerne, Switzerland: C. H. Bucher, 1964); reprinted as James Baldwin, “Nothing Personal,” in *Contributions in Black Studies* 6, article 5 (<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/>: 60).

<sup>7</sup> C. Otto Scharmer, *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Donna H. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Scharmer. *The Essentials of Theory U*, 4.

In the United States, many ancestral land connections were severed when people left their homeland or had it stolen from them, when they were made to live on lands violently appropriated through colonization, when they were converted from “living relative” to “mere property.” The community-sustaining forces of cultures were lost through homeland traumas (such as war, famine, and persecution) that spurred emigration, and were further eroded in the new country through cultural indoctrination by public education and mass media, as well as through direct persecution or marginalization of many cultures, including those of the original inhabitants. Acceptance of diversity was virtually non-existent in the U.S. for the first 150-years after the country’s founding. The greater sociopolitical preference was for assimilation (erasure of cultural difference).<sup>10</sup>

To explain who my people are, it is important to start from the beginning—when the world was devoid of form. Groups who could become “white” were enticed over succeeding generations to leave immigrant languages, traditions, enclaves, and more—in order to gain economic and political privileges. Various minoritized communities have, in turn, had their cultures actively suppressed, snubbed, and slandered; their humanity denied; their presence made illegal; their lives and livelihoods threatened. When we have been offered conditional acceptance into the natural mythology of prosperity and freedom, they have frequently faced the impossibility of meeting the criteria set for “whiteness”—while, as well, suffering the appropriation and fetishization of their cultures.

Within this light of transhistorical social development stands the intentionality of relative deprivation (RD). Social scientists use RD to predict a wide range of significant outcomes variables: willingness to join protests, individual achievement and deviance, intergroup attitudes, and physical and mental health.<sup>11</sup> RD is the judgment that one is worst off compared to some standard accompanied by feelings of anger and resentment. As Karl Marx put it:

A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that inmate has no social position at all to maintain or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilisation, if the neighbouring place rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls.<sup>12</sup>

Human comparisons to other individuals or groups have shaped our emotions, cognitions, and attitudes. The cultural phenomenon of divisiveness is visible to the observer through artifacts, espoused beliefs, values, and basic underlying assumptions.<sup>10</sup> It beckons the inquiry: *do I have belonging?*

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<sup>10</sup> Simona L. Brickers, “Nonprofit Board’s Receptivity to Diversity, Openness to Diversity and Diversity Management: A quantitative analysis,” Doctoral diss. (University of Phoenix, 2019), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Heather J. Smith, Thomas F. Pettigrew, Gina M. Pippin, and Silvana Bialosiewicz, “A Meta-Analytic Critique of Relative Deprivation,” in *Social Justice Research* 28, no. 1 (March 2015), 1–6.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Wage-labour and Capital & Value, Price, and Profit* (New York: International Publishers, 1995), 33.

## Do I Have Belonging?

Inhabiting these interspiritual zones, places where each of the great diversity of the world's religions is held to have equal power and beauty, I often wondered at the uniformity of skin tones in the community. The social paternalization that is recognizable immediately and rarely questioned or resisted. I have often been the only person of color, or blood related to all the other people of color in a room. As I came to understand the colonial origins of the concept of religion, the list of canon religions, the choice to focus on scriptures, I began to question not only the whiteness of the worshippers, but the white diversity-oriented view of how and through what channels shall be conducted. Thus, blind spots become more evident as personal dispositions are skewed to see life through egalitarian lens.

Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion work usually uses a secular materialist framework. When professionals and nonprofessionals do the work, we often tend to believe relational inquiry into the origins of both personal and systemic racist ideology will help the “well-meaning but clueless” change their views and encourage them to start something new. To fully exercise sanctuary, it is essential to envelop the ecological succession, the process of change, as a holy and sacred space between human beings and the surrounding physical environments are organisms that need one another to survive. Blind spots are the dissociation between reflective egalitarianism and automatic preferences in attitudes involving race, sexual orientation, and age as well as skin color, body weight, height, disability, and nationality.<sup>13</sup>

Human beings are social animals, first and foremost. Other members of our species are significant to us in ways that little else in the physical world can compete with. For this reason, perhaps, the primate brain has evolved to pay special attention to others of its kind, and one way in which we do this is to routinely try to predict what might go on in the minds of others. Within this abstract conversation, “having belonging” can only depict fragmentations of what is possible or considered culturally appropriate with a group or by an individual.

Nina Yuval-Davis defines belonging as an emotional attachment and feeling at home.<sup>14</sup> Ghassan Hage identifies home as an affective edifice constructed out of affective building blocks (blocks of homely feeling).<sup>15</sup> However, Michael Ignatieff identifies human rights as representative of moral progression. In other words, they are pragmatic and historical. From a historical experience, human beings have defensible rights. When their agency as individuals is protected and enhanced, they are less likely to be abused and oppressed.<sup>16</sup> It appears that there is a connection between *belonging* (that is, emotional attachments, affective building blocks and individual protected and enhanced) and *sanctuary* (a place of refuge and safety). However, the topic of sanctuary is accompanied by the theory of trauma; thus, revealing insights into the ways that identity, the unconscious, and remembering are influenced by emotional responses to events

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<sup>13</sup> Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald, *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2013), 69.

<sup>14</sup> Nina Yuval-Davis, “Power, intersectionality and the politics of belonging,” in Wendy Harcourt, ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 367–81.

<sup>15</sup> Ghassan Hage, “At home in the entrails of the west: Multiculturalism ethnic food and migrant home-building.” *Home/World: Space, Community, and Marginality in Sydney's West* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

that may appear dormant within each person and group of people.<sup>17</sup> The word *sanctuary* has generally meant public and private “safe spaces.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1980s, sanctuary referred to the efforts of churches and cities to provide various forms of assistance to asylum applications from Central America. In 2007, the meaning expanded to include “sanctuary cities”—a political move to protect undocumented immigrants. Today sanctuary has a pejorative meaning that keeps being reinvented, depending on the social paradigm shifts.<sup>19</sup>

In exploring whether there is sanctuary in one’s belonging, Rain-Song shared that her sense of belonging came not through the deep study of traditional religion, but through the interspiritual door, as a member of multiple communities which celebrate the unity of religious ideas. However, the community was homogeneous, largely White—and the perplexities around race persisted. Yet, as a student in the lineage of Hazrat Inayat Khan, she participated in hundreds of worship services in which scriptures, mantras, or practices from a wide variety of religious traditions were used, subsumed in a structure held by inspired sayings and prayers of her master. In various interspiritual communities of the West Coast, she has participated in scores of worship services where upwards of ten traditional and new age groups bring short prayers, songs, or readings in a sort of potluck.

In contrast, SpiritFinder traveled through several traditional religious settings in search of belonging without fully grasping what she was looking for—but trusting that, when she did, she would feel it. Perhaps, a contributing factor was her being an Air Force child who relocated frequently with her family. In between traveling, she attended Black Baptist churches, where she listened to the litany of exaggerated preaching that sounded like an extended song; but then again, she was referencing her interpretation about church performances during the 1970s. Although her exploration took on different religions over her lifetime, two stood out as spaces calling her name: the Roman Catholic Church and a Synagogue. Upon reflection, she says that it could be the rituals that resonated so much. Since joining the Catholic faith, she has continued to sense that she is home. There has been personal conflict over the years, because she had never felt safe engaging with the people who attend her church. She attributes this to the fact that most Catholic congregations are predominantly White.

Fundamentally, despite the appearances of the dominant white membership or presences within these two different lived experiences, there is an emotional attachment, a feeling of home and a sense of hope as encapsulated by Yuval-David and Hage. Yet, these feelings of attachment, home, and hope may be wrapped within invisible expectations of the veil.

## **The Veil**

The veil has different concatenations depending on the phenomenon under investigation; there is the mask, which depicts human conduct as a binary between what is covered and what can be uncovered. The veil suggests a wide range of human and natural experiences appearing known, yet there are fragmented perspectives of a single interpretation. What comes into human life

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<sup>17</sup> Rose Cusion Villazor, “What is a ‘sanctuary?’” *SMU Law Review* 6, no. 1 (2008), 133–56.

<sup>18</sup> Rosemary Clark-Parsons, “Building a Digit Girl Army: The cultivation of feminist safe spaces online.” *New Media & Society*, 20, no 6 (June 2018):2125–44.

<sup>19</sup> Gareth Bulter, Gerti Szili, Iain Hay, and Cecile Cutler, “Searching for Sanctuary during COVID-19: Exploring regional South Australians’ nature-based tourism experiences,” *Rural Society* 31, no. 1 (2022): 1–14.

through sense perception is received by this veil, discerned, and integrated into faculties of consciousness that prepare the human being for how to be. Some Islamic jurisprudence governs women wearing a veil—that is, a *hijāb* (head-covering) or a *niqāb* (face-covering).<sup>20</sup> Some Christian and Jewish movements prescribe head covering for women and men.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, W. E. B. DuBois noted the sense of being othered, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.<sup>22</sup> His condemnation lay with African Americans emerging from the ashes of the Civil War with a mixed spirit of uncertainty and jubilee. The promises and expectations of the emancipation; however, overall instilled a sense of expectation of full enjoyment of American citizenship. But, within a decade of the declaration that they would be “henceforth and forever free” and the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees that no state “shall make or enforce any law” denying them full citizenship, the emancipation had been betrayed.<sup>23</sup>

Scratching at the root of sanctuary lies an interwoven, often misunderstood, and misinterpreted history of human beings, land rights, and descriptions of what living entities have value and who has the rights to other human beings and land. The projection of life is both descriptive and prescriptive in identifying human beings as central, yet there is always a subtle dilemma, such as the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision reversing rights that held significant relevance to cis-gender women and men around the world: reproductive rights/sanctuary.

In Raphaelite Work, a Sufi healing methodology, we speak of there being five bodies: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and moral. Most people understand sensations, emotions, and thoughts. The spiritual, in this case, is thought of as the location of the incoming essential qualities or divine names that are wishing to manifest in our lives. The moral body is the one that needs the most explaining. It is the living tissue of connection between the person and the rest of experience, including the self. It is the quality of relationships, the feeling of loneliness, alienation, belonging, and connection—and the reaction of the social and family roles. It is called the moral body because true morality comes from recognizing that others are part of the same body as we, as though we individuals were fingers of the same hand; therefore, acts that benefit the ring finger at great cost to the pinky finger do not benefit the whole organism.

Moral rules generally prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction in the running of that machine. Some people prefer to talk about moral “ideals” rather than moral rules. Morality, then seems to be concerned with three social aspects: first, with fair play and harmony between individuals; secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonizing the things inside everyone; and thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole—what humankind was made for; what course the whole fleet ought to be on; what tune the conductor of the band wants it to play.<sup>24</sup> Modern people are nearly always thinking about the first thing and forgetting the other two. However, within the context of morality is *social categorizations*: discontinuous divisions of the social world into distinct classes or categories; the process of locating oneself, or another

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<sup>20</sup> M. S. Setyawan and O. A. David, “Veil (niqab) Problematics in Islamic Law Perspectives: Religion or culture?” *Al-Mada: Journal Agama Sosiasal dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (2021): 225–39.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Baehr, “The Image of the Veil in Social Theory,” *Theory and Society* 48 (2019): 525–58.

<sup>22</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Charles W. McKinney, Jr. and Rhonda Jones, “Jim Crowed—Emancipation Betrayal: African Americans Confront the Veil,” in *A Companion to African American History*, ed. Alton Hornsby Jr (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 271.

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1971), 38, 39.

person, within a system of social classifications.<sup>25</sup> Social identification is a construct that locates oneself, or another person, within a system used to define him or herself and others. This self-identification becomes a personal identity that has been attached to a presumed moral standard that has disproportionately attributed to inequities. The protagonist of a descent narrative traditionally responds to aporia by imploding, by driving downward and into the self. Consequently, the Veil is our initiation threshold that opens and closes for the expansion of consciousness and for elevating free will as a force toward deeper self-purpose. It mediates for us our consciousness in the world; of the spirit and cultivates will within the deeper regions of the human potential. Intention allows the Veil to be transparent, providing access to the creative forces that will, in time, create the outer world.<sup>26</sup> These unconscious biases or invisible relational dynamics can be viewed in plain sight as dominant cultural traditions often depicted as an ancestral memory.

### **Ancestral Memory**

The modern anthropocentric space focused on the visible leaves us with no sense of that space is haunted; rather more a sense of in space no one can hear you scream. Transience in America and the prevalence of urban lifestyles continues the disconnections from land. A history marked not only by the struggle for a space to be occupied—but also by the love for the land, for the agricultural activities, for the cultivation of seeds left by ancestors and perpetuated in the reminiscences of their memories.<sup>27</sup> The significance of ancestral memory is a relationship with cultural traditions and the land. When disruptions such as colonialism, chattel slavery, Indigenous removal, and migration dismantle people and communities' rites of passage, the effects can be devastating. Studies have identified post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event, which can cause flashbacks, nightmares, and severer anxiety.<sup>28</sup> The circumstance around the diagnoses is individualized and cannot be encapsulated by a checklist of isolated experiences as it once was identified largely with men serving in the military. An individual can experience trauma through a life event that appears to reoccur after the fact. Intellectualism pushes against the body's feelings. Connecting to the land requires sitting on the land and with the horrors of colonization and with the continued living presence, then expanding to feel a connectedness between all the lands we were collectively touching both the seen and the unseen.

Consequently, the hauntings exist with the artifacts that are the visible—such as the architecture of its physical environment; its language; its technology and products; its artistic creations; its style, as embodied in clothing, manners of address, and emotional displays; its mythos and stories told about the organization; its published lists of values; and its observable

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<sup>25</sup> John C. Turner, "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group" in *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (London: Academic Press, 1978), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Orland Bishop, *The Seventh Shrine: Meditations on the African Spiritual Journey* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2017), 137.

<sup>27</sup> Fernanda Ielpo da Cunha, Anna Maria Eugenio da Silva, José Gerardo Vasconcelos, Ana Flávia Ferreira de Silva, et al. "Storytelling in the bean threshing: A form of struggle and resistance for tradition and ancestral memory." *International Journal of Advanced Engineering Research and Science*, 8(8), 2021, 234. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijaers.88.28>

<sup>28</sup> Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Viking, 2014), 7.

rituals and ceremonies.<sup>29</sup> These rituals and ceremonies become espoused beliefs and values that are handed down from one generation to the next generation taken on as sacred traditions with social validation that is confirmed and shared. The basic underlying assumptions become so taken for granted that there is very little variation within a social unit. The erasure of cultural differences remains the persistent underlying objective used to sustain divisions:

- *The ecological divide*: unprecedented environmental destruction, resulting in the loss of nature. Currently, our economy consumes 1.5 times the regeneration capacity of plant earth.
- *The social divide*: obscene levels of inequity and fragmentation, resulting in the loss of society—the social whole. An example: eight billionaires own as much as does half of humankind combined. Yes, it is true. A small group of people that can fit into a minivan owns more than the “bottom half” of the world’s population.
- *The spiritual divide*: increasing levels of burnout and depression, resulting in the loss of meaning and the loss of Self (a capital “S” Self meaning, not the “current ego” self, but the highest future potential). Evidence of this loss of self is the death of more than 800K people per year by suicide—a number that is greater than the sum of people who are killed annually by war, murder, and natural disasters combined.<sup>30</sup>

These divides further expand the concept that people are disconnected from the self, the land, the generations that came before, and the generation that is to come. There is an opportunity to reconnect with ancestors in a lived experimental manner that may help repair the feeling of fractured family and poor attachment. Attachment, whether considered as fortunate or unfortunate, is an enduring and deep emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. As Jeremy Holmes puts it, “something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”<sup>31</sup>

From the perspective of the body, the person is primarily an individual, whereas the psyche tends to emphasize a person’s social or collective nature that is indoctrinated in cultural adaptations. These revisions are used for balancing the needs of body and psyche to maintain the overall health of the person, which is presumed malleable in a maladaptive environment. From either perspective, both the body and psyche are present due to the nature of reality—which appears to be fuzzy. Fuzzy logic assumes that real things or concepts applied in real life have a qualitative aspect that are not easily contained by labels or numbers.<sup>32</sup> There linger several phenomena for cultivating ancestral memory as a possibility for some and an impossibility for others. Yet, there remains this sacred dance between the earth and self.

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<sup>29</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Otto Scharmer, *The Essentials of Theory U*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Holmes, “‘Something there is that doesn’t love a wall:’ John Bowlby, attachment theory and psychoanalysis,” in *Attachment Theory: Social, Developmental, and Clinical Perspectives*, eds. Susan Goldberg, Roy Muir, & John Kerr (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Christian Keener, “The Quantum Resonance Revised: An unfinished theory of life,” published by the author on user.xmission.com (2022), 3.



## **The Earth and Self**

Sanctuary—refuge and safety—is the precipice where a deeper contemplation into “Who are my people?” and “Do I have belonging?” rests. A broad range of social phenomena—such as culture, the development and changes of a society, power, and social structures, social behavior, intercultural dynamics, social and political transformation, public health issues, gender, class, and ethnicity (among others)—exemplifies the span of complexities, wide and vast, that stretches across domains of understanding.<sup>33</sup> How can the mechanism between earth and self be one unit of social expression. Disconnected from the land, from ancestors, swamped in the ideas of individuality, the nuclear family, social and geographical mobility, consumerism, novelty-seeking, modernity can be described as an attachment disorder. Through learning to sense the moral body, one can heal and repattern. Modernity treats the human self as the measure of all things—so that spiritually is reformed as a self-improvement or seeking for the true self, rather than as a belonging to something greater than self or even Self. While there may be a surface belief in the unseen world, the unconscious attachment to the secular materialist worldview and the fragmentation into a spiritual self for weekend workshops hidden from the world and a workday self that relates to people who are not part of the in-group leads to a lack of faith in the unseen. All difficulties are to be managed or mastered by the self; only the humans have agency; all values are relative to the human’s eye view.

When we leave behind any aspect of the earth, we abandon ourselves for a perceived richness that cannot exist outside of ourselves as individuals. To mend this deepening wound, there must be a greater understanding of how the flow of the universe works for the good of all people—and of how inequities originate from people with individual or group perspectives that desire hegemony. The eruption of social gaps over the last two years as a byproduct of the pandemic is clearly a sign that the old systems of situated knowledge divide people in different ways. In the 1980s, Donna Haraway famously argued for “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition for being heard,” the answer she gave to what can count as knowledge turned crucially on recognizing the agency of the world and objects of knowledge as actors. Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource. Situatedness was never simply an issue of identifying preexisting interests, but of appreciating the co-constitution of interests as they emerge in interchanges of all kinds.<sup>34</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The qualitative exploration into “Who are my people?” along with “Do I have belonging and sanctuary?” opens the doors to examining the complexities of human beings’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The participants in this study explored their individualism as it related to accessing religious practices that provided a sense of belonging and sanctuary within community. Although the interviewees indicated that they felt belonging and sanctuary, they also acknowledged feeling othered by communities consisting largely of white worshippers and the nuances of the veil. The inconsistencies of who is visible lie within the gaps of a socialized

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<sup>33</sup> Trudy Mercadal, “Sociocultural Theory,” in *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (Hackensack, NJ: Salem Press, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Marilyn Strathern, “Opening up Relations,” in *A World of Many Worlds*, eds. Marisol De La Cadena and Mario Blaser (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018), 27.

construct that burs the relational undercurrents of belonging and sanctuary. This study suggests that the disconnection is mostly likely tied to the diminishment of different cultural identities and the relationship with the land where barriers were institutionalized to benefit some and not all.

Fundamentally, despite the appearances of the dominant white membership, it appeared that these two different BIPOC lived experiences felt an emotional attachment, a feeling of home, and a sense of hope as described by Yuval-David and Hage. Yet, these feelings of attachment, home, and hope may be wrapped within the vortex of the meaning of the veil which may be interpreted and responded to completely differently by other members of the BIPOC community in similar religious settings. The insight from this study invites an opportunity to ask different questions, solicit more participants, and include white worshipers' perspectives around this analysis. It would be interesting to learn if largely BIPOC religious gatherings with few white worshipers have a sense of belonging and sanctuary.

According to Bayo Akomolafe, there is a brokenness that exists. It looks like any kind of rite of passage, any artistic framework, any invitation that opens us out to community and opens us out to the gift of dying that helps up meet each other, not to bring the minorities into a place of power but to descend to the place that the minorities are. And by “minority,” I don’t just mean people of columns. I mean objects around us; I mean the nonhuman; I mean the ancestors; I mean the invisible ones that we have forgotten how to notice.<sup>35</sup>

Within this phenomenon of belonging and sanctuary lingers a higher realm of acceptance that lies within the veil: an endless opportunity for self-reflection through the seen and unseen. The symbolism that supports faith and belief depicts an opportunity around religious practices and social conditionings that can allow one to reach beyond any logical, socialized reasoning to grapple with the meaning of identity, fit, inclusion, and safety as weapons either to reveal or to hide an inner truth that we are connected.



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<sup>35</sup> “What do you do when there is no hope? A talk with Bayo Akomolafe and Toni Spencer,” posted on *advaya* (June 1, 2020), Youtube.com.

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